

**THE CONCEPT OF SIN IN THE THEOLOGIES OF ELLEN G WHITE AND  
LEONARDO BOFF: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

by

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## SUMMARY

The aim of this thesis is to compare the concept of sin in the theologies of Ellen G. White and Leonardo Boff. Chapter 1 examines Ellen G. White's concept of sin. White's historical and theological backgrounds coupled with her use of the "great controversy" motif provide a better grasp of her understanding of sin. White defines sin as the transgression of God's Law. She views sin to comprise at least two dimensions, namely, the individual and the social. White regards these two aspects of sin to have equal significance. White's detailed treatment of the sanctuary teaching also highlights the two dimensions of sin.

In Chapter 2 Boff's idea of sin is investigated. Boff's historical background, which exposed him to the poor, influenced his perception of sin. Boff's theological background together with his familiarity with Karl Marx's social analysis prompted Boff to define sin as the negation of God's love in a human history bedevilled by class conflict. Boff views sin to have the individual and social dimensions. Yet, in

terms of importance, Boff believes that the social dimension of sin is more consequential than the individual one.

In Chapter 3 White's and Boff's views on sin are compared. From this comparison it is evident that both White and Boff recognize the bipolarity of sin. Both seem to agree that Christians should take an active role in correcting social evils because love for God is manifested by how we relate to our neighbor. Boff devotes less space to the individual aspect of sin than White.

Chapter 4 shows that White's theological tradition has a lot to learn from Boff and his tradition and also vice versa. An awareness of the current priestly ministry of Christ evident in White's theology could help Boff to bring some balance to his stance on the social and the individual dimension of sin. Boff's use of Marx's social analysis should also help Seventh-day Adventists, the inheritors of White's theology, not to interpret White's theology of sin only along individualistic lines while overlooking its social dimension.

Title of thesis:

**THE CONCEPT OF SIN IN THE THEOLOGIES OF ELLEN G WHITE AND LEONARDO BOFF: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

Key terms:

Great controversy; Class conflict; Sin; Individual dimension; Social dimension; Sanctuary teaching; Law; Transgression; Disgrace; Capitalistic problematic; Investigative judgment.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

I was born on the 10th of October 1961 in Zimbabwe. For my primary and secondary education I attended Rata School and Solusi Secondary School respectively. I hold a B.A. Theology degree (1987) and a Master of Divinity degree (1995) from Andrews University, Michigan, U.S.A. I also completed a BTh. (Hons) degree (1990) and a Master of Theology degree (1993) with the University of South Africa.

Professionally, I served for five years as a district pastor in the Central Zimbabwe Field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church whose headquarters are in Gweru, Zimbabwe. I also was the Education and Youth Director for the same organization for two years. I was ordained to the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1990. In 1990 and 1991 I was the Chaplain of Solusi College where I also lectured part time. I served as the president of the Pan Africa Club at the campus of Andrews University from 1994 to 1995.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Significance

Since the dawn of human history the question of sin continues to tax the minds of many people from various walks of life. The Old and New Testament writers, for example, reflected on the issue of sin.<sup>1</sup> However, besides the biblical account, the history of the Christian church bristles with undying efforts to grasp the mystery of sin. The mind staggers at the countless books that have been written on the subject.<sup>2</sup> Yet it appears that of all the brilliant minds which continue to peer into the problem of sin, none can conclusively claim to have fully comprehended its mysterious nature.

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<sup>1</sup>See: Gen. 4:7; Ex. 32:32; Nu. 5:7; Dt. 24:16; Isa. 12:23; 1 Ki. 8:46; 2 Ch. 7:14; Job 1:22; Ps. 4:4; 17:3; 32:2; 36:2; 38:18; 39:1; 119:11; Pr. 5:22; Jer. 31:30; Eze. 3:18; Mic. 7:18; Zec. 3:4; Mt. 18:6; Mk. 3:29; Lk. 17:1; Jn. 1:29; Ro. 2:12; 5:12; 6:2; 11, 14, 23; 1 Co. 5:12; Gal. 6:1; 1 Ti. 5:20; Heb. 4:15; Jas. 1:15; 1 Pe. 2:22; 1 Jn. 1:7, 8; 2:1, 3:4; 5:17.

<sup>2</sup>This observation is accurate in the light of the bulk of literature which has been published. Among the many works dealing with sin a few may be cited and these include; Patrick T. McCormick, Sin as Addiction. New York: Paulist Press, 1988; Patrick D. Miller, Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982; Louis Monden, Sin, Liberty and Law. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965; Joseph Morgan, Sin, Its Own Punishment. Newburyport, MA: John Mycall, 1791; Lesslie Newbigin, Sin and Salvation. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956; Holtan Peter Odegard, Sin and Science. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977; Thomas N. Tenter, Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977; Thomas Aquinas, Original Sin. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965.

The purpose of this thesis is to bring Ellen G. White and Leonardo Boff into dialogue concerning their views of sin. Among other things, it is hoped that a dialogue of this kind should help to shed some light on a number of key questions such as: To what extent do White and Boff agree or disagree on their concept of sin? Is White's or Boff's concept of sin in consonance with that of mainstream historic Christianity or does it trade on some form of heresy? In what ways can an objective and frank dialogue between White and Boff on sin enhance a more balanced approach to the individual and social aspects of sin? To what extent can a correct view of sin heighten the Seventh-day Adventist Church's sense of mission? How can Boff also employ the more balanced idea of sin to handle critics who regard liberation theology as lopsided because of its alleged emphasis on the social and not individual dimension of sin?

### **Problem**

In the history of Christianity the concept of sin has experienced some shifts.<sup>3</sup> Some people's understanding of sin has changed because to them; the idea

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<sup>3</sup>Bernard Haring, Sin in the Secular Age. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974, pp. 15-36. He enumerates and discusses fifteen shifts in the understanding of sin. These include: the shift from moral theology for confessors and penitents to a moral theology of life; the shift from a static to a more dynamic vision of life and sin; a change in sin against man's nature in the perspective of historicity; the shift from a predominantly priest, clerical vision of sin toward a prophetic desacralization, a change due to the impact of the authority crisis on the concept of sin; the shift due to the new sensitivity to

of sin evokes different images nowadays than those it used to in the past. Commenting on the alteration of the concept of sin, Xavier Thevenot perceptively notes:

The emphasis today is no longer on sexual sins of individualism and fatalism: the refusal to participate in making history and building a better world. The disorder emphasized today is not so much in the individual's heart and emotions but in the political, economic and social order<sup>4</sup> (emphasis supplied).

Any slight adjustment in the concept of sin is bound not only to affect the key doctrines such as the doctrine of God, Christology, Pneumatology, Soteriology, but the entire spectrum of the Christian doctrines. Granted that sin is a key factor in showing the importance of the mystery of salvation,<sup>5</sup> a change in the concept of sin should not be taken lightly. An awareness of the change in

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theological, ethical, and cultural pluralism; the shift from morality of art and decision-making to a morality of conversion and renewal, a more personalistic concept of sin; the shift from prohibitive laws to the main orientations; the shift from a general individualistic determination of sin to a vision determined by sanctions and controls to a concept determined by pedagogy and concern for development; the shift from sin of disobedience towards sin against one's own moral autonomy; the shift from the law to the gospel; the change of focus owing to the new religious liberty and liberty of conscience and the change of focus in view of modern atheism.

<sup>4</sup>Xavier Thevenot, Sin: A Christian View Today. Ligouri, MO: Ligouri Publications, 1984, pp. 11, 12. See also; Eugene Maly, Sin: Biblical Perspectives. Dayton, OH: Pflaum/Standard, 1973, pp. 1-3.

<sup>5</sup>Gottfried Quell, Sin. London: Adams and Charles Black, 1951, p. v. He quotes William Law who said: "The whole nature of the Christian religion stands upon these two pillars, namely, the greatness of our fall and the greatness of our redemption."

perception of sin makes the following questions inevitable: What factors are responsible for that change? Should the transformation in the meaning of sin be regarded as a natural doctrinal development or as an unfortunate aberration? How far does White and Boff stand with respect to the individual and social dimensions of sin? What undergirding motif could be said to condition White's or Boff's concept of sin?

### **Limitation**

It will not be within the scope of this thesis to conduct a comprehensive analysis of all views of sin. The sheer volume of the literature on the question of sin compels one to prescribe a specific focus for this research. At issue in this study is the comparison of White's and Boff's views of sin. Put differently, the purpose of this study is not to compare White's and Boff's theological traditions' view of sin. This investigation does not primarily aim at dealing with the way Adventism<sup>6</sup> and the theology of liberation<sup>7</sup> look at sin. Rather, the spotlight is on White's and Boff's specific understanding of sin as individual theologians.

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<sup>6</sup>In the context of this research Adventism refers to the characteristic theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

<sup>7</sup>Theology of liberation as used here refers to the subdivision of liberation theology. Liberation theology is generally perceived to have the following major subdivisions, and these include, Black theology as seen in North America and South Africa which deals with racial oppression, Feminist theology which looks at the oppression of women, and Theology of liberation found in Latin America which focuses on class oppression.

There is a cogent reason for drawing a fine line between a theological tradition and one of its key representatives. A distinction between a theological tradition and its given representative allows one to deal with the representative's views separately. Treating the representative singly minimizes the danger of mixing the distinctive perspectives of the representative with those of the theological tradition he or she may belong to.

An in-depth inquiry into White's and Boff's views of sin will be conducted within the context of two key motifs. In the writings of White there is what some scholars have identified as a "great controversy motif."<sup>8</sup> This particular motif provides a framework within which a better understanding of White's concept of sin is facilitated. Boff makes use of the "class conflict motif."<sup>9</sup> Among other things, the class conflict motif throws some light on Boff's approach to the question of sin.

## Methodology

This thesis is written in the area of dogmatics. Ellen G. White's and Leonardo Boff's understanding of sin are compared and contrasted. A thesis of

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<sup>8</sup>See: Jose M. Bertoluci, The Son of the Morning and the Guardian Cherub in the Context of the Controversy between Good and Evil. Th.D. Dissertation, Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1985.

<sup>9</sup>Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Salvation and Liberation. New York: Orbis Books, 1984, pp. 7, 8.

this kind could approach White's and Boff's concept of sin from at least three angles. The first way could be to spell out the basic theological orientations of both theologians and then explore how these orientations affect their concept of sin. The second method could be to conduct an exegetical study of the biblical passages which deal with sin and then evaluate White's and Boff's views in the light of such exegesis. The third approach could be to investigate the historical and theological backgrounds and to articulate the leading motifs in the writings of the two theologians in question so as to assess how these factors influence their perception of sin. This thesis opts for the third approach.

In this thesis, primary sources are analyzed. Books by White and Boff are examined. Relevant literature on sin by other Christian and non-Christian authors are consulted. Scriptural references are used. However, in view of the scope of this thesis, detailed exegesis of scriptural texts is not possible. That task is extended to other seekers of truth.

### **Outline of Chapters**

The burden of Chapter 1 is to present Ellen G. White and her view of sin. To achieve this objective, we will explore the historical and theological background of White as well as her "great controversy motif" to show how they impact on White's concept of sin.

Leonardo Boff's idea of sin will occupy Chapter 2. Boff's historical and theological backgrounds, together with his class conflict motif, will be investigated. This chapter will analyze how these three factors condition Boff's view of sin.

It is in Chapter 3 that White's and Boff's views of sin will be compared and contrasted. Points of agreement and disagreement will be highlighted.

Finally, Chapter 4 will spell out the findings, implications and recommendations of the research. In addition, it is in Chapter 4 that a conclusion to the thesis will be presented.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **ELLEN G. WHITE'S VIEW OF SIN**

In this chapter focus will be directed to three objectives. The first will try to outline and describe the context in which Ellen G. White's view of sin crystallizes. The second objective will be to analyze White's understanding of sin from several vantage points. The third will attempt to show the link between the context for White's concept of sin and her understanding of sin.

#### **1.1 The Context for Ellen G. White's View of Sin**

This section endeavors to explore the triad which constitutes the context for Ellen G. White's view of sin. White's historical background forms the first aspect of the triad. It is difficult to appreciate the nuances of White's conception of sin without a clear knowledge of her nationality, upbringing, education, marriage and life work. The second feature comprises White's exposure to Wesleyanism and Puritanism, among other things,<sup>1</sup> together with her prophetic calling. This second aspect of the triad further enhances one's understanding of White's view of sin.

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<sup>1</sup>Adventism, whose co-founder was Ellen G. White, was indebted to many influences. The following are some of them: Christian Connectionism, Methodism, Anabaptism, Reformed Calvinism, Lutheranism, Restorationism, Deism, Scottish common sense realism, Baconian scientific methodology. Among the foregoing, Adventism was indebted more to Methodism or Wesleyanism. See: George Knight, "Development of SDA Theology," Lectures presented at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan: April, 1993, pp. 2-7. Henceforth referred to as Knight, "Development of SDA Theology."



White's theological motif is the third element of the triad which prisms her idea of sin. White asserts that there is a conflict between Christ and Satan. The "great controversy" is the motif which runs through White's entire theological writings.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Woodrow W. Whidden, II, The Soteriology of Ellen G. White: The Persistent Path to Perfection, 1836-1902. Ph.D. Dissertation: Drew University, Madison, NJ, 1989, pp. 101-155. Henceforth referred to as Whidden, The Soteriology of Ellen G. White. He points out that Ellen G. White scholars debate on what constitutes her basic theological motif. Whidden observes that on one side of the issue are scholars, such as Eric Webster, who contend that "the very best center of White's thought . . . is the reality of Jesus Christ as the Mediator, the Link, the Middleman and the Bridge between God and the universe' and that 'Christ's participation in the great controversy represents only one phase of Christ's activity in the sweep of eternity.'" Whidden himself, however, stands on the other side holding that the great controversy motif constitutes the framework of Ellen G. White's theological effort. Whidden differs with Webster saying: "Though Webster is correct, yet practically all of her (White's) theological expositions presented Christ as the covenant keeping Redeemer in conflict with the Devil. This conflict was to wrest His lost heritage from Satan's grasp and to make secure the government of heaven on the basis of both justice and mercy. . . . Webster is right in what he affirms, but wrong in what he denies. There was a profundity in Ellen White's conception of the Person of Christ that transcends the history of sin but the practical manifestation in her writings was in the setting of His work in combatting the errors of the great Adversary in order to redeem lost humanity and vindicate God's dealing with sin before the unfallen intelligences of the universe." Arguing for the great controversy motif as the central theme in Ellen G. White's writings, Whidden further quotes Joseph Battistone's The Great Controversy Theme in E. G. White Writings. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978. He notes that "the conclusions of Wood and Battistone also evidence that this controlling theme (Great Controversy) was clearly a pre-1888 development and helps to give background to our study of the era after 1888. This central theme was not a latter development, but was fully in place by 1888 (the year The Great Controversy was published). It was embryonically present from the early days, and became clearly evident by the year 1858 (when she had her comprehensive 'great controversy' vision at Lovett's Grove, Ohio)."

White highlights several kairological moments<sup>3</sup> which characterize the great controversy. She holds that the moral fall of Lucifer technically marks the beginning of the great conflict. The eruption of the war in heaven and the subsequent expulsion of Lucifer and his angels transferred the great controversy to planet Earth. The fall of man, the plan of salvation, the resurrection, and the priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary are among the decisive phases of the great controversy. The time of trouble and the second coming of Christ usher in events that lead to the conclusion of the great controversy. With the extermination of sin and annihilation of sinners, the great controversy will be ended.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1.1 A Historical Background of Ellen G. White

A citizen of the United States of America, Ellen Gould Harmon was born on November 26, 1827, at Gorham, Maine. Ellen and her sister Elizabeth were the youngest in a family of eight children. Ellen's father was a hatmaker.<sup>5</sup> Her parents, Robert and Eunice Harmon, raised Ellen in the Methodist Episcopal Church in which

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<sup>3</sup>By "kairological moments" we refer to events with a density of meaning. In this case the context is the conflict between Christ and Satan. Such events, among others, include: the fall of Lucifer, the fall of man, the incarnation, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, and the second coming of Christ.

<sup>4</sup>Ellen G. White, The Story of Redemption. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947, pp. 32, 42, 220, 230, 375, 407, 409. Henceforth referred to as White, The Story of Redemption.

<sup>5</sup>Roger W. Coon, A Gift of Light. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1973, p. 23. Henceforth referred to as Coon, A Gift of Light.

they were members.<sup>6</sup> However, Ellen and her family embraced the Advent message through the preaching of William Miller.<sup>7</sup> Robert and his entire household lost their membership in the Methodist Church because of their new faith.<sup>8</sup>

Ellen did not go very far in her schooling. She only had less than three full years of elementary education.<sup>9</sup> Her formal education was abruptly terminated by an accident which left her in poor health.<sup>10</sup> Rising above her hopeless situation, White pursued education informally. Her fertile mind and fluid pen has left behind twenty-five million written words which constitute her thirty-seven books.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Years Vol. 1. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985, p. 17. Henceforth referred to as White, A. L. Ellen G. White: The Early Years Vol. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>8</sup>Ellen G. White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1915, p. 50. Henceforth referred to as White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White.

<sup>9</sup>White, A. L, Ellen G. White: The Early Years, Vol. 1, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup>White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, pp. 18-19.

<sup>11</sup>Rene Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny. New Canaan: Keats Publishing, Inc., 1972, p. ix. Henceforth referred to as Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny.

In the wake of the Advent Movement's Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, Ellen rose to prominence. At the age of seventeen Ellen received her first vision. God revealed to Ellen that in spite of their disappointment on October 22, 1844, He was still with the ex-Millerite Movement. The message of the vision, therefore, was one of comfort and assurance.<sup>12</sup> It is essential to note that the Advent believers, under the leadership of Miller, held that Jesus was going to come to this world on the 22nd of October, 1844.<sup>13</sup> The basis of their time-setting was a study of Daniel 8:14. This passage speaks of the 2300 days which commenced in 457 B.C. and ended in 1844 with the cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven. The Millerites understood the cleansing of the sanctuary in 1844 to mean the second coming of Christ. Yet, against all anticipation, Christ did not come.

In December of 1844 Ellen Harmon received a key vision of what actually happened in October 22, 1844. Instead of coming to this world as mistakenly supposed, Christ had been transferred from the holy to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. Therefore, the year 1844 marked the commencement of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, p. 59.

<sup>13</sup>Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy. Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950, pp. 421-22. Henceforth referred to as White, The Great Controversy.

<sup>14</sup>Ellen G. White, Early Writings. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1882, pp. 55, 250. Henceforth referred to as White,

After her vision of 1847, White had several visions which varied in content and purpose. Among her visions were those which assisted the Seventh-day Adventist Church to formulate their doctrines.<sup>15</sup> White also received countless visions which illuminated the course of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.<sup>16</sup>

Ellen was married to James White on August 30, 1846.<sup>17</sup> Of the four sons they had in their marriage, two survived.<sup>18</sup> Ellen White tried to balance her family responsibilities with her commitment to the spreading of the Advent message with her husband.<sup>19</sup>

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### Early Writings.

<sup>15</sup>Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958, p. 207. Henceforth referred to as White, Selected Messages Vol. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny, pp. 177-8.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>18</sup>Nkosiyo Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics: A Comparative Study. M.Th. Dissertation: University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1993, p. 7. Henceforth referred to as Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 6-8.

In 1915 Ellen G. White died.<sup>20</sup> However, in 1914 before her death White's contributions were acclaimed by many, among them George Wharton James who said: ". . . this remarkable woman, although almost entirely self-educated has written and published more books and in more languages which circulate to a greater extent than the written works of any woman in history."<sup>21</sup>

### 1.1.2 Ellen G. White's Theological Background

Ellen G. White's theology did not evolve in a religious or social vacuum. White is indebted to several factors which, in varying degrees, shaped her theological thinking. Wesleyanism, Puritanism, Restorationism, Deism, Anabaptism, Scottish common sense realism, Baconian Scientific methodology<sup>22</sup> and White's acclaimed prophethood<sup>23</sup> constitute the soil in which her theological roots are imbedded.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Board of Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate, Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White, Vol. 3. Mountain View: Pacific Publishing Association, 1963, pp. 3193-3210. Henceforth referred to as Board of Trustees, Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White, Vol. 3.

<sup>21</sup>Arthur L. White, The Human Interest Story. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1972, p. 91. Henceforth referred to as White, The Human Interest Story.

<sup>22</sup>Knight, "Development of SDA Theology," pp. 2-7.

<sup>23</sup>Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny, p. 73.

<sup>24</sup>Knight, "Development of SDA Theology," pp. 2-7.

White was raised in a Wesleyan community and her Methodist upbringing impacted her theology in substantial ways. On the linguistic plane, White owes much of her language and terminology to Wesleyanism.<sup>25</sup> In addition, she is indebted to the Wesleyan method of doing theology which places emphasis on speaking the truth in love. This method asserted that while truth is important, the spirit by which one does theology is more important.<sup>26</sup> White was influenced by Wesleyanism, which in turn is rooted in Arminianism.<sup>27</sup> Wesleyanism and Arminianism held several doctrines in

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 5. See also; Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, A Theology of Love. Kansas City: Bacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972, p. 22. She notes that: "John Wesley's theological and religious contribution to the Church was not new dogma but real, spiritual vitality infused into traditional, mainline Christianity. This vitality is love, and love is by its very nature dynamic."

<sup>27</sup>Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, A Comparative Study of Arminianism and Adventism on Atonement and Predestination. Unpublished Term Paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1988, p. 1. He notes that "Arminianism has come to represent the theological system, which denies determinism and affirms that Christ's atonement was intended for all but effectual in those who choose to believe in Christ. After the death of Arminius, his followers issued the Remonstrance of 1610--a document which outlines the system known as Arminianism. John Hicks has correctly stated that, 'Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609) was the fountainhead of the theological system known as Arminianism, but he is not responsible for all the many directions in which the resultant streams flowed.' The official statement made by the Seventh-day Adventist Church reads as follows: 'The Seventh-day Adventist Church is neither Calvinistic nor totally Arminian in theology. Recognizing the virtues of each, we have endeavored to assimilate that which to us appears to be the clear teaching of the Word of God.'" Koranteng-Pipim observes that "the official statement of the SDA church's links with Arminianism is a confession of some degree of attachment to Arminianism. Arminius' influence on SDA theology is probably greater than the Church acknowledges," p. 54. He also gives seven

common. Both taught conditional predestination, unlimited atonement, the freedom of the will, that God's saving grace is not irresistible, and that it was possible to fall from grace. White essentially embraced Wesley's view of justification and sanctification.<sup>28</sup> While Wesley adopted Luther's view of justification by faith, to Wesley is attributed the addition of the concept of sanctification.<sup>29</sup> Wesley taught that perfection was possible in one's span of life. However, his position differed from the one in continental Europe which asserted that perfection was attainable only at death.<sup>30</sup> Wesley argued that sanctification was pure love for God and fellow man.<sup>31</sup> He did not

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points of agreement between James Arminius and the SDA church. These include: "1. Adam and Eve, as representatives of the human race, were created in the image of God, with free moral choice and conditional immortality. 2. While man's nature after sin was not "total depravity," the image of God in man was marred; man also became susceptible to death. 3. Original sin was imputed to Adam's posterity in none other than a sinful tendency, bias or propensity. 4. Through the free and universal grace offered by God, the faculties of humanity can be activated to respond to God's will but grace is not irresistible. 5. The ground of a sinner's justification is in the substitutionary death of Christ. Through faith in Christ, the sinner receives forgiveness of sins and imputation of Christ's righteousness. 6. The atonement of Christ was for the whole world, but efficacious only to those who believe. Limited atonement is therefore rejected. 7. Since no one is predestined to life or death, it is those who continue to depend on God's grace who will ultimately be saved," pp. 53-54.

<sup>28</sup>Russel Staples, "Wesley and Methodism," Lectures presented at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, April, 1993, p. 17. Henceforth referred to as Staples, "Wesley and Methodism."

<sup>29</sup>Knight, "Development of SDA Theology," p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.



see perfection as absolute sinlessness but as perfect caring. For Wesley as well as White, sanctification is both a work of a lifetime as well as a moment-by-moment experience. Wesleyanism has personal and social ethics at the core.<sup>32</sup> In White's theology, too, there is an awareness of the balance between one's relationship to God and one's neighbor.

In the nineteenth century the American religious thinking was largely Puritan. This fact should be borne in mind in order to understand the religious atmosphere which prevailed when White did theology. Puritanism exalted *sola scriptura* such that all issues had to be resolved by Scripture.<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, White was influenced by the Restorationistic Movement. Restorationism or Primitivism was a key force in the nineteenth-century American religious movements. It was a deliberate attempt to go back to the Bible, past the corruptions of the European Church. The idea was to try to encounter the untarnished New Testament Christianity. The Restorationist Movement was, therefore, committed to the Authority of the Bible. The movement's motto was: "When the Bible speaks we speak, when the Bible is silent we are silent."<sup>34</sup> Further, the Christian Connection group had some influence on Ellen White because James White,

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Bryan W. Ball, The English Connection. Cambridge: James Clarke and Company, 1981, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup>Knight, "Development of SDA Theology," p. 8.

her husband, and Joseph Bates, one of the key figures in Adventism, once belonged to it.<sup>35</sup> While White opposed some of their teachings, she, however, affirmed the Christian Connection's primacy of scripture.

William Miller, the preacher who led Ellen White to the Advent faith, was a deist. Miller's outstanding use of logic and reason gained him prominence. White was not a deist, but from Miller she saw that, used within right limits, reason has a vital role to play in the search and communication of Biblical truth.<sup>36</sup>

Another influence on White's theology was from the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists subscribed to the idea of *sola scriptura*. They were non-creedal, fearing that the creed would take the place of the Bible. The Anabaptists strove to restore the New Testament Church in both its essence and form. In addition, they believed that the basis of one's church membership was baptism and not birth in the church. Baptism was, therefore, reserved for the mature people who would have reached the age of accountability. The mode of baptism which the Anabaptists followed was immersion.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, Anabaptists believed that the church was called to be a suffering church. They also taught that the church was to be separate from the state. The

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

situation of suffering was easily realized by the church because its refusal to take oaths and engage in military service offended the state. Anabaptists, however, stressed the need for ethical living. They accepted the Reformation views of the Trinity and justification. Anabaptists were filled with missionary zeal. In the light of the foregoing teachings one sees many links between White's theology and that of the Anabaptists.<sup>38</sup>

White's acclaimed prophethood is probably the weightiest influence on her theology. This predominant factor does not negate the role of the previously discussed influences. What seems distinctive about her prophetic status is that it enabled White to embrace and affirm truth which she encountered in her environment while at the same time rejecting error.<sup>39</sup>

Frequently in her writings White uses the phrases: "I was shown . . . ", "I saw . . . ", or "I was carried . . . "<sup>40</sup> Answering those who asked how she felt while in vision she remarked:

As inquiries are frequently made to my state in vision and after I come out, I would say that when the Lord sees fit to give me a vision, I am taken into the presence of Jesus and the Angels, and am entirely lost to earthly things. I can

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>39</sup>Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny, pp. 73-91.

<sup>40</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, pp. 35, 42, 45, 208, 210. By saying, "I saw . . .", "I was shown . . .", "I was carried . . .", White clearly distinguishes herself as one who had direct revelation from God concerning the progress and extra-Biblical details of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

see no further than the angel directs me. My attention is often directed to scenes transpiring upon earth. At times I am carried far ahead into the future and shown what is to take place. Then again and again I am shown things as they have occurred in the past.<sup>41</sup>

During the time in which White lived there were many who claimed to be prophets. White was reluctant to call herself a prophet. She commented: "Why have I not claimed to be a prophet? It is because many who boldly claim that they are prophets are a reproach to the cause of Christ, and because my work includes much more than the word 'prophet' signifies."<sup>42</sup>

White received "more than two thousand visions and prophetic dreams"<sup>43</sup> which enabled her to write on nutritional, medical and spiritual matters. She also received details on the climax of the great controversy between good and evil.<sup>44</sup>

#### **1.1.2.1 The Authority and Inspiration of Ellen G. White**

In light of the claim that White was a prophet, the issue of her inspiration and authority deserve some considerable attention. Questions such as: Was everything that White said and wrote inspired? Was she infallible? If White was indeed

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<sup>41</sup>Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny, p. ix.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. viii.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

inspired as most Seventh-day Adventist believe, does that place her beyond the realm of criticism?

Not everything that White said and wrote was inspired. Some of the statements which White made were her personal opinions which were independent of divine revelation. A correct understanding of the Ellen G. White corpus demands a clear distinction between her un-inspired but possibly inspiring opinions and her statements which were prompted by divine revelation. Pointing to the non-revelational aspects of her statements, White notes:

But there are times when common things must be stated, common thoughts must occupy the mind, common letters must be written and information given that has passed from one to another of the workers. Such words, such information, are not given under special inspiration of the Spirit of God. Questions are asked at times that are not upon religious subjects at all, and these questions must be answered. We converse about houses and lands, trades to be made, and locations for our institutions, their advantages and disadvantages.<sup>45</sup>

By asserting that every statement that she made was inspired, those that hold a fundamentalistic view of White diminish her humanness. Such an extreme position would make White herself shudder because she was not under inspiration all the time.

Quite often White expressed her indebtedness to her friends who supplied her with accurate dates of some of the historical events which she referred to in her

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<sup>45</sup>Ellen G. White, Selected Messages Vol.1. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980, pp. 38-39.

biographical writings.<sup>46</sup> White also attached an appendix statement in the first 400 copies of her book Spiritual Gifts Vol. II, asking readers to inform her promptly of any "incorrect statements" in her book so as to rectify any errors before the book could be re-published.<sup>47</sup> White often relied on her memory to recall some events she was writing on. At times, with no diary in hand, she contacted those who had witnessed specific events to edit her manuscripts which recounted those events.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, White refuted claims of infallibility. Categorically she stated that "in regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible. His word is true and in Him is no variableness, or shadow of turning."<sup>49</sup> There are times when White declined to comment on some subjects, for example the issue of who would constitute the 144 000 in the book of Revelation, saying that God had not revealed anything to her in connection with that matter.<sup>50</sup> Again, in Letter 27 of 1876, White articulated her position with reference to infallibility saying that "I do not claim infallibility, or even perfection of christian character. I am not free from mistakes and errors in my

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<sup>46</sup>Ellen G. White Estate, Notes and Papers Concerning Ellen G. White and the Spirit of Prophecy. Berrien Springs, MI: James White Library, 1962, p. 93. Henceforth referred to as E. G. White Estate, Notes and Papers on White.

<sup>47</sup>Ellen G. White, Spiritual Gifts Vol. 2. Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1945. See the Preface.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>White, Selected Messages Vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup>E. G. White Estate, Notes and Papers on White, p. 59.

life."<sup>51</sup> Throwing more light on her human limitations, White further observed that "we have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. Those who think they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed."<sup>52</sup>

Reflecting on White and change George Knight is, therefore, right when he notes that White "was capable of both believing error and growing in her understanding."<sup>53</sup>

Knight points out that there are three basic types of change which White experienced with respect to theological issues. The three include: 1) clarification, 2) progressive development, and 3) contradiction or reversal. With respect to the first one, White had occasion to clarify her position on the nature of Christ in 1890 because her treatment of this matter in 1858 had been vague and her position smacked of semi-Arianism. Regarding the second type of change, Knight shows that White's theological ideas developed progressively. As additional "light" came to her concerning, for example, the disadvantages of using pork in her diet, she abstained from eating it. In her theology, therefore, progressive development was evident. The third change which White experienced has the potential to shock those who hold a fundamentalistic view of White because they cannot conceive White as ever being

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<sup>51</sup>White, Selected Messages Vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>George Knight, "Adventists and Change," Ministry, October, 1993, p. 13.

mistaken. Knight points out that White contradicted or reversed some of her earlier theological positions. He cites the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 which had been interpreted to mean that October 22, 1844 was the date of Christ's second advent, the shut door theory which was espoused by early Adventists concerning human probation, and the question of whether the "Sabbath should begin at 6.00 pm, sunrise, or midnight," as some of the examples which demonstrate that White reversed her earlier understanding on some theological issues.<sup>54</sup>

W. C. White also testifies to the progressive development in White's grasp of issues. While he affirms that his mother gained inspiration through visions, W. C. White, however, states that first hand contact with people and visits to historic places shown to her earlier in visions enhanced her understanding of the issues she wrote about. W. C. White comments:

Mother's contact with the European people had brought to her mind scores of things that had been presented to her in vision during past years, some of them two or three times, and other scenes many times. Her seeing of historic places and her contact with the people refreshed her memory with references to these things and so she desired to add much material to the book. This was done, and the manuscripts were prepared for translation.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>E.G. White Estate, Notes and Papers on White, p. 194.



White regarded herself as God's messenger and as such she viewed her writings as embodying a message from God.<sup>56</sup> White rejected the idea that hers was verbal inspiration while asserting thought inspiration.<sup>57</sup> On some occasions she delineated the words spoken to her by an angel in vision by way of quotation marks.<sup>58</sup>

The idea that White is regarded to be a prophet by most Seventh-day Adventists and that White herself claimed inspiration and revelation, should not deter analytical and rigorous scholarly scrutiny of her theology. Adventism seems to benefit from critical thinkers, inside or outside its own ranks, who probe the issue of White's authority and inspiration because this has led to deeper introspection on the part of Adventism.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>White, Selected Messages Vol. 1, pp. 35-36. White also viewed her writings as subordinate to the Bible for she classified them as "lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light." See: White, Colporteur Ministry, p. 125.

<sup>57</sup>E. G. White, Notes and Papers on White, p. 92.

<sup>58</sup>White, Selected Messages Vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup>The issue of White's authority and inspiration has been, and is a subject of intense debate with powerful arguments from both sides. See: Walter Rea, The White Lie. Turlock, CA: M. and R. Publications, 1982; Robert Olson, "How to Interpret Ellen G. White," Adventist Review, August, 1992, pp. 8-10; George Knight, "Crisis in Authority," Ministry, February, 1991, pp. 6-11; Alden Thompson, "The Great Controversy in Changing Times," Gleaner, August, 1993, p. 6; Robert S. Folkenberg, "Reading Ellen G. White: The Need for Balance," Adventist Review, September, 1993, p. 27; John Gate, "Did Ellen G. White Contradict Herself," Record, June, 1991, pp. 4-5; James W. Walters, "Ellen G. White in a New Key," Spectrum, December, 1991, pp. 12-17; Roy Graybill, "Ellen White's Message for Today: Application, Interpretation," Visitor, February, 1995, p. 5; Calvin B. Rock, "If Ellen White was Wrong in Some of Her Statements, How Can We Trust Her Writings?"

### 1.1.3 Ellen G. White and the Great Controversy Motif

#### 1.1.3.1 The Beginning of the Great Controversy

White locates the beginning of the great controversy in the fall of Lucifer. At issue in the fall of Lucifer was the question of status. In rank, God assigned Lucifer to stand next to Christ. God placed Lucifer above the rest of the angels. Lucifer had the rare privilege of being a "covering cherub." Lucifer had an aura which no other angel had. In spite of his exalted position, Lucifer coveted the exclusive honor Christ received from God, the Father, and the angels. Lucifer's envy intensified when he was not consulted over the "anticipated creation of the earth and every living thing that should exist upon the earth."<sup>60</sup> Only the members of the Godhead attended the meeting. The more Lucifer noticed that Christ was included in "the counsel of God" while he was left out, the more he fumed.<sup>61</sup>

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Adventist Review, January, 1995, p. 11; Bert B. Haloviak, "Ellen White: 75 More Years of Role Confusion," Adventist Today, November-December, 1994, pp. 13-15; Harold E. Fagal, "Butler on Ellen White's Eschatology," Spectrum, December, 1980, pp. 24-34; Roger W. Coon, "Hermeneutics: Interpreting a 19th Century Prophet in the Space Age," Journal of Adventist Education, Summer, 1988, pp.16-31; Norman R. Gurley, "Ellen White and the End-Time," Spectrum, December, 1979, pp. 2-13.

<sup>60</sup>Ellen G. White, The Story of Redemption. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1947, p. 13. Henceforth referred to as White, The Story of Redemption.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 14. Here White notes that "Lucifer was envious and jealous of Christ. Yet when all the angels bowed to Jesus to acknowledge His supremacy and high authority and rightful rule, he bowed with them; but his heart was filled with envy and hatred. Christ had been taken into the special counsel of God in

In describing the origin of the great controversy, White notes: "The angels joyfully acknowledged the supremacy of Christ, and prostrating themselves before him, poured out their love and adoration. Lucifer bowed with them, but in his heart there was a strange, fierce conflict. Truth, justice, and loyalty were struggling against envy and jealousy"<sup>62</sup> (emphasis supplied).

When Lucifer questioned the supremacy of Christ, in essence, he was challenging the wisdom, Law, and love of God.<sup>63</sup> Lucifer also blurred the distinction between himself and Christ. He was only a creature and Christ was the creator.

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regard to His plans, while Lucifer was unacquainted with them. He did not understand, neither was he permitted to know, the purposes of God. Lucifer thought that he was himself a favorite in heaven among angels. He had been highly exalted, but this did not call forth from him gratitude and praise to his creator."

<sup>62</sup>Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets. Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1913, pp. 36-37. Henceforth referred to as White, Patriarchs and Prophets. See also: Philip G. Samaan, "Origin of Evil," A lecture presented at the Seventh-day Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan, April, 1994, p. 40. Henceforth referred to as Samaan, "Origin of Evil." He notes that Christ's incarnation, that is, his birth in human form made him vulnerable to Pharisaic jealousy. The Pharisees saw Jesus simply as a son of a carpenter but were moved to jealousy when Christ's authority outshone theirs. Pursuing the same argument, Samaan further suggests that Christ's angelic name, Michael, made Christ a victim of Satan's jealousy. He notes that for God to reveal himself to the angelic host Christ was named Michael, making Christ to look like one of the angels. The name Michael means one like God. Satan blurred the distinction between Michael and himself for he also wanted to be like God. Satan's jealousy was ignited by the exclusive divine prerogatives Christ enjoyed as part of the Godhead.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

### 1.1.3.2 The Creation and Fall of Man

No sooner had Satan and his fellow rebellious angels been defeated and cast out of heaven than God implemented His plan to create man. White succinctly summarizes God's plan and intention in creating man when she says:

The Father consulted His Son in regard to at once carrying out their purpose to make man to inhabit the earth. He would place man upon probation to test his loyalty before he could be rendered eternally secure. If he endured the test wherewith God saw fit to prove him, he should eventually be equal with the angels. He was to have the favor of God, and he was to converse with angels, and they with him. He did not see fit to place them beyond the power of disobedience.<sup>69</sup>

White notes that Satan secured an interview with Christ in order to negotiate reinstatement to his position. However, since Satan's repentance was superficial, Christ told Satan that taking him back would risk the peace of heaven because "the seeds of rebellion were still within him."<sup>70</sup>

When Christ told Satan that he could not be restored, Satan devised a strategy in which he would try to manipulate God to save him together with his fellow wicked angels. Satan convinced his followers to tempt Adam and Eve. A moral fall would place Adam and Eve in a similar rebellious situation before God. Satan reasoned that if God should make a plan to save Adam and Eve perhaps that plan would include him and his angels. Satan argued further saying that if God could not make any provisions

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

for the fall of Adam and Eve, he (Satan) would fight side by side with Adam and Eve to regain the possession of Eden from God by force.<sup>71</sup>

In the great controversy between God and Satan, the fall of Adam and Eve was a victory on Satan's part. White notes: "Satan exalted in his success."<sup>72</sup> The tragic event was registered in heaven. White observes:

The news of man's fall spread through heaven--every harp was hushed. The angels cast their crowns from their heads in sorrow. All heaven was in agitation. The angels were grieved at the base ingratitude of man in return for the rich bounties God had provided. A council was held to decide what must be done with the guilty pair. The angels feared that they would put forth the hand and eat of the tree of life, and thus perpetuate a life of sin.<sup>73</sup>

In view of the sin which had been committed, God pronounced a sentence on the serpent, Adam, Eve, and cursed the ground.<sup>74</sup> God immediately expelled Adam and Eve from the Edenic home.<sup>75</sup> Adam and Eve tried to persuade God to let them continue living in Eden. White notes that "they were informed that in their fall from innocence to guilt they gained no strength but great weakness."<sup>76</sup> Although Adam and

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid. See also; White, Early Writings, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 40. See also; Ellen G. White, Redemption. Payson, AZ: Leaves of Autumn Books, 1988, p. 13. Henceforth referred to as White, Redemption.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid. See also; Ellen G. White, Our High Calling. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1961, p. 66.

<sup>76</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 41.

Eve were "filled with keen anguish and remorse," they were cognizant that "the penalty of sin is death."<sup>77</sup>

### 1.1.3.3 The Plan of Salvation

White articulates the plan of salvation for humanity against the backdrop of a very dismal situation. The sin of Adam spelt death to the entire human race. Angels in heaven lamented the loss of man with untold pain. But in the midst of this gloomy picture White attests to the encouraging revelation she received when she says:

I saw the lovely Jesus and beheld an expression of sympathy and sorrow upon His countenance. Soon I saw him approach the exceeding bright light which enshrouded the Father. Said my accompanying angel, 'He is in close converse with His Father.' The anxiety of the angels seemed to be intense while Jesus was communing with His Father. Three times He was shut in by the glorious light about the Father, and the third time He came out from the Father, His person could be seen. His countenance was calm, free from all perplexity and doubt, and shone with benevolence and loveliness, such as words cannot express.<sup>78</sup>

Further, White notes that Jesus broke the news to the waiting angels. He announced to them that a method had been adopted for the salvation of man. White points out that Christ told the angels that:

He had offered to give His life a ransom, to take the sentence of death upon Himself, that through Him man might find pardon; that through the merits of His

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

blood, and obedience to the Law of God, they could have the favor of God and be brought into the beautiful garden and eat of the fruit of the tree of life.<sup>79</sup>

Initially, the angels were shocked to hear that Jesus had offered himself for the salvation of humanity. As Jesus unfolded the plan of salvation showing them what he was to suffer, the angels painfully accepted the plan.

Gradually, the angels understood the implications of the plan of salvation. White describes the unity the angels evinced in support for the method designed to rescue lost humanity. She says:

Then joy, inexpressible joy filled heaven. And the heavenly host sang a song of praise and adoration. They touched their harps and sang a note higher than they had done before, for the great mercy and condescension of God in yielding up His Dearly Beloved to die for a race of rebels. Praise and adoration were poured forth for the self-denial and sacrifice of Jesus; that He would consent to leave the bosom of His Father. . . and die an ignominious death to give life to others.<sup>80</sup>

Once more in the great controversy between God and Satan, "Satan again rejoiced with his angels that he could, by causing man's fall, pull down the Son of God from His exalted position."<sup>81</sup> Satan and his angels hoped that Jesus would not survive the incarnation. Satan celebrated the idea that he had better prospects to make Jesus yield to his temptations seeing that he was now going to assume human nature.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>80</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, pp. 44-45.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

#### 1.1.3.4 The Incarnation and the Death of Christ

White quotes Galatians 4:4,5 which reads: "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons,"<sup>83</sup> noting that the promise concerning the advent of the Messiah given to Adam and Eve had finally come.

The holy angels celebrated the incarnation of Jesus Christ because the plan of salvation was making headway. White notes that she "was carried down to the time when Jesus was to take upon Himself man's nature, humble Himself as a man and suffer temptations of Satan."<sup>84</sup> White points out that in a vision she saw heavenly angels announce to the shepherds the birth of Christ. In song and worship the holy angels welcomed the advent of God's Son.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages. Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940, p. 31. Henceforth referred to as White, The Desire of Ages.

<sup>84</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 196.

<sup>85</sup>Ellen G. White, This Day with God. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1979, p. 360. Henceforth referred to as White, This Day with God.



### 1.1.3.5 The Trial and Crucifixion

In spite of His unnerving betrayal by Judas and abandonment by the rest of the disciples, Jesus would not be derailed from his mission to suffer and die for humanity. White relates a scene in heaven concurrent with the suffering of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus was praying. She observes:

Angels were hovering over the place, witnessing the scene, but only one was commissioned to go and strengthen the Son of God in His agony. There was no joy in heaven. The angels cast their crowns and harps from them and with the deepest interest silently watched Jesus. They wished to surround the Son of God, but the commanding angel suffered them not, lest, as they should behold His betrayal, they should deliver Him; for the plan had been laid, and it must be fulfilled.<sup>86</sup>

The trial of Jesus was a crucial stage in the great controversy between Christ and Satan. White describes the mood of holy angels as they came to witness the unjust trial of Jesus.<sup>87</sup> She remarks: "The angels, as they left heaven, in sadness laid off

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<sup>86</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 210.

<sup>87</sup>David K. Breed, The Trial of Christ. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1948, pp. 40-43. He enumerates the seventeen intentional errors which the Jewish and Roman tribunals made in order to convict Christ unjustly. The blunders which occasioned the miscarriage of justice are as follows: "1. No process could take place on the Jewish sabbath or on feast days. 2. No process could be started at night or even afternoon for a trial before a regular Sanhedrin court. 3. It was error for Caiaphas, acting as Judge, to have sought words from the mouth of Christ upon which to convict him, without witnesses. 4. Caiaphas' place was not the meeting place of the Sanhedrin: it was error to hold a trial there. 5. It was error for Caiaphas to have acted as judge after having publicly declared that Christ deserved death. 6. It was error to have left him [Jesus] unguarded, to the unrestrained license of the mob in the gallery of Caiaphas' place or court for an hour or more. 7. The Sanhedrin had no jurisdiction in capital cases, having been divested of the jurisdiction by the Romans forty years

their glittering crowns. They could not wear them while their commander was suffering and was to wear a crown of thorns."<sup>88</sup> White also portrays the role of Satan and his angels in the trial of Jesus. She notes that Satan literally possessed the chief priests and elders to violently treat Jesus with the hope that He would appeal to "His divine power and wrench Himself from the grasp of the multitude, and that thus the plan of salvation might at last fail."<sup>89</sup>

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before. 8. The Sanhedrin, if existent, had no power except at a regular meeting. 9. It was error not to appoint someone to defend Him--Jesus had no counsel. 10. It was error to have 'warned' the witnesses in this capital case, in a Sanhedrin court. 11. The courts erred by not taking into consideration the guilt or innocence of Jesus. 12. It was error to take Christ, as prisoner, before Annas. 13. In modern times it would have been error to require Christ to testify as a witness against Himself, but in those days in a trial of blasphemy there seems to have been authority in favor of requiring what we know as 'self-incrimination.' 14. Roman Law required trials to be public, and the private trial of Christ before Annas and Caiaphas was error. 15. It was error to convict a man on the testimony of false witnesses--under modern Law the jury determines the credibility of the witnesses. 16. Pilate having announced Jesus not guilty, erred in permitting the verdict to the 'mob' to stand. The record shows Christ, after Pilate found 'no harm' in Him, was sent to Herod, then back to Pilate, then turned over to be crucified. 17. It was unlawful and therefore error for the Sanhedrin to convict on the same day as the trial; they could acquit the same day but had to hold a verdict 'guilty' under advisement at least two days." See also; Joseph Blinzler, The Trial of Jesus. Westminster: The Newman Press, 1959, pp. 236-266; George H. Thompson, The Trial of Jesus. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Publishers, 1953, pp. 13-22.

<sup>88</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 213.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

Against the hope of Satan and his angels and even Christ's disciples, Jesus would not use His divine power to deliver Himself.<sup>90</sup> In the Judgment Hall Jesus exercised great restraint, for He also knew the eagerness of the holy angels to rescue Him. White again describes Jesus' tenacity to the plan of salvation saying:

It was difficult for the angels to endure the sight. They would have delivered Jesus, but the commanding angel forbade them, saying that it was a great ransom which was to be paid for man; . . . The weakest angel could have caused that mocking throng to fall powerless and could have delivered Jesus. . . . But it was necessary that He should suffer the violence of wicked men, in order to carry out the plan of salvation.<sup>91</sup>

Satan was disappointed to see that, instead of inciting complaints, the crucifixion enabled Jesus to offer forgiveness to His tormentors saying: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."<sup>92</sup> White notes that "while pouring out His life in death, He exercised a love for man stronger than death."<sup>93</sup> White further observes that:

The guilt of every descendant of Adam of every age was pressing upon His heart; and the wrath of God and the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. . . . Sin, so hateful to His sight, was heaped upon Him till He groaned beneath its weight.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 214. See also; White, Early Writings, p. 173.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 225. See also; White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 755, 760.

When Jesus died on the cross He cried: "It is finished!"<sup>95</sup> White notes that while the death of Jesus marked the defeat of Satan and made him realize that "his kingdom was lost,"<sup>96</sup> holy angels celebrated because they knew that "the great plan of redemption was being carried out."<sup>97</sup>

#### 1.1.3.6 The Resurrection and Ascension

The resurrection of Jesus dealt a serious blow to Satan because he realized that his days were numbered.<sup>98</sup> White describes the joy of the unfallen angels at the resurrection of Jesus saying: "In solemn awe the angelic host gazed upon the scene. And as Jesus came forth from the sepulcher, those shining angels prostrated themselves to the earth in worship and hailed Him with songs of victory and triumph."<sup>99</sup>

When Jesus arose Satan called his angels for an emergency meeting. Satan tried all he could to discredit the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. Evil angels prompted the

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid. See also; White, The Desire of Ages, p. 764. She observes that the unfallen angels were glad to watch the triumph of Christ on the cross, "for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary."

<sup>98</sup>White, The Desire of Ages, p. 782.

<sup>99</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 231.

priest and elders to bribe soldiers who guarded Jesus' tomb saying: "Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while we slept."<sup>100</sup> Satan's frantic efforts to conceal the resurrection were futile.<sup>101</sup>

White notes that the ascension of Jesus was eagerly awaited by "all heaven." She describes the jubilations that characterized Christ's arrival and entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem escorted by angels.<sup>102</sup> Describing the scene in heaven, White says:

Then all the heavenly host surrounded their Majestic Commander, and with the deepest adoration bowed before Him and cast their glittering crowns at His feet. And they touched their golden harps, and in sweet, melodious strains filled all

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., p. 232. See also; Alexander Thomson, Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1940, pp. 20-27. He enumerates five theories which scholars have proposed in order to explain away the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are: 1. The theft theory which holds that the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb. 2. The swoon theory which asserts that Christ was not dead when He was in the tomb, but was merely in a swoon, or faint. 3. The vision theory which says that appearances of Christ to His disciples were purely subjective in nature. They longed to see Him and believed that they did see Him. 4. The telegram theory assumes that "the appearances of Christ were not purely subjective but had an objective cause; which, however, was not the body of Christ risen from the grave, but the glorified spirit of Christ producing visions of Himself for the comfort of His disciples, as if sending telegrams from heaven to let them know that all was well." 5. The legend theory suggests that there was no resurrection at all but that a legend of the resurrection rose due to the misunderstanding of the teaching of the Apostles concerning the continued life of Christ. Thomson, however, proves that all the five theories are untenable because the testimony of the witnesses of the resurrection attest to the veracity of the event.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., pp. 234-238.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 239.

heaven with rich music and song to the Lamb who was slain, yet lives again in majesty and glory.<sup>103</sup>

Frustrated, yet resilient, Satan again convened a meeting with his angels,<sup>104</sup> and they admitted defeat because they had utterly failed to prevent Christ from implementing the plan of salvation. However, "with bitter hatred against God's government [Satan impressed upon his angels] that while he retained his power and authority upon earth their efforts must be tenfold stronger against the followers of Jesus."<sup>105</sup>

#### **1.1.3.7 Christ in the Heavenly Sanctuary**

The great controversy did not end at the ascension of Christ. Instead, the struggle intensified. Upon returning to heaven, Christ commenced an important phase of the plan of salvation. He began to function as the high priest in the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>106</sup> The progress of the great controversy on earth is thus closely tied with the ministration of Christ in the sanctuary in heaven.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., pp. 239-240.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics, pp. 17-18.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

### 1.1.3.7.1 The Great Controversy and the Holy Place

When Jesus embarked on His ministry in the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, He immediately honored the promise he had given to his disciples. At Pentecost the promised Holy Spirit came over the disciples, empowering them to spread the Gospel to all the earth.

White notes that the early church period experienced great persecution. Commenting on the ferocity of Satan she says:

The powers of earth and hell arrayed themselves against Christ in the person of His followers. Paganism foresaw that should the gospel triumph, her temples and altars would be swept away; therefore she summoned her forces to destroy Christianity.<sup>108</sup>

Instead of decimating Christians, persecution only served to increase their numbers. White notes: "Thousands were imprisoned and slain; but others sprang up to fill their places."<sup>109</sup> It soon became clear to Satan that his persecution strategies were becoming useless, therefore, he "brought in their place allurements of temporal prosperity and worldly honor."<sup>110</sup> Compromise crept into the church. Standards were lowered and idolatry became fashionable. Gradually the Bible

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<sup>108</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 320.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

was no longer "accepted as the standard of faith."<sup>111</sup> The church experienced a great apostasy.<sup>112</sup>

The great apostasy provided favorable conditions for the rise of the papacy. White cites the conversion of Constantine to Christianity as a defining moment for papal ascendancy. Commenting on the time of Constantine, White says:

Christianity entered the courts and palaces of kings, she laid aside the humble simplicity of Christ and His apostles for the pomp and pride of pagan priests and rulers; and in place of the requirements of God, she substituted human theories and traditions.<sup>113</sup>

One of the most daring and far-reaching blows Satan inflicted on God was to inspire the papacy to "think to change times and Laws" (Dan 7:27).<sup>114</sup> The papacy changed the Sabbath commandment and instituted Sunday observance, hoping to divert people's minds from the creator-God.<sup>115</sup>

White points out that Satan was fully aware of the priestly ministry of Christ in the Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. With the growth of the Roman Church

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 324.

<sup>112</sup>White, The Great Controversy, p. 384.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>115</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 330. See also; Samuele Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath to Sunday. Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977, p. 317.



"faith was transferred from Christ, the true foundation, to the pope of Rome."<sup>116</sup>

White perceptively contrasts Christ's priestly role and the one purported by the pope when she says:

Instead of trusting in the Son of God for forgiveness of sins and for eternal salvation, the people looked to the pope and to the priest and prelates to whom he delegated authority. They were taught that the pope was their mediator, and that none could approach God except through him, and further that he stood in place of God to them, and was therefore to be implicitly obeyed.<sup>117</sup>

God raised men who re-asserted "Christ as the only mediator between God and man."<sup>118</sup> John Wycliffe, known as the "morning star of the Reformation," was the first to translate the Bible into English and this helped to bring the Bible to the common people.<sup>119</sup> Although Satan detested Wycliffe's efforts, nonetheless, the reformation spread to Bohemia where John Huss stood for the primacy of Scriptures in the church.<sup>120</sup> Other reformers worked in given countries: John Calvin was in France, Zwingle in Switzerland, and Luther in Germany.<sup>121</sup>

It is a mistake to suppose that Luther was to have the last word in the work of the reformation. White notes that the work of reformation will "continue to the close

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<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 331.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., pp. 331-332.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 339. See also: White, The Great Controversy, pp. 299-315.

of this world's history."<sup>122</sup> White affirms the work of Luther but laments people's failure to go beyond what Luther and the other reformers initiated. She notes:

Luther and his co-laborers accomplished a noble work for God; but, coming as they did from the Roman Church, having themselves believed and advocated her doctrines, it was not to be expected that they would discern all these errors. It was their work to break the fetters of Rome and to give the Bible to the world; yet there were important truths which they failed to discover, and grave errors which they did not renounce. Most of them continued to observe the Sunday with other papal festivals.<sup>123</sup>

After Luther, the spirit of the Reformation fizzled out. Eventually the Protestant Church itself needed the same kind of reformation because human theories were beginning to eclipse God's Word. White laments the subsequent retrogression saying: "Thus were degraded the great principles for which Luther and his fellow laborers had done and suffered so much."<sup>124</sup>

#### 1.1.3.7.2 The Great Controversy and the Most Holy Place

The major events which characterized the great controversy during the time Christ officiates in the Most Holy Place are the fulfillment of the first, second, and third angels' messages of Revelation 14. The time Christ entered the Most Holy Place was in 1844 and he will remain there until the close of probation.<sup>125</sup> The first angel's

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>125</sup>A. L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Years Vol. 1., p. 192.

message which was proclaimed in 1840-1844 was aimed at warning people to "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of His judgement is come."<sup>126</sup> The first angel's message was an announcement of Christ's ministry in the Most Holy Place where He is involved in the investigative judgement, inter alia.<sup>127</sup> Satan triumphed when he managed to dissuade "the church" from accepting the message of the first angel.<sup>128</sup>

White notes that the second angel's message of Revelation 14 said: "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."<sup>129</sup> White points to the summer of 1844 as the time when the second angel's message was given and "about fifty thousand" came out of the Protestant churches which had experienced a moral fall by rejecting the message of the first angel.<sup>130</sup>

The religious confusion which characterizes the Protestant churches with their multiplicity of denominations is what White interprets to be Babylon. White understands Babylon's crime of having "made all nations drink of the wine of the

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<sup>126</sup>White, Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4., p. 222.

<sup>127</sup>White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 30. See; Knight, "The Development of SDA Theology," p. 36. He notes that E. Everts was the first to use the term "investigative judgment" to refer to the pre-Advent judgment.

<sup>128</sup>White, Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4., p. 230.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

wrath of her fornication" to mean the bewitching and unbiblical teachings which many denominations have uncritically embraced.

The third angel's message is the last warning message which humanity will receive before the close of probation. The warning is given while Christ concludes his ministration in the Most Holy Place.<sup>131</sup> White points to Revelation 14:9, 10 which is the message of the third angel and it says:

Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. . . . If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation.<sup>132</sup>

White believes that the third angel's message emphasizes the eternal nature of the Law of God as articulated in all the Ten Commandments.<sup>133</sup> White also identifies the symbols contained in the angel's message. The symbol of the beast represents the Roman Catholic Church, while the image of the beast represents the United States of America.<sup>134</sup> White comments on how the United States of America will become the image of the beast when the Protestant churches unite to compel the government of the United States into legislating Sunday observance. Those who will keep Sabbath instead of Sunday will be prohibited from buying or selling unless they renounce their

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., pp. 275-276. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 431.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., pp. 278, 279.

allegiance to God.<sup>135</sup> Those who follow the Roman Catholic Church in keeping Sunday tacitly accept "the authority of the Church to legislate in divine things."<sup>136</sup> The Roman Catholic Church itself accepts the responsibility for changing the fourth commandment.<sup>137</sup>

As Christ ministers in the Most Holy Place, "Satan holds earnest consultation with his angels as to the most successful plan of overthrowing their [Christians'] faith."<sup>138</sup> White reveals the key strategy which Satan uses when she comments:

Says the great deceiver: `We must watch those who are calling the attention of the people to the Sabbath of Jehovah; they will lead many to see the claims of the Law of God; and the same light which reveals the true Sabbath, reveals also the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and shows that the last work for man's salvation is now going forward. Hold the minds of the people in darkness till the work is ended, and we shall secure the world and the church also. . . . The Sabbath is the great question which is to decide the destiny of souls.'<sup>139</sup>

Furthermore, White cites other snares which Satan uses during the crucial period of the atonement. She notes that Satan influences religious leaders to disregard God's commandments and also incites a hatred against

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<sup>135</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 280.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid.

Sabbath-keepers. Those who are trying to keep all of God's commandments, Satan tempts with money, pleasure, cynicism, neglect of prayer and unbiblical teachings.<sup>140</sup>

#### **1.1.3.8 The Time of Trouble and the Second Coming**

The time of trouble refers to the period following Christ's exit from the sanctuary. At this time, Satan is allowed to exercise power over those who love God. The righteous go through the time of trouble without an intercessor but they remain firm in the midst of a severe test of faith.<sup>141</sup> White notes that Satan will claim to be the Christ which the righteous have been awaiting.<sup>142</sup> However, this deception fails to trap the people of God. Frantically, Satan uses the Sabbath commandment again. This time Satan influences government and church leaders to enforce Sunday observances so that those who object are put to death.<sup>143</sup> With a death decree passed, God's commandment-keeping people will flee from the "cities and villages, and associate together in companies, dwelling in the most desolate and solitary places."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid., pp. 338-350.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 432.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., pp. 444-445.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 445.

The time of trouble ends when Christ comes the second time. When Jesus comes he resurrects the righteous dead by his voice. The righteous living are translated. Both groups board a "cloudy chariot" bound for heaven.<sup>145</sup>

### **1.1.3.9 The End of the Great Controversy**

For a period of one thousand years, Christ and the saints, while in heaven, will judge Satan, the wicked angels and the wicked dead.<sup>146</sup> During this same period Satan and his evil angels roam the mangled surface of the earth with no one to deceive.<sup>147</sup> At the end of the thousand years Christ comes to this earth with the redeemed and holy angels and while in the air He calls the wicked to life. Crying out in unison but against their will, the wicked will say: "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."<sup>148</sup> White notes that "Christ descends upon the mount of Olives, and as his feet touch the mountain, it parts asunder, and becomes a vast plain."<sup>149</sup> Immediately, the New Jerusalem comes from heaven to settle on the levelled mountain.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 464.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 475. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 662.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 476.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 477. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 662.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 663.

In his fury Satan influences his angels and the wicked to fight the New Jerusalem. Christ orders the gates of the New Jerusalem to be closed and rises above the city sitting on his throne, elevated enough for the wicked outside the city to see. The coronation of Christ is conducted for Satan and his followers to see.<sup>151</sup> White describes this scene aptly saying:

In the presence of the assembled inhabitants of earth and heaven takes place the final coronation of the Son of God. And now, invested with supreme majesty and power, the King of kings pronounces sentence upon the rebels against his government and executes justice upon those who have transgressed His Law and oppressed people.<sup>152</sup>

White points out that "as soon as the books of records are opened, and the eye of Jesus looks upon the wicked, they are conscious of every sin which they have committed."<sup>153</sup> White describes the visual picture of the great controversy saying: "Above the throne is revealed the cross; and like a panoramic view appear the scenes of Adam's temptation and fall, and the successive steps in the plan of redemption."<sup>154</sup> As Satan acknowledges defeat, "every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy is made plain. God's justice stands fully vindicated."<sup>155</sup> Determined,

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., pp. 480-481.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 480. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 669.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 481. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 667.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 486. See also; Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1917, p. 311.



Satan commands his army to attack the holy city. Instantly, "fire comes down from God out of Heaven. The Earth is broken up."<sup>156</sup> The wicked burn in the lake of fire but "some are destroyed as in a moment, while others suffer many days."<sup>157</sup> The punishment corresponds with the sins committed. Satan will burn longest because "the sins of the righteous have been transferred to Satan, the originator of evil, who must bear their penalty."<sup>158</sup>

White negates the doctrine of perpetual punishment of Satan and the wicked. She comments on this point saying:

In the cleansing flames the wicked are at last destroyed, root, and branch--Satan the root, his followers the branches. The justice of God is satisfied, and the saints and all the angelic host say with a loud voice, Amen . . . No eternally burning hell will keep before the ransomed the fearful consequences of sin. One reminder alone remains: our Redeemer will ever bear the marks of his crucifixion.<sup>159</sup>

The great controversy finally ended, the redeemed will enjoy eternity. White gropes for words as she tries to express the joy that awaits the redeemed. She notes:

As Jesus opens before them the riches of redemption, and the amazing achievements in the great controversy with Satan, the hearts of the ransomed beat with a stronger devotion, and they sweep the harps of gold with a firmer

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid., p. 488.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 489. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 673.

hand; and ten thousand times ten thousands and thousands of thousands of voices unite to swell the mighty chorus of praise.<sup>160</sup>

White concludes her great controversy motif by saying that "sin and sinners are no more; God's entire universe is clean; and the great controversy is forever ended."<sup>161</sup>

## 1.2 Ellen G. White's Reflections on Sin

### 1.2.1 Ellen G. White's Definition of Sin

In her definition of sin, White quotes 1 John 3:4 and Romans 7:7. The former reads: "Everyone who sins breaks the Law; sin is the transgression of the Law." The latter says: ". . . Indeed I would not have known what sin is except through the Law."<sup>162</sup> White points to the importance of a correct definition of sin when she says:

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 492. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 678.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 278.

<sup>162</sup>See: Ellen G. White, Testimony Treasures, Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1949, p. 605. Henceforth referred to as White, Testimony Treasures, Vol. 1. See also; Ellen G. White, "The Words and Works of Satan Repeated in the World." The Signs of the Times, April 28, 1890, paragraph 8. White differs from other scholars who think that the definition of sin has been evolving because they see shifts in the meaning of sin throughout history. White comments saying: "Satan deceives and corrupts the world and makes men believe that they are sinless and holy while sinning against God, but in so doing he is only carrying on his original work. He has introduced no new arguments, he has created no new empire of darkness from which to draw supplies for the furtherance of his deceptions. And sin that was sin in the beginning is sin today; and sin, the apostle declares, is the transgression of God's Law."

"The sinner cannot be convinced of his guilt unless he understands what constitutes sin."<sup>163</sup>

The Law of God is crucial to White's definition of sin. White views sin as the breaking of the Law. What is it which constitutes the Law which may be transgressed? White gives a number of insights on what the Law is. She points out that the Law is the transcript of God's character,<sup>164</sup> will, mind,<sup>165</sup> and divine perfections.<sup>166</sup> White also notes that the Law is the foundation of God's government.<sup>167</sup> White indicates that the Law is eternal<sup>168</sup> and immutable.<sup>169</sup> Yet, the Law is based on the principle of love.<sup>170</sup> Furthermore, White notes: "From the first,

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<sup>163</sup>Ellen G. White, Faith and Works. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979, p. 31.

<sup>164</sup>White, That I May Know Him, pp. 289, 291, 305, 366. See also; Ellen G. White, In Heavenly Places. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1967, p. 137.

<sup>165</sup>Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, Vol. 3. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, April 16, 1894, p. 109. Henceforth referred to as White, Signs of the Times.

<sup>166</sup>Ellen G. White, "The Law of God: The Standard in the Judgment," The Watchman, Vol. 14, Nashville, October, 1905, p. 605.

<sup>167</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 49.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., p. 365.

<sup>169</sup>White, Signs of the Times, November 12, 1894, p. 163.

<sup>170</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 305.

the great controversy has been upon the Law of God."<sup>171</sup> She also observes that God's Law is "as sacred as God Himself."<sup>172</sup> Adam and Eve knew the Law of God because it was written in their hearts. White points out that from time immemorial to the time when the Law was codified at Sinai, the Law had been engraved in the hearts of Lucifer, the rest of the angels, as well as Adam. Due to the increasing sinfulness of humanity God decided to codify His Law into the Ten Commandments. White notes that at the end of the great controversy the Law will be written on the hearts of the redeemed once more.<sup>173</sup>

Another key component of White's definition of sin is the term "transgression." In the case of Lucifer, he decided to go contrary to God's will, character and Law. Lucifer rebelled against God's love. Sin is a deliberate negation of God's righteousness. Reflecting on what sin is White remarks:

Satan led many of the angels of heaven to take his side in apostasy and rebellion and by this same method he has secured the world, and even the largest share of the professedly Christian church, to be at enmity with the Law of Jehovah. But the fact that Satan has the world on his side, does not argue that the truth is error, or that error is truth. Numbers cannot make sin anything but sin, -- the transgression of the Law of God.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p. 372. See also; Jer. 31:33, 34.

<sup>174</sup>Ellen G. White, "Obedience Better than Sacrifice," The Signs of the Times. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, January 9, 1896, paragraph 5.

The transgression of God's Law characterizes for White the essence of sin. Knowing how inseparable God and his Law are, Satan tried and is still trying to divert people's attention from God's Law. He hopes to discredit the Law-giver by tampering with the Law. White notes: "Should any change be made in the Law of God, Satan would gain that for which he had instituted controversy."<sup>175</sup> White closely relates the transgression of the Law to the great controversy when she says:

The Law of God was the great subject of controversy in heaven. It is the great subject of controversy ever since the fall of Satan and will continue to be the great test question showing the loyal and the transgressors in two parties.<sup>176</sup>

It is clear that White asserts that sin is the transgression of the Law. In addition to this perspective she also describes sin as saying "No" to God's love. It is important to note that the written Law is based on God's love which forms the foundation of God's government.<sup>177</sup> The Law is based on love and not vice versa. Love is, therefore, broader than Law. A logical question to ask would be: Given that love is the foundation of the government of God, why would it be necessary to have the written Law? The written Law was given because of the transgression of man.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup>White, Signs of the Times, March 12, 1896, p. 375.

<sup>176</sup>Ellen G. White, Manuscript Releases, Vol. 5. Silver Springs: E. G. White Estate, 1990, p. 269. Henceforth referred to as White, Manuscript Releases, Vol. 5.

<sup>177</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 49.

<sup>178</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 305.

Therefore, had man refrained from sinning, there would have been no need for the written commandments.

In communicating His Law which is rooted in His love, God had a great challenge. God had to be eclectic. He chose to put in written form the aspects of His love which man frequently and inadvertently violated. Further, God had to make use of human language and culture as vehicles by which His principles of love could be distilled into the Ten Commandments. White points to the limitations inherent in human language when she says:

The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. . . . The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in infinite vehicles of thought.<sup>179</sup>

The fact that God communicates to us through an imperfect human language does not make His Law imperfect and unreliable. Because of the imprecise nature of human language, any verbal characterization of God's love is bound to be inadequate. Since the written Law is a verbal expression of love it is verbally imperfect yet perfect and adequate to guide humanity in God's will. In the written Law there is a tension of perfection and imperfection but this tension points to the finitude of human language in its attempt to particularize divine thought and not to God's effort to

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<sup>179</sup>Ellen G. White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958, p. 22. Henceforth referred to as White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1.

communicate his will to humanity. The written Law is a reliable transcript of God's will and a dependable guide to human conduct.

White notes that the Ten Commandments "brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and His principle of love."<sup>180</sup> The holiness and perfection of the Law lie in its ability to reflect some of the perfect principles of love. The fact, however, remains that the perfect Law does not encapsulate the totality of all the dimensions of love. Love remains greater than the written Law. The Decalogue does not explicitly command patience and mercy, for example. Neither does the Ten Commandments deplore irritability, resentfulness or arrogance. To see the Decalogue as addressing Christian attributes of patience, humility, kindness, and so on, requires a great deal of creativity. Yet a person who is motivated by the "agape" type of love spontaneously goes beyond what the written Law explicitly commands or condemns. Love fulfills the Law. But beyond that, it also satisfies the other Christian mandates which are implicitly commanded by the Law.<sup>181</sup>

White further shows the precedence of love over the Law by pointing to the classes of sin. She observes that there are four distinct categories of sin in addition

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<sup>180</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 305.

<sup>181</sup>Ellen G. White, Reflecting Christ. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985, p. 300. Henceforth referred to as White, Reflecting Christ.

to those which may be regarded as miscellaneous.<sup>182</sup> The four include sins of commission,<sup>183</sup> sins of omission,<sup>184</sup> secret sins<sup>185</sup> and the unpardonable sin.<sup>186</sup> Of particular interest in this context is her reference to sins of omission. The fact that one may sin by not doing what one is supposed to do indicates that the written Law is less than love. Put differently, there are things which the Ten Commandments do not explicitly list as things a Christian should or should not do which love requires or condones.

White regards love as the perfect pointer of sin. It is possible for one who lacks love to meticulously keep the Ten Commandments and yet be a sinner. White observes that "it is the revelation of God's love that makes manifest the deformity and sin of the heart centered in self."<sup>187</sup> White does not see a disjunction in the function of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant in which he will "convince the world of sin and

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<sup>182</sup>Board of Trustees, Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White, Vol. 3. Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1963, p. 2257.

<sup>183</sup>These are the various kinds of sins which do not seem to neatly fit into the broad classification of sin.

<sup>184</sup>White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 220. See also; White, The Great Controversy, p. 601.

<sup>185</sup>Ellen G. White, Gospel Workers. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1915, p. 80. Henceforth referred to as White, Gospel Workers.

<sup>186</sup>See; White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 49, 322-325, 587-588.

<sup>187</sup>White, The Desire of Ages, p. 498.



righteousness."<sup>188</sup> The Holy Spirit who is entrusted with the guidance of Christians has love as an attribute just like the other two members of the Godhead. Love allows the Spirit to point out not only the sins against the Law but also any other sins which may not be specified by the Law.

At this point a question may be asked: Does White nullify her definition of sin which denotes it as the transgression of the Law when she asserts that love is broader than the Law? White responds thus:

The first four of the Ten Commandments are summed up in the one great precept, 'Thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart.' The last six are included in the other, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Both these commandments are an expression of the principle of love. The first cannot be kept and the second broken, nor can the second be kept while the first is broken. . . . And only as we love God supremely is it possible to love our neighbor impartially.<sup>189</sup>

White perceives a close relationship between love and the Law. She does not trade off one against the other. The Law convicts man of sin and accentuates man's need for a Savior. White also notes that Christ's impeccable life of obedience affirms the claims of the Law and testifies to the fact that man can lead a life of obedience to the Law. On the contrary, "all who break God's commandments are sustaining

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<sup>188</sup>John 16:8.

<sup>189</sup>White, The Desire of Ages, p. 607. See also; Ellen G. White, Fundamentals of Christian Education. Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923, p. 135.

Satan's claim that the Law is unjust, and cannot be obeyed."<sup>190</sup> White also points out that Jesus saves men, not in sin, but from sin; and those who love Him will show their love by obedience.<sup>191</sup> In trying to further clarify the relationship between the Law and love White observes that:

Good works can never purchase salvation, but they are an evidence of faith that acts by love and purifies the soul. And though the eternal reward is not

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 309. See also; Ellen G. White, Evangelism. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946, p. 372.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., p. 688. See also; Ellen G. White, "Christ the Medium of Blessing," The Signs of the Times. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, June, 18, 1896, paragraph 4. White rejects the idea that obedience to God's Law leads to legalism. She notes: "God does not love us because he provided this great propitiation, but he so loved the world that he made the propitiation from the foundation of the world. He has made every provision whereby his grace and favor may come to man. But was the great sacrifice made in order that Adam's sin might be perpetuated, and the flood-gates of woe be ever left open upon our world?--No, it was to bring us back to our loyalty to God, to keep his commandments and live, and his Law as the apple of our eye. Christ says, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Perfect obedience to the Law of God is the test by which it is known that our love is perfect toward Christ. The Father reveals his love to Christ by receiving and welcoming the friends of Christ as his friends. The Father is fully satisfied with the atonement that Christ has made. He suffered the penalty of the Law in order that man might have an opportunity to exercise repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. In behalf of sinners Christ has borne hardships, insults, calumny, abuse, and misrepresentation. He was refused by those he came to save, rejected by his own nation. The Lord of glory was put to a most shameful death, and God himself was in Christ, suffering with his only-begotten Son, in order to reconcile the world unto himself. All this was done in order that fallen man might have another chance by which to redeem himself. Christ imputes his righteousness to the repentant, believing soul, and he who receives Christ becomes the friend of God. Humanity is glorified by the incarnation of Christ. Through the plan of salvation the divine government stands unimpeached, while salvation of penitent souls is secured."

bestowed because of our merit, yet it will be in proportion to the work that has been done through the grace of Christ.<sup>192</sup>

Faithful to her "great controversy" motif which sets great store by the Law, White puts an accent on sin as the transgression of the Law of God. Beyond this, White also sees sin to mean a refusal to love God.<sup>193</sup> It is important to note that White defines sin within the context of the great controversy in which the Law of God is

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<sup>192</sup>Ibid., p. 314. See also; Ellen G. White, "Faith and Works," Signs of the Times, March 30, 1888, paragraph 6. White further explains the relationship of the Law and love when she says: "The Law of God condemns all selfishness, all pride of heart, every species of dishonesty, every secret or open transgression. The natural heart is not inclined to love its precepts, or obey its requirements. 'It is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be.' But genuine faith in Christ converts the heart, works a change in its attitude to the Law, until it delights in the Law of God. The man who manifests enmity to the Law has not submitted to the converting power of God. It is the keeping of the commandments that proves the sincerity of our professions of love. Says John, 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.' Satan is engaged in leading men to pervert the plain meaning of God's word. He desires that the world should have no clear idea in regard to the plan of salvation. He well knows that the object of Christ's life of obedience, the object of his suffering, trial, and death upon the cross, was to magnify the divine Law, to become a substitute for guilty man, that he might have remission for sins that are past, and grace for future obedience; that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in him -- and he be transformed and fitted for the heavenly courts. Satan knows that no transgressor of the divine Law will ever enter the kingdom of Heaven, and to rob God of the devotion and service of man, to thwart the plan of salvation, and work the ruin of those for whom Christ died, is the motive that actuates his warfare against the Law of Heaven. He caused the fall of the holy pair in Eden by leading them to lightly esteem the commandment of God, to think his requirements unjust, and unreasonable, that they were not binding and that their transgression would not be visited, as God had said, with death."

<sup>193</sup>Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 3. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948, p. 380.

being tampered with. At the beginning of the great controversy Lucifer violated the Law of God, after that he deceived Adam and his offspring to trample on it. Following the ascension of Christ, Satan changed that Law by instituting Sunday observance. Before Christ comes the second time, those who keep the Ten Commandments in their original form will be persecuted.

White's concept of sin is also in consonance with the multiplex images and descriptions of sin given in both the Old and the New Testament. White regards sin as rebellion against God. Apostasy and disobedience provoke God and are varied manifestations of rebellion. White subscribes to the Biblical metaphor which views sin as missing the mark (*harmatanein*).<sup>194</sup> She notes that God is disappointed when

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<sup>194</sup>See; C. Ryder Smith, The Bible Doctrine of Sin. London: The Epworth Press, 1953, pp. 69-78. He provides a considerable spectrum of the Biblical metaphors of sin as found in both the Old and the New Testaments. The following try to show the conception of sin: There are instances when sin is viewed as willful error. The Hebrew term *Chata'* with its cognates have 32 Greek translations. In this category, the idea of sin as *Harmatanein*, i.e., missing the mark, is quite prominent. Other descriptions of sin are rendered by words such as *adikia*, which means iniquity or unrighteousness, *asebes*, which denotes godlessness, *anomia*, meaning Lawlessness and *agnoein*, which refers to deliberate ignoring of a known rule. Furthermore there are cases where sin is viewed as rebellion and treachery. Words such as *peshah*, meaning a rebel or iniquitous man, *marah* (be bitter) meaning a rebel or one who provokes God, *marad* meaning someone who stands away from God or a rebel, *apostanai* denoting turning away (apostasy), and *automolein* meaning a renegade, depict sin as rebellion. Words such as *skolios* which means crooked, *paraptoma* which indicates the act of falling aside or away because of a treacherous disposition, and *hupocrinesthai* which means pretense as shown by a hypocrite, accentuate the aspect of sin as treachery. Smith also gives other words which try to describe sin; for example *sarar*, "be stubborn," *athetein*, "to set aside or disregard," *avon*, "trouble," and *mianein*, "stain." See also; Janice Kaye Meier,

man achieves less than the potential God has endowed him or her with. In addition, White understands sin to also encompass the other metaphors which are found in both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>195</sup>

### 1.2.2 Sin and Personal Salvation

Ellen G. White's theological writings show that her view of sin has a strong individual dimension. One way of exploring White's concept of sin is by analyzing it in connection with personal salvation. Since sin and salvation are related themes, studying one at the exclusion of the other may restrict a fuller view of the one under

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An Investigation of Forgiveness in the Penitential Psalms. Th.D. Dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989, pp. 8-46. She provides a wide spectrum of the definition of sin.

<sup>195</sup>It should be borne in mind that when White defines sin first and foremost as the transgression of the Law of God, she does not negate the other Biblical definitions of sin. The accent which she puts on sin as the transgression of God's Law is because of the great controversy motif which dominates her writings. See: Whidden, The Soteriology of Ellen G. White, p. 102. He provides a summary of the charges which Satan levelled against God's government. The charges include the following: 1. "God is harsh, arbitrary, absolute, unjust," and is an "unfair tyrant" in that he has "imposed an absolute Law, which he had no intrinsic right to do." 2. "God cannot (or will not) forgive sin. That is, justice destroys mercy. Justice and mercy are by nature incompatible opposites, Lucifer argues." Both the preceding arguments were refuted in the light of the cross in that Christ demonstrated that God is not an arbitrary tyrant, but a loving and forgiving being who is just in his exercise of mercy. With such refutation, Lucifer then initiated his final charge." 3. "God's mercy has now destroyed justice" because "the Law has been abrogated. To Ellen White, this is the eschatological issue. Thus the God who was declared to be arbitrary and unforgiving is now declared to be just." See also; White, The Desire of Ages, p. 762.

scrutiny. Within the larger context of the great controversy, sin and personal salvation will be examined in order to determine to what degree White regards sin to be a personal phenomenon.

### 1.2.2.1 Sin and Satan

The historical fall of Lucifer can be considered as the starting point of White's reflection on the problem of sin.<sup>196</sup> White locates the origin of sin in Lucifer; an individual. Sin erupted in a single source: a particular angel's heart. White regards the outbreak of sin in Lucifer's heart as both enigmatic and illogical.<sup>197</sup> In the light of his high position and extraordinary talents, Lucifer's rebellion is mind-boggling and defies explanation. Overlooking his creatureliness, Lucifer coveted the exclusive prerogatives which Christ enjoyed as a member of the Godhead.<sup>198</sup> White observes

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<sup>196</sup>Ellen G. White, "Workers With Christ," The Signs of the Times. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, October 8, 1885, paragraph 2. White emphasizes the need for individual effort in attainment of one's salvation. She comments saying: "We must each have an experience for ourselves. The work of salvation lies between God and our own souls. Though all nations are to pass in judgment before him, yet he will examine the case of each individual with as close and searching a scrutiny as though there were not another being on the earth. Every individual has a soul to save or to lose. Each has a case pending at the bar of God. Each must meet the great Judge face to face. How important, then that every mind contemplate often the solemn scene when the individual must stand in his lot at the end of the days."

<sup>197</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35.

<sup>198</sup>White, Early Writings, p. 145.

that sin resulted when there developed in Lucifer's heart "a strange, fierce conflict. Truth, justice, and loyalty were struggling against envy and jealousy."<sup>199</sup>

When Lucifer sinned and became Satan why was he not included in the plan of salvation from which man was to benefit? There are basically three differences between the situation of Satan and that of man. First, prior to Satan's sin, there was no sin.<sup>200</sup> Second, in Genesis, man's sin is preceded by Satan's sin, and yet Satan's sin had no precedent.<sup>201</sup> Third, God acted differently in Satan's fall than in man's fall because the contexts differ.<sup>202</sup>

Another question may be paused at this juncture: Was there any plan of salvation for Satan? White indicates that there was a plan to restore Satan but it did not involve the cross. Whereas with man's case God has to eliminate someone (Satan), therefore the cross was imperative.<sup>203</sup> However, with Satan's situation none needed to die. God was willing to reason with Satan and upon repentance restore him. White comments on Satan's adamant refusal to reconcile with God and she says:

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<sup>199</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 36-37.

<sup>200</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 35.

<sup>201</sup>White, Early Writings, pp. 145-148.

<sup>202</sup>In the case of Satan sin originated within him. Yet in Adam and Eve's case, sin was an external force which was introduced from outside.

<sup>203</sup>Ellen G. White, That I May Know Him. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1964, p. 368. Henceforth referred to as White, That I May Know Him.

He was not immediately dethroned when he first ventured to indulge the spirit of discontent and insubordination. . . . Long was he retained in Heaven. Again and again was he offered pardon on condition of repentance and submission. Such efforts as God alone could make, were made to convince him of his error, and restore him to the path of rectitude. God would preserve the order of the heavens, and had Lucifer been willing to return to his allegiance, humble and obedient, he would have been re-established in his office as covering cherub.<sup>204</sup>

Therefore, White shows that God provided a way of salvation for Satan. But Satan rejected that plan of salvation. Instead, Satan maintained his rebellion based on his transgression of God's Law. God had offered him personal salvation, but Satan continued to fight God's government which is based on love and justice.

#### **1.2.2.2 Sin and Adam**

In the fall of man, it is possible to trace White's view of sin as something personal. When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan registered a measure of success in the great controversy.<sup>205</sup> The Law Satan had caused man to transgress would not be changed.<sup>206</sup> God offered the human race a plan of salvation which entailed the incarnation of Christ so that he could die for man.<sup>207</sup> Inasmuch as sinning involved a personal decision on the part of Adam and Eve, salvation would not be

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<sup>204</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, pp. 319-320.

<sup>205</sup>White, Early Writings, p. 149.

<sup>206</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 46.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., p. 47.



automatic. They were to appropriate by faith the merits of Christ on a personal level.<sup>208</sup>

White describes the personal anguish Adam and Eve experienced in the wake of their transgression of God's Law. White notes:

When Adam and Eve realized how exalted and sacred was the Law of God, the transgression of which made so costly a sacrifice necessary to save them and their posterity from utter ruin, they pleaded to die themselves, or to let them and their posterity endure the penalty of their transgression, rather than that the beloved Son of God should make this great sacrifice. The anguish of Adam was increased. He saw that his sins were of so great magnitude as to involve fearful consequences.<sup>209</sup>

White mentions that God revealed to Adam the future. Among the key events he was shown was the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. In that same revelation God pointed out to Adam the fact that Christ's "sacrifice was of sufficient value to save the whole world; but only a few would avail themselves of the salvation."<sup>210</sup> In the interim, that is between Adam's fall and the death of Christ on the cross, a sacrificial system would be instituted. White notes that the reason why God ordered Adam to kill a sacrificial animal was "to be a perpetual reminder to Adam of his guilt, and also a penitential acknowledgment of his sin."<sup>211</sup> Further, White notes:

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<sup>208</sup>White, Early Writings, pp. 125-127.

<sup>209</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 47.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

The blood of the beast was to be associated in the minds of sinners with the blood of the Son of God. . . . By the act of sacrifice the sinner acknowledged his guilt and manifest his faith, looking forward to the great and perfect sacrifice of the Son of God, which the offering of beasts prefigured.<sup>212</sup>

Adam had a clear sense of sin as an individual phenomenon. Before his transgression of God's Law, Adam held a "direct free and happy"<sup>213</sup> communion with God. White comments on the effect of sin on Adam on a personal level saying that "the transgression of the Law caused a fearful separation between God and man."<sup>214</sup> Adam, therefore, personally and experientially knew sin to be something which separates and isolates man from God.

### **1.2.2.3 Sin and the Patriarchs**

The divergent characters of Cain and Abel further demonstrate the individual dimension of sin in White's theology. After Adam had instructed his two sons about the plan of salvation, Cain and Abel were faced with a test. Would they obey God and offer animal sacrifices or give something else instead? When Abel brought an animal sacrifice to God he showed his loyalty and obedience. White notes that "Abel

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<sup>212</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-51.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid.

grasped the great principles of redemption. He saw himself a sinner, and he saw sin and its penalty, death, standing between his soul and communion with God."<sup>215</sup>

Cain, however, disobeyed God by offering fruits instead of a lamb. He lacked faith in the sacrificial system which pointed to Christ who was to come. White notes that, like Satan, Cain questioned the authority and justice of God.<sup>216</sup> By transgressing God's Law, Cain had sinned. Because sin is a personal phenomenon, it needs to be personally acknowledged. A failure to candidly accept the existence of sin in one's life does not scare it away. White observes that God tried to reclaim Cain but Cain would not listen. "Instead of acknowledging his sin, Cain continued to complain of the injustice of God, and to cherish jealousy and hatred of Abel."<sup>217</sup>

Another patriarch whose life lends support to the idea that White recognizes the individual aspect of sin and salvation is Enoch. White points out that Enoch "loved and feared God and kept His commandments."<sup>218</sup> Enoch walked with God. Commenting on how he walked with God, White says:

Enoch's walk with God was not in a trance or a vision, but in all the duties of his daily life. He did not become a hermit. . . . In the family and in his

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<sup>215</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 72.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

intercourse with men, as a husband and father, a friend, a citizen, he was the steadfast, unwavering servant of God.<sup>219</sup>

Commenting further on Enoch's walk with God, White notes that "for three hundred years Enoch had been seeking purity of soul, that he might be in harmony with heaven."<sup>220</sup> Enoch's life is a powerful testimony of how someone who fears God can maintain moral purity in a sin-infested world. The status quo during Enoch's life was evil and he stood against its evils.<sup>221</sup> God was impressed by Enoch to the point that he offered him personal salvation thus translating and taking him to heaven without dying.<sup>222</sup>

#### 1.2.2.4 Sin and the Earthly Sanctuary

In ordering Moses to build a sanctuary, God wanted to dwell with his people<sup>223</sup> and also show them how he handles the problem of sin.<sup>224</sup> White notes that the earthly sanctuary had two apartments. In the second apartment was the Law and mercy seat. White notes that "above the mercy seat was the Shekinah, the manifestation of divine

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<sup>219</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid.

<sup>222</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>223</sup>Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics, p. 19.

<sup>224</sup>White, That I May Know Him, p. 17.

Presence; and from between the cherubim, God made known His will."<sup>225</sup> She also notes that "the Law of God, enshrined within the ark, was the great rule of righteousness and judgment."<sup>226</sup> Commenting on how a sinner received pardon in the light of mercy and the Law, White says:

The Law pronounced death upon the transgressor; but above the Law was the mercy seat, upon which the presence of God was revealed, and from which, by virtue of the atonement, pardon was granted to the repentant sinner.<sup>227</sup>

The sanctuary had two distinct services. The first one was the daily ministration and the second was the Day of Atonement.<sup>228</sup> The individual nature of sin was quite evident in the daily services, because "the daily ministration was the service performed in behalf of individuals."<sup>229</sup> White notes that "the repentant sinner brought his offering to the door of the tabernacle, and, placing his hand upon the victim's head, confessed his sins, thus in figure transferring them from himself to the innocent sacrifice."<sup>230</sup> The sinner was ordered to personally kill the sacrificial lamb. After the animal was killed the priest took the blood of the animal into the holy place and sprinkled it on the veil separating the holy place from the most holy place. White

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<sup>225</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 349.

<sup>226</sup>Ibid.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., pp. 349-355.

<sup>229</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid.

notes that immediately behind the veil on which the blood was sprinkled "was the ark containing the Law that the sinner had transgressed."<sup>231</sup> Alternatively, the Priest could eat the meat of the sacrifice.<sup>232</sup> Both methods, namely, the sprinkling of blood and eating of the sacrificial meat by the priest, signified "the transfer of the sin from the penitent to the sanctuary."<sup>233</sup> On a daily basis the sins of repentant individual Israelites were transferred to the sanctuary making the sanctuary defiled and in need of cleansing.<sup>234</sup>

Therefore, the Day of Atonement was a special day in which the cleansing of the sanctuary took place annually. Basically, on the Day of Atonement two kids of goats were brought to the sanctuary and lots were cast upon them, "one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat."<sup>235</sup> The goat for the Lord was killed and the blood was taken by the priest into the Most Holy place and sprinkled on the mercy seat above the Ten Commandments.<sup>236</sup> In this way the priest made an atonement for the children of Israel in view of their transgressions. After exiting the most holy place,

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<sup>231</sup>Ibid.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid.

<sup>233</sup>Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>234</sup>Ibid.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid.

<sup>236</sup>Ibid., p. 356.

the high priest, who now symbolically carried the sins of Israel which had been deposited into the sanctuary all year round, came outside and

laid both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confessed over him all iniquities of the children of Israel. . . . putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land not inhabited.<sup>237</sup>

It was only after the scapegoat was banished into the wilderness that the Israelites were "freed from the burden of their sins."<sup>238</sup> Commenting on the tense mood which characterized the Day of Atonement, White says:

Every man was to afflict his soul while the work of atonement was going forward. . . . and the whole congregation of Israel spent the day in solemn humiliation before God, with prayer, fasting and deep searching of heart.<sup>239</sup>

#### 1.2.2.5 The Earthly and the Heavenly Sanctuaries

The correlation of the services in the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary is the heart of White's theology.<sup>240</sup> Apart from corroborating her view of sin as an individual reality, the sanctuary doctrine sheds light on her entire theological structure.<sup>241</sup> White notes that "in the sin offerings presented during the year, a

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<sup>237</sup>Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>238</sup>Ibid.

<sup>239</sup>Ibid.

<sup>240</sup>Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics, pp. 9-29.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid.

substitute had been accepted in the sinner's stead; but the blood of the victim had not made full atonement for sin. It had only provided a means by which sin was transferred to the sanctuary."<sup>242</sup> White directs attention to the ministry of Christ to whom the sin offerings pointed saying: "The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the Law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement."<sup>243</sup>

White also notes that "as the sins of the people were anciently transferred, in figure, to the earthly sanctuary by the blood of the sin-offering, so our sins are, in fact, transferred to the heavenly sanctuary by the blood of Christ."<sup>244</sup> According to White, the death of Christ on the cross and the blood that he shed effect the transfer of the sins of the repentant sinner to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, thus defiling it. White notes that the work of Christ as High Priest in the most holy

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<sup>242</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 356.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid. See also; Ellen G. White, Maranatha. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976, p. 248. White states that "for eighteen centuries this work of ministration continued in the first apartment of the sanctuary. The blood of Christ, pleaded in behalf of penitent believers, secured their pardon and acceptance with the Father, yet their sins still remained upon the books of record. As in the typical service there was a work of atonement at the close of the year, so before Christ's work for the redemption of men is completed, there is a work of atonement for the removal of sin from the sanctuary. This is the service which began when the 2300 days ended. At that time . . . our High Priest entered the most holy, to perform the last division of His solemn work . . . to cleanse the sanctuary."

<sup>244</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 266.



place began in 1844.<sup>245</sup> The process of cleansing the sanctuary in which Christ is currently involved in entails "an examination of the books of record to determine who, through repentance of sin and faith in Christ, are entitled to the benefits of his atonement."<sup>246</sup>

White further individualizes the work of atonement saying that the outcome of the "investigative judgment" enables Christ to reward people as individuals. She comments:

The cleansing of the sanctuary therefore involves a work of investigative judgment. This work must be performed prior to the coming of Christ to redeem his people; for when he comes, his reward is with him to give to every man according to his works.<sup>247</sup>

Furthermore, White points out that while

the sin-offering pointed to Christ as a sacrifice, and the high priest represented Christ as a mediator, the scape-goat typified Satan, the author of sin, upon whom the sins of the truly penitent will finally be placed. When the high priest, by virtue of the blood of the sin-offering, removed the sins from the sanctuary, he placed them upon the scape-goat. When Christ, by virtue of his own blood, removes the sins of his people from the heavenly sanctuary at the close of his ministration, he will place them upon Satan, who in the execution of the judgment, must bear the final penalty. . . . So will Satan be forever banished from the presence of God and his people, and he will be blotted from existence in the final destruction of sin and sinners.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>245</sup>Ibid.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., p. 267.

### 1.2.2.6 The Individual and the Heavenly Sanctuary

White's theology of sin, as it impinges on the individual, is prised through the events that are currently taking place in the heavenly sanctuary. While Christ officiates in the most holy place as the sinner's mediator, the great controversy continues to be fought on the terrain of human souls. White says that she "saw evil angels contending for souls, and angels of God resisting them. The conflict was severe."<sup>249</sup> In the battle for souls the individual has a choice to make. If he or she chooses to follow Satan, the holy angels can do little to rescue the sinner because "it is not the work of good angels to control minds against the will of individuals."<sup>250</sup> If the individual appeals for help from Jesus, Satan "calls a re-enforcement of his angels"<sup>251</sup> to strengthen his attack. However, when the tenacious sinner calls upon the merit of the blood of Christ, Jesus listens to the earnest prayer of faith, and sends a re-enforcement of those angels which excel in strength to deliver him.<sup>252</sup>

Outlining the nature of the great controversy, White points out that Satan's primary aim is to "dethrone God from the heart and to mold human nature into his

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<sup>249</sup>Ellen G. White, Messages to Young People. Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1930, p. 52.

<sup>250</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>251</sup>Ibid.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid.

own image of deformity."<sup>253</sup> Yet every sinner who submits himself to the molding influence of the Holy Spirit becomes more and more like Christ.<sup>254</sup>

An individual should make concerted effort to fight sin and form a strong Christian character. White remarks that "a noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of Christ. . . . It is formed by hard, stern battle with self."<sup>255</sup> White further argues that the reason why it is of utmost importance for an individual to pursue perfection of character is that it is "the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next."<sup>256</sup> Again, White observes that one fights Satan all one's life. Vigilance is imperative. She points out that "the enemy will use every argument, every deception, to entangle the soul; and in order to win the crown of life, we must put forth earnest, persevering effort."<sup>257</sup>

White views personal piety as essential for salvation. She points out that "self-abasement and cross-bearing are provisions made for the repenting sinner to find comfort and peace."<sup>258</sup> White views the process of sanctification as a day-by-day

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>255</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>256</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>257</sup>Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

experience.<sup>259</sup> The work of sanctification is, however, nullified by a person's deliberate transgression of the Law of God. White observes that "the willful commission of a known sin silences the witnessing voice of the Spirit, and separates the soul from God."<sup>260</sup> White points to consistent daily prayer as something a growing Christian should not neglect. Instead of religion occupying a portion of one's life, it should dominate and pervade everything a Christian does.<sup>261</sup> An individual should spare no efforts to subdue self. Commenting along these lines White says that "we must resist, we must deny, we must conquer self."<sup>262</sup>

White argues that if human eyes were allowed to see the detail with which angels record words that one speaks, the most talkative would be reticent.<sup>263</sup> There is also a "record of unfulfilled duties to their fellow-men, of forgetfulness of the Savior's claims."<sup>264</sup> She further notes that "money, time, and strength are sacrificed for display and self-indulgence; but few are the moments devoted to prayer, to the searching of the scriptures, to humiliation of soul and confession of sin."<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>259</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>262</sup>White, Testimonies, Vol. 5, p. 231.

<sup>263</sup>White, Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 312.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid.

<sup>265</sup>Ibid.

Cognizant of the decisive nature of the investigative judgment going on in heaven, individuals should confess their sins, thus sending them forth to the interceding Christ. Satan, however, clearly knows that if people embrace the sanctuary message he will lose his grip on them. This is why Satan customizes temptations making them suit every individual.<sup>266</sup> But most importantly, Satan obscures and eclipses the atoning sacrifice and mediatorial work of Christ.<sup>267</sup> Satan has also managed to create a hatred towards the sanctuary teaching.<sup>268</sup> But White insists that "the subject of the sanctuary and investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God."<sup>269</sup> Focusing on the individual, White says that "all need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest."<sup>270</sup>

Satan wants people to relax and reject the fact that there is a judgment currently taking place. Soon the atonement will terminate. Soon Christ will leave the most holy place and probation for sinners will close. White rejects the complacency which asserts that it's business as usual. The times are momentous. There is no room to gamble with one's life. The mood of the time demands watchfulness and prayer.

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<sup>266</sup>White, That I May Know Him, p. 34.

<sup>267</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, p. 312.

<sup>268</sup>Ibid.

<sup>269</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>270</sup>Ibid.

Surreptitiously, time moves on and White laments the unmindfulness of many concerning the judgment. She notes:

How perilous is the conditions of those, who, growing weary of their watch, turn to the attractions of the world. While the man of business is absorbed in the pursuit of gain, while the pleasure-lover is seeking indulgences, while the daughter of fashion is arranging her adornments, --it may be in that hour the Judge of all the earth will pronounce the sentence, 'Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.' Every soul that has named the name of Christ has a case pending at the heavenly tribunal. It is court week with us, and the decision passed upon each case will be final.<sup>271</sup>

Apart from using it only in defence of one's faith, the sanctuary doctrine should be personalized. Individuals should acquaint themselves with the message relating to the heavenly sanctuary. White perceptively remarks:

The sanctuary in Heaven is the very center of Christ's work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to our view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the close of time, and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin.<sup>272</sup>

### 1.2.3 Sin and Social Salvation

Apart from viewing sin as a private problem, White sees it also as a social reality. In her theology, White projects the idea of corporate personality. Whatever an individual does sends ripples which impact on others. This section is devoted to showing to what extent White perceives sin to have a social dimension.

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<sup>271</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>272</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

### 1.2.3.1 Sin and the Heavenly Society

No sooner had Lucifer sinned than he infected a third of the angels in heaven.<sup>273</sup> If the development of sin had been curbed within the heart of Lucifer preventing it from spilling into the hearts of the other angels, then perhaps sin might have been viewed strictly as an individual reality. Lucifer, however, alleged that God was unjust and tyrannical.<sup>274</sup> He argued that God's Law was faulty and burdensome.<sup>275</sup> The only way Satan could shake loose divine oppression was to influence as many angels as possible to accept his point of view. In subtle ways Satan spread a spirit of rebellion and some angels began to sympathize with him.

Let us consider sin as a social phenomenon at the fall of Lucifer and his angels. To begin with, the angels that Satan deceived were intelligent and possessed freedom of choice. They, however, did not spontaneously have a propensity to sin because of Lucifer's fall. They did not inherit sin from Lucifer since he did not father them. The angels who sinned deliberately decided to side with Lucifer, after listening to his mysterious and persuasive arguments to rebel against God. The fact that sin started with Lucifer right in heaven did not automatically contaminate all of heaven. The

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<sup>273</sup>Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948, p. 291.

<sup>274</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 69.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid.

pollution of sin was confined to Lucifer and his fellow rebellious angels.<sup>276</sup> Sin characterized the society of the rebels. After a bitter war Lucifer and his angels were "cast down" to this world.<sup>277</sup>

In addition, sin can be viewed as a social reality in heaven insofar as it altered the history of heaven.<sup>278</sup> Because of sin, Jesus had to "empty himself" through incarnation, so that he would redeem mankind.<sup>279</sup> The Holy Spirit also had to come and minister to the human race after the ascension of Christ. The fall of Lucifer and his subsequent expulsion to planet Earth has attracted attention from other unfallen worlds. Beings whose planets have not been directly exposed to sin have their focus rivetted on earth. The unfolding of the great controversy has imparted invaluable lessons on God's character as he deals with the problem of sin. Sin has widespread social repercussions. Heaven and other worlds, therefore, though sinless have felt the pangs of sin because with the entrance of sin and the fall of Lucifer the course of history has been irreversibly changed. Because planet Earth is the battle ground on which the great controversy continues, after Satan, sin, and sinners have been

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<sup>276</sup>White, Early Writings, pp. 145-147.

<sup>277</sup>Ibid.

<sup>278</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 37.

<sup>279</sup>White, Early Writings, p. 149.



eradicated, God will rule the universe from this planet. In other words, earth will host the capital city of God; the New Jerusalem.<sup>280</sup>

### 1.2.3.2 Adam's Sin and Humanity

In the fall of Adam, a social dimension of sin is evident. In the context of justification, White quotes St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, that is, Romans 5:12, regarding the consequences of sin on all subsequent humanity. She agrees with St. Paul who writes: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all men sinned." White, however, notes that Romans 5:18 also provides the solution to man's predicament when St. Paul says: "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men."<sup>281</sup>

How does humanity relate to Adam's sin? In answering this question White shows that, whereas in the case of Adam sin was a transgression of the Law of God,

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<sup>280</sup>White, The Great Controversy, pp. 666, 676. She describes the New Jerusalem as the metropolis of the glorified New Earth in which God's throne will be situated.

<sup>281</sup>See also; White, This Day with God, p. 326.

yet for the rest of humanity sin is more than that. Sin is a state in which mankind is born.<sup>282</sup> The basic difference between Adam and his offspring is that Adam had propensities toward good and possibilities to do evil, while mankind is born with propensities toward sin.<sup>283</sup> White rejects the Augustinian idea of original sin<sup>284</sup> in the sense that she holds that humanity is not guilty of Adam's sin, but bears the consequences of Adam's sin.<sup>285</sup> Humanity becomes guilty when it actually sins.<sup>286</sup> Augustine's view of the original sin asserts that when Adam sinned all of humanity was seminally present in Adam.<sup>287</sup> Since we were all in Adam we are, therefore, all

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<sup>282</sup>See; Ellen G. White, Conflict and Courage. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970, p. 36.

<sup>283</sup>White, Manuscript Release, Vol. 13, p. 18.

<sup>284</sup>Whidden, The Soteriology of Ellen G. White, p. 129. He points out that White uses the term "original sin" only once in her writings in the following context: "At its very source human nature was corrupted. And ever since then sin has continued its hateful work, reaching from mind to mind. Every sin committed awakens echoes of the original sin." Review and Herald, April 16, 1901. Whidden, however, asserts that White does not use the term "original sin" with its Augustinian/Calvinistic overtones.

<sup>285</sup>Raoul Dederen, "Christology," A lecture presented at the SDA Theological Seminary, Berrien Springs, Michigan: 1993, p. 27.

<sup>286</sup>Ibid.

<sup>287</sup>Ibid.

guilty.<sup>288</sup> Humanity has a "macula," a dark spot which can be washed away by baptism.<sup>289</sup>

White draws a line between the sinful nature, which humanity inherited from Adam, and the acts of sin. Man's sinful nature is ontological because man is born in a state of sin.<sup>290</sup> But man commits sin because of his inclination toward sin.<sup>291</sup> In the light of the twofold nature of man's situation, that is, having acts of sin and being born in a state of sin, White suggests the need for redemption on two levels. The salvation which Christ offers to the human family is adequate because it takes care of man's need on two planes. First, the impeccable acts of Christ evinced in his perfect obedience to God's Law are sufficient to cover the sins of all who repent.<sup>292</sup> Second, the sinless nature of Christ is adequate to cover the sinful nature of humanity.<sup>293</sup> Commenting on the sinless nature of Christ, White says: "In Him was no guile or

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<sup>288</sup>Ibid.

<sup>289</sup>Ibid.

<sup>290</sup>Ibid.

<sup>291</sup>Ibid.

<sup>292</sup>White, Reflecting Christ, p. 24.

<sup>293</sup>Ibid.

sinfulness; He was ever pure and undefiled, yet He took upon Himself our sinful nature."<sup>294</sup>

Furthermore, White shuns Pelagianism which asserts that Adam's sin affects humanity only as a bad example, and that each individual is born free from the effects of sin as Adam was prior to the Fall.<sup>295</sup> White, however, adopts the Arminian view<sup>296</sup> of Adam's sin, which holds that when Adam sinned, the race sinned. However, no human being is born with the original righteousness Adam had before he sinned. Man is born with a nature bent toward sin which leads to committing actual sins when the individual reaches the age of accountability, when each person can and must choose God or Satan.<sup>297</sup>

In rejecting the idea of original sin as espoused in Augustinianism or Calvinism,<sup>298</sup> White steers away from the concept of total depravity which portrays humanity as incapable of choosing anything but evil. White holds that in the Fall, the image of God in man was marred but not obliterated. She believes that every part of

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<sup>294</sup>Ellen G. White, Review and Herald. Washington DC: The Review and Herald Publishing Association, December 15, 1896, p. 1.

<sup>295</sup>The Complete Biblical Library, p. 85.

<sup>296</sup>Ibid.

<sup>297</sup>Ibid.

<sup>298</sup>Ibid.

the human being has been affected by Adam's sin, but man is not incurably degraded.<sup>299</sup>

### 1.2.3.3 Individual and Corporate Accountability

White views all of creation as a unit.<sup>300</sup> Nothing stands in isolation because everything is interrelated. When sin entered the human race it affected everything.<sup>301</sup>

She further points out that "a disposition to cause pain, whether to our fellow men or to the brute creation, is satanic."<sup>302</sup> White observes that in the judgment, many will face their record of mistreating not only human beings but the rest of God's creatures.<sup>303</sup> Since everything in creation is related, the final salvation of man will relieve all creation. To bring about complete restoration, God will not patch up, renovate, or even overhaul the world damaged by man's sin. God "will make all things new."<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>299</sup>Ibid.

<sup>300</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 443.

<sup>301</sup>Ibid.

<sup>302</sup>Ibid.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid.

<sup>304</sup>Rev. 21:5.

White's reflection on the story of Achan, recorded in Joshua 7, shows her view of how the sin of one person can affect society.<sup>305</sup> God had commanded Joshua to tell the children of Israel not to take any spoils upon conquering Jericho. Achan disobeyed God and took for himself some silver, gold and a robe from Babylon. Because of Achan's sin the Israelites experienced defeat when they fought Ai. Joshua attributed their defeat to God's displeasure because Ai had a small army, much weaker than the one of the Israelites. Achan's transgression brought God's judgment on the whole nation. God asked Joshua to assemble the Israelites and conduct a search for the criminal. Fearing discovery, Achan confessed his sin but it was too late.<sup>306</sup> Achan and his family were stoned and were buried under a pile of stones thrown by the entire nation.<sup>307</sup>

Commenting on the corporate nature of sin, White observes:

For one man's sin the displeasure of God will rest upon His church till the transgression is searched out and put away. The influence most to be feared by the church is not that of open opposers, infidels, and blasphemers, but of inconsistent professors of Christ. These are the ones that keep back the blessing of the God of Israel and bring weakness upon His people.<sup>308</sup>

Furthermore, White observes that the sin which society commits as a corporate body will be particularized when God shall judge all people. The contribution each

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<sup>305</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 497.

<sup>306</sup>Ibid.

<sup>307</sup>Ibid.

<sup>308</sup>Ibid.

individual makes in the social sin will be determined. God will mete out justice with alarming precision. White perceptively notes: "God weighs actions, and every one who has been unfaithful in his stewardship, who has failed to remedy evils which it was in his power to remedy, will be of no esteem in the courts of heaven."<sup>309</sup>

Underlying White's reasoning is the fact that every person has some influence. In addition, White implies that some people are more influential than others. White, therefore, seems to assert that the more influence a person has, the more the degree of accountability.

The reason why God can hold individual members responsible for corporate social sins is clear. The members of any given society wield some influence which can accelerate or reverse evil in society. If an individual stands against sin in his or her community or nation, he/she dissociates him/herself from the sinful society. God will not hold such a person culpable of the sin society commits. However, the individual who connives with or collaborates in the social sin will receive punishment which corresponds with his or her role in the social sin.<sup>310</sup>

White's position on individual and social accountability has far-reaching implications. First, White's view of sin negates the superficial dichotomy between

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<sup>309</sup>Ellen G. White, The Southern Work. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1966, p. 38. Henceforth referred to as White, The Southern Work.

<sup>310</sup>See; White, Great Controversy, p. 330. See also; White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 1, p. 313. See also; White, Gospel Workers, p. 22.

personal and social sin. To deal with social sin while ignoring individual sin is to inculcate irresponsibility in the individuals who constitute the society. White sees a strong link between the individual and the society. She says that "we are not to seek to get rid of the responsibilities that connect us with our fellow men."<sup>311</sup> She further notes that "those who are indifferent to the wants of the needy will be counted unfaithful stewards and will be registered as enemies of God and man."<sup>312</sup>

Second, White's view of individual and social accountability rebukes an aloofness evinced by many Christians with regard to institutionalized sin. Many have the mistaken notion that their society or nation can be guilty of perpetrating racism, oppression, and exploitation of the poor without jeopardizing their personal salvation. Failure to challenge the sinful status quo while benefitting from the wealth acquired through fraudulent ways makes the silent Christian an accomplice.

White believes that the sins that can be forgiven are the ones which are acknowledged, confessed and repented of. Individuals as well as societies should ask for forgiveness from God for their sins. But if individuals within a society which is renowned for its sinful ways choose to remain silent, these individuals will receive

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<sup>311</sup>White, The Southern Work, p. 38.

<sup>312</sup>Ibid.



divine judgment. However, if a person stands up to challenge the evil societal structures and to ask for forgiveness, God will forgive that individual.<sup>313</sup>

#### 1.2.3.4 Sin, Poverty and Suffering

God created the world so that it could be enjoyed not endured. The entrance of sin, however, affected society in its entirety. In society, therefore, there is a polarity between good and evil but it is their cohabitation which makes humanity revolt, yearn and hope.<sup>314</sup>

In discussing the evil and suffering which result from sin, White dismisses the notion that evil is part of God's plan. Reflecting on human misery White remarks:

There are many who complain to God because the world is so full of want and suffering, but God never meant that this misery should exist. He never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life while the children of others cry for bread.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>313</sup>See; Ellen G. White, "The Ark Restored," The Signs of the Times, Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, January 19, 1882, p. 12.

<sup>314</sup>White, Early Writings, p. 20.

<sup>315</sup>Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 6. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948, p. 273. Henceforth referred to as White, Testimonies for the Church. The problem of evil continues to tax the minds of people from all walks of life. See: Jurgen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981, pp. 47, 49. He notes that "it is in suffering that the whole human question about God arises" because suffering is the "open wound of life in this world." In response to the question of evil, many theories have been put forth to try to account for why evil exists on this world. William Dyrness, Christian Apologetics. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983, pp. 152-164. He suggest six theories which have been

While God did not intend the existence of evil, however, He relates to it in three basic ways. First, White affirms that God is linked to the concept of immanent judgment where one reaps what one sows. A good example would be: You lie, you suffer. Second, White points to situations where evil may result from divine judgment.<sup>316</sup> In this particular case one receives punishment for transgressing God's Law.<sup>317</sup> Third, White alludes to the fact that evil is absurd. It does not make sense to human reason. Commenting on the ambiguity of poverty White says:

The reason why God has permitted some of the human family to be so rich and some so poor will remain a mystery to men till eternity, unless they enter into right relations with God and carry out His plans instead of acting on their own selfish ideas.<sup>318</sup>

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given as an attempt to explain the existence of evil and these may be summarized as follows; 1. Evil is a result of man's own wickedness. 2. Good can come out of evil, therefore evil is all right. 3. Evil brings good in the long-run. 4. Evil is a moral exercise because it makes humanity spiritually strong. 5. Evil is undesirable but unavoidable in this world. 6. Evil is necessary because it highlights the good. Dyrness suggests five possible solutions to the problem of evil by appealing to; 1. Origins, for example Augustine in his book "City of God" argues that evil is a privation or negation of the good creation, and not something positive, it is accidental, not essential. 2. Mystery, because of human limitation to understand why sin exists. 3. God's larger purposes. 4. God's present purposes. 5. God's final purposes.

<sup>316</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 723.

<sup>317</sup>Ellen G. White, Welfare Ministry. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952, p. 21. Henceforth referred to as White, Welfare Ministry.

<sup>318</sup>Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers. Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1962, p. 280. Henceforth referred to as White, Testimonies to Ministers.

White does not, however, say evil is absurd to God. She says it is senseless to those who do not understand how and why God acts in history.<sup>319</sup> God permits evil because in his providence he knows what he is doing. Nothing takes him by surprise.<sup>320</sup>

White traces the evil of poverty, for example, to sin which "has extinguished the love that God placed in man's heart."<sup>321</sup> White notes that the world is full of resources which are adequate to meet all peoples' needs.<sup>322</sup> God has placed the rich to serve as stewards of his bounties. The rich have failed God. White observes that when the affluent neglect "to relieve the poor and the oppressed, the Lord is displeased and will surely visit them."<sup>323</sup> Pointing to the Western hemisphere, White specifically says:

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<sup>319</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 17.

<sup>320</sup>Ibid.

<sup>321</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>322</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>323</sup>Ibid. See also; White, Southern Work, p. 39. Elaborating on this point White says: "Those who center everything upon themselves misinterpret the character of God. The Lord designed that the gifts He bestows upon men should be used to minister to the unfortunate and the suffering ones among humanity. . . . We are in God's world, and are handling His goods, and we shall be called upon to render a strict account of the use that we have made of His entrusted riches. If we have hoarded God's gifts for our own advantage, if we have indulged in luxury, if we have heaped upon treasure for ourselves, and have been indifferent to the wants of those who are suffering around us, we shall be charged as guilty of embezzling God's goods. The cries of suffering humanity go up to God, and He hears their complaints of hunger, of ignorance, and of darkness." See also; Ronald D. Graybill, E. G. White and Church Race Relations. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970.

"In the professed Christian world there is enough expended in extravagant display to supply the want of all the hungry and to clothe the naked."<sup>324</sup>

The "so-called Christian countries"<sup>325</sup> are not only called to share God's material blessings with the poor of the world but are also asked to show their charity at home.<sup>326</sup> White laments the yawning gap between the rich and the poor in the wealthy nations saying that in the big cities "there are multitudes of human beings who do not receive as much care and consideration as are given to the brutes."<sup>327</sup> Put differently, White is saying that in the affluent Christian nations animals, such as cats and dogs, are accorded better treatment than people who were created in the image of God.

Commenting on the plight of children in the cities she notes:

There are thousands of wretched children, ragged and half starved, with vice and depravity written on their faces. . . . These children are left to grow up molded and fashioned in character by the low precepts, wretchedness, and the wickedness around them. They hear the name of God only in profanity.<sup>328</sup>

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pp. 108-109. He notes that Satan is the originator of slavery and that every type of oppression is satanic.

<sup>324</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 188.

<sup>325</sup>Ibid.

<sup>326</sup>Ibid.

<sup>327</sup>Ibid.

<sup>328</sup>Ibid., pp. 188-189.

Suffering in society will continue to exist as long as sin remains.<sup>329</sup> White argues that no human being can come up with a program or formula to get rid of "moral corruption, poverty, pauperism, and increasing crime."<sup>330</sup> She also notes that human efforts to establish economic systems which hope to ensure equitable distribution of wealth are futile.<sup>331</sup> White rejects socialism as an economic option capable of eradicating poverty, noting:

There are many who urge with great enthusiasm that all men should have an equal share in the temporal blessings of God. But this is not the purpose of the Creator. A diversity of condition is one of the means by which God designs to prove and develop character.<sup>332</sup>

Furthermore, White calls attention to Deuteronomy 15:11 which states that "for the poor shall never cease out of the land."<sup>333</sup> White, therefore, is under no illusions concerning the degree of suffering which sin has caused in society. She also is not too optimistic about what man can do to terminate human pain.

#### **1.2.3.5 The Church and Social Responsibility**

Notwithstanding the intensity of human suffering, Christians must eschew despondency and inaction by alleviating human misery. White points to Isaiah 58 as

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<sup>329</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>330</sup>Ibid., pp. 173-174.

<sup>331</sup>Ibid.

<sup>332</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>333</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

a divine prescription for the relief of human agony. She notes that "the whole of the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah is to be regarded as a message for this time, to be given over and over again."<sup>334</sup> Again she states that the entire chapter of Isaiah 58 is "of the highest importance."<sup>335</sup> The central message of Isaiah 58 is that God will not accept any fasting devoid of justice, mercy, and humility because these three constitute the essence of true religion. Succinctly put, Christians should actively and visibly engage in liberating the oppressed. White cites the kind of fasting which the Lord prefers, namely:

to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?<sup>336</sup>

In the context of the message of Isaiah 58, therefore, White stresses the need to translate into concrete action what God commands, frankly stating:

This is the special work before us. All our praying and abstinence from food will avail nothing unless we resolutely lay hold of this work. Sacred obligations are resting upon us. Our duty is plainly stated. The Lord has spoken to us by His prophet.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>334</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>335</sup>White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, p. 159.

<sup>336</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, pp. 29-30. See also; SDA Bible Commentary, p. 305.

<sup>337</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

White notes that Isaiah 58 articulates a twofold reform. The first aspect of the reform has to do with the work of advocating justice.<sup>338</sup> The second entails "repairing the breach that has been made in the Law of God."<sup>339</sup> White, therefore, sees perfect compatibility between working for justice and directing people to keep all the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment.<sup>340</sup>

Endorsing commitment to the suffering ones, White says: "I have no fears of workers who are engaged in the work represented in the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah."<sup>341</sup> She further observes that "this chapter is explicit, and is enough to enlighten anyone who wishes to do the will of God."<sup>342</sup>

White, however, laments the lack of balance which Seventh-day Adventist Christians, generally, show between the pursuit for human justice and the preaching of their doctrinal distinctives.<sup>343</sup> White tries to rectify the imbalance when she says:

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<sup>338</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>339</sup>Ibid.

<sup>340</sup>Ibid.

<sup>341</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>342</sup>Ibid.

<sup>343</sup>Ibid.

The third angel's message is not to be given a second place in this work, but is to be one with it. There may be, and there is, a danger of burying the work that is right to do. This work is to be to the message what the hand is to the body. The spiritual necessities of the soul are to be kept prominent.<sup>344</sup>

In exploring ways through which Christians may address poverty and the resultant suffering, White points to God's plan for Israel to curb inequality. White says that God knew that society had a penchant for class oppression because of sin. She remarks that "without some restraint the power of the wealthy would become a monopoly, and the poor, though in every respect fully worthy in God's sight, would be regarded and treated as inferior to their more prosperous brethren."<sup>345</sup> White notes, therefore, that in order to promote economic and political equality, God instituted the sabbatical year and the jubilee.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>344</sup>Ibid. See also; Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics, pp. 126-140. He notes that White believes that Seventh-day Adventist Christians should participate in the "broad" but not in the "narrow" aspects of politics. The "broad" aspect of politics pertains to government policy issues whereas the "narrow" dimension of politics refers to voting and party politics. Even concerning the "broad" aspect of politics, White believes that those who wish to participate in this area of politics should do so with great caution. They should not lose sight of the priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary and its implication for their personal salvation. The salvation of their own souls should not be sacrificed on the altar of politics.

<sup>345</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>346</sup>Ibid.



On the basis of the plan God had for Israel, White argues that "the poor are not more dependent upon the rich than are the rich upon the poor."<sup>347</sup> All classes of society depend on each other. Christians should fight the myth that poverty connotes inferiority.<sup>348</sup>

White notes that God takes great interest in every effort which is exerted for the benefit of the suffering ones. She notes that "every merciful act to the needy, the suffering, is regarded as though done to Jesus."<sup>349</sup> White also mentions that "every act of justice, mercy, and benevolence makes melody in heaven."<sup>350</sup>

God will reward all those who have in one way or another softened the misery of the less fortunate. White comments on the crucial value of praxis in the judgment and she says: "When the cases of all come in review before God, the question, What did they profess? will not be asked, but, What have they done?"<sup>351</sup> Further, White notes that "those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have little of theology, but they have cherished His principles."<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>347</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>348</sup>Ibid.

<sup>349</sup>Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>350</sup>Ibid.

<sup>351</sup>Ibid.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid., p. 318.

Most satisfying to the redeemed will be the gratitude of those they helped while on earth. Christians who worked for the complete salvation of souls will hear the saved testify to their sacrificial spirit. White notes that "the redeemed will meet and recognize those whose attention they have directed to the uplifted Savior."<sup>353</sup> Many of the redeemed will say: "I was a sinner without God and without hope in the world, and you came to me, and drew my attention to the precious Savior as my only hope."<sup>354</sup>

### 1.3 Summary and Conclusion

We have examined Ellen G. White's view of sin within the context of her historical and theological backgrounds and her great controversy motif. We have discovered that Ellen G. White's definition of sin as the transgression of God's Law is inextricably intertwined with her theological motif of the great controversy. We have also noted that White's accent on sin as transgression of the Law does not diminish her regard for the multiplex Biblical definitions of sin. However, we have realized that White regards the coincidence of the eruption of sin and the inception of the great controversy as marking the transgression of God's Law. We have seen that White views sin first and foremost as the transgression of God's Law because every

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<sup>353</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>354</sup>Ibid.

phase of the great controversy resonates with the issue of God's Law, which is the transcript of his character.

White has shown that Satan's charges against God are basically threefold. The first is that God is arbitrary and unjust because he "imposed an absolute Law, which He had no intrinsic right to do." The second is that God will not forgive sin. But when Christ demonstrated by dying on the cross that God is both loving and forgiving, Satan raised a new charge against God. The third charge, then, is that God's "mercy has now destroyed justice" and the result is that "the Law has been abrogated." According to White, the great controversy evolves around God's Law which Satan himself violated and wants all to transgress.

Furthermore, we have observed that White views sin as having two major dimensions. These are the individual and social aspects. We have noticed that while Ellen G. White subscribes to the idea of corporate personality, which is exemplified by the entrance of sin by one individual, which in turn affects everything and everyone. However, White sees individual responsibility within the concept of corporate personality. God holds individuals accountable for sin committed by the society in which the individual is a member. White is emphatic on the point that God spares and forgives the individual who is engulfed by a sinful environment on the condition that one repents. In addition White has argued that the individual must do everything within his or her sphere of influence to resist sin and alleviate the suffering brought on humanity by the social sins. White has shown that social sin can be

particularized to each individual accomplice. In the light of the fact that no individual can plead anonymity or innocence in a society which perpetrates sins of oppression, for example, White urges individual heart-searching. Self-examination becomes a major priority also in view of Christ's decisive work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary. White has shown that the problem of sin will end after Christ redeems his saints and God is vindicated and when Satan, his angels, and the wicked will be destroyed.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LEONARDO BOFF'S VIEW OF SIN**

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate Leonardo Boff's concept of sin. In order to achieve this objective two steps will be taken. The first will be to outline the context which influenced Boff's view of sin. The second step will be to analyze his understanding of sin from the perspectives which are evident in his theology of liberation.

#### **2.1 The Context for Leonardo Boff's Understanding of Sin**

There are primarily three key influences which impact on Boff's view of sin. The first is Boff's historical background. Boff's early exposure to the poor indelibly affected his worldview. Boff's theological background is the second influence which helped in shaping his concept of sin. In his theological development, Boff is clearly indebted to St. Francis of Assisi whose selfless commitment to the poor he emulated. The third influence on Boff's understanding of sin is his partial adoption of Karl Marx's social analysis which makes use of the class conflict motif. Without an acquaintance with the three foregoing points which form the context of Boff's reflection on sin, a proper grasp of his idea of sin would be impossible.

### 2.1.1 Leonardo Boff's Historical Background

A Brazilian, Leonardo Boff was born in 1938 in Concordia, Santa Catarina. He is the grandchild of Italian immigrants. His grandparents originally came from the northern part of Italy in Feltre, Seren del Grappa, and Bulluno.<sup>1</sup> Leonardo points to survival as the reason which impelled his grandparents to head for South America. In retrospect, Leonardo observes: "The reasons they left Italy amid an industrial boom are still present in Brazil. Our industrial system continues to expel those who are regarded as surplus--back then in Italy, and today in Brazil."<sup>2</sup>

Leonardo was the first of the eleven children in his family.<sup>3</sup> He is grateful to his parents for their hard work and support. Besides meeting their children's needs for food and shelter, Leonardo's parents were relentless in making sure that their children obtained an education. The fact that all eleven children hold at least

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<sup>1</sup>Dean William Ferm, Profiles in Liberation. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988, p. 125. Henceforth referred to as Ferm, Profiles in Liberation. See also; Leonardo Boff, The Path of Hope. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987, p. 1, 114.

<sup>2</sup>Leonardo Boff, The Path of Hope. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987, p. 1. Henceforth referred to as Boff, The Path of Hope.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 114. The implications of being the first-born son in a family of ten siblings became obvious to Leonardo Boff quite early in life. Among other things, he had to assume a leadership role together with his parents in carrying out the family chores.

a university degree and that five of them obtained graduate degrees is clear testimony, among other things, that Leonardo's parents were painstaking.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to working as a school teacher, Leonardo's father served in several other capacities in his community. He "led prayers in the chapel, served as druggist, assisted in births, and was a justice of peace."<sup>5</sup> Leonardo describes his mother as "illiterate, but she had a lot of common sense."<sup>6</sup> In complementing her husband's efforts to fend for the large family, she raised crops, chickens, pigs and cattle.<sup>7</sup>

Leonardo's poor economic background did little to shield him from hardships. Reminiscing on his austere childhood experiences, Leonardo points out that "in the cold of our harsh winter, in freezing mornings, sometimes in frost on the ground, it was hard to get up early and go three or four hours on horseback to the nearest mill."<sup>8</sup> Yet, in hindsight, Leonardo considers himself to have been quite "privileged" as compared to his poor neighbors.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

Leonardo, therefore, is no stranger to poverty. Quite early in his life, Leonardo observed how his family empathized with the poor and the Blacks in their neighborhood. Leonardo points to his intimate association with his father as one of the key factors which indelibly shaped his worldview. From his father, Leonardo learnt to view life from the perspective of the underprivileged and marginalized.<sup>10</sup> When his father died, at the age of fifty-three, Leonardo and his fellow siblings wrote on their father's tomb the following statement: "From his lips we heard, and from his life we learned: One who does not live to serve does not deserve to live."<sup>11</sup> Reflecting on his indebtedness to his father, Leonardo comments: "From him I inherited that eternal flame, without which intellectual work turns insipid; the option for the poor, without which our faith is ineffective; and the unquenchable hunger for justice, without which we cease to be human."<sup>12</sup>

Leonardo made good use of his opportunity to gain an education. He obtained his primary and secondary education in Concordia. Proficient in several languages, Leonardo spoke the Venetian dialect at home, mastered Portuguese at the age of ten, and learnt Latin and Greek in primary and secondary school. Leonardo completed a master's degree in Philosophy in 1961 in the city of Curitiba

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<sup>10</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.

<sup>11</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



and another in theology in 1965 from Petropolis. In 1970 he earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Munich.<sup>13</sup>

Professionally, Leonardo has made some major contributions. Leonardo has been a Professor of Systematic Theology in Petropolis for more than two decades.<sup>14</sup> He has also served as advisor to the Brazilian Conference of Bishops and the Latin American Confederation of Religions.<sup>15</sup> A prolific writer, Leonardo has published or co-published sixty-five books, articles and interviews which have been compiled under systematic themes.<sup>16</sup> Among his books, the one entitled: Church, Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church, published in 1981, prompted the Vatican to impose an "obedient silence" on Leonardo Boff for an unspecified period of time."<sup>17</sup>

On June 26, 1992, Leonardo Boff resigned from the Franciscan Order. His resignation was the climax of an estranged relationship between the Vatican and himself. Prior to his decision to step down from his priestly office, Leonardo

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<sup>13</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. See also Harvey Cox, The Silencing of Leonardo Boff. Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988, pp. 28-29. Henceforth referred to as Cox, The Silencing of Leonardo Boff.

<sup>16</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. v.

<sup>17</sup>Cox, The Silencing of Leonardo Boff, p. 3. The silencing of Boff was unspecified at the time of imposition but it lasted for eleven months from May 9, 1985, to March 29, 1986.

indicated his readiness to comply with the church's discipline saying: "I would rather walk with the church than walk alone with my theology."<sup>18</sup>

It was on June 28, 1992, that Leonardo wrote an open letter entitled: "Letter to my Companions" in which he tried to explain the reasons which motivated his resignation from the Franciscan Order. In the letter Leonardo articulated his position with respect to the Roman Catholic Church saying:

There are moments in a person's life when, in order to be faithful to himself, he must change. . . . I am leaving the priestly ministry but not the church. I am leaving the Franciscan Order but not putting aside the tender and fraternal dream of St. Francis of Assisi. I continue to be and will always be a theologian in the Catholic and ecumenical mold, fighting with the poor against their poverty and in favor of their liberation.<sup>19</sup>

### 2.1.2 Leonardo Boff's Theological Background

Among the factors which contribute to the theological background of Leonardo Boff, two seem prominent. The first is the Franciscan priesthood. The second is his formal theological education.

At a tender age of eleven years, Leonardo indicated his intention to join the priesthood. On May 19, 1949, an itinerant priest from Rio de Janeiro came to his hometown. His mission was to recruit young men for the priesthood. In a

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<sup>18</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. vi. See also; Cox, The Silencing of Leonardo Boff, p. x. He attests to the loyalty which Leonardo Boff showed to his church regardless of the controversy. Cox drew some spiritual lesson of "what it means to be a theologian who loves both the church and the truth."

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

persuasive speech the priest challenged the young men to emulate St. Francis and St. Anthony who imitated Jesus to the point "of being another Christ on earth."<sup>20</sup> No sooner had the priest asked those who wished to pursue the priesthood to raise their hands than Leonardo raised his. As time went on Leonardo regretted his impulsive decision to become a priest. Looking back to that red-letter day in his life, Leonardo muses: "But my word had been given, my life defined."<sup>21</sup> Time was to transpire, however, before Leonardo Boff's inklings to become a priest would materialize. After gaining admission into the Franciscan Order, Boff was ordained a priest in 1964.<sup>22</sup>

St. Francis of Assisi impacted Boff's theology in at least five ways. The first was the alignment of theory and practice, experientially, in the life of St. Francis. Boff emulated the way Francis could honestly live what he vigorously preached. There was no disparity between what Francis said and what he did. When Francis verbally extolled the virtues of poverty, he also demonstrated that "he lived the radicalness of poverty with passion and gentleness."<sup>23</sup> Even if Boff may not match Francis in the extent of living the poverty he preaches, Boff's ministry among the

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Leonardo Boff, Saint Francis. New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1982, p. 20. Henceforth referred to as Boff, Saint Francis.

poor and oppressed, while living under harsh conditions himself, shows the impact of St. Francis's influence on his life. Highly educated as he is, Boff might have easily done theology by "remote control," that is, while far removed from any contact with the poor. However, Boff like St. Francis seems to have conquered "the instinct for compromise and the Law of least resistance."<sup>24</sup>

The second area in which Boff was influenced by St. Francis was on methodology. Boff admired the manner in which Francis linked theory to practice. In his formulation of a theology of liberation, Boff insists on the vital link between theory and practice. In Boff's view, theology should embody praxis. Doing should inform reflection and vice versa. Theological reflection should be rooted in what people experience with God in history.<sup>25</sup> Put differently, a theology that negates the marriage of theory and practice is a mockery of Christianity because Jesus lived what He preached and preached what He lived.

Third, Francis influenced Boff to make the poor a starting point in doing theology. Although Francis was born of rich parents, he identified with the poor to the point of donating all his clothes to them. He remained totally naked. Filled with compassion, Francis also ministered to the lepers. Boff notes that Francis lived with the lepers, "denying himself so to serve them, even to the point of

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Leonardo Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987, pp. 6-9. Henceforth referred to as Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology.

kissing them on the mouth."<sup>26</sup> Boff asserts that it was in such close interaction with the poor that "Francis rightly intuited that, from the downtrodden and the presence of God in them, one finds the intimate secret heart of Christianity."<sup>27</sup>

Fourth, Francis influenced Boff in the area of Christology. St. Francis views the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ to be enshrined, not in "abstract formulations" such as portrayed in the "metaphysical formulas of the great Christological Councils of Ephesus (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon (451 A.D.), but as a mystery of divine sympathy and empathy."<sup>28</sup> Boff's Christology is one of engagement in which Jesus addresses the human predicament with its multifaceted needs. According to Boff, Jesus does not spiritualize human poverty but fights against it while showing His preferential option for the poor. It was Francis's mission in his life to "re-present the life of Jesus."<sup>29</sup> Francis's life was in many ways a reaction against the distorted picture of Jesus, which many Christians developed from the Gospels. Boff's Christology essentially resembles that of Francis in that Boff rejects the Jesus which some Christians impose on the Gospels:

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<sup>26</sup>Boff, *Saint Francis*, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

a Jesus who is co-opted by the ruling class. Boff sees in the Gospel a Christ who is radical because of his taking a stand for the outcast, oppressed and poor.<sup>30</sup>

Celibacy is the fifth area in which Boff was influenced by Francis.<sup>31</sup> Boff must have seen the merits of celibacy in his own theological reflection and Christian life. Commenting on the way Francis mortified his body so as to enhance his usefulness Boff notes:

He curbed the stimulus of the senses with a discipline so rigorous that at great pains did he accept what was necessary for his sustenance. . . . He understood his life as a 'life of penance' and his as the Order of Penitents.<sup>32</sup>

Boff further elaborates the meaning of mortification and he observes that "mortification, as the etymological meaning of the word suggests, lies in the activity of putting to death the overflowing of the passions so that their creative power may be directed toward holiness and humanization."<sup>33</sup>

It would not be accurate to say that all of Boff's theological training preceded his work as a priest; for he became a priest in 1964. However, most

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<sup>30</sup>Leonardo Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978, p. 243. Henceforth referred to as Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator.

<sup>31</sup>Cox, The Silencing of Leonardo Boff, p. 28. Boff's commitment to celibacy is without question. Cox, commenting on this issue says: "A friend once remarked that if someday priests are allowed to marry, he is sure Leonardo will remain celibate."

<sup>32</sup>Boff, Saint Francis, p. 21.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

of his priestly work took place after he obtained his doctorate in theology in 1970. Boff was privileged to acquire the finest of classical theological training. Boff claims to have read all of Plato's works besides "Aristotle, Augustine Boethius, the medieval masters and many of the moderns."<sup>34</sup>

Yet Boff's elite theological training came to grief in the face of the Brazilian context. Lamenting his theological bankruptcy, Boff notes:

All of a sudden I felt that my whole theology, in the way it was expressed, was worthless. It is like going to the United States bulging with millions of cruzeiros, and wanting to buy something with them. You have millions, but there they are worthless.<sup>35</sup>

Boff's theological training, however, was not totally in vain. From his advanced education Boff had, no doubt, attained intellectual rigor and a profound capacity for critical thinking. But confronted with people who had little or no formal education, how could an esoteric theologian communicate? Boff learnt that for theology to effectively speak to the needs of the common people who are struggling for survival it should strip itself of "its technical expressions."<sup>36</sup> A recognition of the class-based language in which theology converses led Boff to break the language barriers so that he could speak the same language with the people he hoped to serve. Pointing to the challenge to adapt theology to human

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<sup>34</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

needs, Boff insightfully remarks: "It has to be as simple as possible. And how hard it is to be simple! . . . I have recognized that in contact with people theology loses its irresponsible dilettantism."<sup>37</sup>

In the crucible of at least two encounters with the poor and oppressed, Boff forged his theology of liberation. The first was Boff's protracted ministry among the poor in a Petropolis slum area. From intimate association with the under-privileged, Boff experienced the sordid living conditions fellow human beings had to endure. In the Petropolis slums, he interacted with people "who simply live by competing with the swine and the vultures for what they can find in the garbage dumps."<sup>38</sup> Boff was impressed to realize that the poor evinced an indomitable spirit in spite of their squalid environment. Far from dampening their sense of hope in Jesus Christ, the harsh circumstances in which the poor found themselves seemed to strengthen their christian resolve. In these slums, the christian base communities play a vital role.<sup>39</sup>

The second encounter with the poor which radically influenced Boff's theological outlook came in the wake of his regular visits to the Catholic Church members in the Amazon jungles. Boff, again, witnessed the pangs of poverty and oppression. Ministering to the destitute in the remote Acre-Purus diocese of the

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.



Amazon presented a challenge to Boff. His pre-packaged theology was irrelevant because the issues the poor contended with were different. Preoccupied with concrete day-to-day realities which constitute their life, the poor were oblivious to the structure of the church, especially the "Vatican pronouncements or bishop's conferences or theological reflection or Marxism."<sup>40</sup> Concretely Boff learnt that the poor had different concerns. He notes: "Everything is summed up in the struggle for survival: how to withstand the violence of nature, of the rain forests and the surging rivers, of wild animals and diseases. There, faith and life, God and suffering, are one."<sup>41</sup>

### 2.1.3 Leonardo Boff and the Class Conflict Motif

The class conflict motif is a recurring and salient thematic feature in the writings of Leonardo Boff.<sup>42</sup> This section has three objectives. The first is to

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>While Boff asserts the value of the idea of class conflict in his theological methodology he, however, is categorical in his rejection of the "myth" that Marxism is the "moving force, basis or inspiration of the theology of liberation." Boff explains the way Marxism is used. He notes that "it is the gospel that is the determining qualifier of the theology of liberation, as it must be of any theology. The Gospel is the heart. . . . Marxism is a secondary, peripheral issue. When Marxism is used at all, it is used only partially and instrumentally. . . . We confess: The difficult subsumption of Marxist elements has not always been effected with adequate lucidity, perspicacity, and maturity. But we are improving along the way--serenely, with evangelical caution, but without any

investigate the reasons why Boff employs Karl Marx's social analysis in his theology of liberation. The second goal is to outline Marx's understanding of social strata and the inherent class conflict. The third objective is to show how Boff's application of Marx's social analysis aptly depicts an ongoing class conflict in Latin America.

### 2.1.3.1 Boff and Marx

Boff does not indiscriminately embrace all of Karl Marx's ideological framework. However, Boff is eclectic and critical in his selection of aspects of Marx's reflections on society and its dynamics. Boff is convinced that to reject truth just because it has been brought to light by Marx is not only illogical but shortsighted. Arguing for the need to recognize and accept truth regardless of the vehicle which conveys it, Boff perceptively comments:

Whatever truth there is in Marx--always a merely 'approximative' truth, of course--Christian faith will always consider that truth to be something it must assimilate. In this, the attitude of faith toward Marxism is no different from its attitude toward any other system of thought. This is not 'rehabilitation' or theft but simply the recovery of 'goods already belonging' to the Christian faith in the first place, as Saint Augustine, along with so many other Church Fathers, insisted.<sup>43</sup>

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fear of the heresy hunters." Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Liberation Theology. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986, pp. 22-23. Henceforth referred to as Boff/Boff, Liberation Theology.

<sup>43</sup>Boff/Boff, Liberation Theology, p. 70. See also; Boff, Saint Francis, p. 83. He argues that Marx has high credibility and is worthy listening to. He notes that "some of the distinguished representatives of modern liberation were Jews: Marx, Nietzsche, Jung, Marcuse, Einstein. They carried with them the

Furthermore, Boff notes that truth cannot be monopolized. Once discovered, truth becomes public property. Boff forcefully points out that "we must recognize that no science or truth can be the private property of anyone at all, not even of its own 'father'."<sup>44</sup> Boff regards it as bizarre and naive to label someone "Marxist" just for using Marxist terminology and categories. To support his argument, Boff draws attention to the fact that Pope John Paul II in his encyclical Laborem Exercen indulged in categories he clearly borrowed from Marx. Boff cites the Pope's usage of characteristically Marxist words such as: "alienation, exploitation, means of production, dialectic, praxis."<sup>45</sup> Boff argues that the Pope's indulgent use of Marx's terminology does not necessarily make him a Marxist. Boff, therefore, contends that Liberation theology's power to assimilate some elements of Marxism resembles a time-honored characteristic of Christianity itself. With a bit of humor he reflects: "After all, Christianity has demonstrated all through history that it has an 'ostrich's stomach'--that it can swallow anything, and transform it."<sup>46</sup>

Boff points to fear as the key factor which causes people to reject Marxism.

He observes that "fear of Marxism is fear that Marxism may be true. And when

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liberating wisdom of the Old Testament prophets and the sense that history continually should be made to be worthy of the Creator."

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

we fear truth, we begin to control and repress."<sup>47</sup> Boff notes that "certain epistemological obstacles block an adequate view of Marxism."<sup>48</sup> For example, to many people's minds Marxism connotes "atheism, violence, barbaric repression, depersonalizing collectivization, concentration camps and so on."<sup>49</sup> While these negative things associated with Marxism may not be totally false, prejudice, however, blinds many from seeing the positive side of Marxism.

The reason why Boff is comfortable using Marx's theoretical framework to understand society is because Marx's analysis makes sense. Because of Boff's open-mindedness he claims to circumvent the "epistemological blind spots"<sup>50</sup> and is able to see the value of Marxism for what it is. According to Boff's perspective, capitalists have an epistemological blind spot and to overcome it they should experience an "epistemological break."<sup>51</sup> This break or rapture will enable those

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<sup>47</sup>Leonardo Boff, Faith on the Edge. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989, pp. 70-71. Henceforth referred to as Boff, Faith on the Edge.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>By "epistemological blind spots" we refer to those areas which one's ideological perspective does not allow one to see or appreciate. For example, a capitalist tends to fail to appreciate even the positive aspects of Marxism or the other way round. Boff's appeal for objectivity on the part of the critics of Marxism is understandable because subjectivity tends to prevent a person from seeing any positive aspects of an opponent's ideology. While it is difficult to overcome one's epistemological blind spots, those who attempt to do so should be commended.

<sup>51</sup>Louis Althusser, For Marx. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969, p. 249. Henceforth referred to as Althusser, For Marx. He notes that "epistemological

who have the blind spot to transcend and overcome the capitalist "problematic."<sup>52</sup>

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break is a concept introduced by Gaston Bachelard in his *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique*, and related to uses of the term in studies in the history of ideas by Canguilhem and Foucault. It describes the leap from the pre-scientific world of ideas to the scientific world; this leap involves a radical break with the whole pattern and frame of reference of the pre-scientific (ideological) notions, and the construction of a new pattern (problematic q.v.). Althusser applies it to Marx's rejection of the Hegelian and Feuerbachian ideology of his youth and the construction of the basic concepts of dialectical and historical materialism (q.v.) in his later works." However, the phrase "epistemological break" is used in this research to refer to what Boff sees as the way out of the grip of capitalism on those who practice it. Capitalists need a break with their past and present frame of reference in order to appreciate the truth about society which Marx was trying to convey. See also; Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro, eds., *Expanding the View*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 47, where Boff shows acquaintance with the phrase "epistemological break" when he describes Gustavo Gutierrez. See also; Theo Witvliet, *A Place in the Sun*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984, pp. 24-42. He provides a scholarly discussion of "the epistemological break."

<sup>52</sup>Boff's quest for objectivity on the part of critics of Marxism is reasonable because subjectivity tends to blind a person from seeing any positive aspects of Marxism. While it may be difficult for individuals to transcend their own "problematic," those who strive to do so should be affirmed because dialogue between ideological opponents thrives where there is openness. By "problematic" we are referring to factors which form a person's worldview which make it difficult for a person to see and accept things which are contrary to one's own worldview. See also; Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 66. He shows that Marx himself never used directly the term "problematic," yet the term has been employed to analyze his ideology in his mature years. Althusser acknowledges his indebtedness to Jacques Martin for making use of the concept of a "problematic." Althusser, however, uses the term "to designate the particular unity of a theoretical formation and hence the location to be assigned to this specific difference." He also notes that a problematic is "the internal essence of an ideological thought." See also; p. 67, where Althusser further comments saying: "So it is not the interiority of the problematic which constitutes its essence but its relation to real problems: the problematic of an ideology cannot be demonstrated without relating and submitting it to the real problems to which its deformed enunciation gives false answer." See also; pp. 253-254. Here Althusser points out that "a word or concept cannot be considered in isolation; it

### 2.1.3.2 Social Classes and Class Conflict

It is important to note that Karl Marx did not discover the "existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them." Marx himself gives credit to his forebears saying: "Long before me bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes."<sup>53</sup>

However, Marx points to the three distinctive contributions which he made to the theory of social classes. The first was to prove "that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production."<sup>54</sup> The second contribution was to demonstrate "that the class struggle

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only exists in the theoretical or ideological framework in which it is used; its problematic. . . . It should be stressed that the problematic is not a world-view. It is not the essence of the thought on an individual epoch which can be deduced from a body of texts by an empirical, generalizing reading; it is centered on the absence of problems and concepts within the problematic as much as their absence." It is, therefore, in viewing capitalism as an ideology that Boff considers it as a particular problematic.

<sup>53</sup>Z. A. Jordan, Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971, p. 148. Henceforth referred to as Jordan, Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution. See also; I. Yurkovets, The Philosophy of Dialectical Materialism. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984, pp. 171-185. He explores the evolution in the meaning of the term 'class.'

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>55</sup> The third was to show "that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society."<sup>56</sup>

In order to appreciate the dynamics of class conflict we first need to know the characteristics of the key classes in modern society. Like the bourgeois historians who analyzed society before him, Marx saw four main social classes in modern society. The first one is the bourgeois class. The bourgeois own the capital and because of this they have effected unprecedented change in history. The bourgeois "put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations."<sup>57</sup> To the bourgeois is attributed the taming of professions which were shrouded with awe and marked with independence. No wonder the bourgeois has "converted the physician, the Lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science into paid wage-laborers."<sup>58</sup>

In addition, the bourgeois funded industrialization whose expansion in the West gave impetus to the exploitation of Third World countries.<sup>59</sup> The bourgeois has consequently shrunk the world into a global village where communication among the nations of the world is fast and frequent.

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

Reflecting on the influence of the bourgeois, Marx perceptively notes:

The bourgeois has subjected the country to the rule of the towns. It has created enormous cities, has greatly increased the urban population as compared with rural, and has thus rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life. Just as it has made the country dependent on the towns, so it has made barbarian and semi-barbarian countries dependent on the civilized ones, the nations of peasants on the nations of bourgeois, the East on the West (emphasis supplied).<sup>60</sup>

The second class in modern society is the modern working class or the proletariat. Succinctly Marx describes this class as:

--a class of laborers, who live only so long as they find work, who find work only as long as their labor increases capital. These laborers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.<sup>61</sup>

The only class with the clout to shake the bourgeois in modern society is the proletariat because the success and survival of the bourgeois is closely tied with the performance of the proletariat. In terms of bringing about revolution, therefore, the proletariat has the capacity to do so.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid. The terminology such as "barbarian and semi-barbarian countries." which Jordan employs should sound vitriolic to any sensible modern ear. Jordan, apparently, is not alone. There are many today who seem comfortable with labels which have been attached to those countries which, because of exploitation, have been under-developed. This is why most parts of Africa, South America, and Asia are regarded as "Third World."

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 154.



The middle class is the third strata in modern society. Marx groups "the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesmen generally, the handicraftsmen" into the middle class. The major significance of the middle class is that from it is recruited the proletariat.<sup>63</sup>

The fourth class is the peasant class. This class comprises peasants who are usually isolated from each other. The peasant class, like the middle class, serves as a reservoir from which the proletariat is drawn. Because the peasants are isolated, their political influence is felt through their representatives who in many instances are their governing authority.<sup>64</sup>

Marx asserts that "the history of all hitherto-existing society is the history of class struggle."<sup>65</sup> By "history" he refers to written history which dates from 1847.<sup>66</sup> While modern society has four main social classes, the conflict which polarizes society is really between the bourgeois and the proletariat. Marx, on the one hand, observes that in every era, the ideas that determine the course of events are those of the ruling class. The working class, on the other hand, is united by a "common interest which they have against their boss."<sup>67</sup> The wages they earn is the common

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

factor which galvanizes them into what Marx calls "combination," which amounts to a shared sentiment of resistance. Marx notes that combination serves two purposes. The first is to eliminate competition between the workers themselves.<sup>68</sup> The second is to promote "general competition with the capitalist" or bourgeois.<sup>69</sup> The proletariat can free itself from the oppression of the ruling class by some revolution which is aimed at displacing the existing social order. Marx insists that the old or existing social order cannot co-exist with the new. Reflecting on how a classless society can be realized, Marx reflects:

An oppressed class is the vital condition for every society founded on the antagonism of classes. The emancipation of the oppressed class thus implies necessarily the creation of a new society.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 166

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid. See: T. B. Bottomore ed., Karl Marx, Early Writings. California: Watts and Company, 1963, p. 44. Marx notes: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways, the point is to change it." See also; Jon Sobrino, The True Church and the Poor. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970, p. 47. He says: "The theological concern is not to explain as accurately as possible what the essence of sin is, or what meaning a sinful world has, or what meaning existence has in such a world. The concern is to change the sinful situation." See also; Alistair Kee, Domination or Liberation. London: SCM Press, 1986, p. 70. He argues: "The problem of suffering is not understanding it, but identifying its causes and eliminating them." See also; John Lewis, Marxism and the Open Mind. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1976, pp. 156-157. He discusses how capitalism creates conditions for the rise of socialism.

### 2.1.3.3 Boff and Marx's Social Analysis

The Latin American social context is characterized by conflict. Describing the Latin American culture, Boff perceptively laments:

We have a culture of fragments, of the flotsam of something that was once whole. There is no escaping the fact: we are a broken mirror, a tragic, unhappy consciousness obliged to see itself in the mirror of others, evidently maintained in a state of underdevelopment and thereby deprived of the necessary means to be sovereigns of our own history.<sup>71</sup>

Boff points to "three successive invasions" to which Latin America has been subjected. These invasions help to account for the social polarities which are rife in Latin America. Boff cites the sixteenth century as the period when the first invasion took place. This intrusion was marked by the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of Latin America. The native Indians were conquered and dominated. The Africans were shipped across the Atlantic Ocean to provide slave labor. The reason behind the colonial project was the extraction of raw materials and wealth from Latin America in order to transfer them to Europe.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Leonardo Boff, Good News to the Poor. Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Burns and Oates, 1992, p. 11. Henceforth referred to as Boff, Good News to the Poor. See also; Tom Sine ed., The Church in Response to Human Need. Monrovia, CA: Missions Advance Research and Communication Center, 1983, p. 167. He insightfully reflects on poverty saying: "People are not necessarily culturally deprived because they are economically poor. Rather, they suffer cultural deprivation when the symbols associated with their culture begin to connote shame."

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

The nineteenth century saw another invasion. The main feature of this second invasion was to consolidate capitalism in Latin America in the wake of the attainment of independence by Latin American countries. Europe strengthened capitalism in Latin America while marginalizing the Indians and the Blacks.<sup>73</sup>

The third invasion started in the 1930s. Boff notes that it was only in the 1960s that "military dictatorships were installed in the principal countries of the continent."<sup>74</sup> Class oppression intensified as the bourgeois worked hand in hand with large foreign capitalistic companies. As a result, "capitalistic relations penetrated everywhere, even in rural areas, creating social inequalities and levels of impoverishment unequalled in our history."<sup>75</sup>

In light of the poverty in Latin America, Boff clearly opts for a social analysis which has a dialectical inclination.<sup>76</sup> First, Boff argues that dialect structuralism is the appropriate analytical tool for Latin American society since it has been styled in a capitalistic matrix where the few are rich at the expense of the majority. Second, the radical awareness of capitalism also uncovers how the local social structures have been set up to perpetuate the capitalism of North America and

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 26-28. See also; Boff, Faith on the Edge, pp. 61-62.

Europe. Third, dialectical structuralism promises the realization of a "more social and economic equality and thereby more justice for all."<sup>77</sup>

Boff clearly rejects two other possible ways of addressing the Latin American situation. He notes that Empiricism which "moves from (1) the facts to (2) a naive awareness to (3) assistentialism" is inadequate.<sup>78</sup> Its weakness lies in the fact that it only appreciates the existence of poverty and from good will engages in activities that relieve pain and poverty only temporarily.<sup>79</sup>

Again, Boff shies away from functionalism which "proceeds from (1) socio-economic circumstances to (2) a critical consciousness to (3) reformism."<sup>80</sup> This approach is not radical enough because, while it is critically aware of social reality, such as poverty, it only pushes for reforms. Because functionalism will not go beyond mere reforms, the poor wax poorer as the rich get richer.<sup>81</sup>

Extolling the merits of dialectical structuralism which recognizes class conflict within the Latin American situation, Boff aptly reflects:

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<sup>77</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 62.

<sup>78</sup>Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, Salvation and Liberation. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979, p. 6. Henceforth referred to as Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid. See; Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 25-28. See also; Boff, Faith on the Edge, pp. 48-49.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

The strategic definition of liberation must always remain clear, even when, by dint of historical conjuncture, we are obliged to settle for merely reformist measures. Liberation, by definition, involves a qualitatively new society. Reformist measures are only tactical steps, not strategic goals. . . . Liberation is never merely a matter of intention, aspiration. It is the fruit of a process, in which all must participate; it is not the result of a single stroke of the will.<sup>82</sup>

Boff asserts that an accurate analysis of society is pertinent to the doing of theology. The social, the economic, and the political, among other things, are aspects of history--the history whose ruler is God. The people to whom the Gospel is preached respond positively or negatively to God as members of a given social milieu, economic set-up, or political regime. Therefore, Boff sees no difficulty in employing Marxist social analysis in order to better understand and effectively minister to society.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>83</sup>It should be borne in mind that unlike Marx, who perceives the proletariat to be the agents of transformation in society, Boff looks to the poor. For Boff, the poor possess the capacity to bring about change. The poor are on vantage ground because they are where theological reflection should start. See; Boff, *The Path of Hope*, p. 68. Boff categorically notes that: "The Gospels ascribe to the poor an altogether special privilege. Their poverty and marginality, being the fruit of injustice, constitutes a challenge to the Messianic king. . . . The poor have a sacramental function. They provide the rest of us with an opportunity to encounter the Lord, who is concealed in them anonymously."

## 2.2 Leonardo Boff's Concept of Sin

The purpose of this section is to determine Boff's concept of sin. To accomplish this objective seven issues will be explored. The first will be to ascertain what Boff's definition of sin is. The second will deal with why he puts more emphasis on the social and not the personal dimension of sin. The third issue will investigate the concept of accountability. How does Boff determine whether the individual or the corporate body is accountable for the problem of sin. To analyze the relationship between sin and personal salvation is the fourth concern that will be addressed. The fifth issue will focus on how Boff understands total Christian commitment and how that illuminates the problem of sin. Sin and poverty will be the sixth point of scrutiny. Finally, the issue of sin will be reflected upon in the context of the church and social responsibility.

### 2.2.1 Towards Boff's Definition of Sin

In his perceptive book, Liberating Grace, Boff opens a large window into his concept of sin. He reflects on sin from a dialectical perspective of grace versus disgrace.<sup>84</sup> Although Boff views these two realities to be diametrically opposed, yet he asserts their coexistence in the history of Christian experience.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Leonardo Boff, Liberating Grace. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979, pp. 4-5. Henceforth referred to as Boff, Liberating Grace.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid.

It is important to note that, on the one hand, the term "grace" evokes several images in Boff's thinking. Grace may be seen as the epitome of "the presence of God in the world and in human beings."<sup>86</sup> It also connotes "the openness of humans to God."<sup>87</sup> In addition, Boff sees grace as a sign of "reconciliation of heaven and earth, God and humans, time and eternity."<sup>88</sup> Boff equates grace with salvation and also perceives grace to be "more than time, history or humanity."<sup>89</sup> Therefore, in Boff's thinking, grace denotes the "absolute meaning that brings fulfillment to everything."<sup>90</sup>

On the other hand, Boff views "dis-grace" to be the antipode of grace. "Dis-grace" symbolizes "a lack of encounter, a refusal to dialogue and a closing in upon oneself."<sup>91</sup> "Dis-grace" is synonymous with sin.<sup>92</sup> Boff points out that dis-grace is "absolute absurdity" because there is no cogent reason to explain its

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.



existence.<sup>93</sup> The eruption of sin or dis-grace is a mystery. Dis-grace is "evil, violence, destruction, and cruel inhumanity."<sup>94</sup>

It is also crucial to note that Boff's concept of sin is tinted by his sacramental<sup>95</sup> view of history. In Boff's thought, the economic, social and political aspects of human existence are not neutral. Instead, they are vehicles of grace or dis-grace in history. Boff aptly comments: "Things cease to be merely things and become sacraments of God and his love. . . . While preserving all its own solidity, the world becomes a sacrament, a vehicle for the concrete communication of God."<sup>96</sup> Boff cites the example of how science and technology have mediated both grace and dis-grace in the world. He observes that grace has been communicated in every instance where science and technology have been utilized to improve human living conditions. Unfortunately, science and technology have also been vehicles of dis-grace because developed nations have employed them to subjugate, marginalize and dehumanize the developing countries.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., pp. 118-119.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., pp. 88-89.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-64.

A characteristic feature of Boff's reflection on sin is that he intentionally places the accent on both penultimate and ultimate salvation.<sup>98</sup> He points out that "a spiritual liberation or liberation from sin that fails to include the material realities of human life is a mutilated liberation."<sup>99</sup> Boff is convinced that "the economic is more than the economic; it is the locus of grace and sin and thus can become a mediation of the Reign of God."<sup>100</sup> Boff, therefore, rejects as naive a dichotomy

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>99</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 166. See also; Hugo Assmann, Theology for a Nomad Church. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976, p. 55; Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973, pp. 36-37. Both authors give three aspects of liberation, namely: "political liberation of oppressed nations and social classes; the liberation of mankind throughout the course of history; and the liberation from sin, the cause of evil, preparing the way for a life of all mankind in communion with the Lord."

<sup>100</sup>See Boff, When Theology Listens to the Poor, p. 71. Boff explains further the dialectical relationship between grace and sin in one and the same history. He perceptively notes: "All human practices, even those maintained outside the Christian space, occur within the dimension of grace/sin. Hence the theological value of human beings' whole historical reality, their culture, and their various modes of production. All historical articulations contain an objective theological reality, even if we do not wish it, even if our consciousness has not risen to an awareness of it. This ontic reality can be 'conscientized'--represented in a religious discourse, indeed in a theological reflection. Grace steps human history and permeates the human heart. So does sin. Concretely, human history is organized in a difficult dialectic of sin and grace, obedience and rebellion, both the realization and frustration of God's plan in history existing side by side." See also; Jacques B. Doukhan, Hebrew for Theologians. New York: University Press of America, 1993, p. 199. He shows that the Hebrew concept of history is unique because history is seen as one, as a unity. In other words there is no dichotomy in history because God is present in both the secular and sacred. In the light of Doukhan's research, one can appreciate the fact that Boff's view of history as a unity is consistent with the Hebrew view of history where God's presence is felt in all aspects of human existence.

between religion and economics, for example, because God cannot be compartmentalized within one sphere of human life. It is too audacious to presume that one can bar God from the economic or political since that is where His presence should be felt more. In these "secular" aspects of life, crucial decisions are made which consign the majority of people to a life of poverty and oppression.<sup>101</sup>

Essentially, Boff regards sin as anything which "contradicts God's salvific design."<sup>102</sup> Since the salvation which God offers is both present and eschatological, any obstacle which frustrates either aspect of salvation is sinful. It is a mistake to speak of salvation only in futuristic terms. Boff sees an inseparable link between the present and the future aspects of salvation. He perceptively comments:

Salvation defines the terminal situation of the human being in God. It was secured once for all by the redemptive act of Jesus Christ. But salvation is not actualized only in the last moment of one's life, or only in eternity. It is anticipated. The human being must enter upon a whole salvation process, a process that begins here on earth and ends in eternity.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 166.

<sup>102</sup>Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 18.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid. See also; Alasdair MacIntyre, Marxism and Christianity. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 103. He points out two functions of religion according to Marx and these are: "to buttress the established order by sanctifying it and by suggesting that the political order is somehow ordained by divine authority, and it consoles the oppressed exploited by offering them in heaven what they are denied upon earth. . . holding before them a vision of what they are denied, religion plays at least partly a progressive role in that it gives the common people some idea of what a better order would be." Although Boff employs Marx's social analysis in better understanding society, he does not

Orthopraxis and not orthodoxy is the underlying principle in Boff's understanding of sin. He is annoyed by an analysis of sin which is inflated with theory while devoid of practice. Boff notes:

We must give up circumlocutions like `Human selfishness is the root of all evil; it must be abolished by a society of fellowship and justice, a Christian society, built up through mutual assistance, co-responsibility, and love.'<sup>104</sup>

It is important to realize that Boff's reflection on sin is both a reaction against and a critique of the classical definition of sin which shies away from "historical realities and practices that create and sustain generalized poverty."<sup>105</sup> In describing the two kinds of liberation which humanity needs, Boff throws additional light on the dimensions of sin. Perceptively he remarks: "Ultimate liberation (liberation from sin and liberation for grace) implies penultimate liberations (economic, political, social, pedagogical, and so on)."<sup>106</sup> In essence, Boff's concept of sin takes serious account of liberation from oppressive social structures and future salvation which will mark the full reign of God.

As far as affirming that sin is "deviant interior attitudes," Boff concurs with traditional Christianity.<sup>107</sup> In response to his critics who question his neglect of the

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agree with Marx's views of salvation, Christianity, and religion.

<sup>104</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 167.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>107</sup>Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 17.

individual dimension of sin, Boff refutes the allegation, noting that in the theology of liberation, the traditional view of sin "was simply presupposed as already belonging to the solid, sure treasury of Christian faith. . . . Silence was not denial. What was already known and received was not discussed."<sup>108</sup>

While Boff basically accepts the definition of sin as "selfishness, and the other vices that injure human community and compromise human beings' relationship with God,"<sup>109</sup> he is acutely disturbed by an irresponsible interpretation of sin which overlooks concrete human existence. Boff is opposed to the traditional view of sin which borders on "moralism, utopia and idealism."<sup>110</sup>

In defining sin, therefore, Boff opts for an approach which evinces an awareness of the social dynamics which account for poverty, oppression,

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<sup>108</sup>Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 17. See also; pp. 46-47. Here Boff's main criticism of classic theology is directed towards its failure to seriously reflect on secular aspects of human life such as economics, politics, and education in order to discern "the presence of the evil one, and sin." He notes that "classic theology theologized on overtly theological material. It reflected on God, Jesus, sin, grace, heaven, and the like. These themes are theological in recto. These subjects do not need to be constructed. They are given by religion. But now a new need arises. A theological discourse is to be developed on materials that are not theological in recto--that is, they are not presented as theological. They are secular--economics, politics, education. These fields have their own discourse. There is political science discourse, pedagogical discourse, and economic discourse. How may such material, in itself secular, be transformed into theological material? The theological element is not given; it has to be constructed."

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 165.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

dehumanization and marginalization. Marx's social analysis helps to reveal the naked realities which characterize the Latin American society. Since Boff, like Gutierrez, makes use of Marx's social analytical tools, Boff has no qualms with Gutierrez's identification of sin which views it as the "personal or collective will"<sup>111</sup> which hates God and neighbor. Boff considers sin to be the propelling force behind economic systems like, for example, capitalism whose continuance occasions economic, political, and other various forms of oppression.<sup>112</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Personal and Social Dimensions of Sin

A careful analysis of Boff's reflection on the issue of sin shows that he calls more attention to its social than to its personal dimension.<sup>113</sup> Boff is aware of the difficulty involved in trying to separate the social from the personal aspects of

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<sup>111</sup>William M. Ramsay, Four Modern Prophets. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1986, p. 63. Henceforth referred to as Ramsay, Four Modern Prophets.

<sup>112</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 168.

<sup>113</sup>Boff/Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 46, 50, 52, 53, 61, 88, 93. See also; David Moberg, The Great Reversal. Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott, 1977, p. 102; John R. Sachs, The Christian Vision of Humanity. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991, p. 63. Both authors show the relationship between the personal and social aspects of sin. See also; Itumeleng J. Mosala and Buti Tlhagale, eds., The Unquestionable Right to be Free. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986, pp. 107-110. In this anthology, Simon Maimela asserts that salvation should be viewed in both the social and the individual terms.

sin.<sup>114</sup> He is also cognizant of the danger of only focusing on the individual dimension of sin while totally ignoring the social aspects as if the social dimension of sin was non-existent.<sup>115</sup> Boff, therefore, asserts that both dimensions of sin are real and that they need separate analysis. One reason for drawing a line between the two aspects of sin is the determination of accountability.<sup>116</sup> Failure to delimit the proper locus of either the personal or social aspects of sin leads to irrelevant prescriptions for dealing with the problem of sin.<sup>117</sup> Therefore, while Boff acknowledges the interaction between the personal and social features of sin, he strongly argues for their distinction.

When Boff opts for the primacy of the social dimension of sin over the personal, that radically influences his theology of sin. Granted that the personal and social poles of sin are the key realities in the understanding of sin, a theological reflection on sin from either pole should yield beneficial results. Boff's view of sin, therefore, is clearly different from that of traditional Christianity which places greater emphasis on the personal than on the social aspect of sin.<sup>118</sup> Unequivocally,

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<sup>114</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, pp. 158-160.

<sup>115</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, pp. 4-5.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, pp. 43-45. See also; Boff, Liberation Theology, p. 17. Boff articulates the distinctive contribution of liberation theology in its emphasis on the social dimension of faith. He notes: "There can be no doubt about it, liberation theology today primarily develops the social

Boff rejects the individualistic view of sin in which sin is exclusively regarded as a private affair.<sup>119</sup> Boff is uncomfortable with a vague localization of sin in the inner recesses of the individual's heart. He regards a privatization of sin to be fraught with serious implications. One implication is that an emphasis on the personal face of sin may lead some people to regard social sin to be the result of the sins of individuals.<sup>120</sup> In other words, the aggregate sins of individuals equal social sin. Another implication is that conversion of individuals within any given society must automatically yield reforms in the social structures.<sup>121</sup> At issue in this stance of seeing sin as fundamentally personal is the fact that the conversion of individuals is equated with the conversion of society. The reason why Boff is reluctant to accept such a view is that it assigns equal weight to personal and social sins.<sup>122</sup>

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dimension of faith. Hence its name. This is due to the fact that this dimension presents itself, first, as being of the greatest urgency, and second, as the aspect of faith most neglected by past theologians. . . . By all means, the transcendent dimension of faith (liberation from sin and communion with the Father by grace), so well developed by classical theology, is enthusiastically and unhesitatingly accepted by the theology of liberation. Indeed, it is in view of this transcendent dimension that a liberation theology is possible at all."

<sup>119</sup>Boff, *Liberating Grace*, p. 141.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-142.

<sup>121</sup>Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, p. 46. Here Boff points out that a conversion of society involves much more than personal conversions because "there are structural evils that transcend individual ones."

<sup>122</sup>Boff, *Liberating Grace*, p. 142. He argues that "ontologically speaking, we can say that the social dimension is fundamental. It exists prior to the will of individuals or their encounter with each other. It is a structural reality that helps constitute the human person. Either a person is social or is not a person at all."



Therefore, Boff is against a situation whereby social sin is identified as being no greater than the net total of personal sins.

Boff regards social sin as both the aggregate of, and the breeding ground for personal sin.<sup>123</sup> He substantiates his position by appealing to several arguments. One of the arguments Boff gives is that there is a growing consciousness of the social aspect of humanity in modern thinking. In each person the individual and social dimensions coexist. Boff accentuates this point, when he says:

The social dimension is not something added later to the human person. It pervades the human person and is a constituent element of the latter. In the form of institutions, values, forms of organizations and power, it has its own independent density.<sup>124</sup>

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Even if there was only one person in the world, that person would be social and communitarian by the very fact of being a person. Such a person would coexist with himself or herself, and with his or her world, ideas, projects, and interpretations of the surrounding, interacting world. Thus the social dimension is a web of relationships that constitute the very being of a person."

<sup>123</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 142.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 28. In addition, Boff sees a close relationship between total liberation (salvation) and partial liberation (on economic, political and social levels). See; Rosino Gibellini, The Liberation Theology Debate. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987, p. 21. He summarizes Boff's perception of the relationship between salvation and liberation by pointing to Boff's "four models of relationships: (a) the Chalcedonian model: as in Christ's divinity and humanity are related in such a way as to form a dual unity without division or separation, but also without confusion or mutation, so eschatological salvation intrinsically includes historical liberations: 'Jesus, our salvation, is also our liberator'; 'eschatological salvation goes through historical liberations'; 'salvation and liberation are realized without division and without separation, but also without confusion and without mutation from one to the other'; (b) the sacramental model: just as, according to the principle of sacramentality, grace is

Another reason which Boff gives in support of his primacy of the social over the individual dimension of sin is that it is the sphere in which the individual has concrete interaction with reality.<sup>125</sup> A person experiences freedom in its multiplex forms in the socio-historical realm. The capacity for a person to heighten or diminish his/her inwardness is always conditioned by society and history.<sup>126</sup> This, therefore, means that sin as an internal hatred towards God always translates itself concretely in interpersonal relationships.

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mediated (=sacrament) by a reality of this world to which it is joined, so historical liberations are not dissociated from salvation, even if salvation is not just realized in historical liberations; (c) the agapic model: according to the Christian concept of love there is an identification between love of God and love of neighbor, to the degree that one who loves his or her neighbor loves God; just as God is to be encountered in the neighbor, so salvation is to be encountered in historical liberation; (d) the anthropological model: the unity and difference of the two principles (body and soul) which make up the human being serve to illuminate the unity and the difference between historical liberations and eschatological salvation."

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 142. See also; Boff, *Saint Francis*, p. 85. He points out that "Salvation comes about not only in liberating movements, but also in every human expression; but today it finds its dominant and most valuable expression in the social and political dimension, because this is the area where the greatest human decisions are made and it is where God is primarily served or offended" (emphasis supplied).

<sup>126</sup>Boff, *Faith on the Edge*, p. 49. He perceptively notes that "every social locus permits or prevents particular discourses. For example, the wealthy will naturally be in favor of capitalism and oppose any change in the system of ownership and distribution of goods. . . . The suffering workers, however, who have to subsist on the minimum wage, once made genuinely aware of their circumstances will necessarily become agents for change. They will call for a new set of rules for the social game, because change will improve their situation. . . . The social locus produces development of ideas and world views."

Furthermore, Boff argues that social sin exceeds personal sin in terms of its intensity, duration, and penetration.<sup>127</sup> Sins which individuals commit as a corporate body, therefore, yield far-reaching consequences. Moreover, social sin is more heinous because it surpasses the independent individual intentions and wills.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, social responsibility exceeds the separate individual responsibilities.

Again, Boff ranks social sin as greater than personal sin because the former is subtle in nature. Social sin tends to lull into complacency the individuals within oppressive societies. Some become oblivious to their complicity in perpetrating oppression because they cannot see the link between their corporate sin of oppression and its victims.<sup>129</sup> Others become gullible due to their uncritical disposition. Of such, Boff aptly remarks: "Individuals may personally have the best intentions in living their lives, but in structural terms they are the Herodian agents of sinfulness in the world."<sup>130</sup>

Boff is convinced that the recognition of the fact that the social dimension of sin is more crucial than the personal is imperative. It is only when a person comes to grips with structural sin that genuine conversion can be envisaged. Insightfully,

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<sup>127</sup>Boff, *Liberating Grace*, p. 142.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

Boff unmask the shallowness of a personal conversion which does not take into account the social dimension of sin, when he observes:

When Christians take cognizance of the link between the personal and the structural level, they can no longer rest content with a conversion of heart and personal holiness on the individual level. They realize that if they are to be graced personally, they must also fight to change the societal structure and open it up to God's grace. In so far as the latter does not happen, their personal goodness will remain terribly ambiguous. . . . They will feel a need for pardon every day and they will not be able to rest content with pharisaical reliance on a wholly Christian life.<sup>131</sup>

### 2.2.3 Sin and Personal Salvation

In reflecting on sin and personal salvation, Boff is faithful to his theological methodology which puts greater emphasis on orthopraxis. Boff points out that

salvation or damnation of the individual is decided by the person's acceptance or rejection of people, especially of the poor and insignificant in whom God himself is hidden.<sup>132</sup>

According to Boff, the criterion which God uses to determine whom to save is based on how persons relate to their fellow human beings. Put differently, assurance for personal salvation is realized largely by concretely interacting with all people, particularly the poor. This interaction with the poor and oppressed is

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

<sup>132</sup>Leonardo Boff, God's Witness in the Heart of the World. Chicago: Claret Center for Resources in Spirituality, 1981, p. 253. Henceforth referred to as Boff, God's Witness in the Heart of the World.

not neutral. Individuals must take the side of the poor by working and fighting for their liberation from dehumanizing poverty and oppression.

For calling on individuals to commit themselves to the poor, Boff should not be viewed as an exponent of salvation by works. Boff, however, should be regarded as one who invites individuals to emulate the historical Jesus who, by virtue of his incarnation,<sup>133</sup> sided with the poor. Inherent in Boff's thinking is the logic that the closer an individual imitates Christ, the more he/she identifies with the poor. Therefore, when someone works for the liberation of the poor and oppressed the motive is not to earn salvation. Rather, it is love which impels the individual to give of oneself to others inasmuch as Jesus gave himself for the salvation of mankind. Put another way, the engagement of the individual for the

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<sup>133</sup>Reflecting on the purpose of the incarnation, Boff departs radically from the more traditional view which asserts that Jesus became incarnate "due to the sinfulness of the human race." In essence this view holds that "the Father, in his infinite mercy, sent his only Son to set us free in our own situation." Putting it differently, Boff argues: "So the incarnation is not an emergency solution thought up by the Father to bring creation back from going astray." However, Boff, in accordance with Duns Scotus and the Franciscan view holds that the reason behind the incarnation was for God's self-revelation through the Son. Boff puts it this way saying: "The Father wanted the individual Jesus of Nazareth, hypostatically united to the Son, to give supreme glory to the Father through his life, his works and his passion, and to root the Trinity in the midst of the human race and all creation." See; Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988, pp. 185-188. For Boff to negate human sinfulness as the cause of the incarnation while opting for God's self-revelation as the exclusive reason for the incarnation is unfortunate. Boff's stance seems to betray his concept of the depth and breadth of the incarnation. Apart from revealing God, Christ came to save sinners.

cause of the underprivileged is a "by-product" of an intimate relationship existing between the Christian and Jesus Christ.

Boff views sin to be a failure to love God and neighbor. In reflecting on original sin, Boff tries to ground it in concrete existence because for him the effects of sin are concrete and not theoretical. Perceptively Boff observes:

Original sin in human beings consists in the schizophrenia of our historical existence which makes us incapable of love, incapable of decentering ourselves radically; it ontologically distorts us even in our ultimate biological roots and places us in a bent position before God.<sup>134</sup>

It should be noted that Boff's view of sin is basically different from that of the tradition of a key christian theologian such as St. Augustine. However, Boff's approach from below shifts the accent on the view of sin as it relates to the individual.<sup>135</sup> The presence of sin in an individual may be shown by certain attitudes and acts. Boff does not deny this fact. However, he points to the "centering of the 'I' in itself"<sup>136</sup> as irrevocably manifested in one's lack of sympathy for the poor and suffering. In other words, one's relationship to the poor becomes a "test case" because it reveals the presence or absence of love. In most aspects of

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<sup>134</sup>Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator, pp. 202-203. See also; John Murray, Imputation of Adam's Sin. Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1959, pp. 9-21. He discusses the Pelagian, Roman Catholic, Calvinistic, and Classic Protestant interpretations of the original sin.

<sup>135</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, pp. 84-86.

<sup>136</sup>Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 202.

life, individuals may live hypocritical and sinful lives without being detected. However, pretense is unmasked when confronted with the issue of the poor.

If upon introspection an individual realizes that he/she is sinful, upon conversion there is a possibility of salvation. Since Boff's view of sin primarily entails turning away from God and neighbor, by the same token, repentance implies returning to God and to neighbor.<sup>137</sup>

### **2.2.3.1 Towards Total Commitment to God**

When Boff reflects on the need for the religious to render total commitment to God, he indirectly throws light on his view of sin as an individual reality. The preceding sections have shown that Boff asserts that sin is basically saying "No" to God. Conversely, when Boff talks of total consecration to God, he is referring to the act of saying "Yes" to God.<sup>138</sup> Implicit in the unreserved personal consecration to God is an intimate relationship between man and God where sin and its venom are overcome.

Boff points to three components of an entire consecration to God's will. The first is the vow of poverty. Boff believes that when a person takes the vow of poverty he or she makes a profound statement. Boff draws our attention to the primary meaning of poverty. He points out that before poverty can be understood

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid. p. 46.

<sup>138</sup>Boff, God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, pp. 84-85.

as one's relationship to material possessions, it should be perceived as one's posture before God. Perceptively Boff defines poverty saying:

Poverty is the proper ontological, creaturely condition of everyone. To be a creature means not to have. It is to receive unceasingly one's essence and existence from God. To be poor is to understand that everything that comes to us, everything we have, is given. Even the capacity to receive is a gift of God. To be poor is to experience concretely this umbilical dependence on God. Sin lies in wanting to possess what does not belong to us. It is to forget our creaturely condition, beginning to keep what is not ours for ourselves, as if any of us could claim our own right or not depend on God (emphasis supplied).<sup>139</sup>

Put differently, Boff sees the vow of poverty as a powerful weapon an individual can use to fight sin. A confession of one's dependence on God stifles the tendency to declare one's independence. A clear view of one's creatureliness helps one to see his true status before God; for before God every human being is a beggar indeed.

In addition, Boff believes that a recognition that we have received all things from God should spur us to give others everything as well. Thoughtfully, Boff comments saying: "The poor person is not only one who asks, but also the one who gives and sets no limits to the giving."<sup>140</sup>

The second part of total consecration to God is chastity. Boff points out that contrary to chastity connoting "absence" it symbolizes "superabundance."<sup>141</sup> Boff

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., pp. 90-91.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., pp. 91-92.



believes that chastity is making oneself available to God and should not be seen as a condemnation of marriage. Reflecting on the essence of chastity Boff points out that

chastity is not a depreciation of marriage, just as martyrdom is not a depreciation of life. . . . Chastity. . . .is the experience of faith in eternal life already present in the world, definitely manifested in Christ and by Him, bringing the future to reality and even now fulfilling the promises; it is, in short, the love of the sons and daughters of the resurrection even now being introduced into the world. Thus it is already the witness of Christian faith in its radicality and its ultimate projection in flesh and blood.<sup>142</sup>

Obedience is what Boff cites as the third component of entire consecration to God. By obedience Boff refers to the willingness to listen to and discern God's will in one's personal life as well as in society. Since free individuals are in a position to exercise obedience, Boff points out that "we thus obey not because the Law commands it or the other demands it, but because we have chosen to obey."<sup>143</sup>

Boff believes that the total consecration to God which is expected of the religious should be recommended to the laity in Latin America. While the vow of chastity is certainly difficult to enforce, the vows of poverty and obedience should be embraced by every individual christian.

Boff sees a shift in the way the vow of poverty has been understood. He notes, for example, that "religious life must reinterpret its vow of poverty, moving

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<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

away from an interior, private, and ascetical meaning to one of public commitment to solidarity with the economically poor and socially downtrodden."<sup>144</sup>

An entire consecration to God, therefore, should find concrete expression in the way one treats others. Boff believes that a total devotion to God is not insular. The conquering of sin on a personal plane is attested to by one's christian treatment of one's neighbor. To love God supremely entails loving man dearly.<sup>145</sup>

#### **2.2.4 Sin and Social Salvation**

This section aims at articulating Boff's understanding of sin and social salvation. Three steps will be taken in order to achieve this objective. The first step will be to discuss Boff's view of individual and corporate accountability. The second will be to explore Boff's reflection on sin, poverty and suffering. The third step will be to analyze Boff's perception of the church and its social responsibility.

##### **2.2.4.1 Individual and Corporate Accountability**

Boff asserts that a clear understanding of the wider locus of sin evokes a measure of accountability on both the individual and corporate levels of human

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<sup>144</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

existence.<sup>146</sup> Pivotal to Boff's theological reflection is the view of history as one.<sup>147</sup> The idea of a single history implies that God's presence pervades all history. In other words, God's presence cannot be confined only to issues theological. Rather, God's presence permeates areas of life where classic theology seems to least expect God. The economic, political and pedagogical are impinged on by the presence of God because the decisions and choices made in these areas testify to either the presence or absence of the God of all history.<sup>148</sup>

Furthermore, individual and corporate accountability is conceivable in proportion to the realization of the place sin assumes in history.<sup>149</sup> Accountability presupposes some knowledge on the part of the one to whom it is required. On the individual level, for example, a person needs to know<sup>150</sup> where sin is situated so as to know how to relate to it. According to Boff, apart from sin being located in the human heart which is marked by selfishness, it is also evident in the economic,

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<sup>146</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 85.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>148</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 166.

<sup>149</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, pp. 4, 89.

<sup>150</sup>While the knowledge one may have is useful in determining an individual's culpability in relation to the existence of sin in economic and political systems, not all ignorance is innocent. This is particularly so when individuals refuse to know, fearing that knowing the true causes of sins of oppression, poverty and suffering will require them to act. Many embrace ignorance lured by the serenity and security it offers. Willful ignorance does not, however, absolve anyone from accountability. God will surely judge those who opt to remain ignorant when knowledge is available.

political and educational structures. It is only after the individual recognizes the subtle manifestations of sin in the so-called secular spheres of existence that he/she can sense the need to do something to eradicate the systemic poverty which characterizes the oppressive and sinful institutions.<sup>151</sup>

Boff believes that a clear awareness of the fact that sin and grace exist in a dialectical tension within the same history should spur individuals to side with the poor. Boff notes that judgment awaits those persons who refuse to imitate God the Father who hears and responds to the cry of the oppressed.<sup>152</sup> In addition, a person who shuns commitment to the poor and oppressed rejects the example left by Christ when he made an option for the poor. Boff also points out that

the gospel of Jesus is quite clear on this point; at the supreme moment of history, when our eternal salvation or damnation will be decided, what will count will be our attitude of acceptance or rejection of the poor (Matt. 25:31-46).<sup>153</sup>

An individual's capacity to uproot sin which is found in structures that perpetrate oppression is closely tied to a person's sphere of influence. Boff sees three levels of involvement. These are, the professional, the pastoral and the

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<sup>151</sup>Boff, The Path to Hope, p. 87. He insightfully notes that "human life is indissolubly connected with a material infrastructure. No matter how high the spirit soars, no matter how deep our mystical probings, or how metaphysical our abstract thinking, the human being will always be dependent on a piece of bread, a cup of water -- in short, on a handful of matter."

<sup>152</sup>Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, p. 44.

<sup>153</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 45.

popular levels.<sup>154</sup> Put differently, Boff recognizes that the professional has its own sphere of influence inasmuch as the pastoral and popular levels have theirs. First, an individual who is a professional theologian, for example, is expected to engage in a detailed and rigorous discourse aimed at bringing liberation to the poor. Because of the professional person's training Boff believes he/she must articulate his/her arguments with clarity and in an orderly fashion. The professional must employ the "socio-analytical, hermeneutical and theoretico-practical" method. The professional theologian can influence thought leaders in theological institutes or seminaries. Conference papers, lectures and seminar papers together with books and articles help to address the evils responsible for the widespread oppression and suffering. Within their academic preserve, the professionals must seek to excel because shoddiness in their fight against poverty would be tantamount to a neglect of duty.<sup>155</sup>

Second, the pastoral level includes the priests, the religious and the laypersons. Boff points out that their logic of action is "specific, prophetic and

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<sup>154</sup>Ibid., pp. 12-13. Boff, however, does not regard the three foregoing levels of individual involvement in challenging sinful structures to be exclusive to individuals alone. While the neglect of a person's role in uprooting oppression and poverty brings judgement on the individual organizations, be they professional, pastoral or popular, the individual person is accountable as well. This means any mediocrity in the performance of roles makes the organizations liable for divine judgement. In Boff's stance, therefore, the individual cannot hide in the corporate, neither should the corporate hide in the individual because accountability is required of both within their spheres of influence.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

propulsive."<sup>156</sup> The method they employ to address social oppression and poverty is "seeing, judging, and acting."<sup>157</sup> Because the discourse they use is organically related to practice, they employ sermons and talks to effect liberation from poverty.<sup>158</sup>

Third is the popular level. Boff notes that the discourse employed at the popular level is spontaneous. The logic is one of life in which theory and practice are sacramental. On this level, the Gospel confronts life. Bible study groups within base communities help to galvanize individuals for commitment to the marginalized. The mode of communicating insights is through "notes, letters, commentaries, celebrations and dramatizations."<sup>159</sup>

Boff, therefore, believes that individuals are responsible and accountable for both personal and structural sins. As far as the latter is concerned, the degree of complicity is determined largely by the individual's sphere of influence. If one is the person in a position where effecting much change is possible but does nothing, more blame rests on him/her.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid.

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

<sup>160</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, pp. 142-143

#### 2.2.4.2 Sin, Poverty and Suffering

The situation in Latin America is one of abject poverty. Boff provides some revealing statistical information on Brazil, which is one of the countries in Latin America. He notes that

75 percent of the people live in relative economic marginalization; 43 percent are condemned to a minimum salary in order to survive. . . . 40 percent of all Brazilians live, work, and sleep with chronic hunger; there are 10 million who are mentally retarded due to malnutrition; 6 million suffer from malaria; 650,000 have tuberculosis and 25,000 suffer from leprosy.<sup>161</sup>

The reason why Latin America is characterized by chronic poverty is not because of laziness or lack of economic acumen. Neither does poverty prevail because people in Latin America are inferior with a low intelligence quotient. Instead, Boff believes that poverty is a product of the capitalist system which was imposed on Latin America by North America and Europe. Without qualms of conscience, industrialized countries audaciously exploited Latin America. The situation in Latin America is sinful because behind the scandalous poverty is a collective and deliberate will to impoverish other human beings. Due to greed, self-centered capitalists siphon wealth from "the periphery to the center."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Leonardo Boff, Church, Charism and Power. New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1985, p. 22. Henceforth referred to as Boff, Church, Charism and Power.

<sup>162</sup>Leonardo Boff, When Theology Listens to the Poor. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988, p. 35. Henceforth referred to as Boff, When Theology Listens to the Poor. See also; Boff, God's Witness in the Heart of the World, p. 260. He notes: "A socio-analytical study of the real situation gives rise to a religious and theological reflection: poverty is not a guiltless reality, but

Boff notes perceptively that "the poor are made poor by economic mechanisms, social relations, and discriminations that all offend against justice."<sup>163</sup>

Boff also quotes historian Capistrano de Abreu who describes the plight of the Latin American people saying that they are "buried and buried again, bled and bled again."<sup>164</sup> Graphically, Boff echoes the yearning for emancipation which is on the hearts of the oppressed. He reflects on the concerns of the Puebla Document saying:

From the depths of the countries that make up Latin America a cry is rising to heaven, growing louder and more alarming all the time. It is the cry of a suffering people who demand justice, freedom, and respect for the basic rights of human beings and people.<sup>165</sup>

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the result of social sin; the dependence of some people on other people in an oppressive regime is not something neutral, but the result of a bitter, collective selfishness." See also; p. 103. Here Boff notes that "the cause of poverty is not lack of opportunity, laziness, nor lack of motivation to work, but lies in unjust relationships, in unbounded acquisitiveness, in despoiling and robbing, in fraud, in extortion, and in the exploitation of one person by another. This is the spirit that gives rise to rich and poor."

<sup>163</sup>Boff, Good News to the Poor, p. 1.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid. See also; Rosemary Radford. Ruether, Disputed Questions: On Being a Christian. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982. pp. 139-142. Unlike other feminist theologians who reject the Biblical idea of sin, the fall and inherited evil, Ruether accepts these christian themes. However, she also appeals for a new understanding. She thinks that "self-alienation and transformation of primal relations of men and women into an oppressive dualism is the root sin upon which the crimes of history have been constructed."



Christianity has made at least four important discoveries in Latin America. The first to which Boff points is the "discovery of the passion of the people."<sup>166</sup> Boff observes that Christianity practiced "from a position on the margin" can readily recognize that "capitalism is an antihumane `system of sin' and tantamount to atheism in practice."<sup>167</sup> Put differently, only a Christianity outside the "capitalist problematic" can critique capitalism effectively because perspective, usually, is enhanced by distance rather than by proximity. It is difficult to solve a problem impartially when one is part of that problem.

The second discovery is that of "institutionalized violence."<sup>168</sup> Christianity has seen that the poor are victims of institutionalized violence. The church has realized that the exploitation of the poor and their subsequent suffering are not

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<sup>166</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 42.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid. See also; Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. New York: International Publishers, 1983, p. 620.

<sup>168</sup>Leonardo Boff believes that it is appropriate for the oppressed to use violence in order to counteract the violence of the oppressors. His stance on the issue of violence is based on the realization that violence in essence is dehumanization and exploitation. Contrary to what some people think, violence is not confined to taking up of arms in order to resist oppressive regimes. Instead, violence also encompasses the political oppression, economic marginalization and all other forms of subjugation of other people. Boff, therefore, is sensitive to institutionalized violence which may be subtle and yet sentences millions of people to a life of poverty. In Boff's estimation, physical or military violence evinced by the oppressed in an effort to extricate themselves from misery is less violent than institutionalized violence. See; Deane William Ferm, Third World Liberation Theologies. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986, pp. 30, 116.

accidental. Rather, the violation of the rights of the marginalized is intentionally built into the institutions and structures of society.<sup>169</sup>

Third, Boff shows that the church has discovered "the power of the poor in history."<sup>170</sup> Christianity has seen that in spite of incessant efforts to crush the poor, their resilience is extraordinary. Boff observes that "popular piety especially constitutes a cell of liberation, a breathing space, a place where hope springs anew and the meaning of life lives on."<sup>171</sup>

The fourth discovery which Christianity has made is that the lowly have an evangelizing potential. Notwithstanding their pitiable condition of poverty, the poor evince "the fundamental evangelical values of solidarity, hospitality, and sincerity."<sup>172</sup> Christianity is discovering that from Latin America is radiating revival which is spreading to the center instead of the other way round. The center should re-learn the essence of Christianity from the periphery.

#### **2.2.4.3 The Church and Social Responsibility**

The church in Latin America is familiar with the sinful social structures which continually oppress the poor. Instead of passively tolerating the galling

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<sup>169</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 43.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid.

situation of deprivation as God intended, the Christians in Latin America are working for change. They believe that the church's mission is to bring liberation to the oppressed. By participating in the liberation of the poor and oppressed, the church sees itself as carrying out the work Jesus Christ did and wills to do on behalf of the poor.<sup>173</sup>

In the light of social injustice and inequality which characterize Latin America, the church shuns neutrality. For the church to say nothing against the oppressive capitalistic system is to be part of the status quo. A silent church becomes an accomplice with the sinful social institutions.<sup>174</sup> Put differently, by doing nothing the church becomes guilty of the evils society commits because the church should act as the "conscience of society." Christians should be the salt of the earth not only by curbing but by eliminating oppression.

Christians in Latin America take seriously the challenge to eradicate the poverty on their continent. Historic meetings such as Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979) helped the church to reflect on the causes of the poverty in Latin America and also to map out ways of dealing with the situation. Describing the relationship

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<sup>173</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 171.

<sup>174</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 86. See also; Boff, Church, Charism and Power, p. 27. He perceptively notes that "the Church cannot cease to be involved with politics; that is, it cannot be indifferent to the justice or injustice of a cause nor can it be silent in the face of the obvious exploitation of any people. There is no neutrality in politics: one is either for change in the direction of greater social participation or one is in favor of the status quo, which in many countries marginalizes a vast majority of the people."

of Puebla to Medellin, Boff says that the Puebla Conference should be seen as "confirmation of a baptism received at Medellin."<sup>175</sup> In other words, Puebla endorsed and refined what the Medellin Conference had recommended as the direction the church was to follow so as to combat poverty and oppression.

Boff highlights the "ten themes" which the Puebla document articulated. Puebla's first and foremost theme was the endorsement of the methodology of liberation theology. This method has three components, namely, 1) seeing analytically, 2) judging theologically, and 3) acting pastorally.<sup>176</sup> Put differently, liberation theology initially "undertakes a broad critical analysis of Latin American social reality, detecting the greatest anguish and highest hopes of our peoples."<sup>177</sup> Second, "it engages in theological reflection: it rethinks, under the lens of faith, the challenges it has identified in the analytical moment."<sup>178</sup> Lastly, "it indicates pathways of Christian practice, as imperatives flowing from the analysis of the first moment and the reflection of the second."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 18.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20. Boff cautions against the dangers that beset the interpretation of social reality. He notes that "one danger is theologism, valuing theology as the only valid discourse for reflecting on social reality. Another is sociologism, regarding the social sciences as the sole legitimate discourse. A third is bilingualism, which holds two discourses in parallel without articulating or interconnecting them. A fourth approach merely mixes all the languages

The second theme was Puebla's three prophetic condemnations. Christians in Latin America condemn capitalism, the national security doctrine, and Marxism.

Commenting on Puebla's sentiments against capitalism Boff notes:

Capitalism is condemned with invectives once reserved for Marxism: `system of sin', `materialism', `idolatry of individual wealth', `closed humanism', and `practical atheism', that is atheism in practice.<sup>180</sup>

Boff reflects on the second condemnation, that is, the national security doctrine. He points out that this doctrine "suppresses any broad participation by the people in political decisions."<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, the same doctrine "presents itself as absolute, ranking higher than persons . . . and institutionalizes the insecurity of individuals."<sup>182</sup>

Significantly, the third condemnation is directed to Marxism. Boff notes that the kind of displeasure against Marxism is "in the spirit of the social encyclicals."<sup>183</sup> By directing criticism to Marxism, liberation theology shows its eclectic use of Marxism. While Puebla embraced the Marxist social analytical method it, however, does not accept everything Marx said. Consequently, Boff remarks: "The criticism is joined to an acknowledgement of Marxism's well-taken

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uncritically; it results from a faulty articulation of all of them. Liberation theology on the whole has had to learn how to avoid all these extremes."

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

criticism of the fetishism of the market and of the refusal to recognize the value of human labor."<sup>184</sup>

The third theme of Puebla was the acknowledgement of the social and political dimensions of faith. The bishops who attended Puebla uncompromisingly declared that "our social conduct is part and parcel of our following of Christ."<sup>185</sup> Boff thinks that this categorical stance by the bishops was unprecedented because "never in the history of Christian awareness has the political and social dimension of faith been so strongly asserted."<sup>186</sup> Puebla affirmed that

the church criticizes those who would restrict the scope of faith to personal or family life; who would exclude the professional, economic, social, and political orders as if sin, love, prayer, and pardon had no relevance in them.<sup>187</sup>

Boff also notes that Puebla blessed christian involvement in politics, saying that politics "flows from the very core of the Christian faith."<sup>188</sup> Puebla sees politics as a "way of worshiping the one God."<sup>189</sup>

A preferential option for the poor and against their poverty is the fourth theme Puebla articulated. In their fight against poverty, Christians are to side with

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<sup>184</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>185</sup>Ibid.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid.

the underprivileged. Puebla believes that the oppression which prevails in Latin America is aggravated if not actually caused by the church's alignment with the "mighty." Christianity's co-optation by the ruling class as from Constantine's period bequeathed to the church a paternalistic theological methodology.<sup>190</sup> Boff believes that doing theology from the underside of history, that is, making the poor to be the interlocutors, saves the church from blundering, as has happened in the past.

The fifth theme of Puebla is the defense and promotion of the dignity of the human person. The church believes that the "defense of the dignity of the human person `may be the prime imperative of this, God's hour on our continent.'"<sup>191</sup> High on the christian agenda is the safeguarding of the "rights of the poor and the neediest."<sup>192</sup>

The option for integral liberation was Puebla Conference's sixth theme. Puebla believes that the church in Latin America should promote both salvation and liberation. The church's emphasis on liberation is a response to "the terrible challenges of social contrasts and concrete oppression."<sup>193</sup> The church asserts that far from being unchristian, "liberation `belongs to the very core . . . of

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid.

<sup>193</sup>Ibid.

evangelization."<sup>194</sup> Boff, however, notes that Christians "must offer people today 'an especially vigorous message concerning liberation,' framing it in terms of the 'overall plan of salvation.'<sup>195</sup> In an attempt to guard against any reductionism, Boff perceptively reflects on the aspects of liberation saying:

Being comprehensive, liberation refuses to tolerate reductionisms that are actually mutilations: at one extreme a neglect of 'liberation from sin,' and at the other, a neglect of liberation from 'dependence and the forms of bondage that violate basic rights that come from God.' Liberation begins in history and will culminate in eternity.<sup>196</sup>

The seventh theme of Puebla is the option for the Base Church Communities. Christians in Latin America realize that the base communities have an unparalleled potential to carry out evangelization. The eighth theme of Puebla is the "adoption and purification of popular piety."<sup>197</sup> Boff remarks insightfully saying: "The Puebla document recognizes the legitimacy of the popular Catholicism by which the poor and simple live the message of the gospel. Catholicism is the 'continent's cultural matrix.'<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>194</sup>Ibid.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.



Puebla's ninth theme is the "preferential option for youth."<sup>199</sup> Because about fifty percent of Latin Americans are below the age of eighteen, Puebla resolved to have the church take seriously the education of the youth. Boff notes that "the pedagogy of the church must try to steer youth in the direction of social and political action and structural changes by instilling in them a preference for those who are poorer still."<sup>200</sup>

The final theme of Puebla is the advancement and liberation of women. Puebla sees women as doubly oppressed because "they are not only women but also poor."<sup>201</sup> Boff points out that in many ways the church has hindered women's progress by marginalizing them in ministry. Puebla asserted that

women must share in the transformation of society and share in it as women. . . . Women should have a voice in pastoral planning and co-ordination, religious education and the like.<sup>202</sup>

Boff does not view Puebla's pronouncements as absolute as far as christian participation in effecting change in society. Yet, Boff is convinced that "the foundation and core of Puebla . . . will likely determine the shape of the Latin American Church of the future."<sup>203</sup> Beyond the South American continent, the

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<sup>199</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid.

<sup>201</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

Christian experience of involvement in liberation should serve as a model of the role of Christians in any given society. Boff believes that Christians have a key role to play in concretely bringing liberation to the poor and oppressed.<sup>204</sup>

### 2.3 Summary and Conclusion

We have discovered that Boff's historical and theological backgrounds, together with his use of Marx's social analysis, have a strong influence on his view of sin. Boff perceives sin to be the negation of God's grace in human history. Whenever God's grace, which is synonymous with salvation, is frustrated dis-grace obtains, and Boff calls this sin. Boff deliberately steers away from viewing sin primarily in personal terms. Rather, he emphasizes the social dimension of sin. In Boff's estimation, social sin outweighs the personal sin because the former surpasses the independent individual intentions and wills.

Boff, therefore, contends that a view of sin which takes seriously the social aspects should lead to a more genuine conversion and a fuller commitment to God. Instead of being content with individualistic conversion while sharing in the spoils of oppressive social structures, persons should work earnestly for social conversion in concrete ways. Boff believes that when sin is treated, first and foremost, as a social phenomenon, its personal aspects will be accurately ascertained. Put differently, Boff sees the social dimension of sin as the correct starting point in

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<sup>204</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

reflecting on sin. In his view, starting with the personal aspect tends to distort the essence of sin by eclipsing its social feature.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **A COMPARISON OF WHITE'S AND BOFF'S VIEWS ON SIN**

The aim of this chapter is to compare White's and Boff's views on sin. In order to achieve this objective, two basic steps will be taken, namely, first to compare the context in which White's and Boff's understanding of sin occur and second to highlight points of agreement and disagreement in the way White and Boff view sin.

#### **3.1 Historical Backgrounds**

There are substantial similarities and differences between the historical backgrounds of White and Boff. The first similarity is that White and Boff grew up in families where both parents shared the responsibility of raising children.<sup>1</sup> Because neither complain of estranged relations between their parents, one can reasonably assume that both White and Boff came from homes with considerable stability.

Another common aspect in White's and Boff's historical backgrounds is the large sizes of their respective families. White was one of eight children.<sup>2</sup> Yet,

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<sup>1</sup>A. L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Years, Vol. 1, p. 17. See also; Boff, The Path of Hope, pp. 1, 115.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Boff was the first-born son in a family of eleven children.<sup>3</sup> White, however, was the last born together with her twin sister.<sup>4</sup>

Apparently, White and Boff had different degrees of responsibility in their childhood. Gender and seniority among fellow siblings help to account for the different kinds of responsibilities between White and Boff. Boff was a first-born son and White was a last-born daughter. Boff's position in his family meant carrying heavier responsibilities than the rest of the children.<sup>5</sup> White's position most likely shielded her from key responsibilities within her family. However, both were undoubtedly familiar with the joys and hardships common to large families.

Both White and Boff were raised in industrious families. Ellen White's father, Robert Harmon, was a hatmaker.<sup>6</sup> Leonardo Boff's father had several roles in his community. He "led prayers in the chapel, served as druggist, assisted in births, and was a justice of peace."<sup>7</sup> Leonardo's mother raised crops, chickens, pigs and cattle.<sup>8</sup> Boff considers his family to have lived a decent life.<sup>9</sup> In White's

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<sup>3</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 114.

<sup>4</sup>A. L. White, Ellen G. White: Early Years, Vol. 1, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 115.

<sup>6</sup>Coon, A Gift of Light, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 114.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

case, one may assume that the economic status of her family was average because the basic needs were apparently met. Neither White's nor Boff's families were rich or poor. Through hard work both of their families were able, it seems, to earn a decent livelihood.

The other striking difference between White and Boff concerns their birth dates. A period of one hundred and eleven years interspaces their births. White was born in 1827.<sup>10</sup> Boff was born in 1938.<sup>11</sup> White died in 1915<sup>12</sup> but Boff is alive at the time of this writing.<sup>13</sup> White lived when technology was in its infancy. Yet, Boff belongs to a period in which technology has blossomed. A disparity in White's and Boff's periods of existence implies a difference in the questions they faced. However, some perennial issues remain changeless from generation to generation. Such are the issues which link the past with the present and affirm humanity's common predicament. Therefore, while White and Boff are separated by over a century, their challenges are not totally different.

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<sup>10</sup>A. L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Years, Vol. 1, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.

<sup>12</sup>Board of Trustees, Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White, Vol. 3, pp. 3193-3210.

<sup>13</sup>Leonardo Boff is still alive as of the end of December 1994, when this thesis is under progress.

Not only were White and Boff born at different times, but also in different places. White was born in the United States of America.<sup>14</sup> Boff was born in Brazil.<sup>15</sup> While both are of Caucasian descent, Boff is a grandchild of Italian immigrants who originally came from the northern part of Italy.<sup>16</sup> White's family tree shows that her descendants came from England.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, White's and Boff's educational backgrounds are different. White had less than three full years of elementary school.<sup>18</sup> She was forced to

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<sup>14</sup>A. L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Years, Vol. 1, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.

<sup>16</sup>Boff, The Path to Hope, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup>David Olson, "A Geneological Sketch of the Robert Harmon Family," Unpublished term paper, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1974, p. 2. He points out that the geneology of Ellen G. White can be traced easily due to the work of Artamas C. Harmon in his book, Harmon Geneology, Washington, DC: Gibson Brothers, 1920, pp. 3, 4, 5, 41. He shows that "the first Harmon on record is John Harmon, Bishop of Exeter, who first received the Harmon coat of arms. John Harmon was born in 1465 at Sutton-Coldfield, Warwickshire, England, and died October 23, 1554 at Mare Hall at age 89. From this common ancestor five branches of Harmons came to New England. The founder of the Scarborough branch was John Harmon who was born February 28, 1786 and died at some unknown time. This Scarborough branch settled in Cumberland County (originally York County) Maine, by the sea coast. John Harmon was the father of Samuel Harmon, who was the father of a second but unimportant John Harmon who was the father of Daniel Harmon, who was the father of Robert Harmon, Sr., who was the father of six girls and two boys, one girl being Mrs. Ellen Gould Harmon White."

<sup>18</sup>A. L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Years, Vol. 1, p. 25. He notes: "It was probably in the autumn of 1833 that Ellen started school, just before her sixth birthday. . . . In 1836 the wooden building was replaced by a two-storey brick structure, and it was doubtless in this building that Ellen spent her last full year in school."

discontinue her formal education because of an accident which robbed her of good health.<sup>19</sup> Informally, White acquired an education enabling her to make enormous literary contributions.<sup>20</sup> Boff, however, attained a master's degree in Philosophy in 1965 and earned a doctorate in Theology from the University of Munich in 1970.<sup>21</sup>

White and Boff were not equally exposed to the poor in their childhood. Boff notes that he came in contact with the poor early in life. He was impressed with the manner his parents helped the less fortunate in their neighborhood.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, White does not mention coming into contact with the poor during her childhood years.

Another difference in White's and Boff's backgrounds is their marital status. Boff is single at the time of writing because he took the vow of celibacy in accordance with the Franciscan priesthood.<sup>23</sup> White was married to James White.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup>Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny, p. ix.

<sup>21</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup>Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny, p. 35.



Of the four sons they had in their marriage, two survived. White, therefore, had an experience of raising her own family. Boff does not.

### 3.2 Theological Backgrounds

White's and Boff's theological backgrounds are substantially different. A major exception, however, is that both positively responded quite early in their lives to serve God. It was at the age of seventeen that White received her first prophetic vision.<sup>25</sup> Boff was only eleven when he pledged to join the Franciscan priesthood.<sup>26</sup> Apart from this similarity of responding to God's call at a tender age, much of their exposure and theological development is significantly divergent.

White's theological background can be summed up under two aspects. The first has to do with her religious and social environment. The second deals with her call to the prophetic office. Born a Methodist, but converted to Adventism at the age of 15, White's theological terminology is largely drawn from her Wesleyan

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<sup>25</sup>Ellen White and James White, Life Sketches of James and Ellen G. White. Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Association, 1888, p. 326.

<sup>26</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 2.

heritage. Her manner of doing theology characterized by love as opposed to combativeness is also typical of her Wesleyan tradition.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, in many ways White was a child of her times. Influences of the restorationistic movement, the Puritans, the Anabaptists, the Scottish common sense realism and Baconian scientific methodology impinged in varying degrees on White's overall theology.<sup>28</sup> White was not insular to the religious and social milieu of her period. Butler is correct when he assert that "Ellen G. White virtually personified the Protestant period of American culture, and her writings offer a perspective on every major issue and event of the era."<sup>29</sup> White, however, gave no static response to her times, instead she interacted with her religious and social environment in a dynamic manner which reflected her own change and development. White's eschatological perspective and her response to the issue of slavery and racism in the United States of America help to show her historical particularity to the events of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>George R. Knight, "Development of SDA Theology," p. 5.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-7.

<sup>29</sup>Jonathan Butler, "The World of E. G. White and the End of the World," *Spectrum*, December, 1979, p. 3. Henceforth referred to as Butler, "E. G. White and the End of the World."

<sup>30</sup>Masao Yamagata, Ellen G. White and American Premillennialism. Ph. D. Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1983, p. 293. Henceforth referred to as Yamagata, E. G. White and American Premillennialism.

White's eschatology seems to have been largely shaped by the events that were taking place around her in the United States of America. The issue of the Sunday Law (Blair Bill) was before the Congress, the anti-Roman Catholic sentiments were part of the fabric of the American culture, and

in the current events of her time she (White) saw the rapid fulfillment of prophecy. The end was aborning. The Adventist prophetic did not look forward to another decade for the end to materialize. Her own decade held all the ingredients of the apocalypse (emphasis supplied).<sup>31</sup>

The fact that White forged her eschatological perspective in a nineteenth century American social and religious matrix presents some problems. For those outside the United States of America the problem may be one of relevance. How relevant is White's eschatological perspective to those outside the United States of America since White ties her eschatology to events that characterized that part of the world in the nineteenth century? The other problem with White's historical particularity in her interpretation of prophecy is that although she thought that "her own decade held all the ingredients of the apocalypse,"<sup>32</sup> the world did not end during her life time.

Another complication that arises from White's grounding of some of her prophetic interpretation in the social and religious cross currents of the nineteenth century is what to make of the future. Since the end did not come in White's

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<sup>31</sup>Butler, "E. G. White and the End of the World," p. 11.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

nineteenth and early twentieth century does that make her prophetic interpretation false? Were her eschatological prophecies conditional? Are White's eschatological prophecies to be understood as having dual or multiple fulfillment such that the events of the nineteenth century America which precipitated her eschatological perspective will be repeated in macrocosmic proportions in the future prior to the end of the world?

A reflection on the foregoing issues has polarized Adventism into at least two camps. On the one hand are those who believe that the events of the nineteenth century which characterized White's time will be somewhat repeated, giving the great controversy corresponding dimensions to those of the nineteenth century.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, however, are those who assert that White was historically particular to the nineteenth century and as such much of her eschatology should be discarded since it is anachronistic.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps a more balanced approach to White's eschatological perspective should recognize that White was a child of the nineteenth century and because of this she could not see all the nuances and intricacies the great controversy would entail in the future. Although the basic theme of the great controversy would remain intact from generation to generation until the end of time, some detail within

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<sup>33</sup>Harold E. Fagal, "Butler on Ellen White's Eschatology," Spectrum, December, 1980, pp. 24-34.

<sup>34</sup>Butler, "E. G. White and the End of the World," p. 12.

the great controversy would be contextualized to each era in history. This delicate tension between the basic theme and the contextualization of the details of the great controversy should help to show that White was human and limited. She was not able to see the social dimension of sin as it would manifest itself in colonialism, apartheid, or tribalism, for example. These expressions of the social aspect of sin, as we recently experienced them or are currently dealing with them fall outside White's purview. Her eschatological outlook does not specifically reflect specific social challenges each country or continent would confront.

The issue of slavery and racism in the United States of America in the nineteenth century show that White was influenced by her environment. In the 1850s and the 1860s White opposed and denounced slavery in unison with the abolitionists. She described slavery as "a sin of the darkest dye." Appealing to the doctrine of creation and redemption, White affirmed the equality of whites and blacks before God.<sup>35</sup> White also condemned racial prejudice as sin. White opposed separation in worship between whites and blacks. In 1891 she protested, "you have no license from God to exclude the colored people from your places of worship."<sup>36</sup> However, in light of the mounting racial tension in the Southern part of the United States of America, after the mid 1890s White demanded discretion

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<sup>35</sup>Yamagata, *E. G. White and American Premillennialism*, pp. 293-294.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 295.

and expediency from Adventists on the issue of racial integration. Yamagata's analysis is plausible when he says:

Seemingly contradicting her former position, she demanded that Adventists not encourage social equality and that Negro Adventists not claim an equality with the whites. Instead she encouraged the Negroes to build their own churches, to found their own schools, and to form their own administrative units.<sup>37</sup>

The fact that White "followed a path of concession and expediency in the matter of the racial question, 'until the Lord shows us a better way'"<sup>38</sup> demonstrates not only White's pragmatic approach to issues but also the need for Adventism to adapt to the changing times. White was historically particular to her times but within that particularity she evinced flexibility and an open mind.

Of much consequence to White's entire theological experience was her calling as a prophet. Implicit in her function as a prophet is the fact that she received special divine revelations which unaided human reason could not discover.<sup>39</sup> Since White was accepted as a prophet by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one would expect her to have dominated the formulation of Seventh-day Adventist doctrines. However, this was not the case. Her role was to supplement

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>39</sup>Noorbergen, Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny, pp. 73-91.

and not to supplant intense Bible study. She received numerous visions to correct or confirm the direction the church was to take.<sup>40</sup>

Basically, Boff's theological background consists of three influences. The initial influence was his contact with the poor, both as a child<sup>41</sup> and also as a priest ministering in the Petropolis slums<sup>42</sup> and the Amazon jungles.<sup>43</sup> Confronted with the mind-boggling reality of poverty, Boff developed very early in life a worldview quite sensitive to the plight of the poor. His parents' philanthropic gestures to the poor instilled in him a strong humanitarian concern. The issue of poverty dominated Boff's consciousness and theological thinking as he ministered among the underprivileged. Encountering the poor in their hopelessness, Boff was led to reshuffle his theology.<sup>44</sup> He was impelled to see the relevance of making the poor a starting point of doing theology.<sup>45</sup>

The second influence which forms part of Boff's theological background is the life of St. Francis of Assisi. In St. Francis, Boff found a role model.<sup>46</sup> The key

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<sup>40</sup>White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1, pp. 206-207.

<sup>41</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 126.

<sup>44</sup>Boff, The Path of Hope, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 126.

<sup>46</sup>Boff, Saint Francis, pp. 17-20.

areas in which Boff emulated him were in linking theory to practice on a personal and theological level, in Christology, celibacy, and making the poor, again, a starting point of theological reflection.<sup>47</sup>

Lastly, Boff's formal theological training and education form a vital aspect of his theological background. The rare and priceless analytical skills which high education imparts enabled Boff to articulate his theological reflections systematically. Boff's perspicacity is indisputable. He communicates his theology of liberation with clarity and analytical focus.<sup>48</sup>

The issue of authority is a major part of contrast in White's and Boff's theological backgrounds. To White is ascribed prophetic status by Seventh-day Adventists. Boff is not viewed as a prophet, at least the way White is regarded by Adventists. This difference between White and Boff presents a problem. A difference of this nature makes it necessary for White to be subjected to more intense and rigorous scrutiny to avoid the danger of "immunizing" her against criticism because of her appeal to inspiration. The knowledge that not everything

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid. p. 20. Here he notes: "Only those who desire the impossible achieve what is possible within human limits. Francis was taken by the desire for radicalness. What he understood and what he proposed he lived out to its logical conclusion. There did not exist for him theory on the one hand and practice on the other. Both coexist in him in an impressive manner." See also; Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125. Here Boff notes: "I follow the Franciscan school--the synoptic, Antiochene, and Scotist tradition. I find God precisely in Jesus' total, complete humanity."

<sup>48</sup>Ferm, Profiles in Liberation, p. 125.



White wrote and said was inspired should help to level the theological ground beneath Boff's and White's feet and facilitate dialogue on an equal basis. But the revelational component of White's corpus seems to give her an unfair advantage over Boff. While this presents a challenge, objective scholarship demands that no part of White's theology be placed beyond the reach of analytical scrutiny. Like St. Anselm of Canterbury, asking penetrating questions even about God, should not be branded as skepticism rather it should be viewed as *fides quaerens intellectum* "faith in search of understanding."<sup>49</sup>

### 3.3 White's and Boff's Motifs

It is difficult to understand either Boff's or White's concept of sin without some initial understanding of the motifs which undergird their theological reflections. A fundamental difference between Boff's and White's motif is that one is mainly synchronic while the other is largely diachronic. Boff's synchronic motif on the one hand, primarily focusses on a given period of history. Although the phenomenon of class conflict may be evident in other eras of human history, it is a characteristic feature of the modern society.<sup>50</sup> Marx, to whom Boff is indebted for the class conflict motif, also gives credit to the bourgeois historians for their

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<sup>49</sup>See: Daniel L. Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding. Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup>Jordan, Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution, p. 148.

recognition and study of class struggle in the modern society.<sup>51</sup> The fact that Boff's class conflict motif is synchronic (having a focus on a given period in history) does not mean that it is devoid of any diachronic elements. Boff's class conflict motif also tries to analyze society in a linear fashion throughout the modern times to the present. In other words, the punctiliar nature of Boff's motif as it relates to a specific period in history does not negate its own inherent linearity. While the class conflict motif has evolved through time within the framework of the modern times, it should be understood first and foremost as synchronic because it seeks to understand the modern society in terms of "layers" or "strata". It is precisely this vertical approach to the analysis of society as having classes or strata which gives Boff's social conflict motif a synchronic outlook.

To appreciate Boff's class conflict motif as being synchronic in approach is to find some access to his reflection on sin. According to Boff sin cannot be understood apart from the friction or the "vertical" class struggle which characterize the modern society. To rid society of the propensity for class oppression is in Boff's thinking to eradicate sin. There is, therefore, a direct link between Boff's class conflict motif and his concept of sin.

White's great controversy motif, on the other hand, is diachronic in that it not only spans human history, it also pre-dates it. The great controversy motif which, as White asserts, started with the fall of Lucifer (Satan) has passed and will

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

pass through some key phases which include: the creation, the fall of man, the incarnation, the trial and crucifixion of Christ, the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the high priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, and the second coming of Christ.<sup>52</sup>

The diachronic aspect of White's great controversy motif depicts the gains and the losses in the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan through each of the successive stages of the confrontation. In the great controversy motif White tries to show that each phase of the conflict has far-reaching implications for the question of sin. The fall of man, for example occasioned the implementation of the plan of salvation. Because humanity had sinned, Jesus was going to be born to die for humanity's sins. By causing mankind to sin against God, Satan won this particular phase of the great controversy.<sup>53</sup> After incarnation, the controversy continued. While Satan did register some successes, Christ's victory on the cross was the most decisive blow he inflicted on Satan (Gen. 3:15).

At the risk of creating an impression in the reader's mind, this thesis in Chapter 1 showed the unparalleled restraint which Christ exercised during his unjust trial. The trial of Jesus is discussed in more detail to show the intensity, the suspense which Christ experienced and the singularity of purpose which Christ evinced to secure the salvation of mankind. At the heart of Christ's confrontation

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<sup>52</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 40.

<sup>53</sup>White, Early Writings, p. 149.

with Satan was sin. The trial of Jesus is by no means the only phase of the great controversy which can be cited to illustrate the breathtaking and precarious nature of the conflict between Christ and Satan. If Jesus had faltered during his trial or any other phase of the great controversy for that matter, human salvation would have been jeopardized.<sup>54</sup>

Crucial to the salvation of mankind as the death of Jesus on the cross is, are the other stages of the great controversy as well. Diachronically, White shows that in as much as the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ are important, the current priestly ministry of Christ in the sanctuary in heaven is important. In White's view the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary is important because it sets the stage for the conclusion of the great controversy. It is in the heavenly sanctuary that Christ is involved in the work of judgment in which the saving merits of his atoning sacrifice at the cross are applied to repentant and forgiven sinners. When Christ ceases his mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary probation for the human race closes and soon after the second coming of Christ occurs. The great controversy finally ends with the eradication of sin and the annihilation of Satan and sinners.<sup>55</sup>

It is, therefore, this diachronic approach of White's great controversy motif which provides a framework of her reflection of sin. From the beginning to the end

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<sup>54</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 210.

<sup>55</sup>White, The Great Controversy, p. 278.

of the great controversy the basic problem is sin. The existence of sin sparked the inception of the great controversy and the extermination of sin will signal the end of the same conflict.

Incidentally, both of their theological motifs are charged with military imagery. Their two motifs connote some kind of clash or confrontation between some opponents. On the one hand, White's great controversy motif depicts a cosmic war between Christ and Satan. Divided between the two are innumerable angelic and human followers who are locked in a bitter struggle.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, Boff's class conflict motif portrays the war between social classes, with specific reference to the Latin American context. While society can be classified into at least four classes, the critical polarity is between the bourgeois and the proletariat. The bourgeois own capital and means of production, while the proletariat provide labor. The bourgeois tends to oppress the proletariat who revolt in an effort to liberate themselves.<sup>57</sup>

White points to a single being's heart, namely, Lucifer's, as the source of the great controversy.<sup>58</sup> The great controversy, whose scale has swelled to cosmic

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<sup>56</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 19. See also; J. Philip Wogaman, Christian Perspectives on Politics. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, pp. 277, 278; Nicholars Bredyaev, Christianity and Class War. London: Sheed and Ward, 1933, p. 11. These two authors recognize the fact that human history is situated in a "larger cosmic drama" between good and evil.

<sup>57</sup>Jordan, Karl Marx: Economy, Class and Social Revolution, p. 166.

<sup>58</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 36-37.

proportions, started when Lucifer allowed his heart to be the battlefield. White notes that "in his heart there was a strange, fierce conflict. Truth, justice, and loyalty were struggling against envy and jealousy."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, when envy and jealousy prevailed over truth, justice and loyalty in Lucifer's heart, sin resulted. Although Boff subscribes to the doctrine of the fall of Lucifer as taught by traditional Christianity, he points to human greed, endorsed by collective selfish wills, as the source of class conflict.<sup>60</sup> Put differently, Boff regards the capitalistic system as a product of decisions made by those who own capital and means of production to oppress the poor. It is this situation of conflict which is a result of sin. Boff, therefore, locates the source of sin to be in the collective or corporate inclination to oppress others.<sup>61</sup>

In pursuing her great controversy motif, White asserts that inasmuch as the great controversy started in one heart, it continues to be waged within human hearts today. The cosmic nature of the great controversy lies in the fact that each and every individual, each heart is involved in the war between Christ and Satan, good and evil. The great controversy is not universal or cosmic in the sense of collective involvement without engaged individual participation. Each person, each human

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ramsay, Four Modern Prophets, p. 63.

<sup>61</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 168.

being, is an actor. None is a spectator. In the great controversy, therefore, White places the spotlight on the individual whose role is distinct in the cosmic conflict.<sup>62</sup>

Focal to Boff's class conflict motif is society as a corporate entity. Before he sees the individuals who comprise society, Boff sees society which is precisely an aggregate total of individuals. According to Boff's perspective, it is not so much the individuals in their isolated capacity who really pose the problem of sin. Rather, it is individuals in their collective nature who enact and pass oppressive policies. Therefore, in the class conflict motif, Boff hopes that people will be able to see individuals in their corporate status before the same individuals can be viewed in their independent and insular capacity.<sup>63</sup>

Boff openly acknowledges his indebtedness to Karl Marx for making use of Marx's concepts.<sup>64</sup> Boff believes that Marx's social analysis was both cogent and accurate. Boff is disappointed by Christians who reject or deny the veracity of Marx's portrayal of society as bedeviled with class conflict. Boff, however, points to fear as the reason which impels most Christians to reject Marx's social analysis. Boff believes that most Christians are afraid that what Marx says about society

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<sup>62</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 51.

<sup>63</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 142.

<sup>64</sup>Boff/Boff, Liberation Theology, p. 70. See also; Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., Liberation Theology: A Documentary History. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 418; George C. L. Cummings, A Common Journey. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993, p. 67.

might be true. Boff urges people to be objective enough to embrace Marx's description of society because it mirrors reality more accurately. Boff opposes the notion that one becomes a Marxist by simply appreciating some aspect of Karl Marx's philosophy. Personally, Boff does not, however, employ the class conflict motif as a driving force in his theology. He uses it only as a tool to help him address the problem of sin which society faces.<sup>65</sup>

White gives credit to divine revelation for the unique insights of her great controversy motif.<sup>66</sup> She claims to have received prophetic visions which graphically revealed the framework and the details of the conflict between Christ and Satan. White frequently remarked concerning the visions she received saying, "I was shown. . ." "I was taken . . ." and "I saw . . ."<sup>67</sup> These phrases are accepted by most Adventists as testimony that most of what she wrote concerning

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid. See also; James V. Spickard, "Transcending Marxism: Liberation Theology and Critical Theology," Cross Currents 42, No. 3. (Fall 1992), p. 326. He points out that "liberation theology appropriates Marxist tools of analysis, but places them in a Christian worldview and context. . . . Cut off from its governing ideology, Marxism can be plundered for theological use."

<sup>66</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, pp. 35, 42, 45, 208. See also; p. 9. Here the Trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications provide a foreword which reads: "There are many themes upon which Mrs. E. G. White, God's chosen messenger to the Advent believers, received enlightenment in the early days, near the beginning of her work. Foremost among these was the great conflict between good and evil, from the fall of Lucifer in heaven and the fall of man, down through the centuries of probationary time to the second coming of Christ, and the setting up of the kingdom of God in the earth made new."

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.



the great controversy was not a product of her own ingenuity or exegetical acumen but a direct revelation from God. However, the concept of a conflict between good and evil was not new to the period in which White lived. In addition, the idea that the confrontation between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism was a manifestation of an aspect of the conflict between God and Satan was part of the nineteenth century religious subculture. The view of the great controversy as involving Protestantism and Roman Catholicism was, therefore, historically particular to the nineteenth century which constituted White's environment.<sup>68</sup>

Because of White's description of the great controversy in nineteenth century parlance, scholars such as Butler doubt whether White's perception of the great controversy which was historically conditioned by that period should be applied to our time or to the future. Butler thinks that White's eschatology, for example, was rooted in the events of her time and as such it is now anachronistic.<sup>69</sup> Butler is right in asserting that White was heavily influenced by the social currents of her time. Butler, however, does not draw a line between the details of the great controversy which were characteristic of the nineteenth century and the principles of the great controversy which go beyond the nineteenth century into the future.

Both White and Boff believe that the great controversy and the class conflict, will come to an end someday. White asserts that the great controversy will be

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<sup>68</sup>Butler, "E. G. White and the End of the World," pp. 3-12.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

terminated after Christ comes the second time. Christ's return will ensure the destruction of sin, sinners and Satan. However, saints will inherit eternal life. In other words, the great controversy ends after Christ comes back as victor over Satan and sin. Christ will then vindicate God's character which is reflected in God's Law.<sup>70</sup>

Boff, however, alludes to an ultimate liberation where class conflict will be a thing of the past. Harmony and equality will prevail. Unlike White, Boff believes that God will take over and consummate the human efforts of penultimate liberations.<sup>71</sup>

### **3.4 On White's and Boff's Views on Sin**

This section will attempt to objectively highlight the similarities and differences in White's and Boff's concept of sin. In order to accomplish this task, attention will be directed to four important areas. The first area concerns the way White and Boff define sin. The second deals with their perceptions of the personal and the social dimensions of sin. White's and Boff's understanding of sin and

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<sup>70</sup>White, The Great Controversy, p. 504.

<sup>71</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 165. John S. Dunne, The Church of the Poor Devil. New York: MacMillan Company, 1982, p. 143. He points out that Karl Marx sees a classless society which is characterized by harmony to be the fruit or end of class conflict.

personal salvation is the third area which will receive attention. Sin and social salvation is the last area that will be compared.

### **3.4.1 White's and Boff's Definition of Sin**

The way White and Boff define sin shows their faithfulness to the motifs which run through their theologies. White asserts that sin is basically the transgression of God's Law. White points out that the Law is a transcript of God's character and that it forms the foundation of God's government.<sup>72</sup> She also notes that the Law is based on the principle of love. White shows that at every phase of the great controversy the Law has been, is, and will continue to be the central issue.<sup>73</sup> The entrance of sin occurred when Lucifer transgressed God's Law. Sin continues because Adam and his descendants have transgressed and are transgressing it.<sup>74</sup> The end of sin will come when the transgressed Law will be

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<sup>72</sup>White, That I May Know Him, pp. 289, 291, 305, 366.

<sup>73</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 69. The framework and distinct phases of the great controversy have been outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis. The reason for a lengthy and detailed description of White's great controversy motif is to acquaint those who are less familiar with White's theology so that they may better understand her view of sin. In every stage of the great controversy, the Law of God is the point of contention.

<sup>74</sup>White, Testimony Treasures, Vol. 1, p. 604.

vindicated. In other words, it will be shown that Satan's charges against God, portraying him as a merciless tyrant, are unfounded.<sup>75</sup>

In essence, therefore, White defines sin as opposition to God's will and character which are expressed in God's Law.<sup>76</sup> To sin is to rebel and go contrary to God's revealed will.<sup>77</sup> Sin is therefore, saying "No" to God who knows what is best for his creatures. Essentially, when one chooses to sin, one makes a statement to the effect that Satan's allegations that God is a tyrant are legitimate. By sinning, therefore, one sustains Satan's unfounded claims.<sup>78</sup>

Boff also casts his definition of sin within the context of his class conflict motif. He defines sin with history and society in mind. Boff notes that within the same history, grace and disgrace co-exist. Whenever God's presence is felt in the world and among human beings, grace is communicated.<sup>79</sup> However, disgrace or

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<sup>75</sup>White, Last Day Events, p. 299.

<sup>76</sup>White, Signs of the Times, Vol. 3, p. 109.

<sup>77</sup>White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 222. See also; Solomon Schimmel, The Seven Deadly Sins. New York: The Free Press, 1992, pp. 232-233. Henceforth referred to as Schimmel, The Seven Deadly Sins. He cautions against the danger of regarding sin as a disease or addiction because that tends to shift the problem of sin from a moral to a clinical framework.

<sup>78</sup>White, Desire of Ages, p. 762. See also; George Vass, The Mystery of Man and the Foundation of a Theological System. London: Sheed and Ward, 1985, p. 37. He notes that "the undefinable kernel of sin is always the possible "no" to God, the transcendent reality."

<sup>79</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 84. See also; Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, pp. 60-61. Here Leonardo Boff shows how his Catholic sacramental view of history influences his understanding of sin. On p. 60 he defines a

sin prevail when there is lack of encounter, selfishness, violence, destruction and inhumanity. Boff sees an ongoing confrontation of grace and disgrace in society. Sin for Boff obtains, therefore, when one refuses to be part of grace, opting for disgrace instead. Sin is anything which contradicts God's salvific design. To go contrary to God's efforts to save humanity is to sin.<sup>80</sup>

It is on the point that sin is the negation of God's will and design that White's and Boff's definitions of sin intersect and meet. Both White and Boff recognize sin to denote a refusal to comply with what God wills for humanity. Both regard sin as a frustration of God's plan.<sup>81</sup>

However, Boff's sacramental view of history sharpens his focus on his definition of sin. Boff asserts that history is not neutral because it is a vehicle of grace and disgrace. Grace and disgrace find concrete expression in the political, economic, and social aspects of history. God's presence is accepted or rejected in these aspects of history. Sin, therefore, is a concrete reality because the resultant

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sacrament to be "a visible deed of God, by means of which the divine salvific will is signified and rendered present in the historical dimension of human beings." Boff, therefore, notes on p. 61 that: "Historical events are charged with grace or sin. Events are sacraments. . . . The tragedies of history result from the fact that sacramental structuration permits a cleft, a hiatus. History is not always the vehicle of salvation. Salvation is not indissolubly conjoined to this or that historical sign or reality. Realities can communicate ungrace: they can be vessels not only of weal, but of woe."

<sup>80</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 166.

<sup>81</sup>White, Selected Messages, Vol. 1, p. 222. See also; Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 166.

decisions emanating from selfish economic, political and social systems are real and can be oppressive.<sup>82</sup>

Boff is successful, therefore, in bringing the definition of sin to a point where refusal to obey God is translated into concrete social interactions of man with man. In other words, Boff shows that the vertical relationship which an individual has with God is meaningless if it cannot be mirrored in the horizontal relationships the individual has with other fellow human beings. Boff's definition of sin is rooted in praxis because he takes the close alignment of belief and behavior seriously. In defining sin, Boff therefore tries to bring to focus the social implications of sin which he feels traditional Christianity has glossed over.<sup>83</sup>

It is doubtful whether White, as a low-church Protestant would describe history to be sacramental as Boff does. Perhaps White's problem would be one of employing terminology characteristically Roman Catholic. Yet when one takes a close look at White's description of history it is evident that she had a "sacramental" view of history in which God's will steers the direction of history. White perceptively notes:

In the annals of human history, the growth of nations, the rise and fall of empires, appear as if dependent on the will and prowess of man, the shaping of events seems, to a great degree, to be determined by his power, ambition, or caprice. But in the word of God the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interest

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<sup>82</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 168.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

and power and passion, the agencies of the All-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of his own will.<sup>84</sup>

It should be noted that White arrives at the same idea of defining sin in concrete social terms. Yet she also believes that a person's vertical relationship with God should have horizontal impact. White makes use of the Law of God to illustrate the relationship which individuals should have to God and to their fellow men. She actually summarizes the Decalogue as: "Supreme love to God and impartial love to man."<sup>85</sup> This means that persons should not say that they love God when they hate their fellow man. Since, according to White, sin is to refuse to love God, it is also true that sin should be seen as a refusal to love one's fellow human beings. White, therefore, comes to the same social implications of the definition of sin which Boff recognizes.

While White and Boff try to define sin, they both agree that its nature is mysterious. They accept that sin is an absurdity because no satisfactory explanation can be given for its existence.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>White, Conflict and Courage, p. 250.

<sup>85</sup>White, The Desire of Ages, p. 498.

<sup>86</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 4; See also; White, Welfare Ministry, p. 17.

### 3.4.2 The Personal and Social Dimensions of Sin

An awareness of the personal and social dimensions of sin is implicit in both White's and Boff's reflections on sin. In the case of White, one has to critically analyze the various contexts in which she discusses the issue of sin in order to ascertain whether the personal or social aspect is being stressed. Put another way, a systematic reflection on sin specifically stating the personal and social dimensions is absent in White's writings. Yet, as far as Boff is concerned, he clearly discusses the personal and social dimensions of sin separately and systematically.<sup>87</sup> Boff spends time showing that it is not easy to compartmentalize the individual and corporate features of sin because they constantly influence each other. However, he argues for a theoretical or conceptual distinction between the two sides of sin in order to facilitate an accurate understanding of the scope of sin.<sup>88</sup>

Boff argues that while the task of particularizing the personal and social aspects of sin is risky, he sees greater risk in denying that sin has the two dimensions.<sup>89</sup> Failure to "anatomize" sin into its two facets invariably leads some

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<sup>87</sup>Boff/Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 46, 50, 52, 53, 61, 88, 93. See also; Boff, Liberating Grace, pp. 4-5.

<sup>88</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 85.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid. See: Robert McAfee Brown, Spirituality and Liberation. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988, pp. 23-42. He reflects on the risk of dividing life into separate and unrelated spheres, for example, sacred versus secular and personal versus social. Overcoming this fallacy demands that life be viewed as a blend of the two apparently diametrically opposed spheres. See also; Donald G. Bloesch, The Crisis of Piety. Grand Rapids, MI: William



to fail to recognize its cryptic and subtle social aspect.<sup>90</sup> Boff points to traditional Christianity which unwittingly downplays the social dimension of sin by reflecting on sin as a private problem which a person has between himself and God.<sup>91</sup>

Furthermore, Boff believes that coming to terms with the bipolarity of sin facilitates accurate prescriptions to the problem of sin. A diagnosis of sin which is blind to its personal and social nature leads to random and shoddy attempts to deal with the question of sin.<sup>92</sup>

After arguing for the separation of the personal and social aspects of sin for analytical purposes, Boff further argues that the social dimension of sin is more critical and decisive. Boff refuses to place equal weight on the two features of sin because he thinks that such an attempt ignores some crucial points. First, he believes that treating the personal and social aspects of sin as equal creates misconceptions. The major one is that people will tend to regard the aggregate sins of individuals as equivalent to social sin. Boff, however, finds this untenable because in his view social sin is the sum total of the individual person's sin and also

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Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1968, pp. 49-61.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>91</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, pp. 43-45.

<sup>92</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 85. See: Arthur F. McGovern, Liberation Theology and Its Critics. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989, p. 101. He criticizes liberation theology for situating sin in social structures while overlooking the personal dimension of sin.

the breeding ground for personal sins.<sup>93</sup> Second, Boff argues that social sin is greater than personal sin because it is on the social level that individuals have direct and concrete interaction with reality.<sup>94</sup>

White does not explicitly argue for either the primacy of the personal or social dimension of sin. However, if one goes by the space which White devotes to sin as it relates to individual persons, one may quickly conclude that she puts more emphasis on the individual aspect of sin than on the social. To ascertain the proportions of the personal and social dimensions within White's view of sin is a daunting task. A mere quantitative comparison of passages which deal with the individual and the corporate aspects of sin may not pass analytical scrutiny. Perhaps the most reasonable manner of evaluating the status White attaches to each of the two dimensions of sin would be by way of qualitative analysis. This means that the fact that White spoke of the individual aspect of sin in more passages than those concerning the social aspect of sin should not be used to prove the primacy of the individual over the social dimension.<sup>95</sup> A careful analysis of White's

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid. See also; Boff, Saint Francis, p. 85.

<sup>95</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 189. White spoke forcefully on the need to address the social dimension of sin. She notes: "The work of gathering in the needy, the oppressed, the suffering, the destitute, is the very work which every church that believes the truth for this time should long since have been doing. We are to show the tender sympathy of the Samaritan in supplying physical necessities, feeding the hungry, bringing the poor that are cast out to our homes, gathering from God every day grace and strength that will enable us to reach to

comments on the personal and social dimensions of sin suggests that she saw them as having equal significance.

The major difference between Boff and White is that Boff seems to pay less attention to the individual aspect of sin to a point where the social dimension becomes altogether too dominant.<sup>96</sup> White, however, uses the individual aspect of sin as the starting point of her reflection on sin but does not suffocate or stifle the social aspect of sin. White tries to keep a healthy balance between the two aspects of sin. White's language on the need to recognize the social aspect of sin is as strong as her language on the individual aspect of sin.<sup>97</sup> Yet her commitment to social change is not as radical as that of Boff. White's eschatological view of the imminent return of Christ seems to short-circuit her optimism in human effort to bring about total social change. Yamagata is right in his assessment of White's reluctance to engage in radical and drastic social change when he notes that "White... believed that the imminent Parousia will establish a happy, sinless society

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the very depths of human misery and help those who cannot possibly help themselves."

<sup>96</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, pp. 43-45. See also; Boff/Boff, Liberation Theology, p. 17. He notes: "There can be no doubt about it: liberation theology today is. . . due to the fact that this (social) dimension presents itself, first, as being of the greatest urgency, and second, as the aspect of faith most neglected by past theologians."

<sup>97</sup>See; White, Welfare Ministry, p. 16. See also; White, Southern Work, p. 39.

for the redeemed, she did not see the social reforms of her day as effective means to improve society."<sup>98</sup>

Noteworthy is the fact that Boff's fears concerning the granting of equal status to the individual and social dimension of sin seem to be confirmed in the way some people interpret White's view of sin. Depending on one's worldview, it seems many Adventist Christians have interpreted White's theology of sin while heavily influenced by where they come from. Adventist Christians who are part of the capitalistic system, with its emphasis on individualism, tend to see White's view of sin in individualistic terms.<sup>99</sup> Such Christians are satisfied with a strict view of sin which focuses only on the personal aspect of sin. To these individualistic Christians, the social dimension of sin is not as important, although history has

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<sup>98</sup>Yamagata, E. G. White and American Premillennialism, p. 290.

<sup>99</sup>Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, Citizens of Two Worlds. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1992, p. 229. In a study dealing with religion and politics among American Seventh-day Adventists, Dudley and Hernandez perceptively point out that "structural pluralism, the segmentation of social experience into public and private spheres, has had a decisive effect on Adventism. Historically, Adventism has encouraged withdrawal from the public arena to focus on 'spiritual' matters. The majority of Adventists, with the exception of ethnic groups, has also adopted an individualistic political ideology which favors the status quo. . . . It is interesting that despite a strong stance on the separation of church and state, Adventist orthodoxy finds close affinity with the American economic system of capitalism. Thus, while rhetorically Adventists advocate separation, in reality they are closely aligned with conservative Republicanism. This is particularly true for those with higher income levels--those who have invested heavily in the system" (emphasis supplied).

shown that they make it important when their personal and collective interests are threatened.<sup>100</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists who interpret Ellen G. White from a capitalistic and individualistic worldview evince a theological blindspot since they fail to see White's concern for the social aspect of sin. An objective hermeneutical approach to White's theology of sin must accurately reflect her concern for the individual as well as the social dimensions of sin. Because of the different pre-suppositions between White's theology and Socialism or Marxism, it would be inappropriate to impose a Socialist or a Marxist's interpretation on White's theology of sin. A vantage hermeneutical approach to White's concept of sin is one which selectively adopts elements of Marx's social analysis which depict the truth about the conflict between the social classes. Boff's bold but selective use of Marx's social analysis is a viable hermeneutical approach that can be used to facilitate a better understanding of White's attention to both aspects of sin.

Therefore, Seventh-day Adventist Christians who are outside the "capitalistic problematic" should more easily appreciate White's attempt to place equal significance on the individual as well as the social aspects of sin.<sup>101</sup> It seems that

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>See: Dudley and Hernandez, Citizens of Two Worlds, p. 229. See also; Richard Shaull, Naming the Idols. Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988, pp. 53-58; Curt Cadorette, From the Heart of the People. Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988, p. 90. Cadorette notes that "victims of an exaggerated sense of self, we unwittingly give our lives and labor to a social fragmentation and the

those that benefit most from the capitalistic system are more susceptible to being trapped within the capitalistic problematic where life is viewed mainly from an individualistic perspective. What this means is that geographically one may live in America, for example, yet if one does not draw material benefits from the capitalistic system, one is in a better position to critique capitalism more objectively. To be inside or outside of the capitalistic problematic ultimately has little to do with the geographical location of an individual. The capitalistic problematic is largely ideological. The world is a global village today. Those who reap wealth from capitalism may not want to bite the hand that feeds them. Because of their proximity to the capitalistic system ideologically, many lack objectivity. Some education does help in improving people's objectivity because even in the capitalistic United States of America there are some Adventist scholars<sup>102</sup> who critique capitalism and individualism. Unfortunately, for the majority of people within the capitalistic system, such a detachment from capitalistic and individualistic thinking is difficult if not impossible.

As a prophet to a church whose members were eventually to be found in every part of the globe, White's message was supposed to transcend the North American boundaries reaching out to the rest of the world. Divine inspiration,

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domination of one class by another. . . . By propagating belief in an individual soul and a God who relates to each of us as a unique person, Christianity has been a mainstay of capitalism."

<sup>102</sup>See: Dudley and Hernandez, Citizens of Two Worlds, p. 233-268.

possibly, helped her to deal with the problematic of being born and raised in the capitalistic United States of America. In her critique of the extravagance of the rich in the United States of America, White shows that although she belonged to a capitalistic society herself, she was not blind to the evils of capitalism.<sup>103</sup>

Due to many Seventh-day Adventists' captivity to the "capitalistic problematic," however, the same criticism which Boff directs against traditional Christianity can be directed to some Seventh-day Adventists. Traditional Christianity has been blamed for its failure to stress the social dimension of sin. As a result, it has been implicated in the perpetration of oppression in conjunction with capitalistic regimes. A failure to recognize the due significance of the social feature of sin might have opened the way for the co-optation of Christianity by the ruling class as can be seen in Constantine's time. A view of sin which diminishes the social aspect has also led to the "co-optation" of White's theology of sin, reducing it to a partisan level where it can be used to bolster the individualistic aspirations of those who are trapped within the capitalistic problematic.<sup>104</sup>

Boff's observations concerning the deceptive nature of the social aspect of sin are accurate. It is true that individuals can be lulled into complacency within oppressive social structures. It is also true that many individuals are oblivious to

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<sup>103</sup>White's remarks on how Christians should relate to the poor and marginalized show that she was able to objectively critique the capitalistic spirit of the rich Western nations. See; White, Welfare Ministry, pp. 188-193.

<sup>104</sup>See; White, The Story of Redemption, p. 327.

their complicity in perpetrating oppression because they see no link between their corporate sin of oppression and the victims of that oppression.<sup>105</sup>

Yet, when Boff subordinates the individual dimension to the social one, he seems to over-react. Unlike White, Boff swings the pendulum to the other extreme. He almost eclipses the individual aspect of sin of whose distinct identity he argues. Boff's criticism of traditional Christianity's neglect of the social dimension should not throw him off balance as it seems to have done. Rather, he should maintain his composure while arguing for a healthy balance in the perception of the personal and social dimensions of sin.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 86.

<sup>106</sup>Boff/Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 64-65. Whether Boff is over-reacting or not when it comes to the question of his emphasis of the social dimension over the individual one is a matter of perspective. An important observation, however, is that Boff is under no illusions when it comes to the temptations which threaten liberation theology. He enumerates some of the temptations and these are: "Disregard for mystical roots, from which all true commitment to liberation springs, and overemphasis of political action. . . . Overstressing the political aspect of questions relating to oppression and liberation, at the expense of other, more supple and more deeply human aspects: friendship, pardon, feeling for leisure and celebration, open dialogue with everyone, sensitivity to artistic and spiritual riches. . . . Subordinating considerations of faith to considerations of society in one-sided constructs paying too much attention to class struggle and too little to what is specifically religious and Christian. . . . Absolutization of liberation theology, downgrading the value of other theologies, and overemphasizing the socio-economic aspect of evangelical poverty, which can lead to underemphasis on other types of social oppression, such as discrimination against blacks, women or indigenous cultures."



### 3.4.3 Sin and Personal Salvation

The issue of sin and personal salvation receives significant attention in White's and Boff's theologies. A look at Boff's point of view shows that he holds that personal salvation is primarily and almost exclusively attainable within the context of society. In other words, Boff does not see how personal piety alone can adequately serve as a basis for personal salvation at the exclusion of any interaction with society.<sup>107</sup>

It is the high premium which Boff places on the role of society with regard to the individual's salvation which gives his perception of personal salvation a humanistic bias. Boff puts society at the center of the enterprise of salvation because he says that personal salvation is determined by one's acceptance or rejection of people.<sup>108</sup> In principle, White agrees with Boff. Like Boff, she accepts the fact that at the last judgment when "the goats and the sheep will be separated,"<sup>109</sup> the criterion that God will use to determine who will be saved is how well individuals related to people.

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<sup>107</sup>Boff, God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 253.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid. See also; Victorio Araya, God of the Poor. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983, p. 83. He points out that "God seeks to be loved *inse* and to be loved in others. . . . Love of neighbor, then is what makes it possible to experience the transcendent, as *Dios Mayor*."

<sup>109</sup>Boff/Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, p. 45.

The apparent convergence of Boff's and White's views of the last judgment can be deceptive. While Boff and White concur on the point that the way one treats fellow human beings will affect one's eternal destiny, what really matters is the context within which they reiterate Jesus' words found in Matthew 25:31-46. For Boff, the context is one which makes people or society the starting point. A person's interaction with others is not only crucial, but determinative when it comes to personal salvation. The role of society seems to dominate Boff's range of vision to a point where humanitarian concerns can be perceived as having salvific properties. One can easily allege that Boff may be unwittingly bolstering the doctrine of salvation by works. Boff's argument, which asserts that personal salvation is determined by the acceptance or rejection of people, also sounds a bit reductionistic because personal salvation involves many dynamics which cannot be neatly compressed into humanistic and humanitarian concerns only. Being nice to people is not the only thing which ensures personal salvation.

White, however, makes the individual's relationship with God her starting point.<sup>110</sup> A person whose devotion to God is strong will relate well to human beings, prompted by godly motives. Implicit in White's position is that any genuine christian will naturally address human needs in concrete ways. The concern to alleviate human suffering is an unavoidable by-product of a personal acquaintance

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<sup>110</sup>White, Signs of the Times, October 8, 1885, paragraph 2.

with the will of God. The individual's relationship with God comes first and cannot find any equivalent substitute.<sup>111</sup>

An issue that arises from White's implicit position that "genuine Christians will naturally address human needs in concrete ways" sounds simplistic. How many people, who are considered "genuine Christians," find it so unnatural to engage in concrete social action for the alleviation of human suffering? The genuineness of an individual's relationship with God should translate into visible empathy for the oppressed.

Further supporting the pivotal role which society has in deciding the destiny of individuals, Boff comments on original sin, but with a social bias. He notes that "original sin in human beings consists in the schizophrenia of our historical existence which makes us incapable of love, incapable of decentering ourselves radically."<sup>112</sup> Sin in individuals, therefore, is marked by a selfishness which insulates a person from others. It is when one is wrapped up with oneself that love for God and for others finds no room in the heart. Consequently, Boff asserts that sin hinders personal salvation when an individual refuses to imitate the example of Jesus who sided with the poor.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Boff, Jesus Christ Liberator, p. 202.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid. Concerning the issue that Christ sided with the poor, White agrees with Boff. See: White, Welfare Ministry, p. 172. She remarks: "Christ has ever been the poor man's friend. He chose poverty, and honored it by making it

The major difference between White and Boff on the issue of sin and personal salvation lies in the fact that White provides more details on personal piety than Boff. Boff's preoccupation with the individual's need to better society limits his treatment of the issue.<sup>114</sup> Because of a more comprehensive treatment which White gives to the question of sin and personal salvation, her emphasis on the personal dimension of sin, instead of diminishing the social aspect, enhances it.<sup>115</sup>

Unlike Boff, White basically deals with the issue of sin and personal salvation in two ways. First, she deals with some personalities in the Bible whose lives illustrate how sin and personal salvation relate. For purposes of this research, only a few individuals have been selected to show the direction of White's thought.

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His lot. . . . He took His position with the poor that He might lift from poverty the stigma that the world had attached to it."

<sup>114</sup>Boff/Boff, *Salvation and Liberation*, p. 17. Boff's limited discussion of the individual's personal piety is deliberate. He puts more emphasis on the social dimension of sin because he feels that this aspect has been neglected by traditional Christianity.

<sup>115</sup>Dudley and Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds*, pp. 277-305. Perceptively, Dudley and Hernandez reflect the balance which White's theology accords the individual and social dimensions of sin. These two scholars reveal that Adventism's failure to stress the social dimension of human existence is untenable because it militates against its self-understanding of being a 'remnant' community. In addition, a neglect of the social aspect of life cripples the ambitious program of evangelization of unreached areas of the world entitled, 'Global Strategy' which the Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently involved in. See; p. 278. Dudley and Hernandez on page 305 therefore believe that "Adventists must consider the call to radical social involvement as being an integral part of its commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Adventism needs to make a radical shift in its self-understanding and its relationship to secular society."

Second, she investigates how sin was dealt with in the earthly sanctuary to depict personal salvation. In this point, parallels are drawn between the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary to show how sin is dealt with currently so as to ensure personal salvation.

In an eclectic fashion, White's treatment of individuals like Satan, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Enoch is investigated. In the case of Satan, White points out that sin started in him as an individual, but he would not repent in spite of God's efforts to win him back. The plan to save Satan did not involve any cross. No one needed to die. Only persuasion and genuine repentance could ensure his personal salvation.<sup>116</sup>

When Adam and Eve sinned, God revealed to them the plan of salvation. As recorded in Genesis 3:15, God told them of the Savior who was to crush the serpent's head while the serpent bruised his heel.<sup>117</sup> While the salvation Christ was

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<sup>116</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 320.

<sup>117</sup>It is important to note that the act of crushing the serpent's head which the seed of the woman was going to do entailed some inestimable sacrifice. This reality is vividly portrayed by picturing someone barefooted intentionally stepping on the head of a live poisonous snake. The audacious process is not without risk because the serpent strikes his heel while he crushes its head. Upon the cross, Jesus Christ experienced excruciating pain from Satan. Yet, through the same cross Christ crushed the serpent's head. While the serpent's body currently wriggles, that should not be viewed as a sign of vitality, for it only marks the oozing out of its life. The serpent's head is incurably damaged, therefore the imminent extinction of the serpent (devil) is irreversible.

to bring would be sufficient for the whole world, its efficacy was to be premised on individual conversion and repentance.<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, in the case of Cain and Abel, White demonstrates that the sacrificial system which God initiated was to direct people's minds to Christ, the antitypical sacrifice who was to come. Abel, personally, understood the principles of salvation, hence he offered the sacrifices as prescribed. Cain, unfortunately, refused to follow instructions, thus placing himself outside the pale of salvation.<sup>119</sup> This case underscores the need for a personal engagement in dealing with sin.

Another case which White points to is that of Enoch. He distinguished himself in a corrupt environment by walking personally with God. Impressed by his individual devotion, God translated Enoch so that he went "to heaven without seeing death."<sup>120</sup> In this case again, we see that personal piety is central to White's reflection on sin and personal salvation. While God provides universal salvation, each individual should, on a personal level, confess and forsake sin in order to be saved.

It is perhaps when White deals with sin and personal salvation in the context of the sanctuary that she shines brightest. At this juncture there is little basis for comparison with Boff because the concept of the earthly and heavenly sanctuary

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<sup>118</sup>White, The Story of Redemption, p. 56.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., pp. 52-53.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 59.

seems foreign to Boff's theology. White shows that in the scenario of the earthly sanctuary God reveals deep insights of his attitude towards sin and the sinner.<sup>121</sup>

The second apartment of the sanctuary housed the ark which contained the Law of God, the Ten Commandments. White notes that "the Law pronounced death upon the transgressor; but above the Law was the mercy seat, upon which the presence of God was revealed, and from which, by virtue of the atonement, pardon was granted to the repentant sinner."<sup>122</sup>

The two key services of the sanctuary portray how sin was dealt with. The first of the major services of the sanctuary was the daily. In the daily services the individual sinner was to bring a sin offering to the door of the sanctuary where he confessed his sin while placing his hand on the sacrificial lamb. Through this process sins were symbolically transferred to the innocent sacrifice.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>White, Testimonies, Vol. 5, p. 575. She points out that "the scenes connected with the sanctuary above should make such impression upon the minds and hearts of all that they may be able to impress others. All need to become more intelligent in regard to the work of the atonement, which is going on in the sanctuary above. When the grand truth is seen and understood, those who hold it will work in harmony with Christ to prepare a people to stand in the great day of God, and their efforts will be successful. By study, contemplation and prayer, God's people will be elevated above common earthly thoughts and feelings and will be brought into harmony with Christ and His great work of cleansing the sanctuary above from the sins of the people." See also; Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics, p. 21.

<sup>122</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 349.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

In addition, the sinner was supposed to slay the lamb personally, after which the priest took the blood of the sacrifice so that he could sprinkle it on the veil separating the holy place from the most holy place. Behind the veil on which the blood was sprinkled was the ark with the Law that the sinner had transgressed. However, because of the mercy seat above the Law, the repentant sinner was offered forgiveness.<sup>124</sup> The point is that daily the importance of a personal initiative and action of an individual to separate oneself daily from sin was demonstrated by transferring sin to the sanctuary. Sin was dealt with in a personal way, because each individual was to publicly transverse the encampment of the children of Israel to the sanctuary which was situated at the center. Courage and determination were needed to drag a sacrificial lamb to the sanctuary. One needed to ignore the inquisitive eyes of the onlookers because personal salvation was at stake.<sup>125</sup>

The second critical service was that of the Day of Atonement. Again, the issue of sin and personal salvation was highlighted. On the Day of Atonement the sins which the individual sinners had transferred to the sanctuary had to be removed from the sanctuary. The whole process of cleansing the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement was charged with intense suspense. White notes that "every man was to afflict his soul while the work of atonement was going forward."<sup>126</sup> Every

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>White, Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 263.

<sup>126</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 355.



individual, therefore, took a keen interest in the proceedings of the Day of Atonement since their lives hung on the outcome of activities of that solemn day.

In his discussion of sin and personal salvation, Boff does not bring into view the effect of the priestly ministry of Christ on the salvation of humanity. Boff's christology stresses the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ. However, the crucial ministry which Christ is currently engaged in is something which Boff does not focus on.<sup>127</sup> Unlike Boff, White's theology pulsates with the priestly ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. It is as crucial as his incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection. White's view of sin and personal salvation finds resonance in what Christ has been doing in the heavenly sanctuary since his ascension.<sup>128</sup> Put differently, White sees a direct link between what is currently taking place in human affairs on a personal level with what Christ is presently doing in the heavenly sanctuary. Sin and personal salvation, according to White, are issues which cannot be done justice to without taking into account Christ and his current work in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of mankind.

With the picture of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, White establishes clear parallels between the sanctuary in the Old Testament and that in

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<sup>127</sup>The subject of Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary falls outside Boff's purview. One can only speculate to what extent the sanctuary teaching would impact on Boff's view of sin.

<sup>128</sup>Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics, pp. 17-18.

heaven. Actually, the Old Testament sanctuary does not chronologically precede the sanctuary in heaven into which Christ went to minister after his ascension. Rather, the Old Testament sanctuary was built following the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary which God revealed to Moses on the mount.<sup>129</sup> In her theology White tries, therefore, to show how God currently deals with sin, basing and corroborating her insights on the figure and services of the sanctuary found in the Old Testament.<sup>130</sup>

Of particular bearing to the question of sin and personal salvation is the parallel White draws between the scope of the daily and yearly services of the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries. White points out that the daily services in which the sinner took the sacrificial lamb to the priest at the sanctuary foreshadowed broadly the dynamics of the cross of Christ.<sup>131</sup> In essence, Christ, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world, was pre-figured by the sacrificial lamb which each sinner took to the sanctuary in the Old Testament. The priest in the Old Testament sanctuary typified Christ as well. Therefore, the death of Christ (the sacrificial Lamb) on the cross enabled him (Christ the Priest) to carry his own blood, as it were, so he could sprinkle it on the veil which separates the holy place from the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary.

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-27.

<sup>131</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, p. 266.

White shows that the phase of Christ's ministry which the Old Testament daily services represented terminated in 1844.<sup>132</sup> She comments, saying: "The blood of Christ, while it was to release the repentant sinner from the condemnation of the Law, was not to cancel the sin; it would stand on record in the sanctuary until the final atonement."<sup>133</sup> The termination of Christ's ministry in the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, which was the antitype of the Old Testament sanctuary daily services, marked the beginning of Christ's work in the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary.

The work of Christ in the most holy place puts a spotlight on sin and personal salvation. Of the various aspects of Christ's work in the most holy place, perhaps none stresses more the need for personal introspection than the investigative judgment.<sup>134</sup> White points out that each individual should make a concerted effort in fighting sin and forming strong Christian character. She therefore notes that "a noble character is earned by individual effort through the merits and grace of

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 356.

<sup>134</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 266. See also; Frank B. Holbrook, ed., Doctrine of the Sanctuary. Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1989, pp. 119-157. Here C. Mervyn Maxwell provides a detailed analysis of the early development of the investigative judgment concept.

Christ. . . . It is formed by hard, stern battles with self."<sup>135</sup> Describing the thoroughness of the investigative judgment, White writes:

The lives of all men who have believed on Jesus pass in solemn review before God. Beginning with those who first lived upon the earth, our Advocate examines the case of each successive generation; and closes with the living. Every name is mentioned, every case is closely investigated. Names are accepted, names are rejected. From age to age, all who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon written against their names in the books of Heaven, and in the closing work of judgment their sins are blotted out, and they themselves are accounted worthy of eternal life.<sup>136</sup>

In view of the crucial and decisive implications of the investigative judgment on sin and personal salvation, White argues that individuals should confess their sins and make the most of Christ's mediatorial work before probation closes.<sup>137</sup>

White also encourages persons in their individual capacity to take seriously the sanctuary doctrine because Satan has eclipsed its importance in Christendom.<sup>138</sup>

Therefore, White emphasizes the need for each person to acquaint himself or herself with the sanctuary message, saying:

The sanctuary in Heaven is the center of Christ's work in behalf of men. It concerns every soul living upon the earth. It opens to our view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the close of time, and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>White, Messages to Young People, p. 99.

<sup>136</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 309.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>White, That I May Know Him, p. 34.

<sup>139</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 313.

### **3.4.4 Sin and Social Salvation**

White and Boff substantially deal with sin in the context of social salvation. In order to compare and contrast their views, three steps will be taken. The first will compare how White and Boff treat individual and corporate accountability. The second step will focus on sin, poverty and suffering. The third will deal with the church and social responsibility.

#### **3.4.4.1 Individual and Corporate Accountability**

White and Boff have more points of agreement than disagreement on the issue of individual and corporate accountability for sin. Both agree on the need to ascertain the degree of accountability between the individual and society for the sins that are committed.<sup>140</sup> However, Boff asserts that a society which is guilty of sins of oppression and other sins, for that matter, is more culpable than the individual members within that given society. Boff bases his argument on his conviction that social sin is greater than personal sin in extent, duration, and penetration. He argues that social sin is the breeding ground for personal sins, therefore, the two cannot be equal. According to Boff, social sin is always greater than personal sin.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>See; Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 85; See also; White, The Southern Work, p. 38.

<sup>141</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 142.

While White regards the individual and the corporate nature of sin to be of equal significance,<sup>142</sup> her treatment of the two aspects of sin seem to convey a misleading message because, by devoting more space to a person's vertical relationship with God, she seems to lean more towards the individual dimension of sin. Ironically, White seems to be afraid of a superficial dichotomy between personal and social sin. She negates the emphasis put on personal sin at the expense of social sins because that may inculcate social irresponsibility in the individuals who constitute society.<sup>143</sup>

White and Boff believe that God is able to particularize to each individual, sins which society commits as a corporate body. God is able to particularize sins, but we may not see this reality in the present yet in the future we will. The wicked may presently seem to get away with heinous sins but in the future when God shall judge all according to their deeds, secrets will be revealed. Boff aptly observes:

The history of anonymous people who suffer and die seems innocuous and meaningless to those in power; but God takes note of it all and will one day

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<sup>142</sup>There is a growing conviction among some Seventh-day Adventist scholars from the western hemisphere that White's stance on the individual and social dimensions of sin has been misinterpreted by Adventism. For example, Dudley and Hernandez call for a recognition of the balance in White's approach because she placed equal weight to the personal and social aspects of sin. See: Dudley and Hernandez, Citizens of Two Worlds, pp. 233-268.

<sup>143</sup>White, The Southern Work, p. 38. She notes that "the character of our Christianity is tested by the dependent ones who are around us, who are ignorant and helpless."

make a reckoning. The seeming anti-phony of history will be seen to be a true sym-phony from God's standpoint.<sup>144</sup>

In other words, the contribution each individual makes in the social sins will be determined with meticulous accuracy. While sinful individuals may anonymously perpetrate social sins of oppression, their role does not escape God's notice. When God shall mete out judgment to evil social structures, these individuals shall receive punishment commensurate with the part they played.<sup>145</sup>

Another point on which White and Boff seem to agree is on the issue of the sphere of influence.<sup>146</sup> Both concur on the need for individuals to be concerned with the social sins for which their communities or nations are responsible. White and Boff reject the notion that individuals are insular.<sup>147</sup> Each individual should make use of his or her sphere of influence so as to effect meaningful change. Commenting on this point, White says: "God weighs actions, and every one who

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<sup>144</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 150.

<sup>145</sup>White, The Great Controversy, p. 330. See also; White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 1, p. 313. See also; White, Gospel Workers, p. 22.

<sup>146</sup>See; White, The Southern Work, p. 38; Boff/Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 12-13. See also; Anselm Kyongsuk Min, Dialectical of Salvation. Albany, NY: State University Press, 1989, p. 107. He agrees with White and Boff on the issue of individual responsibility and the sphere of influence. Min notes: "The extent of responsibility for social sin, therefore, is defined by the extent to which individuals, as members of an organized community and thus together with others can know and control the consequences of their communal actions."

<sup>147</sup>See; White, The Southern Work, p. 38; See also; Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 28.

has been unfaithful in his stewardship, who has failed to remedy evils which it was in his power to remedy, will be of no esteem in the courts of heaven."<sup>148</sup>

Furthermore, White points out that "we are not to seek to get rid of the responsibilities that connect us with our fellow men."<sup>149</sup> She also states that "those who are indifferent to the wants of the needy will be counted unfaithful stewards and will be registered as enemies of God and man."<sup>150</sup>

Unlike White, Boff systematically spells out three levels on which an individual may exercise his/her sphere of influence. In addressing sinful social structures, Boff calls upon the professional, pastoral and popular levels of the church to each exert their influence. The professional theologian should, through rigorous discourse, fight for the liberation of the oppressed. The pastoral level should employ sermons that highlight the need for liberation from poverty. Finally, the popular level should, through Bible studies with base communities, mobilize and galvanize the lay persons for the emancipation of the marginalized.<sup>151</sup>

Although White does not articulate levels of engagement in fighting social sin the way Boff does, she however stresses the need for each person to discover his or her sphere of influence. White rebukes the apathy and self-induced ignorance

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 12-13.



which blinds persons to the fact that everyone has some sphere of influence.<sup>152</sup> White's view of individual and social accountability is a critique of most Christians' attitude with respect to institutionalized sin. Many have the mistaken idea that their societies may promote oppression without endangering their personal salvation. Few realize that a failure to rebuke the sinful status quo while reaping benefits accumulated and procured through devious ways implicates the passive christian into complicity with the corrupt institutions.<sup>153</sup>

In essence, White and Boff seem to share the view that history is one. Both agree that God's presence cannot be confined to the "sacred" or "secular" aspect of history. However, Boff insists that God's presence or absence is particularly felt in the so-called secular sphere; in the economic, political and social aspects of human existence.<sup>154</sup> Boff argues that in these aspects, God is disgraced more because policies are enacted which offend against God's justice.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, Boff

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<sup>152</sup>White, The Southern Work, p. 38.

<sup>153</sup>Consistent with White's and Boff's concept of an individual having some sphere of influence, it is logical to assert that in the issue of personal salvation and corrupt institutions God will consider case by case. If one's sphere of influence is greater, God will expect more from that person in terms of social change and eradication of social sin. The challenge, therefore, is for individuals to recognize the locus of their sphere of influence and to be objective in rebuking corrupt social institutions to avoid complicity.

<sup>154</sup>Boff, When Theology Listens to the Poor, p. 71. See also; White, The Southern Work, p. 38.

<sup>155</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 166. See also; Augustus Cerillo, and Murray W. Dempster, Salt and Light. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989, pp.

shows that a realization of the enormity of corporate sins in the political, economic and social structures should spur individuals to side with the poor while fighting against their poverty.<sup>156</sup>

Both White and Boff seem convinced that both individuals and societies should confess and forsake their sins.<sup>157</sup> Boff believes that social repentance is more consequential than individual repentance since it is capable of terminating social sin which gives birth to individual sins.<sup>158</sup> White, however, believes that both social and individual repentance are imperative. If society refuses to repent of its sins in spite of the warning from some individuals who form part of the society, the virtuous individuals will be spared but the rest of the society will perish.

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140-142. In this book, North Americans such as Ed Hindson urges Christians to be involved in politics since failure to do so may result in social injustices which would make Christians accomplices because of their silence.

<sup>156</sup>Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, p. 44. See also; Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, eds., Lift Every Voice. San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990, p. 165. The two editors, in their introductory remarks to this book, note: "Feminism, Black, and Latin American theologians of liberation have questioned the prevailing emphasis on grace as forgiveness of sins, because they believe that what most urgently needs repair is not the sins of individuals but the systemic evils of societies."

<sup>157</sup>Boff/Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 64-65. See also; White, Messages to Young People, pp. 71-72.

<sup>158</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 142.

Nevertheless, these individuals must confess and forsake their own personal sins in order to be saved.<sup>159</sup>

#### 3.4.4.2 Sin, Poverty and Suffering

White and Boff agree that sin is responsible for poverty and suffering among human beings. Since sin is a mysterious invasion of God's plan for all his creation, poverty and suffering offend God. When White points out that God "never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life while the children of others cry for bread,"<sup>160</sup> she states something which Boff echoes in his writings.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 72. See also; Ezekiel 3: 18-21. Schimmel, The Seven Deadly Sins, pp. 234-235. He reflects on the implications of repentance (*teshuva*) in accepting responsibility for sins committed. He also draws a parallel between *teshuva* and the Catholic sacrament of penance with its five aspects which include; "remorse for sin, resolve not to repeat the sin (these two being components of contrition); confession to a priest; sacramental absolution by a priest; and satisfaction (the imposition by the priest of a sacramental satisfaction or penance, such as prayer, fasting, cultivation of a virtue, or good works)." See also Leo Trepp, A History of the Jewish Experience. New York, NY: Behrman House, 1973, p. 186. He points out that "*teshubah*, the Hebrew term for repentance, literally means 'return,' return to God and the right way of life. . . . This is the way of Teshubah. The sinner parts from his sins, banning them from his thoughts and pledging in his heart never to commit them again. . . . Everyone must make spoken confession, he must improve in charity, showing kindness to others to the very limit of his ability and means. . . . Let him confess openly. . . but only his transgressions against his fellow man, his sins against God he need not reveal to others." Note also that *teshuva* and *teshubah* are both acceptable transliterations of the Hebrew word for repentance.

<sup>160</sup>White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 6, p. 273.

<sup>161</sup>Boff, God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, pp. 260-261.

Boff also believes that the inequities which characterize the distribution of wealth are symptoms of a sick and selfish human heart.<sup>162</sup>

White and Boff further agree that the human selfishness which accounts for poverty and suffering finds expression in various forms. Both point to lack of love for others as one of the factors which corrodes the spirit of sharing the necessities of life with the needy.<sup>163</sup> White and Boff concur on the fact that most of the love which humanity evinces is imperfect because it is prompted by ulterior motives. As long as the "self" is not perceived as the ultimate beneficiary, many acts of "love" will evaporate. White, therefore, perceptively notes that sin has extinguished love in man's heart.<sup>164</sup>

Another way in which selfishness finds expression is in human exploitation. In this case, selfishness assumes a more aggressive guise because it makes some human beings take advantage of others. Selfishness is self-imposed blindness because it does not want to see a fellow human being as an equal. Boff therefore sees exploitation as a key cause of poverty because it results from a collective and

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<sup>162</sup>Ibid. See also; Philip F. Mulhern, Dedicated Poverty. Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1973, pp. 1-27. In his insightful study of poverty in scripture he shows that there is a difference between spiritual poverty and material poverty.

<sup>163</sup>Boff, When Theology Listens to the Poor, p. 35. See also; White, Welfare Ministry, p. 38.

<sup>164</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 14.

deliberate will to oppress others.<sup>165</sup> Although White does not employ the same terminology as Boff to convey the impact of selfishness in society, she however communicates the same ideas.<sup>166</sup> For example, White does not use words such as "exploitation," yet she spoke against it. One, therefore, needs to move beyond the mere terms in order to see the concepts which unite White and Boff in their critique of poverty and suffering. Put differently, had Boff and White been contemporaries, it is likely that they might have used similar terminology to articulate their concerns on the problems of poverty and suffering.

Boff believes that human exploitation has been facilitated by factors which include economic mechanisms, social relations and various discriminations.<sup>167</sup> White agrees in principle with Boff's assertion. Boff cites capitalism as an evil economic system which is responsible for the impoverishment of the underdeveloped countries.<sup>168</sup> In other words, Boff sees capitalism as an economic mechanism which widens the gap between the rich and the poor. While White does

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<sup>165</sup>Boff, Good News to the Poor, p. 1.

<sup>166</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 14.

<sup>167</sup>Boff, Good News to the Poor, p. 1.

<sup>168</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 43. See also; Boff, God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 212. Here Boff throws some light on how underdevelopment came about. He observes that "underdevelopment is interpreted as a global, dialectical process that results from the capitalist system. . . In this system, a center arises which is highly developed. . . at the expense of peripheral areas from which cheap raw materials are extracted. The periphery takes on a dependent status in all areas of its life."

not blame capitalism for every human woe, she however, appeals to the rich Western countries to share wealth with the poor at home and abroad.<sup>169</sup>

When Boff reflects on social relations and discriminations which bolster poverty and exploitation, he seems to be in agreement with White. In order for the rich countries to oppress and impoverish the poor nations, they develop stereotypes and attitudes which seek to justify their actions. Without qualms of conscience, the rich oppress the poor by attributing their poverty to some inherent inferiority.<sup>170</sup> White is disgusted by the attitudes of the rich to the poor. She observes that the rich show better treatment to animals than to human beings. White and Boff, therefore, seem to agree that the rich countries have a way of rationalizing their exploitation of the poor countries.

White and Boff seem to agree that the disparity between the rich and the poor triggers conflict, resistance and revolt. White observes that the rich "separate the poor from them simply because they are poor, and thus give them occasion to

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<sup>169</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 188.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 174. See also; Michael Walsh and Brian Davies, Proclaiming Justice and Peace: Documents from John XXIII to John Paul II. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1984, p. 142. In the Encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI entitled: *Populorum Progressio* he notes that "there is a threefold obligation upon the wealthier nations: material aid, better trading relations with developing world, universal charity."

become envious and jealous. Many become bitter, and are imbued with hatred toward those who have everything when they have nothing."<sup>171</sup> Boff also notes:

Poverty generally causes all kinds of misery: illness, hunger, psychological disturbances, destruction of the individual and the family, hatred, theft and other crimes, blasphemy against God, despair. Since poverty is the result of sin, it inclines and impels one to sin. The unjustly rich are those responsible for the evil and violence perpetrated by the poor and humbled.<sup>172</sup>

Again, White and Boff agree that affluence tends to stifle the desire to give to the poor. White perceptively notes that "nothing saps spirituality from the soul more quickly than to enclose it in selfishness and self-caring."<sup>173</sup> She further points out that "it is because the rich neglect to do the work for the poor that God designed they should do, that they grow more proud, more self-sufficient, more self-indulgent, and hardhearted."<sup>174</sup> Boff also points out that "material goods make the spirit materialistic and cause the destruction of our capacity for openness and communion."<sup>175</sup>

Boff and White differ sharply on their prescriptions for dealing with poverty and suffering. White sounds categorical when she says that suffering and poverty

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<sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>172</sup>Boff, God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 103.

<sup>173</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, pp. 18-19.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>175</sup>Boff, God's Witnesses in the Heart of the World, p. 103.

will continue as long as sin continues.<sup>176</sup> White does not see any human formula with enough potency to eradicate corruption, poverty, pauperism and crime.<sup>177</sup> White is, therefore, pessimistic when it comes to man-made theories which promise to uproot poverty and suffering. White blatantly rejects socialism as a viable economic alternative to end gross inequities typical of human history.<sup>178</sup>

White's use of the term "socialism" is too general and confusing. There are various kinds of socialism and among many others are: American socialism, African socialism, British socialism, Christian socialism. In her discussion of the economic model suggested in Leviticus she seems to advocate for some kind of "socialism," and yet she rejected socialism as an effective alternative for dealing with the problem of poverty.<sup>179</sup> Her unqualified rejection of socialism is deplorable because she herself affirms that if the rich would share their wealth with the poor, everyone would have enough to meet their needs. When White urges people to share their wealth with the poor she is in consonance with one of the cardinal tenets of socialism which asserts: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."<sup>180</sup> If White's rejection of socialism was based on the common

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<sup>176</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 15.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>179</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 174.

<sup>180</sup>Lovestein, Meno. Capitalism, Communism, Socialism. Minneapolis, MN: Curriculum Resources, 1962, p. 110.



denominator of the various kinds of "socialism" which places greater emphasis on the society rather than on the individual,<sup>181</sup> she should have registered her objections against this or other elements of socialism which she was not comfortable with instead of generally condemning socialism and then turn around and advocate the type of socialism found in Leviticus.

White, therefore, sees the termination of the great controversy between Christ and Satan as the only time when suffering and poverty will also be completely obliterated.<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless, White believes that much can be done to alleviate human suffering and poverty. White's remarks on Isaiah 58 depict her stance on what Christians should do to address poverty and suffering. Although White's comments were primarily directed to Seventh-day Adventist Christians, their relevance spill over to all Christians in general. With striking emphasis White urges Seventh-day Adventists to study Isaiah 58. She directs their attention to the need for preaching the commandments of God which are being trampled by mankind. However, the advocacy of God's commandments should be done within the context of social reform. White shows that Isaiah 58 is revolutionary because

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<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

<sup>182</sup>White, The Great Controversy, p. 678.

social reform should not be divorced from the proclamation of the commandments of God, particularly the fourth one, which has been changed.<sup>183</sup>

Within the setting of the great controversy, White envisions Seventh-day Adventist Christians as playing a substantial role. They should take Isaiah 58 seriously. In other words, they should try to transcend their "capitalistic problematic"<sup>184</sup> in order to correctly see the social dimension of sin. With an eye capable of seeing the enormity of social sin, these Seventh-day Adventist Christians will exert their influence for the emancipation of the poor and oppressed. White is convinced that it is only when Christians concretely address the plight of the poor, oppressed and marginalized that their fasting makes sense to God. In other words, when the keeping and preaching of the Ten Commandments is devoid of any meaningful fight against poverty and suffering, it is futile and a mockery to God.<sup>185</sup>

White shows that the Law of God is the pivotal issue in the great controversy.<sup>186</sup> The conception, continuation and termination of the great controversy hinge on God's Law. With this in mind, White argues that as the great controversy draws to its close, the Law of God, as expressed in the Ten

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<sup>183</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 33. See also; Pamela H. Gruber, Fetters of Injustice. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1970, pp. 61-70. She reflects on Isaiah 58 and the church's role in alleviating human suffering.

<sup>184</sup>See: Althusser, For Marx, p. 66.

<sup>185</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, pp. 29-30.

<sup>186</sup>White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, p. 625.

Commandments, will be the bone of contention. Importantly, the fourth or Sabbath commandment which is the seal of the Law of God will be directly attacked by Satan.<sup>187</sup> White, therefore, believes that the emphasis on the Sabbath commandment should be coupled with a clear message concerning social reform. Instead of detracting from the clarity of the Law of God, the concern for the social aspect of sin will enhance respect for the proclamation of God's commandments.<sup>188</sup>

Unlike White, Boff believes that there are a lot of things which Christians can do to eradicate poverty and suffering. Christians are not to wait passively anticipating the eschatological salvation which God will bring. In the interim, Boff believes, Christians should be active artisans of their destiny by fully participating in bringing into existence social, economic and political systems which will coalesce with God's invasion of history when He brings ultimate salvation.<sup>189</sup> In Boff's

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<sup>187</sup>White, The Great Controversy, pp. 54, 436-438, 613, 640. On p. 640 White specifically notes that "the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is the seal of the living God."

<sup>188</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 33.

<sup>189</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 160. He observes that "the dynamics of the human being yearn toward a blessed outcome. Faith guarantees us a happy ending. It goes further and presents heaven as the absolute realization of all that is latent within us. It shows what God ultimately means for the human being. But everything in this equation, even God, has been stated only in terms of human beings and their vocation." See also; Boff/Boff, Liberation Theology, p. 14. In trying to show the relationship between the kingdom of God and human effort to bring about social and change, he (Leonardo Boff) notes that: "The theology of liberation seeks to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God is to be established not only in the soul--this is the individual personal dimension of the Kingdom--and not only in heaven--this is its transhistorical dimension--but in

understanding, God will bring to completion what man is starting and developing by way of human liberation.

A slight difference between Boff and White in the role of Christians in social reforms is that Boff creates the impression that the world, revolutionized by human effort, is what God will come and bring to perfection.<sup>190</sup> However, in White's view, the current order of things, no matter how reformed or revolutionized, will be replaced completely by God's new order. God will re-create and make all things new. He will not renovate, refurbish or overhaul the socio-economic or political order. God will displace the old with the new.<sup>191</sup>

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relationships among human beings, as well. In other words, the Kingdom of God is to be established in social projects, and this is its historical dimension. In sum, liberation theology is a theology that seeks to take history, and Christians' historical responsibility, seriously."

<sup>190</sup>Although Leonardo Boff creates the impression that a classless society which human beings may achieve equals the kingdom of God, his brother Clodovis Boff clarifies the distinction between human liberation and divine salvation. See, Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 76. Clodovis notes: "The Kingdom of God is not simply a classless society. It is infinitely above that. Salvation is not simply political liberation. It is something else, an infinitely superior something. Salvation is not in the same order of things as liberation. Salvation isn't just a deeper and deeper and more radical liberation to the point that you finally get salvation. They're not the same sort of reality. Salvation is transcendent. There is no proportion between salvation and liberation. Salvation is a divine, supernatural work. Liberation is a political, historical, work."

<sup>191</sup>White, The Great Controversy, p. 678. See also; White, Last Day Events, p. 492.

Boff is quite optimistic concerning the accuracy of Marx's social analysis. Boff believes that what Marx tells us about society is truth since he mirrors the forces that are in conflict within society.<sup>192</sup> One can only guess to what extent White would embrace Marx, but Boff is clear that he adopts Marx's analysis only as an instrument which reflects accurately what society experiences. From White's writings, it is clear, however, that she sees some definite polarities between the rich and the poor in society.<sup>193</sup> When Boff argues that his instrumental use of Marx is not the driving force behind his theology of liberation, it shows that his confidence in socialism as the solution of poverty is not absolute. Whereas White openly throws out socialism as a solution to poverty, Boff does not share the same perspective on this issue.

Unlike White, Boff pushes for more than social reforms to confront the problem of poverty and suffering by opting for dialectical structuralism as the most viable tool to deal with the situation in Latin America.<sup>194</sup> In essence, this tool uncovers the evils of capitalism in South America. It also reveals the structures which perpetuate capitalism locally in conjunction with North America and Europe. Boff believes that justice, equity and freedom will return to Latin America. Boff

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<sup>192</sup>Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, pp. 26-28.

<sup>193</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, pp. 188-189.

<sup>194</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, pp. 61-62.

rejects empiricism<sup>195</sup> which only promotes "assistentialism" which motivates shortlived relief to pain and poverty. He also criticizes "functionalism"<sup>196</sup> which, although aware of the socio-economic circumstances responsible for poverty, only settles for reforms. Boff is not satisfied with "reformism" either because it leaves intact the structures that generate oppression and poverty.<sup>197</sup>

When Boff suggests that "dialectical structuralism" is the appropriate method to resolve the poverty of the conflict-ridden Latin America, he seems to be on vantage ground than White. Boff's use of Marx's social analytical tools has enabled him to nuance the concept of social change. In his reflection of sin and poverty, Boff has managed to determine which kind of action will ensure meaningful change in the situation of poverty and oppression in Latin America. Boff refuses to settle for mere assistentialism or reformism because both do not radically change the structures which produce suffering.<sup>198</sup>

White does not specify which kind of social change Christians should engage in the same way as Boff does. When White calls upon the rich Western countries to share with the poor countries she sounds like she is advocating for what Boff

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<sup>195</sup>Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 6.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid.

terms "assistentialism."<sup>199</sup> Again, when she talks of social reform found in Isaiah 58, White seems to be satisfied with reformism which Boff does not tolerate.<sup>200</sup> Although White would want a kind of social change which is lasting and radical, she however does not cite dialectical structuralism as the tool to bring about that type of social change.

Boff argues that Christians in Latin America have made significant discoveries which aid them in addressing the problem of poverty and suffering. Boff notes that the Christians in Latin America have found out that there is institutionalized violence in their society.<sup>201</sup> This kind of violence sentences many to a life of poverty, illiteracy, disease and pain.<sup>202</sup>

Boff also points out that the church has also discovered that the poor have power in history. They can effect social change. In addition, the poor have an unparalleled evangelizing potential.<sup>203</sup> The main reason which Boff gives for the ability of the poor to determine institutionalized violence in their society, realize their power in history and their evangelizing potential, is that they lie outside the capitalistic problematic. The poor in Latin America have the advantage of distance,

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<sup>199</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 16. See also; Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 6.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid., p. 30. See also; Boff/Boff, Salvation and Liberation, p. 6.

<sup>201</sup>Ferm, Third World Liberation Theologies, pp. 30, 116.

<sup>202</sup>Boff, Church, Charism and Power, p. 22.

<sup>203</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 43.

which enhances perspective.<sup>204</sup> They are not in North America or Europe where people are trapped in the capitalistic problematic. From the periphery the poor can establish the true cause of their plight. The poor have unmistakably identified capitalism as the source of their untold suffering and poverty.<sup>205</sup>

While White does affirm that the kind of greed evinced by capitalism is to blame for poverty, however, she attributes some poverty to other causes than just capitalism.<sup>206</sup> In White's theology there is a place for a God who can bless some and not others. God can bless some with prosperity.<sup>207</sup> In addition, some of the poverty and human suffering has nothing to do with capitalism. Natural disasters are not capitalistic. Many wars which impoverish and maim people are not all motivated by capitalism. White takes a radical shift when she asserts that "God has permitted some of the human family to be so rich and some so poor."<sup>208</sup> White argues that the reason God permits poverty is that "there may be a constant exercise

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<sup>204</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>205</sup>Boff, When Theology Listens to the Poor, p. 35.

<sup>206</sup>White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 280. See also; White, Welfare Ministry, p. 20; White, Counsels on Diet and Foods, p. 69.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid. See also; White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 227.

<sup>208</sup>Ibid.



in the human heart of the attributes of mercy and love."<sup>209</sup> It is doubtful whether Boff would accommodate this radical view on poverty which White takes.<sup>210</sup>

#### 3.4.4.3 Church and Social Responsibility

In asserting that the church should be socially responsible, Boff and White seem to agree. They both see no room for a neutral church in a conflictual world. The church should concretely do something to address the plight of the oppressed and the poor.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, p. 17.

<sup>210</sup>The researcher believes that the issue of poverty is mind-boggling. It is difficult to see how God would permit poverty as a way of creating a "constant exercise in the human heart for the attributes of mercy and love." Given the calloused condition of the human heart, it is not surprising that the poor continue to suffer while most of the rich go without any qualms of conscience with respect to the plight of the poor. Leaving the poor at the mercy of the rich seems too risky. Equal access of both the poor and the rich to a God who blesses is to be preferred than relegating the fate of the poor to chance.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., p. 30. See: Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 86; Donald E. Messer, Christian Ethics and Political Action. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1984, pp. 17-37. He urges North American Christians to be actively involved in politics. One wonders, however, whether Messer would equally recommend Christians elsewhere to engage in politics, when doing so means fighting against capitalism. See also; Gustavo Gutierrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984, p. 15. He notes the danger of individualism when he says: "Individualism operates in fact, as a filter that makes it possible to 'spiritualize' and even volatilize what in the Bible are nuanced statements of a social and historical nature."

Furthermore, White and Boff regard politics and poverty as the key areas in which the church's presence in society should be felt.<sup>212</sup> In principle both are agreed that the church should participate in politics. However, since politics has two dimensions, namely, the "broad" and the "narrow" aspects, White and Boff take different stances on each dimension of politics. White believes that the church, through its members, but not in its official capacity, should engage in the broad aspect of politics. Christians should speak to the issues of justice and order.<sup>213</sup> White strongly condemns christian participation in party politics which constitutes the "narrow" aspect of politics.<sup>214</sup>

Unlike White, Boff points out that the church should engage in both dimensions of politics. The church should participate in both the broad and narrow aspects of politics. Boff also points out that Puebla endorsed the fact that the church in its official capacity could engage in politics so as to effect the liberation of the oppressed.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 86. See also; White, Welfare Ministry, p. 314.

<sup>213</sup>Ellen G. White, Prophets and Kings. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1917, p. 545. Henceforth referred to as White, Prophets and Kings.

<sup>214</sup>White, Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, pp. 332, 333. See also; H. M. Kuitert, Everything is Politics but Politics is not Everything. Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmanns Publishing Company, 1985, p. 51. He appeals for caution when it comes to the way Christians ought to participate in politics.

<sup>215</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 22.

On the issue of poverty, White urges the church to concretely alleviate the plight of the poor by donations of food and clothing.<sup>216</sup> However, more important, White recommends that the church should conduct training programs for the poor to ensure that the poor become self-reliant. White notes that such an approach to poverty should yield positive and lasting results locally and internationally.<sup>217</sup>

Boff urges the church to take an active interest in the economic and social policies in order to eradicate poverty.<sup>218</sup> He commends and endorses Puebla's stance on poverty. Puebla articulated the church's condemnation of capitalism, Marxism, and national security doctrine which repress participation in politics.<sup>219</sup> Boff notes that Puebla blessed the church's participation in politics and that it should take a preferential option for the poor.<sup>220</sup> In addition, Puebla argued for the church's promotion and defense of human dignity and the advancement of women.<sup>221</sup> The church was also to vigorously promote both liberation and

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<sup>216</sup>White, Welfare Ministry, pp. 18, 20, 209.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., pp. 189, 194.

<sup>218</sup>Boff, Faith on the Edge, p. 22.

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., pp. 24, 27.

salvation.<sup>222</sup> Puebla endorsed the pivotal role of the base communities in the fight against oppression.<sup>223</sup>

#### **3.4.4.3.1 An Evaluation of Human Effort and Social Transformation**

In light of White's and Boff's conviction that the church be socially responsible, the question that arises is: How effective can human efforts be in transforming society? Perhaps the best way to address this question would be to view social transformation as having at least three aspects. The first aspect of social change encompasses those things which may and should be handled by human beings. In other words, there are things in society which human beings are capable of doing because God has already give them the ability to accomplish these tasks. God will not do for us what he has already given us power to do by ourselves. The second aspect of social change has to do with what God alone can do. Suppose pain and death were banished from our world, can you imagine the amount of social transformation this would be? But no human being can eradicate pain and death, only God can. The third aspect entails the co-operation of human and divine effort. Effective social change is one which would seek to exhaust all the avenues toward the betterment of human social conditions here and now in

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<sup>222</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>223</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

anticipation of the ultimate change which God will bring with the full establishment of his kingdom.

Although human effort to change society is often tinted with ulterior motives, any attempt and initiative to improve the social conditions of humanity should be commended. It may be the fear of the unknown or unquestioning loyalty to the status quo which deter people from working for social change. Yet at times it is the high price that has to be paid for the attainment of freedom, for example, which prevents some from active engagement in social transformation. In history some wars have been justified while others have been condemned and lives have been sacrificed in attempts to transform society. Whatever the case may be, when humanity evinces a quest for order, peace, justice, and freedom it mirrors the attributes of a God who has the welfare of the entire human race at heart. Human penultimate efforts of social transformation should be pursued in light of the ultimate social change God will bring when establishes his eternal kingdom.

#### **3.4.4.3.2 An Evaluation of Boff's and White's Eschatologies**

It is difficult to appreciate the positions that Boff and White take on the role of human effort in social transformation without a clear understanding of their respective eschatologies. Boff argues that "God and human beings collaborate to bring about the birth and growth of the kingdom of God in history until it attains its

final fulfillment."<sup>224</sup> Boff also point to the limits of human attempts in striving for complete social transformation when he notes that "historical liberations anticipate eschatology but they do not establish the eschatological state."

In Boff's eschatology there is the divine consummation of human efforts to change society. Perceptively, Boff notes:

Class struggle, conflict, and uncertainty about our end are not the only realities. They reveal the `not yet' of the future reality, but there is also the emergence of the `already' in history which gives ground for Christian joy and optimism. To talk about eschatology is to stress the two aspects of present and future. The present is the concretization of a future that is anticipated. The unexperienced future calls the present into question, ensuring that the latter will not bask in self-sufficiency or degenerate into orgiastic celebration of itself as the fullness of eschatology.<sup>225</sup>

Boff's eschatology does not describe how the end of the world will take place. Neither does it preoccupy itself with the signs of the times which point to the imminent realization of the kingdom of God. What Boff's eschatology stresses, however, is the consummation of penultimate human efforts to bring about social change into ultimate liberation and salvation which God will accomplish in the future.

White's eschatology, on the other hand, was largely forged in the matrix of the events characteristic to the nineteenth century. The social and religious events of her time convinced her that the end of the world was near. White, like

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<sup>224</sup>Boff, Liberating Grace, p. 155.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid.

other premillennialists, believed that only Christ's imminent return would bring about radical social transformation. White maintained that in the interim, human pain and suffering should be alleviated.

It is, however, White's claims with respect to revelation and inspiration which make her historical particularity to the nineteenth century extend into the future. This means that instead of viewing the events that White describes in her eschatological framework as only confined to her times, White believed that similar events would also characterize the times preceding the end of the world. In White's eschatology God will disrupt the flow of human history at the second coming of Christ. Social transformations as embodied in human civilizations will be displaced by the "new heaven and the new earth."<sup>226</sup>

### 3.5 Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to compare and contrast White's and Boff's views on sin. We have observed that the way White and Boff define sin is greatly influenced by their historical and theological backgrounds as well as their respective undergirding motifs.

We discovered that White tries to place equal significance on both the personal and social dimensions of sin. White is not, however, as radical as Boff when it comes to the role of human effort in social transformation. Traditionally

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<sup>226</sup>White, The Great Controversy, p. 678.

Adventism has often interpreted White's writings in a way which portrays her as biased towards the individualistic view of sin. The traditional Adventist stance is not without good reason. White's premillennial view of Christ's return left her somewhat pessimistic about the effectiveness of human effort to uproot social ills. However, this chapter tried to show that an interpretation of White's view on sin which recognizes her effort to transcend the "capitalistic problematic" can recognize that White was aware of the social dimension of sin and that she vigorously addressed it.

We also observed that Boff's view of sin places an emphasis on the social dimension. While recognizing the dual aspects of sin, Boff argues that the social feature of sin is weightier than the personal. Boff contends that a view of sin which takes seriously the social aspect can more effectively address the individual dimension since the former is the breeding ground for the latter.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter has four objectives. The first is to spell out the salient findings which have resulted from comparing White's and Boff's concept of sin. The second objective is to articulate some of the significant implications which this research and its findings have on the theologies of both White and Boff. The third is to outline the recommendations that White's and Boff's theological traditions should seriously consider. The fourth objective is to draw a conclusion to the entire research.

#### **4.1 Research Findings**

##### **4.1.1 On White and Boff**

This research has tried to bring into dialogue two individuals from different theological traditions. White was a Seventh-day Adventist, while Boff is a Roman Catholic. Inherent in their divergent theological backgrounds and different worldviews are presuppositions which undergird their positions on theological issues. Their reflection on the concept of sin too, needs to be understood in this context. When Boff's and White's agreements and disagreements are highlighted, their basic theological presuppositions and objectives should never be lost sight of. It is, however, those moments of agreement between Boff and White, no matter how fleeting, superficial or simplistic they seem, which provide a starting point for serious dialogue and engagement. When Boff and White together with their

theological traditions are brought onto a forum where suspicion is minimized and trust natured, frank and productive dialogue becomes possible.

Furthermore, we saw the necessity of exploring White's prophetic claims and her historical particularity in order to establish a reasonable basis for a fair comparison between White and Boff. While it is possible that White's appeal to revelation and inspiration can short-circuit an objective comparison between the two on their concept of sin, this research has tried to show that this should not be allowed. A number of statements by White which clearly show that she was not infallible and not under inspiration every time she wrote or spoke something help to level the ground under White's and Boff's feet. In addition, the fact that rigorous inquiry into revelational truth is not necessarily a sign of unbelief should encourage those that take a fundamentalist view of White to fearlessly subject her to scholarly scrutiny. How can a comparison of White and Boff be fair when White is insulated in an impenetrable revelational mystique?

In exploring White's thought and historical particularity we saw that White developed in her theological understanding. On a number of theological issues White experienced some shifts. There were times when White had to clarify something she had stated vaguely earlier. At other times she simply gained a better understanding of an issue which she had not fully grasped before. White also, had to reverse or contradict her earlier position on some issues and the issue of race relations in the United States of America in the 1860s and 1890s is a good example.

Whereas earlier she had advocated for integration of the blacks and whites in worship, latter White suggested separation for pragmatic reasons.

White was also a child of her times and it is not difficult to see how much of her eschatology mirrors the events of the nineteenth century United States of America. While White was historically particular to her period of existence, we saw that confining her great controversy motif to the events characterizing her time alone truncates and blunts her over-arching theological motif which also seeks to embrace human history before and after her period of existence. Boff's historical particularity is not an issue because he is not surrounded by prophetic claims as White is.

#### **4.1.2 On White's and Boff's Definitions of Sin**

We have discovered in this research that White's definition of sin is closely tied with God's Law. It is also around the same Law of God that the great controversy evolves. We saw that Satan attacked God's Law at the beginning of the great controversy. He will continue to attack the Law of God until the end of the great controversy. Throughout history Satan's argument remains unchanged. He alleges that God's Law is unjust. Consequently, Satan deceives many to break the Law of God. We learnt that White defines sin to be the transgression of God's Law. In addition, we saw that God's Law is the transcript of his character and will.

Alternatively, Boff defines sin in the light of the dialectical nature of history. We found out that he views sin to be the manifestation of disgrace in a history which is supposed to communicate God's grace. Boff understands sin to be the penchant that humanity has for oppressing and dehumanizing other human beings. Boff's definition of sin is, therefore, forged within the matrix of social dynamics.

Following a systematic analysis of how White and Boff define sin, we discovered that they basically agree. It is noteworthy to realize that both characterize sin as rebellion against God's will. However, we saw that their respective perspectives tint and nuance their definition of sin. In the case of White, the great controversy motif plays an important but not exclusive role in the manner she defines sin. Yet, Boff stresses the concrete manifestation of sin in society as reflected in the class conflict motif. As a result, the class conflict motif influences his theological outlook.

#### **4.1.3 The Bipolarity of Sin**

A significant observation we made is that both White and Boff perceive sin as consisting of two major aspects, namely, the personal and the social dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See also; Dudley and Hernandez, Citizens of Two Worlds, pp. 260-261. Here they note that "a holistic conception of sin, of course will have a personal as well as a social dimension. We have emphasized the social-collective view of sin only because of Adventism's tendency to overlook this dimension. Why? It is principally due to our political conservatism, individualism, and status as middle-class members of society. We tend to selectively hear only those Biblical

However, we noted that White and Boff differ in their treatment of the two dimensions of sin. White accords equal significance to the two aspects. On the contrary, Boff does not. Instead, he asserts that the social dimension of sin serves as the breeding ground for personal sin.<sup>2</sup> Because of this reason, Boff believes that social sin is weightier.

Moreover, we saw that in their reflection on the two dimensions of sin, Boff is more explicit than White. Boff juxtaposes and explains the terms "personal" and "social" in his remarks on sin. White, on the contrary, follows a different style. A dialectical theologian herself, White comments on the personal as well as the social aspects of sin within a variety of contexts. Although she does not bring the terms "personal" and "social" side by side or specifically label the two aspects of sin, yet she comments on both dimensions with remarkable tenacity and rigor regardless of the diversity of situations.

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messages that soothe our consciences and neglect those that call for radical discipleship. However, to ignore either the personal or the collective dimensions of sin is to seriously distort the Biblical message. Such narrow focus also fails to understand the true nature of society's problems."

<sup>2</sup>See also; James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, eds., Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry. New York: Seabury, 1980, pp. 127-144. They note that the social view of sin regards persons as products of society.

#### **4.1.4 On Sin and Personal Salvation**

We saw that Boff's treatment of sin with respect to personal salvation leaves a lot to be desired. This observation is particularly true in the light of a comparison with White on the same subject. Admittedly, Boff's limitation in the treatment of sin as it relates to its individual aspect is self-imposed. He deliberately accepts what traditional Christianity has taught concerning the perception of sin as the individual's problem. He, therefore, does not probe into the intricacies of the personal dimension of sin for himself.

Furthermore, we realized that White's reflection on sin and personal salvation is both extensive and profound. White places the spotlight on the individual, from the inception to the completion of the cosmic conflict between good and evil. We also saw how White highlights the role of each individual within the great controversy. According to White, nothing should downplay the personal dimension of sin because, in the final analysis, people will not be saved as aggregate groups but as individuals. Salvation, as far as White is concerned, is based on a meticulous scrutiny of each person's case before God and how individuals have accepted or rejected Christ as their personal Savior.

Again, we discovered that White weaves into a tapestry the great controversy motif and the sanctuary teaching. Through the great controversy motif White shows the lethal nature of sin and how God is dealing with it both on a cosmic and personal level. Through the sanctuary teaching White directs people's attention

to the way God deals with sin so as to effect salvation for repentant individuals. Therefore, the sanctuary doctrine which forms the core of White's theology tries to show the manner in which God handles the problem of sin to ensure personal salvation for repentant individuals.

We also found out that by providing a detailed account of the great controversy and the sanctuary doctrine, White gives insightful information pertaining to the work of atonement which Christ is currently doing in the heavenly sanctuary. Within the crucial priestly ministry of Christ, White provides a breathtaking commentary of future events which will mark the termination of the great controversy.

#### **4.1.5 On Sin and Social Salvation**

It was discovered that both White and Boff address the social dimension of sin. Notwithstanding the distinctive flavor each brings to the question of sin and social salvation, both seem to agreement on a number of points. Coincidentally, Boff frequently employs terms and language which are reminiscent of the ones White used. We discovered that both believe that one's sphere of influence determines the degree of complicity in the commission of social sins. Boff and White are convinced that God will particularize the social sins committed by individuals in their collective capacity so that each individual participant can receive punishment commensurate with his or her degree of involvement.

Furthermore, we found out that Boff and White equally deplore the existence and prevalence of poverty. Both concur that selfishness, which is the epitome of the capitalistic system, accounts for the unequal distribution of wealth among the countries of the world. It was observed that White and Boff basically agree on some of the causes and results of poverty. However, they substantially differ on the specific prescriptions for the eradication of human suffering. Again, White's and Boff's differences find cogent explanations in the divergent motifs which each one follows.

We discovered that White and Boff are united on the need for the church to be socially responsible by addressing issues that cripple society. In the case of White, we saw that involvement in politics, for example, has to be tempered with and conditioned by the decisive ministry of Christ currently in progress in the heavenly sanctuary and Christ's imminent return. Yet Boff believes that the church's participation in politics is a way of worshiping God.

#### **4.1.6 A Hermeneutic of White and the Problematic**

There are at least two factors which help to account for an interpretation of White which projects her as someone who primarily focussed on the individual dimension of sin. The first factor lies in her eschatological outlook which was premillennialist. White was pessimistic with regard to what human beings could do to change society. She believed that all people could do was to alleviate human



pain and suffering while awaiting the imminent return of Christ. Those who hold a fundamentalistic view of White adopt a rigid approach which portray White as only interested in the individual's vertical relationship with God. In this same approach social involvement is shunned because Christ is about to come and when he comes he will "make all things new." Perhaps a knowledge of the fact that White herself changed in her theological thinking to suit the changing times may inspire a more balanced approach which place equal significance on both aspects of sin.

Those that interpret White's theology as if it was devoid of the social dimension of sin are not totally to blame. White's eschatological stance show that she expected Christ to come if not during her lifetime, soon after her death. As such, White's preoccupation with humanity's vertical relationship with God tends to eclipse her strong advocacy for social reforms. Perhaps given the time distance from White, the ever present urgency of proclaiming Christ's soon return, and the need for social involvement in light of human suffering, Adventism should try to move beyond White's ambivalence. It should stop being "haunted" by the issue of social involvement. Adventism should take a categorical position which maintains the urgency of their apocalypticism from one generation to another and still be the "salt of the earth" which arrests social decay and injustices.

The second factor which helps to explain why White's theology of sin is interpreted along individualistic lines is the issue of the "problematic." In this

research we discovered why most Seventh-day Adventists fail to see White's bold stance on the social dimension of sin. Given the sincerity of most Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we realized that a de-emphasis of the social side of sin is not always intentional. Rather, most Seventh-day Adventists, particularly those in the capitalistic system, seem to have a theological blindspot. Trapped within an environment which places a great premium on individualism, most people find it natural to interpret White's writings with an individualistic bias. Consequently, the social aspect of sin is eclipsed by an individualistic worldview.

Unfortunately, a lopsided interpretation of White's view of sin places many well-meaning Seventh-day Adventists in an awkward position. Oblivious to the social dimension of sin, many White Seventh-day Adventists in the pre-independent South Africa, for example, feasted on the spoils of the apartheid system without qualms of conscience because they thought that their personal salvation was not in jeopardy.<sup>3</sup>

We found out that it is ironic that those in the developed countries who interpret White's theology of sin along individualistic lines are quick to rebuke institutional sin if their social interest is at stake. This "co-optation" of White,

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<sup>3</sup>See: Eric Webster, "South African Churches Call Apartheid Sin," Spectrum 21, No. 2. March, 1991, pp. 9-16. See also; Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society. New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1932. The argument in his book is that pious man may contribute to social evil by their silence in a society which perpetrates social injustices.

which twists her theological arm in order for her to buttress egoistic interests, is criminal, to say the least.

We also saw that although White was a citizen of the United States of America, she tried to transcend the capitalistic problematic which holds most of her compatriots captive. She tried to place equal significance on the personal and social dimensions of sin. We saw that to her acclaimed prophetic calling is attributed the unique details of her great controversy motif which reveal how God deals with sin.

## **4.2 Implications**

### **4.2.1 Definitions of Sin**

There are several crucial implications that can be drawn from the way White and Boff define sin. White's definition of sin places the Law of God at the center. Pointing to the changeless nature of sin, she notes that sin is what it has always been, namely, the transgression of God's Law. White, therefore, tries to show the importance of the Law of God. She highlights the fact that the decalogue cannot be taken lightly. Any slight change or omission of some aspect of the Ten Commandments courts God's wrath.

By appealing for the observance of the Law of God as a package, White directs attention to the entire decalogue, including the fourth commandment which has been changed by traditional Christianity. Although numerous and well-crafted arguments have been presented for Sunday observance, White maintains that all

these efforts are without divine approval. In addition, White believes that behind the purported change of the fourth commandment is Satan's subtle strategy of undermining the Law of God around which evolves the great controversy. Since the Ten Commandments are indissolubly linked, the negation of one commandment nullifies the rest.

Boff's definition of sin as the manifestation of disgrace in a history which should convey grace has at least two important implications. The first is that human beings should affirm and celebrate the expression of God's grace in the world. Every act of love and goodwill that human beings extend to each other should be encouraged and commended since that reflects God's desire for his human family. The second is that the acts of dehumanization and oppression should be rebuked and countered since they convey disgrace which is sin. Every human effort should be bent towards uprooting disgrace.

We saw that, laying terminological dispute aside, Boff and White view history as sacramental. Both believe that God's hand is in control of events which characterize human history. When divine purposes are frustrated, disgrace prevails but when God's will is triumphant, grace is displayed. In White's reflection of sin, this dialectic of grace versus disgrace is expressed in the language of the great controversy between good and evil while Boff articulates it in the context of class conflict.

### **4.2.2 The Bipolarity of Sin**

The fact that White and Boff recognize that sin has two aspects is significant. To begin with, it helps in the understanding of the "anatomy" of sin, making it easier to prescribe appropriate solutions to either facet. In addition, it imposes a moral responsibility to strive for balance in the way people should relate to sin. Put differently, a knowledge of the fact that sin has two facets opens to view people's obligations to God and to their fellow men. Such a balance cautions people from de-emphasizing one aspect of sin at the expense of the other.

In sum, a concept of sin which is cognizant of the bipolarity of sin stresses the point that the shortest route to God may be through one's neighbor. Humane treatment of one another can thrive under the auspices of the concept of sin which takes seriously the existence of the two dimensions. Humility and candid introspection are evoked by the realization that personal piety is void if it insulates one from ministering to the needs of one's neighbor.

### **4.2.3 Sin and Personal Salvation**

The issue of sin and personal salvation echoes in every phase of the great controversy. However, it is when White articulates the import of the investigative judgment that the implications of sin and personal salvation are unmistakable. The investigative judgment is a key component of the work of atonement which Christ is currently engaged in. White points out that during the investigative judgment

every name is mentioned, every case is closely investigated. Names are accepted, names are rejected. From age to age, all who have truly repented of sin, and who by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon written against their names in the books of Heaven, and in the closing work of judgment their sins are blotted out, and they themselves are accounted worthy of eternal life.<sup>4</sup>

In the light of Christ's priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, individuals should take a keen interest in their personal spiritual condition. While Christ is still officiating on behalf of the human race, persons must confess and forsake sins. People in their individual capacity should carry out thorough introspection and plead with God for their personal salvation.

Boff's point that sin hinders personal salvation when an individual refuses to follow Jesus in taking a stand with the poor is significant. This point challenges those who become engrossed with personal piety while oblivious to their obligations to the poor and suffering neighbor.

#### **4.2.4 Sin and Social Salvation**

There are several implications which can be drawn from White's and Boff's stance on sin and social salvation. The first one is that people should not be misled into thinking that they can perpetrate sin in their corporate capacity and get away with it. Since God has a way of matching the individual culprit to his role in committing social sins or institutional sins, this knowledge should make people

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<sup>4</sup>White, The Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. 4, p. 309.

more circumspect. If this fact could be kept fresh in people's minds, most sins committed under the guise of institutions would be prevented. A clear knowledge of the futility of purported anonymity before a God who sees everything would dissuade many from supporting oppressive social structures.

Second, people should seek to alleviate poverty and human suffering. There should be a radical conversion on the part of the rich who continue to hoard resources to themselves while neglecting the plight of the poor. Since God will take into account what the privileged do for the poor, sharing life's necessities with the poor is not optional but mandatory.

Third, the church should mediate penultimate salvation in anticipation of the ultimate one which God will bring in the future. Although Boff and White differ on their stance on politics, they both agree that the church should raise its voice on behalf of justice. This means that the church should challenge and rebuke social sin wherever it exists. More important, the church should call for social conversion, pointing people to a God who forgives those who truly repent of their sins.

### **4.3 Recommendations**

In the light of the findings and the implications resulting from a comparison of White's and Boff's concept of sin, several recommendations ought to be made. In order to achieve this goal, we shall outline the recommendations which White's

theological tradition should consider seriously. After this, we shall also present some recommendations which Boff and his theological tradition ought to pay close attention to.

#### **4.3.1 For White and Her Theological Tradition**

The first recommendation directed to White's theological tradition is that it should initiate dialogue with Boff and his tradition not only on sin but also on other areas of theology. Open and candid dialogue will foster mutual understanding and illuminate the presuppositions which undergird both liberation theology and Seventh-day Adventist theology.<sup>5</sup>

Seventh-day Adventist theologians will benefit from a frank dialogue with Boff because there will be some cross-pollination of ideas. This research bears testimony to this exchange of ideas. For example, White's view of sin has been further clarified by its contact with Boff's view of sin, particularly on the issue of "a problematic." This concept of a problematic which Boff discusses is helpful in explaining why most Seventh-day Adventists fail to see White's balanced view of

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<sup>5</sup>Carl E. Armerding, ed., Evangelicals and Liberation. Vancouver: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977, pp. 128-136. In this anthology, Clarke Pinnock appeals for the liberation of North American Christians. Instead of closing their ears, North American Christians should view liberation theology as "God's instrument for the refinement of our own commitment to the gospel." Pinnock further urges the U.S.A. and Canada to share their wealth with the poor countries of the world.



sin. White places an equal weight on both aspects of sin, that is, the personal and the social. However, most Adventists interpret White's theological reflection on sin as having a definite bias towards the personal dimension of sin.

In earlier sections we noted that an objective hermeneutic of White's theology was vitiated by an uncritically elevation of White to a prophetic status which ignores her historical particularity and also the fact that many Seventh-day Adventists are captives to the capitalistic problematic. Although the concept of a problematic is not original with Boff, yet bringing White and Boff into dialogue has provided a conducive forum where the term "a problematic" can help to throw light on the phenomenon which accounts for the widespread misinterpretation of White's reflection on sin. Put differently, Boff's remarks on the issue of "a problematic" aptly explain why sincere Seventh-day Adventists who are willing to embrace White's entire theology would gloss over the social aspect of sin against which White spoke so vehemently.

Another recommendation is that those Seventh-day Adventists who voluntarily or involuntarily are part of the capitalistic problematic should be humble and try to subdue their arrogance. In the light of White's lucid stance on the social dimension of sin, Seventh-day Adventists should pray for conversion. This conversion should spur them to balance their concern for both the individual and social dimensions of sin. Put another way, Seventh-day Adventists who are trapped within the capitalistic problematic should, to use Boff's words, experience an

"epistemological break." They should strive to transcend their individualism-infected worldview in order to interpret White's theology more accurately.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, we recommend that Seventh-day Adventists should take seriously White's injunction that the ten commandments and social concerns be preached as a package. In view of their current world-encompassing evangelistic endeavor entitled "Global Strategy," Adventists should address sin comprehensively by attending to both of its dimensions. White's prediction that many will be drawn to God when the Law of God and social justice are presented jointly will be fulfilled. The Seventh-day Adventist church needs to be more proactive in rebuking social sins.<sup>7</sup>

We also recommend that Seventh-day Adventists should move beyond assistentialism, functionalism, and reformism in their efforts to address social sin. Adventists should seek to radically change society by making use of the social analytical tools of Karl Marx. They should guard against the rejection of the truth which Marx has observed concerning the conflict between classes in society. Cognizant of the ultimate eschatological salvation which God will bring, Adventists

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<sup>6</sup>Monte Sahlin, "Who are North American Adventists?" Spectrum 21, No. 2, March 1991, pp. 17-22. He attests to the fact that Adventism needs to extricate itself from the North American capitalistic problematic.

<sup>7</sup>Gerald Winslow, "Renewing the Adventist Social Vision," Spectrum 16, No. 5, February, 1986, pp. 30-33. He laments the fact that on social issues such as racism, equality of gender, etc., the Adventist Church has been more reactive rather than proactive, waiting for secular institutions to spearhead the treatment of such issues.

should participate in bringing about penultimate salvation.<sup>8</sup> Since salvation denotes healing, Adventists should seek ways of bringing healing to society which is wreathing in various sufferings.<sup>9</sup>

We wish to submit that Adventism should realize that there were some questions on which White confessed her lack of revelational insight. In essence she was showing that theological or doctrinal development was to be an on-going exercise into the future. White's revision and reversal of some of her theological positions should teach Adventism that theological development is healthy and to be encouraged. As Adventism encounters changing times it cannot remain mute to the social dimension of sin which assumes a variety of shapes in different generations and countries of the world. Adventism should try to construct a viable biblical theology of social involvement which speaks to the current times.

Another recommendation that can be made is that Seventh-day Adventist theologians should urgently construct a systematic theology of White. The need for such an effort is compelled by the fact that White is more of a dialectical theologian than a systematician. The main difference between White and systematic

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<sup>8</sup>See: John Brunt, Now and Not Yet. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987, p. 15. He points out that the proclamation of the second coming of Christ eclipses the need for the Seventh-day Church's involvement in social issues.

<sup>9</sup>Roy Branson, "Social Reform as a Sacrament of the Second Advent," Spectrum 21, No. 3, May 1991, pp. 49-59. He notes that Adventists see themselves as the Laodicean church of the present time and as such they should challenge the status quo by shunning accommodation.

theologians is that she deals with diverse issues in a variety of contexts. This does not mean that she is disorganized. Her intention was not to come up with a systematic theology. Rather, she saw her role as one of giving counsel and guidance to the Seventh-day Adventist church.

A contemporary systematic compendium of White which covers the locus of the discipline of systematic theology should produce enormous benefits. First, it would minimize the chances of co-opting White to personal advantage with regard to the cryptic issues she addressed. In other words, a scholarly systematic theology of White would extricate many who are engulfed by the capitalistic problematic to conduct a more objective interpretation of White's view of sin and other theological topics. Elevated above their individualistic biases, Seventh-day Adventists would more easily see White's balanced approach to the personal and social dimension of sin. Second, a systematic theology of White would make White's theological reflections more accessible to scholars and laypersons of other theological traditions. Since little has been done to project White as a theologian of high calibre, her appeal has remained largely parochial.

We also would recommend that Seventh-day Adventist theology should keep in view the link between the individual's sphere of influence and his or her complicity in the perpetration of institutional sins. The tempo of our times is such that bureaucracy tends to blur the connection between policy makers and those who reel under the oppressive policies. Seventh-day Adventist Christians, therefore,

should know that they cannot take cover in anonymity because God sees every person's part in the commission of every institutional sin.

#### **4.3.2 For Boff and His Theological Tradition**

We recommend that Boff and liberation theology should seriously consider the importance of God's Law since this may probably enrich their theology of sin. Boff should go further than just asserting that sin is selfishness. He should consider the scope and importance of the Law of God in order to fully appreciate the enormity of rebellion which sin amounts to. Boff should try to incorporate White's centrality of God's Law in his definition of sin.

Furthermore, we recommend that Boff ought to address more vigorously the personal aspect of sin. This will help him to achieve a healthy balance between his treatment of the personal and social dimensions of sin. When Boff intentionally shies away from the individual aspect of sin in favor of the social component, he unwittingly weakens the former. What Boff would need to keep in mind is that before sin was a social phenomenon it was already a personal problem. In White's view sin was a problem of an individual and rebellious heart before it spread to affect other beings. White's assertion of the individual origin of sin does not negate the complexity of human freedom and moral obligation in society. In consonance with some more recent scholars who have reflected on moral

obligation,<sup>10</sup> White is aware of the intricate interaction of the individuals with their respective social institutions. She was cognizant of how, to use Teel's words, one's "language, social structures, patterns of relations - which predate individual actions constrain and limit the choices and imaginative possibilities open to particular people." Commenting on God's awareness of the diverse predicaments individuals find themselves, White perceptively notes that "Jesus, our Advocate, is acquainted with all the circumstances with which we are surrounded and deals with us according to the light we have had and circumstances in which we are placed" (emphasis supplied).<sup>11</sup> Even in her literalistic concept of the fall which takes into account the fallenness of all human institutions and social structures, White locates the origin of sin, not in the social structure (heaven) but in the individual (Lucifer or Satan). This helps to show why White comments on God's sympathetic dealings with the individuals who find themselves trapped in sin-infested social environments after the fall of Lucifer. Contrary to what Boff asserts, it would be more accurate to say that individual sin is the breeding ground for social sin. It should always be

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<sup>10</sup>For a more comprehensive analysis of the individual and moral obligation, see: Stanley Hauerwas, The Peaceable Kingdom. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983, pp. 1-11; Michael Goldberg, Theology and Narrative. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1982, pp. 200-213; James W. McClendon, Ethics. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986, pp. 160-186; Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, pp. 22-34.

<sup>11</sup>White, Testimonies Vol. 2, p. 74.

remembered that sin originated from one heart and spilled over to other hearts and not vice versa.

In addition, we recommend that Boff should extricate himself from the problematic created by his leaning on Marx's social analytical tools. While Boff points out that he uses Marx's social tools only instrumentally, one wonders to what extent this has blinkered his view of sin. Boff's use of the class conflict motif undoubtedly facilitates his development and articulation of a theological paradigm which envisions society as having inherent conflict among the classes. It appears, however, that Boff's use of Marx's analysis of society prisms his theology to a point where he finds it natural to assert that the social dimension of sin is heavier than the personal one. It is, *ipso facto*, impossible for Boff to view the personal and the social aspects of sin as equal. However, for Boff to have a balanced view of sin with the two dimensions carrying the same weight, he needs an "epistemological break" himself. This would enable him to transcend the self-imposed "Marxist social analysis problematic."

Moreover, Boff should consider and investigate White's teaching of the sanctuary. The doctrine of the sanctuary provides an alternative way of understanding the dynamics of the personal dimensions of sin. In a graphic manner, the sanctuary teaching shows how God deals with the problem of sin on both the individual and social levels. Liberation theology should be advised that up

to the nineteenth century traditional Christianity was involved in investigating and studying the doctrine of the sanctuary. However, interest in the subject waned.<sup>12</sup>

We recommend that Boff should try to make christian participation in social change take into account the implications of the sanctuary doctrine on personal salvation. A recognition of the current priestly work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, on Boff's part, should hopefully inspire some balance on the two facets of sin. In addition, an awareness of the imminence of the close of probation and return of Christ should spur Boff to prioritize the agenda which Christians have to deal with in life.

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<sup>12</sup>See: Zvandasara, Ellen G. White and Gustavo Gutierrez on Christians and Involvement in Politics, pp. 27-28. He notes that: "Historically, the Christian tradition is known to have had an interest in this doctrine. Leslie Hardinge undertook a revealing study on the subject of the sanctuary. He researched on its history in the National Library of Scotland. Hardinge shows that from 1650 to 1700 A.D. there were few books that were published on the subject. The period between 1700 and 1775 saw a small increase in the number of books on the sanctuary doctrine. A few more books appeared from 1775 to 1850. But from 1850 to 1900 there was an influx of books and articles on the subject of the sanctuary. However, after 1900 the interest in the subject waned as shown by the dwindling amount of books that were published on the subject. Today, the subject of the sanctuary seems to be a forgotten one, as far as the Christian Church is concerned." Hardinge does not, however, cite philosophical reasons which account for the decline in interest in the doctrine of the sanctuary among the christian churches. See also; Ricardo Planas, Liberation Theology. Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1986, pp. 15-43. He diachronically traces the way the Christian Church has emphasized the individual's vertical relationship with God over and above the horizontal one. Planas shows that from the period of the enlightenment things have changed and attention is increasingly directed to the social or horizontal dimension of spirituality.



#### 4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to note that a comparison of White's and Boff's concept of sin enhances the chances of mutual understanding between White's and Boff's theologies. Boff and liberation theology should glean from White's view of sin insights which can broaden their appeal. White's spectacular treatment of the personal dimension of sin in the light of the great controversy motif and the sanctuary teaching is likely to revolutionize Boff's perspective of the total view of sin. Seventh-day Adventist theology, too, can make use of Boff's perceptive reflection on sin so as to unequivocally re-present the bi-polar view of sin White envisaged but which is often missed due to the issue of "the capitalistic problematic."

Although sin is mysterious in its origin, and excruciating in its effects, the hope that sin will some day be completely eradicated provides much-needed consolation. White's and Boff's reflection on sin is commendable because they both believe that Christians should help to effect penultimate salvation while awaiting the ultimate one, which God will definitely bring.

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