



### 3. The Reality of the Heavenly Sanctuary: Why would it Matter for Adventism?

#### La realidad del santuario celestial: ¿por qué le importaría al adventismo?

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#### **Abstract**

The doctrine of the sanctuary is one of the most specific fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist church. However, besides its uniqueness and specificity, this doctrine may have been seen as something irrelevant for Christian theology in general. In this article, I will attempt to show that this belief provides a solid basis for understanding how biblical Adventism builds itself in a systematical and consistent manner. Indeed, we shall see that not only does this doctrine help understand how Adventism sees both the nature of earthly realities (i.e., human beings) and the heavenly ones (i.e., God), but also how these realities relate to each other accordingly. Nevertheless, as I write within a French adventist context, this doctrine, somehow, seems to have lost its significance. This may be explained by the fact that Adventism may have unconsciously blended classical Greek philosophy (ontology) with the biblical one. As a matter of fact, this, as we shall see, may hinder the consistency of the adventist vision, its identity and its role, whether in Christendom or beyond its borders.

#### **Keywords**

Sanctuary — Material — Time — God — Heaven

#### **Resumen**

La doctrina del santuario es una de las creencias fundamentales más específicas de la Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día. Sin embargo, aparte de su singularidad y especificidad, esta doctrina puede haber sido vista como algo irrelevante para la teología cristiana en general. En este artículo, intentaré demostrar que esta creencia provee una base sólida para entender cómo el adventismo bíblico se construye a sí mismo de manera sistemática y coherente. De hecho, veremos que esta doctrina no solo ayuda a entender cómo el adventismo ve la naturaleza de las realidades terrenales (o sea, los seres humanos) y las celestiales (o sea, Dios), sino también cómo estas realidades se relacionan mutua y correspondientemente. No obstante,

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como escribo en un contexto adventista francés, de alguna manera esta doctrina parece haber perdido su importancia. Esto se podría explicar por el hecho de que el adventismo puede haber mezclado inconscientemente la filosofía griega clásica (ontología) con la bíblica. De hecho, como veremos, esto puede entorpecer la congruencia de la visión adventista, su identidad y su papel, ya sea en la cristiandad o más allá de sus confines.

### Palabras clave

Santuario — Material — Tiempo — Dios — Cielo

## Introduction

For most part of my theological training I have been studying at non-Adventist universities. As a French who has always been the only one Adventist in class, this challenging but enjoyable and enriching experience led me to ask myself the following questions:

Why most of my non-Adventist peers do not believe what I believe as an Adventist, though we read the same Bible? Why while debating some theological issues, at some points, couldn't we reach to an agreement? What is Adventism? What can be its role in Christianity, and beyond its border? What is the Bible for it, and how does it interpret it? For the doctrine of God and the way His reality is conceived work as the presuppositions for every doctrine in Christian theology, how do Adventism understand God? How, from this theological understanding, did it get to its fundamental beliefs? More specifically, why do most Adventists believe in the so-called doctrine of the Sanctuary—which “opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious”<sup>2</sup> —, while generally speaking, Christians do not? Indeed, within my French context, an interesting statement was made by the theologian and professor Jean-Claude Verrecchia:

They [Christian interlocutors] understand our attachment to the sabbath, and our long for Jesus' Return. They admire our lifestyle and our ceaseless commitment to humanitarian concerns. But really, this sanctuary matter, they do not understand.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan during the Christian Dispensation* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), 423.

<sup>3</sup> Jean-Claude Verrecchia, *Dieu sans domicile fixe: entre autels, sanctuaires, temples et maisons* (Dammarie-les-Lys: Vie et Santé, 2013), 129.

Narrowing the perspective, how come that even within Adventism strong disagreements saw the light of day regarding this doctrine that seems to be unique?<sup>4</sup> Indeed, while some believe the heavenly sanctuary is a concrete tridimensional, spatial and temporal building, others do not. Does it really matter whether Adventism is divided on this point or not? In other words, would Adventism and its unity be strongly affected, whether one believe the heavenly sanctuary correspond to a concrete three-dimension structure in heaven or not?

This article argues that it would, and the comprehension one has about the reality of the heavenly sanctuary is decisive regarding Adventism's *raison d'être*.

For this article inquires primarily whether the heavenly sanctuary is material or not, we need to specify that this theological issue has to be dealt with systematically. Indeed, since the Bible speaks about the heavenly sanctuary, one needs to realize that a mere reading of the texts is insufficient if he wants to determine its reality. Moisés Silva explains:

... whether we mean it or not, and whether we like it or not, all of us read the text as interpreted by our theological presupposition. Indeed, the most serious argument against the view that exegesis should be done independently of systematic theology is that such a view is hopelessly naïve.<sup>5</sup>

In other word, our reading of the Bible will surely be impacted by what we have in mind, that is, the way our own ideas are conceived and organized by reason. What we have in mind refers to all the background (or *a priori*) that the subject brings to the object within the subject-object relationship<sup>6</sup> from which knowledge comes out. Rudolf Bultmann rightly says that interpreter brings conceptions as presupposition to exegesis.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I refer, for example, to the Desmond Ford worldwide crisis of the late 1970's.

<sup>5</sup> Moisés Silva, "Systematic Theology and the Apostle to the Gentiles", *Trinity Journal* 15, no. 1 (1994): 25.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Tillich speaks of the union between the knower (subject) and the known (object). He says: "Knowing is a form of union" (*Systematic Theology: Three Volumes in One* [Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1967], 1:94).

<sup>7</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), 48.

How can systematic theology be defined?

Systematic theology asks the following question: “What does the whole Bible teach us today?”<sup>8</sup> For our purpose here, the question may be if the Bible teaches that the heavenly sanctuary is material, or immaterial.

As we look for answers, we will seek to understand biblical realities—that include the reality of the heavenly sanctuary, which is a part of the whole—through its own worldview and not simply provide an outline of what the Bible teaches about it.

If the question of reality is raised, then philosophy (and especially ontology) has to be considered for both “philosophy and theology make claim to much the same turf—both are interested in the questions of God and of good life and of what being ‘human’ means, for example—but in importantly different ways, which is why there is bound to be competition and conflict between them, along with the possibility of cooperation.”<sup>9</sup> In this article, philosophy will be considered as *ancilla theologiae*, i.e. handmaid of theology. However, in this article, philosophy as handmaid of theology means that it will be submitted to theology and not the other way round. In other words, philosophy will not function as the ultimate authority over theology, but it will serve it as a tool which helps clarify and envision it with more precision. As William Horden says, philosophy “can be of service in helping the theologian to organize the language with which he speaks about his faith.”<sup>10</sup>

In addition to that, by studying systematically we mean one needs to see if the related doctrine is consistently connected to other doctrines, so that he may obtain a complete system of truth, connected and

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrines* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 23.

<sup>9</sup> John Caputo, *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>10</sup> William Horden, *Speaking of God: The Nature and Purpose of Theological Language* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1964), 78.

harmonious, and not “a mere aggregate”<sup>11</sup> of believes. In other words, we shall see “how the parts relate to the whole and the whole to the parts”.<sup>12</sup>

### Methodology

Through a process of deconstruction,<sup>13</sup> we shall first—not exhaustively, but hopefully accurately enough as we confine ourselves to that which is relevant to our study—look at the macro-hermeneutical principles<sup>14</sup> that some philosophers as well as some Christian theologians had generally been using through out history, in order to do theology. Macro-hermeneutical principles includes God’s ontology—for God is the supreme Being—and His concomitant relationship to humans (metaphysics), for these are of primary concern if God matters in one’s life. Such perspective will help us understand how these presuppositions inform and influence one’s interpretation or theory about the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. As Millard Erickson says, “our interpretation of the Bible is affected by our philosophical presuppositions”.<sup>15</sup>

Due to the limit of space for this article, I have decided to deal with Plato’s and Philo of Alexandria’s works first. I chose Plato because his ontological presuppositions—which supports a timeless understanding of the being of God—have functioned as a court of appeal for many theologians throughout history. Indeed, not only did Plato’s philosophy “dominate Christianity in the early Middle Ages, through the writings

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<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Max Müller (London, UK: Macmillan, 1922), 518-519.

<sup>12</sup> Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xxvii.

<sup>13</sup> Deconstruction is a critical method that leads to the analysis of the hermeneutical presuppositions upon which one’s theological tradition is based. It deconstructs the received theological interpretations. However, deconstruction is not an end *per se*, but it is an instrument that opens the way to a new construction. See Fernando L. Canale, “Deconstrucción y teología: una propuesta metodológica,” *DavarLogos* 1, no. 1 (2002): 5, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Raúl Kerbs explains that “the macro-hermeneutical principles are the most basic assumptions the mind needs to be able to function and to get acquainted with reality as such”. “Philosophical Assumptions of the Church Fathers: God and Creation,” *Enfoques* 26, no. 1 (2014): 36.

<sup>15</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Truth and Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 326.

of Boethius and Augustine of Hippo, the greatest Catholic theologian before Thomas Aquinas”,<sup>16</sup> but it also influenced theologians of the Protestant Reformation such as Martin Luther. Moreover, Platonism is still the philosophical ground upon which modern Christianity roots itself. Canale puts it: “Greek philosophy, rather than biblical insights, described God’s being as timeless, and this view affected theological thinking from early times and is found both in classical and liberal traditions”.<sup>17</sup>

Then, I selected Philo of Alexandria for—being strongly influenced by Plato’s philosophy, he is known as the Hebrew Plato—he explicitly exposes his view on the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. In fact, his view has been foundational for Christianity’s understanding of biblical realities.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, we will analyze how these ontological principles affected the theology of three different Christian theologians: Thomas of Aquinas, John Calvin and Jean-Claude Verrecchia. The reason why I selected the first two ones is because the both of them have written a systematic theology and are instrumental theologians for Christianity, whether it be Catholic or Protestant. Therefore, we will be able to see systematically how their ontological principles and the way their understanding of God and their conception of the heavenly realities (which includes the heavenly sanctuary) are put together. Then, I have chosen to look at Jean-Claude Verrecchia’s theology (though he did not write any systematic theology) because he recently wrote about his view on the reality of the heavenly sanctuary in the actual French Adventist context.

Thirdly, since the method of deconstruction must open the way to a new construction, I will attempt to rebuild an Adventist view of the heavenly sanctuary’s reality based on the *sola Scriptura* principle that is

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<sup>16</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Fernando L. Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration: The Ground for a New Approach”, *AUSS* 31, no. 2 (1993): 91.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Origen, one of the most prolific and influential early Christian theologian, was strongly influenced by Platonic philosophy and the works of Philo. So were Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Ambrose, and Augustine. Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker books, 1999), 592-593.

Scripture interprets itself, and in terms of authority, the Scriptures are the sole religious authority—and one may add the sole authority at the level of hermeneutical presuppositions as well—in Christianity<sup>19</sup>.

In our conclusion, will shall summarize the research, and we shall make some further suggestions.

### Ontological principles in Plato and Philo of Alexandria

*Plato (427-347 B.C.)*

Plato's allegory of the Cave is foundational in order to understand his view of reality. This allegory is fueled by a dualistic vision of the universe: the world of Sense versus the world of Ideas. Essentially, this dualism consists in the distinction and separation between time/space/corporeality (i.e. the world of Sense) on the one hand, and timelessness/spacelessness/incorporeality (i.e. the world of Ideas), on the other. In this case, time and timelessness function as primordial presuppositions that condition the macro-hermeneutical principles<sup>20</sup> of the philosopher. By timelessness I mean both the absence of time (i.e. time does not exist), and the concept of non-sequentially (i.e. time exists in a "simultaneous" way such as Karl Barth suggested)<sup>21</sup>, where there is no experience of "the flow from past to present and future"<sup>22</sup> that is, there is no before and/or after.<sup>23</sup> Con-

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<sup>19</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, xxii.

<sup>20</sup> Fernando L. Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness As Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Spring, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> "Even the eternal God does not live without time. He is supremely temporal. For His eternity is authentic temporality, and therefore the source of all time. But in His eternity, in the un-created self-subsistent time which is one of the perfections of His divine nature, present, past and future, yesterday, to-day and to-morrow, are not successive, but simultaneous" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, III.2*, ed. G.W Bromiley and T. F. Torrance [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010], 437).

<sup>22</sup> Fernando L. Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: An Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotec, 2005), 93.

<sup>23</sup> From a biblical interpretation of ontology, one may say that a time that is not sequential is not a real time, but a negation of it.

sequently, the timeless understanding of God means that His reality is non-historical and incompatible with human history.

From this conception, time has to be seen as a container (the Cave) from which one needs to go out in order to live in eternity (or timelessness), such as God does. This definition also implies the fact that if time can be defined as the measure of movement (as John Callahan indicates)<sup>24</sup> then in timelessness there is no movement. If there is no movement, then, there is neither space nor corporality, hence the association time/space/corporality and timelessness/spacelessness/incorporality. In other words, a timeless (or eternal) world implies spacelessness, motionlessness and by extension, incorporality. In *Timaeus*, Plato explains it this way:

For we say that it “is” or “was” or “will be,” whereas, in truth of speech, “is” alone is the appropriate term ; “was” and “will be,” on the other hand, are terms properly applicable to the *Becoming which proceeds in Time, since both of these are motions; but it belongs not to that which is ever changeless in its uniformity* to become either older or younger through time, nor ever to have become so, nor to be so now, nor to be about to be so hereafter, nor in general to be subject to any of the conditions which *Becoming has attached to the things which move in the world of Sense, these being generated forms of Time, which imitates Eternity and circles round according to number*. And besides these we make use of the following expressions, that what is become is become, and what is becoming is becoming, and what is about to become is about to become, and what is non-existent is non-existent ; but *none of these expressions is accurate*.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, Plato’s cosmology implies that the world of Sense is a movable image of eternity—or a movable imitation of the unmovable reality, i.e. God—and time is a creation of the divinity. As a matter of fact, motion—and we shall add space—exists only in time, not in eternity. Speaking about the world, Plato adds:

... it has come into existence; for it is *visible* and tangible and *possessed of a body*; and all such things are sensible, and things sensible, being apprehensible

<sup>24</sup> John Callahan, *Four Views of Time in Ancient Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 68-69.

<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Timaeus 37e-38b* (*Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. R. G. Bury [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925], 9:77 [emphasis is mine]).

by opinion with the aid of sensation, come into existence, as we saw, and are generated.<sup>26</sup>

In other words, Plato's world of Sense, that is our world, is a temporal, historical, movable—and he remains consistent as he put forwards the idea of “body”, i.e. corporeality—, spatial image of the timeless, non-historical, unmovable, incorporeal, and spaceless world of ideas, that is, the supreme and supernatural world. Needless to say that in Plato's view, our earthly reality is therefore inferior and less real than the heavenly one. Assuming this platonic cosmology, one has to think that what is abstract in our world is real, and what is concrete is less real, nay, illusory.

#### *Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C-50 A.D)*

As being one of the most illustrious philosopher in Hellenistic Judaism, Philo's writings provide an important backdrop for the Christian understanding of the realities and its view of the heavenly sanctuary. Philo's—and the Alexandrian school of theology wherein he studied—shares with Plato the same ontological principles: a cosmological dualism through which the invisible (or intelligible) corresponds to the timeless and impassible reality—the visible (or sensible) is temporary, passing and transient. Philo, as Millard Erickson puts it, “blended Old Testament thought with Greek Stoicism and Platonism”.<sup>27</sup> Philo regarded the Scriptures as God's revelation written by men under divine inspiration. But his platonic epistemological framework made him think that biblical writers could only express universal truth through an “allegorization” of literal meaning of biblical texts which relates to biblical characters, such as Moses who was supposed to have seen some heavenly realities on mount Sinai. Thus, when Philo speaks about the heavenly sanctuary, he says:

It was determined, therefore, to fashion a tabernacle, a work of the highest sanctity, the construction of which was set forth to Moses on the mount by divine pronouncements. He saw with the soul's eye the *immaterial forms of the material*

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 28b-c (emphasis is mine).

<sup>27</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1986), 128.

*objects about to be made, and these forms had to be reproduced in copies perceived by the senses, taken from the original draft...and from the pattern of the mind.*<sup>28</sup>

Here, Philo's statement is clearly assuming Plato's dualism between the world of Ideas and the world of Sense. Philo is explaining that what Moses was caused to see on Mount Sinai (Exod 25,9.40; 26,30; 27,8; Num 8,4) pertained to the heavenly/godly realm, that is, the timeless and spaceless world of Ideas. Therefore, Moses did not see a three-dimension structure —whether it be the original Heavenly Sanctuary itself, or a copy of it “that serves as a model/patterns for another copy”—,<sup>29</sup> but through his soul's eyes he saw the spaceless and immaterial reality that had to be converted into a spatial and material reality for sensible eyes. In line with this view, Philo remains consistent when he considers the reality of the angels, as he says: “An angel is an intellectual soul or rather wholly mind, whole incorporeal [...]”<sup>30</sup>

As a matter of fact, if heavenly realities are to be immaterial and spaceless, so must the angles be.

So, if Philo cannot consistently say that what was shown to Moses was a concrete three-dimension structure, how can one define what Moses saw? With respect to the platonic world's view, Philo will answer that what Moses saw was “the whole universe”. Indeed, he says: “The highest, and in the truest sense *the holy temple of God is*, as we must believe, *the whole universe*, having for its sanctuary the most sacred part of all existence [...]”<sup>31</sup>

This brief analysis allows us to say that Philo interpreted the reality of the heavenly sanctuary as being immaterial, abstract, spiritual, incorporeal and spaceless. That is because his macro-hermeneutical principles

<sup>28</sup> *De Vita Mosis*, II.xv.74 in LCL, *Philo* VI, 485-487 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>29</sup> Richard M. Davidson, “Old Testament Basis for Sanctuary Typology in Hebrews” in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, ed., Frank Holbrook, DARCOM, Vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), 169.

<sup>30</sup> *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum*, II, 13, in LCL, *Philo*, *Philo*, Supp. II, 48 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>31</sup> *De specialibus legibus*, I.xii.66 in LCL, *Philo*, VII, 137, 139 (emphasis is mine).

relied on a platonic dualistic view of reality which assumes that the idealistic heavenly realm (which includes God's being)<sup>32</sup> is timeless and spaceless on the one hand, and that the sensible earthly realm (which includes humans' being, except from his soul) is temporal and spatial, on the other.

### Ontological principles in some Christian theological works

#### *Thomas of Aquinas (1224-1274)*

Thomas of Aquinas was probably one of the most influential Christian Catholic theologian of the Middle Ages. In order to do theology, Aquinas relies on Aristotle philosophy (Plato's pupil). The Aristotelian conception of being led Aquinas to see God as the ultimate cause of the existence of everything, which includes their movements. If everything moves, there must be an "Unmoved Mover" who is out of space, and out of time. As Aquinas relates to the way Scriptures' content must be understood, he explicitly exposes his view on God when he says: "As God, although *incorporeal*, is named in Scriptures *metaphorically* by corporeal names, so *eternity* though *simultaneously whole*, is called by names implying *time* and *succession*".<sup>33</sup>

Here, Aquinas explains that the data which are contained in Scriptures do not relate to our reality (our sensible world in a platonic sense) but, in a temporal and human way, they refer to the eternal, timeless,

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<sup>32</sup> Philo explicitly follows the classical Greek philosophy by endorsing the timeless interpretation of God's being when he says: "But God is the maker of time also, for He is the father of time's father, that is of the universe, and has caused the movements of the one to be the source of the generation of the other. Thus, time stands to God' in the relation of a grandson. For this universe, since we perceive it by our senses, is the younger son of God. To the elder son I mean the intelligible universe, He assigned the place of firstborn, and purposed that it should remain in His own keeping. So, the younger son, the world of our sense, when set in motion, brought that entity we call time to the brightness of its rising. *And thus, with God there is no future, since He has made the boundaries of the ages subject to Himself. For God's life is not a time, but eternity, which is the archetype and patterns of time; and in eternity there is no past nor future, but only present existence*" (Philo, *Quod Deus immutabilis*, in LCL, 31-32 [emphasis is mine]).

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I q. 10 a. 1 ad 4 (emphasis is mine), *Fathers of the English Dominican Province*, 5 vols (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981).

incorporeal realities. This is why everything must be interpreted metaphorically. Following Philo's way of interpreting Scriptures, Aquinas is consistently forced to imply that the heavenly realities—which include God's being—are no different to the way Plato considered them.

More precisely, one must notice that Aquinas' definition of eternity implies timelessness in a sense of time simultaneity, wherein there is no succession. In other words, God has no history: He has no past, and He has no present which anticipate a future, for He lives everything simultaneously, that is, timelessly, in a permanent and absolute present. As a matter of fact, God must also be the "Unmoved Mover" who "moves" only within the context of Plato's simultaneous world of Ideas, which—from our sensible world's perspective—basically means that He does not move at all.

Indeed, if God was to move (in a sensible way of thinking), this would imply succession: passing from point A to point B. That is not conceivable for Aquinas (as for Aristotle). Indeed, if God could move in such a way, He would be subjected to necessity: the need to make a move in order to satisfy a lack. This would make Him imperfect for God—who therefore must be impassible—<sup>34</sup> cannot be subjected to need.<sup>35</sup> Eventually, for movement implies composition—for there would be nothing to move otherwise—, Aquinas aptly associates both the ideas of incorporeality with simultaneity (or timelessness).

According to this thomistic conception of God's being, how to consider the fact that Jesus-Christ is now in Heaven as the Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle, which is in heaven? having a seat there (Heb 8,1-2)? To this, quoting John of Damascus, Aquinas would answer: "We do not speak of the *Father's right hand* as of a *place*, for how

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<sup>34</sup> The impassibilist Rob Lister recognizes that the God of Scripture is not impassible as he says: "Scripture never makes a direct assertion of a metaphysical doctrine of divine impassibility" (*God is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology of Divine Emotion* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013], 190).

<sup>35</sup> God is "perfect because He lacks not", *Summa Theologica* I, q. 4, a. 2.

can a place be designated by His right hand, who Himself is *beyond all place*?<sup>36</sup>

In other words, for Aquinas, heaven and its realities (which implies the heavenly sanctuary) are “named in Scriptures metaphorically by corporeal names” (i.e. tabernacle), and as a matter of fact, Jesus-Christ cannot live in a corporeal place and have a corporeal seat. Therefore, the entire cosmos must be spiritualized, and the idea of a material-three-dimension structure in heaven—such as the heavenly sanctuary along with corporeal heavenly beings such as angels—must be rejected.

#### *John Calvin (1509-1564)*

As being a great Protestant reformer, John Calvin was a theologian that developed an influential systematic theology for Christianity. For example, his theology was foundational for Karl Barth’s voluminous *Church Dogmatic*. However, though Protestantism launched the *sola Scriptura* principle, only did the Reformers use it for the purpose of modifying some Catholic’s systematical issues, but not to question Catholics’ ontology and metaphysics in light of Scripture alone. Bruce McCormack describes the lack of ontological reflection as a serious weakness in Protestant theology. Indeed, he explains that the real culprit, for both Luther and Calvin, was “the ancient Greek ontology they inherited—either Aristotelian substance or Platonic realism”.<sup>37</sup> In addition to that, McCormack makes the following insightful remark:

The problem with refusing ourselves to engage ontological questions as an essential part of the dogmatic task is that we all too easily make ourselves the unwitting servants of the ontology that is embedded in the older theological rhetoric that we borrow – and that was with Calvin.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica III*, q. 58, a. 1, ad 1 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>37</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, “What’s at Stake in Current Debates over Justification”, in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed., Mark Husbans and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 107.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

As a matter of fact, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*<sup>39</sup> (and in a traditional platonic fashion), John Calvin distinguishes between temporality and eternity.<sup>40</sup> This understanding of God's ontology affects Calvin's epistemological reflection upon God's knowledge, or prescience. Indeed, for Calvin, if God's being is timeless, so is God's knowledge. As a matter of fact, God (fore)knows everything as an eternal present. He says:

When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye ; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him (as those objects are which we retain in our memory), but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, God's knowledge of future events or things comes from His own mind where they are already real. This understanding is foundational for Calvin's conception of predestination and God's eternal election.

Now, how did Calvin interpret Scriptures? Is his reading similar to Aquinas', that is, one need to understand biblical statements of heavenly realities metaphorically? I argue that the answer for the latter question is yes. That is visible through Calvin's *principle of accommodation*. Basically, this principle indicates that God speaks to us through intelligible human words (in platonic sense, our words are part of the temporal world of Sense) in order to impart His knowledge (God's knowledge belongs to the atemporal world of Ideas). Therefore, what is written in Scriptures does not present what God could have said to human being through out history, but God's "speech" must be understood as something eternal that lies behind temporal human's speeches (or writings).

In that way, temporal human biblical writings are accommodations of God's timeless expression, and one needs to extract the eternal hidden sense of God's eternal "speech" that lies behind the biblical words.

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<sup>39</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. ed. John T. MnNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960).

<sup>40</sup> "In eternity there can be no room for first or last". Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.13.18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.21.5.

Concretely, the notion of God being in heaven must be a metaphor that accommodates non-spatial and timeless realities to human spatial and temporal cognition. As a matter of fact, the *principle of accommodation* reveals the issue of the dichotomy between the words and things in order to find the meaning of biblical texts. Interestingly enough, this issue was already dealt with at the theological school Alexandria with its allegorizing of Scripture, that is, “a metaphor extended into a story where the elements of the story take on meanings that are quite different from the ordinary literal sense of the words”.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, when Calvin speaks of God’s manifestation in the Old Testament (that includes His manifestation in the earthly sanctuary) as hints of God’s “incomprehensible essence”.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, how does Calvin understand the biblical testimony of Christ being in the heavenly sanctuary?

Calvin affirms that Jesus-Christ “entered a sanctuary not made with hands to appear before the Father’s face as our constant advocate and intercessor”.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, one must not be misled by thinking that Calvin sees heavenly realities as concrete. For Calvin, the term “heaven” incarnates the way finite human mind can speak about “unspeakable glory”, since “wherever our sense comprehend anything they commonly attach it to its place”.<sup>45</sup> Therefore the term heaven “is only a metaphor. Since it is an abstract notion, the Scripture uses a concrete image which corresponds to the highest thing visible, because our ‘ignorance’ and ‘stupidity’ prevents us from understanding the abstract”.<sup>46</sup> Following Aquinas’ ideas, Calvin assumes the idea that God is “beyond all place” for God “is not confined to any particular region but is diffused through all

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<sup>42</sup> James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2008), 123.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.3. It is interesting to notice that while Calvin says that God’s essence is incomprehensible, he, at the same time, assumes a foundational comprehensive understanding of God’s essence as being timeless.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.16.16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. 20. 40.

<sup>46</sup> J. H. Mazaheri, “Calvin and Augustine’s Interpretations of ‘the Father in Heaven’”, *Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique* 106, n. 3-4 (2011): 448-449

things” which means that there is nothing “earthly or physical about Him, lest we measure him by our small measure”.<sup>47</sup> He consistently suppose that we must therefore “rise above all perception of body and soul”.<sup>48</sup> Kilian McDonnell put it this way:

Calvin’s emphasis on Christ’s body having its place in heaven can be misleading. He did not think Christ’s body being assigned to a definite place in heaven. [...] He is quite aware that there is not a celestial circumscription reserved to the divinity and the glorified creatures, that the glorified body of Christ is not bound by the Aristotelian category of place. Christ is not in a place in heaven, but he is there as a in a space of place”.<sup>49</sup>

In summary, it can be said that John Calvin did not consider the reality of the heavenly sanctuary as being a concrete spatial three-dimensional structure within which Jesus-Christ entered after His ascension. The reason why Calvin rejects this reality is because, as we saw, he is influenced by Greek ontology and assumes it as a presupposition in order to understand God’s being, and by extension, biblical data.

### *Jean-Claude Verrecchia*

Jean-Claude Verrecchia is a French theologian and professor of the New Testament, hermeneutics and the Second Temple literature, currently teaching at Newbold College, England. He has recently authored a book entitled *Dieu sans domicile fixe: entre autels, sanctuaires, temples et maisons* [*Homeless God: Between Altars, Sanctuaries, Temples and Houses*],<sup>50</sup> in which he exposes his view on the reality of the heavenly sanctuary.

First of all, Verrecchia communicates explicitly the ontological presuppositions that he assumes as he speaks about the reality of the heavenly sanctuary when he says: “Mesopotamians religions, those coming from

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<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.20.40.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Kilian MacDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), 226-227.

<sup>50</sup> Every quotation will be of my own translation.

Iran, India, central Asia as well as Israel have at least one thing in common that we also find in Plato's philosophy: the belief in a split universe".<sup>51</sup>

Through this assertion, Verrecchia seems to say that the biblical Israel assumed a platonic cosmology. As we have seen in our first part, Plato's cosmology does conceive the notion of a "split universe", which implies a dualism between time and timelessness. Thinking that the Bible presupposes such philosophy, Verrecchia goes on to say: "Unquestionably, the writers of the Bible—the book of Exodus and the other books—did not ignore this split cosmology (general conception of the world) that one can say is virtually universal".<sup>52</sup>

Interestingly enough, Verrecchia concurs with Philo's (as well as with Flavius Josephus') ontological principles in order to expose his understanding of the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. Indeed, as we saw earlier, Philo sees it as being immaterial. Therefore, Verrecchia says: "What matters is that, though coming from two different backgrounds, Philo and Josephus bring a concurrent view on the reality of sanctuary/temple. One expression can summarize their thoughts: *the temple is the universe*".<sup>53</sup>

Needless to say that, according to that view, the universe must be understood as timeless and spaceless. Indeed, if one cannot say that because God cannot live in a "heavenly building" (i.e. the heavenly sanctuary), He could, at the same time, live in a "wider box" (i.e. the universe). This would not make sense because, again, the universe would be seen as temporal and spatial territory, and God would be living in there. Eventually, that would make God temporal, spatial, corporeal.

Now that we have seen Verrecchia's ontological view of the heavenly sanctuary, we will briefly see how his ontological presuppositions guide his reading of some biblical texts, and help him support his view. One example (2 Chr 6,18) will be sufficient for our purpose. This verse says: "But will God really dwell on earth with humans? The heavens, even the

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<sup>51</sup> Verrecchia, *Dieu sans domicile fixe*, 34.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 42 (emphasis is mine).

highest heavens, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!<sup>54</sup>

Then, commenting on God's presence in the earthly temple, Verrecchia says:

Have we ever read such inappropriate prayer? Here is a king [Salomon] who gathered all the dignitaries and the political leaders of the land. Here is a king who stands before his people gathered for the temple's official dedication. Here is a king who had just been witnessing the divine's response to his project through his miraculous appearance within the clouds, but who will say nothing else that never will God live in such a place!<sup>55</sup>

If read with platonic presuppositions in mind, one will surely think that the text is saying that God cannot—ontologically—live within any space, whether it be a heavenly sanctuary (“even the highest of heavens”), or an earthly one. Therefore, Verrecchia can consistently say that God will never “live in such a place”, because God cannot live in any space.

Nevertheless, Verrecchia shows that he adheres to the Adventist historicist interpretation of the book of Daniel. Indeed, when it comes to the interpretation of Daniel 7, Verrecchia sees the empires' succession as followed: Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks, then the Romans.<sup>56</sup> Then, after referring to the “two thousand three hundred days” in Daniel 8,14, and showing that Daniel is confused regarding the understanding of this time period, Verrecchia explains:

He [God] will give Daniel the keys to understand this two thousand three hundred days period. What matters is that God explains to Daniel the vision he was shown goes far beyond the history of his people, the city of Jerusalem's fate and its actual destroyed temple's. The prophecy has another dimension: the geography is not local, but universal ; time is *not literal*, but *symbolical*. [...] So, the devastated sanctuary is not the temple in Jerusalem, but *another sanctuary, in heaven*. One prophecy, but a double perspective: the first one is for Daniel and its people, with a seventy-year due date. The second, universal, has a much longer due date: two thousand three hundred nights and days.

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<sup>54</sup> NIV.

<sup>55</sup> Verrecchia, *Dieu sans domicile fixe*, 94 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

It is on this basis that the Adventist Church has built its doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary. *This incarnates a foundational interpretation for there would undoubtedly be no Adventist Church*.<sup>57</sup>

What does Verrecchia mean by a “symbolical” time? “Another sanctuary, in heaven”? Moreover, Verrecchia seems to say that the sanctuary doctrine is foundational for Adventism *raison d’être*.

Regarding the first question, Verrecchia concurs with the Adventist understanding of the two thousand three hundred days’ *terminus ad quem*: 1844. It is in this sense that Verrecchia seems to imply an understanding symbolical time (which is not a negation of time). Interestingly, after quoting the twenty-fourth belief of the twenty-eight fundamental Adventist beliefs<sup>58</sup> —which gives a brief explanation of the eschatological event that has occurred in the heavenly sanctuary since 1844—, he points negatively to the Australian and former Seventh-Day Adventist Desmond Ford who, back in the 70’s, rejected the Adventist view of “1844”. However, Ford consistently rejected “1844” and the sanctuary doctrine because his ontological presuppositions came from Greek philosophy.<sup>59</sup> This naturally led him to adopt a Lutheran view of justification by faith.

Regarding the second question above, Verrecchia’s understanding of the other “sanctuary, in heaven”, as we saw, must correspond to the timeless, spaceless, immaterial universe. He explains it clearly when he says: “... the corner stone [Jesus-Christ] cannot be confined in any space”.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 122 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., cf. Jean-Claude Verrecchia, *Ce que croient les adventistes* (Dammaries-lès-Lys: Vie et Santé, 2001), 314.

<sup>59</sup> Ford assumes the platonian dualism: temporality/spatiality and timelessness/spacelessness as he speaks about the being of God. Indeed, like Aquinas and Calvin, he sees God as being spaceless (incorporeal), and therefore timeless. Commenting the book of Genesis, he says: “We have never known an omnipotent God, who is an omnipresent Spirit, to use vocal cords and condescend to the activities of a surgeons, a gardener, a walker, and a seamstress. But all these are to be found in Genesis chapter 1-3. God is a spirit to John 4: 24. [...] Therefore he has no vocal cords of physical parts such as we know – hands, feet, buttocks, etc”. See Desmond Ford, *Genesis Versus Darwinism: The Case for God in Scientific World* (n.p: A&S, 2014), 146.

<sup>60</sup> Verrecchia, *Dieu sans domicile fixe*, 173.

Then, commenting on the Epistle of Hebrews, he says:

... the one who preaches to the Hebrews deconstructs any understanding of a materialistic view of celestial geography. There is a sanctuary in heaven. Jesus entered into it. But *the sanctuary should not be seen as a building, as a geographical space. It is in the very presence of God that Jesus went in for us.*<sup>61</sup>

He also says: “Let no one tell me that it is on the existence of a material dwelling place of God in heaven that Adventism’s survival lies.”<sup>62</sup>

In other words, Verrecchia—assuming a platonic worldview—consistently says that there is no material heavenly sanctuary in heaven (for heaven is timeless and spaceless). One may wonder what it means to be “in the very presence of God” as Jesus is. For consistency’s sake, one must think that being “in the very presence of God” means to enter the timeless and spaceless dimension of God.

However, how about “1844” and Jesus entering the second and last phase (in the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary), of His ministry on humanity’s behalf?

Indeed, if God is spaceless, incorporeal, then He also is timeless. If He is timeless, then any supposed date coming from our temporal and spatial world—or sensible world, to say it in a platonic fashion—such as “1844”, pointing toward any historical event that takes place in heaven is unconceivable. In other word, though Plato, Philo, Aquinas, Calvin, Ford and Verrecchia would agree on the being of God (i.e. spaceless/incorporeal), Verrecchia is not coherent in supporting “1844” for this date is supposed to belong to a temporal dimension, which is attached to a historical event taking place in heaven (which in a platonic worldview cannot be historical).

Indeed, if Jesus moved out from the holy place to the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary in order to start the second phase of his ministry on humanity’s behalf, then he cannot do so anymore for passing from one phase (and one place) to a second one would require time (and therefore,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 205 (emphasis is mine).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 133.

movement/space/corporeality, which would imply a materialistic reality of the heavenly sanctuary). In other words, if Verrecchia holds a platonic view of a “split universe”, he cannot consistently maintain the Adventist doctrine of the Sanctuary and its historicist understanding of Daniel, on the one hand, and “1844” (as he seems to support) on the other. In that case, Desmond Ford was more consistent as he rejected foundational Adventist beliefs.

We now turn to the third point: a reconstruction of an ontological ground for Adventism.

### Ontological principles in biblical Adventism

The first fundamental belief of Adventism relies on the *sola Scriptura* principle. Not only does Adventism believe the Bible is the primary source (*prima Scriptura*) of God’s Revelation in order to do theology, but it is also the source (in its entirety: *tota Scriptura*) that plays a magisterial role in order to do theology. As a matter of fact, Adventist ontology is based on the Hebraic-Christian-biblical view of the universe.<sup>63</sup> This view does not concur with the traditional Greek-Christian split universe. In fact, according to the biblical view, God is not timeless, spaceless, incorporeal, static, but He is temporal, spatial, corporeal and dynamic: He moves,<sup>64</sup> He speaks, He has feelings and can be influenced by something outside of Him (He is passible), such as human’s decisions.

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<sup>63</sup> For more details about the biblical Adventist ontology, see, Canale, *Timelessness As Primordial Presuppositions*; Gulley, *Systematic Theology*; Elmer A. Guzman, “The Collateral Effects of the Delay of Jesus’ *Parousia* on the Message, Mission, and Worship of the Church”, in *Scripture and Philosophy: Essays Honoring the Work and Vision of Fernando Luis Canale*, eds., Tiago Arrais, Kenneth Bergland, and Michael F. Younker (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2016), 475-490; John C. Peckham, “Divine Passibility, Analogical Temporality, and Theo-Ontology: Implications of a Canonical Approach”, in *ibid.*, 32-53; John C. Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014).

<sup>64</sup> For example, Gordon J. Wenham observes that the term “walking” (*hitpa’el* participle of the root *halak*) in Genesis 3,8, points to a horizontal movement as God walks in the Garden of Eden (*Genesis 1-15*, WBC [Dallas, TX: Word, 1998], 76).

In this view, time is not a thing, or a “container”, from which one must come out in order to reach eternity (timelessness), but time is intrinsic to being. In other words, if time exists, it is because things (God, humans, angels, etc) are. If things are, then time exists. One cannot be without the other. While through Greek-Christian philosophy one might say things are “within time”, or “out of time”, in a Hebraic-Christian philosophical fashion one may say things are temporal (and not “in time”). If they are not temporal, they do not exist. They are not. As a matter of fact, while Greek philosophy teaches that there are two realities, that one is timeless/spaceless (heaven), and that the other is temporal/spatial (earth), biblical Hebraic-Christian philosophy teaches that there is only one temporal/spatial reality, in which to different territories (earth and heaven) coexist. Interestingly enough, though this biblical Hebraic realism may be seen a “naïve” (as Karl Barth says). It can only be seen this way if one reads the Bible through Greek idealistic glasses.

Not realizing his ontological inconsistency, Verrecchia is right when he says that what separates God from humanity is sin.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, what separates humanity from God is not a “ditch” that separates time/space from timelessness/spacelessness, as it is supposed in Greek philosophy. In light of biblical philosophy, when Salomon was saying that the heavens could not contain God (2 Chr 6,18), it does not mean God is timeless/spaceless. Without sacrificing his temporality/spatiality, one may just think that God is not forced, or restricted (or constrained) to dwell in a temple, or even the heavens. He could decide to live somewhere else, whatever that place be. But as the Bible shows it, he decided to do so anyway, whether it be in a earthly sanctuary (Exod 25,8), or in the heavenly one (Heb 8,1-2), and it is from there that he shows the universe how He fixes the problem of sin.

Nevertheless, one must not think that God’s time is totally univocal (i.e., similar) to human’s time. Indeed, contrary to humanity, God has so far (and will always in the future) live the totality of time (i.e., history).

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<sup>65</sup> “For God’s project has never been to let sin separate him from humanity, but on the contrary to meet it, whatever its situation may be, whatever its faults” (Verrecchia, *Dieu sans domicile fixe*, 63).

He is everlasting. He does not have a beginning of existence, though he has lived every single beginning that may have started within God's infinite "intratrinitarian"<sup>66</sup> and historical love relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, before any creature came into existence (whether it be, angels, human beings or any being).

On the other hand, God's time is neither totally equivocal (i.e., different) to humans. As we have seen, from a biblical perspective, God shares his history with ours. In other words, human history is fully part of God's history, though human history is not God's full history. Indeed, unlike God, humanity was created in a beginning of God's everlasting history (Gen 1,1). In this way, one may say that God's time is "analogous" to human's time. It is eternal time. Therefore, one can affirm that "in Eternity, time is more present than ever".<sup>67</sup> Eventually, one may say God is infinitely temporal.<sup>68</sup> It is in this biblical sense that God can be seen as being transcendently immanent. He is transcendent because his time is infinite (contrary to human's) and at the same time he is immanent because his time (or history) is no stranger to human's time.

In sum, because biblical Adventism adheres to the Hebraic-Christian biblical realism, it can reasonably conceive the reality of the heavenly sanctuary as spatio-temporal and material. This biblical ontology leads Adventism to do exegesis as well as theology accordingly. In fact, I would disagree with Verrecchia when he says that the survival of Adventism does not depend on the existence of a material dwelling place of God, located somewhere in heaven. I would rather suggest that the reality of the spatio-temporal, material, physical and concrete heavenly sanctuary is a knowledge upon which Adventism stands or falls. If not sustained, inconsistency lies ahead—as we compared Verrecchia's understanding of "1844" with his platonic view of the heavenly sanctuary.

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<sup>66</sup> John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 60

<sup>67</sup> Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, ML: University Press of America, 1993), 202.

<sup>68</sup> Fernando Canale, "Absolute Theological Truth in Postmodern Times", *AUSS* 41, no. 1 (2007): 95-96.

Dematerializing, or spiritualizing the heavenly sanctuary (or any heavenly reality) would force any theologian to go back to Plato's philosophy. Indeed, realizing the corporeal reality of the heavenly sanctuary, biblical Adventism—from the beginning of its history back in the mid-nineteenth century—could understand that God is not timeless/spaceless, but is in fact is temporal and spatial. This led the first Adventists<sup>69</sup> to read the Bible according to its own philosophy. From that moment on, the *sola Scriptura* principle—initiated by the Protestant reformer—had started to grow more mature.

Indeed, these biblical ontological presuppositions gave biblical Adventism a firm ground to support its historicists interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, a literal six-day creation, the Sabbath, the conditional immortality of human beings (absence of immortal soul) and so forth. Also, the historical death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus-Christ (as past events), as well as his present intercession in the material heavenly sanctuary (including his two-phased ministry), his future coming, the Millennium, etc., become relevant.

## Conclusion

Huw P. Owen noticed that in the Occidental world, theism has had a double origin: the Bible and Greek philosophy.<sup>70</sup> In a nutshell, this assertion was made manifest in this article as we tried to figure out how heavenly realities, and more specifically the reality of the heavenly sanctuary may have been perceived throughout history.

Through a process of deconstruction we have seen that the biblical heavenly sanctuary may have been interpreted by theologians as being

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<sup>69</sup> This does not mean that all Adventist kept on doing theology upon the Hebraic-Christian biblical realism. Very early in its beginning, some Adventists left this philosophical ground. For instance, John H. Kellogg and his pantheistic view of the universe is an example.

<sup>70</sup> H. P. Owen, *Concepts of Deity* (New York, NY: Herder y Herder, 1971), 1. See also Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990), 4-5. In the same vein, Roger E. Olson explains that the history of Christianity has strongly been influenced by philosophy, and especially Greek (Hellenistic) philosophy (*The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999], 51).

immaterial. This was the view of Philo of Alexandria, Thomas of Aquinas and John Calvin. This is due to the fact that platonic dualism (which opposes time to timelessness) has served as an ontological ground upon which biblical interpretations and theology should be done. Besides, the Adventist theologian Jean-Claude Verrecchia seems to share this view while supporting the twenty-fourth fundamental belief of Adventism which relates to the heavenly sanctuary and “1844”. As we saw, maintaining both an immaterial view of the heavenly sanctuary and 1844 leads to inconsistency.

However, biblical Adventism does not understand it this way. While Greek-Christian philosophy cling to the a platonic split universe idea, wherein temporality is at odd with atemporality. Adventists (based on the *sola Scriptura* principle) see it as a temporal and spatial place that includes different spaces such as the earth (upon which physical beings live) or a concrete three-dimension building (i.e. the heavenly sanctuary) in which corporeal beings live, including a corporeal Jesus-Christ. This understanding allows Adventism to see why it interprets the Bible (e.g. Daniel and Revelation) in such a specific way, and can reasonably expose a dynamic system of biblical truths that are consistently and harmoniously connected (systematic theology).

Furthermore, I would like to suggest that the twenty-fourth fundamental belief should contain a more accurate formulation of the heavenly sanctuary’s nature, that is, the idea of its materiality. Though this might be seen as a small detail, as we noticed, Verrecchia does quote it with favor in his book while sustaining the traditional philonic-thomistic-calvinistic view of it. He could have done so because the idea of the nature of the heavenly sanctuary’s spatio-temporal reality lacks. As a matter of fact, though the temporal aspect of Jesus’ ministry in heaven is mentioned (i.e. “1844”), may be misled with the actual formulation as he/she may connect this doctrine—while assuming an abstract idea of its reality—with the doctrine of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of human beings and so on. In this article, we have seen that Verrecchia’s book proves this assertion right. In a Aristotelian

fashion, we may say that a small thing in the principle becomes excessively big in the end.<sup>71</sup>

So, is the comprehension one has about the reality of the heavenly sanctuary decisive regarding Adventism's *raison d'être*? I believe it is, and we have tried to explain why in this article. The main reason is because if the heavenly sanctuary is spiritualized in a platonic fashion, this would lead Adventism to give up on the *sola Scriptura* principle, and it would not prevent it from spiritualizing any other reality whether it be in heaven (God, angels, etc.) or on earth (human beings). This would eventually cause its end. In other words, the materiality of the heavenly sanctuary helps Adventism to remain consistent in its theology.

I would further add that if Verrecchia says that our Christian interlocutors do not understand that “sanctuary matter”, it is because Adventist theologians may have presented it from a Greek-Christian perspective. As we saw, this latter is at odd with the biblical one. As a matter of fact, it is normal that our interlocutors feel confused about what Adventist theologians may say about the doctrine of the sanctuary. Assuming a Greek-Christian worldview would eventually lead Adventist theologians to think that this doctrine is a belief that is just peripheral, but not essential, for Adventism and its understanding of the Gospel, especially when it comes to have interreligious exchanges (whether it be with Christians or not).

However, if the sanctuary doctrine is systematically studied from a biblical perspective, it would allow one to look for understanding why Jesus-Christ is not on earth anymore, where he is now, what he is doing, with whom and for whom.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, since his resurrection and ascension to heaven (Acts 1,9-11) Jesus-Christ went into the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8,1-2 ; 9,11-12 ; John 14,1-4 ; Rev 5 ; etc.) where he started his

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<sup>71</sup> Aristote, *Cœuvres d'Aristote: Traité du Ciel, Livre I, Chapitre V*, trans. Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire (Paris: Librairie Philosophique de Ladrangé, 1866), 29.

<sup>72</sup> In order to have an overview of Jesus' current heavenly ministry. I recommend Jiri Moskala's article “Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Judgment: A Celebration of the Cross in Seven Phases of Divine Universal Judgment (An Overview of the Theocentric-Christocentric Approach)”, *JATS* 15, no. 1 (2004): 138-165

ministry of intercession in favor of repentant sinners who have accepted his death for them, in order to inherit eternal life (John 3,16). This biblical understanding prevents notably mystical theology as well as sacramental theology that basically bring Jesus' presence down on earth, with in the believer's soul. These theologies actually nourishes the liturgy of modern Christianity (i.e., the Eucharist, music, prayer, sermon, etc.) and its lifestyle. Nevertheless, Jesus, the Son of man, will not return until he finishes his ministry that actually takes place in the heavenly sanctuary, and more precisely since 1844, in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary (Dan 7,9-10, 13-14 ; Dan 8,14 ; Rev 11,19).<sup>73</sup>

Eventually, what can be the role of Adventism in Christianity, and beyond its border? I believe Adventism can become a guide in order to show that, in a biblical systematic fashion, the doctrine of the sanctuary can "opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious".<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> For an insightful study on the relationship between the reality of the presence of Jesus-Christ and Christian liturgy, see Guzman, "The Collateral Effects of the Delay of Jesus' *Parousia* on the Message, Mission, and Worship of the Church", 475-490.

<sup>74</sup> White, *The Great Controversy*, 423.