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**THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES:  
PARADIGM FOR A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW**

by

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### Introduction

The Adventist educator of the nineties functions in an academic and social environment in which the secular worldview predominates. Our students are constantly bombarded through the entertainment industry and other avenues by the misguided priorities of the secular mindset which places prosperity above principle, success above service, pleasure above piety, and human potential and plans over divine power and providence. The Book of Ecclesiastes is a valuable tool with which to counteract these influences because it so effectively exposes the emptiness of a lifestyle based on a secular worldview.

The purpose of this paper is to present the worldview of Ecclesiastes, show that it counteracts the secular worldview, and offer some suggestions on how the Book may be used in leading students to adopt and retain a Christian worldview. Two approaches are recommended -- the philosophical/theological and the practical/personal.

### Worldview Concept

The term *worldview* has become very popular in the vocabulary of most disciplines. It has been defined as “a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the makeup of our world,”<sup>1</sup> “a set of beliefs about the most important issues of life,”<sup>2</sup> “a comprehensive view of existence,”<sup>3</sup> “a perspectival construct about the makeup of life as it struggles with the questions of reality, truth, ethics, and history,”<sup>4</sup> a “fundamental framework through which we view life and the world,”<sup>5</sup> “the structure by means of which you integrate and interpret all of experience . . . your set of presuppositions about the world.”<sup>6</sup>

A worldview, however, is not just a theoretical construct, but a perspectival framework which impacts upon one’s whole approach to life. It is not merely a vision *of life* but a vision *for life*, providing a model *of the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*.<sup>7</sup> “It forms the basis of our beliefs, determines our values, and guides our conduct,”<sup>8</sup> conditioning “the entire range of thought and action,”<sup>9</sup> providing “a point of departure, a sense of direction, a focus of destination,”<sup>10</sup> maintaining the unity and coherence of life,<sup>11</sup> and giving meaning and direction to all activities and events.<sup>12</sup>

The secular worldview which has dominated western civilization has taken many forms such as realism, existentialism, humanism, naturalism, materialism, empiricism, scientism, secularism, atheism, and rationalism. However, the worldview which is described as secular humanism encompasses the essential elements of all these and may be considered the matrix from which they have emerged.

The term *humanism*, first used in the 17th century, was coined to “differentiate the study of things using human authorities from the study of the same things theologically.”<sup>13</sup> This substitution of human authority for divine authority is the foundation of the humanistic outlook on life, making secular humanism the embodiment of the secular worldview and the antithesis of the Christian worldview.

The three principal characteristics of secular humanism are pleasure, reason, and freedom.<sup>14</sup> Weiss further notes that the centrality of pleasure-seeking is conveyed by the expression “rejoice in the present life; all else is beyond thee,” and that human reason is exalted to a level which ascribes limitless potential to human intelligence and to mankind’s capability to accomplish whatever is desired.<sup>15</sup>

Freedom is at the centre of secular humanism, the notion being that human beings are “legislators and judges of their own conduct, responsible to no one else,” having their destiny in their own hands.<sup>16</sup> This assertion of complete freedom involves the denial of the reality of any transcendent, superior Being, and the rejection of the idea that there are moral absolutes.<sup>17</sup>

The approach, format, and content of the Book of Ecclesiastes makes it not only an excellent paradigm for the Christian worldview, but an effective polemic against secular humanism. If philosophy is defined as the investigation of the principles underlying reality, as mankind’s quest for truth, then Ecclesiastes is a book of philosophy.<sup>18</sup> Outrightly rejecting secular humanism,<sup>19</sup> it presents a God-centred worldview<sup>20</sup> and provides a sound philosophy of life, of the purpose of human existence, and of mankind’s duty and destiny.<sup>21</sup> Since it portrays and recommends this God-centred perspective on life against the background of personal experience, it is necessary to address the question of authorship, with a view to establishing the historicity of the experiences described in the presentation of its worldview.

### **Authorship and Tone of Ecclesiastes**

The Hebrew title for the Book is *Qoheleth* which probably refers to the “convener” of a meeting, or the “speaker” or “preacher” at such an assembly.<sup>22</sup> The identity of the author, the Preacher, is not given. He is described only as “son of David, King in Jerusalem” (1:1). From ancient times Solomon has been considered the author of Ecclesiastes described in this verse, but there are those who deny Solomonic authorship for various reasons.<sup>23</sup> Gleason L. Archer presents a cogent and persuasive argument for ascribing the Book to Solomon:

The author of this work identifies himself as the son of David, king in Jerusalem. While he does not specify that his name is Solomon, it is fair to assume that the direct successor of David is meant rather than some later descendant. This assumption is confirmed by numerous internal evidences, such as the references to his unrivaled wisdom (1:16) his unequaled wealth (2:8), his tremendous retinue of servants (2:7), his opportunities for carnal pleasure (2:3), and his extensive building activities (2:4-6). No other descendant of David measures up to these specifications but Solomon himself.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the points made by Archer, the ascription of many proverbs to the Preacher (12:9), also lends credence to authorship by Solomon who wrote three thousand proverbs (1 Kings 4:32). Ellen White states categorically that Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes in his old age,<sup>25</sup> having returned to God after many years of atheistic doubt and complete apostasy.<sup>26</sup> It was upon this experience that Solomon drew, under divine inspiration,<sup>27</sup> in outlining the elements of his worldview.

Solomon’s reference to his own personal experience in the futile quest for happiness, and

his conclusion that all such human effort is vain has led some to regard him (or whomever they consider the author) as having a negative view of life, seeing things in the worst possible light, and holding out no hope for human happiness. His use of the Hebrew word *hebel* (“vanity”) thirty-nine times to describe a wide range of human activities has been pointed to in substantiating this claim. The basic meaning of *hebel* is “breath” or “vapour,” but as used in Ecclesiastes it connotes that which is transitory and unsubstantial,<sup>28</sup> inconsequential and futile,<sup>29</sup> profitless,<sup>30</sup> meaningless.<sup>31</sup>

The author has been described as gloomy,<sup>32</sup> melancholy,<sup>33</sup> despairing,<sup>34</sup> boldly skeptical and gently cynical,<sup>35</sup> fatalistic,<sup>36</sup> nihilistic,<sup>37</sup> extremely pessimistic,<sup>38</sup> a neurotic “pathological doubter” suffering from a “psychic disturbance,”<sup>39</sup> and as one who “concludes that everything (bright or shadowed) is only a vapour blown down the corridors of time; and being only a vapour himself it does not too bitterly disturb him.”<sup>40</sup>

W. J. Deane asserts, however, that such a conclusion can only be arrived at when these negative expressions are considered apart from their context and the place they occupy in the overall presentation. Consequently, when the treatise is viewed in its totality, rather than evaluated by isolated passages, the charge of pessimism falls to the ground. He further states concerning the author’s outlook:

He believes in the moral government of the universe; he acknowledges the reality of sin; he looks to a life beyond the grave. He would not paralyze exertion and hold back from work; he recommends diligence in one’s own duties, beneficence towards others; he leads men to expect happiness in the path on which God’s providence leads them. There is no real hopelessness, no cynical despair, in his utterances taken as a whole.<sup>41</sup>

Far from pessimistic in tone, the Book of Ecclesiastes includes a call to joy. Set within the description of the futility of purely human endeavour are numerous references to joy and commands to enjoy life as a gift from God. The Hebrew root *šmh* (“gladness”, “mirth”, “pleasure”, “be glad”, “rejoice”) occurs seventeen times (cf. 2:24,26; 3:12,13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7,9; 11:8,9). R.N. Whybray identifies seven pessimistic sections in Ecclesiastes<sup>42</sup> and notes that towards the end of each section there is a call to rejoice<sup>43</sup>, a call which constitutes the solution to the problem<sup>44</sup>. Gordis avers that in Ecclesiastes “joy is God’s categorical imperative for man.”<sup>45</sup>

Further testimony to the strong element of joy in the tone of Ecclesiastes is the fact that it is read in the synagogue at the Festival of Tabernacles, the most joyous of the Israelite festivals (cf. Deut. 16:14,15).<sup>46</sup> The comments of Rabbinic authorities on this is enlightening. Isaac Tira states, “The reason seems to me to be that Sukkoth (Festival of Tabernacles) is the season of our rejoicing and the book of Koheleth praises joy.”<sup>47</sup> Magen Abraham expresses a similar view: “And on Sukkoth, Koheleth is read, because they are days of joy.”<sup>48</sup>

### Worldview of Ecclesiastes

Arthur F. Holmes defines worldview in terms of four needs, one of which is “the need to define the good life and find hope and meaning in life.”<sup>49</sup> That this is the primary focus in the

worldview of Ecclesiastes is quite evident from its theme and content. It presents two opposite life-views, two contrasting approaches to finding meaning in life. One is based solely on human devisings and endeavours, limited to the finite confines of the dwelling-place of man, “under heaven” (1:13), “under the sun” (an expression which occurs twenty-nine times), while the other is rooted in the fear of God (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12; 12:13) and the resultant relationship of submissive faith in the One who dwells in heaven (5:2), above the sun. Ecclesiastes places these two alternative views of life over against each other and recommends the life of faith<sup>50</sup>, highlighting the futility of an earthbound life-view and the joyous vitality of a relationship with God.<sup>51</sup>

Jensen proposes an outline of Ecclesiastes which demonstrates the relationship between the two worldviews.<sup>52</sup> He identifies four sermons, each of which expounds on two themes -- futility (“vanity”) and hope. They first show the hopelessness of the earthbound (“under the sun”) outlook, then the hope found in a relationship with God who dwells in heaven. This is followed by a conclusion which restates the premise that all is futility (12:8) and provides a summary of the solution which consists of the fear of God and submissive obedience to Him (12:9-14).<sup>53</sup> The outline is as follows:

- I. Premise -- All is Futility (1:1-11)
- II. Bring God into the Picture (1:12-3:15)
  - A. Futility (1:12-2:23)
  - B. Purpose with God (2:24-3:15)
- III. God Is in Heaven (3:16-5:20)
  - A. Futility (3:16-4:16)
  - B. Worship of God (5:1-7)
  - C. Futility (5:8-17)
  - D. Gifts from God (5:18-20)
- IV. Who Knows What is Good? (6:1-8:13)
  - A. Futility (6:1-12)
  - B. Knowledge of God (7:1-8:13)
- V. Remember Now Thy Creator (8:14-12:7)
  - A. Futility (8:4-9:18)
  - B. Remembrance of God (10:1-12:7)
- VI. The Conclusion of the Whole Matter (12:8-14)
  - A. Futility -- Premise Restated (12:8)
  - B. Source of Solution -- Ministry of God’s Word (12:9-11)
  - C. Concluding Solution -- Fear God (12:13,14)

From this intricate interweaving of the two contrasting life-views the God-centred worldview of Ecclesiastes emerges. The centrality of God in this worldview is reflected in the fact that the word *God* (mainly *elohim*) occurs forty times, a more frequent usage than “vanity” (*hebel*) which appears thirty-nine times. The Book affirms that only an outlook that recognizes that God is present, good, and generous makes life coherent and fulfilling.<sup>54</sup>

Young asserts that the grand theme of the Book is that life in all its many aspects is completely without meaning apart from God who, as the ultimate standard for every facet of life,

is the only one who can give meaning to life.<sup>55</sup> Jensen states that the purpose of the Book is to show the futility of pursuing materialistic goals as ends in themselves and to point to God as the source of all that is truly good.<sup>56</sup>

The worldview of Ecclesiastes stands in sharp contrast to that of secular humanism with its claim of human self-sufficiency and its tendency to absolutize human reason. In presenting this God-centred view of life Ecclesiastes discloses the “hopelessness and untenability of the secularist concept of life,”<sup>57</sup> driving the reader not to the self but to God,<sup>58</sup> reminding us of the finitude of our wisdom (3:11; 8:17; 11:5) and the creatureliness of our existence (7:29; 12:1). Archer notes these and other dimensions of the worldview of Ecclesiastes:

The purpose of Ecclesiastes was to convince men of the uselessness of any world view which does not rise above the horizon of man himself. It pronounces the verdict of “vanity of vanities” upon any philosophy of life which regards the created world or human enjoyment as an end in itself. To view personal happiness as the highest good in life is sheer folly in view of the preeminent value of God Himself as over against His created universe. Nor can happiness ever be attained by pursuing after it, since such a pursuit involves the foolishness of self-deification. Having shown the vanity of living for worldly goals, the author clears the way for a truly adequate world view which recognizes God Himself as the highest value of all, and the meaningful life as the one which is lived in His service.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to the evidence provided by its overall theme, the worldview of Ecclesiastes can also be recognized in the answers it gives to four basic questions posed by Walsh and Middleton as the basis for establishing a worldview -- Who am I? Where am I? What’s wrong? What is the remedy?<sup>60</sup> Ecclesiastes gives clear, pointed, answers which constitute its worldview.

### **Who am I?**

Mankind is created by God (12:1, 7:29) who has created all things (11:5). God is transcendent, “higher than the highest” (5:8). He is in heaven; human beings are on earth (5:2). He observes human activity, including oppression and injustice (5:8), and is the Judge who will ultimately pass judgment upon all (3:17; 11:9; 12:14). The attitude of humanity towards Him should be one of submissive awe (3:14; 5:7). Those who respond to Him thus benefit from His beneficent immanence because He sees to the well-being of those who are in awe of Him (8:12) and sees them through (7:18). The righteous are in the protective, providential care of His hand (9:1).

In contrast to God’s eternal sovereignty, man is finite, beset by many limitations. His intellectual power (wisdom) is limited. Human wisdom has its place and its exercise is profitable (2:13; 8:16), but there are aspects of reality which human wisdom cannot comprehend (3:11; 8:17; 11:5). Man’s knowledge, as a tool to help him understand the meaning of life and the purpose of God as reflected in the world is not, and never will be, adequate for this purpose.”<sup>61</sup> Walther Eichrodt elaborates on this:

This dethronement of self-proud wisdom is also that which Koheleth seeks to accomplish when he acknowledges wisdom, limited as it is, to be of great value,

but, at the same time, through his reflection of the creative power of God, lays bare the fruitlessness -- the 'vanity' -- of wisdom in regard to the ultimate questions."<sup>62</sup>

The finitude of human wisdom is particularly evident when seen against the background of divine omniscience. God knows the past (3:15) while humanity forgets much of it (1:11; 2:16; 9:5,15). God knows the future (6:10) but mankind cannot predict much concerning it (3:22; 6:12; 8:7; 10:14; 11:2,6). This gap between divine omniscience and finite human wisdom makes it impossible for human beings to understand some things, particularly the actions of God. Deane draws attention to this:

Koheleth professes man's inability to understand God's doing, and the uselessness of wisdom in satisfying human aspirations. He does not affirm that man can know nothing... he asserts that human reason cannot fathom the depth of God's designs. Reason can receive facts, and compare and arrange and argue from them; but it cannot explain everything; it has limits which it cannot pass; perfect intellectual satisfaction is beyond mortals' attainment.<sup>63</sup>

Mankind is not only limited in wisdom, he is limited in life, both in terms of its activities and in its impermanence. One should joyfully engage in the activities of life because this is a God-given privilege and opportunity (2:24; 3:13; 5:18, 19; 8:15), but should do so within the confines of what is acceptable to the divine Judge (11:9). Mankind is capable of accomplishing great works (1:14; 2:4-6) but these are unfulfilling in themselves (1:3, 14; 2:18; 3:9). Furthermore, they are not permanent because God can destroy them (5:6). On the other hand, man cannot even alter God's works (7:13) which endure forever (3:14).

Human beings are subject to death (3:19; 9:5,10; 12:7). After development in a mother's womb (11:5) and the excitement and vigour of youth (11:9; 12:1) comes a period of gradual physical declension (12:2-5) which culminates in death (12:5-7). In this regard mankind is no better than the lower animals in that they experience the same ultimate fate of death (3:19,20). The point of focus here is that both share a creaturely status which they cannot alter and a physical existence which they are powerless to prolong.

### **Where am I?**

The entire realm of nature, including mankind, has come into being by the creative power of God (7:29; 11:5; 12:1). Mankind has been placed on the earth, "under the sun." His physical environment includes the sun with its constant, dependable pattern of rising and setting (1:5). Its presence is a welcome sight and the light it gives is pleasant to behold (11:7). The moon and stars also provide light (12:2). There are clouds which provide the earth with rain (11:3; 12:2). The wind follows a consistent, observable pattern (1:6) and impacts upon agricultural activity (11:4).

The earth itself appears to be a permanent structure, lasting from generation to generation (1:5). There are rivers which run into the sea (1:7). Mankind shares occupancy of the earth with land animals (3:18,19), birds, and fishes (9:12). There are trees (11:3) and other forms of plant life (2:4,5; 3:2). All these elements which constitute the natural environment were created beaut-

iful: “He has made everything beautiful” (3:11, NIV). Not only are they good, but aesthetically pleasing, appealing to the eye.<sup>64</sup>

### **What’s wrong?**

Ecclesiastes is very specific regarding what the problem is: “God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions” (7:29). Young explains the significance of the statement:

The word translated ‘inventions’ (hishshevonoth) means ‘thoughts, reckonings, devices’. The idea is that God has made man perfect(i.e., straight, right), but man has deviated from this condition in discovering for himself devices of his own that are contrary to his original condition. In other words, we learn here that man has fallen from the original state of uprightness in which the Lord God had created him.<sup>65</sup>

This falling away from the original state of a right relationship with God took one main form -- the development of a confident humanism.<sup>66</sup> Men began to think that they could secure happiness by their own efforts.<sup>67</sup> In this quest for happiness crass materialism became a dominant feature of life, and the acquisition of wealth a primary focus (1:16; 2:4-8). The accumulation of wealth did not satisfy (4:8; 5:10), and resulted in sleepless anxiety (5:12). The wealth eventually perishes (5:14) and while it lasts only God who supplied it can provide the power to enjoy it (5:19; 6:2) In any event, enjoyment of wealth or any other human activity is cut short by inevitable death (3:19; 9:5, 10, 12:7).

Engaging in self-indulgent pleasure (2:1-3, 10; 11:9) was another manifestation of what went wrong. It proved, however, to be an empty exercise (2:1; 11). Eating was no longer for strength but for drunken gluttony (10:17). While true joy is found in marital bliss (9:9) many were caught in the snare of sexual immorality (7:26).

The situation has reached the point where everyone sins (7:20). Indeed, “the heart of the sons of men is full of evil” (9:3). There is much oppression perpetrated by the powerful, and when the oppressed are brought to tears there is no one to comfort them (4:1). Not only is there “oppression of the poor,” but also “violent perverting of judgement and justice” (5:8). In the place where justice is to be dispensed wickedness is found (3:16), apparently in the form of bribery and corruption (cf. 5:8).

### **What is the remedy?**

The presentation of the solution is as pointed as the statement of the problem. As the KJV renders it: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil” (12:13,14). Deane points out that the solution as formulated here is a most fitting conclusion to the discourse:

As to the momentous conclusion, every one who thinks with us concerning the religious views of the writer, and the design of his work, will agree that it is most



apposite, and is the only conceivable summing-up that satisfies the requirements of the treatise. It is also in full accord with that has proceeded. The solution of the anomalies in life, offered by the fact of a future judgement, has been intimated more than once in other parts of the book; it is here only presented again with more emphasis and in a more striking position.<sup>68</sup>

The solution to the human dilemma consists of three theocentric elements -- the fear of God; the keeping of the commandments of God; a final judgement by God (12:13,14). This three-pronged solution, with its demand for submission to God's Being and will, and its announcement of a final judgement, strikes at the very heart of secular humanism with its denial of the transcendent and of any moral absolutes, and its claim to unlimited freedom and pleasure-seeking.

The imperative "Fear God" (12:13) is not a call to abject fear but to reverential awe<sup>69</sup>. In the Old Testament fearing God generally does not denote a state of terror but one of obedience to God's will, expressed either in worship or in ethical conduct.<sup>70</sup> Here it means the submissive awe which has already been identified as the appropriate creaturely human response to the sovereign Creator (3:14; 5:7). This reverential fear which constitutes the proper relationship with God and the appropriate "attitude and ontological posture before God," has at its core a recognition of the eminent superiority of God's transcendence and sovereignty over mankind's finitude.<sup>71</sup>

The mandate to keep God's commandments serves to inform humanity that their ethical standard must be the will of God as revealed in His Word.<sup>72</sup> It is God, not mankind, who sets the standard for human conduct. The call to obedience to God's commandments provides an opportunity for the members of the human family, who had abandoned God's way to follow their own devices (7:29), to solve the problem by entering into a submissive relationship with Him so that they may be restored to the original state of uprightness (7:29).

The last phrase of 12:13 reads literally: "For this is the whole (of the) man."<sup>73</sup> Rendered thus, it means that to fear God and to obey Him is "the whole man" and "constitutes man's whole being."<sup>74</sup> The combination of fearing God and keeping His commandments is what makes life complete and meaningful. Indeed, it is the supreme purpose of life.<sup>75</sup> A relationship with God that is based on a reverential response to His Being (fear) and a submissive response to His will (obedience) is the solution to the human problem.

The ultimate remedy for all the problems of sinful humanity is a final judgement when God will judge the whole earth (12:14). The call to obey His commandments (12:13) indicates that His revealed will is the standard by which all will be judged. Those who have engaged in carnal indulgence will be judged (11:9). Both the righteous and the wicked will be judged (3:17). God who observes the oppression of the poor and the perversion of justice (5:8) will correct the situation by carrying out the judgement Himself (3:16,17). In that final judgement, as in this present life, "it shall be well with them that fear the Lord"(8:12).

### **Application**

In the very secular academic and social environment in which the Adventist teacher functions as we move towards the twenty-first century, the task of leading students to adopt a Christ-

ian worldview has become increasingly challenging, and the need more intensely urgent. The accomplishment of this objective is crucial to the cause of Christian education for two major reasons -- (1) the need to counteract the pervading influence of secular humanism; (2) the centrality of a Christian worldview to the effective integration of faith and learning.

Prevailing worldviews subtly and imperceptibly affect the scholarly community as well as society in general, influencing all we do or think.<sup>77</sup> Secular humanism, in the many forms it has taken, is the worldview which dominates western society with its three-pronged emphasis on reason, pleasure, and freedom. The exaltation of reason is seen in scientism which has held civilization firmly in its grasp for over four centuries.<sup>78</sup> The emphasis on freedom and pleasure is evident in the impact of secular humanism on western culture, particularly on the young. On this point Weiss asserts:

There is no doubt that Sartre's philosophy has had a major influence on our western culture, especially the culture of the young. For many today "authentic" living means the expression of a reckless freedom which knows no transcendent values<sup>79</sup>.

Our students need to be snatched from the clutches of this monster called secular humanism. Harry Blamires is certainly correct when he avers that the Christian worldview "is the only counterpoise to a secularism that is decomposing our civilization."<sup>80</sup> This God-centred worldview is the only solution because it is the only valid worldview. It is "the most coherent view of the origin, purpose, and destiny of human life."<sup>81</sup>

The Christian worldview is central to the integration of faith and learning. It provides a comprehensive perspectival framework which gives meaning to all the disciplines and all of liberal education.<sup>82</sup> It has special value for learning which is integrated with faith because it contributes to the overall framework in which such learning takes place.<sup>83</sup> This is particularly true of *perspectival integration*:

In *perspectival integration*, the entire educational enterprise is viewed from a specific perspective. Thus, a worldview supplies the coherence, in the sense that disparate and even conflicting elements cohere as they fit into a larger framework of thought and practice. The person views all of life, including education, from the perspective of his or her worldview.<sup>84</sup>

It is, therefore, crucial that students be led to develop and maintain a Christian worldview. This may be accomplished by modeling, as the worldview of the effective teacher gradually conditions the worldview of the pupil.<sup>84</sup> However, since it is not easy to develop a Christian worldview in this secular, materialistic age, there is need for *deliberate integration*, "the process of infusing the formal curriculum with a God-centred, Christian worldview."<sup>86</sup>

The Book of Ecclesiastes can play a vital role in this venture, as it is a unique Biblical tool for leading students to adopt and retain a Christian worldview. A number of factors make it ideally suited for this purpose:

1. There is a timelessness about its message that makes it strikingly relevant to the issues facing contemporary humanity.
2. It presents a God-centred worldview which should serve as a paradigm for Christians

today.

3. It is a useful vehicle for conveying the Christian values related to such a worldview.
4. Its theological principles, as it relates to the quest for knowledge, encompass and guide enquiry in both the "secular" and the religious domains.
5. Its worldview is the very antithesis of secular humanism which dominates western thinking and life with its unbridled freedom, crass materialism, denial of transcendence, and absolutizing of human reason.
6. Its philosophical format is conducive to dialogue and confrontation with the everyday issues of life from a Biblical perspective which is intellectually stimulating and appealing.
7. It is rooted in the futile quest of a brilliant, creative thinker to find happiness and meaning outside the bounds of a relationship with God.
8. It affirms in practical, philosophical, and theological terms that only a Bible-based, God-centred worldview meets the needs of humanity in the quest for meaning and fulfillment.

The employment of Ecclesiastes in guiding students to develop and maintain a Christian worldview may be approached from two fronts -- the philosophical/theological and the practical/personal. This combination is the same found in the Book which draws on Solomon's own experiences as well as divine relation in the presentation of its God-centred worldview. The objective of both approaches is to lead students to adopt a Christian worldview and the values that are rooted in it.

With regard to the philosophical/theological approach, one may use Ecclesiastes to demonstrate, based on its theme and content, the superiority of the Christian worldview over that of secular humanism. One way of doing this is to draw attention to the striking similarity between the Book's pronouncement of meaninglessness ("vanity") upon all human effort without God and the tragic cry of modern existentialists.<sup>87</sup> The following statement concerning Arthur Schopenhauer, "the philosopher of pessimism," clearly shows the depressive futility of the existentialist form of secular humanism and evidences the superiority of the Christian worldview:

The pendulum of life, he says, swings between pain and boredom. If he sets himself a task to do, it is painful to exert the effort required to accomplish it. When he has accomplished it, there is nothing more to do -- boredom sets in. He can only wait for the pendulum to rest.<sup>88</sup>

At the practical/personal level one may draw parallels between Solomon and the college student -- the thirst for knowledge; the hunger for meaning and fulfillment; the drive towards accomplishment; the inclination towards pleasure-seeking and self-gratification. By identifying with Solomon's quest, its futility, and his conclusion students may be led to adopt and retain a Christian worldview without having to experience the tragedy and pain which accompanied his attempts to find meaning in life when his relationship with God was broken.

Solomon sought for fulfillment in knowledge (1:13-18), pleasure (2:1-3), labour-related accomplishments (2:4-6), material possessions (2:7,8), fame (2:9), all normal preoccupations in the secular world.<sup>89</sup> These avenues to meaning and fulfillment in life are still being pursued today. If it can be demonstrated that Solomon achieved more in these areas than most people ever

will and yet found life without God empty, then we may be able to lead students to choose a God-centred worldview as he eventually did once again.

Solomon's quest for material possessions was met with astounding success. He was the richest man on earth (1 Kings 10:23). He had fleets of trading ships which brought him gold and other valuable merchandise (1 Kings 9:26-28; 10:22). He accumulated approximately 23 tons (666 talents) of gold annually, not including revenue from merchants and rulers (1 Kings 10:14), making his income in gold alone more than twenty-five million US dollars per month!<sup>90</sup> All his drinking vessels and the household articles in his palace were of pure gold, because silver was considered of little value during his reign (1 Kings 10:21). In fact he "made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones" (1 Kings 10:27, NIV).

The elaborate palace Solomon built for himself took thirteen years to be completed (1 Kings 7:1-12). His daily provisions consisted of 30 cows, 100 sheep, other animals such as deer and fowls, and at least 1,060 gallons (30 cors) of flour and 2,120 gallons (60 cors) of meal (1 Kings 4:22, 23).<sup>90</sup> He had twelve officers who supplied these provisions, each for one month of the year (1 Kings 4:7) and nothing was ever lacking (1 Kings 4:27). By any standard, every day was a virtual feast!

The pursuit of pleasure included the use of wine (2:3), the carnal satisfaction of having 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3), and the indulgence in unbridled self-gratification, facilitated by his wealth (2:10). His outstanding accomplishments included the construction of a magnificent temple (1 Kings 6:37; 7:13-51) and a splendid palace (1 Kings 7:1-12).

Solomon's initial quest, however, was for meaning and satisfaction through intellectual pursuits (1:13). His achievements in this regard border on the incredible. He was renowned around the world as the wisest, most knowledgeable man on earth (1 Kings 4:30-34). His expertise in botany ranged from large trees to small shrubs, and his knowledge of zoology covered every form of animal life: "He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish" (1 Kings 4:33, NIV). In modern terms Solomon was the world's leading authority on botany, zoology, ornithology, herpetology, and ichthyology! Out of this vast reservoir of knowledge came three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs (1 Kings 4:32).

When Solomon lost contact with the source of his great wisdom and knowledge (cf. 1 Kings 4:29), his intellectual achievements, successful in the eyes of others (1 Kings 4:30, 34) became painfully unfulfilling (1:14, 18). Contemporary humanity, and particularly those engaged in intellectual pursuits, should learn from this. If it did not work for Solomon who achieved so much, it will not work for us. Students need to be brought to the realization that they will never attain Solomon's fame and international stature in so many fields of study, acquire anything near his wealth, nor have his opportunities for pleasure-seeking and self-gratification, so they should embrace his conclusion of what makes life complete and meaningful: a relationship with God that is based on a reverential response to His Being and a submissive response to His will (12:13).

The task of leading students to adopt a God-centred worldview as found in the Book of Ecclesiastes, whether through the philosophical/theological or the practical/personal approach, includes transmitting to them the Christian values which are related to this worldview. Values are "a type of belief, centrally located in one's total belief system, about how one ought or ought

not to behave, or about some end-state of existence worth or not worth attaining.”<sup>92</sup> They are anchored in a worldview and find expression in norms and behaviour patterns.<sup>93</sup> A Christian worldview should produce a lifestyle which reflects Christian values. To encourage the development of such a lifestyle is a primary objective of Adventist education.

The Book of Ecclesiastes makes a significant contribution to the attainment of this objective. Not only does it recommend a God-centred worldview but it affirms some specific values which derive from and are part of such a worldview.<sup>94</sup> These include reverence for God (5:1,2,7; 8:12); submissive obedience to God (12:13); trust in God (8:12); moderation in eating (10:17); moderation in life as a whole (7:16); a good reputation (7:1); justice and equity (5:8,9; 7:7); discretion (10:20); responsibility (11:9; 12:14); peace and harmony (4:6); commitment and dependability (5:4); sincerity (5:5); generosity (11:1,2); industry (4:5; 10:18); meekness (10:4); teachableness (4:13; 7:5); contentment (5:10); wisdom (7:19; 9:15-18); sexual purity (7:26; 9:9); self-control (7:9).

### Conclusion

The Adventist teacher today functions in an environment dominated by a humanistic worldview which impacts particularly on the youth. The God-centred worldview presented in the Book of Ecclesiastes is a paradigm for a Christian worldview and provides the teacher with the arsenal to counteract the secular mindset at the philosophical/ theological level. Set out in a philosophical mode, Ecclesiastes answers effectively the basic questions of life regarding the nature of humanity, the nature of the human environment, the problem that prevents our finding meaning in life, and the solution to the problem. It reveals the emptiness of secular humanism and recommends a God-centred worldview as the sounder philosophy of life.

The fact that the presentation of the worldview draws upon the actual experience of someone in quest of the same things students seek today, thus allowing for a measure of identification with Solomon, provides an opportunity for the teacher to approach the issues from a practical/personal level. By drawing attention to Solomon’s quest for meaning and fulfillment without God, his “success,” his frustration, and his conclusion, the Adventist teacher may lead students to adopt a Christian worldview and those values that are a subset of this God-centred perspective on life.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> James W. Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), pp. 29,30. He goes on to state that it answers seven basic questions (pp. 30, 31).

<sup>2</sup> Ronald H. Nash, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 16, cited by Fernando Canale, “Importance of our Worldview,” *Ministry* (December, 1995), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ayn Rand, *Romantic Manifesto* (New York: New American Library, 1975), p. 19, cited by Rasi, “Fighting on Two Fronts,” *Christ in the Classroom*, vol.8, p.225.

<sup>4</sup> John M. Fowler, “The Making of a Worldview,” unpublished article (1996), p. 27. See also Fowler’s “The Making of a Worldview,” *Dialogue* 2:1 (1990), pp. 5-8, 30, 31.

<sup>5</sup> Humberto M. Rasi, “Faith Development and Adventist Youth,” unpublished article (January, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Pearson, "Word Made Flesh -- How the Christian Worldview Affects Teaching and Learning," *Christ in the Classroom*, vol. 6, p. 285.

<sup>7</sup> Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*. (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), pp. 31,32. They posit a set of four questions, the answers to which constitute one's worldview (p. 35.)

<sup>8</sup> Rasi, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Canale, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Fowler, "The Making of a Worldview" (1996), p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Rand, p.19.

<sup>12</sup> Ken Badley, "The Faith/Learning Integration Movement in Higher Education: Slogan or Substance?," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 3:1 (Spring, 1994), p.25.

<sup>13</sup> Lillian E. Weiss, "Sartre's Humanism Versus Biblical Humanism," *Christ in the Classroom*, vol. 10, p. 354.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.353.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.352.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp.353, 358, 361.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Rasi, "Fighting on Two Fronts," *Christ in the Classroom*, vol.8, pp.225,226.

<sup>18</sup> Irving L. Jensen, *Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p.11.

<sup>19</sup> O.S. Rankin, *Ecclesiastes* (The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 5), (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), p.19.

<sup>20</sup> Jensen, p.12.

<sup>21</sup> Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1976), p. 1058.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 1057. It is further suggested, in view of the feminine form of *Qoheleth* and its use with a feminine verb form (7:27), that it may also refer to personified divine wisdom speaking through the Preacher.

<sup>23</sup> For a summary of the arguments against Solomonic authorship see Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), pp. 347-349. For the pros and cons of Solomonic authorship see Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (The New American Commentary), (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), pp. 254-263. He concludes that Solomon is the author.

<sup>24</sup> Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 478. (Throughout this paper, all textual references from Ecclesiastes are cited as chapter and verse, without naming the Book.)

<sup>25</sup> Ellen G. White in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol 3, p. 1164. Interestingly, Rabbinic tradition holds that Solomon wrote the book at the end of his life. Cf. E.Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York, 1967) p. 157.

<sup>26</sup> White, *Prophets and Kings* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1917), pp.51-80.

<sup>27</sup> White, *Education* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), p. 154.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Gordis, *Koheleth -- The Man and His World: A Study of Ecclesiastes* (New York:

Schocken Books, 1968), p.205.

<sup>29</sup> Timothy Polk, "The Wisdom of Irony: A Study of *hebel* and Its Relation to Joy and the Fear of God in Ecclesiastes," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 6 (1976), p.8.

<sup>30</sup> R.B.Y. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes* (The Anchor Bible), (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965), p.202.

<sup>31</sup> Donald C. Fleming, "Ecclesiastes," *The International Bible Commentary*, new edition, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p.693.

<sup>32</sup> Curt Kuhl, *The Old Testament: Its Origins and Composition*, tr. C.T.M. Herriott (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox, 1961), p. 265.

<sup>33</sup> F. Buck, "Ecclesiastes," *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. R.C. Fuller (Nelson, 1969), p. 513.

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

<sup>35</sup> Morris Jastrow, *A Gentle Cynic* (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1919), p.29.

<sup>36</sup> Scott, p.192.

<sup>37</sup> Bickerman, p.151.

<sup>38</sup> J.A. Loader, *Ecclesiastes: A Practical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p.14.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Zimmerman, *The Inner World of Koheleth* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), p.8.

<sup>40</sup> Rankin, p. 24. He denies Solomonic authorship.

<sup>41</sup> W.J. Deane, *Ecclesiastes* (Pulpit Commentary, vol. 9), (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), pp xxiii, xxiv.

<sup>42</sup> 1:12-2:26; 3:1-15; 3:16-22; 5:9-19; 8:10-15; 9:1-10; 11:7-12:7

<sup>43</sup> 2:24-26; 3:12; 3:22; 5:17; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:9-10; 12:1

<sup>44</sup> R.N. Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982), pp.88-94.

<sup>45</sup> Gordis, p. 119.

<sup>46</sup> Ecclesiastes is one of the "five *megilloth*" or "five *scrolls*," each of which is read at an annual Jewish festival.

<sup>47</sup> Isaac Tirna, *Sefer Minhagim* (Warsaw, 1882), p.21b, cited by Gordis, p. 388.

<sup>48</sup> Magen Abraham, *Hilkhos Pesah*, sec. 490, par.8, cited by Gordis, p. 388.

<sup>49</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p.5, cited by Fowler, "Building a Christian Worldview," *Christ in the Classroom*, vol. 2, p. 64.

<sup>50</sup> Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), p.156.

<sup>51</sup> Jensen, p.32.

<sup>52</sup> Jensen's outline is not without shortcomings, as are all attempts to outline the Book of Ecclesiastes, but it comes closest to demonstrating structurally the relationship between the two contrasting worldviews, between the futility of the one and the joy of the other.

<sup>53</sup> Jensen, pp. 15, 16, 25, 33, 40, 47, 55, 56.

<sup>54</sup> Eaton, p.48.

<sup>55</sup> Young, p. 350.

- <sup>56</sup> Jensen, p. 11.
- <sup>57</sup> Aarre Lauha, "Die Krise des religiösen Glaubens bei Kohelet," in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Martin Noth and D. Winton Thomas (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1955), p. 191.
- <sup>58</sup> Garrett, p.277.
- <sup>59</sup> Archer, p. 475.
- <sup>60</sup> Walsh and Middleton, p. 35.
- <sup>61</sup> Rankin, p. 18.
- <sup>62</sup> Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Leipzig: J.C. Heinrichs, 1933-39), vol. 2, p. 43.
- <sup>63</sup> Deane, p. xxviii.
- <sup>64</sup> Nichol, pp. 1074, 1075.
- <sup>65</sup> Young, p. 350.
- <sup>66</sup> Cf. Rankin, p. 19.
- <sup>67</sup> Deane, p. xxiii.
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxxv.
- <sup>69</sup> Nichol, p. 1075.
- <sup>70</sup> Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (New Century Bible Commentary), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p.25.
- <sup>71</sup> Polk, pp. 14,15.
- <sup>72</sup> H. Carl Shank, "Koheleth's World and Life View as Seen in His Recurring Phrases," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974), p. 71.
- <sup>73</sup> The literal meaning of the expression *kol-ha'adam* is "the whole (of the) man." Elsewhere in *Ecclesiastes* it is rendered "every man" (3:13; 5:19). This has led many commentators to translate it "every man" here in 12:13. This is not justifiable as the syntax of 3:13 and 5:19 is totally different from that of 12:13, and the rendering "every man" makes no sense in the latter, necessitating the addition of the words "duty of." The translation "the whole man" is the most appropriate. Cf. Garrett, p. 344; W.T. Bullock, "Ecclesiastes," *The Holy Bible: With an Explanatory and Critical Commentary*, vol. 4), ed. F.C. Cook (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, N.D.), p.662.
- <sup>74</sup> Herzfeld, cited by Bullock, p.662.
- <sup>75</sup> Nichol, p. 1105.
- <sup>76</sup> Weiss, p. 361.
- <sup>77</sup> Paul Brantley, "From Athens to Jerusalem and Points Beyond: The Continuing Search for an Integrated Faith," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 3,1 (Spring 1994), p.9.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9.
- <sup>79</sup> Weiss, p.361.
- <sup>80</sup> Harry Blamires, *Recovering the Christian Mind: Meeting the Challenge of Secularism* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p.10, cited by Badley, p.20.
- <sup>81</sup> Rasi, "Fighting on Two Fronts," p.230.
- <sup>82</sup> A.F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p.10.
- <sup>83</sup> Badley, p.28.



<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>85</sup> F.E. Gaebelien, *The Patterns of God's Truth: Problems of Integration in Christian Education* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1968), p.37, cited by Raquel Korniejczuk and Jimmy Kijai, "Integrating Faith and Learning: Development of a Stage Model for Teacher Implementation," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 3,1 (Spring, 1994), p.80.

<sup>86</sup> Korniejczuk and Kijai, pp. 79, 80.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Weiss, p. 366.

<sup>88</sup> Pearson, "Room with a View: World Views and the Christian World View," *Christ in the Classroom*, vol. 6, p. 275.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Dwight E. Stevenson, *Preaching on the Books of the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Brother, 1961), p. 114.

<sup>90</sup> The actual figure is US\$25,308,000.00. This is based on the current price of gold -- US\$380 per ounce.

<sup>91</sup> The *cor* ("measure", KJV) is given a range of 35 to 60 gallons. The lower figure is used in the calculations here.

<sup>92</sup> Milton Rokeach, *Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values* (San Francisco, California: Jossey -Bass, 1968), p.124, cited by Rasi, "Christian Values in Adventist Education," paper presented at the 18th International Faith and Learning Seminar, West Indies College, Jamaica, 1996, p.7.

<sup>93</sup> Rasi, "Christian Values in Adventist Education," p.1.

<sup>94</sup> Some of these values are expressed directly, while others are implied by the condemnation of their opposites.