

Biblical Or Political Correctness? Drinking As A Case Study

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

Some readers of the last newsletter (no. 57) commented on my use of the phrase “politically correct” with reference to a pastor who changed his view on women ordination. Some have interpreted my comment as an attempt to defame the pastor in question. This was not my intent at all. I am not in the business of defaming anybody. My aim is to examine issues and trends in the light of Biblical teachings. Any example of people who adopt new views to be politically correct, only serves an illustrative purpose.

The phrase “politically correct” is commonly used today to describe people who adopt views or agendas based on popular considerations. The notion of being politically correct, affects not only the adoption of political agendas, but also of Christian beliefs and practices. This trend kept me thinking during my recent speaking engagements in Switzerland and England. As a church historian I have been reminded lately of the fact that much of the history of Christian churches is a story of creeping compromise, or we might say, “political correctness” influenced by societal pressures. To avoid criticism and to gain popular acceptance, Christian churches have often opted to become “politically correct” by modifying or even changing their beliefs and practices.

In recent newsletters we have discussed some examples of creeping compromise caused by the pressure of cultural conformity. For example, we have seen how the desire to be politically correct has led some Christian churches to adopt entertainment type of music for their church services. We noted that some Christian churches have become more tolerant on divorce and remarriage in order to accommodate the increasing number of divorced and remarried members. Other churches attempt to redefine God as an impersonal Being or a female deity to make God more acceptable to feminists. For the same reason they explain away the biblical role distinctions between men and women in order to justify women ordination. In newsletters 55 and 57 we have seen how some people argue that the church must accept homosexuality as a genetic condition rather than a moral behavioral problem. The common denominator of the above examples is the desire to be politically correct by adopting doctrinal positions which are more consonant with popular trends.

To further illustrate how the pressure of cultural conformity is influencing Christian churches in general and the Seventh-day Adventist in particular, we will consider in this and the following newsletter two examples: (1) drinking, and (2) dress and adornment. In this newsletter we focus on the changing attitudes toward the use of alcoholic beverages by some evangelical churches in general and the Adventist church in particular. This survey shows how societal pressures have caused various Christian churches to modify their position in order to be politically correct.

In the next newsletter we will use another case study, namely, dress and adornment. Again, the historical survey will show that numerous Christian churches, including our own Adventist church, have relaxed their dress code standards in order to be politically correct.

As a church historian I like to look at developments from a historical perspective. Such a perspective helps us to see the direction we are going. The aim of this historical survey is not to be accusative or judgemental, but simply to highlight the importance of being biblically correct, at a time when the pressure of social conformity causes many to be political correct. *To be biblically correct often demands the courage to be politically*

incorrect. It requires the courage to stand for moral principles which may be unpopular today.

REPORT ON THE VISIT TO BASEL, SWITZERLAND

Every overseas lecture tour is a learning experience for me. The latest visits to Basel (Switzerland), and Birmingham (England), are no exception. On Friday, Saturday, and Sunday November 17, 18, 19, I spoke four times at the Central SDA Church in Basel. On Sabbath morning about 300 members and friends attended the meeting. The attendance was somewhat lower at the other sessions.

It soon became evident that there are theological tensions between the conservative and liberal members of the Basel SDA Church. The liberal are few, but influential. German-speaking congregations, like the one in Basel, tend to be more theological oriented than the pragmatic American congregations. They love to study and debate the fine points of theology. In fact, they specifically asked me to skip my testimony on Friday night so that I could deliver a lecture on the theology of the Sabbath. I was glad to comply by speaking for two hours on the three fundamental meanings of the Sabbath: (1) Perfect Creation, (2) Complete Redemption, (3) Ultimate Consummation. Nobody fell asleep. This would hardly have been the case in a typical American congregation on Friday night.

Someone told me that some of the liberals chose not to attend some of my lectures. Apparently they did not feel comfortable with my attempt to help fellow believers rediscover the Sabbath, not merely as one or two hours of church attendance, but as a 24 hours day in which we give priority to God in our thinking and living.

The liberal mentality became evident on Sabbath afternoon when a distinguished-looking brother asked me what I thought about participating in political rallies on Saturday. He felt that Adventists in Switzerland are failing to contribute to the political process because they do not participate at political rallies, which usually take place on Saturday.

I responded by pointing that Adventists make a statement by being absent at political rallies on Saturday. They show that they are a conscientious people who choose to give priority to God on His Holy Day. I pointed to the example of Senator Joseph Liberman who chose not to participate at political rallies on Saturday during the recent presidential campaign. His example raised serious questions about the genuineness of Governor George Bush's claim to be a "born again" Christian, when he spent his Lord's Day on the campaign trail seeking for votes, rather than seeking for the presence and peace of God in His life.

The vast majority of Adventists in Basel, as everywhere I have been, are very eager to deepen their understanding and experience of biblical truths. This was evident by their warm reception and response. In fact they asked me to deliver a two hours lecture even on Sunday morning. Not too many Adventists in America would come out to church on Sunday morning for a Bible study.

After the Sunday morning lecture, several families invited me to spend with them the Sunday afternoon. They squeezed me like a lemon. I have seldom found such an eagerness to deepen the understanding of biblical truths. In fact, they offered to pay my travel expenses for a future visit next year. They are thinking about organizing a special retreat at a camp, especially for our young people. I look forward to share my ministry with them again in the future.

REPORT ON THE VISIT TO BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND

The latest visit to England was perhaps the most successful. The credit goes mostly Malcolm Watson, a pastor of the North England Conference. He did a great job in planning and promoting my visit. He arranged for me to speak at three Adventist churches in Birmingham, Northampton, and Manchester, besides a special meeting with the clergy on the campus of Birmingham University. On Saturday, November 25, about 800 people attended the rally at the Camp Hill SDA in Birmingham. The church used all the available facilities to accommodate the overflow.

Rather than reporting this event personally, I will post the following report filed by Pastor Malcolm Watson for the MESSENGER, the official church paper of the British Union of SDA.

Sharing the Sabbath Rest

Pastor Malcolm Watson, North England Conference.

A unique event, a first for the North England Conference and British Union Conference, occurred on the afternoon of November 23 at George Cadbury Hall, Selly Oak Colleges, affiliated with the University of Birmingham. Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi retired Theology and Church History Professor at Andrews University, Michigan, presented a confessional lecture on the Sabbath to an invited audience of Birmingham clergy, church workers and members of various denominations. He explained in an irenic fashion how the Sabbath enables him to experience the presence, peace, and rest of Christ.

The Pastoral team of North England Conference Area 5 together with The Center for Black and White Christian Partnership, Selly Oak Campus, University of Birmingham, organized the event as an interdenominational dialogue addressing the need to experience the blessing of the Sabbath rest and renewal in our tension filled and restless lives.

Dr. Bacchiocchi set his address in the context of two contrasting Sabbath developments that he is continually tracking. The first one is the unprecedented recent attacks on the 7th day Sabbath and the second is the rediscovery of the Sabbath by numerous churches, religious groups, and church leaders.

The most bitter attacks against the Sabbath are coming today from former 7th day Sabbatarians. This is a first in Christian history because never before has the Sabbath been attacked by those who in the past have been the champions of its observance. These include not only the leaders of the World Wide Church of God but also former Adventist pastors and Bible teachers, who recently have written books and articles against the Sabbath. They have influenced several thousand Adventists to abandon Sabbath keeping.

Protestant and Catholic scholars are also attacking the Sabbath, by arguing that Sunday observance is a biblical institution, established by Apostolic authority. Numerous doctoral dissertations have recently been published negating the continuity of the Sabbath and defending the biblical legitimacy of Sundaykeeping.

Within Catholicism, Pope John Paul II promulgated a Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini* on May 28, 1998, where he makes a passionate plea for a revival of Sundaykeeping by grounding Sunday observance in the Sabbath commandment. This attempt to make Sunday the embodiment of the biblical Sabbath, runs contrary to the traditional Catholic explanation that the solemnity of the Sabbath was transferred to Sunday, as Thomas Aquinas puts it, "not by virtue of a biblical commandment, but by the authority of the Catholic Church."

The Pope departs from the historical position by making Sunday observance a moral imperative of the Decalogue. This strategy seems to be dictated by the desire to counter world wide declining attendance at mass. But, the Pope's strategy is misleading,

because Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days have a different origin, authority, and experience.

During the weekend Sabbath Enrichment Seminar at Handsworth and Camp Hill SDA churches in Birmingham, Dr. Bacchiocchi explained that the Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini* appeals to Christians at large “to strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duties to keep Sunday holy.” Such an appeal is designed to influence the international community of nations to promulgate a Sunday legislation.

While some are attacking or undermining the Sabbath, Dr. Bacchiocchi noted that there is another significant development, namely, the rediscovery of the Sabbath by numerous religious groups, churches, and scholars. International Sabbath conferences are being sponsored by secular universities. Articles and books, written by non-Sabbatarians promoting the seventh-day Sabbath, have recently appeared in newspapers such as *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, and even the in-flight *Hemisphere* magazine of United Airlines. During the past 30 years about 300 seventh-day Sabbathkeeping groups and churches have been established. Even in mainline denominations such as the Southern Baptist and Methodist, some of the local churches have moved their Sunday services to Saturday. These developments are documented in the book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*.

Dr. Bacchiocchi’s confessional presentation of how Sabbathkeeping enables him to experience more fully and freely the awareness of Christ’s presence, peace and rest, was positively received at the interconfessional meeting on the campus of Birmingham University. In his response, Rev. Garnet Parris, Lecturer in Theology at the University, did not dispute the Sabbath but acknowledged its relevance as a day of rest and renewal for our tension-filled and restless society.

The dialogue moderator, Bishop Joe Aldred, Executive Director of the Centre, insightfully asked how the SDA church is coping with the trend among some Adventists to reduce Sabbathkeeping to church attendance, rather than the observance of the whole day. Dr. Bacchiocchi acknowledged that some Adventists observe the Sabbath as it were Sunday, that is, as an hour of church attendance rather than a 24 hours day consecrated to God. This is a real challenge facing the Adventist church today. He exclaimed, “This is why we are having a special Sabbath Enrichment Seminar in Birmingham this Sabbath.”

The many positive comments received indicate that this event has caused people to re-examine the relevance of the Sabbath for today. Both Bishop Joe Aldred and Rev. Garnet Parris received gift copies of *From Sabbath to Sunday*, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* and *The Sabbath Under Crossfire* from Dr. Bacchiocchi. The Centre will also be receiving an autographed set of his 16 books for use by its students.

This interconfessional meeting convinces me that we need to place more emphasis on sharing the blessings of the Sabbath with other Christians, particularly the clergy of Great Britain. Current Sabbath developments demand that we adopt a strategy to reach out to all the clergy in Britain. The special bimonthly edition of *Ministry* magazine targeted to clergy in general, should be sent to the British clergy as well.

Furthermore, non-Adventist clergy and church workers could be invited to regular professional growth seminars. Such a strategy adopted in the North American Division has and continues to break down the walls of prejudice that separate us from that majority of God’s people who are not yet part of our SDA communion. May the successful interconfessional meeting that took place on November 23, 2000 on the campus of the University of Birmingham, encourage similar meetings in Great Britain in the future.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINAR

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the last of the forty seminars conducted during this past year. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area during the coming year. I am in the process of developing my calendar of speaking engagements for 2001 and I still have few open weekends.

If you live in the Washington D. C. area, may I extend you a special welcome to the last seminar for the year 2000. I pray that this will prove to be the best. The seminar is sponsored by the Southern Asia Adventist Association. Here is the information.

December 8-9: Silver Spring, Md: Round Oak Baptist Church

Location: 15812 Good Hope Road, Silver Spring, MD.

The seminar is sponsored by the Southern Asia Adventist Association.

For information call Premi Rathan RajMy at (301) 622-3213 or Maharajan M. Ponraj at (301) 236-5609.

A CORRECTION ABOUT SUNDAY SERVICES

In the previous newsletter I mentioned that members of the North Atlanta SDA Church asked me what I thought about SDA Churches conducting services on Sunday to reach the community. The question was asked because they were informed that their former Pastor, William F. Levin, is conducting Sunday services.

The information was not accurate. Pastor William F. Levin of the BridgePoint Church has informed me that he no longer conducts Sunday services. He did it for six Sundays to reach the community, but he is no longer doing it. Apparently his former members are not aware of the fact the he has discontinued the Sunday service.

The fact remains that there are SDA churches that conduct Sunday services. The trend will continue as I am told of other pastors who are planning to introduce Sunday services. We discussed the problem related to this practice in the previous newsletter.

BIBLICAL OR POLITICAL CORRECTNESS? DRINKING AS A CASE STUDY

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The Adventist position on the use of alcoholic beverages has undergone a gradual evolution from a strong stand on total abstinence as a biblical, moral imperative, into the present concessionist view that God allowed in Bible times the use of alcoholic beverages (without approving their use). The new view permits to treat drinking more as a medical than a moral issue, sickness rather than sin.

In my opinion this evolution represents an example of political correctness, that is, an attempt to deal with the increasing alcohol consumption among Adventists, by making drinking less sinful. This evolution is discussed at some length in my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES*. The study shows that what is true for the Adventist church is also true for several evangelical churches which have gradually abandoned their stand for total abstinence and adopted moderationist position instead.

For the sake of brevity and clarity, I will attempt in this newsletter to present first the historical Adventist position on drinking as reflected in the writings of Ellen White, and second, the recent position presented in SDA publications. Brief reference will also be made to other Christian Churches who have experienced a similar modification of their position. This survey is designed to highlight how the pressure of social conformity can impact on the religious beliefs and practices of Christian churches.

ABSTINENCE: A BIBLICAL IMPERATIVE!

Historically Adventists have believed and taught that total abstinence is a biblical imperative. In fact Adventist pioneers wholeheartedly participated in temperance societies which promoted total abstinence as a Christian lifestyle. Ellen White encouraged Seventh-day Adventists to join and participate in temperance societies. Frequently mentioned is the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, whose main objectives she endorsed. So highly did she esteem this organization that she affirmed: "None who claim to have part in the work of God should lose interest in the grand object of this organization in temperance lines." (*Review and Herald*, November 8, 1881).

In 1908 Ellen White reiterated, "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union is an organization with whose efforts for the spread of temperance we can heartily unite. . . . By uniting with them in behalf of total abstinence, we do not change our position regarding the observance of the seventh day, and we can show our appreciation of their position regarding the subject of temperance." (*Temperance*, pp. 222-223).

Incidentally, the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union is still alive today. In fact, they sponsored the abridged version (64 pages) of my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE*, which they are endeavoring to place in the hands of clergy. Few years ago they invited me to speak at their 127th National convention that was attended by over 500 delegates representing various denominations. Surprising I was the only Adventist present at the convention.

Dr. Ernest H. J. Steed, who for many years served with distinction as the General Conference Temperance Secretary, used to be very active in National Woman's Christian Temperance Union as well as in many other organizations promoting total abstinence. On a private visit to our home, Dr. Steed explained to me that when the Temperance Department was merged in 1982 with the Health Department of the General Conference, the biblical/moral motivation for total abstinence was gradually replaced by medical, social, and health considerations.

Clear Biblical Conviction. There was no uncertainty in the mind of Ellen White about the biblical basis for total abstinence. She emphatically states: "The Lord has given special directions in His word in reference to the use of wine and strong drink. *He*

has forbidden their use, and enforced His prohibitions with strong warnings and threatenings. But His warning against the use of intoxicating beverages is not the result of the exercise of arbitrary authority. He has warned men, in order that they may escape from the evil that results from indulgence in wine and strong drink.” (*Temperance* p. 42).

On a similar vein Ellen White wrote in *The Ministry of Healing*: “*The Bible nowhere sanctions the use of intoxicating wine.* The wine that Christ made from water at the marriage feast of Cana was the pure juice of the grape. This is the ‘new wine found in the cluster,’ of which the Scripture says, ‘Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it’ (Isaiah 65:8).” (p. 333).

Ellen White continues, saying: “It was Christ who, in the Old Testament, gave the warning to Israel, ‘wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise’ (Prov 20:1, KJV). . . . It was Christ who directed that John the Baptist should drink neither wine nor strong drink. It was He who enjoined similar abstinence upon the wife of Manoah. Christ did not contradict His own teaching. The unfermented wine that He provided for the wedding guests was a wholesome and refreshing drink. This is the wine that was used by our Saviour and His disciples in the first communion.” (p. 333).

In commenting on Leviticus 10:9 where God says to Aaron, “Drink no wine nor strong drink, you nor your sons with you,” Ellen White says: “Here we have the most plain directions of God, and his reasons for prohibiting the use of wine; that their power of discrimination and discernment might be clear, and in no way confused; that their judgment might be correct, and they be ever able to discern between the clean and unclean. Another reason of weighty importance why they should abstain from anything which would intoxicate, is also given. It would require the full use of unclouded reason to present to the children of Israel all the statutes which God had spoken to them.” (*Temperance*, p. 44).

In this statement Ellen White explains the reason for God’s prohibition of alcoholic beverages, namely, that they impair the “power of discrimination and discernment” as well as the capacity to teach the principles God has revealed. Ellen White finds support for her belief in total abstinence in numerous Biblical passages. In her tract *Drunkness and Crime*, she writes: “There are many solemn warnings in the Scriptures against the use of intoxicating liquors.” (cited in *Temperance* p. 52). She continues by quoting in full Deuteronomy 29:6, Proverbs 20:1, 23:29-32, 31:4, Amos 6:6, and Ecclesiastes 10:17. She closes saying, “The Lord has given special directions in His word in reference to the use of wine and strong drink. He has forbidden their use, and enforced His prohibitions with strong warnings and threatenings.” (*Temperance*, p. 53-54).

The most compelling example of abstinence often quoted by Ellen White is Daniel and his three companions. She writes: “Not only did these young men decline to drink the king’s wine, but they refrained from the luxuries of his table. They obeyed the divine law, both natural and moral.” (*True Temperance, An Indictment of the Liquor Traffic*, p. 14). The lesson that she draws from their example is that “those who would preserve their powers unimpaired for the service of God must observe strict temperance in the use of all His bounties, as well as total abstinence from every injurious or debasing indulgence.”(Ibid., p 15).

Summing up, Ellen White deeply believed that total abstinence is a principle clearly taught in the Scripture by warnings and examples. Disregard for this principle represents a violation of the law of God. Obedience to this principle through Christ’s enabling power, contributes to the restoration of God’s moral image in us. Total abstinence is part of the gospel and more specifically of the third angel’s message. This means that abstinence is part of the process of restoration brought about by the power of the gospel—a restoration which is an essential part of the preparation for Christ’s return.

Personal Discoveries. The two years I spent examining the relevant Biblical passages and the studies done by recent and past scholars, have convinced me that the

position of Ellen White on total abstinence as a biblical imperative, is biblically correct. I will briefly mention some of the personal discoveries that stand out in my mind. You will find a full treatment of the findings of my research in my book *WINE IN THE BIBLE: A BIBLICAL STUDY ON THE USE OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES*.

I was surprised to learn that the four related words—*wine* in English, *vinum* in Latin, *oinos* in Greek and *yayin* in Hebrew—have been used historically to refer to the juice of the grape, whether fermented or unfermented. When I applied this finding to Biblical references to wine, I was pleasantly amazed to find that the positive references to “wine” have to do with unfermented and nonintoxicating grape juice, while the negative references concern fermented and intoxicating wine.

Another surprising discovery was finding Bible passages which condemn not only the abuse of wine but also any use of it at all. In Chapter 3 I examine several passages in the Old and New Testaments which condemn wine per se, irrespective of the quantity used.

The study of the preservation of wine in the ancient world was also very enlightening. To my surprise I discovered that the ancients were far more knowledgeable in the art of preserving fruits and wines than we generally assume. As Chapter 4 reveals, ancient writers tell us that the preservation of unfermented grape juice was sometimes simpler than was the preservation of fermented wine. Various techniques were used to preserve grape juice unfermented.

My study of the major wine-related stories and sayings of Jesus, reported in Chapter 5, was also very revealing. As I examined each passage grammatically, contextually and historically, I saw clearly that none of them indicate that Jesus used alcoholic beverages or sanctioned their use for His followers.

The most startling aspect of this whole research was the study presented in Chapter 6 on the apostolic admonitions to mental vigilance and physical abstinence. To my surprise I found that some of the clearest apostolic admonitions to abstinence have been translated figuratively as “be temperate” or “Be sober,” when in reality they should have been translated “Be abstinent.” Presumably the translators wanted to save the face of drinking by condemning drunkenness instead. Such inaccurate translations have misled many sincere Christians to believe that the Bible teaches moderation rather than total abstinence.

Two things impressed me in reading the medical reports on the physical effects of alcohol. First, as Chapter 9 indicates, alcohol harms practically every major organ of the body. Second, some medical studies show that there is no such thing as moderate safe drinking, because even one drink can put some brain cells temporarily out of commission, impairing attention, judgment, concentration and emotional balance. Medical research help us appreciate why Scripture warns us not even to look at wine (Prov 23:31).

The reasons given in Scripture for total abstinence are primarily moral and eschatological. In several passages both Peter and Paul call upon Christians to be mentally vigilant and physically abstinent as part of the preparation to live in the holy presence of Christ at His soon coming. The reason the biblical teaching on total abstinence is not always clearly perceived by many Christians, is partly because, as mentioned earlier, some crucial biblical injunctions to total abstinence have been translated figuratively as “be sober” or “be temperate,” thus allowing for moderation. Most likely these mistranslations reflect the desire of the translators to justify moderate drinking.

FROM CERTAINTY TO UNCERTAINTY ABOUT ABSTINENCE

The clear conviction of Ellen White that God has forbidden the use of alcoholic beverages and “enforced His prohibition with strong warnings and threatenings,” has gradually been weakening in the Adventist church in recent years. A fitting example is the special 1982 temperance issue of *Adventist Review*. The leading article is entitled “Does

the Bible Condemn 'Moderate' Drinking?" The answer to this question is abundantly clear: "The truth is, the Bible does not contain the type of concise and explicit directive enjoining total abstinence that many of us would like to see." The same thought is expressed in the next paragraph: "Total abstinence is but one of a number of areas where the Bible gives no explicit directive."

The recent Adventist uncertainty on the biblical teaching on the use of alcoholic beverages stands in stark contrast with the certainty expressed by Ellen White. This uncertainty reflects the shift from a prohibitionist view to a concessionist view—a shift that could have been influenced by social pressures. According to the concessionist view God did not approve but merely permitted the use of alcoholic beverages. As stated in the popular book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .* "Scriptural stories involving the use of alcoholic beverages may give the impression that God approved their use. However, Scripture also indicates that God's people participated in social practices . . . that God certainly did not condone. In interpreting such Scriptural passages, it is helpful to keep in mind that God does not necessarily endorse all that He permits." (p. 282).

In its comment on Deuteronomy 14:26, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* expresses the same concessionist view: ". . . Thus it was with 'wine' and 'strong drink.' Neither was strictly prohibited, except to those engaged in religious duties, and perhaps also in the administration of justice (Lev 10:9; Prov 31:4, 5) . . . In times past God often 'winked' at the gross 'ignorance' responsible for practices He could never approve." (Vol 1, p. 1002).

By adopting the concessionist view that alcoholic beverages were permitted (though not approved) by God in past times of ignorance and perversion, Adventists today find it necessary to appeal primarily to health reasons for their position on abstinence. An example is the *Fundamental Beliefs* 21, which deals with Christian behavior. It states: "Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco, and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well."

Weaknesses of the Concessionist View. The concessionist view that God permitted alcoholic beverages without approving their use, is contradicted by those passages which describe "wine" (*yayin*), not as a divine concession to human failings but as a divine blessing for the people to enjoy. For example, Psalm 104:14, 15 says: "Thou [God] dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine [*yayin*] to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen man's heart." Here "wine" is joined together with food and oil as a basic divine blessing which enjoys God's approval.

Similarly, in Isaiah 55:1 God's free offer of His mercy is likened to the free reception of water, wine and milk: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine [*yayin*] and milk without money and without price." The fact that "wine and milk" are here paired together as symbols of good and satisfying spiritual benefits suggests again that "wine" (*yayin*) was not merely permitted but also approved. Other examples indicating divine approval for wine can be found in those passages which describe wine as the symbol of prosperity and gladness of the messianic age. These passages are discussed in Chapter 3.

The above examples recommending wine as a divine blessing for believers to enjoy stand in sharp contrast to those passages condemning wine as "treacherous" (Hab 2:5), and "a mocker" which "at the last . . . bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder" (Prov 20:1; 23:32). These two contrasting sets of verses present a puzzling Biblical paradox. How can the same inspired Bible both commend and condemn the use of wine? It is evident that the same wine cannot be both good and evil at the same time.

The solution to this apparent paradox cannot be found in the amount of wine ingested, as argued by moderationists, because the Scripture commends and condemns wine itself, irrespective of the quantity used. Nor is the solution to be found by viewing the positive references to wine as divine concession rather than a divine approval, since,

as we have seen, often wine is presented together with food as a divine blessing for people to enjoy.

The solution is rather to be found in recognizing that the Hebrew and Greek words (*yayin* and *oinos*) which are uniformly translated “wine” can refer to both *unfermented grape juice* and *fermented wine*. The failure to note this double meaning of the Biblical terms for wine has led some to conclude that Bible teachings on drinking are contradictory.

The uncertainty about the biblical basis for total abstinence has gradually led to view drinking more as a *medical* (health) problem, than a *moral* issue. An example of this evolution in the Adventist position is the series of five articles on chemical dependency published in the *ADVENTIST REVIEW* on October 29 and November 5, 12, 19, and 26, 1987. Its authors discuss the problem of alcohol dependency primarily as a *sickness* rather than as a *sin* problem. The underlying assumption seems to be that the Adventist church should move away from viewing the drinking of alcoholic beverages as essentially “a deliberate sin.” Instead it should view drinking more as a medical than as a moral problem.

This new orientation is reflected in the literature produced by the Health and Temperance Department of the General Conference. For example, the booklet entitled *THE CHRISTIAN AND ALCOHOL: WHAT'LL IT BE?* discusses the medical, physical, economic, social, and addictive effects of alcohol, but it completely ignores the biblical prohibitions of the use of alcoholic beverages. Why? Most likely because of the weakening of conviction that total abstinence is a Biblical imperative. The latter is documented in a survey published in *Adventist Review* (June 1, 1989) which indicates that about one third of Adventists believe that the Bible allows for moderate drinking.

Weakening of the Conviction. In my itinerant ministry in North America and overseas I have often been approached by church members and even some pastors, who have come to believe that the Bible allows for a moderate use of alcoholic beverages. Consequently, they feel that it is better to promote abstinence on the basis of social and medical considerations, than of biblical and moral reasons.

The weakening of the conviction that total abstinence is a biblical imperative is undoubtedly a major contributory factor to the increased in the consumption of alcoholic beverages in the Adventist church. Surveys in *Adventist Review* published in 1987 indicate that 58 percent of Adventist youth are experimenting with alcohol and 17 percent of Adventist College students are habitual drinkers (October 29, 1987, pp. 6-7). Most likely the percentage of Adventist drinkers has increased considerably since 1987.

To remedy the drinking problem lectures are given on our college campuses on alcohol recovery by visiting experts. Classes on substance abuse are taught on our campuses and counseling centers have been set up to help students with drinking problems. Two organizations have been established by the General Conference to meet the challenge of the steadily rising drinking of alcohol within the church: (1) a Study Commission on Chemical Dependency and the Church, and (2) the Institute of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency.

The Need for a Deep Moral Conviction. All the various efforts and programs established to deal with the drinking problem in Adventist institutions and churches, deserve support and commendation. But education alone is not enough. It takes more. In my view what it takes to help people overcome their drinking habits, is a profound moral (biblical) conviction that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only physically harmful, but also biblically and morally wrong. Christians need to understand that drinking alcoholic beverages is not only a health hazard, but also a violation of a principle given to us by God for ensuring our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

When people accept total abstinence as a biblical, moral imperative, they are more likely to feel compelled to abstain from intoxicating substances and to help others abstain

likewise. The reason is that it takes a strong moral conviction to motivate a person to seek for divine grace to overcome a sinful habit.

This has been my experience while teaching college Bible classes at Andrews University. Usually I spent a week each quarter sharing the highlights of my research on the biblical teachings on the use of alcoholic beverages. My aim has been to help the students understand that from a biblical perspective partaking of alcohol and drugs is not only physically harmful, but morally wrong, because it impairs our capacity to make moral responsible decisions.

In most cases the reaction of the students has been very positive. Practically every quarter some of the students would testify before the class during the short morning devotion that for the first time they had become convinced of the sinfulness of drinking and consequently they decided to pour down the drain their cans of beer or bottles of wine.

From Certainty to Uncertainty in Other Churches. The shift from certainty to uncertainty on total abstinence is not unique to the Adventist church. Several other churches have experienced the same evolution. In the nineteenth century the cause of total abstinence was most enthusiastically embraced and promoted by those evangelical churches which stood for total abstinence such as the Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, New School Presbyterian, Salvation Army, some holiness movements and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their fervor was inspired by the conviction that Scripture teaches abstinence from intoxicating beverages rather than moderation in their use.

In the early part of this century evangelical churches which stood for total abstinence, played a major role in influencing the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States on January 16, 1919, outlawing the "manufacture, sale or transportation" of alcoholic beverages.

Since the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, however, most churches have abandoned their stand for total abstinence, encouraging "moderation" instead. Unfortunately, moderation has led over 18 million Americans to become immoderate drinkers, because alcohol is a habit-forming narcotic which weakens one's capacity for self-control.

One wonders, why have the Methodist and Baptist churches, whose strong stand for abstinence contributed mightily to the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, have gradually adopted a moderationist position in recent years?

A major factor appears to have been a weakening of the conviction that total abstinence is a clear biblical principle to be respected like other God-given principles. Even Billy Graham, a teetotaler, said: "I do not believe that the Bible teaches teetotalism . . . Jesus drank wine. Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast. That wasn't grape juice as some of them try to claim." (*Miami Herald* Dec. 26, 1976, sec. A, p. 18).

No longer having a Biblical for total abstinence, evangelicals who, like Billy Graham, still recommend abstinence, do so for social or medical reasons. Such reasons, as noted earlier, do not provide a compelling motivation to remain or become abstinent. As long as Christians believe there is nothing wrong Biblically and morally in the moderate use of alcoholic beverages, they are not likely to feel compelled or convicted to be totally abstinent.

Conclusion. The gradual shift experienced by various Christian churches from certainty to uncertainty on total abstinence as a biblical imperative, appears to have been influenced more by social pressures than biblical reasons. The increasing consumption of alcoholic beverages and their acceptance as a legitimate form of social relaxation, have influenced Christians and churches to find a biblical concession for moderate drinking.

In the next newsletter we shall see that the same weakening of conviction has occurred in several churches regarding dress and ornaments. Churches that last century would not allow members to enter their church when dressed immodestly or wearing ornaments, today they would have no problem to welcome Jezebel. History teaches us that the pressure of cultural conformity has often caused churches to modify their theological beliefs.

My forthcoming book on *POPULAR HERESIES* traces the historical origin and development of about 20 popular heresies. The origin of most heresies can be traced to the influence of ideological, cultural, or social pressures. Simply stated, throughout the centuries churches have faced the challenge to be either *politically correct* by adopting beliefs and practices consonant with the culture of the times, or to be *biblically correct* by upholding the morally principles revealed in God's Word. May God grant us today the wisdom, grace, and courage to be biblically correct, even if it means to be politically incorrect.

SPECIAL OFFER ON WINE IN THE BIBLE

WINE IN THE BIBLE is a most timely book that may well provoke a revolution in the attitude of many Christians toward alcoholic beverages. This book is desperately needed at a time when alcohol and drugs are destroying so many lives. I have been invited to discuss the content of this book in numerous TV and radio talk-shows. Scholars of different persuasions have favorably reviewed the book. You can read a sampling of their comments below. To facilitate the circulation of this timely study, we are making a special offer with this newsletter. You can order copies by phone, simply by calling us at (616) 471-2915, by regular mail, or email. To order the book by mail or email simply fill out the order forms below.

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