

Theological Evolution

Happy Sabbath to all.

We are about halfway through our studies that are (loosely) based on the Letters to Rachel Series that we hope to have in audio form before too long. This week, however, another matter was presented before me that I believe will be beneficial for us to examine, both for our own growth, and in our attempts to reach out to others.

Some time ago, I corresponded briefly with an individual who refers to himself as “The Servant of God,” and who believes himself to be a voice of reform within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He is firmly within the “stay with the ship” camp, however, he publishes (I think daily) an email newsletter that points out all the terrible things going on in the SDA Church. He hits on just about everything from the educational institutions, to the hospitals, to the leaders... No doubt, the particulars that he is saying are true... they are certainly documented, but some time ago we had a brief correspondence, and due to what I perceived to be a fault-finding spirit, and the fact that he believes that despite the massive amount of apostasy he has compiled we should not consider the SDA Church to be “fallen,” we hit an impasse, and I asked him to remove me from his mailing list.

Somehow, some of his emails still end up in my junk box, and I will occasionally skim the more interestingly-named ones. This got me thinking, though, about what it would really take to convince a committed Adventist such as this fellow that the Church, like a “sister to fallen Babylon,” is really beyond reformation, and that Yahweh has indeed called out a people to complete the Gospel work.

This led me to consider “apostasy” in general, and how it might be confused with genuine growth. We need to be able to distinguish between them.

Creation Seventh Day Adventists, often enough, are charged with “apostasy,” because we as individuals no longer believe much of what the modern Adventist Church holds to be true. Technically, this IS an accurate (if derogatory) term, based on what the word actually means.

The word “apostasy” does not mean “bad doctrine.” It does not mean blasphemy, or unfaithfulness to one’s sincerely held beliefs. All that the word “apostasy” signifies is “change.” It comes from a Greek word that means “defection,” to leave something behind. In this sense, all Christians who are not Roman Catholics could rightly be labeled “apostate,” because they have abandoned a corrupted Church due to their Protestant convictions. The Apostolic Church, from which the Roman Catholic Church arose, would rightly be called an apostate movement from Judaism...but of course, we would not use that word routinely because of its connotations.

However, and this is important, Creation Seventh Day Adventists are not apostates from “Adventism.” Although we have abandoned (changed from, left behind) the modern SDA Church, we maintain that it is modern Adventist that has gone apostate, that it has “changed” its beliefs from what original Adventism has held to be true.

Now, this does not mean that we have not had light since that time. Indeed, unlike the early Adventist Church, CSDAs are feast-keepers, New Moon observers, and we tend to use the Biblical names Yahweh and Yahshua for the Father and Son.

What this indicates, then, is that there are two ways of “changing.” There are two ways in which an individual, and even a Church, can develop over time, one being legitimate growth, and the other due to the introduction of error.

We can see a parallel in the corporate context with the way that individual Christians change over time. The Bible describes a process called Sanctification; that is, a process of becoming sanctified, or holy. Clearly, the end-product of this process leaves one very changed from the initial few steps, but as we have seen in previous studies, there is a difference between growth and a kind of “spiritual evolution.”

In spiritual evolution, which is taught by most Churches, an individual becomes a Christian and then, over time, through a series of ups and downs as determined by emotions and perceived measures of progress, the individual will hopefully become a “better Christian.” Perfection is seen as some distant, unattainable ideal that we strive for, but never really get to, and yet we are forgiven for our failures because God is love, and Christ is our Savior.

In the Bible, which contains doctrines taught by the Bride of Christ, an individual becomes a Christian and, at that moment, Yahshua the Savior enters his or her heart and says, “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” (John 15:3)

He says, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (Mat 5:48) Thereafter, as the Christian continues to grow, he or she discovers more and more perfect ways to obey the will of the Father, and puts away “former things” as they are discovered to be less excellent. Perfection is seen as a gift that we receive through grace, and our Father keeps us from falling into failure and sin because God is love, and Christ is our Savior.

The former pattern of change follows the principles of evolution, and has been defined as such within Adventism since the days of the pioneers. The latter pattern is the Creationist model that, just as Yahweh added to the work of creation over the course of six days, of each day it was said, “It was good.”

Individuals that change according to the Evolution model can never perfect the character of Yahshua, because that is something that is entirely beyond the human capacity for excellence. They rely upon their own efforts of will, their own works (even as they claim to be “under grace,” and dispute with those whom they perceive to be works-based because they respect Yah’s Law), and limit supernatural intervention to “miracles.”

Individuals that change according to the Creation model daily perfect the character of Yahshua, because He abides in them from the beginning, and shares with us the very glory that He and the Father had in their One-ness even before Adam was formed. (John 17:21-24) They rely, moment-by-moment, on the Savior, and receive supernatural assistance on an ongoing basis, every moment a miracle of faith.

These are things we have seen before, in concept if not in actual wording, this sharp contrast, and we have discussed “theistic evolution,” the idea that Yahweh exists, but uses evolutionary processes to accomplish His aims. The Christian must conclude that such an idea is quite contrary to His character as revealed in the Bible, and see Biblical theology, and evolutionary thought (of any kind), as utterly incompatible.

But this distinction can also apply, not only to individual beliefs and practices, but also to Church-wide doctrines and practices. It can hardly be disputed, for example, that the modern SDA Church has “changed” from the original. We might cite its adoption of the Trinity view of the Godhead, the development of its Fundamental Doctrines, (i.e., its creed) or we might talk about its shifting attitudes regarding a variety of supposedly “minor” issues like health care and assorted worldly policies. All these are held to be good things, positive changes, by its current leadership, and are at least accepted by the majority of its members.

But we can know whether or not these changes are ordered by Yahweh by examining them to see if they are an evolution, or a growth.

All Churches, including Christ’s Own Bride, do change over time. How do we distinguish the principles guiding those changes? I have outlined, briefly, seven distinctions between the growth due to evolution, and the growth due to sanctification. Based on these, we will be able to see clearly how to identify development due to the guidance of the Spirit, and development due to human reasoning and judgment.

1) Evolution results from a series of “ups and downs.”

An example of this may be seen in how the mainstream SDA Church addresses righteousness by faith. The original Protestants, while certainly resistant to the sin/repent cycle to a greater degree than modern ones, did not emphasize complete victory over sin. Perhaps there was less of a need in that generation; but it is clear that in the early days of Adventism, Ellen G. White and other pioneers did strongly promote this idea. Now, once again, the idea is all but ridiculed in modern Adventism. We have a series of ups and downs, and it is not likely that this will end up getting any better, despite the faith of the “stay within the ship” reformers. In fact, based on what we know about the conditions of “Babylon” and “Babylon Fallen,” reform at this point is a spiritual impossibility.

By contrast, in the Creation mindset, Growth is perfect at each step. The early Protestants, leaving the Roman Catholic Church behind, began to restore the true apostolic doctrines to the Christian movement. Over time, Victory over Sin once again entered the Protestant consciousness, and from that point to this there have been individuals who have lived and taught it as a most precious Gospel promise. This is genuine sanctification, growth from glory to glory, at each stage perfect for its intended purpose.

And again, we are applying this to the Church as a corporate entity, not just to individuals. The Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church has merely continued the teachings on Righteousness By Faith that began with our Adventist pioneers, who in turn inherited it from the Biblical writers, and that without ups-and-downs, without doctrinal uncertainties.

2) Evolution is an improvement based on human standards.

Since it is – by definition – a random, undirected process, at best guided by a distant Intelligence, there are no objective standards of “good” or “bad.” Just about any change is “assumed” to be an improvement, and so the Church members tend to passively accept anything that the “leaders” tell them. Ultimately, any claim of “progress” is based on human reasoning, and not on infinite wisdom. If you have never thought that by passively accepting ideas from religious leadership, without investigating them on your own, you are participating in evolutionary thinking... let this now be clear.

By contrast, Christian growth defines a Church as becoming objectively more mature, objectively closer to Yahweh’s standards as defined by the Law of Yah. They receive new light, as we have done regarding New Moons, Feasts, our understanding of Biblical prophecy regarding last day events, and so on.

The Bible becomes more foundational, more central, as new light is discovered. This does not mean that individuals cannot fall short and be sifted out, but as a Church there is preparation for the Harvest, and those individuals that stand in the judgment that this sanctification reveals are those who endure to the end.

3) Evolution is a long, slow, gradual process

We have seen this defined for individuals, who sin-repent-sin-repent, hoping each time to sin “less often.” But it is equally applicable to Churches. Those who believe that the mainstream Adventist Church, for example, is not fallen beyond repair will claim to be crying in the wilderness, will claim to be waiting for the former and latter rain, and say, “Someday... someday the leaders will realize I am right, and then we will see revival and reformation.”

True Creationist Sanctification, however, as applied to a church-wide movement, has never come gradually. There has been a specific prophet, a specific reformer, called at a particular time, who brings a message of reproof and correction. If that message is accepted, the Church movement is saved. If that message is rejected, the movement falls, and Yahweh calls new vine-keepers to service.

Because the warnings of Adventism’s special messengers were not heeded, because they were disregarded, belittled, and now seen as “historical” and thus irrelevant for the present time, they can experience no revival or reformation, even if one were to wait vast periods of time. A plant, or an animal, that does not experience continual growth will die within a short time, and this applies also to religious movements that claim to be promoting reform.

4) Evolution results in incompatible descendants.

In the biological world, mammals, birds, reptiles, etc., evolved from simpler forms, and after they developed, they were genetically incompatible with their ancestors.

If a Church movement experiences evolutionary development, it will come to a point where its new beliefs are so incompatible with its original doctrines that its members are easily identifiable as “different kinds” of Christians from the founders.

Within Adventism, our example for examining these distinctions, it has often been said (even among mainstream Adventists) that the SDA Pioneers could not join the current Adventist Church, because their beliefs about the Gospel, the Godhead, Church organization and discipline, and a significant number of other particulars, are wholly unlike what the SDA Church has become. It is clear that the Adventist Church has not “grown.” It has “evolved,” becoming an entirely different “kind” of creature than it was intended to be.

By contrast, and very briefly, true growth merely produces more of the same “kind.” I have often pointed out that we can take a pioneer Bible study (Jones, Waggoner, White, etc.) and copy-and-paste it into any of our modern CSDA meetings, and we would not need to change a word of it to rejoice in its inspiration.

We have grown, to be sure, and we will have some beautiful insights to share with our spiritual forefathers when they join us at the close of human history, but we will know them, and they will know us, and we will be one in love and spirit.

5) Evolution produces different species.

Not only does a supposedly evolved creature produce incompatible descendants, it also produces a variety of them. Within religious movements, we see offshoots, independent ministries, competing factions, schisms (doctrinal splits) which Paul specifically identifies as one of the “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5. Essentially, “denominationalism” within a religious movement does not occur until evolution has begun.

By contrast, sanctification does not change the organism’s fundamental character. Since a Church that is truly growing is becoming more Christ-like, it will by its very nature place a supreme emphasis on unity, on using the Gospel Order to resolve disputes, and to come into harmony on all principles and most doctrinal interpretations. There will be individuality, there will be preferences, there may be different amounts and rates of growth in individual members, but the Spirit of love will absolutely forbid dissensions to the point of separation if both parties are genuinely converted to the Faith of Yahshua.

6) Evolutionary progress depends upon violence and force

In order for one organism to survive under this worldview, its competitors must die off, and its prey must be sacrificed to its need for sustenance.

In a religious context, the application of force is a concept examined nowhere else as it is in the CSDA Church. We explain, Biblically, the satanic character of religious control methods, of cult-like behavior among those that have no true Christian foundation, and of Trademark lawsuits that treat the Church of Christ as if it were some secular business to be defended by the strong arm of the civil law. These are all examples of force being used to compel the consciences of individuals, and they are by their very nature evolutionary processes within religion.

In the Creation view of growth and sanctification, progress depends not on human force, not even on human effort, but on the Spirit of love.

As it is written, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” (1 Cor. 3:5-7)

Those who believe they have a message to share ought to share that message according to the direction of their consciences, and no man ought to forbid them any more than anyone should be compelled to listen to error. But the messengers are not in harmony with the Gospel if they are not forgetful of self, not considering their individual efforts, or even their religious organization, to be “anything,” except a channel by which men may come to know and worship Yahweh. The moment they believe themselves to be special or important outside of that purpose, they begin to develop a kingdom of this world, and seek to defend it using unlawful means.

In the true faith, the Gospel is shared, and then the Spirit does the work of conviction without any coercion, pressure, or force. Finally...

7) Evolution ends in death

No matter how “fit” a creature is, it got there by exploiting the death of others, and will eventually die to make room for a superior, more evolved, alternative.

Within a religious context, evolutionary thinking decides which is a successful religion, which is a “true” religion, by seeing how powerful it is, how many members it has, and how much influence it has on society. This lasts a while, and then it is replaced by another “most powerful,” “most relevant” religion. Religions that are evolutionary in nature will attempt to capture these ideals, establishing their “name” in the earth, seeking to sway political figures or the popular conception. Inevitably, instead of succeeding in bringing the world up to the standards of the Church, such religions will lower themselves to the standards of the world, and there they will be discarded by the world in favor of the next big thing in spirituality.

Creationist sanctification is constant. It endures. It leads to a harvest, and then on unto everlasting life. It need not be large, numerous, or powerful. It may be a small group of believers living in the mountains, or a single family kept safe by Yahweh on an ark.

Even a tiny plant, if it is loved and nurtured by infinite love and power, will mature in its due season, and perfectly reflect that care that went into its growth and development.

In these things, then, we see a clear distinction between the principles of Heaven, as revealed in the creation and genuine development of both individuals and Churches, and the principles of Satan as manifest in the world that he controls. The policies, philosophies and mindset of the earth are becoming increasingly distant from divine principle, and we ought not to think that we are here to repair it. Of course, we wish to preserve it as long as possible, but we are under no illusions that mankind will one day produce a perfect, secular society. The world has a terminal illness in sin, and only Yahshua can heal this terrible sickness.

It is our work, as the Redeemed, as the Healed, to reveal the difference between the holy and the profane, between the sacred and the common. It is our testimony to be Creation Seventh Day Adventists, revealing the fullness of all that those words mean, and teaching men to step out from the legacy of death, the legacy of chaos and disasters, and to find a home in the saving and sanctifying power of Yahweh and His Anointed.

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