



*"Watchman,  
what of the night?"*

*The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12*

# THE "HOLY FLESH" ALTERNATIVE

T. A. Davis Follows

R. S. Donnell

Prior to the 1888 Message Conference at Andrews University in August, 1986, a group of the "leading lights" within corporate Adventism who profess to be concerned about the apostasy in "Israel" assembled at Hartland Institute in Virginia.<sup>1</sup> It was their objective to arrive at a consensus in certain key doctrinal areas so as to speak with one voice. Among those present who were involved in the various discussions were Ron Spear, Dr. Ralph Larson, Thomas and Margaret Davis, Elder Joe Crews and some of his staff, Elders R. J. Wieland and D. K. Short, Dr. Bernell Baldwin from Wildwood, Dr. Herbert Douglass, President of Weimar Institute, besides the host, Dr. Colin Standish and his staff. One of the major topics discussed was the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Elder Thomas Davis, author of Was Jesus REALLY Like Us?, led in the discussion on the subject. The position taken by Davis was challenged only by Dr. Douglass; the rest either went along, or remained silent. When the editors of Ministry in 1985<sup>2</sup> printed essays giving the two divergent views held in Adventism today on the human nature of Christ,

Davis responded with a resume of the position taken in his book. This was published under the title - "Christ's Human Nature: An Alternate View." (Ministry, June, 1986, pp. 14-16) But, and here is the crux of the whole issue, the alternative presented by Thomas Davis, is the exact teaching of the Holy Flesh Movement on the same doctrine!

## Some Historical Background

When the book, Questions on Doctrine, was first published, this editor was ministering in the Indiana Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Visiting a retired minister who during the Holy Flesh Movement had served the Indiana Conference as Book Agent [now called the Publishing Department Secretary], we discussed certain teachings of the book. He remarked that the Holy Flesh men taught the same thing. He then put me in contact with key persons by which I was able to obtain source documents of the Holy Flesh Movement. Then when I was head of the Bible Department of Old Madison College, I assigned a senior student this topic on which to do further research. He obtained letters written by S. N. Haskell to Ellen G. White telling of his contacts with the Movement in Indiana. One thing Haskell emphasized was their understanding of the Incarnation. He summarized his perception gathered from contacts during his attendance at the Muncie, Indiana, campmeeting. He wrote to Ellen White:

Their point of theology in this particular respect seems to be this: They believe that Christ took Adam's nature before he fell." (Ltr. #2, Sept. 25, 1900)

Because of this correlation between Haskell's evaluation of the doctrine of the Incarnation as taught during the Holy Flesh Movement and the teaching of the book, Questions on

Doctrine, the research manuscript - The Holy Flesh Movement 1899-1901 - emphasized Haskell's summation as the teaching of the leaders in that Movement.

During the time of the initial research in Indiana, we did obtain a copy of an "Essay" written by R. S. Donnell from Memphis, Tennessee. From this we quoted in our manuscript, and in retrospect, it gives the shade of difference from Haskell's conclusion. Donnell in this "Essay" sent to S. S. Davis, the founder of the Movement, wrote:

Christ's body represented a body redeemed from its fallen spiritual nature, but not from its fallen, or deteriorated physical nature. (See Manuscript, p. 31)

Those ministering in Indiana who opposed the Movement under the leadership of R. S. Donnell and S. S. Davis noted the bottom line which Haskell did not perceive, and challenged this position. Two of these were Elders S. G. Huntington and G. A. Roberts. Roberts stated that "Hebrews 2:7-14, was used to prove that Christ was born with flesh like 'my brethren' and 'the church' would have after they passed through the garden [of Gethsemane] experience," in other words, converted and cleansed. (Ibid.)

Huntington charged those teaching this concept of the Incarnation with a teaching which led to Papal error. He wrote:

In adopting the theory of sinless flesh, though its advocates have ever been loathe to admit it, they are nevertheless unconsciously led into the papal error of the Immaculate Conception and other errors of the Catholic church. The theory of sinless flesh is pre-eminently papal - the foundation upon which the Catholic church stands. Remove this, and the whole structure of the Papacy, as a religion, falls to the ground. The expression, "sinless flesh," is nowhere found in the Bible: then why adopt such an expression... The record says that Christ was "made in the likeness of sinful flesh," (Rom. 8:3) "Of the seed of David," (Rom 1:3) "Of the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:16) Then let us believe that it was just that way without trying to spiritualize these plain declarations to suit a perverted fancy, and by so doing entangle ourselves in an inextricable web of inconsistencies. (Ibid. p. 32)

When the first manuscript on the Holy Flesh

Movement was put together as the requirement for the class - Research in Theology - at Andrews University, I was promised by Arthur White access to all available material in the Document Files of the Estate on this Movement so as to incorporate the previously gathered data with the on-the-ground research done while ministering in Indiana. If this promise had been kept, the actual position of the leaders of the Holy Flesh Movement in regard to the Incarnation could have been completely clarified at that time. However, within the day, after learning of the conference at Hartland Institute, and the position taken by those present, with the exception of Dr. Douglass, I was given copies of a series of tracts from the Estate Document files written by Donnell in defense of his teaching on the Incarnation. These tracts clarify the teaching beyond all doubt.

Following Donnell's resignation as president of the Indiana Conference in 1901, he went to Elnora, Indiana, and lived with the S. S. Davis family for several years. In 1905, he was called back into the ministry of the Church to serve as pastor of the Raleigh, Tennessee, church near Memphis. There he taught the same doctrine of the Incarnation as he had taught in Indiana. As a result of this teaching, action was taken by the conference on February 24, 1907, to annul his credentials and disfellowship him from the Church. Donnell responded by publishing in tract form a series of articles which he wrote while president of the Indiana Conference, and which were published in the Indiana Reporter. This 26 page tract is entitled - What I Taught in Indiana. His explanation of these articles as they first appeared gives some interesting insights. He stated:

These articles all bear upon what I taught in Indiana, to which opposition was taken by a number of the General Conference Committee. This opposition was so strongly urged that I finally resigned my position as president of the conference. The articles were headed "Did Christ Come to This World in Sinful Flesh?" Why I was charged with teaching "Holy Flesh" I know not, unless it was that in my article, as well as in the pulpit, I took the negative side of the question.

In these articles his teaching is clearly

defined. That the reader might see the exact parallel between what Donnell taught and what Thomas Davis is teaching today, we shall place them side by side in two columns:

R. S. Donnell

Thomas A. Davis

In Hebrews 2:8, referring to the change wrought as a result of the fall, the apostle says: "But we see not yet all things put under him." No; man fell and lost his estate and marred the image of God in him. He now needs a restorer, a Saviour. So the apostle, continuing in verse 9, says: "But we see Jesus." In what way do we see Him? Ah, we see Him coming as the Restorer, as the Saviour of the fallen race. And now, how must He come? Must He come possessed of the inherent traits of the fallen race, or while He comes as a man should He not come as a man redeemed, possessed of all the traits of character, all the inherent principles of a godly nature, and holding a title to the lost estate? Are not these what He offers to man?... In short, if Christ proposes to restore man to his first estate, He must come to man standing in that estate Himself. He must come standing where Adam the first owner, stood before he fell. That is where the world must see Him. And, thank God, it is just at this point that the Bible presents Him to us. "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels (exactly the record concerning Adam), for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor (just so with Adam); that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." (Heb. 2:9) The Spirit of Prophecy, in the Signs of the Times, June 13, 1900, says "Christ came to this earth and stood where Adam stood, overcoming where Adam failed to overcome." Now, Christ stood where Adam stood, and Adam stood there without a taint of sin. So Christ must have stood where Adam stood before his fall - that is, without a taint of sin.

This must be so, for Paul continues the subject, and in verse 11 he says: "For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified (not those He is going to sanctify, but they who are sanctified) are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren." Notice it is the sanctified ones who He is not ashamed to call brethren. Further, it is the sanctified ones of whose flesh He partakes. Forasmuch, then as the children (or brethren, sanctified ones) are partakers of flesh and

There is an alternate understanding to the two viewpoints of the human, incarnate nature of Christ championed by Drs. Douglass and Gulley. This view could provide a bridge between these two positions and resolve a number of problems that arise in each of them. I can only outline the third viewpoint here.

We may use as a point of departure a quotation from The Great Controversy, p. 477: "Through Jesus the fallen sons of Adam become 'sons of God.' Both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." (Heb. 2:11)"

Here Ellen White equates the "sons of God" with those who "are sanctified," and who, additionally, are called the brethren of Him "that sanctifieth" - Jesus. Paul refers to "those sanctified in Christ Jesus." (I Cor. 1:2, RSV).

It is a particular group - those who are being "sanctified" - who are referred to as Christ's brethren. Who are these people?

Romans 6:22 tells us: "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life." (RSV). No proof is required to state that those "set free from sin" are those who have been regenerated, born again. It is, then, those born-again ones, those being sanctified, whom Christ is not ashamed to call His brethren - and no others. It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants." (Rom. 9:8 RSV...) The unregenerate are not "sons of God" but are "children of wrath." (Eph. 2:3; ...) And there is no third category.

But we read in Hebrews 2:17 that Jesus was "made like unto his brethren [the born-again, sanctified ones] in every respect."

\* \* \*

This brings me to my main emphasis. To develop my thesis, I stated, some paragraphs back, that "there was something important about the incarnate nature of Christ that was like born-again people." Now I give

Donnell (cont.)

Davis (cont.)

blood, He also Himself likewise (just as the sanctified ones are partakers) took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil." Heb. 2:14.

\* \* \*

Christ Himself took part of flesh and blood, just as the children did. That is, He took part of the same flesh that the children possessed. We found also that the children are the sanctified ones. Now the sanctified ones are surely those upon whom the truth of God and the power of His Holy Spirit has wrought - the ones who are new creatures in Christ Jesus, those who have been created unto good works, the same which God before ordained that they should walk in. (pp. 3-5 Emphasis supplied)

dowed with was not like that of unregenerate sinners. His human nature was common only with those who have experienced a spiritual rebirth.

Let us express this another way: Of Mary, Jesus was born, "born-again." (Was Jesus REALLY Like Us, p. 30, Emphasis his.)

How does one relate to the reasoning and seeming logic of both Donnell's and Davis' position? Donnell takes off from the point of "the first dominion." His understanding of this concept is faulty. Christ came to claim back "the first dominion" by overcoming the enemy. He entered the strong man's house to spoil his goods, but first He bound the strong man, and then spoiled "his house" [dominion] (Mark 3:27) As Paul put it - Jesus "condemned sin in the flesh." If He had not taken upon Himself, the fallen, sinful nature of Adam, He could not have done this. Here we come to the very core of the "holy flesh" doctrine. Donnell taught that for God to dwell again in man - "sin must be eradicated." (Tract, op. cit., p. 5) Thus for him, Christ took a body prepared of God in which all the fallen nature of Adam had been eradicated. This is also the essence of Davis' teaching when he wrote that "Of Mary, Jesus was born, "born again."

As one studies Donnell's application of his understanding of the Incarnation to Christian living, there is very little difference between his teaching, and the seminar presentations of Margaret Davis on "How to Be a Victorious Christian." In other words, we are seeing a revival of "holy flesh" teaching in the ministry of Thomas and Margaret Davis minus the emotional extravaganza which accompanied it in 1899-1901. When the Indiana Movement was brought to a halt at the 1901 GC Session, a special conference session was called to meet in Indianapolis, at which time Ellen G. White said - "When I am gone from here, none are to pick up any points of this doctrine and call it truth. There is not a thread of truth in the whole fabric." (EGW Estate Document File #190)

Elder Thomas Davis in his take off on his teaching of the incarnation as an alternative to either Drs. Douglass' or Gulley's position uses a quotes from the Writings.<sup>3</sup> The "holy flesh" men of Indiana were also quite profuse in their use of the Writings. Huntington, in reply, called their attention to some of the Writings they wanted to overlook. He noted Desire of Ages, p. 638, which states that Christ "is the Son of man, and thus a brother to every son and daughter of Adam." Then he commented:

it the proper perspective by rewording it thus: There is something about born-again people that is like the incarnate Christ. This, I believe, is the better viewpoint, rather than the more common one - one that is sometimes given short shrift - that Jesus was "born born-again." (It might be observed that the difference here is in perspective.) (Ministry, June, 1986, pp. 14-15)

Now carefully consider the following statement from Hebrews 2:17, and as you read, emphasize the word in capital letters: "Therefore he had to be made like his BRETHREN in every respect."

The point that presents itself so foreceably here is that Jesus was not incarnated with a nature common to all men. He did not come to this world to be in all respects like all men. The human nature He was en-

## LAKE REGION FOLLOW-UP

In the January issue of WNN, we reported on alleged irregularities involving the Sharon Seventh-day Adventist Church of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a local church officer, and the pastor at the time. It has been called the "Zaddock Scandal." We also noted that a Lake Region Survey Commission had been formed by the North American Division to investigate activities within the conference. We suggested - "There is a possibility that this 'Lake Region Survey' involves more than merely the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Milwaukee." Information now at hand so indicates. In a letter to Elder Robert H. Carter, President of the Lake Union Conference, J. J. Adam, Secretary of the Adventist Laymen Council states:

The Lake Region Conference has placed \$700,000.00 of tithe funds into the Racine Street Project. Into a shopping center, Continental Partners, the Lake Region Conference has invested \$1,300,000.00 without authority from anyone. On the reverse side of this letter you will see where the state of Wisconsin is looking into the criminal activities of Adventist ministers in the Zaddock Scandal. [Reported in January, WNN] To top it off you allowed the Adventist Hospital System-NORTH to lend \$220,000 to the Lake Region Conference with no board authorization. (Letter dated, Jan. 2, 1987)

The General Conference officers have now entered into this picture, and have sent a strong Memo to the Executive committee of the Lake Union Conference. This Memo reveals that the report of the Lake Region Survey Commission had been presented to the Lake Union Committee. As a result certain actions were voted, one which read that the Union officers were to appoint "an individual to directly oversee the daily financial operations of the [Lake Region] conference." Now it appears that in carrying out these actions, there has been negligence to such an extent, that the Memo reads:

The General Conference officers feel bound to express to the Lake Union Conference Executive Committee and its officers that the measures taken up to the present by the Union to resolve this serious situation must be considered as merely preliminary and, from a practical viewpoint, quite unsatisfactory.

The Memo further reveals that the Study Commission "met with some difficulty" in being able to obtain "accurate and well

documented facts" for its report. A summary follows expressing the convictions of the General Conference officers which reads:

In summary and with deep regret, it is the considered opinion of the General Conference officers that the situation in the Lake Region Conference has taken on unacceptable proportions, has become a reproach to the church at large and can no longer be tolerated. From reports reaching the General Conference, it is apparent that the patience exhibited by the North American Division over a long period of time is being considered as weakness and inability to take corrective and disciplinary action. In spite of appeals and urging during the last two years, there has been no substantial change in the financial status of the conference. If anything, it has worsened. This has been the trend for at least four years, and should have been resolved long ago.

Compounding this, there appears to be an underlying spirit of defiance, cynicism, and insubordination on the part of conference leadership and the conference committee. It is our understanding that the Lake Region Conference officers are misrepresenting the November 19, 1986 action of the Lake Union Executive Committee as being a victory for the Lake Region Conference. We feel that this is unfortunate for it is leading the members of the conference into believing that the situation has been satisfactorily settled.

It is also being alleged that because no charges of personal gain, fraud, or embezzlement are being brought against the president, or other officers, that the situation has been cleared up. The facts are that there are several areas of expenditure which have not been fully accounted for, and which therefore leave unanswered questions. It is unclear at this point whether certain individuals may or may not have personally benefitted from the transactions which have taken place. The commission however has chosen to give the benefit of the doubt to the leaders. Even though there are expenditures which are not yet fully accounted for, and certain questions remain unanswered, we prefer to believe - contrary to the convictions of some - that individuals have not taken advantage of their office for personal benefit.

Due however to repeated willful violation of policy and rejection of counsel, the General Conference and North American Division officers have lost confidence in the ability of the conference leaders, who are ordained ministers of the gospel to operate in harmony with established policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is clear that this state of affairs cannot continue, and in our judgment the president and possibly some of his associates have disqualified themselves for spiritual, ecclesiastical, and executive

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From p. 4 - Davis

Notice, His brethren are every child of Adam - sinners, men and women under the law, and not simply the spiritual seed of Abraham alone. Now if the spiritual seed of Abraham and the sanctified ones only are those referred to, and they being redeemed are no longer under the law, and Jesus was made like unto them, then it would become evident that Jesus was not made under the law at all. (Son of Man, p. 12)

This is exactly what the men leading the Movement in Indiana believed, that Christ was exempt from the law of heredity that effects every other child of Adam. In 1903, the president who succeeded Donnell, Elder Ira J. Hankins, sent a set of questions to both S. S. Davis, and Donnell. To the question - "Is every child born into the world naturally inclined to evil even before it is old enough to discern between good and evil? - Davis replied: "Yes, unless preserved from the law of heredity in conception by the power of the Holy Ghost."

Donnell in replying to the same list of questions wrote in answer to one - "Christ's nature was a divine human nature. A nature which, prior to the new birth, has not been possessed by a single son or daughter of Adam since the fall." (Tract, op. cit., p. 20)

The approach to the papal teaching of the "immaculate conception" is embodied in the Davis "holy flesh" alternative to the historic Adventist position and the "new" theology. The kernel of his whole incarnation theology is to be found in the single statement - "Of Mary, Jesus was born, 'born again'." If so, then Mary was able to give to Jesus a human nature different than any other mother can give to her child. To say that Mary was merely a "carrier" for the human body of Jesus, and that her womb was sanctified, is but to avoid the immaculate concept of Romanism yet produce the same results. Davis' position is actually the apostate Evangelical Protestant position, which in turn is but a modification of the Papal teaching.

One has only to note the next sentence following the one - "Of Mary, etc." - to get a revealing insight. It reads - "Please note that this concept did not originate with me." Where did it come from? His footnotes tell you - authors whose works

are promoted by the Evangelical publishing houses such as Zondervan which promoted the book of Walter Martin - The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism. (Davis, op. cit., p. 34) The water is totally different coming from the cisterns of Babylon than the water from the wells of salvation!

This whole conference held at Hartland Institute under the sponsorship of Dr. Colin Standish should send forth a message loud and clear to those who are enamored with the "firm foundation" publication and seminars that the "foundation" being presented is really not so "firm" but has become a guise to promote evangelical theology in the area of the incarnation. Keep in mind there is no alternative to truth! Truly as the Lord counseled Isaiah -

Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; near fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Isa. 8:12-14)

<sup>1</sup>My information concerning the conference held at Hartland came from conversations with three persons who were present. Their description of what took place was so nearly identical, except that each added detail the others didn't, that I accept as valid their reports. (See Deut. 19:15) All three were highly alert and intelligent men.

<sup>2</sup>See Ministry, June, 1985, pp. 8-21.

<sup>3</sup>In using the Writings as a take off point, Elder T. A. Davis violated the counsel found in the Writings themselves. Ellen White has clearly stated - "You have no right to use the testimonies to prove doctrine." ("Proper Use of the Testimonies", p. 5) Since Elder Davis has laid aside this mandate, perhaps he should consider the following statement:

Clad in the vestments of humanity, the Son of God came down to the level of those He wished to save. In Him was no guile or sinfulness; He was ever pure and undefiled; yet He took upon Himself our sinful nature. (R&H, Dec. 15, 1896)

Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost, all those who had inherited the fallen nature of Adam.

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From p. 5 - Lake Region

leadership. (p. 3)

Certain immediate actions are demanded:

- 1) The resignation of the president of the Lake Region Conference.
- 2) Rectification of the "untenable financial position" of the Conference.
- 3) Submission of a plan for "immediate payment of delinquent remittances" to the General Conference.

This Memo was signed by Elder C. E. Bradford on behalf of the officers of the General Conference. Certain questions remain. Why was a serious situation which is now acknowledged to have been "contrary to accepted ethics, spirit, and authority of the church" allowed to continue four years? Why was the so-called "patience" of the North American Division leadership interpreted by the officers of the Lake Region Conference as "weakness and inability to take corrective and disciplinary action"? Did such a sentiment come as a result of the counsel given by the North American Division leadership, or was this a Lake Union leadership failure? Since it is admitted in the Memo that the present situation "has become a reproach to the Church at Large," it should, therefore, be reported to the Church through the Adventist Review in full detail with all questions answered, including those suggested above.

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### IN RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT - II

Enclosed with the January issue of "Watchman, What of the Night?" was the new 1987 Order Form. We have reduced the published manuscript offerings to the basics, primarily those containing the research done by the Foundation. The prices are held to a minimum as no labor is included in the charge. Labor costs are paid from other sources. The cassette tapes include messages given either at the annual fellowship meetings, or at the monthly convocations held here on the campus. We have also added a new section - Facsimiles of important documents for those who do not have access to original copies. If there are documents which are not listed, which you are interested in, write to us, and we will try to help you.

As we plan ahead until Jesus comes, we want

to increase our potential for service. For those living in the continental United States, we are arranging a telephone service with AT&T, for any needing information, documentation, or counsel may call us, giving their name and number. We will reply at the earliest possible moment when not away from the campus. Just call (501) 292-3251. (No call will be answered which gives a number only.) Actually the cost of your call will be about the same as the cost of a first class letter, and be charged as one minute on your telephone billing. For others, we can only do what we have tried to do over the years, answer your letters promptly. Naturally, when on an itinerary, we cannot maintain our objective of replying within forty eight hours to any letter. Then there are delays when we return due to the backlog of mail which has come in during our absence. We trust you will continue to understand as you have over the past years.

While the eerie light of deception cover the earth - the Bible calls it darkness - there is to be light in each dwelling of the saints. We seek to send forth that light through the printed page, on cassette tapes, and in personal contacts. We solicit your prayers for our protection as we travel the highways; for the presence of God's Spirit as we write, that what we write may be truth - pure and unadulterated. We pray for you in 1987, the Spirit of discernment so that as you read or hear you may have clear minds to discern truth alone, in this hour when "many voices" are crying out in deception, and in some cases, actual deceit, under a guise of professed historic Adventism.

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