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Apostasy -- A Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Approach

Octavian Cureteu

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APOSTASY--A BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND
PASTORAL APPROACH

by

Octavian Cureteu

A Thesis in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts
in Theology

September 1987
Each person whose signature appears below certifies that this thesis in his opinion is adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree Master of Arts.

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Abstract

APOTASY--A BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND PASTORAL APPROACH

by

Octavian Cureteu

This thesis concerns apostasy, which responds to a major religious crisis in the life of a believer by a deliberate alienation and abandonment of faith. This crisis involves a conflict on an intellectual, social, or emotional dimension.

The problem of the thesis may be stated as follows: How can an understanding of the dynamics of apostasy benefit gospel workers?

To this question the thesis answers in three different ways: Biblical, theological, and practical. Chapter Two, the Biblical approach, is a rather detailed survey of two typical cases which serve to define apostasy as a sinful process. The first example, belonging to the Old Testament, treats the Fall of Man, while the second example, belonging to the New Testament, deals with the Hebrews to whom the letter bearing the same name was addressed. Moreover, each of two cases offers the possibility to make plain certain elements of a theological value, whose understanding will increase the practical importance of dealing with such a topic.

Chapter Three, the theological approach, focuses on the three elements of theological significance involved in any case of apostasy: freedom of will, sin, and sin against the Holy Spirit. In the sinful
process of apostasy, it is man's freedom of will which makes sin possible. In its turn, the unremittance of sin brings man to the ultimate stage of apostasy--the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Four, the pastoral approach, examines the dimensions of religious commitment versus religious defection, and the main factors influencing believers toward apostasy. But it underlines the fact that apostasy is not a hopeless, unsolvable event in one's life. For this reason, some practical suggestions to prevent and to cope with apostasy are mentioned at the end of this chapter.

Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the conclusions and suggestions for further exploration of this important subject.
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The thesis concerns apostasy which responds to a major religious crisis in the life of a believer by a deliberate alienation and abandonment of faith. This crisis involves a conflict of an intellectual, social, or emotional dimension.

The problem of the thesis may be stated as follows: How can an understanding of the dynamics of apostasy benefit gospel workers?

To this question the thesis answers in three ways: Biblically by explaining apostasy as a sinful process, which could degenerate into sin against the Holy Spirit if it is not stopped and controlled; theologically, by discussing the main issues implicated in an apostatic process, such as freedom of will, sin, and the sin against the Holy Spirit; and practically, by exploring the dimensions of Christian commitment and defection, factors contributing to apostasy, and solutions suggested as a help in preventing and recovering from apostasy.

Within the Christian Church as a body, apostasy is one of the most dramatic crises which can occur. Today, while there never seems to have been a more favorable time for the Church--its sanctuaries full of worshippers, its projects so ambitious, and its budgets so promising--the crisis still exists. It might be visible or not, depending on the angle from which we choose to scrutinize the Church. For instance, for
the many contemporary researchers exploring the religious phenomenon from the social angle only, there is no alarming signal of crisis. To them, everything that takes place within the religious framework of society today is a mere reflection of social, cultural, or behavioral alterations, a normal outcome that could take place in any society in a given time. According to them, the primary molding influence of society, and consequently, of religion, is secularization. Yet, a question remains. What is the inner effect of secularization within the heart of believers in our times? Is it not what the Church calls "apostasy"? Here lies the answer, drawn by Charles Y. Glock and Robert Wuthnow, in a study significantly entitled "Departures from Conventional Religion":

The scenario for the future of religion... is that religion has no future; the future of religion is non-religion. Perhaps this is not what is intended when social scientists talk about secularization and about how the secularization process seems to be an inexorable one. Yet, as the evidence of a decline of conventional religion in American society has mounted, the most common assumption among social scientists has been that defection from conventional religion means defection from religion altogether—the data testify more to the possibility than to the probability that non-religion will ever become dominant.1

This means that what the researchers call "secularization" is actually a gradual alteration of the Church, a plain process of apostasy, until "non-religion will ever become dominant."

To the researchers who see things from a psychological perspective, the "religious experience is rooted in the intellectual and emotional stream of life." If there is a crisis, even in the case of a psychosis, it is "socially valuable in the remaking of personality."2

But to those who explore the Church from within, to those who are familiar with its life by personal experience and commitment, rather
than by polls and statistics or psychiatric expertise, the Church crisis is a crude reality. But in the last instance, the Church's crisis is actually the individual's crisis. According to Jeffrey K. Hadden, the individual's crisis is advancing toward two foci, one referring to the "purpose and the meaning of the Church," and the other one to the "belief." This means that on one hand there is a crisis of authority, while on the other hand a crisis of faith exists.

As shown by the above observations, the central theme of this thesis concerns apostasy as a resulting manifestation of a crisis in the life of a believer. Today it seems to be an issue which deserves full attention, deep investigation, and operative solutions.

Need for the Study

There are three background circumstances which contributed to this study. First, it was out of personal need that this thesis was written, in an attempt to find a satisfactory answer to this question: "Why do people leave the Church and drop their faith?"

The author was born in a Christian home, with a father who has been a minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church for more than 30 years. During his childhood and then as he became a member of the same Church, the writer had occasion after occasion to see crowds of people committing their lives to Jesus as their own Lord and Savior, and becoming members of the Church, while many others left the church. "Why?," was the persistent question in his mind.

Later on, in Seminary studies and practice, the writer devoted more time to this question, looking for a theological understanding of apostasy. At the time some other questions had added to the previous
questions, questions related to the doctrines of conversion, regeneration, election, personal freedom, and personal responsibility to salvation. The writer thought that through his Bachelor of Arts thesis, which dealt with the personality and the role of the Holy Spirit in man's life, some of those questions received an answer. Yet, as he found out due to his pastoral and counseling duties, the old questions gave birth to additional questions concerning apostasy: "What are the internal and external factors which contribute to a Christian's becoming a backslider?" "What are the theological implications in discussing apostasy?" and so on.

Secondly, in choosing this topic, the writer had in mind the mission of the Church and its success. According to the Bible, the primary mission of the Church, which should justify its existence in the world arena, is to carry the Gospel to the end of the world and to enlarge the spiritual kingdom of God on earth. Moreover, as derived from the first aspect of its mission, the Church also has a duty to defend and preserve the truth, and to nurture and conserve the faith, hope and love of its flock.

Although the ranks of the main Christian churches are dramatically affected by apostasy, little has been written on this subject which is so vital to the Church. Because of the importance of this topic, this thesis aims to contribute to a better understanding of it, and to provide some help to the Church in its attempts to cope with the factors producing apostasy.

Thirdly, this thesis intends to give an answer to those unexpressed questions which bother the minds of many sincere believers who have
fallen away, like these: "To what extent is there a hope before God that an apostate can be renewed, rehabilitated, and saved?" "Is my apostasy similar to the sin against the Holy Spirit?" By finding correct answers to questions like these, it is the hope of the writer that this thesis will become a help for many cold and judgmental--yet at the same time "righteous" and "in good standing"--ministers and Church members to change their feelings and attitudes as they regard the apostates around them.

**Definition of Terms**

Research in the area of apostasy must start with a definition of what apostasy is. According to the *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, apostasy is "forsaking or renouncing religion" or "deliberate abandonment of one religion for another." The word in the classical Greek means "a revolt," "a departure," or "to abandon an alliance." In the Jewish tradition it was used to signify "abandonment of belief," or "infidelity to Jahweh." Then the word was used to speak of abandonment of the Christian faith. In this respect, the most elaborated definition found may be that of Thomas Aquinas, which says that

apostasy means falling away from God, which takes place in various ways, corresponding to the various ways in which man is united to God: by faith, by the duly submissive readiness of the will to obey His commandments, and by works of supererogation, such as the religious life, the clerical state, or holy orders.

In the practical way, it is the total abandoning, departure, defection, dropping out, giving up, slipping down, or turning away of a believer from his faith by words or by actions. It does not necessarily imply the adoption of another belief or religious philosophy, or set of
teachings, though this may happen and deepen the apostatic process. The particular context given in this thesis must be considered in establishing the meaning of the term.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is an exploratory study of apostasy. The method used here to treat the topic is to approach it from three sides: Biblical, theological, and pastoral, one chapter for each approach.

As to its structure the thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter deals with the statement of the problems and the purposes of the study and offers a definition of terms and a description of its structure.

Chapter Two is a Biblical approach to the topic—a quite detailed survey of two typical cases of apostasy, which define apostasy as a sinful process rather than a particular sin. The first example is taken from the Old Testament narrative, namely the fall of the first human beings. The second one belongs to the New Testament and is that of the young Judeo-Christian Church to whom the letter to the Hebrews was addressed. These two cases offer the possibility of not only depicting the process and dynamics of man's apostasy, but also to make plain certain issues of a theological significance involved in the sinful process of apostasy.

Chapter Three is a theological approach which focuses on three elements of theological value which are present in any case of apostasy: freedom of will, sin, and sin against the Holy Spirit. In the sinful process of apostasy, it is man's freedom of will which makes sin possible, as man's unremittance of sin, in its turn, brings man toward
the ultimate stage of apostasy—the sin against the Holy Spirit. Yet even as apostasy appears to be grafted on the background of a certain sin, apostasy is not a sin in itself, but rather a sinful process which, in its turn, could bring man to the ultimate stage of apostasy—the ultimate sin.

Chapter Four examines the dimensions of religious commitment versus religious defection in order to find the correlates and the precipitants of one's apostasy, and to draw some practical suggestions which would prevent as well as cope with apostasy in the Church.

Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the conclusions and gives some suggestions for further exploration of this important subject. Writing this thesis kept the writer constantly aware of the subjective degree of his observations. As the limitations of this thesis will reveal, the need for more research in the future is obvious.
Chapter II

BIBLICAL APPROACH

Readers of the Holy Scriptures who undertake a careful research cannot escape that overwhelming feeling of discovering God in all His presence, power, wisdom, character, providence, love, and grace. And all these because the entire book is God-centered; it is the Word of God. Unfortunately, on the same inspired pages man is present, too, with all his history of reprehensible deeds, lack of faith, rebellion, moral and physical decadence, and all his apostasies.

Obviously, the main purpose of this chapter is not to survey the entire Biblical narrative in order to make an inventory of all the cases of individual or collective apostasies with all their details, implications, and comments. The purpose, rather, is to select only two typical cases—one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament—to analyze them to detect the principal factors which tend toward apostasy, and draw out their theological implications. The first case selected from the Old Testament narrative is that with which the Bible itself opens its long list of apostasies in sacred history.

The Temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve

Historical Background

The Bible opens its records with an excitingly significant assertion as a background for what was going to happen: "In the beginning
God created the heavens and the earth." The first declaration of the Bible stands out with a tremendous importance for the whole of human history. It places God above all of His creation, giving to the whole earthly existence a strong theocentric character, from which nothing can defect without peril.

In creating human beings, God was pleased to imprint them with His own image and likeness. Paul later explained these features as being of a spiritual order: righteousness and holiness, and knowledge. Besides the capacity to exercise responsible rulership over the earth, besides those spiritual features mentioned by Paul, the Genesis story brings out other capacities with which God entrusted man, according to His likeness: capacity of fellowship and communication with God, intelligence, sentiments, and freedom of will. Created only for God's glory, perfect in His likeness in character with God, man became the ultimate goal of divine blessing, revelation, and instruction.

Temptation

And the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

Surely the fruits of that tree contained no poison. What God created and pronounced "good," could not in itself be called evil. But what does "the knowledge of good and evil" mean? Probably this expression should be taken as a figure of speech in which the extremes may be used to stand for a single meaning, in this case "moral knowledge."

To have moral knowledge of good and evil is nothing condemnable
in itself. This is a divine attribute. God Himself knows good and evil. Accordingly, the serpent said: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." But was not in this very word hidden that deep significance of temptation? Adam and Eve were not merely tempted by something special in the aspect or taste of that fruit, but by that unexpected possibility of acquiring a divine capacity, which they evidently felt God refused to give them.

Even from the beginning man had knowledge of good, and desired it. He already knew, at least theoretically, the difference between good and evil, between life and death. He knew that death was something undesirable, something to be avoided. But experimentally, evil was still unknown to him. Man felt that his knowledge was less than that of the Divine Being, and without it his comprehension of life was incomplete.

Without blocking man's way to knowledge of evil, God, in His wisdom and love for man, concealed evil from Adam. The tree stood there not to bring evil into man's life, but "for the possibility of man's rebellion against the simple word of God." It stood there to test man's obedience and free decision to follow his Creator and Master, to stay in close dependence upon Him.

The Tempter

In both the Jewish and Christian interpretations of the fall, the serpent was always identified with Satan. The apostle John, in Revelation, draws an equality between "the great dragon" and "the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world." It is quite evident that Jesus Himself, referring to the Devil, used the Eden story in the same
way, calling him "murderer from the beginning" and "a liar and the
father of lies." But here in the Genesis record there is no reference
to Satan or the Devil in the account of the temptation and fall.

In Hebrews the word SA'TAN means "adversary," and comes from the
verb "satan" which means to cherish animosity. Most often this word
is used to describe someone who is an adversary to God's will or to
God's people. Although Satan was not mentioned in the story of man's
fall, he was there "in the guise of a serpent, to persuade Eve to dis-
trust the goodness of God, to doubt His word, and to reject His
authority."  

The questions of the serpent to Eve were evidently contrary to
the will of God, as it has been revealed to the first couple. One of
the most subtle Satanic suggestions was regarding the providence of
God, depicting God as depriving them of food, of what was necessary and
desirable: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the Garden?'"
The woman knew the correct word of God: "We may eat fruit from the trees
in the garden."

Then followed the second suggestion: "God deprives you not of
the material things, but also of the spiritual, intellectual and moral
things. 'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be
opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" This was
the real core of the temptation: "There is something more that you
could be and have. . . . Why does God retain you from that, if He
really loves you? You are already in the image of God. . . . You are
already lord over all the earth. . . . Why don't you try to be and act
exactly like Him, to snatch what He forbids you to know and to be?
What you need is only a step!"
The Sinful Act

Finally, Adam and Eve disobeyed God's word. They proved themselves disloyal to God's revealed will. Theologically speaking, their act of disobedience is called sin. Sin, in the Biblical understanding, is always related to the revealed will of God. It is any deviation from the known will of God, either by neglecting to do what He has specifically commanded, or by doing what He has specifically forbidden. Translated into the inner attitude of the human heart, it is the rebellion against God.

Rebellion is the essential aspect of apostasy. It is an attitude of man's heart, based on a false interpretation of God's character, of His will, or way of working; it is mistrust in His love and providence. Somewhere, in the deepest zone of the human soul that apostatizes, there is the same anxiety, dissatisfaction with the actual state, a kind of wounded pride which raises against God, thinking that He deprived us from having, or being, something.

Great Implications

Regarding God. The first issue implicated in that first sin, as well as in any apostasy, is God's authority. God is the One who provided everything for man's benefit: life, environment, food, fellowship. Based on the fact that He is the Creator and the Provider, He has the right to limit, prohibit, test, and finally pronounce a penalty for violation. In His providence, His authority was something implicit and necessary. Even if He delegated all authority over creation to Adam, God had the right to reserve for Himself full disposition to set limits on man's actions.
Instantaneously, man rebelled against God. The rebellious act against God reveals that He is a God of justice, of judgment, of a moral nature, knowing good and evil. This, of course, does not imply that His nature and acts contain both good and evil features, but rather that He has the full capacity to see the good or evil structure of anything--persons, things, and actions. Also, he has the full capacity to judge, to pronounce judgments upon everything, and the right to decide according to or against their good or evil structure.

As the Genesis record continues, "Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden, to work the ground from which he had been taken." This is the tragic epilogue of man's apostasy. It reveals God as being a Holy One. God does not suffer sin, and in no way feels Himself responsible for man's sin. Adam was not tempted by God, as God did not create a satanic agent (the serpent), not even Satan. But God definitely created the free will principle. This is the second issue implicated in man's apostasy. The wrong use of this principle was counted by God as sin.

The third theological issue put into play in any discussion of apostasy is the question of what the last limit of God's mercy and love is. From the same record of Genesis, God proved Himself to be a merciful God. Despite His verdict "for when you eat of it, you will surely die," God continued the existence of both man and woman. Later, this merciful decision proved to be full of wisdom and love. By this they had enough time to taste God's love, reconsider their attitudes toward God, change their minds, ask for forgiveness, and enjoy a new life. In a second instance, God's provision of a grace was beneficial.
to them. They were prevented from eating from the tree of life in
order not to remain eternally alienated from God.

Regarding man. The first apostate event underlines some other
implications regarding man. First of all, man was created as a free
agent, free to obey or to transgress the specific commandments of God.
God surely knows the outcome of all man's choices, and He expressed
clearly that knowledge. However, God leaves man the full responsi-
bility for his choices and their final "harvest."  

Immediately after their defection from God's will, Adam and Eve
knew the gravity of their act with all its consequences. The Bible
says that a sense of fear and shame about God and each other took
possession of their hearts. This seems to indicate that they under-
stood the moral implications of their apostasy.

Secondly, as a consequence of his sin, man became a mortal being.
This implies a broader understanding since the death man had to face
from that moment on was more than just expiring with the last breath.
The meaning of death was years of toil and sweat, pain of travail,
sorrow, unending hostility from Satan, and then the return to dust.
Being driven from the presence of God, he left man almost alone in
his trespasses and sins. Is man's apostasy incurable, unrecuperable?
Is this tragic story of the first apostasy and alienation from God, and
death, like a tunnel with no end, no hope, no other second chance and
option? No! There was, right there in Eden, just at the place of their
rebellion and defection a divine promise of a Redeemer, and a tree of
life that will be accessible again to them.

The human race was born in sin. The whole of mankind became
absolutely evil. Once he had experienced evil, man's sinful propen-
sities and drives accentuated more and more, became so perverted that
by the time of the flood generation the Biblical record says that
"every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the
time. So the Lord said: 'I will wipe mankind, whom I have created,
from the face of the earth.'" 17 Obviously, the generation of Noah
departed extremely far from God, passing beyond any divine patience
and forgiveness. That generation reached the point of "no return."
Theologically speaking, such a stage of extreme rebellion against God
is called "sin against the Holy Spirit." This is the third great
implication regarding man.

Yet even in those times men of faith continued to worship God, to
walk with God, 18 to involve God more and more in their lives, and to
obey Him. 19 Others were more and more preoccupied with and interested
in building a world without God, a world according to their ambitions
and fancies. It is so sad to see only eight people from an entire
generation saved. 20 But much more sadness fills our hearts when we
read that just after the flood the descendants of those eight alienated
again from God. To their alienation idolatry was added. A world of
idolatry originated in a forgetting of God, which actually is the
worship of no gods, as Kaufmann points out in his work:

The idea of man's rebelliousness, by which Genesis explains
the origins of the human condition, is a fundamental idea of
biblical literature and of Israel's religion in general. One
might call the Bible a chronicle of human rebellion. The history
of Israel, from beginning to end, is motivated by defiance of
God. The idolatrous world trusts in its strength and wisdom,
and ignores God. Out of this idea the prophets were to create
their vision of a last judgment, when human rebelliousness
would come to an end. 23
Conclusions

The story of man's fall, in all its details, proves itself entirely significant in making us understand the dynamics of apostasy through the dynamics of sin. First, it displays all the factors man was endowed with in order to establish a right relationship with God: intelligence, knowledge of good, faith, sense of dependence on God, and freedom of will. Then, too, the narrative also depicts how sin took place due to a willful deviation from God's known will. Sin is shown as a conflict between man's will and God's will.

Translated in terms of attitudes and behavior, which indirectly explain it as an act of rebellion, sin could never occur without man's capacity to freely exercise his will. Yet, while sin is an act of rebellion against God, apostasy is a continuing attitude which exhibits the same spirit so specific to sin. But apostasy is not a "dead-end street," as the apostate can always choose to return to God and ask forgiveness. It is all a matter of free will.

The first example, the story of man's fall, brings out two theological concepts--man's freedom of will, and sin--which are to be further discussed in Chapter Three.

Hebrews: Warning Against Apostasy

The second apostate event selected to be discussed in this thesis is from the New Testament narrative. It is contained in the letter to Hebrews, chapters 5:11-14, and 6:1-10. It represents a case of apostasy from the Christian belief and life in terms drawn from the ancient apostasy of God's people of Israel in the wilderness.
Historical Background

Just as little is known about the author of this epistle, so little is known about who were the receivers. Even though the authorship and the receivers are undetermined, from the content of the epistle, some information in it appears certain.

Evidently a persecution had stricken that Christian-Hebrew community to whom the letter was sent, but it was not what could happen—"to resist unto blood." Scorn, calumny, imprisonment, and the confiscation of their goods, were their lot.

In A.D. 63, the high priest Anania and the Sadducees banished the Jewish-Christian congregation from meeting at the Temple, and from all its privileges. Thus those Christians were treated as apostates. They were even cut off from the outer court of the Gentiles, being compelled to go "outside the camp" to accept the same treatment as their Master suffered. In those times they had to choose between standing steadfast in spite of all fearful persecution in order to save their souls, or to "draw back unto perdition."

In order to strengthen their spiritual endurance, the author reminded them of the "cloud" of ancient witnesses who, "through faith... sought a better country." They were told to remember Jesus, who endured the cross and despised the shame. Even though He was Son and remained sinless and faithful to God, His Father, He was not exempted from suffering. It was as if the author intended to assure them that God had only one Son without sin, but no sons without suffering.

From the content of the entire letter, another trial may be detected among those Christians, ready to undermine the faith of that believing community. Now the threat was of a different nature—"not
physical, but spiritual; not from outside the Church, but from inside. They were tempted to come to a halt in their spiritual progress, to a break, if not indeed a slipping back. Their hearts gradually became full of doubt and unrest. The redemptive Person and work of Christ were questioned, as was the content of their faith. For many it became deserted by its hope, joy, horizon and attractiveness. Their faith became like a ghost town. They had lost Jesus from their sight. Cut off from their Jewish spiritual heritage, and not totally rooted and experienced in the new religion, they came to feel that this new religion was somehow inferior to the long-established religion of their ancestors. They started to think that their old religion had the seal of God, given directly by God on Sinai, ministered by angels, performed by God's faithful servant, Moses. It was a faith which proved many times to be in direct touch with heaven by the ministry of priests. It had a visible altar and sacrifices. To all these was added their vision of themselves. They used to see themselves as a "chosen nation," and because of this, having a clear priority in their relationship with God over all other nations.31

But now—sad thing—they are members of a supra-national Church where "there is no Jew, nor Greek."32 Hurt in their ethnocentric feelings, discouraged, they were feeding their hearts with thoughts tending toward decline. From the tenor of the entire letter it becomes evident that the salvation and hope of their receivers were in peril.

At this point of deep discouragement and loss of vision, where the author finds his readers, he starts to awake them to their danger of returning to the shadows of their old-time religion. The writer tries to help them to see the superiority of the new covenant over
the old; to change their faded hope for a "better" one; to set out the sufficiency of the Christian Gospel; to make Christ more real and bring Him closer to them; to show them the privilege of living not in the shadow of their faith, but in the "substance" of it.

The writer wants to urge his readers to see that in Jesus Christ they actually have everything they need: God, Savior, Sacrifice, High Priest, Mediator, Author and Perfecter of their faith, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep. He urges them to see the benefits of the "better things of the New Era, namely, a better hope . . . testament . . . set of promises . . . sacrifice . . . inheritance . . . country."

Reading this letter raised a natural question which was to remain, stirring up the minds of those bewildered Christians: "With such a perfect Saviour and salvation, is it not a folly to step down in doubt, unbelief, and discouragement?" Normally, having such "better things" the Hebrews should have gone ahead triumphing, stepping over any persecution and spiritual failure. But contrary to God's expectations, they were in a deplorable state, just on the threshold of their apostasy.

Two Steps Toward Apostasy

Immatu...
is full of meaning. This could mean "slow moving in mind," "torpid in understanding," "witless," and/or "senseless." This last expression can be used for the numbed limbs of an animal which is ill. It can be used for a person who has the imperceptive and lethargic nature of a stone.42

Why and how did they become so? In times past they heard clearly, witnessed their hope joyfully, and had been entirely determined to suffer for Christ. But their deliberate rejection of the known truth led them to lose that capacity to comprehend those things "hard to be uttered."

Consequently they became unskilled in sustaining themselves even by the other "things" less "hard." They had fallen in a sort of spiritual inertness, their perceptions becoming blunted, their vision regarding the certainty of God's salvation and promises blurring, as those "many things to be uttered" were asking for a sharp mind, since they had to be "spiritually discerned."43

Although the receivers of this letter became "dull of hearing" for the "many things to be uttered," as a strange "compensation," they became experts in matters like "washings," "laying on hands," "resurrection of the dead," and "eternal judgment."44 The time had come for them to realize their state and engross their minds with the "words of righteousness," with those teachings which dealt with the one source of righteousness, and the means by which man is enabled to be made partaker of it.45 The word "righteousness," along with the teachings about repentance, faith, and forgiveness of sins, upon which was based the doctrine of Christ's priestly work, should become their "strong meat,"46 enabling them to become teachers of others. But instead of
this, as the author of the epistle said to them, they needed to be
taught again "the first principle of the oracles of God."47 They were
like little children incapable of eating "strong meat," only drinking
"milk, . . . unskillful in the word of righteousness."48

Spiritual babyhood is natural and beautiful directly after
conversion (1 Pet. 2:1,2), but just as it would be in things
physical if a person's development was arrested, and he con-
tinued a babe in body and mind for several years, so it is in
things spiritual--the spiritual charm of a babe in Christ
becomes the very opposite of beautiful if the believer remains
a "babe" for years.49

"But strong meat belongs to them that are full of age, even those
who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good
and evil."50 One of the features which makes distinction between maturity
and immaturity is the capacity of spiritual perception and skill in
spiritual discernment. Here the author places, face to face, two ages
and two kinds of food: "babies," "full of age," "milk," and "strong
meat." If the "milk" of God's Word is put in contrast with the "strong
meat," it does not suggest that the Gospel first preached to them was
different from the "hard things to be uttered." But those "babe-
Christians" wanted "milk" because they became "unskillful" to "taste"
different deep subjects. They ought to be teachers. But the outcome
of their regressing childhood was not only an incapacity to teach
others, but it was also a "dullness of hearing." Formerly they were
hungry and thirsty after righteousness, impressed by the importance of
heavenly things, learning easily and feeling delight in the knowledge
of Jesus. We ask again, "Why and how did they become senseless?" The
sad answer is this: their ignorance. Using their spiritual senses
less and less, their minds had lost the capacity to comprehend the
things of God, even the "first principles of the oracles of God." Their
Christian knowledge became inadequate because of their ignorance. In the last instance, a willful ignorance is sin. When one, by a deliberate choice, takes the decision to reject the call of going further in searching and accepting new truth, or living the truth already known, that ignorance appears to be a clear defect of will.

Worldly spirit. The next occasion in which the Hebrews regressed in their Christian understanding may also be found among themselves. They had drifted back in their hearts, and probably in their Christian practical life, too, to the old materialistic Jewish view of life. It is no wonder that their intellect became less and less able to comprehend the spiritual things of God. Their minds had silently become more attracted by the pomp and show of their Temple rituals, and their old dreams of national glory and rulership over all other nations negatively affected their capacity to comprehend the spiritual truth of their heavenly calling and revelation. Living most preoccupied by the material aspects of the ordinary life, their way of thinking made them unfit to acquire more spiritual knowledge. Thus they slipped back into a worldly kind of perception, less familiar with the disclosure of the unseen world, with its objects of faith: a Savior and High Priest, angels, a better sacrifice, a heavenly Temple and altar, a better country, etc.

Becoming "dull of hearing" because of a willful and continued ignorance, growing unfamiliar with objects of spiritual contemplation, but too familiar and too busy with seen and temporal things, the readers of the epistle faced the peril of falling away from Christ, and that impossibility of restoring their faith unto repentance.51
A Solemn Warning

To the readers of the epistle, standing on the perilous threshold of apostasy and their abandonment by God, the writer addresses a striking admonition and warning:

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame.

Actually, this letter is full of repeated warnings against the danger of falling away into apostasy, expressed in different ways. They are warnings against carelessness regarding their salvation in Christ; an evil and unbelieving heart, deceived by sin and lack of confidence in Christ unto the end; disobedience of the Holy Spirit; deliberate sinning even after receiving the knowledge of the truth; abandonment of the Christian struggle; rejection of heavenly warnings; and an acceptance of erroneous teachings. But none of the warnings mentioned above sound as solemn and impressive as that in chapter 6:4-6, which says their spiritual condition was critical. They were immature and unfruitful, and they could not remain for long in that standstill in the faith they professed. They needed to advance both in the mastery of truth and in the progress of their practical life to its fullness and perfection. If they did not go forward, their weaknesses would increase, and what little knowledge they had would decrease and disappear.

The believer who ceases to grow will cease to live. As in the physical life, similarly in the religious life--there is no place for stagnation. Where it happens, the end is death. There must be a
change for the better, or everything will be lost. "Therefore," says the author of this epistle, "leaving the principle of the doctrine of Christ, let us go unto perfection." 

Unless there is progress toward the fullness of a Christian life, there will soon be apostasy from Christ altogether. If they drifted more and more to their former state, they would undoubtedly sink into irreparable ruin, placing themselves beyond all hope of restoration, for "it is impossible . . . to renew them again unto repentance."

What a climax! There is no wonder that many a Christian reading this passage trembled in his heart. This warning appears in the Bible as stern and awful, and solemn as ancient Mount Sinai where the Lord descended in fire, storm clouds, thunder and lights, and a heavenly voice proclaimed His presence. This warning was to give to the readers of all times the same vision of a holy God, "that fear of God may be upon us, and that we sin not."

Who Are the Apostates?

In this warning, six aspects are implied in the spiritual experience of those who are "impossible to restore again." These aspects define who are the apostates.

Those who once professed repentance. The repentance may properly be called the foundation of God's work in the soul of man, because by it we forsake the sin and turn to God to find mercy. It is that which "leads to salvation and brings no regret." As a memorable event on our road to heaven, it is once for all. Also, repentance is a constant process. As in the old times there was a daily, unceasing
sacrifice offered at the Temple—a symbol of the divine provision for man's constant repentance and assurance of God's constant forgiveness, now in the New Testament times, Jesus Christ stands as our unceasing Sacrifice and Mediator before God. In regard to this provision comes the ardent appeal of the apostle John:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have One who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, if we confess our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.63

Daily sins and shortcomings make repentance and forgiveness a daily need. By God's grace the former ungodly life is left behind, repentant at the starting point of his way to God, and then, day by day, by repentance, he moves on that way which leads unto perfection and holiness.

Those who have once been enlightened. To be enlightened means to have the knowledge of the salvific truth. As the Bible says, "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ. . . . For God said, 'let light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.'"64

Without a divine illumination there is no hope in the human capacities and efforts to see, accept, and transfer the truth in the daily life. On the other hand, the grace of enlightenment burdens the heart of the saved with solemn responsibilities, "to have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather to expose them."65 They are "acts that lead to death." Thus an apostate is one who, once enlightened, and at a given moment begins and continues
to neglect or to refuse to live according to the light already received.

Those who once have tasted the heavenly gift. This heavenly gift is the "free gift of God," about which the apostle Paul speaks in the Epistle to Romans--the gift of righteousness. About this gift Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria, suggesting that she ask Him to give it to her. Those "candidates" to apostasy are not only those to whom the gift has been offered, but those also who once had a personal experience in it, who "tasted that the Lord is good."

Those who have once become partakers of the Holy Spirit. Besides Jesus, "the unspeakable gift" of God, the other extraordinary gift of heaven is the Holy Spirit. Any positive change in the spiritual life is the result of His miraculous work. Anywhere His presence is pleased and appreciated, He will work for the soul's renewal and conformity with God. Those who choose to stay continually under the guidance and the power of the Holy Spirit will prove this by a joyful obedience. The Holy Spirit in turn will bestow upon them His spiritual gifts. And more than this, the life will flourish and will be full with the fruits of the Spirit. But a continued rejection of His voice, His will and His guidance, will definitely prepare the way toward apostasy.

Those who have once tasted the good Word of God. To "taste" means to have a personal experience in the promises of God which are "exceeding, great and precious promises." They can comfort the troubled heart, give assurance of His love and mercy, and strengthen
and uplift the spiritual life. To taste the Word of God means to entertain daily the spiritual life using the "manna" of His Word.

Those who have once tasted the powers of the age to come. This means that they once possessed the dynamic evidence of the activity of the Holy Spirit within themselves, probably manifested by miraculous facts or providences in their lives. These manifestations were among them like testimonies to the fact that the age to come had already come upon them, that the Kingdom of God was upon them. \(^73\) The conquest and the victory over sin in their lives gave them the possibility to pre-taste and pre-enjoy the genuine experience of the power of the age to come.

Taking a look at those aspects presented above (which are implied in any healthy spiritual life) it is easy to realize that the apostates are not those Christians whose lives had not been a reality. They had not been hypocrites or self-deceivers. If their religious experience had been a deception it would be impossible for them to fall away since they never would have truly been followers of Christ. If the writer had regarded them as being false believers, he would not need to tell them of the danger to which they were exposing themselves, nor would he need to urge them to "go on unto perfection."

But they were once true Christians. Now, in spite of such a plenitude of gifts they received, they had become careless and indolent to all of them. The Gospel once clearly seen and dearly received and tasted by them, now became like a "sealed book." \(^74\) Darkness, doubt, inertness, sluggishness, and consequently a lack in the manifested power of God among them, was the tragic picture of their hearts. What
a difference between the profession of their mouths and their outward appearance! What a dreadful possibility! The work of God which once took place in the life of a Christian does not exclude the possibility that in some way one can have a rebellious heart. Unless a change toward maturity occurs, any Christian, and even more so an apostate, could reach that "point of no return."

"He that is not with Me is against Me," said Jesus. Similarly for the Hebrews to whom the letter was written, there was no choice. Either they must go on to perfection, to fix again their eyes on Jesus—"the Author and the Perfecter of faith, and their heavenly Priest"—and to a mature Christian life, or fall back into a willful and conscious enmity against Jesus.

A Terrible Perspective

According to what the writer asserted in chapter 6:6, "it is impossible to renew them again into repentance." Evidently the reference is made to those who, despite the fact that for a time they have enjoyed the abundant and valuable gifts of God and experienced a good start in their Christian life, they "have fallen away."

There are here some questions to be asked: To what particular sin is that "impossibility" of renewal in an apostate due? Is there a certain sin, a hideous transgression of God's Law for which the writer saw no divine grace offered? What sort of sin is "impossible" for God to forgive, and why? Is this passage an open theological discussion about the sin against the Holy Spirit, as many Biblical interpreters used to see it?

From the verses following verse 6, the conclusion becomes evident
that the writer, as any good pastor today, wanting to warn his congregation against indolence and lack of progress in their lives, tries to call his readers' attention to that terrible perspective of being "cursed" and "burned" if they will not awake and change the course of their lives in order to live the faith.

They were on the verge of apostasy. But apostasy is not an end in itself. From this state they can either lift up their hearts, become enlightened again, and refresh their Christian experience, or lose all the access to God's grace, being rejected forever, for the simple reason that the divine grace was made inoperative by a continual rejection on the part of man's will. There is no reference here to an ordinary sin, or a specific one, simply because God can accept and forgive any sin. But refusing God's grace to work a new life, a fruitful life, finally becomes a sin against the Holy Spirit. This sin is committed not simply by ignorance. It is rather a continuance in sin, committed in spite of all the knowledge, and even in spite of some experience of God's truth.

When the writer of the letter to Hebrews talks about an impossibility of renewal for a case like this, that impossibility is not dependent on God's inability or unwillingness to forgive again and renew the life of an apostate. It depends rather on man's attitude of attachment to his sin and his refusal to cut off any connection with it. Actually, his real sin is a willful, constant living against the Light.

What remains a basic feature in each case of apostasy, starting with that dramatic case in the Garden of Eden and ending with the last
man remaining unsaved outside the golden gates of the heavenly city, is the principle which operates in all apostasies, that of a willful and constant rebellion against God. It is the attitude of gradual rejection of all the rays of His truth and will, until the mind of man becomes incapable to sense and to accept the light. Finally, it is the attitude of a deliberate alienation from God, ending in a life without God.

Conclusions

Besides the theological concepts of freedom of will and sin drawn from the previous example, the Epistle to Hebrews depicts the dynamics of apostasy and adds a new concept—that of sin against the Holy Spirit—as an end-result of apostasy. Basically, apostasy follows the same pattern as sin, based on the same spirit of disobedience and rejection of God's will and a false interpretation of God's character, truth, or ways of working. At its very root, apostasy displays the same feelings of dissatisfaction, anxiety, and wounded pride which we found in the Genesis example.

The only element which creates a difference between sin and apostasy is the time element combined with perseverance in sin. Sin appears to be an event, an occurrence, while apostasy appears to be a sinful process, not an end in itself.

As a process, apostasy could be stopped or could be nurtured further. It could be repented for and forgiven, or it could proceed in bringing one further apart from God until reaching the point of no return. Everything depends on what man chooses or refuses to do.
These three theological issues of freedom of will, sin, and sin against the Holy Spirit, which are implied in the sinful process of apostasy, are to be treated in the next chapter.
Chapter III

THEOLOGICAL APPROACH

As it was seen in the previous chapter, both the typical apostasy of the first human beings, and the one about the Christians to whom the letter to Hebrews was addressed, raised up certain theological questions regarding man's freedom of will, sin, and sin against the Holy Spirit. It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss briefly each of these three crucial issues, pointing out their place in the experience of apostasy.

Man and the Freedom of Will

Freedom is the first necessary element by which man realizes himself in any aspect of his life. Any man has an actual freedom of choice in a large spectrum of decisions. That is his freedom to exercise his will, freedom to determine his own choice, to be originating cause of his own act, or to move his life in any direction he chooses. The "instrument" through which man expresses his freedom is his will. It is, according to the outstanding definition of one of the best religious commentators, Ellen G. White,

the governing power in the nature of man, bringing all the other faculties under its way. The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power which works in the children of men unto obedience to God or unto disobedience.
Human Will--A Divine Endowment

Human existence finds its origin and reason in God as its Creator. The Bible never speaks of man himself as an isolated being, but always in terms of his relationship to God, being this: creation, fall, salvation, walking with God, joy, sorrow, repentance, forgiveness, death, resurrection, and glorification.

Having been created as a body, soul and spirit, these features should be seen not as disparate segments of man's life, but rather they may be used together to describe personal wholeness. They give man perfect personality.

Besides this personality, the next endowment given to man is the "image and likeness of God"--a resemblance featured in the immaterial aspect of man's nature. The implications of this divine gift are too profound to be entirely understood and measured by us. Furthermore, due to this similitude to God, man holds a personality, a dignity, and a superior place among other creatures. The "image of God" comprises the meaning of those features in the Divine Being, of which man is a copy.

One of those elements which is properly ascribed to God is that of spiritual existence. God is called "Father of the Spirit," indicating that the spiritual realm of our life stands in a closer relation to God than the corporal realm. Being created in God's image, it was also recognized that man has an intellect flowing from God, and corresponding to something in God.

Another point of analogy between the divine and the human being is that of self-consciousness about our status before God, as "the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."
Related with this, the last important term of spiritual similitude with God is that of freedom of will. Combined together, these four features—personality, intellect, self-consciousness, and freedom of will—embody in the main respects that "image of God."

Being created at the end of the material creation, the human existence must be understood as a part of the physical nature, subjected and dependent on its laws. And being created according to the "image of God," as a spiritual being man has the capacity of reason, feeling, and free will, and of changing his blind submission into a willful adhesion and intelligent service to God. God is the supreme source of man's freedom. Yet, although freedom is interpreted as being a spirit of autonomy, independence, or arbitrary power, it is truly that power by which a man determines himself whether and how he shall act and put his energy into action. Viewed from a practical angle, human life is a constant mixture of inner desires, affections, and decisions of conscience, blended in all possible combinations. Many other stimuli come from the surrounding sides of life, causing man to be faced with that constant need to make decisions and to apply them to his or other people's lives.

Human Will Under No Law of Cause and Effect

When God created man, his provision was that only a part of man's being was to be governed by the same laws which rule the material world. In this respect, man's physical nature, his intellectual and sensitive life, all were subject to the great law of cause and effect. But that part by which his personal decisions are called into existence—the will—was not subject to the same law. In fact, being a constituent of
man's personality, the will should stay as God created it—above any causal law, above any coercion. The principle by which God created human will to work is that of self-determination.\textsuperscript{10}

Concerning self-determination, as man's freedom of will was translated in terms of man's relation to God, many theologians have gone too far, insisting that man's freedom of will implies (perhaps partially) a limitation of God's power. The objection is that a so-called "limitation," in its turn, raises up the position of creatures so that man becomes the first cause as God Himself, which is not true. Other Arminian theologians,\textsuperscript{11} borrowing the Pelagian view,\textsuperscript{12} regard freedom as an inalienable element of human existence and personality, while Calvinists,\textsuperscript{13} stepping on the same footprints as the Augustinians,\textsuperscript{14} restrict the presence of freedom to only the time before the fall of man.

Surveying the past centuries of theology on this matter, one could discover the main streams of thought developed in this respect, as follows: (1) fatalism, which sees the universe as having a fixed order, with which causes have nothing to do. Evidently, in this system there is no place for an acting human will; (2) predestinarianism, which holds that all that happens is foreknown and foreordained by God. This view abuses the confidence of man in the wisdom of God, teaching man that high above his reasons and plans there are the unchangeable reasons and plans which have to be and will be fulfilled. Even this view seems to offer some place for man's freedom; it is only to the direction to accept God's will in a blind way; and (3) determinism, which sustains the idea that all the acts of man's will are not free because they are deeply, and all the time, determined by a large variety of influences, forces,
and motives (as antecedents), which act upon the mind and the character of the actor. Thus his actions are not really the outcome of his free choice. As it may be expected, nothing in this view admits the free exercise of man's will because for a determinist there is no such thing as "free will."

In fact, all these three streams of thought, which deny the presence of free will, and others which are not mentioned here, could be better reduced to only one, namely "determinism." This term describes the nature of human freedom subjected to different causes, consequently making even a free act the result of a determined will. According to the opposite side, any free act is the product of a will which determines itself without any external cause because, as Dr. Baldwin underlined, "any regulation of circumstances that would cause an event, would force that event." Then taking the classical example from Eden, he continued:

Satan regulated the circumstances surrounding the temptation of Eve, but not in such a way as to cause Eve to sin. It has been shown that there is no cause for the negative function of the will. Satan merely helped to make Eve's sin possible. If making sin possible is causing sin, then God caused sin by making Lucifer and man free moral agents. If Satan could have regulated circumstances in such a way that Eve would have been forced to sin, he would have caused her to sin. He could not do this. . . . Neither does God force or cause the will to choose to obey. He regulates circumstances to win and to draw men to Himself. But the will is not forced.15

From this rationale it becomes evident that there is no personal or impersonal force in the universe which is allowed to coerce the will of man in any way, positively or negatively. It must be free in order to be responsible for its actions.
Human Freedom of Will Versus the Foreknowledge of God

Consequently, as discussed above, if God preserved man as a free agent and his acts--moral or immoral--remain unconstrained by external causes, they are totally accounted to man, and then unpredictable in the sight of God and others if they spring from a free will. Actually, the issue of free will which raised the controversy between determinism and indeterminism, is now accountable for a deeper conflict, that given by the relation between human freedom and the sovereignty of God's foreknowledge.

According to one mode of thinking, God knows the future and, moreover, His knowledge on this matter is infallible. According to this view, God is always right about what will happen simply because, due to His supernatural attribute of foreknowledge, He cannot be wrong. On the other hand, if God foresees that something will happen in one's life, supposing that one would like to refuse that act fore-known by God, he has no chance to avoid it. Or, taking a Biblical event, the Flood, the Bible says about God that He "saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . . and it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart."16 These words seem to imply that, contrary to the traditional belief of divine foreknowledge, He had not foreknown the wickedness of that generation. What other reason could we find for His grievance if He foreknew that sad occurrence? Why did He create man in spite of the regrettable perspective which He foresaw on the horizon? On what reasons are His later regrets founded if that event was inevitable?

Some theologians have tried to harmonize both concepts asserting
that God foreknows only those acts which He knows man will perform freely. For instance, if in God's foreknowledge I am seen as buying a car at 10:00 a.m. the next day, there is no reason to assert that my will be free since I don't have the freedom to avoid that previewed "appointment," or to perform it sooner or later than 10:00 a.m. In this respect, Pannenberg comments, "for the key problem of divine foreknowledge . . . there is an antimony in the attitude adopted by traditional Christian theism to human freedom."  

If a theology faithful to freedom must be promoted, Dr. Rice concludes that it must be built on the base of man's personality and indeterminism, and must stand on the doctrine of an open future and of a God who is open to the future. As he argues, if God infallibly knows the future, obviously that future must not be different from what God knows it to be. This makes the future not really open, and the human freedom is not really freedom.  

The open view of God presupposes an open view of reality itself, in which the concept of time, novelty, and freedom are essential. . . . The openness of God thus denotes God's reception of new experiences.  

If God is so open to the future that He keeps pace with our daily progress to His kingdom, with all its bad and good experiences, then there is more hope for grace, forgiveness, and comfort with such a God, even for an apostate.  

**Limits to Freedom of Will**  

All through history man's experience has proved that he is free from any external compulsions, yet his freedom of will is actually limited in at least two ways. Life is full of many circumstances
which cannot be controlled by our own will. Thus the sphere of our will is narrower in a sense than that of life. For example, man, in spite of how interested and anxious he may be to determine his own decisions, has no choice in many things—the name of his parents, his nationality, the color of his eyes, his inherited features of character, his circumstances in childhood, and so on. Man is also unable to determine, through his will, the behavior of others toward him. All these things, far above man's desire and capacity to choose, are the daily conditions of our human life. They tend to and are able to influence, to modify, to limit, or to control the extent of both man's freedom to perform and his responsibility. Yet man still remains the ultimate actor of his own free choices.

There is another limit to man's freedom of will, set by the imbalance in powers which work the dictates of his own will. As it is known, every man possesses a will which manifests itself in two different aspects—choosing and performing.

The ideal freedom of choice can exist only in the presence of a morally balanced life, when man's will chooses and performs only what is right, when all compartments of his life are in complete harmony with each other. Then one could say that he reached the ideal of his freedom. On the contrary, though our daily experiences prove that oftentimes, despite the light we have, despite our right choices, unholy thoughts and passions, bad habits, and desires too strong to overcome try to gain control of our capacity to perform. The truth is that between our will's powers to choose and to perform there is a sad discrepancy which could result one day in creating a close resemblance to the "divided house" of Jesus' parables.20
In this respect, regarding the limits which result from our unbalanced freedom to choose, the personal experience of the apostle Paul is cogent. It proves that man is free in his power to choose, but not equally free in his power to perform what he has chosen. This discrepancy is noticeable especially in the life of those who, for a large number of years, have lived a life of sin. Doing wrong, they gradually increased their compulsive and reflexive behavior, diminishing at the same time their capacity to perform according to the right choices of their will. As they try to do their best, they find out, as did the apostle Paul, that they are not able to do exactly the things they want and choose to do.

Then, too, this could be the unfortunate experience of a believer on his road to apostasy. When pet sins, unruly sentiments, or bad habits are tolerated and nurtured for a long time, their first effect is that of weakening the believer's moral sensibility, and then his will power to perform its right dictates. Behaving again and again against his best knowledge and decisions about right and wrong, that believer will finally undoubtedly entangle his will to do right as he becomes more limited, more defeated, and finally even enslaved in the territory of his own life.

Enslaved, but still free to choose a change toward the positive side of God's will. Defeated, but free to start again the good fight. Limited, but still sovereign in his decisions. If such a man, damaged and limited in his will to perform, is interested in a new inbreathing of holy spiritual energies in order to bring his life to equilibrium with his will to choose good, by the grace of God he can experience repentance, forgiveness, and a new beginning.
Man and Sin

The greatest risk which God Himself assumed in creating man with freedom of will and an open future was the risk of old sin—a risk equal to Golgotha. Could God have avoided all the terrible and painful and costly experiences of sin both for Him and for mankind? Yes, He could have. He could have created a being as perfect and manageable as a machine. Yet when He chose to create a free and then morally immature being, He had accepted the possibility that one of His intelligent creatures might choose sin. According to our sense of liberty, security, and care, such a decision may appear very unusual and unreasonable. But a free will had no other chance. A God who enjoys freedom could do nothing against man's freedom of will and against the appearance of sin. But what is sin?

The Concept of Sin

Sin is a theological concept designating behavioral or only mental defection from the will of God. Up to this point the history of theology has provided different theories and systems of thoughts which, although not the main object of this section, are mentioned briefly.

One of these, rooted in Greek philosophy and elaborated upon and expressed in a dualistic form, holds that in a man two principles always exist—those of good and evil, the first depending on the soul and the second depending on the body. This theory renders all the ethical and moral charges of sin meaningless, as being independent of human will.

Furthermore, there is another view which sees sin as a misfortune,
as a necessary evil. Yet according to Leibnitz, the promoter of this concept, the present world is the best possible one. This theory of sin simply releases the human mind from any sense of guilt and all the moral responsibility implied by sin is thus annulled. Another theory, that of Spinoza, declares sin as being an illusion, as are man's knowledge, his experience, and his sense of conscience. An easy conclusion comes from it. If sin is an illusion, then notions like character, moral conduct, etc., are meaningless because, simply, sin is an illusion. Yet according to another theory proposed by Schleiermacher, sin does not have an objective existence. It has only a subjective representation in man's conscience, provoked and proportioned according to the individual's sense of God. If there were people without a real and absolute sense of God, the first who would be responsible for man's sin is only God. Moreover, another view holds that sin is determined by man's relation to the expressed plan of God to establish His kingdom. Depending on man's knowledge regarding this fact, his evil may or may not be pardonable. 23

But the Bible defines sin in totally different terms. "Whosoever commits sin, transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law." 24 Sin could properly and should always be defined in terms of man's reaction to God and to His will and character, essentially expressed in His moral law of the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, as expressed in terms of human freedom, sin is essentially a willful breaking away from God, a conscious opposition to God, by an intentional transgression of His law. Or as Schoonenberg points out,

It is the act by which man chooses his eternal attitude, thus definitely and irrevocably deciding his direction. This is, in the fullest sense of the word, the act of love unto life or sin
unto death. During this life we may grow in the direction of such a decision through an increasing interiorization and ever-deeper living from within. . . . Thus we discover in the domain of our will the same gradation in our moral-religious activity which we met in the domain of knowledge.25

Fundamentally, the Bible points to sin as a moral evil. Because man is a moral creature, he has implanted in his conscience the knowledge of sin,26 and that committing of sin is a moral evil.27 Therefore sin is not a sort of unexpected calamity or misfortune that came upon man, but an evil act which man has consciously chosen. It is not simply a "weakness," a "shortcoming," an "imperfection," or a "limitation" of man's nature, nor is it a "subjective" state of man's own mind.

Sin is a deliberate choice to disobey the known will of God. It requires one's full responsibility toward his acts. As Paul Tillich underlined, "sin is a matter of freedom, responsibility, and personal guilt."28

Contrary to this, there are many acts of evident disharmony with God's norms of good which cannot be yet considered as being sins, even though they are sinful. For example, there are children of three to four years of age who lie, steal, or curse. Indisputably, their acts are wrong, or even sinful, but they are not sins. They do not involve all the moral responsibility of those children since they do not yet comprehend the full significance of their wrong actions.

Perhaps a clear example of sinful acts on which man does not have full responsibility and for which he cannot be charged as a sinner, is that of the apostle Paul's past. In this respect his confession regarding his unrecommendable past as persecutor of the Church is very conclusive. To this sinful experience he testifies in these words:
I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. . . . I put many of the saints in prison, and they were put to death. I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to execute them. 29

And now here is the explanation of his past:

Even as I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 30

Evidently the apostle acted not completely aware of the origin of his acts. It was ignorance, unbelief. Sometimes the source of many people's sinful acts could be a compulsive behavior, a lack of spiritual education, immaturity, or even sincere opposition to truth. Are they accountable as sins before God? Inasmuch as they are not committed as deliberate transgressions of God's will, they are not sins, even though they are sinful acts.

If sin should always be defined as a "lack of conformity to the "Law of God," it means that in the content of the divine law there is something essential that defines the nature of sin and opposes its character. Both the Old and the New Testaments point out the principal demand of the law, namely "love." That means that sin is not only a problem of a wrong moral attitude toward law and conduct, but a problem of affection also. The spiritual substance of each moral commandment is love. 31 For this reason the spiritual substance of sin is separation from God, hatred of God, opposition and rejection of God. "Man reaches a decision about God. Sin is voluntarily breaking of the covenant with Him, whereas the good actions are a free accepting of it." 32 Between a good and an evil act, the Bible does not see any compromising transaction, neutral state, or bridge; only hate or love. 33
Sin is Placing the Self-Will Above God

A rightful attitude toward life consists of a two-fold love toward God and man. This will be the ultimate life purpose of a healthy spiritual man. Toward God a man like this will be found in a continual state of trust, adoration, and obedience, and toward men he will be gentle, understanding, forgiving, and helpful. His self will never try to take the place of God, nor ever seek to profit against his fellows.

Contrary to this position, sin uses the self will as the ultimate end of each action. It tries to install the self above God and His claims of love and duty. This is the very first root of sin in the universe. Self will rejects both forms of love (toward God and man) because in its core sin consists of selfishness.

A man's continuance in a sinful atmosphere will misdirect him, will imprint on his own character of sin, and finally ruin him morally. At last his will to perform, like the will of those possessed of demons, will belong to the sin realm only. Its final stage will be that of slavery to sin.

But is there any good news for those who have fallen in this deplorable state? Yes, indeed, says the Bible. "But thanks be to God that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed." These words emphasize the fact that even in a wicked, sinful life, the freedom to choose faith and restoration is still present. The same great truth is brought out by following inspired commentary:

Many a man tampers with evil, thinking that he can break away at pleasure; but he is lured on and on, until he finds himself controlled by a will stronger than his own. Yet his condition
is not hopeless. God does not control our minds without our consent; but every man is free to choose what power he will have to rule over him. None have fallen so low, none are so vile, but that they may find deliverance in Christ.... Those who consent to enter into covenant with God are not left to the power of Satan or to the infirmity of their own nature.

This is the actual state of an apostate. He acts in a rebellious way against God's government and His standards, against His truth or procedures, and against his fellows, placing his will above God's will, until he finds himself a slave of sin. But by this preserved power to choose, man can reverse the balance from defeat to victory "through Him who loved us."

The Effects of Sin

The first effect of sin is that, accepted in man's life by exercise of his free will, evil becomes established in the character, becoming in its turn an ill source of influence to the will. The constant danger of practicing sin consists in the fact that repeated sinful deeds gradually establish sinful habits. The sinful habits in turn will create a pattern for a sinful mind, for a sinful will, and finally for a sinful life. Speaking in medical terms, what seemed at the beginning to be just a symptom of one organ, remaining untreated, could gradually become an illness of the whole body.

Furthermore, sin has a pronounced tendency to perpetuate and disseminate itself, but individually and collectively, as one sin attracts another. For instance, Eve tasted the forbidden fruit and then, the Bible says, "she gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat."

Moreover, one man imitates another and as Jesus said, "a blind
man leads a blind man."42 Thus in the course of time, a single sin becomes a collective sinfulness. As an example, the idolatrous act of Jeroboam, the rebellious servant of Solomon for many years after his reign, became for Israel and Judah a spring of idolatry and a dark point of reference in their history.43

Even though a sin might be eradicated in the life of its generator, the collective consequences of a misdeed are likely to be prolonged in the life of a nation or church, perhaps for many generations. For this reason a special consideration must be given to the further effects of sin in the life of a collectivity.

Lastly, the most dangerous effect of sin, as was mentioned before in this chapter, is that wherever it persists, it mortifies the spiritual sensibilities of man, weakens the will's capacity to perform and undermines continually the right and holy desires of the soul. In this respect the cases of Judah, King Herod, Festus, or Demas are very conclusive. Besides the sinner's alienation from God and along with that state of latter rejection of God, there always follows a state of disruption and demoralization. This is the marginal experience of the apostate on the very edge of his experience, the moment when his recovery has the best chance. But repeated and constant refusals to respond in a positive way to the Holy Spirit's appeals for confession and deliverance from that sin create a moral condition called "hardness of the heart"44 in the Bible.

Despite all the effects and changes in the sinner's heart, the work of sin has not come to an end yet. The real end of sin is that state which the Bible calls "sin against the Holy Spirit."
The Sin Against the Holy Spirit

What does this sin imply? Is this a sin of a definite gravity among the multitude of other sins which one commits during life, a kind of superdestructive sin? Is this sin related to a specific precept of the moral law of God, a profound violation, which consequently removes us suddenly from the grace of God? And where is the threshold of this sin beyond which there will be no chance for salvation, as most Christian believe? Yet, what does the Bible say about this sin?

Regarding this the most quoted verses belong to the synoptic Gospels. In rather different variations they contain the same admonition of Jesus given to the Pharisees as a rebuke for their malicious and conscious misinterpretation of the power of the Holy Spirit which they had seen at work through Jesus' healing ministry.

According to these verses, the sin against the Holy Spirit was an obvious perversion and denial of the facts--this antipathy against the acts of Christ by means of the Spirit and finger of God. According to K. Fitzer, quoted by G. C. Berkouwer, this sin is a "conscious and radical renunciation of the Holy Spirit and His work." Or, according to a further affirmation in the same volume, it is "a revelation of a total recalcitrance or guilty stubbornness in one's heart."

In the letter to the Hebrews, there are two other outstanding passages where the reader learns that "it is impossible" to restore again those who have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. The blessed result which God expected from them was a fruitful life. But contrary to this expectation, the ground of their spiritual life was full of "thorns
and thistles." The fate pronounced to such an outcome was divine abandonment, anathema, and finally destruction by fire.\textsuperscript{49} The sin against the Holy Spirit, as it appears in this first passage, seems to be checked not simply by attitudes toward God, but by a person's willingness to accept the work of the Holy Spirit, permitting Him to yield His fruits.\textsuperscript{50}

In the second passage of the same letter to the Hebrews, the sin against the Holy Spirit has a strong Christological address. Obviously, it is a conscious offense against Jesus Christ, an act similar to that revealed by Jews, who crucified Him. Here the meaning of this ultimate sin stands for a guilty person despite Jesus' "atoning blood."\textsuperscript{51} Yet this passage traces no difference between sinning against Christ and sinning against the Holy Spirit because, as Berkouwer notes, "it is not so much the magnitude of one's sin as the subjective disposition of one's heart."\textsuperscript{52}

The heart of man is what excludes the final possibility of salvation from this "mortal sin"\textsuperscript{53} and therefore there is no forgiveness.

Thus the sin against the Holy Spirit is not a particular sin, and bears no special reference to one of the holy precepts of the moral law of God. It is, as Calvin defined it, a bitter and a hardhearted resistance against the truth of God; or as Luther defined it, a persistent resistance against the mercy of God.\textsuperscript{54} Directing his attention to animosity against the grace of God, received by the proper office of the Holy Spirit, Berkouwer concluded his monography in this way:

We see the contours of this sin in a radical and total, blatant and willful apostasy; therefore the scripture wants us that we must flee from this sin with our lives. . . . The preaching of
the Gospel will show us that only in the rejection of God's good invitation can we possibly see that "border" from which we are constantly called forth, no matter which our offense, back into the promised land. 55

Conclusions

As a first conclusion of the issues discussed before, some ideas about God and man are worthy to be mentioned here. God made man and imprinted him with His own image. As a special feature of His image and likeness, God created and sustained man with a free will, setting it high above any law of cause and effect.

Before the first sin, God empowered man with a full capacity to choose, which implies an ability to originate free decisions and act upon them. As soon as man sinned, he destroyed his ability to perform the free decisions of his will. Thus man fell into that "slavery of sin."

Weakened by a daily servitude to sin, limited by a compulsive behavior, and inheriting all the defects of his ancestors, man seemed to be in a hopeless state. In Paul's cry, "What a wretched man I am," there was the cry of the entire humankind. What a desperate state, to have the desire to be free but to see yourself as having no power to break the chains of this slavery.

But Jesus came especially to liberate man from this slavery. He came to free man from the "law of sin and death," to take away from him the "wages of sin," and then, at the end of the time, the consequences of sin. Jesus came to give man forgiveness, a state of righteousness necessary for a new beginning, and the power to become a son of God.

As it was emphasized before, sin did not despoil man of his power
choose. It remained the privilege of every sinner to select the
direction of his own destiny—death or life, blessing or curse. This
essential truth remained illustrated so clearly in that question which
Jesus used to ask those sick people, whose illness He knew as being the
direct outcome of their sins: "Do you want to get well?" If the answer
was positive, then Jesus' command was, "Thy sins are forgiven." When
those sick sinners tried to meet Jesus, they knew that their first need
was to be healed from the disease of sin, then to be forgiven and to be
untied from their sinful past. All that Jesus looked for in their
hearts was a sincere expression, a personal desire, or a request to be
healed, no matter how weakly or awkwardly it was expressed. Only on
this basis could Jesus intervene and add to that life whatever it
lacked—the power to act, to obey, or to make a change in the course
of life. How sad it is in this respect for Jesus to have to exclaim,
"Yet you refuse to come to Me to have life." 57

Now there is no necessity to sin; there is no power to separate us
from the love of God. Then if a rational being passes today beyond that
so-called "point of no return," refusing in a willful and obstructive
manner to choose a holy life, to turn to the Biblical truth, to accept
every ray of light which God displays on his path, he is in danger of
losing, first, that purchased freedom to choose and to enjoy God, 58 and
finally, any attraction to salvation.

Whenever sin is cultivated and persevered, it empties the heart
of every element of godly life and attraction to heaven. That heart
will become influenced and attracted to "things on the earth," 59
motivated only by unholy and selfish purposes. This perseverance in
sin, in the end could be equated with sin against the Holy Spirit, with spiritual death.

When all this is regarded in terms of human freedom of will, the sin against the Holy Spirit appears to be the extreme limit of exercised freedom, the ultimate evidence that man enjoys a complete freedom of choice, to love God and man or to do the contrary. It proves that God loves and respects our free will to so great an extent that He permits even the worst use of it, permitting its perversion, and even allowing for the fall of man if man chooses to fall. Proceeding in this way, God offered us the proof that man's will does not mean impotence in the face of divine omnipotence but, rather, if man wants it so, it could mean sin, guilt, alienation, rebellion, stubbornness, and even death. Or if man chooses God and lets Him work in him, "in accordance with His pleasure and will," man can become omnipotent through his power, so that he can express with great confidence, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."  

With God there is a permanent and abundant forgiveness and desire to welcome all sinners to come back to Him. In this respect, all the Bible is full of God's appeals as they all are at the same time a divine assurance that God loves and accepts sinners. In all of the scriptures, perhaps the most reassuring verses in this respect are those from Ezekiel:

Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? says the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? . . . Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed: and make you a new heart and a new spirit: and for a while will ye die, O house of Israel. . . . But if the wicked will turn from all of his sins that he hath committed, and keep all of my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.
Based on these wonderful promises, the border of divine forgiveness seems not to be restricted by the multitude of sins, or by their abjection, but only by man's response to God's gracious call. He is surely able to give mercy, hope, salvation, and abundant life to everyone who chooses so. Truly, this is one of the most glorious promises of the Gospel, one of the wonders of God's grace.
As was seen in the first chapter, both the typical apostasy of the first human beings, and that apostasy so meaningfully addressed by the Hebrews, brought up certain theological issues regarding freedom of will, sin, and sin against the Holy Spirit, along with many questions such as: Why do some people apostatize? What are the correlates and the precipitants of such a negative experience in a believer's life? To what extent is apostasy a controllable event for a Christian, and what hope for salvation remains for one who falls from his faith? It is the purpose of this pastoral approach to examine the sources of religious defection for our times, revealed by the studies of religion by social scientists, and some empirical observations, and to find an answer to the questions above.

Dimensions of Religious Commitment

There is no doubt that apostasy, "falling from the faith," "defection," or "dropping out," is one of the most frequent and most painful dilemmas which cause the organized church of our generation to be shaken from its very foundation. The dilemma resides in the fact that although the Christian religion offers to the world at least two great benefits--real meaning for life and real fellowship--the churches, particularly the mainline churches, do not seem to be able to stir up much enthusiasm among their members. While some conservative
fundamentalist denominations seem to be flourishing, and while the charismatic movement continues to attract crowds of new adherents, the membership rolls of either the traditional or historical churches, both Protestant and Catholic, are declining more and more, and church attendance and interest have fallen dramatically. According to a recent study, over 90 percent of adult Americans were currently at least marginally involved in the life of a religious community at some point in their lives, and nearly 60 percent were once weekly attendants at worship services or religious classes. "The study of the unchurched is therefore primarily the study of church dropouts."1

For Robert Wuthnow and Glen Mellinger, the religious defection appears as going toward two foci: (1) as an apostasy from an organized religion, and (2) as an experimentation with Eastern, mystical religions.2 Yet at the same time, many people remain convinced of their traditional faith.

Stan L. Albrecht and Howard M. Bahr, who examined the patterns of defection and disaffiliation from religious experience in the Mormon Church, described those who disaffiliate as falling into two basic patterns: "One disaffiliates because one chooses to affiliate with another organization, or the disaffiliate ceases formal religious involvement altogether, and becomes a non-member."3

Combining these observations, we can note the existence of a curious mixture among the Christian churches: a religious loyalty; a trend to explore, experience, and reaffiliate with an alternative religion; and an apostasy which puts an end to any religious involvement.

A more extreme point of view is perhaps held by Charles Y. Glock
and Robert Wuthnow when they say that "the key to America's future religious course probably rests with those whom we have classified as nominally religious. . . . Their nominalism could conceivably be transformed into non-religion."  

But this is only an extreme opinion because the rest of the researchers, with few exceptions, expect a new and more profound Christian period as they interpret the present rejection of traditional beliefs. Perhaps the most optimistic view of this point is supported either by statistical figures showing the proportion of Christians in the world, or the proportion of the Western people who identify themselves with a religious denomination or who express a simple belief in God as our Creator, in Jesus as our Savior, and in the Holy Spirit as our Comforter, and who believe in miracles, in life after death, etc.

W. H. Hudson seems to be very suspicious regarding all these optimistic statistics. In his article he made some crucial observations contrary to those who prophecy a "golden epoque" for both faith and believers. Thus he first noted that many of the denominations submit reports of their membership from year to year in round numbers, and that those reports increase gradually in the same way, using round figures. His second observation was that the statistics make no provision for considering those denominations which furnish membership reports for the first time in a given year. Actually, their members have belonged to other congregations or are of the old congregation. Then he indicates that the methods of compilation and reporting contribute to inflation rather than deflation and that, too often, congregations are not so careful in maintaining accurate reports of
membership. He further indicates that many members are retained on the church rolls a long time after they have discontinued their membership, so that indeterminate proportions of individuals have been counted more than once.  

The reflection of the first indicator of membership, the financial prosperity of the church's members, expressed by their increases in investments in church buildings, in per capita donations, tithes, and offerings, started to become another indicator of the prosperous state of a church's religiosity. At the same time, the degree to which religious matters catch the attention of the mass media, or the degree to which the church is a subject of popular criticism, or involvement in the public or political arena of that nation, was taken to be an indicator of its increased degree of religiousness over the last two or three decades. In this respect perhaps the Moral Majority movement, with all its public and political ambitions, or the anti-nuclear campaigns supported by the Christian multitudes in most of the Western countries of Europe, or those campaigns against abortion and human rights, for many minds became certain signs of a religious awareness and maturity. Contrary to our modern ways of interpreting the reality of the church in the world, the history of nearly 2,000 years of Christianity proves well that whenever the church became wealthy and popular, a subject of the public's concern and interest, it also became a church accommodated to the world without a sense of its existence and mission.

Another popular indicator, regarded by many of the Western churches as proving the good spiritual state of the church today, is its capacity
to survive various drastic socio-political or economic conditions. The
most obvious case in this respect is that of the church in Communist or
pagan areas of the world. As one who escaped seven years ago from
Romania—a country behind the Iron Curtain—the writer took with him
over the borders of his native country tremendous experiences and unfor-
gettable memories of a Christianity which seems to be an inspiration to
this Western side of the world; that is, a suffering Christianity,
constantly subjected to an unequal confrontation with a totalitarian
system, a Christianity deprived of freedom of speech and the freedom
to live according to the dictates of its own conscience. It is a
Christianity brainwashed daily by impertinent atheistic propaganda,
spied upon and controlled in all its internal affairs, relations,
activities, and even in its most insignificant administrative details.
For example, it is the state that approves how many kilograms of fire-
wood a given church is allowed to burn for the winter, or to what
extent a church is allowed to be remodeled or painted. One would be
greatly surprised to find that all the money of the church stays in
the pockets of the state, and that the church has to ask the State
Department of Religious Affairs for approval for each expenditure.
But despite all the threats, fines, harassments, and dismissals of
their members from their jobs, despite all imprisonments, deportations,
and mental “treatments” in neuro-psychiatric clinics, and despite all
the incredible physical sufferings and even death, the church there
continues to survive. Furthermore, even more surprisingly, the church
has become larger and stronger, refreshing its membership with a genera-
tion of new believers who are more responsive, more prepared, and more
determined to nurture the new generation, and to install it quickly on its old barricade. Furthermore, due to the prolonged confrontation with so many adverse forces and circumstances, the church was highly stimulated and finally succeeded in developing its own system of information, nurture, defense, and resistance. It learned, along with advances in time, to modify its own strategies, to clean its ranks (whenever possible), to procure the needed religious literature, to catch the attention of the public, and to deal with all the aspects of this unfair war.

But this is only one side of the coin--only that one which creates in the mind of the Western world an idealistic image about the so-called "adaptability" of the church. In contrast with this heroic resistance and much praised "adaptability," a careful and acquainted eye could detect the other unpleasant and unrecommendable side of the coin. Too often, that so-much-applauded "adaptability" of the church must be translated into another term: "conformity." Sometimes the efforts to survive can gradually blind the awareness of the conscience as is the case with most of the religious leaders from there. All the elections for the higher positions in the church are controlled by the same Department of Religious Affairs, and in order to be elected an individual must be pre-accepted by that Department. Also, someone from the "old guard" must give verbal or written guarantees for the new candidate. From this it is very easy to understand that the elections do not represent God's will as expressed by the church body. On the contrary, they are a sad religious masquerade. Then, too, time and later events in the church, after election, prove that almost all the leaders pre-elected
by the State (in order to hold their standing) served God with divided hearts and made grave compromises which later affected the freedom and activity of the church for years. Many of the leaders, while serving with divided allegiance, have lost all their spiritual sensitivity and conscience. Under their leadership the state got more freedom to deeply intrude into the affairs and activities of the church. Sometimes what the church won in terms of approvals or benefits--to build new churches, to print censured literature, to receive small quantities of Bibles printed in the West, to operate a seminary, to receive the visits of foreign church officials, to participate in international church forums, or to allow pre-approved leaders to enroll outside the country for graduate or doctoral studies--were paid for with big sacrifices of money, liberties, or "counter-services." Corruption, mystification of elections, nurture of worldly interests, spirit of nepotism, coquetishness with the state power, and formalism are present behind that heroic face that Eastern churches display to the Western world. In fact, these are only the symptoms of the same maladies from which the whole Christian body in this world suffers, as the church stepped down from the position of a "city on a hill," "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world," and became a part of the world, if not the world itself.

Returning to the point of religiosity, it should be clear that the degree of religiosity cannot be measured simply by statistics of church affiliation, financial contributions, church attendance, indicators of popularity or adaptability, or by statistics by which people acknowledge simply a belief in God along with other too formal issues. Let
us not forget what the apostle James said in this respect: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder."  

The vitality of religiosity of an individual or a collectivity would be easier to study and understand if it were measured by other indicators. According to Glock and Stark, within all world religions there are five "universal" dimensions. They are the experimental, the ritualistic, the ideological, the intellectual, and the consequential. All these five indicators taken together give the picture of the religious commitment of a believer. According to these, religiosity must be considered as a multi-dimensional phenomenon.

First the experimental dimension recognizes the fact that when people achieve a personal knowledge of ultimate reality, feelings are involved, feelings that are an essential element of religiosity. The ritualistic dimension has to do with the specifically religious practices of worship, prayer, or participation in certain sacraments, while the ideological dimension deals with the certain set of beliefs to which a religious person is expected to adhere. The intellectual dimension tells about the necessary amount of information and knowledge which one must possess regarding the basics of his faith. Even one's belief is not expected to come from knowledge, yet there can be no believer without a minimum of knowledge of what he should believe. The consequential dimension--the last--differs from the other four as it encompasses the secular effects of religious belief, practice, experience, and knowledge of an individual. This dimension refers to the believers' relationship with the surrounding world.
Speaking about the same dimensions of religious commitment, Richard R. Clyton and James W. Gladden say the predominant factor in man's religiosity is the ideological dimension. According to the results of their factor analysis, "the crucial task in the study of religiosity is, first, to pinpoint the belief system (ideology) with which a subject identifies or toward which he reacts." The other four dimensions classified by Glock and Stark are for Clayton and Gladden simply ways of expressing the commitment strength such as, regularity of ritual participation, the erudition of religious knowledge, the affective religious experience, and the involvement in social action.

Dimensions of Religious Defection

From the different indicators used to determine the degree of one's religiosity, a natural question arises: What are the dimensions of religious defection, or apostasy? The answer seems to be easy and logical. If there are dimensions of religious involvement, there must be dimensions of religious disinvolvement, too. Glock and Stark have discussed five theoretical dimensions of involvement, along with Martin King and his empirical system of nine dimensions. Thus, knowing the religious commitment dimensions, the religious disinvolvement may be expected to be just as complex as the religious movement.

In this study, apostasy is more or less similar to "defection," "withdrawal," or "disidentification." terms used by the majority of social researchers of religion. The term apostasy used here is applied to those church members who once had a history of good Christian reputation, regular attendance, and personal involvement in the three-fold direction of church life: Martyria (witness), Diakonia (service), and
Koinonia (fellowship). It is obvious that, from an ecumenical perspective, the nominal affiliation or "denominational switching" have little to do with the meaning of the term "apostasy."

But according to the Seventh-day Adventist perspective, a denominational switching from the Adventist belief and practical life is considered an apostasy. The explanation resides in the special calling which this church believes that it received from God for the time in which it exists.

It is the understanding of this church that among the other Christian bodies of the last days, it represents God's appointed movement, called to preach a complete "everlasting Gospel" both in its truths and effects. It is to stress to everyone certain basic truths of a tremendous importance for the last days we live. Some of these truths are: the true Sabbath of the seventh day, Jesus' ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary, immortality only in Jesus, the second coming of Christ, and others. These points of truth are exactly those which Christendom overpassed or misinterpreted during the Christian ages. Because the conviction of this church is that all its points of belief are pure, consistent in themselves, and in full harmony with the teachings of the whole Bible, it is its understanding that any falling down --both by theory and by practice from its Biblical platform of truth-- means apostasy. Based on the data provided by some recent works in the social scientific study of religion, and from my own empirical observations as a pastor, I have differentiated three major dimensions of disinvolve ment or apostasy.
**The Intellectual Dimension**

This dimension is, in a sense, the negative replica of Glock's "ideological dimension" of religiosity. It refers to that kind of apostasy based on disbelief of certain important and cardinal doctrines, possibly accompanied by a belief in different doctrines which rival Christianity, such as atheism, agnosticism, paganism, or Satanism, or rival even some of the clearest doctrines the Bible teaches.

According to Caplovitz and Sharrow's investigation, it is one of the four "determinants" of apostasy among college students. These four determinants of defection are: (1) poor parental relations, (2) personal maladjustment or neurosis, (3) a radical or leftist political orientation, and (4) a commitment to intellectualism.

Presented in another form, Glock and Stark say this commitment to intellectualism simply means secularization. In its turn, this secularization means that the better educated and more sophisticated people become, the less likely they are to maintain their ties with the traditional or inherited religious affiliation and practice, or with any affiliation at all. In this respect there is enough empirical evidence in all the churches that the higher education in many academic fields such as social studies and humanities, the less likely that person is to maintain a strong religious commitment. Certainly this does not mean that one needs to be a scholar, academician, or even a highly educated person, to experience this kind of defection.

Often the deepest factor of an intellectual defection is not simply its exposure to the rival alternative of religion, but its lack of foundation on faith. This is one of my major empirical conclusions.
regarding the precipitant factors working toward one's apostasy. This empirical conclusion is also supported by the scientific investigation of Bruce Hunsberger. In his critical study of Caplovitz and Sharrow's findings, Hunsberger tries to contradict two of their conclusions: (1) that in college students apostasy is a form of rebellion against parents, an expression of dissociation from parental religion, and (2) that college is indeed a breeding ground for apostasy.\(^\text{17}\) Contrary to them, through his research Hunsberger found that the reported emphasis placed on religion in one's childhood home is one of the best predictors of later religiosity. Here is one of his conclusions on this matter:

... the home religious environment may well play an important part in the apostasy process, such that weaker emphasis on religion and religious practices is related to a greater probability of apostasy late in life.\(^\text{18}\)

This is exactly what the Bible stressed thousands of years before, "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."\(^\text{19}\)

Of course, Hunsberger's observations and conclusion do not modify the truth expressed by Caplovitz and Sharrow, that many colleges guide their students toward intellectualism, making the college indeed a "breeding ground for apostasy." It happens so because students with a religious background, entering college, are subject to a strong conflict generated by their impact with the secular perspective of life. Confronted with secular intellectualism, they feel it undermines their own ideology. As a next step they become very cautious about those religious presuppositions which seem to have a very limited intellectual foundation.
A very common reaction among those students, prospective candidates to apostasy, is to involve themselves less and less in a strenuous intellectual activity to support their religious ideology. But if religion requires a self-consistent ideology, it also requires intellectual activity. So the solution to having a strong mind built on truth does not require becoming less intellectual, but rather more persuasively disciplined in intellectual activity. Thus some of the empirical indicators of apostasy, based on intellectual dimensions are: expression of disbelief in any kind of God or in the divinity of Jesus Christ; a view of religion not as an appropriate response to all life's questions and troubles, but just a palliative answer or solution; a constant preference of reading literature of secular "high-class" culture rather than religious literature which is regarded as being less cultural; a lessened inclination to go along with counsel, advice, and spiritual strength provided by the Bible as if it were an outmoded kind of wisdom, and so on.

The Social Dimension

One of the most outstanding researchers studying religious groups in the modern metropolis, Gerhard Lenski, sees them as being primarily social organizations. In the complexity of relations which they develop among their members they are more complex and efficient than any other organizations, such as corporations, labor unions, or even some traditional churches.

Lenski's assertions are based on three major factors which, according to his view, are often "ignored" by social researchers of religion.
The first factor is that the religious groups "are basically endogenous." This means that marriage within the same religious group results in a deeper interaction among the members of the same family, and mostly among the members of the same group. Those interactions, familial and collective, gradually will affect the group's attitude toward norms and standards, as Lenski noted. "The more people have internalized the norms, or standards of the group, the more their actions reinforce similar tendencies in other members of their families."

The second factor pointed out by Lenski is that of the family as being the crucial place in the development of one's personality and in the establishment of behavioral patterns. Finally, the third factor is the presence of "friendly cliques" within the group, which also tend to bring together religiously homogeneous units.

Thus, participation in the group's life on a social level helps to determine clear conformity to the church norms, even independent of the intellectual dimension, as Photiadis points out. According to Hagburg, the level of participation in an organization is correlated with the emotional dimension, being dependent on the group satisfactions which members experience from their participation. In this respect he sees the church, labor unions, and all other social organizations as being equivalent in offering such satisfactions to their members. Thus, having a spiritual satisfaction and compensation is a normal expectation of every member who shares his life with others in a group, working as a catalytic factor in preventing the members of that given social unit from disrupting each other or, applied to this thesis, from apostatizing.
In my empirical observations in this respect I found some factor precipitants responsible for apostasy, such as disintegration of the social ties specific to the big metropolitan churches, unsatisfied social experiences, or nonparticipation in the three-fold aspects of Christian life (Martyria, Diakonia, and Koinonia). This disintegration can occur anywhere—in the family, in the church or any religious group—and sooner or later will follow a certain pattern of consequences: first alienation, then disaffection, disinvolvelement, disidentification, and finally, apostasy.

To such an outcome there might be one or more of the following participants: a loss or a lack of close friends in the church; a personal acquaintance with few, if any, people including clergy, church workers, or lay leaders; a lack of participation in church programs or social activities: a marriage to a devout member of another church which, doctrinally speaking, follows the "musical chairs" model; 23 a perception of "coolness" or the presence of unfriendly "cliques" among members of that congregation.

The Emotional Dimension

The third kind of apostasy which could be seen in a church might occur on an emotional basis of circumstances. The most elaborate analysis found in this respect is that of Dr. John S. Savage. Noting that not all denominations or sects within the church are losing members, and inquiring into the causes of his denomination's losses, Dr. Savage came to the conclusion that the constant inner cause of members' defection is anxiety. Even he does not use this adjective
"unique," yet he leaves the impression that anxiety is the unique "determinant" of people's religious apostasy.24

Citing Schmale and Sullivan, Dr. Savage interprets anxiety as being the "first psychic awareness of discomfort."25 The mechanics of defection seem to follow this order: anxiety; anger; hopelessness; helplessness, apathy and boredom; loss of meaning; and indifference. The most important sequence which retained the attention of Dr. Savage is anger.

For Dr. Savage, anger is the first indication that an individual is "off balance." It may manifest itself by a person's language, body reactions, actions, or, surprisingly, by entertainment. It could be either repressed (involuntary) or suppressed (voluntary) by "acting-out" or "acting-in." The simple presence of anger is an indication that a sorting process has started to take place within the mind of that individual. Acting "out" or "in" becomes simply a personal attempt to escape from that inner conflict.

"The use and control of anger is of major importance to the individual within the church," says Dr. Savage. "Anger is not pathological, but rather a natural process. The healthy person gets angry."26 Going through anxiety/anger-provoking circumstances will cause a healthy person to try to work through each of these in such a way that the next set of provoking circumstances will be met in a more constructive manner, thus enhancing that person's capacity to solve the conflicts.

When an individual cannot find a way out of his anger, he begins to feel a sense of frustration and hopelessness, because a feeling of helplessness prevails. All the negative impressions perceived by the subject as failures or deficiencies of the environment led him to
experience that sense of helplessness. Furthermore, all the negative impressions about himself, perceived as his own failures and inadequacies, make him feel hopeless.

A person going through this helplessness/hopelessness stage, says Dr. Savage, begins to think and express that the external environment no longer could serve as a useful base for his life. Thus, as a consequence, a process of "giving up" begins to install in that person's mind. This process is associated with feelings of apathy and boredom, and is considered to be about the final stages of that process. As a parallel feeling to that helplessness/hopelessness mental sensation, a sense of "loss of meaning" comes to install.

Spoken or unspoken, it is the inner desire and expectation of the subject crossing this stage that something will intervene to interrupt those negative feelings. something like a pastoral visit or a discussion with those persons implicated in conflict, or perhaps removal of the circumstances which provoked the anxiety-anger syndrome. If nothing intervenes to interrupt this helplessness/hopelessness perception, the subject begins to develop a tendency to interrupt not only the ideological relationship with the church, or the spiritual-ritualistic activities, but the whole relationship with these persons who were once meaningful to him. Thus, under the pressure of that sense of "loss of meaning," which accompanies apathy and boredom, many people turn away from the church with a feeling of indifference.

As empirical precipitants of the emotional dimension of apostasy, some deserve special attention. These include a conflict of personalities or interests with pastors, church leaders, or family members;
spiritual conflict and disagreement with moral values or theological, financial, and educational issues; physical and psychic tiredness due to overwork; personal problems such as a death in the family, divorce, separation from mate, illness, or loss of material things; an exaggerated emotional liability, etc.

Obviously the anxiety levels, with all their symptoms and manifestations, are primarily determined by mental perceptions rather than by theological problems. In becoming an apostate, as Dr. Savage has seen, there are no significant differences between an active or an inactive member due to theological issues. The person who defects did not give up his faith and leave the church principally because of a conflict over certain theological matters, but because of a conflict over socio-emotional matters. In this respect, Dr. Savage's conclusion seems to be in conflict with other researchers' conclusions, especially that of apostasy based on an intellectual or cognitive dimension. Regarding this, a typical case is that of college students who, being under social or ideological pressures, tend to conform to the agnostic or atheistic presuppositions they face. Being inadequately equipped as intellectuals and unable to defend their positions, they start to feel embarrassed, uncomfortable, anxious, and helpless. Many a student crossing such a confrontation cannot see an exit from the situation, other than to yield to the social pressure, in order to be accepted by the secularized society of teachers and students. After being accepted, another goal is settled, that of rationalization, of coming to terms with the old religious convictions to find a base for the new commitment, which is determined by the new intellectual insight received.
Unfortunately, in the majority of these cases that new commitment means stepping down from faith.

Actually this is the major objection that this thesis can bring against Dr. Savage's study, namely a constant bias to attribute all the apostasy simply to one dimension—an emotional one. Another objection is that of its relying heavily on the conclusions drawn from questionnaire responses and statistics rather than considering them on an equal basis with other data. I still question the validity of taking the answers of the already departed and disidentified members of any church as sure rationale in establishing the real dimension of their apostasy. It is well known that often such statistics are not quite reliable, but subjective in nature because the answers of most of the apostates are simply rationalizations of their own former unpleasant experiences, or ego-defense tactics which people, as human beings, almost involuntarily use to hide themselves and their wounds. Because of this my understanding and my opinion regarding the dimensions of which apostasy occurs and based on my empirical observations and lectures, is that all three dimensions discussed above—the cognitive, the social, and the emotional—must be seen in a combined interaction.

**Other Factors Influencing Toward Apostasy**

Besides the intellectual, social, and emotional dimensions, with their precipitant factors toward apostasy as they were mentioned in the previous subdivision, there are some other factors to be mentioned which are substantiated by the findings of another master's degree thesis, 28 by a statistical study, 29 and by the pastoral experiences of the author of this thesis.
James Smuts' Thesis

This thesis is comprised of three areas of data: (1) a history of the apostasy of three outstanding former Seventh-day Adventist leaders, (2) special insights from the inspired writings of Mrs. Ellen G. White on this issue, and (3) the findings of some questionnaires promoted on the Seventh-day Adventist church campuses. After discussing the data, J. H. Smuts concludes with some "causes" responsible for apostasy among Seventh-day Adventist members.

Regarding the case of those three apostatized leaders, the two main precipitant factors which influenced them toward apostasy are the "desire for supremacy" and a "refusal to accept the counsels of the Word of God and the Spirit of Prophecy." From Mrs. White's writings, according to Smuts, the basic factors influencing one toward apostasy are: a lack of surrender to God, unbelief in the fundamentals of Christianity, tests and trials, a lack of active Christian missionary work, undue self-esteem, criticism and selfish ambition, a failure to study the Bible truths, rejection of the Spirit of Prophecy, and delusions caused by the rejection of truth.

Among the questionnaires used, one from 1948 makes the main object of that thesis analysis. That questionnaire was sent to a total of 133 ministers whose names were selected with the help of the Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists. From that number of questionnaires, 88 were filled out and returned, and some other hints came out from them.

The questionnaire is comprised of four questions. The first three were specific on the subject of apostasy, while the fourth gave an
opportunity to each respondent to express his personal opinion regarding the possible factors influencing one toward apostasy.

The first question deals with the influence of offshoot movements in producing further apostasies. From seventy-one answers received on this question, 2.8 percent considered them as having great influence, 91.6% considered them as having a negligible influence, and 5.6 percent felt they had no influence. From the replies to this question, the conclusion was that little danger of membership losses exists because of dissident movements. Twenty-three respondents stated that these movements succeeded only in criticizing the leaders and the administrative policies of the church, and happened only among the more unstable and immature members of the church.

The second question dealt with the apostate leaders and their influence on the church body toward further apostasies. Of the total responses received, 5.7 percent indicated a great influence, while 87.1 percent indicated a negligible influence, and 7.2 percent affirmed that there was no influence in their causing of apostasies. The influence of the apostate leaders was viewed by some of the respondents as being successful only among those malcontented members or those not too well established in the faith, or even those who regarded their leaders with admiration and respect.

Furthermore the third question deals with the time when an apostasy happens to occur: 49.9 percent of the answers pointed out a short time, about two or three years after baptism. Another 28.4 percent suggested that apostasies occurred quite a long time after baptism, about six or seven years. The remainder of 29.7 percent asserted that the apostasies
do not take into consideration the time factor, and are spread quite evenly over the years.

The last part of that questionnaire was the most important one because it contained the answers given by sixty-eight leader respondents depicting the factors considered as working together toward apostasy among Seventh-day Adventist members. The factors were later classified into five categories according to the conditions upon which the responsibility is placed. The responsible categories are: (1) the church, (2) the individual, (3) the social conditions, (4) the educational background, and (5) the economic conditions.

The conditions most often incriminated for which a church is kept responsible were:

1. a lack of sufficient indoctrination prior to baptism, due to a competitive spirit between pastors and evangelists in an attempt to report more baptisms to prove their efficiency to their leaders;
2. a lack of instruction after baptism;
3. failure in pastoral activities, personal instruction, counsel, and encouragement to the members;
4. a lack of brotherly love, kindness, friendliness, and understanding for the new converts;
5. failure to involve the new members into active missionary work; and
6. a lack of positive recreational activities.

Regarding the conditions favorable to apostasy for which an individual is held responsible, the data provided by the same questionnaire say that the main factor is the lack of a true conversion, a conversion
not supported enough by watchfulness and prayer, or a conversion
endangered by negligence of spiritual life. Besides these, other
apostatic factors could be a failure to nurture the spiritual life
with the Bible and the works of the Spirit of Prophecy, or a spiritual
life continually endangered by worldly influence, by an incomplete
surrender to Jesus, by doctrinal disagreements, or by doubts.

In the last three groups of social, educational, and economical
factors which are thought to influence people toward apostasy, the most
incriminating conditions were poor home influences, marriage problems,
insufficient capacity of comprehension of tensions due to customs and
readjustment, the economic struggles and cares of life, or employment
troubles due to the Biblical Sabbath (Saturday) observance. Studying
with attention all the data of James H. Smuts' thesis it will be
interesting to notice many similarities between his findings and the
factors already mentioned in this chapter.

Jerry Lee's Summary of a Study

Almost the same factors mentioned above were perceived also by
Jerry Lee in his research study. In order to perform this he sent a
questionnaire to 238 current members of the church and to another 205
individuals counted by the Seventh-day Adventist church as being
apostates. From the two groups, fifteen and eight-two, respectively,
were returned as being undeliverable, but of those who received the
questionnaire, 60 percent of the current members and 65.9 percent of
the apostates responded.

According to this study there are seven factors which seemed to
influence individuals to leave the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They
are as follows:

1. Feelings that there is too much politics in the church, that the church administration is more concerned about the people who are going to be baptized than those who were already baptized, that there is too much strictness in terms of rules and regulations, and there are some feelings of dissatisfaction with the top leaders of the organization.

2. There is opposition to the church position regarding some sensitive issues such as worldly entertainment, heterosexuality, homosexuality, tithe and offerings, and suspicion of both church members and pastors of being hypocritical.

3. There are feelings that church members were cold, judgmental, bigoted, and hypocritical.

4. Lack of understanding and sympathy with the work problems related to Sabbath (Saturday) observance.

5. Opposition to the church's position regarding alcoholic beverages and smoking.

6. Dissatisfaction with the church's position on divorce, and for its lack of concern for marital problems.

7. Misunderstanding of the nature of the Seventh-day Adventist church and its doctrines.

As can be seen, most factors noted by Jerry Lee fall into an emotional dimension working toward apostasy, as was discussed earlier in this chapter.
Factors Collected from Pastoral Experience

The most frequent incriminating factors which influence individuals toward apostasy, as they were drawn by the author of this thesis out of his twelve years of pastoral experience, were divided for a better simplification into two categories. The first category places the responsibility upon the pastor of the church, while the second one places the responsibility upon the individual. Too often, in an acute phase of their alienation from God, His truth, and His people, both individuals and pastors/leaders of the church tend to project responsibility upon each other, and burned-out pastors tend to blame the individuals or the church administration for their apostasy. Yet it is not hard to delineate the factors specific to pastoral activity, or individual life working toward defection within the church.

Factors of pastoral responsibility. The main factors drawn from the pastoral activity, for which a pastor is primarily responsible, are:

1. Lack of sound doctrinal preparation of the new converts for baptism. Many pastors hurry to baptize people, not because of a wrong spirit of competition with other pastors, but because of the requirements and standards of their own church as well. This happens because they fail to put the right emphasis on belief. For many pastors the important thing for their baptismal candidates to begin their new spiritual life is that they simply accept Jesus Christ as their Savior. The mistake consists of not allowing enough time to instruct the candidates of the principles of their new faith and life with Jesus, and then to allow time to see the fruits of their newborn faith.
The church is seen by God as being the "pillar and the foundation of the truth." Furthermore, He warns the church that "in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things thought by demons." Teachings like these, the Bible continues, "come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." From this warning, clearly, the main reason for which solid building upon the true doctrines of the Bible is necessary is that the members resist the hypocritical liars of the later times and demons and be unwilling to abandon their faith.

In the line of the same "professional" mistake of baptizing candidates insufficiently prepared, many pastors have an explanation in Jesus' words of His great commission given to His disciples: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Giving these words a narrow interpretation, they assert that their first duty is to baptize people, and only after that is it time to teach them the truth. Yet such a pastor forgot that Jesus regarded His teachings as being like a solid rock in time of great trial of faith. In this respect Jesus was very specific. He said, "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the stream rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock." The conclusion from these words is self-evident.

2. Lack of real concern for nurturing the spiritual life of church members. This duty of nurturing the church is so complex, so demanding, so essential, that it requires more than a weekly "smart" sermon of
forty minutes, more than religious fancies and ceremonies, or church entertaining programs. It might require all of these, but above all of these, it requires time and a deep concern to visit the homes of new converts as often as possible, effort and patience to educate them on how to grow into the new life, a sincere and permanently opened way of reciprocal communication, and feeding spiritually the lambs and the sheep.  

Especially when one has dropped out of the faith, there is a desperate need in the life of that one for someone who cares, who is willing and able to listen, and to accept the way he feels. And who should be the most qualified person to do this but his pastor? In this respect the observation of Dr. Savage is conclusive: 

After persons have dropped out they wait 6-8 weeks to see if anyone will come to them to find out why they had left. During that period there is a type of holding pattern—a nonengaging behavior—that takes place. They do not reinvest the time in other areas, but passively wait. When no help comes, they begin to reinvest their time in other organizations . . . as well as recreational activities . . . . By the time they have reinvested their time much of the intense feelings have subsided, and slight reorientation begins to take place toward how God works in the world. A phenomenon occurs: it is as if the parishioner equated God’s ability to act in the world with one’s own ability.

Factors of individual responsibility. Besides the pastoral factors working toward one’s apostasy, the individual factors have a definite place, too. It is the opinion of the author of this thesis that most of the responsibility for spiritual welfare, growth and functionality lies on the shoulders of the church members. The Biblical history is full of examples in this respect. For instance, in ancient Israel, even when all the nation had departed from God, when the king, his court, his
employed prophets, and the priests of the Temple had fallen down in a
darkened apostasy, there was Elijah. Even though he thought he was
alone. God revealed to him an unexpected fact: There were still 7,000
people who remained strong and unmoved in their faith, even in the midst
of that general apostasy.

Thus, as this story reveals, the ability to remain steadfast in
one's faith does not depend on the pastor, the family, the other church
members, or the environmental conditions, but rather, it has to do with
one's own choice to be and to remain a victorious Christian. Here are
listed only some of the main individual factors from which an individ-
ual's apostasy could begin.

1. A weak foundation. This factor is not mentioned for the first
time during the discussion of this chapter, but it was treated before
from a standpoint of pastoral activity in preparing the new converts for
baptism. But the main responsibility for setting the life on a strong
foundation lies at everyone's door. In this respect, many Christians
seem to be fairly "strong" in their faith, and yet sometimes even some
common experiences in their lives reveal the weakness of their founda-
tion.

A real Christian should not know only what he believes; also, he
should know what his beliefs are founded upon. He must be able not
only to recognize and enumerate all the doctrinal points of his belief,
but he has to be able to know the reason for which there is no other
foundation for his faith. This "stubborn" perseverance on truth is
the only feature which lifts a true Christian above the common camp of
all the relativistic and subjective features of many modern Christian
"credenda." To explain the basis of his belief is the responsibility of each believer, because whatever the faith assumes, it must also be supported by the Word of God. Besides those who seem to be indifferent about the basis of their faith, there are many who do not know for sure what and why they believe as they do.

The necessity to check and recheck the basis upon which faith is built is a permanent duty for a Christian, because the faith value grows in direct proportion with one's growth of understanding. How significant, in this context, is the experience of those two disciples on their way back to Emmaus after the distressing and hopeless event of their Master's crucifixion? They were right on the edge of unbelief. The working factors trying to precipitate their apostasy were both emotional and intellectual. The crisis they went through revealed their weak foundation. Thinking in a positive or a negative sense about the Christians from Galatia, Thessalonica, and Berea, or the original receivers of the letter to the Hebrews, could cause one to draw a definitive and correct conclusion—a genuine understanding of truth becomes a basis for genuine faith, and genuine faith, in turn, leads to a genuine experience.

When God gives us sufficient reasons to believe, to search after truth, to know it, to then live the truth less than He offered us is the surest way toward apostasy and finally toward the sin against the Holy Spirit.

2. A weak commitment. It is no secret that for the veritable Christian, the true mark of his faith is obedience. The Gospel is for him not only the revelation of the good news of Heaven, but it is
also a convenant of God with him. From His side, God has sealed this
covenant with the blood of His beloved Son. But it is not enough. Now,
for that covenant to be valid, it needs also our signature and our
commitment, which means that a certain degree of personal knowledge in
the truth requires a certain degree of personal commitment and obedience,
as Jesus pointed out. 

If today there happens to be a weakness in the life of many Chris-
tians, it is not only in the realm of the cognitive truth, the foundation
of faith, but also in the will of those who fail to enter with all their
hearts into the obligations of obedience. Apostle Paul speaks about
the "obedience of faith." This, in fact, is the heart of true dis-
cipleship.

Today many Christians try to stress faith apart from obedience.
Consequently their hearts will be nurtured with a cheap grace which,
with negative effects will misdirect them gradually to a superficial,
careless, and finally, a sinful life. On the other hand, those who
stress obedience apart from faith would be in danger of decaying
gradually into legalism.

Actually, a personal faith must be "obedience of truth." When
a person has a strong conviction about any truth, it will become his
own unless he does not choose to obey it. On the other hand, if a
person who professes to believe a truth does not have a serious commit-
ment to it, his faith will gradually decrease until his heart and mind
will no longer be able to comprehend even a lesser light from Heaven.
Here resides the awful responsibility of every believer, to prove a
strong commitment to any little ray of divine light. Continuous
rejection of the light, in any amount it comes, precipitates the life of the believer toward apostasy, and finally toward the ultimate sin.

3. A lack of growth. The Christian life is in many respects a new life—the life of Jesus Christ implanted in the believer's life, transforming it and bearing its fruits more and more. This is the ultimate purpose and end to which Jesus wants to lead our lives.42

Yet for many Christians it is very easy to forget that becoming a Christian is only the beginning, that a miraculous evolution toward a fruitful life lies ahead. But too often the Christian puts an end to his growth by carelessness in prayer, discontinuance of family worship, absence from church services, lukewarmness in spiritual or church activities, negligence in Bible study or private devotions, avoidance of the ordinances of the Lord's house, and remissiveness in tithe paying and offerings.43

Many endanger their evolution of growth and fruitfulness, thinking so little of the outcome of their choosing. In this respect the warning of Jesus cannot be overlooked: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes so it may bear more fruit."44 To grow, to bear the fruit, appears to be our own responsibility, and privilege.

4. Bad and uncontrolled feelings and habits. Spiritual maturity comes through discipline and not through years only. Because many subjective elements play their role in the decision process of belief, the Christian life exhibits a definite basis for sentiments, feelings, and emotions. Sometimes they may stay under the control of reason. Yet, too often they rise up against it in their own malignant form of despair, anger, jealousy, fear, loneliness, etc.
Despite the knowledge of the reasons of belief, despite the trust in God, and despite all the experiences with Him, the Christian's life is colored by his imagination. Yet the question remains: What will dictate—the reasons or the feelings, the faith or the imagination?

The remedy for a disturbed sentimental state is found through a self discipline of sentiments and habits. Mastering them means to keep them under the strict control of the Holy Spirit. Many Christians choose to understand this control in a wrong way, as they undertook ascetism, repression of the sentiments, or some punishments against themselves. They missed seeing that the purpose of discipline is not to suppress their bad sentiments, but to bring them to the position of being teachable. As the apostle Peter himself underlines, before one can experience that longing for the "pure spiritual milk," he has to "put aside" or get rid of any of his bad habits and defects. Removing the negative feelings and habits which resist instruction makes the positive feelings and habits more effectual.

The consequence of a Christian's continued unwillingness to get rid of his unruly sentiments and bad habits will become a continued disability to develop a strong appetite for a holy life entirely controlled by the principles of God's Word and by the Holy Spirit. By preserving those bad features of character, the spiritual life, like the people of Noah's generation, will enter into a perilous competition with the will of the Holy Spirit and, after a long and willful rejection of His voice, they will be forsaken by Him.

5. Failure to utilize all the divine helps. Growing up, for a Christian, means not only to get rid of the bad habits of the old.
nature, but to establish a new set of holy habits. Some of the good habits which must be achieved are prayer to God, study and meditation upon the Word of God, obedience to God's counsels and teachings, trusting God, and doing good. These are not only habits, but are means of divine grace provided to nurture and support our spiritual life.

For instance, at the heart of prayer lies an affectionate fellowship with God, resulting from a spiritual union with Him. Prayer is the proof of an earnest desire for God as our highest good. The expression of such a desire in words will have an effect on the believer and give definiteness to his life with God. Prayer and meditation are more than a spiritual habit, more than an affirmation of our theism. Prayer is an encounter with God. When we pray for others we bring them into the same encounter with God. Doing this, we see our fellows in a new life, because we stand together in the presence of God, as persons with the same rights and needs, and loved in the same way.

As we speak to God in prayer, naturally we should let Him speak to us, not just as a response to our prayer, but as a fresh revelation of Himself. For the growth of the inner life the use of these divine "tools" is essential. To this mutual friendship, which is renewed each day, the believer yearns to know God, to learn His will, to find an understanding of life's puzzles, and to appropriate the strength which God so willingly imparts.

Besides these, there is an outward aspect of Christianity, also, which makes the Christian experience a whole. It is the corporate experience. It was proved that nobody could become a Christian by himself. An individual needs that togetherness with other followers of
Jesus to grow "unto perfection." As divine helpers of the outward spiritual life, God gave us the church worship, the work of witnessing Christ, the discipleship of Jesus, and the fellowship with people. Although there is no need to discuss each of them extensively, some observations might be necessary.

Public worship is an essential element of any religion because of its opportunity to strengthen the basis of the corporate belief. During the many years of belief in one's life, it was proved to be the most dependable cure to the "dry" periods of inner religious life. The fellowship of the believers, the inspiring, uplifting hymns, the up-building reading and interpretation of the Word of God, and prayers, all fulfill our need of a reminder of the eternal values which, in their turn, give a sense and destination to our faith. Those who come to the worship events only to satisfy an empty tradition, to perform a habit, or just to feed their social needs or religious status, sooner or later will lose the taste of the heavenly gifts, and it will be no wonder to see them leaving the church for good.

The grace and the duty of Christian witnessing and discipleship of Christ must be regarded in the same way. Both are an essential discipline for the feeding, renewal, and growth of any Christian life. Too often the followers of Jesus have regarded witnessing as a burden on their shoulders, not a grace or a privilege. Accordingly, they have tried to shift this burden to the ministers' shoulders. Surely this is a grave misunderstanding of the point. It cannot be correctly understood unless we review the whole meaning of the Christian faith. The Christian faith is more than a code of ethical principles, or just an
affirmation of certain moral demands which man should test and practice. It is, or must be, rather, an announcement, a public proclamation about a person and an event which prove together the incommensurable love of God for us. A disciple is a witness, a personal ambassador of God among people. He should go into all the world with the message of the divine love after he experienced this truth in his own life. Thus his primary concern is not to point out the sins of people or to urge them to be good, but rather a true Christian must live as a living example of how God changed his life through faith in Christ, a promise ready to be repeated in the life of everyone who wants it.

A failure to live an inner life with God and to experience the new outward life as a disciple of Jesus, witnessing in His behalf, in example and words, will result, without doubt, in a loss of spiritual power and of the principal reason for which our existence stands, thus preparing the ground for future alienation and defection from God.

Some Practical Suggestions

In a sense apostasy is a spiritual illness. It is like an epidemic illness. To identify and study it truly is important, yet ineffective if it is not used to prevent other people from being contaminated or to help those who have already fallen victims to it.

Sometimes the problem of diagnosing an apostasy is a difficult task because of the many symptoms and forms in which it can manifest itself. And also, the many hidden reasons which stand for that apostasy, about which not even the apostate is aware enough, make the diagnosis of apostasy a difficult task. But a genuine minister will never lose sight of his main goal. His only concern in establishing a correct diagnosis
must be to apply the appropriate treatment. Oftentimes, just as a physician is obliged to treat each symptom separately due to the lack of a specific and causal therapy, so a minister of the soul also has to consider and treat separately each symptom of apostasy.

Although a "treatment" of apostasy was not numbered among the purposes of this thesis (this being the job of other works about pastoral care and counseling), yet the writer found it appropriate to mention some practical suggestions to cope with apostasy in the church. Some of the suggestions are preventive in nature.

Deep Spiritual Life of Minister

Every minister should live a deep spiritual life among the members of his congregation. His life, like the "salt of the earth," has to prevent his church from alteration. It must be a good example of what is meant by living a holy life, and a solid support for his members. Nothing is more dismantling and destructive to a congregation than the failures of a minister. In this respect, the most direct appeal in the Word of God toward all the ministers of His church is that from I Timothy 4:12: "Don't let anyone look down on you, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and purity." It must be so, that at the end of his career, each pastor has to be able to say, like the Apostle Paul, "Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men."51

Careful Preparation for Baptism

A more careful consideration for the preparation of the candidates for baptism can also prevent apostasy. As has been seen from statistics
mentioned before in this chapter, about 49 percent of the apostasies occurred in the first three years after baptism. This level was proved to be "stimulated" by, if not totally responsible for, a lack of former doctrinal instruction for the newly converted. The reason for which Paul could consider himself innocent of the blood of all men is presented by him in the same place mentioned above, "For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."

Intense Pastoral Care

The main duty of a minister is not that of sermonizing people, but that of creating, developing, inspiring, and modeling the life of his church that it might become the most inclusive, safe, comfortable, holy, and uplifting social environment for everyone's life. In this respect, the appeal of God to ministers is: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of God which He bought with His blood."

Education of Members to Manage Their Conflicts

As G. Douglass Lewis pointed out, it is one of the essential duties of a minister to educate his church members how to manage their conflicts. For him a "conflict management at its depth should be liturgical, should be institutionalized." That is the reason why he proposes that ministers create a liturgy on this subject to be inserted in the weekly worship service. Here are some of his insights about his suggestion:

Liturgy has a repetitive quality that makes it so familiar and routine that it becomes integral to who we are. Then it frees us to be open to the wonder, surprises, and gifts of others,
and to the depth and insight and creativity within ourselves.

... For a liturgy to affect us, we need to participate in it frequently and regularly. We must prepare for it, rehearse it, and use it until its message permeates our spirit and is stamped indelibly upon our actions. Also, the author points out that in any conflict management process there are six effective principles which can grant success if they are properly considered. They are as follows:

1. Help others feel better about themselves.
2. Strive for effective communication.
3. Examine and filter assumptions.
4. Identify goals or what is wanted.
5. Identify the primary issue.
6. Develop alternatives for goal achievement.

A Team of Dedicated and Trained Workers

An appropriate action in coping with apostasy within the church is that of creating a team of dedicated and trained lay leaders who, with the minister, will be involved in visiting those members in need, as a ministry of caring. This ministry is to enable both sides involved in a conflict to develop responsibility toward each other and toward Jesus Christ to whom they both belong. And furthermore, Dr. Savage emphasizes that the function of such a team is "never to be manipulative, judgmental, nor demanding, but supportive, encouraging and upbuilding ... for the purpose of sharing the redeeming love of God."

Always in Time

If we take into consideration the fact that behind the stage of each case of apostasy there is a conflict of either intellectual, social, or
emotional nature, it is quite simple to imagine the direction in which our efforts have to be applied. But too often the cure proves to be inefficient because of its timing. As a general rule a pastor shall not let more than six weeks pass from the first sign of a conflict in the life of a member until the first caring visit of either pastor or a member of the team mentioned above shall occur. It was established by experience that after more than six weeks the process of recovering a defected or an angry member is too difficult, if not impossible, because that member lost his trust in the love and care of the minister and the church for him.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Biblically speaking, apostasy is a sinful attitude of man against the love and will of God—his Creator, Protector, Sustainer, and Savior. It is manifested through a spirit of distrust, discontent, rebellion, and independence. It is the general trend of this multifaceted attitude to degenerate toward a desire to defect from God. This is in fact the natural attitude of the entire human race against God, to be alienated and defected from Him.

From a theological standpoint, apostasy is a negative expression of man's unlimited and uncoerced will, by which he can reject God any time, going in an opposite direction to His will. God has made known His will through His Word, His law, and man's conscience. Thus, any mental or behavioral defection from God's will is considered a transgression of it, namely sin.

The core of man's sins stands in placing his self-will above God and His will. Therefore, apostasy is not a specific sin in itself, or a status point, but an attitude, a process of a progressive sin. A man, continuing to live in his willful rejection of the divine government, standards, truths, and procedures, could become so enslaved by this sinful attitude until he reaches that point of his extreme refusal to consider the will of God, which is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Apostasy is not similar to sin against the Holy Spirit. This grievous sin is rather the final decision of man's will to stay apart
from God. The gravity of this ultimate sin is given not by the magnitude or multitude of one's sins, but the subjective condition of his will: rejection, which refuses any attempt of the divine love to forgive and save the apostate. It is not that the love and patience of God are exhausted for the sinner; it is rather man's lack of love, gratitude and consideration toward God, man's unwillingness to turn back to God, which prevent him from being able and ready to receive the grace of divine forgiveness. Thus man, by the free exercise of his will, is his own factor determinant to be either saved or lost.

From the practical standpoint of pastoral ministry, apostasy has to be viewed as an intellectual, social, or emotional defection from God, from His people, His church, His truth, His salvation. It could be manifested in many ways: by refusing the light of true knowledge of God and His truth, by nurturing conflicts with other people, or by living a negligent or disrespectful life regarding salvation.

Although there is no theological ground upon which to establish "causes" which work toward one's apostasy, there is sufficient ground to speak of some precipitant factors or conditions working together toward an apostasy. According to the area in which apostasy becomes manifested, the precipitant factors are of an intellectual, social, or emotional nature.

The purpose of the church is not to judge people, to determine, or even to guess who will be saved or lost, or who reaches the point of no return. Its mission is to go into all the world to proclaim the Good News about a God of love, that there is still an open door of hope for salvation. The appointed work of the church is not to close the door
of salvation before sinners, but to keep it open, as far as God Himself keeps the door of His grace open to the world.

Furthermore, the task of the church is not only to proclaim salvation and to invite people into the church to receive salvation, but also to minister to the people who already have received salvation, and to carry it unto the end with "fear and trembling."

Finally, according to the last of the pastoral letters of the Bible, that of Jude, the task of all members of the church is a three-fold one:

But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you want for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.1

BUILD YOURSELVES . . . KEEP YOURSELVES . . . TO OTHERS SHOW MERCY.
Endnotes
Endnotes

Chapter 1


4 Matthew 28:19, 20.

5 Acts 20:28, 32.


8 Joshua 22:22; Jeremiah 2:19; II Chronicles 29:19; Acts 21:21; II Thessalonians 2:3.


Chapter 2

1 Genesis 1:227.

2 Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10.

3 Genesis 2:15-17.

4 Genesis 3:5.


6 Ibid., p. 77.

7 Revelation 12:9.
8 John 8:4.


10 Genesis 3:2.

11 Genesis 3:22.

12 James 1:13.

13 Genesis 4:7.

14 Galatians 6:7.

15 Ephesians 2:5.

16 Revelation 2:7.

17 Genesis 6:5, 7.

18 Genesis 5:24.

19 Genesis 6:22.

20 Genesis 7:13.

21 Kaufman, p. 295.

22 Hebrews 12:4.

23 Hebrews 10:32-34.


26 Hebrews 10:39.

27 Hebrews 12:1; 11:6, 16.

28 Hebrews 12:2.

29 Hebrews 12:3.

30 Hebrews 12:7, 8.

31 Deuteronomy 4:33, 34; 10:15; Romans 3:1, 2.
32 Galatians 4:28.
33 Hebrews 8:10, 13.
34 Hebrews 7:19.
35 Hebrews 7:25.
36 Hebrews 1:3; 11:1.
37 Hebrews 1:9; 3:1, 4; 4:15, 16; 12:2.
39 Hebrews 11:40.
40 Hebrews 5:11.
41 Bruce, p. 107.
43 Hebrews 5:12-14.
44 Hebrews 6:2.
45 Westcott, p. 136.
46 Hebrews 5:13.
47 Hebrews 5:13.
48 Hebrews 5:12.
50 Hebrews 5:14.
52 Hebrews 6:4, 5.
54 Hebrews 3:12-14.
55 Hebrews 4:1, 6, 11.
56 Hebrews 10:26, 31.
Chapter 3


2I Thessalonians 5:23.

4Numbers 27:16.

51 Corinthians 2:11.

6Romans 8:16.

7Deuteronomy 29:29; John 3:16.

8Romans 12:1.


10Deuteronomy 30:19, 20; II Corinthians 9:7.


12Ibid., pp. 168-172.

13Ibid., pp. 348-357.


15Baldwin, pp. 44-45.

16Genesis 6:5, 6.


19Ibid., pp. 31, 26.

20Matthew 12:25.

21Romans 7:15, 18, 19.

22II Timothy 4:7.


26 Romans 2:14, 15.
27 James 4:17.
30 I Timothy 1:13.
31 Romans 13:10.
32 Schoonenberg, p. 35.
33 Psalms 97:1.
36 Isaiah 14:12-14.
37 Lamentations 1:14; Romans 6:14.
38 Romans 6:17.
40 Romans 8:37.
42 Matthew 15:54.
44 Romans 2:5.
47 Ibid., p. 331.
48 Ibid., p. 332.
49 Hebrews 6:4-6. 8.
50 Galatians 5:22, 23.
Chapter 4


6Matthew 5:13, 14.

7James 2:19.


At this point it might be necessary to notice the scarcity of available research literature on the subject of apostasy. It seems that the researchers are more interested in studying the phenomenon of religious commitment than that of apostasy.


Revelation 14:6.


In this thesis the term "determinant" has an equal meaning with "factor precipitant" or "influence to defection."

Caplovitz and Sharrow, p. 83.


25 Ibid., p. 23.

26 Ibid., p. 25.

27 Ibid., pp. 27-31.


29 Jerry Lee, "A Summary of a Study Concerning Church Membership Loss of the Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists," Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University, 1980. (See Appendix A.)

30 Regarding the term "cause" employed by James H. Smuts in his M.A. Thesis, a correction is necessary to be made, as this term in improperly used. As was already pointed out in Chapter II of this thesis, the basic feature of human personality, always implicated in any process of apostasy, is the will. In order to be free, it must be under no cause, or compulsion. In this respect the term "cause" is improperly used. If we accept the existence of a determinant cause, then man's actions will be no more the end-result of his will.

31 This is another generic term for the writings of Mrs. Ellen G. White, used in the Seventh-day Adventist church. It is the strong conviction of this church that her writings are inspired by God, as they were proved being received and transmitted through the gift of prophecy.

32 I Timothy 3:15.

33 I Timothy 4:1.

34 Matthew 28:18, 20.

35 Matthew 7:24-27.

36 John 21:15-17.

37 Savage, p. 60.

38 Revelation 14:12.


40 Romans 16:26.

41 I Peter 1:22.
Chapter 5

1 Jude 24, 25.
Appendix A

Questionnaire
Factors Influencing Church Membership

Most of the questions in this questionnaire are answered by putting a checkmark in a box like this: [ ]. Occasionally you may be asked to write a number in a blank space as when you are asked for your age later in this questionnaire. On a few occasions you may be asked to make a short written response. This will not usually require more than a few words. We estimate that the entire questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

1. How old were you when you first joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church by baptism or profession of faith?
   Age first joined ________

2. Were you raised in an Adventist home?
   1[ ] Yes, both parents or guardians were Seventh-day Adventists.
   2[ ] Yes, but one parent or guardian was not a Seventh-day Adventist.
   3[ ] No, neither parent or guardian was a Seventh-day Adventist.
   4[ ] Other, please specify.

3. Before you first became a Seventh-day Adventist Church member, either by baptism or profession of faith, what was your religious commitment?
   1[ ] Was raised as a Seventh-day Adventist.
   2[ ] No religious commitment.
   3[ ] Protestant (please specify denomination)
   4[ ] Catholic
   5[ ] Other religion (please specify)

4. If you are married, what is the religious commitment of your spouse?
   1[ ] I am not currently married.
   2[ ] No religious commitment.
   3[ ] Seventh-day Adventist.
   4[ ] Protestant (please specify denomination)
   5[ ] Catholic
   6[ ] Other religion (please specify)

5. How long did you consider the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church before you first became an Adventist church member?
   1[ ] Can't say, was raised a Seventh-day Adventist.
   2[ ] Less than 2 months.
   3[ ] 3 to 11 months.
   4[ ] 1 to 3 years.
   5[ ] More than 3 years.

6. What percentage of your current friends are Seventh-day Adventist?
   1[ ] None
   2[ ] 1 to 20%
   3[ ] 21 to 40%
   4[ ] 41 to 60%
   5[ ] 61 to 80%
   6[ ] 81 to 100%
   7[ ] All

Code no. 22-056-018-1-1
7. What percentage of your relatives are Seventh-day Adventists?

- [ ] None
- [ ] 1 to 20%
- [ ] 21 to 40%
- [ ] 41 to 60%
- [ ] 61 to 80%
- [ ] 81 to 99%
- [ ] All

8. The following is a list of possible sources of influence toward joining the Seventh-day Adventist church. Please indicate how much of an influence EACH source was toward your first joining the Seventh-day Adventist church by checking the appropriate box.

HOW MUCH INFLUENCE DID EACH OF THE ITEMS BELOW HAVE FOR YOU IN JOINING THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH? (Please be sure to check a box for each item.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GREAT DEAL OF INFLUENCE</th>
<th>FAIR AMOUNT OF INFLUENCE</th>
<th>SOME INFLUENCE</th>
<th>NO INFLUENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ] 1. Church pastor</td>
<td>[ ] 2. Bible worker</td>
<td>[ ] 3. Youth leader or director (MV, Pathfinders, etc.)</td>
<td>[ ] 4. Relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] 5. Adventist acquaintance (please specify type of acquaintance)</td>
<td>[ ] 6. Bible lessons with a church member in your home</td>
<td>[ ] 7. Bible classes in the church</td>
<td>[ ] 8. Series of public meetings (such as evangelistic services in a church)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] 9. Musical group</td>
<td>[ ] 10. Adventist school, academy, college, or university</td>
<td>[ ] 11. Seventh-day Adventist radio or television program</td>
<td>[ ] 12. Ingathering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ] 13. Vacation Bible School</td>
<td>[ ] 14. Junior or youth camp</td>
<td>[ ] 15. Seventh-day Adventist books, magazines, or other publications (please name which ones)</td>
<td>[ ] 16. Other sources (please specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. Whether we remain in the Seventh-day Adventist church or decide to leave it, many events can influence our decisions. Below is a list of factors which might make a person wish to leave the Seventh-day Adventist church. Please indicate how much EACH of these may have influenced you toward leaving the Seventh-day Adventist church.

STRONG INFLUENCE TOWARD LEAVING THE CHURCH
MODERATE INFLUENCE TOWARD LEAVING THE CHURCH
SLIGHT INFLUENCE TOWARD LEAVING THE CHURCH
NO INFLUENCE POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE OR DOES NOT APPLY
HAS BEEN AN INFLUENCE TOWARD MY STAYING IN THE CHURCH

1. The church's stand on divorce
2. Judgmental attitude of church members
3. Coldness of church members
4. Racial bigotry of church members
5. Poor sermons
6. Church's rejection of smoking
7. Church's rejection of drinking alcoholic beverages
8. Dissatisfaction with local church leadership
9. Dissatisfaction with higher levels of church leadership
10. Feeling the church was too organized
11. Lack of sympathy and understanding of marital problems
12. Lack of sympathy and understanding of work problems
13. Church's demand for tithe and offerings
14. The church's attitude toward male-female sexuality
15. The church's attitude toward homosexuality
16. The church's attitude toward "worldly entertainment"
17. Hypocrisy among church leaders
18. Hypocrisy among church members
19. Church's concern for rules and regulations
20. Church "politics"
21. Other (please specify)
10. Below and on the next page is a series of statements. Next to each statement are five boxes. For EACH statement, please place a check mark in the box that indicates your degree of agreement or disagreement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRONGLY AGREE</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>NEUTRAL</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
<th>STRONGLY DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>1. I believe in God as a heavenly Father who watches over me and to whom I am accountable.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>2. I believe that my works have no effect on my salvation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>3. I believe that God revealed Himself to man in Jesus Christ.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>4. I believe that the Word of God is revealed in the scriptures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>5. I believe that Ellen White is inspired by God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>6. I believe that Christ will return soon.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>7. I believe that God set aside the seventh day of the week as a special day for rest and worship.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>8. I spend a good deal of time trying to grow in understanding of my faith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>9. My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>10. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>11. Most Adventists think they can work their way into heaven.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>12. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has too many rules and regulations.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>13. Many church leaders care more about the number of people baptized than the people who are baptized.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>14. There is too much politics in the Adventist church.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>15. Facing my daily tasks is usually a source of pleasure and satisfaction to me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>16. I have discovered satisfying goals and a clear purpose to life.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>17. My life is often empty, filled with despair.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>18. When I have tried to lead the Christian life, I have usually failed.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1[ ] 2[ ] 3[ ] 4[ ] 5[ ]</td>
<td>19. I have about given up trying to understand worship or get much out of it.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Continued

STRONGLY AGREE

AGREE

NEUTRAL

DISAGREE

STRONGLY DISAGREE

20. My personal existence often seems meaningless and without purpose.

21. My original impression of the Seventh-day Adventist church was different from what I later found.

22. When I became an Adventist I did not really understand the doctrines of the SDA church.

23. You can classify almost all people as either honest or crooked.

24. There are two kinds of people in the world: the weak and the strong.

25. The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not meet my personal or social needs. (Please specify the needs that have not been met.)

11. For each of the following statements please indicate how frequently the events described occur.

REGULARLY

FAIRLY FREQUENTLY

OCCASIONALLY

Seldom

NEVER

1. How often do you pray privately in places other than at church?

2. How often do you ask God to forgive your sin?

3. When you have decisions to make in your everyday life, how often do you try to find out what God wants you to do?

4. If not prevented by unavoidable circumstances, how often do you attend church meetings or in church work?

5. How often do you read the Bible?

6. How often do you read literature about Christianity?

7. How often do you talk about religion with your friends, neighbors, or fellow workers?
11. Continued

REGULARLY
FAIRLY FREQUENTLY
OCCASIONALLY
Seldom
Never

[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] 9. How often have you personally tried to convert someone to faith in God?
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] 10. How often have you been visited by other Seventh-day Adventist church members?
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] 11. How often have you been visited by a Seventh-day Adventist pastor?
[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] 12. How often do you have daily devotions?

12. Below is a series of concepts followed by pairs of adjectives. Rate each of the concepts on the dimension represented by each pair of adjectives. For example, if the concept were California and you thought California was very nice, somewhat good, and extremely dishonest you might mark the scale as follows:

CALIFORNIA
NICE [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Awful
GOOD [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Bad
Honest [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Dishonest

Be certain you place a mark in EACH of the three scales following a concept.

A. SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH
NICE [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Awful
GOOD [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Bad
Honest [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Dishonest

B. CHRISTIANITY
NICE [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Awful
GOOD [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Bad
Honest [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Dishonest

13. Are you currently practicing the Seventh-day Adventist faith?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

If you answered yes to question 13, please skip to question 25.
14. Which of the following best describes how you stopped practicing Adventism?

1. [ ] Drifted away gradually
2. [ ] Quit suddenly on my own
3. [ ] Drifted away gradually and was disfellowshipped
4. [ ] Quit suddenly on my own and was disfellowshipped
5. [ ] Was disfellowshipped

15. If you drifted away gradually, how long did this process take?

1. [ ] Less than one month
2. [ ] 1 to 5 months
3. [ ] 6 to 11 months
4. [ ] 1 to 2 years
5. [ ] 3 to 5 years
6. [ ] More than 5 years
7. [ ] Does not apply

16. Approximately how long has it been since you practiced the Adventist faith on a regular basis?

1. [ ] Less than one month
2. [ ] 1 to 5 months
3. [ ] 6 to 11 months
4. [ ] 1 to 2 years
5. [ ] 3 to 5 years
6. [ ] More than 5 years
7. [ ] Does not apply

17. Were you visited by a pastor or church member during or after the period when you stopped practicing the Adventist faith?

1. [ ] Yes
2. [ ] No

18. Did they express concern about your becoming separated from the Adventist church?

1. [ ] Yes
2. [ ] No

19. Are you currently a member of any church?

1. [ ] Yes
2. [ ] No

20. If you answered yes to question 19, to what denomination do you belong?

1. [ ] Seventh-day Adventist church (nominal member—name on books)
2. [ ] Other protestant (please specify denomination)
3. [ ] Catholic
4. [ ] Other religion (please specify)
21. During the time in which you stopped practicing the Adventist faith, what was the religious commitment of your spouse?

1[ ] I was not married at the time.
2[ ] Seventh-day Adventist
3[ ] Other protestant (please specify)__________________________
4[ ] Catholic
5[ ] Other religion (please specify)__________________________

22. At the time during which you stopped practicing the Seventh-day Adventist faith, what percentage of your friends were Seventh-day Adventist?

1[ ] None
2[ ] 1 to 20%
3[ ] 21 to 40%
4[ ] 41 to 60%
5[ ] 61 to 80%
6[ ] 81 to 99%
7[ ] All

23. For what reason do you no longer practice the Adventist faith? (Please write a brief description below.)

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

24. What are the chances that you might again become a practicing Seventh-day Adventist some day?

1[ ] Very likely
2[ ] Likely
3[ ] Don't know
4[ ] Unlikely
5[ ] Very unlikely.

________________________________________

PLEASE GO ON TO THE NEXT PAGE FOR THE SECOND SECTION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
25. **LIFE EVENTS**

If any of the following life events has happened to you in the last twelve months, place a checkmark in the brackets.

- [ ] Death of spouse
- [ ] Divorce
- [ ] Marital separation
- [ ] Death of close family member (excluding spouse)
- [ ] Major personal injury or illness
- [ ] Marriage
- [ ] Fired at work
- [ ] Marital reconciliation
- [ ] Retirement
- [ ] Change in health of family member (other than self)
- [ ] Pregnancy
- [ ] Sex difficulties
- [ ] Gain of new family member
- [ ] Business readjustment
- [ ] Change in financial state
- [ ] Death of close friend
- [ ] Change to different occupation
- [ ] Change in number of arguments with spouse
- [ ] Mortgage over $10,000
- [ ] Foreclosure of mortgage or loan
- [ ] Change in responsibilities at work
- [ ] Son or daughter leaving home
- [ ] Trouble with in-laws
- [ ] Outstanding personal achievement
- [ ] Spouse begin or stop work
- [ ] Begin or end of school
- [ ] Change in living conditions
- [ ] Change in personal habits (self or family)
- [ ] Trouble with boss
- [ ] Change in work hours or conditions
- [ ] Change in residence
- [ ] Change in schools
- [ ] Change in recreation
- [ ] Change in social activities

26. Sex:  
   - [ ] Male
   - [ ] Female

27. Race:  
   - [ ] American Indian
   - [ ] Black
   - [ ] Mexican-American
   - [ ] Oriental
   - [ ] White
   - [ ] Other (specify)

28. What is your age? _____
29. What is your current marital status?

  1[ ] Never married  
  2[ ] Divorced and remarried  
  3[ ] Widowed and remarried  
  4[ ] Married  
  5[ ] Separated  
  6[ ] Divorced and single  
  7[ ] Widowed and single

30. Do you have any children?

  1[ ] Yes  
  2[ ] No

31. If you answered yes to question 30, how many boys do you have? ____

32. If you answered yes to question 30, how many girls do you have? ____

33. Please check the grades you have taken in Seventh-day Adventist and non-Seventh-day Adventist schools.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST</th>
<th>NON-SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>a[ ] First</td>
<td>a[ ] First</td>
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<td>q[ ] Graduate or</td>
<td>q[ ] Graduate or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34. What is the highest degree you have attained?

  1[ ] High school graduate  
  2[ ] Bachelor's degree  
  3[ ] Master's degree  
  4[ ] PhD  
  5[ ] MD  
  6[ ] Other doctorate (please specify)  
  7[ ] Other (please specify)
35. What is your occupation?

36. Have you ever been employed by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination?
   1[ ] Yes
   2[ ] No

37. Are you currently employed by the Seventh-day Adventist denomination?
   1[ ] Yes
   2[ ] No

38. How long have you been employed by your present employer?
   1[ ] Less than six months
   2[ ] 7 to 11 months
   3[ ] 1 to 2 years
   4[ ] 3 to 5 years
   5[ ] Over 5 years

39. How many times have you moved in the last five years?

40. What is your yearly gross income? (Please indicate joint income of husband and wife if you are married.)
   1[ ] $0 to $4,999
   2[ ] $5,000 to $9,999
   3[ ] $10,000 to $14,999
   4[ ] $15,000 to $24,999
   5[ ] $25,000 to $39,999
   6[ ] $40,000 and above

41. How would you describe the community in which you are now living?
   1[ ] Rural
   2[ ] Small town
   3[ ] Suburban
   4[ ] Urban (city)
Bibliography
Bibliography


