

Historical Review of the Doctrine of “Clean and Unclean Meats”

by Robert Coulter

In the earliest stages of the development of the Church of God (Seventh Day) the doctrinal concerns of the Church were the second advent of Jesus Christ and the Sabbath. In Marion, Iowa, Merritt E. Cornell first attracted an audience by focusing attention on the second advent, the observance of the whole law and the unconscious state of the dead.

At the time Gilbert Cranmer began to establish the Church of Christ in Michigan, and the Marion Church was organized in 1860, neither church was concerned about the practice of distinguishing between clean and unclean meats for food.

In the earliest stages of the Church's development, more attention was given in its magazine, *Hope of Israel*, to tobacco than the meat's issue. Gilbert Cranmer chewed tobacco. This fact was generally known and was the subject of both criticism and support as it was debated in the pages of the *Hope*.

James and Ellen G. White report that it was Cranmer's use of tobacco for one thing that caused them to deny Gilbert Cranmer a license to preach. But, at this time (1857-58) neither church had taken a stand on clean and unclean meats.

The first known reference to the problem of the consumption of pork as food appeared in the June 10, 1866 issue of the *Hope of Israel*, published in Marion, Linn County, Iowa. It was a news item. It in no way defended nor condemned the practice of eating pork. The item as published in *Hope* had been selected from the local newspaper, the *Linn County Register*. It read in part, "No little degree of excitement had been occasioned in this vicinity during the past week by the fact being made known that almost every member of a large family of this place have been affected with the dreadful disease, Trichinosis."

The account went on to report that, of a family of ten, only one abstained from eating pork and was unaffected by the disease. It seemed that this family had been eating uncooked yet well-cured ham.

Nearly two years later, the second item appeared in the May 5, 1868 issue of the *Hope of Israel*. This time it was written by William Lockard, Emporia, Kansas. The title of Mr. Lockard's article was, "Shall We Reform our Diet?" in which he wrote, "The subject of diet for health is properly before the American people at this time. It is a fact, that in all this western country, the earth brings forth her abundance of the richest food for man and beast, so abundant, so rich, and of such vast variety, that many indulge their appetites to such a degree that it brings on bilious diseases, and finally Dyspepsia."

"We see the necessity of preaching 'temperance,' raising a warning voice against 'gluttony,' but all this does not prove that it is sin to eat meats that God in solemn covenant gave to man. 'Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you, even as the green herb have I given you all things' Genesis 9:3. There must have been some reason why God gave all things to man for food (blood excepted) for all of His doings are founded on principles of strict justice and reason. Likewise the great sheet in Peter's vision was filled with 'all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him. Rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God has cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice. Acts 10:12-16. Peter understood that he should go to the Gentiles and that they were to be brought into the Church of Christ, though they did eat of those things which were unclean among the Jews. He went to them and 'did eat with the Gentiles.' Galatians 2:12. Nor does our selecting those animals that suit our taste prove too much. It is no reason that it is any more sinful to eat any of them, than our selecting some vegetable in preference to others proves that it is sinful to eat them . . ."

"While we are taking care of our health let us be sure we have no moral pollution."

This article and several which follow have an obvious reference to the "health reforms" which were advocated so prominently during this period. Health reform in the United States had become popular and was advocated widely for both secular and religious reasons. Not all reforms were tied directly to religious practices, such as those adopted by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church through the purported vision Mrs. White had on June 6, 1863. Obviously, the reforms proclaimed by Mrs. White made an impact upon all Sabbatarian adventists, not excluding those of this denomination.

While the question of clean and unclean meats was not discussed frequently in the pages of the Church's paper, it did make an appearance once in a while. A letter appeared in the June 10, 1885, issue of the *Advent and Sabbath Advocate*, published at Marion, Iowa, from Mrs. Mattie Brady, "I would like to ask a question, in Leviticus 11th chapter, of meats clean and unclean, are not the unclean meats in that chapter unclean to us yet! We are not told any place in the Bible that they are not unclean to us. Will someone be so kind as to answer my question . . ."

In the next weekly issue of the *Advocate*, published on July 7, 1885, an unnamed author, presumably the editor, Jacob Brinkerhoff, wrote a short answer to Mrs. Brady's question. The author stated that the enactment of pure food laws had helped to provide the public better and more wholesome food. He conceded that there were different opinions on the subject of clean and unclean before he suggested, "We know that those animals and flesh meats prohibited to the Israelites were not as healthy and good for food as were those allowed; hence those not conducive to health should be left alone."

Brother Brinkerhoff concluded his reply by referring to Peter's vision in Acts 10, and asked, "If this distinction of meats was once good why is it not now?"

Another article dealing with the health aspect of food appeared in the February 16, 1886 issue of the *Advocate*. This article was entitled, "Eating and Drinking." It was written by W. H. Ebert, a frequent contributor to the paper from Frankton, Indiana.

Mr. Ebert does not use the Bible study format for his article. He approached it from the health reform standpoint. He made reference to the likelihood that eating pork contributes to ill health and bad judgment when it is combined with "all the other bad habits prevalent among men, such as smoking, drinking and gluttony."

While there may have been references to the subject of the clean and unclean in the pages of the church's magazine, which have been overlooked, the major items have probably been found and reviewed for the purpose of this article. In any event, the Church of God had not taken an official stand on this subject when John Nuesch again addressed it in the May 9, 1911 issue of the *Bible Advocate*, published at Stanberry, Missouri. His article entitled, "While Observing the Weightier Matters Leave Not the Other Undone," began, "We have the testimony that the law given by Moses came from God. Therefore none of them are old wives' fables. It seems to me that men would be afraid to think any of them are old wives' fables."

Brother Nuesch, who wrote much for the Church of God in his time, then directed his discussion toward celibacy as commanded by some religious bodies. He reported that the Bible does not forbid marriage, and stated, "Therefore celibacy is wrong except it be a voluntary sacrifice for the sake of preaching the word of God."

Following this introduction Brother Nuesch took up the discussion of the clean and unclean. He reasoned, "... To abstain from meats which God pronounced unclean is not foolish and no fable. God commanded it to his chosen people.

"Brethren, if there was no unclean flesh why was it mentioned in the Bible? Clean and unclean went into the ark. There was a distinction even from the beginning. And although immediately after the flood God allowed men to eat any kind of flesh (even as because of the hardness of their hearts He allowed marriage-divorce), yet it was not so from the begin-

ning. The followers of Christ should not do as the Gentiles, they ought to walk as Christ walked."

Continuing to develop his theme Brother Nuesch wrote, "I knew people who would not use hoglard in their cooking — but they used beef tallow. Such ought to know that tallow is the worse of the two. Tallow is not as wholesome even as hoglard, therefore God forbade it to Israel. We certainly cannot grow olives here, which are so abundant in all countries surrounding the whole Mediterranean . . . But the Creator has provided for us also: there are a number of vegetables requiring but a very short growing season, that produce fine oil in abundance. . . The oil of all them can be produced at one third the cost of hoglard. The real value of the corn, as food by itself, is much greater than it is after being turned into flesh and lard by feeding it to hogs."

In the same issue of the *Advocate*, editor Jacob Brinkerhoff wrote a short explanation of the attitude and policy of the magazine on this subject. He noted, "On the subject of food, we must be lenient with those who do not see the matter as we do . . . We should not ignore the importance of correct habits of life if we would live good lives. So while one 'believes he may eat all things,' others believe that a choice of food is better and tends to good health . . . So in matters of food many of us feel it of sufficient import to set it forth."

Brother Brinkerhoff on this and other occasions, stated that pure food laws had improved the quality and wholesomeness of food bought in the market place. It seemed the question of unclean meats was a matter of health, not doctrine, with the Church of God.

Shortly after Brother Nuesch's article appeared in the *Advocate*. It was followed by another one in the July 25, 1911, issue of the paper. This time a frequent writer to the *Advocate* from Dubuque, Iowa, Mrs. J. Smith, wrote an article called, "The Eating Question."

Mrs. Smith's article is rare in that it approached the subject of the clean and unclean in the form of a Bible study. She used various scripture references in an attempt to prove that the New Testament writers did not make a difference between clean and unclean meats for food purposes.

This article was followed by another one in the August 8, 1911 issue of the paper. "Meat for Food" was written by G. H. Hutchins, of Frisco, Arkansas.

Mr. Hutchins, who had been a Seventh-day Adventist, wrote to report that he had just withdrawn his membership of 26 years from the Adventist Church over the question of the three-day and three-night entombment of Jesus. Having introduced himself, he addressed Mrs. Smith's study with a study of his own using several scriptures to point out his opposition to the use of unclean meats for food.

These latter two articles are different from those which preceded them. They are of the nature of a Bible study. Previously so much of what had been written was offered as opinions about healthful practices. These two articles attempted to provide Biblical reasons why meats classified in Moses' law as

unclean should or should not be eaten. This is important because it is possible that it was beginning to signal a change in attitude of how the Church of God was eventually to look upon the clean and unclean meats issue. Undoubtedly the debate on the issue continued both in and out of the *Advocate*. So long as it was viewed as a matter of health, the policy of Brother Jacob Brinkerhoff toward leniency was acceptable. On the other hand, as the issue became more and more a matter of Bible doctrine, leniency and tolerance gave way to debate and division.

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, the attitude of the Church of God toward differences in Scriptural understanding was stated as, "... We proclaim the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God — all of the Bible is true and inspired, and no other divine revelation is given to man, but the Bible. On the plan of salvation, perfect unity; on the parts of the Bible not a direct part of salvation — charity."

This attitude of charity in the matter of clean and unclean meats gradually gave way. By the 1927 meeting of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), held August 28 at Rich Hill, Missouri, the following amendment was adopted to the Conference's bylaws, "No member of this conference shall teach any doctrine in public which is not believed by us as a Conference without stating clearly that such belief has not been endorsed by the Church of God, but that it is his own individual opinion."

In the 1929 meeting of the General Conference, held on August 12, Stanberry, Missouri, an effort to fortify this amendment failed. The lost motion was, "Ministers of this conference shall not teach in public doctrines contrary to those adopted by this conference." But this conference did manage to pass a resolution which put it on record regarding the use of unclean meats for the first time. After much parliamentary maneuvering the conference passed this resolution: "Resolved that this conference recommend that the ministers teach against the unclean meats and the use of tobacco."

Surprisingly, the 1929 volume of the *Bible Advocate* does not contain articles regarding the unclean meats. In the May 15, 1930 issue of the *Advocate*, a tract is listed for the first time covering the subject. It is advertised as, "The Clean and Unclean Meats," containing 23 pages, and taking up every objectionable point offered, which is explained in a clear, comprehensive manner, showing that people should discern between the clean and the unclean."

This tract was written by Theodore J. Flo, a minister of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in Michigan. Brother Flo reported that he wrote the tract at the request of Elder A. N. Dugger. Later he expressed disgust at Dugger whom he felt had failed to support the clean meats issue when he began to receive heavy criticism from many of the church's members for his own public stance on the subject. Flo felt that Dugger should have shared the criticism and publicly supported the tract.

It would be impossible to report what Dugger's stand on the question of the meats issue was in 1930.

But as late as 1927 Dugger wrote a letter in which he identified his long-standing position of that time. He wrote to a Sister Harrod on May 21, 1927, making the following statements, "... I see you are well read in the scriptures and understand these questions real well. I am sure as I have previously stated, and have been of that opinion for a long while that there is no sin connected with what we eat. It is impossible to find scripture to this effect, still it is much better for our health and spiritual welfare to abstain from eating the meats that God declared was unclean formerly ... From a health standpoint, from my careful and personal observation in traveling all over the United States and meeting our people who eat pork and who do not, I am convinced beyond any question of doubt whatever that we should not eat it for our own health, although my family always have eaten it and I was raised with pork on the table at almost every meal."

The May 27, 1930 issue of the *Advocate* carried an article entitled, "A Scientific View of the Hog." This article was written by Dr. J. H. Kellogg. In it he vividly exposed the unfitness of pork for human consumption. He described the physical makeup of swine which render them unhealthful as food from his point of view.

From this time on articles seem to appear more frequently in the *Advocate* against the use of pork for food. Many of them use a mixture of health and Biblical reasons for not consuming unclean meats. The question of the clean and unclean meats is reported to have played a role in the division of the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) in 1933. To what degree this matter was an issue is hard to say. But it, along with several other subjects, are reported to have created enough friction to have provided the excuse for the Salem organization to come into existence. Shortly after November 4, 1933, when the Salem Conference was organized, it published doctrinal statements identical to those published over the years by the Stanberry Conference. In both statements mention of the clean and unclean was omitted. Later, however, the Salem document was revised and it included Statement No. 24, as follows, "That the law of the clean and unclean is still to be observed in this age." This was followed by several Bible texts.

When the merger of the Salem and Stanberry conferences occurred in 1949, a pamphlet entitled, "What the Church of God Believes and Why" was published. In its Foreword it said, "It is ... deemed fitting and proper that we set forth the following Articles of Belief which were agreed upon by a convention of ministers, church officers, and other leaders of the Church, as being the essential doctrine of the Church." In this tract, Article 18 is listed as the "Law of Clean and Unclean." It states, "The people of God and the followers of Christ in this age are to use for food those things which were given by God for that purpose, as distinguished from those things designated as unclean for human use." Scripture texts followed.

Continues on p. 21

you've come to a decision on just how many hours you should be spending on the job, go see your church board. Tell them that after hearing their priorities you would like to suggest that you work X hours per week or month. Tell them how you arrived at that figure and ask if they feel it's appropriate.

Share with the board your job goals for the next year, while you're at it. This can be used for evaluation later. It's better to be judged by your criteria than someone else's standards. Besides, you'll be setting up some of the feedback you need to avoid further role-conflict.

4. The only thing worse than having too much to do—having nothing to do.

Speed Leas discovered that when a pastor wants to leave a congregation, 20% of the time it is because the job held no challenge, no potential for growth.

Think of that. While most ministers are harried and over-extended—a full 20% are... bored!

They're bored because there's no intellectual challenge. No nearby cultural or educational opportunities. Because there are too few people to work with and any more projects would overtax the tiny congregation.

They're bored because the congregation is focused on one tiny ethnic or age group that has closed itself even to its minister. Such a congregation cannot grow. Even when it's situated in a large city.

You can make a challenge where there is none.

Assuming you can't, or don't want to, make a move at this time, then you must provide your own challenge by widening your horizons and setting goals for yourself that demand excellence.

You start by sowing seeds where plants are likely

to grow. Which means you do not have to limit your efforts to your present congregation. You must not neglect those in your charge, but since they are not filling your time now, they probably won't suffer from your involvement with new souls.

Remember, however, that merely escaping an unhappy situation is not the answer. You must have a clear idea of what you're trying to accomplish.

Choose a specific area and become an expert in it. (It could be ministering to the aging, for instance. Or you could be an expert on church music. Or fund-raising. Or world hunger.)

Now use your non-challenging setting as an arena for study and research in your new specialty. Set objectives.

Lastly, find a way to use and share your expertise in your own newsletter, writing articles, leading discussions or workshops.

If you discover how to challenge yourself, you'll have found a whole new life.

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Other books that may help pastors with time problems:

STRATEGY FOR LIVING: HOW TO MAKE THE BEST USE OF YOUR TIME AND ABILITIES by Edward R. Dayton and Ted W. Engstrom. G/I Publications, Glendale, California.

MANAGING YOUR TIME: PRACTICAL GUIDELINES ON THE EFFECTIVE USE OF TIME by Ted W. Engstrom and R. Alec MacKenzie. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

From p. 14

Historical Review of the Doctrine of "Clean and Unclean Meats" in the Church of God (Seventh Day)

Robert Coulter

In 1974, the North American Regional Ministerial Council, serving Conference churches in the United States and Canada, revised the entire tract containing the "Doctrinal Beliefs of the Church of God (Seventh Day)." The statement adopted on the clean and unclean in 1974 is the one which is still in effect. Under the general heading, "Food," Article No. 24 is entitled "Clean and Unclean." It states, "God's people are to use for flesh food only those animals, birds, and fish which were designated by Him for that purpose. All others are to be regarded as unclean and unfit for human consumption."

In summary, the pages of the Church's publications, beginning with the *Hope of Israel*, traces the attitude and concern of the Church of God in regard to the subject of the clean and unclean meats. The subject was no doubt studied and debated to greater lengths outside the pages of the *Advocate* than in that medium. But articles contained in the magazine appear to reflect accurately the manner in which the

Church approached the subject and the transitions which occurred in its thinking.

What is true of the Church's attitude toward the clean and unclean meats also applies to several subjects. In the earliest days of its history, it had little or no concern for a variety of subjects. The Church was slow to develop positions on a number of subjects which are now very much a part of its discipline. The subjects of the use of tobacco, unclean meats, alcoholic beverages, tithing and the manner of the observance of the Lord's Supper, were of little concern to the Church in the nineteenth century. At first these were matters in which individuals exercised their own judgment. As corporate concepts about them began to develop within the Church, differing opinions were treated with leniency in the sense of tolerance. As more definite opinions developed, supported by Bible texts, tolerance gave way. The Church began to seek for conformity on the part of its membership.