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Institute For Christian Teaching  
Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY THEME IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL:  
A BACKDROP FOR A CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW  
IN FAITH-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

BY

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Prepared for the  
Faith and Learning Seminar  
Held at  
Southern Asia Division  
Hosur, Tamil Nadu, India

May 1990

**094 - 90 Institute for Christian Teaching**  
12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring Md 20904, USA

THE "GREAT CONTROVERSY" THEME IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL  
A BACKDROP FOR A CHRISTIAN WORLD-VIEW  
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The golden line of redemption runs through the Scriptures against a backdrop of the Great Controversy. Salvation history in the Scriptures is characterized by the element of rivalry between God and the Devil; the evil forces against God's people. Thus God's redemptive actions are opposed by the Devil who tries to abort and defeat God's plans.

This study attempts to explain the Great Controversy theme as presented in the Scriptures and present how an understanding of this theme enables us to form a basis for a biblical/Christian world-view. A comparison will be made with the Hindu religion which also has the concept of a conflict between the good and bad but the contrast can be seen in the Hindu world-view to the Christian world-view.

The book of Daniel is taken as a sample of the biblical world-view that presents the Great Controversy theme in the biographies of the chief characters in the book, and the movement of history both in secular and spiritual events. The purpose of this study is to see the curricular implications of the Great Controversy theme for value education and to re-enforce the theme in the formation of a biblical world-view through curricular activities for young people in secondary schools.

The Great Controversy

The Adventist usage of the term "Great Controversy" was drawn from Ellen G White who presents it as the comprehensive plan of God for fallen man to be restored to the original condition in which he was created. This theme is well represented in Ellen White's book, "The Great Controversy" ("Cosmic Conflict" is a recent title to the same book).

The Great Controversy (GC) deals with the character of God, that Satan attempts to misrepresent before the universe with his many accusations against God. God's answer to the Devil's accusations was presented

on the cross; in the death of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. The plan of salvation was necessitated because of the Great Controversy of which man has become a victim. Thus the Great Controversy theme is the canopy under which we see the origin, existence and elimination of sin.

#### Summary of the GC Theme in the Scriptures

In the Scriptures the Great Controversy theme is presented as seven narrative or historical events that are both terrestrial and heavenly. The GC theme is cosmic in scope and therefore involves God, man, angels (both good and bad), and the Devil. The seven major events are: primeval creation, rebellion, creation of man, fall, redemption, consumation, and restoration.

Peace and harmony prevailed in heaven to characterize the perfect creation of God. The Controversy began with the origin of sin in heaven with Lucifer, who allowed pride to grow in his heart and rebelled against God, and commanded a following of one third of the angelic host in heaven. Sin could not exist in the presence of a righteous God; so the fallen angel and his followers were cast out of heaven. The Controversy then changed scene from heaven to earth; the perfect creation of God on earth became the target of the Devil's attack.

It was again a perfect creation on earth that God said was good, and the creation of man, in the image of God was the crowning act of creation. Man's disobedience to God's will (in eating the forbidden fruit) broke the harmonious relationship that existed between God and man.

The plan of salvation was brought into effect when man sinned in the Garden of Eden, where God made the first promise of a Redeemer (Gen: 3:15). The plan was revealed to Israel in the wilderness through the sanctuary service and the typologies that kept the hope of the Saviour alive, and constantly reminded by the prophets, who gave Messianic prophecies of Christ's incarnation and death. At the cross the accusations of Satan against God were proved wrong. God's character was clearly vindicated and Satan's ultimate defeat was sounded.

Christians look forward to the final consummation at the end of this world when Jesus shall come the second time as the King, to reward the righteous with immortality and destroy the power of sin forever. Some view this as the end of the Controversy but the Scriptures talk of the

final restoration of the whole world; the cosmic scope of the Controversy to be accomplished. Sin will be destroyed forever and the earth recreated to bring in once again peace and harmony that existed at creation before the origin of sin. Thus restoration guarantees that sin will not arise again; (Nahum 1:9) and the Controversy never to be waged again.

It is interesting to note how the GC motif runs through the Scriptures, and particularly, in the book of Daniel, which presents the theme in a contrast; evil which seemingly wins over good but good eventually comes out victorious. This pattern can be seen in each chapter of the book of Daniel. It seems as if Daniel had the Great Controversy context in which he presents each chapter (For instance, Chapter 1 begins with a defeat for God's people being carried away as captives by the Babylonians but the chapter ends with a victory for Daniel and his friends).

### Christian World-View

The GC theme presents a unique world-view of Adventist concept of history. This world-view presented in the Scriptures is characterized by a controversy between God and Satan, beginning with Genesis through Revelation. This rivalry between good and evil is not uncommon to the Hindu religion, which presents a world-view entirely different to the Christian world-view.

Christian lifestyle molded by our belief in the reality and nature of God forms a segment of our world-view (Hill, 1990). Our values form the central component of our religious faith and the way how we interpret the world (James Fowler, 1987). Our world-view grows out of asking questions, such as "Who am I?", "Where am I?", "What is wrong?", "What is the solution?" (Walsh and Middleton, 1984). In an attempt to answer these questions we develop a perspective of this world. "This world view becomes a vision of our life which proposes standards for conduct and it also overlaps Christian faith" (Rasi, 1990), and are "founded on ultimate faith commitments" (Walsh and Middleton, p. 35). "So everyone has a world view, whether he realizes it or not" (John Fowler, 1990).

The world-view in which Daniel wrote is essential for interpretation of Daniel. He writes with the world-view of GC -- the constant battle between the Devil and God's people (Walvoord, 1987:13).

The Hindu concept of a controversy between good and evil is characterized by determinism, fatalism, and a circular philosophy of history. In the Hindu world-view, good and evil co-exist from eternity and even the gods belong either to the side of good or evil. Mythology presents many stories that describe the battles between the good and evil gods, and humans take sides with these gods. In fact, the gods even incarnate and appear among humans to help them from the trouble caused by the evil gods.

The Hindus' sacred epics, The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are classical examples of the ongoing controversy between the good and evil forces. The Ramayana is an account of the warfare between Rama, who represents the good, an incarnation of god Vishnu, the Ravana, who represents (as the king of the demons) the evil forces. Rama, as king of Ayodhya, suffers trial for his wife who was kidnapped by Ravana. It was eventually a victory for Rama who comes out as the righteous to establish Ramarajya (kingdom of righteousness). The Mahabharata is an account of the family feud between the Pandavas and Kauravas. The Pandavas represent the good and the Kauravas represent the evil forces. The outcome of the battle was a victory for the Pandavas who receive help from Krishna, an incarnation again of god Vishnu. Eventually it is a victory for the good gods that prevail over the evil.

#### The Book of Daniel

The book of Daniel is apocalyptic in nature and belongs to the 6th century B.C. as its historical background suggests. Daniel, the hero of the book, was an exile in Babylong (carried away in the first captivity in 605 B.C. along with his three companions who also faced the crises in chapters 1 and 3). It seems that "the fortunes of war" brought Daniel and his friends to the center of world empire (Porteous, p. 24). The literary genre of the book of Daniel is an example par excellence of apocalyptic in the OT (Baldwin, p. 46) dating to 6th century, contrary to the general apocalyptic literature (secular and non-canonical) of 2nd century B.C. to 1st century A.D.

The book falls into two sections: (1) the historical (chs.1-6) and (2) the prophetic (chs. 7-12). The historic section records the incidents that happened to Daniel and his friends and the prophetic section that

records the four visions of Daniel (to include chapter 2 which is a dream of Nebuchadnezzar that is prophetic). <sup>154</sup>

The historical section of the book of Daniel demonstrates the principle that divine wisdom, power and authority operate through the history of nations for the eventful fulfilment of divine purposes (SDA BC VIII:252). The prophetic sections focus on the eternal kingdom of God that would be established at the end of the political kingdoms. "All four visions of the book of Daniel are concerned with the struggle between the forces of good and evil on this earth from the time of Daniel to the establishment of the eternal kingdom of Christ" (SDABC, IV:752). Interestingly, the prophetic sections stand side by side God's actions to the people in interpreting them and making known the counsel of the Lord in guiding and governing their efforts (Keil, P 24).

In this Paper the Great Controversy theme is observed as it takes its turn through events, persons, and nations in the book of Daniel. This study also attempts to show Christian students the significance of an individual's role in the GC and in the formation of a Christian world-view.

#### Great Controversy Theme in the Biographies

The GC can be seen operative in the lives of individuals as they take their stand to belong either to the side of God or the Devil. The lives of the chief characters in the book of Daniel reveal the ongoing struggle as it wages in their lives.

#### GC Theme in Daniel

A. Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian monarch struck catastrophe on God's people; destroyed Jerusalem, their city and their temple, and took away many as captives. It was a mighty victory for the Devil who, through King Nebuchadnezzar, was able to overpower God's people. It was God who gave King Jehoiakim into the hands of the enemies (Dan. 1:2), because Judah had rejected the warnings of God to remain loyal to God; and instead continued in their wicked ways. So God used a heathen king to punish His people. Yet through this king God reveals the future of the world through the dream of the image (Dan 2). Nebuchadnezzar relied on the wisdom of his wisemen but only Daniel could interpret the king's dream. So the king comes to acknowledge the mighty God who gave Daniel wisdom and understanding. But contrary to the message of the dream the king wanted to remain on the throne forever. And so the king proposes to make an image of gold that

would represent his perpetual empire. God did not leave this heathen king but continued to reveal Himself, later in the dream of the tree (Dan 4). The dream of the tree showed the king the seemingly sky-reaching pride of his was to be cut; yet with a chance to change. The period of one year of grace proved unfruitful and the axe was laid until seven years passed, of beastly life, a state into which he dragged himself due to his blind pride. He was to recognize that the kingdoms of the world are ruled by the Most High God and not by proud, power-crazy monarchs. God's grace still operated in allowing the king to return to God and acknowledge Him as Lord of his life and that His supreme will was to be accepted. The Devil tried to use the king in carrying on his plans while God revealed Himself to allow the king to make a voluntary decision in response to divine revelation. Thus Nebuchadnezzar's life became a battle ground for the great controversy with an individual involvement that he was responsible for.

B. Daniel. The life of Daniel took unexpected turns. A captive, then an interpreter of dreams, and then honoured to a position next to the king. Daniel turned Satan's victory in capturing him from Babylon to a victory for God when he exercised loyalty to God's health rules and let God's wisdom operate in his training. As Daniel's life and career extended into the Persian rule his opponents sought to dishonour his faith and even tried to get rid of him. But Daniel was blameless before God and man and thus gave no room for accusation on any charge except his undaunted religious life. Even at the expense of a night with the lions, Daniel would not change the pattern of his prayer life. This test of faith for Daniel was a witness of his relationship with God and a witness before King Darius. Daniel's prayer in chapter 10 is a model experience of faith on God's promises and intercession on behalf of his people. Daniel believed in the power of prayer and his help came from Michael who alone is able to fight the greatest foe. Daniel's life is an example of how the GC is waged in the life of an individual.

Thus, Daniel's life was one of absolute loyalty to God who does not delight in compromises or adjustments with evil or a tolerance of sin but calls for personal integrity (Jeoffrey, 1978:356-7).

C. The Hebrew Youth. The king of Babylon ordered the best of the Hebrew captives to be trained for service in his empire and for three years they were to be educated in the language and literature of the Chaldeans. The Hebrew youth received the training not only in the hands of the Chaldeans but from God who "gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom." (Dan 1:17). At the end of the training they were found superior in all matters of understanding "ten times better than all the Chaldeans in all the realms" (Dan 1:20). Even in the test on food, Daniel and his friends proved victorious because they did not want to defile themselves with the portions of the king's delicacies but chose food, acceptable to God. God honoured the faith of the Hebrew youth and turned their experience of exile into a victory for God and a defeat for Satan.

D. Belshazzar. Young Belshazzar took the reins of the Babylonian empire from his father Nabonidus, who was away in Tema on vacation. The prince was pleasure-seeking and feasted with his lords, and at which time he foolishly attempted to humiliate the God of the Hebrews. He desecrated the golden vessels from God's temple in Jerusalem and praised the gods of gold, silver, iron, wood, and stone (Dan 5:4). In his drunken stupor he was jolted to witness a divine revelation; he saw the finger of God write the fate of Babylon on the wall. The prophecy was fulfilled that same night and Belshazzar had to send for Daniel. He was reminded by Daniel of what God did for his grand-father Nebuchadnezzar and how that experience should have taught him humility (Dan 5:22); yet his pride and arrogance was lifted against the God of heaven and to desecrate the holy things. God brought a sudden end to his life and the end of the empire of Babylon on that fateful night in allowing the Medo-Persians to put an end to the proud king and his kingdom. We see in his life how pride leads to destruction and a life in defiance of God leads to sudden utter end.

#### Movement of History in Daniel

The historical section of the book of Daniel forms the background for the prophetic section that follows. The historical section gives the setting for the events of the prophetic section and thus validates the historicity of the book. In the book of Daniel we see history presented from the perspective of secular and spiritual events. History in Daniel deals not only with secular events but salvation history, in which God intervenes in the affairs of man to carry out His plans for His people. History plays the



role of a teacher in instructing man about the ways of God and man ought to co-operate with God, and what future holds for those who oppose God. Thus, movement of history in Daniel is characterized by a controversy between good and evil and God's guiding hand in history.

A. Secular Events. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image in Ch. 2 and Daniel's vision of the four beasts in ch. 7 are parallel accounts of the rise and fall of nations in history. Babylon rose to power to end the reign of the cruel and wicked Assyrians. The glorious rule of Nebuchadnezzar was followed by weak monarchs who brought to an end the empire of Babylon in a short time. The joint rule of the Medes and the Persians was followed by the Greeks. Alexander rose as a meteor and fell from that very height. The tyrannical rule of the Romans as evidenced in their cruel persecution of God's people, destroyed from within, thus dividing the empire into ten kingdoms. Daniel's philosophy shows that at the height of power tyranny crashes and the tide thus suddenly turns and the righteous can expect sudden delivery.

In opposition to divine revelation king Nebuchadnezzar conspired of an eternal kingdom; thus made an image of gold (ch. 3) to usurp the power of God and position as the one who establishes the eternal kingdom. The end of the Babylonian empire came as a result of divine intervention in the feast of Belshazzar. These two events show that God is in control of the affairs of man and places kings and removes them. History progresses to the rise and fall of nations as each come to their end as God determines. The book of Daniel presents God, who is still in control of history and intervenes in human affairs to carry on His goodwill and pleasure.

B. Spiritual Events. The spiritual events in Daniel bring to focus Gods people who suffer at the hands of opposing powers that work under the Devil. Babylon's relation with God's people was to the extent of taking them captives to Babylon. The Medo-Persian and Greek nations subjugated the Jews but it was the later Seleucid rulers and the Romans who intensified their attacks on the Jews. The Little Horn power that came after the four beasts of Daniel 7 was not as concerned with establishing an empire as interfering with religious activities of God's people. In Daniel 7 and 8 we have accounts of the terrible actions of the Little Horn against God's people and even against the Prince of princes by taking away the continual burnt offerings and trampling the sanctuary underfoot. But this power shall be broken not by human hand (8:25) but by divine intervention. As the battle against God's people

intensifies, judgement shall be pronounced and the Little Horn's power will come to a sudden end. God's people face the greatest persecution by the Little Horn, and those who do not receive its mark and remain faithful to God shall see His deliverance and rejoice in the victory wrought by God for them.

Thus the triumphant call to loyalty and an affirmation that history is still in God's control and underneath all the imagery is the unmistakable sign of a great religious experience. The downfall of evil is sudden and the saints will finally outlast their enemies. The Ancient of Days is on their side and the universe is their inheritance. What a turn of events? The kingdoms of this world seem to grow in power and their attack on God's people intensifies but God does not allow them to continue but executes judgement upon them and God's people are vindicated just and true and the kingdom given to them. Thus God shall restore a right relationship with His people.

#### Curricular Implication of GC Theme in Daniel

The GC Theme has implications for the education and training of God's children in biblical and spiritual perspective. Education of children which rightly begins at home has lasting impact in the acquisition of knowledge and future education and for character development. The GC theme high-lightens the qualities of a value education such as choice, courage, character, conscience, worship, prayer, loyalty, etc.

A. Choice. The nation of Judah suffered captivity and exile for the choice they made to reject God and to ally with Egypt. Despite the warnings given by Prophet Jeremiah to the kings of Judah, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, both rejected God's messages and followed the advice of their friends. They thus suffered for the deliberate choice made against God and consequently suffered the captivities in 605 and 586 B.C. respectively.

But on the contrary, the Hebrew youth showed courage of conviction in the choice they made regarding the unclean food offered at the king's table and in the worship of the golden image. They chose to remain faithful to the health principles and to the first and second commandments rather than fear the king's orders in the face of death. This choice brought honour to them. They proved to be healthier and more intelligent than their colleagues. Their later choice to be thrown into the furnace rather than worship the idol was also honoured by God. He rescued them from certain and painful

death which awaited them.

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While King Nebuchadnezzar disobeyed God and chose not to follow divine message to repent of his sinful ways, he reaped the consequence in a life of 'beastly order' for seven long years. Similarly, Belshazzar's choice to humble the God of the Hebrews proved fatal, thus remains as the cause for its fall. And so the choices one makes determines to which side of the battle he belongs and also has a prominent role in education and personality development.

B. Courage. The Hebrew youth showed courage in defying the king's order to worship the image and chose rather to follow the value of being God's children. Their valient courage and faith on God withstood the king's orders knowing that they would be cast into the furnace. God honoured their courage and rescued them and placed them in high positions in the empire, bestowing on them wisdom and understanding superior to the Chaldeans. Daniel's period of testing came when he was plotted against by his enemies who envied his position. The decree of the king to serve no other god but himself, was courageously defied by Daniel as he continued to open the windows toward Jerusalem and pray to his God. Nothing could change his fidelity and relationship with his God even in the face of death (wasn't he saved after all from being devoured by the hungry lions?). Courage to stand firm for principle and belief in God is to be emulated by students as they grow in knowledge and wisdom.

C. Character. Character formation is an integral component in the process of education. Choices and decisions go into making habits that compose the character. Character is formed, tested, and purified through trials, sufferings, difficulties and these are essential in the school of Christ to perfect character. The character of Daniel and his companions stand in contrast to the other Chaldean youth that the king recognized, and they were rewarded accordingly. The character of the Hebrew youth is a reflection of God's power over the forces of evil and how their lives stand out as a witness before the world. This is what is needed of Christian youth to develop in their education.

D. Loyalty. A person's role in the controversy is determined by the side one chooses to pledge loyalty. The Hebrew youth pledged their loyalty to God and forever remained true and loyal to God, though they were also loyal to the kings and in their service to them. Daniel's life that spanned

the reign of several monarchs was <sup>160</sup>one of loyalty to whichever king ruled and consequently he rose to high positions in their rule, but this supreme loyalty was always to his God. King Nebuchadnezzar's loyalty wavered between his gods and the God of heaven--a divided loyalty.

Our loyalty should be placed upon one who is trustworthy and able to deliver us. So it is to God, the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer that we should be loyal. Daniel submitted his loyalty to God and also remained loyal to earthly kings and removes them. We may show loyalty to whomever accepts God and are loyal to Him, while our primary loyalty remains to God.

E. Worship. A clear contrast can be drawn from the book of Daniel regarding the form of worship. The Babylonians bow to images that represent selfish and egotistic motives, and the worship of the true God calls for a personal experience through prayer and accepting His will. The Hebrews worshipped God not by force of a king's decree but out of love that places no conditions. Nebuchadnezzar tried to enforce the worship of the God of the Hebrews, when He saved His children from the furnace, but force was never the method of God. True worship not only is characterized by externals but is a genuine relationship with God, the Creator, and an expression of our praise to Him for His goodness.

F. Prayer. Daniel's prayer is a model experience of faith and intercession on behalf of his people. The heavenly transmission had ceased and Daniel in humility thought that he was the obstacle. So he prayed that, if this were true, he be removed. Daniel learned that Gabriel was sent in answer to his prayer that very moment, but was hindered by the Devil from reaching him. Daniel continued to pray for three weeks in fasting, on behalf of his people, and heaven's reply was sent to him in reply to his prayers. As Daniel prayed that God's promise made to His people of deliverance and return from captivity be accomplished and then in response, he received the splendid vision of Michael who always comes to aid God's special people. The experience of Daniel in the den of lions is a witness to the consistent prayer pattern of Daniel, praying three times a day with his face toward Jerusalem. His relationship with God in prayer could not be altered by any human force. Daniel is also known to present his problems before God especially when he needed heavenly guidance and insight to interpret dreams of the kings. Daniel's prayer life is one of model for all to follow and experience the power of prayer and the relation with God.

G. Conscience. Conscience is the ability to distinguish right from wrong and to love the law that points out right from wrong. To man alone, the crowning act of creation, was given conscience so that it may be developed in harmony with God. "Conscience is the voice of God heard amid the conflict of human passions" (5T, p.120). An educated conscience will keep you up-to-date on your relation to the commandments of God (Jemison, p. 139).

The Hebrew youth had a well-educated conscience that could hear the voice of God amid the influence of pagan culture and pressures. They continued to keep God's law as the standard of judgement and held fast to its principles despite hardships they faced as a result of obedience to their conscience. It was better for them to follow their conscience and even face death. Daniel's conscience was clear to set right his priorities, that nothing can come to take the place of his allegiance to God. Belshazzar is an example of one whose conscience had been blunted and even put to rest due to immorality and intoxication that benumbed not only his senses but also his conscience. Nebuchadnezzar had a weak conscience; he accepted divine revelation and acknowledged the true God, and at the same time he failed to heed the voice of God that spoke through his conscience.

The role of conscience is significant as we see in the experience of the chief characters in the book of Daniel. Daniel and his friends possessed a well-educated conscience. Bible study and prayer are the means of enlightening the conscience (Jemison, p. 140), and young people need these so much in their education.

#### Curricular Activities to Reinforce the GC Theme

The grand themes of GC should be translated into concepts and values to be understood and accepted by Christian youth. Christian values discussed earlier should be emphasized for value education, and the youth should have a faith-learning experience in each discipline of study. An experience of faith and acknowledgement of God behind the course of events of history; that God is still in control but values human choice, should be understood by students. In the context of curricular activities a method of presentation of these themes should be developed. Teachers' guidance and students' participation should take place simultaneously in the process of integrating faith and learning and can be carried on in such areas as question and answers discussions, role modelling, writing, acting, composing, and other activities.

Suggested Questions

- a) How did Daniel and his friends show superiority in wisdom and understanding over the Chaldeans?
- b) Did God take revenge on Belshazzar instantly because he desecrated the sacred vessels of His temple?
- c) Why does God intervene in human affairs?
- d) Does God really control every event of history and at the same time honour human choice?
- e) How does God deal with sinners?
- f) Does God always answer our prayers?
- g) Are prophecies trustworthy?
- h) Can God be defeated?/ Does God ever fail?

Topics for Discussion

- a) Can food be considered clean or unclean?
- b) Is it wrong to eat food offered to idols?
- c) What is the role of music in worship?
- d) Why does God allow the righteous to suffer?
- e) To what extent should a Christian compromise, adopt to the cultural context? Are there limits?

Topics for Essay-Writing

- a) Identify the prayers in the book of Daniel and discuss the basics of a prayer: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. (ACTS)
- b) Draw a contrast between the Great Controversy theme in the Bible and in other religions such as Hinduism.
- c) Compose a song or poem enumerating and describing the various stages of the Great Controversy.

Group Activities

- a) Write a skit or drama on any particular situation or incident in the book of Daniel and organize a group to act the drama.
- b) Act out the various characters in the book of Daniel.

Conclusion

The grand theme of the GC stands as a backdrop for the formation of a Christian or biblical world-view for an understanding of salvation history in the Scriptures, and particularly, in the book of Daniel. Daniel presents

the basic controversy between God and Satan as operative in mankind and highlights the main events of the eschaton in prophetic perspective. The controversy has cosmic implications but the emphasis of the individual as a battle-ground of the controversy is significant. Eventually, the outcome of the conflict rests upon the choice an individual makes to belong to either one of the sides, God's or Satan's. The experience of faith and learning process becomes a useful tool in participating in the controversy successfully.

In the educational process, the GC theme should be the factor that guides young people in developing or influencing the formation of a Christian worldview. It is just not sufficient to expose Christian youth to the GC theme but also help them to accept and practice the values that are prominent for a Christian worldview. The curriculum should be enriched by activities that promote an understanding of GC theme in the formation of a Christian worldview. Efforts should be made to adopt the approach of integration of faith and learning in the disciplines of education. Thus, the purpose of Christian education and redemption to restore in man the image of his Maker can be accomplished.

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