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Sanctuary of Hope: A Response to Glen Greenwalt

by Roy Gane

Glen Greenwalt addresses a question in which all Adventists have a vested interest: What happens to our originally apocalyptic movement in view of the fact that deliverance from this world has apparently been delayed for 150 years?

Greenwalt cites Harold Bloom, who perceives the importance of our 1844 theology and our need to preserve the prophetic voice of Ellen White and to extend the sanctuary doctrine from theory to everyday life. However, Bloom's suggestion that we move beyond maddening literalization of Leviticus betrays his failure to understand Seventh-day Adventist sanctuary doctrine.

Agreeing with Bloom in principle, Greenwalt properly identifies two major themes of the ancient Israelite sanctuary: the presence of God, and God's withdrawal of his presence, which indicates judgment. Furthermore, he points out the contemporary need for God's presence and uses the sanctuary as a metaphor for the church. Through this profound idea, all three—the church, the sanctuary, and God Himself—become more “friendly” to us and to our children. I think Greenwalt would agree that this concept need not diminish our appreciation for the kingly aspects of God, to whom we have limited access until “atonement” is completed and divine-human coexistence can carry on without boundaries necessitated by sin.

Greenwalt writes beautifully, almost poetically. However, his development of the main idea that “1844 represents a prophetic fulfillment of a pattern of presence/defilement/restoration” is hard to follow, unbiblical, and turns Seventh-day Adventist theol-

ogy on its head. If 1844 fulfills such a pattern, to which part of the pattern does the 1844 event belong? Greenwalt does not say it, but the most obvious answer would be “restoration,” because Daniel 8:14, from which we get the date 1844, refers to the restoration of the sanctuary. Greenwalt makes the unbiblical assertion that judgment should be defined only in terms of divine withdrawal (see, however, Lev 23:29-30). Therefore we infer that a restoration in 1844 meant the return of God's presence to his people (the church) after a time of judgment during which his presence had been withdrawn. There is no evidence, of course, that the sanctuary in the context of Daniel 8:14 is the church rather than God's sanctuary in heaven, but if Greenwalt is correct, 1844 would represent not the beginning of a judgment, as taught by the Adventist Church, but the end of a judgment!

The radical nature of Greenwalt's revisionism is confirmed by his theology of atonement, which has Israelite sacrifices throughout the year cleansing the sanctuary rather than persons. The implications of this idea for Christian theology are shocking, suggesting first that Christ's blood does not cleanse *us*, flying in the face of I John 1:9 for example, and suggesting also that as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary from the time of his ascension onward (for example Heb 4:14-16), Christ was cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of his people. Therefore, there is no need for another cleansing of the sanctuary in a pre-advent judgment beginning in 1844. Again, the effect is to wipe out the historical Adventist understanding of Daniel 8:14. Again, the interpretation is unbiblical.

There is abundant evidence in the Bible for the Adventist view, namely that the sins of God's people are removed in two stages, first from the individuals themselves when their sins are transferred to God's sanctuary, and then from the sanctuary. The most important passages on this subject are Leviticus 4, which specifies sacrifices offered throughout the year for purification from sins, and Leviticus 16, which outlines the yearly rites of the Day of Atonement. In Leviticus 4, persons are cleansed. There is

no indication here that the sanctuary is cleansed at this time. In Leviticus 16, on the other hand, the sanctuary is cleansed from *all* the sins of the entire community which have accumulated in the sanctuary during the year. How did the sins get into the sanctuary? They must have been transferred there as God accepted the sacrifices of the people throughout the year. He gave cleansing by taking defilement to himself, but he did not keep it forever. He had it removed from himself on the Day of Atonement.

Greenwalt's idea of a single-phase atonement is based on a theory of Jacob Milgrom, my teacher and friend, who holds that sins or ritual impurities automatically penetrated the sanctuary from afar, and sacrifices throughout the year purged the sanctuary from these evils. At least one problem with this hypothesis is the fact that sins reached the sanctuary from afar only in some exceptional cases when flagrant violations of divine commands could *not* be atoned for by sacrifices (Lev 20:3, Num 19:13, 20).

The sanctuary doctrine may appear complex, at times to a “maddening” degree, but this is so because it unpacks the rich, multifaceted ministry of Christ for us, which now continues an important phase begun in 1844: the cleansing/vindication of God's sanctuary in heaven (Read Dan 8:14 in light of Job 4:17). This can be understood as the vindication of our salvation just before Christ's Second Coming. We have this hope, not this disappointment!

In the final analysis, Greenwalt's superficial biblical interpretations appear designed to serve a sociological agenda to redefine Adventism. Our religion has important sociological implications, which should be emphasized, but when it comes to *defining* Adventism, the only basis which we have acknowledged is biblical theology. We must continually re-evaluate our theology and its relevance, but Greenwalt's approach creates more problems than it solves.

Glen Greenwalt believes his respondent misunderstands both his beliefs and his intentions. Greenwalt's reaction will appear in the next issue of Adventist Today.



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