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Preface	1
Presenting Jesus to Muslims: A Suggested Approach PRABAN SAPUTRO	3-14
A Brief History of Bible Interpretation AECIO E. CAIRUS	15-23
Methods, Steps, and Tools for Interpretation KENNETH D. MULZAC	25-42
The Issue of Genre and Apocalyptic Prophecy JOEL N. MUSVOSVI	43-60
The Relationship Between "What It Meant" and "What It Means" and the Task of Theology FRANCISCO D. GAYOBA	61-71
Hermeneutics and Preaching KYUNG HO SONG	73-82
Essentials in Interpreting Ellen G. White's Writings to an Asian Audience REUEL U. ALMOCERA	83-99
Response to Reuel U. Almocera's Paper "Essentials in Interpreting Ellen G. White's Writings to an Asian Audience NESTOR C. RILLOMA	101-5
Vision for an Adventist Hermeneutic EUGENE HSU	107-9
Are You Listening? LESTER MERKLIN	111-6
The Strength of the Name NESTOR DAYSON	117-21
Testing and Growing JOHN DUROE	123-27

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PREFACE

This is the last issue that will have my name on the masthead as editor. I am handing over the editorship as of the next issue to my assistant editor, Ken Mulzac, who has been appointed as the new editor. It was a challenging experience to found this journal and get it off the ground from scratch, including the extensive subscription list, yet it has also been a very rewarding experience. We are pleased to have found major universities and seminaries willing to subscribe to our journal, believing we have something to offer them. We have already been abstracted in *Old Testament Abstracts*, and we were pleased recently to receive a letter from ATLA, the American Theological Library Association, which indexes over 700 religion journals from around the world, that they have waitlisted us for regular indexing beginning in the year 2004 or 2005.

Ken Mulzac is well qualified for the job of editor. He is a prolific writer, as well as a speaker who is greatly in demand. He is a careful researcher and a top-notch scholar. He has served as Assistant Editor for the last two years, learning the rigors of editing a journal. He is Associate Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages at the AIIAS Theological Seminary, and he will be taking over as chair of the Biblical Studies department upon my departure. Welcome to the helm, Ken. I know the journal will fare well under your leadership.

Because all of our regular Forum papers this year were presented by AIIAS seminary faculty, we have decided to publish only one regular article in addition to the Forum papers. It was written by Praban Saputro, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of World Mission. He comes from Indonesia, so he has a strong interest in Christian-Muslim relations. His article on a suggested approach for building bridges between Christians and Muslims in attempting to present the gospel to Muslims is based on thoughtful reflection on the teachings of Islam in the Quran. Other papers may be published in later issues of the journal.

The Theological Forum 2002 was presented by selected AIIAS seminary faculty, and most were responded to by selected Forum participants. Only one of the responses is being included in this issue. We encourage those of our readers who are near enough geographically to attend the Forum to benefit by registering for this annual event, normally held early in August of each year. Contact the office of the Seminary Dean by mail, or by e-mail at semdean@aiaas.edu.

As usual, we also include abstracts of theses and dissertations successfully completed since the last issue. And there are critical book reviews submitted by faculty and students of AIIAS.

We trust you will once again enjoy the content of this issue and will subscribe to our journal if you have not already done so. Every year we reduce the number of complimentary subscriptions we are sending out. Make sure that this will not be the last issue you receive.

Edwin Reynolds

PRESENTING JESUS TO MUSLIMS: A SUGGESTED APPROACH

PRABAN SAPUTRO, Ph.D.

Islam, like Christianity, is a growing religion. From the Arabian Peninsula to the north and east parts of Africa, and from the Balkans to the whole of the Near and Middle East to China and down to the East Indies, Muslims are promoting their religion.¹ Islam has rapidly grown to become the second largest religion, with more than one billion followers,² or about one-fifth of the world's total estimated population today.³

The growth of Islam presents a challenge to Christian missions in many parts of the world. In Africa, Islam is making converts faster than Christianity.⁴ It is reestablishing its Islamic values, practices, institutions and laws in Muslim countries.⁵ Many Muslims now live in large cosmopolitan centers like Amsterdam, London, Paris, Sydney, Toronto, Los Angeles and New York.⁶ There are more Muslims than Methodist Christians in the United States now.⁷

One of the biggest obstacles that prevent Muslims from accepting Christianity is that Christianity teaches that Jesus is divine as well as human, and that He died

¹Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 19-22.

²Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 9.

³The world's total estimated population in 1996 was about 5.8 billion, of which Muslims numbered about 1.1 billion. David B. Barrett, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1996," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 20 (1996): 25.

⁴J. Herbert Kane, *A Concise History of the Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 51.

⁵Islam also is recreating an Islamic social order or government based on *sharia* (Islamic code of laws). It is known as the Islamic resurgence. Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Fajar Bakti, 1987), 2, quoted in S. Batulamai, "Response to Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia," *Asia Journal of Theology* 3 (1989): 4-6.

⁶William J. Saal, *Reaching Muslims for Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1993), 23.

⁷Geisler and Saleeb, 9.

on the cross.⁸ Muslims believe that Jesus was merely a human being and He did not die on the cross.

Various approaches on how to share the gospel with Muslims have been suggested. The oldest one is a polemical approach. In this approach, Muhammad was branded as a liar and an impostor.⁹ But the polemical approach fails to bring Muslims to accept the person of Jesus Christ, including His divinity, because Muslims are offended by this approach.¹⁰

Another approach is dialogical in nature. It attempts to find the similarities between Christianity and Islam. In this approach, Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and the Quran, the holy Book of Islam, are appreciated. But this approach does not persuade Muslims to come to Jesus as the only Savior, because the aim of dialogue is conversation only, not conversion.¹¹ The main purpose of this approach is to find a point of understanding with Muslims, not to convert them.

The latest approach for sharing the gospel with Muslims is an attempt to understand the worldview of Muslims and then express the truth of the gospel in

⁸There are six obstacles that prevent Muslims from accepting Christianity: (1) according to Islam, the Quran is more authoritative than the Bible; (2) Islam denies the deity and the crucifixion of Christ; (3) a person can convert to Islam but not from Islam; (4) to convert to Christianity is to become an apostate from the faith of Muslims and a traitor to one's country; (5) Islam is a religion that permeates all of life and is practiced more in public than in private; and (6) Islam still has the memory of the Crusades. Kane, 114-17.

⁹Heikki Räisänen, "The Portrait of Jesus in the Quran: Reflection of a Biblical Scholar," *Muslim World* 70 (1980): 122.

¹⁰A debate with a Muslim scholar about the person of Jesus may be found in Anis Shorrosh, *Islam Revealed* (Nashville: Nelson, 1988). Shorrosh did not report whether or not the Muslim converted to Christianity. An attack against Muhammad the prophet and the Quran is found in Robert Morey, *The Islamic Invasion* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992). It has made Muslims angry because Muhammad and the Quran are very sacred to Muslims.

¹¹George N. Malek, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue," *Missiology* 16 (1988): 279-86. James P. Dretke, *A Christian Approach to Muslims: Reflections from West Africa* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey, 1979), discusses how, as a missionary in West Africa, he practiced the dialogic approach with Muslims, especially in Ghana. In this approach, Dretke expresses appreciation for Muhammad the prophet and suggests that the Quran makes a useful point of contact. In this dialogical approach, twelve doctrines which are held in common by Christians and Muslims are compared. See Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *Islam and Christianity: Muslim and Christian in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980). For example, comparisons are made between the Quran and the Bible, and between Muhammad and Jesus. However, the comparative study cannot explain how Muslims think. To them, the Bible is corrupted but the Quran is perfect. Furthermore, Jesus is the prophet of Israel only but Muhammad is the prophet of mankind. The comparative study in the dialogue approach does not win Muslims to Jesus.

forms and terms that can best be understood by them. This approach may have the most potential for penetrating the Muslim world, but it may lead to syncretism.¹²

In line with this approach, this paper seeks to understand the Islamic view of the person of Jesus and then express the truth of Jesus Christ in terms that can be best understood by Muslims. It discusses the life and titles of Jesus, then suggests a biblical model for sharing Jesus with Muslims.

The Life of Jesus

Muhammad had a high regard for Jesus. This is evident both from the accounts of Jesus' life as well as the titles which are used in the Quran. There, references to the person of Jesus are found in fourteen *suras* or chapters, totaling ninety different verses: four *suras* were written during the Meccan period and ten were written during the Medinan period.¹³

In the Quran, the life of Jesus is linked with miraculous events such as His birth, His works, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His return.

The Birth of Jesus

The Quran speaks of the birth of Jesus through the Virgin Mary. Sura 19:18-22 states that the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said, "I am only a messenger from thy Lord to announce to thee the gift of a holy son." Mary responded, "How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?" The angel replied, "So it will be; Thy Lord said: 'That is easy for me, and we wish to appoint him as a sign unto men and a mercy from us.' It is a matter decreed."¹⁴ So Mary conceived Jesus, and she retired to a remote place.

¹²Don M. McCurry, "Cross-Cultural Models for Muslim Evangelism," *Missiology* 4 (1976). See further idem, "Contextualization: Indigenization and/or Transformation," in *The Gospel and Islam: A 1978 Compendium*, ed. Don M. McCurry (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1979); Phil Parshall, *New Paths in Muslim Evangelical Approaches to Contextualization* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982).

¹³The Quran is the collection of revelations which consist of 114 *suras* (chapters) and 6205 verses, and about 78,000 words. Murteza Mutahhari, *Revelation and Prophethood* (Tehran: Foreign Department Bonyad Bethat, n.d.), 65. The Quran is divided into two periods: the Meccan period and the Medinan period. The first comes from a time when Muhammad had to cope with much resistance to his message from the people in Mecca. This resistance was focused on his message about the resurrection. The Medinan period covers a time during which there was increased tension and hostility toward the Jews, but less toward the Christians. See Roelf S. Kuitse, "Christology in the Quran," *Missiology* 20 (1992): 357.

¹⁴*Roman Transliteration of The Holy Quran with Full Arabic Text*, English trans. A. Yusuf Ali (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1991).

Many Christian scholars state that the Quran supports the Christian teaching that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and His birth was different from that of any other human being. This implicitly suggests the divinity of Christ.¹⁵

However, in order to stress the humanity of Jesus, Muslims teach that the birth of Jesus was similar to the creation of Adam. This belief is based on Sura 3:59: "Jesus is like Adam in the sight of God. He created him of dust and then said to him, 'Be,' and he was."¹⁶ Muslims maintain that "God demonstrated omnipotence by creating Jesus in the womb of Mary without a father's involvement. Even more miraculous, however, was the creation of Adam without father or mother."¹⁷

Nevertheless, the Quran speaks of the nature of the birth of Jesus in Sura 19:21, pointing to His divinity. It states that Jesus is "a sign unto men and a mercy from God." Since the Quran was written in a Semitic culture, parallelism consisting of two statements of the same thought is found in this verse.¹⁸ Thus, the phrase "a sign unto men" is parallel with "a mercy from God." It means that His birth is a sign of God's mercy to humanity.

The Works of Jesus

The Quran speaks of miracles performed by Jesus. All miracles that are attributed to Jesus are summarized in Sura 5:113:

When God saith: "O Jesus Son of Mary, Remember my favour unto thee and unto thy mother; how I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit, so that thou spokest unto mankind in the cradle as in maturity; and how I taught thee the Scripture and Wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel; and how thou didst create of clay as it were the figure of a bird, by my permission; and didst breathe thereon, and it became a bird by my permission; and thou didst heal one blind from his birth, and the leper, by my permission; and when thou didst bring forth the dead, by my permission."¹⁹

¹⁵J. Elder, *The Biblical Approach to the Muslim* (Houston: Leadership Instruction and Training International, n.d.), 51, states that "the Quran accepts the truth that Jesus was born of Mary apart from a human father. He was born by direct creative act of God." C. R. Marsh, *Share Your Faith with a Muslim* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 46, affirms that "no other was ever born as He was. . . . He was born by the power of God (*qudrat Allah*) apart from the intervention of a man." Robert J. Wieland, *In Search of the Treasure of Faith* (Africa: All Africa Publications, n.d.), 100-101, adds, "Jesus' birth was different to that of any other human being. . . . He is called *al Manzul*—he who descended."

¹⁶Kuitse, 357.

¹⁷Paul Varo Martinson, *Islam: An Introduction for Christian*, trans. Stefanie Ormsby Cox (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994), 185.

¹⁸Giulio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1977), 70.

¹⁹Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq, *Sharing Your Faith with a Muslim* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1980), 101.

Many Christian scholars believe that the Quran's record of miracles performed by Jesus point to His divinity. For example, although Roelf S. Kuitse says that the story of the child Jesus giving life to birds made of clay is not biblical but a story in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas, he demonstrates that many words used in the story are also used in the account of the creation of Adam according to the Quran:

Sura 3:49: Jesus makes; Sura 6:2: God makes. . . . Sura 3:48: Jesus makes from clay; Sura 6:2: God makes from clay. . . . Sura 3:49: Jesus breathes into it; Sura 32:9 God breathes into it. . . . The Arabic imperative *kun* (be) used in the creation story (Sura 3:47) is also used in the story (*kun fa-yakun*).²⁰

Fuad Accad, a Muslim convert to Christianity, compares the story of the child Jesus and the creation story of Adam to show Jesus as the Creator and hence, divine.²¹ Abdiyah Akbar Abdul-Haqq, also a Muslim convert, adds that "the story of Jesus making birds out of clay makes a significant point about His divinity."²²

But Muslims maintain that many miracles Jesus performed were done only by the will of God, not as a proof of His divine nature. For example, Ishaq Husaini, a Muslim scholar, states that "all the miracles Jesus produced" were done only "by the will of God."²³ Muslims believe that Jesus performed more miracles than any other prophets.

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

The Quran speaks of the death and resurrection of Jesus in Sura 3:55; 4:157-58; and 19:33.²⁴ But Muslims deny the death of Jesus based on Sura 4:157-58:²⁵

The Jews said, "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary." But Muhammad said, "They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them. . . . God raised him up unto Himself; Allah is exalted in power and wisdom."

Muslims believe that it was impossible for such a good man as Jesus to die on the cross. God would have saved him from such a terrible death. They believe that God took Jesus to heaven just before the crucifixion and that a substitute, perhaps

²⁰Kuitse, 358.

²¹Fuad Accad, "The Quran: A Bridge to Christian Faith," *Missiology* 4 (1976): 334.

²²Abdul-Haqq, 97.

²³Ishaq Husaini, *Christ in the Quran and in Modern Arabic Literature* (n.p., n.d), 3, quoted in Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Quran* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 83.

²⁴In Sura 3:55, Allah says: "O Jesus! I will take thee [in death] and raise thee to Myself and clear thee of those who blaspheme. I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the day of resurrection." Sura 19:33 states that Jesus said, "Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day I shall be raised up to life again."

²⁵Elder, 53.

Judas, was crucified in His place.²⁶ But a certain sect of Islam, the Ahmadiyyah, holds that Jesus was crucified but did not die on the cross. He was taken down in a coma and subsequently revived and traveled to Kashmir, where he finally died.²⁷

Muslim commentators are not in agreement about the substitute. The candidates for this individual have ranged from Judas to Pilate to Simon of Cyrene or one of Jesus' close disciples.²⁸

Accad suggests the possibility of harmonizing Sura 4:157-58 to the death of Jesus on the cross, as follows:

It was not the Jews themselves who crucified Jesus, as this was not permissible to them. They caused the Romans, who were the masters of Palestine then, to do it for them. It was God who planned this crucifixion according to the Old Testament. The Jews were not able to slay him, because "God raised him up unto himself," after His death and resurrection.²⁹

The Ascension and Return of Jesus

The Quran speaks about the ascension of Jesus in Sura 4:158. Muslims believe Jesus is now in heaven and has access to the throne of God:

Muhammad, on his night journey to the seventh heaven, met Jesus in the second heaven and was introduced to him by Gabriel; whereas others of the fathers were in a higher place, for instance, Joseph in the third heaven, Aaron in the fifth, Moses in the sixth, and Abraham in the seventh heaven.³⁰

The Quran, in Sura 43:6, also implicitly makes a singular reference to Jesus in connection with the coming judgment. It states, "And Jesus shall be a sign for the coming of the hour of Judgment. Therefore have no doubt about the hour, but follow ye Me: this is a straight way."

Islamic tradition says that Jesus will descend on a mountain in the Holy Land, near Afiq. He will kill *Al-Dajjal*, the AntiChrist, with a spear. Then Jesus will go to Jerusalem to worship in the Islamic manner; thereafter He will kill the swine, destroy the churches and synagogues, and kill all Christians who do not believe in Him. From that time on there will be only one faith on earth. Jesus will reign for forty years and die and be buried in Medina beside Muhammad.³¹

²⁶Marsh, 54.

²⁷Michael Nazir-Ali, *Islam: A Christian Perspective* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983), 17-18.

²⁸Geisler and Saleeb, 65.

²⁹Accad, 340.

³⁰Erich W. Bethmann, *Bridge to Islam: A Study of the Religious Forces of Islam and Christianity in the Near East* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), 60. Tradition says that Muhammad's journey occurred in A.D. 621. See Geisler and Saleeb, 73.

³¹H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, "Isa," *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (1974), 173-74.

The Titles of Jesus

The Quran gives a greater number of honorable titles to Jesus than to any other prophet.³² It refers to Jesus, for example, as a “Prophet,” an “Apostle,” a “Servant,” a “Sign and Mercy,” an “Example,” a “Witness,” “Blessed,” One who “held honor in this world and the hereafter,” and “Nearest one to God.”³³

Other quranic titles for Jesus, such as the “Word from Allah,” the “Spirit proceeding from Him [Allah]” and the “Messiah,” may imply the divinity of Jesus.³⁴ These three titles are discussed below.

The Word from Allah

The most exciting title given to Jesus in the Quran is the “Word from Allah.” It is found in Suras 3:39,³⁵ 3:45,³⁶ and 4:171.³⁷ Some scholars think that the Quran’s statement that Jesus is the “Word from Allah,” means that He *is* the “Word of God” who became the “Son of Mary.”³⁸ In addition, since the Quran was written in the Semitic culture, the title “Word from Him [Allah]” in 3:45 is parallel to Jesus Christ who “held honor in this world and the hereafter” where these titles appeal to His divinity. The name “Jesus Christ” is parallel with “Son of Mary” in connection with the birth and humanity of Jesus. Thus, Sura 3:45 essentially states that Jesus is the Word of God who became a man through the Virgin Mary.

However, Muslims believe that God does not reveal Himself to anyone in any way. He reveals only His will.³⁹ Therefore, most Muslim scholars argue that the “Word from Allah” did not become flesh but became a book, namely the Quran.⁴⁰

³²Parrinder, 16.

³³Ibid., 30-54. See respectively Sura 2:136; 3:45; 4:159,171; 19:21,30,31; 43:57.

³⁴Sura 3:39,45; 4:171.

³⁵Sura 3:39 states that the angel Gabriel said to Zecharias, “Allah doth give thee glad tidings of Yahya [John], witnessing the truth of a Word from Allah [God].” In this verse, the angel told Zecharias about the mission of John, his son, namely, to witness, or to confirm the “Word from Allah.”

³⁶Sura 3:45 claims that the angel Gabriel came to Mary and said: “O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of those nearest to Allah.”

³⁷Sura 4:171 says, “Christ Jesus the son of Mary was an apostle of Allah and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him.” In light of this verse, the expression “Word from Him” in 3:45 is equal to “His Word.”

³⁸Thomas J. O’Shaughnessy, *Word of God in the Quran* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1984), 9.

³⁹Phil Parshall, *The Fortress and the Fire* (Bombay: Gospel Literature Service, 1975), 112.

⁴⁰Frank K. Flinn, *Christology: The Center and the Periphery* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 106.

For them, “The great theophany of Islam is the Quran.”⁴¹ As one writer expresses it,

The Quran was more than a book. It was a faithful reproduction of the original scripture in heaven. To this heavenly copy, it is not implausible to hold, was transferred the Christian concept of the uncreated Word of God, the Logos, which was later applied by the orthodox to the Arabic copies of the Quran.⁴²

Other scholars, such as Al Tabari (d. A.D. 932), Zamakshari (d. 1144), and Al Baidawi (d. 1286), believed that the “Word from Allah” referred to Jesus, but only as a created being.⁴³

The Spirit from Allah

Another title given to Jesus in the Quran is a “Spirit proceeding from Him[Allah]” (Sura 4:17). It is more supreme than any title given to other prophets. In the Quran, Adam is called the “chosen of God,” Noah is the “prophet of God,” Abraham is the “friend of God,” Moses is the “spokesman with God,” and Muhammad is the “messenger of God.”⁴⁴ But some Muslims believe that the Spirit from God is a created spirit, while others explain that it is the angel Gabriel.⁴⁵

This view on the Spirit from God is ambiguous. Sura 21:91 suggests that the Spirit from God is neither the angel Gabriel nor a created spirit, but it pertains to God: “And remember her who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all people.”

The Messiah

The Quran speaks of Jesus as the “Messiah” eleven times.⁴⁶ One of them is found in Sura 3:45:

Behold! The angel said: “O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: His name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the hereafter and of those nearest to Allah.”

⁴¹Frithjof Schuan, *Understanding Islam*, trans. D. M. Matheson (Baltimore: Penguin, 1972), 43.

⁴²M. S. Seale, *Muslim Theology* (n.p., n.d.), 66, quoted in Abdul-Haqq, 69.

⁴³O’Shaughnessy, 13-17.

⁴⁴Parshall, *New Paths*, 140.

⁴⁵Michael Nazir-Ali, *Frontiers in Muslim-Christian Encounter* (Oxford: Regnum, 1987), 32.

⁴⁶Parrinder, 30.

Abdul-Haqq points out that Muslim scholars believe that the word “Messiah” is derived from the Arabic word *Saha*, meaning “to travel.” Jesus was called Messiah because he had traveled much. But other Muslim scholars such as Baidhawi and Zamakshari reject this derivation, stating that the word was foreign to the Quran.⁴⁷

The word “Messiah” means “the anointed one.” Abdul-Haqq claims that the meaning of Messiah is found implicitly in Sura 2:87, where God said, “We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁸

To conclude, the Quran speaks of various aspects of Jesus and of His titles which reflect Muhammad’s knowledge of both the humanity and the divinity of Jesus. The Quran confirms the existence of the Virgin Mary, the unique birth of Jesus, His miracles, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His coming judgment. The Quran also confirms that Jesus was the “Word from Allah” who became the “Son of Mary.” He was the “Messiah” who was anointed by the Holy Spirit. And He is the One who “held honor in this world and the hereafter.” These Quranic teachings about the person of Jesus can be used as a bridge to approach Muslims. The following section suggests how to share Christian teachings about the person of Jesus with Muslims by using these teachings.

Matthew’s Model

To share the person of Jesus with Muslims, Christians should follow what the disciples of Jesus did in the past. The disciples had a hard time witnessing to the Jews, who did not accept the divinity of Jesus because they were strictly monotheistic people. Therefore, Christians can learn from the disciples how to approach monotheistic people such as Muslims. This study suggests Matthew’s model for sharing Jesus with Muslims, which starts with the humanity of Jesus and moves to His divinity.

From the Gospel of Matthew (16:13-17), we learn that it is not easy to share the person of Jesus, which includes His divine nature, with monotheistic people. In this sense, it may be easier to share the person of Jesus with Gentiles than with Jews. Indeed, Matthew points out that when Jesus was born, the Magi from the East searched out the birthplace of Jesus and came to worship Him, but the Jewish leaders did not show any interest.

To approach the Jews, a monotheistic people, Matthew first introduces Jesus as the son of Abraham and David (Matt 1:1). Matthew evidently believed that his introduction of the person of Jesus would not offend the Jews because they believed themselves to be the descendants of Abraham and they admired King David, Israel’s most famous monarch. Matthew was aware of the beliefs of his audience when he started with the humanity of Jesus. Indeed, he is following the

⁴⁷Abdul-Haqq, 82.

⁴⁸Ibid., 84.

advice of Jesus: "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (10:16).

Matthew introduces the divinity of Jesus united with His humanity by stating that through the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary gave birth to a son named Jesus (1:20-21) or Immanuel, which means "God with us" (1:23). When Matthew introduces Jesus' divinity to the Jews, he points to the fulfillment of the OT prophecies concerning His unusual birth and the presence of the Holy Spirit. By doing this, he shows the necessity of examining the Scriptures, namely the OT prophecies concerning the coming Messiah. This is vital in sharing the doctrine of the divinity of Christ with monotheistic people.

Matthew indicates that Jesus first used the title "Son of Man" to introduce Himself to the Jews (8:20). Afterwards, Jesus demonstrated His miraculous works such as healing the sick, raising the dead, and driving out demons. He then introduced Himself as the "Son of Man" who has authority on earth to forgive sins (9:6). After His resurrection, Jesus introduced Himself to the disciples as the One who has "all power . . . in heaven and in earth" (28:18). It is important to note that Matthew was a Jew, a monotheistic believer, yet he came to believe that Jesus was God who became a man.

Matthew started with the humanity of Jesus, moved to His divinity, and then shared the person of Jesus with the Jews. That is Matthew's model.

This study suggests that Christians working with Muslims should follow what Matthew did. They should begin with the humanity of Jesus in sharing Christ with Muslims. They should communicate the person of Jesus beginning with what Muslims already believe about Jesus.

Muslims believe that Jesus is the "Son of Mary," which shows that He is human. Thus, by way of introduction, Christians may start their dialogue with Muslims with the humanity of Jesus. They may use the title "Son of Mary" instead of the title "Son of God" in the initial stages of the dialogue, because the title "Son of Mary," is familiar to them since it is mentioned several times in the Quran. Christians may also use the Quran wisely from the beginning to explain Jesus as the "Son of Mary." Though Muslims believe the birth of Jesus was similar to the creation of Adam, Christians can stand together with Muslims in terms of the procreation of Jesus. Christians can show verses from the Bible about the birth of Jesus and the creation of Adam to demonstrate the significance of the birth of Jesus.

Muslims believe that Jesus was a prophet. Prophets, according to Muslims, are not ordinary men. Muslims believe that Jesus performed many miracles. Yet they admit that unlike the prophets, Jesus is never found confessing sins or praying for forgiveness either in the Quran or in the Bible.

Muslims believe that Jesus is in heaven now and that He will return to this earth for judgment. Christians can invite Muslims to believe in Jesus because, in biblical teaching, Jesus will return to save people who believe in Him. It is important to note that most Muslims are uncertain of their salvation. The doctrine

of the Second Coming of Christ is important to help Muslims open their minds about Jesus' coming to save people who believe in Him.

As to the death and crucifixion of Jesus, while some Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross, others believe that He did. The Quran points out both His death and resurrection. Christians can explain that the divinity of Jesus did not perish on the cross, but Jesus as a human being died on the cross. They can emphasize that the person of Jesus is more than human by pointing to the titles of Jesus in the Quran which reflect His divinity. These include Jesus "the Messiah," who "held honor in this world and the hereafter," the "Spirit from Allah," and the "Word from Allah."

Christians can explain the divinity and the humanity of Jesus in the Quran where it refers to the "Word from Allah" who became the "Son of Mary" (Sura 4:171). At this point, Christians may review quranic and biblical teachings ranging from the birth of Jesus up to His Second Coming. Finally, they can invite Muslims to accept, by faith, the person of Jesus, which includes His divinity.

Some Practical Suggestions

We may now consider some practical suggestions that are needed in sharing Christ with Muslims:

1. Christians should be aware that to approach Muslims is not an easy task. For that reason, Christians must have a good relationship with God as well as with Muslims.
2. Christians should properly understand the biblical teaching of the person of Jesus before they share the gospel with the Muslims. They should also believe that Jesus is God and man in one person, eternally.
3. Christians should study the quranic teachings about Jesus in order to bridge the gap between Muslims and themselves in understanding the person of Jesus. They can share the person of Jesus with Muslims by pointing out how quranic teachings about Jesus compare with biblical Christology.
4. Christians should understand the Muslim view of the person of Jesus and the Islamic concept of God in order to share the person of Jesus in terms that will not be offensive to Muslims. Christians should begin on the basis of what Muslims believe about Jesus.
5. Christians should show respect for the Quran when they study the person of Jesus with Muslims. They must hold it properly and place it properly, because Muslims believe that the Quran is the exact Word of God.
6. Christians should never attack Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, nor the Quran, the holy Book of Islam. Muslims believe that both the life of Muhammad and the holy Book of Islam are key elements for the ideal Muslim.
7. Christians should be good neighbors to Muslims because Muslims have a high regard for good Christians. Being a good neighbor will help to break down walls of prejudice.

8. Christians should encourage and lead Muslims to read the Bible and give opportunity for the Holy Spirit to speak to them. Many Muslims have come to believe in Jesus because of reading the Bible.

9. Finally, Christians should explain the importance of prayer and faith for accepting the person of Jesus, which includes His divinity. Just as Christians accept the divinity of Jesus by faith, Muslims also can accept the divinity of Jesus by faith.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION

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Introduction

The interpretation of any text depends to a large extent on the kind of commitment we have to its content. Should we study the writing under consideration in order to know more about the author and the community that treasured his work and their circumstances, but without getting personally involved, in the same way biologists study flowers or insects? This is actually how the greater part of the scholarly study of the Bible is conducted today. Or, in contrast, should we rely on the message of the text, even to the point of life-or-death decisions? This is the conservative approach to the Bible.

The first principle in this commitment to the value of a text is categorization. How do we conceive of the book as a whole? The importance of categorizing texts may be illustrated by comparison with other kinds of works. Suppose we find some kind of map with the outline of this island (Luzon, Philippines). Is this a chart for sailing around the island? Or is it perhaps a blank map for school children so that they may locate the main natural resources and crops of Luzon for an exercise in economics or geography? In the first case, we may test the reliability of the outline by personally checking a particular section of the coast, and keep the chart if we find it accurate. In the second case, there is no need to check the accuracy of the coastline; it is valuable even as a rough sketch. If the chart is used for sailing, every line on the map should be taken with utmost faithfulness to avoid shipwreck; if it is used for economics, only the general location of a line is important. This is not to say that one kind of map is better than the other; they may both be adequate or inadequate for their own purpose. The point is that we interpret a work on the basis of the category we think it belongs to.

In the case of the Bible, the commitment it gets from faith communities such as Judaism or Christianity starts with its categorization as the word of God. The Scriptures are unambiguously called the word of God in Mark 7:13; John 10:35; and Rom 3:2. In addition to these references, "word of God" occurs about sixty times in the OT, mainly for prophetic messages, and about forty in the NT, mainly

referring to apostolic preaching. This in itself defines the canon: the scope of Scripture, or God's word, is the full collection of extant, authentic prophetic and apostolic writings. But the sense in which the Bible is understood as the word of God has changed with the times. We will now review the main stages in these changing conceptions.

Interpretation in Traditional Judaism, the Church Fathers, and the Middle Ages

Traditional Judaism

Systems of interpretation arose as soon as the Bible was complete.¹ The first is found in traditional Judaism. In order to understand it adequately, we may ponder exactly what elements found in the Bible constitute the word of God. Are the words of the original text themselves to be taken as the voice of God, or is it rather their sense that constitutes the word of God, no matter how that sense is expressed through human authors? In the first case, not only the thoughts contained in the Bible, but its very terms are inspired. If so, no translation of the original text, no matter how good, can be God's word in the same way and to the same degree as the original.

This is precisely the conviction often found among the Jewish interpreters after the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.). They took a dim view of all translations. The first translation of the OT into a non-cognate language, that is, the LXX, was compared by ancient rabbis to the making of the golden calf. They said that if a translator renders the original literally he is a falsifier,² while if the translator interprets the sense freely, he is a blasphemer, because he dares to present his own views as God's words!³ A similar conception is still current in Islam, as common translations of the Quran take pains to remind the reader.⁴

Because of their conviction that the words themselves are inspired, ancient Jews developed *gematria*. This technique assumes that the very letters of the text

¹The division of the history of hermeneutics into periods and their characterization here follows standard hermeneutical works such as Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 218-47. However, the identification and evaluation of main principles is the sole responsibility of the present author.

²Probably because the literal rendition of a phrase may be completely misleading for those who do not know its usage in the original language.

³H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1978), 4:414 w, x.

⁴For example, the title of the translation by M. M. Pickthall (New York: New American Library, 1953) is not *The Koran* but *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. The foreword (p. vii) states flatly that "the Koran cannot be translated," contradicting the description on the title page.

are significant: Hebrew phrases with the same number value as the letters in the original text are held to point to its meaning. As a "proof," it was observed that the letters forming the name of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham, add up to a numerical value (based on their alphabetical order) of 318, which is precisely the number of Abraham's servants as specified in Gen 14:14.⁵

But not all was *gematria* in the Jewish system of interpretation. Independently of its mechanical concept of biblical inspiration, it developed reasonable exegetical criteria employed by NT authors, even Jesus Himself in His capacity as "rabbi." This includes the seven *middot* or techniques of interpretation attributed to Rabbi Hillel, often encountered in the NT.⁶

Church Fathers

Early Christians also performed *gematria*. For example, the Epistle of Barnabas points out that the number 318 may be written in the Greek system of number values as *TIH*, where *T* has the figure of the cross and *IH* is the beginning of the word *Iēsous* (Jesus) in Greek. Both Jews and Christians of those times accepted the gematrical reasoning for applying Shiloh in Gen 49:10 to the Messiah: the phrase "Shiloh comes" adds up to 358 in Hebrew, just like "Messiah."

For the normal reading of the Hebrew Bible, a system of vowel points fixes the traditional pronunciation and therefore the vocalization and word division. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the times of Protestant scholasticism, these vowel points and even the *te'amim* (chant notation), which fixed the punctuation of the Hebrew text, were held to be inspired.

However, the Bible never claims to have been mechanically inspired, or to be significant in every detail. Quite the opposite, the Bible authors observe that "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets" (1 Cor 14:32 NIV), and the relationship between God and His prophet is comparable to that of a leader and his spokesman (Exod 7:1; cf. 4:15-16). A spokesperson, as we know, is not just a speaker. A speaker on television may merely read the text given to him or her on the teleprompter. In contrast, a spokesperson knows the mind of a

⁵Even in our own times, the mechanical inspiration of the Bible has its defenders. Those who believe in the "Torah code" (the title of a popular paperback) cast the Pentateuch in lines of particular lengths, so that by reading vertically across them, Hebrew phrases can be formed which are supposed to "predict" events. This system of prediction is greatly aided by the flexibility of Hebrew writing, which represents only consonants. The vertical reading suppresses all separation between the supposed "words," so with a little ingenuity all kind of things can be read in this way.

⁶For example, a technique called *gezerah shawah* allows comparison and connection of verses sharing the same original key term (as in Rom 4:3, 6-7). The *qal wahomer* principle is used to argue that if A is true (as proven by the Bible), being more difficult than B, then B can also be inferred to be true with all the more reason (as in John 10:35-36).

leader and enjoys his or her trust. The spokesperson then relays the ideas of the leader to the people according to need. In the case of the Bible, the diversity of style and other parameters of composition are consistent with the dignity of its authors, who were spokesmen and not mere mediums, as are authors under pagan or spiritist (spiritualist) inspiration.

Middle Ages

In fact, the Greco-Roman pagan belief in mechanical inspiration was in part the source of the medieval interpretation system. A Greek poet hallowed by time and fame, such as Homer, according to the pagans, had composed his work under the inspiration of particular deities. Teachers of Greek literature at Alexandria, which was also the center of philosophical teaching, combined lofty philosophical conceptions with this mechanical concept of inspiration and developed the theory that, beyond the obvious meaning of the narrative found in the poem, stood a mysterious metaphorical sense, so that the narrative was actually an allegory of philosophical truth. Church Fathers at Alexandria adapted this theory to Christian beliefs. They taught that Scripture has multiple meanings, only one of which is the literal or "historical." Following them, medieval interpreters tried to find "spiritual lessons" in every biblical statement, the so-called "moral sense," as well as theological and eschatological allusions. These second, third, and fourth senses were obtained by assuming, as pagans did with Homer, that the text functions as an allegory (extended metaphor). The allegorical (figurative) method of exegesis presupposes, like *gematria*, hidden meanings in the biblical text. NT authors do not use the allegorical method.⁷ During the early Middle Ages, however, the school of Christian theology at Antioch, a rival of Alexandria, was the only one rejecting the allegorical method.

The Reformation and the Conservative Evangelical System of Interpretation

The Reformers (sixteenth century) made the Bible their only rule of faith and practice. They often encountered the objection that Scriptures, like "a wax nose," can be twisted to accommodate many different opinions. The "wax nose" refers to a toy of the times, namely dolls featuring a nose made of beeswax, which children could turn whichever way in play. A wax nose is certainly the case of the Bible if we allow the allegorical method of interpretation, but not if we hold strictly to the evident meaning of the biblical author, the literal or "historical"

⁷Paul used the term "allegory" in Gal 4:24-31, but he does not claim Genesis speaks about Judaism and Christianity under the figure of Sarah and Hagar. He is making a "contemporary application" of the passage (4:25), which remains the responsibility of the author of the reflection.

sense. For this reason the Reformers championed a return to the literal method of exegesis practiced in the patristic age by the School of Antioch. Their position became the evangelical, or conservative Christian, system, the one followed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Since there is no evidence that mechanical inspiration is the normal situation in the Bible, Adventists believe that “the writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”⁸ For Adventist exegesis, the meaning intended by the biblical author is paramount, since the communication of divine ideas is mediated by the intelligence of the human author. In some cases, however, the purpose of the author has been merely to testify to a revelation from God, the signification of which he could not fully know at the time (1 Pet 1:10-12), so that he merely transmits the revelation verbatim and lets us know that he is doing just that. The signification or “full import”⁹ of such revelation constitutes the application of the prophecy today. In those cases we are interpreting the divine revelation to the prophet rather than his writing. In all cases, however, the author’s intention can be confidently recovered through the procedures of exegesis, and the authorial purpose is never lost sight of when interpreting prophecy.

Rationalism and the Origin of the Historical-Critical Method of Interpretation

During the time of the Enlightenment (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), there was a general revolt against the oppressive authority of the kings (i.e., absolute power) and the clergy (i.e., absolute dogmas). The system of interpretation that arose in that age and blossomed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, known as the historical-critical method of exegesis, largely ignored the authority of the Scriptures. “Authority” means the right to be obeyed, and the right of the Scriptures to be believed and obeyed was perceived during the Enlightenment as dependent on dogma. In fact, the Bible is autonomous in its claims, and church authority depends on the revelation embodied in its pages, not the other way around. By ignoring the authority of biblical statements about the circumstances in which the various books were written, this system of interpretation constructed its own isagogics. In other words, it identified the author, time, unity, purpose, and historical setting of each writing guided by the principles of historical criticism commonly applied to profane literature. Thus, for instance, the Pentateuch is held to have been written after the prophetic books of the OT, Isaiah to be a work of composite authorship, and Daniel a prophecy *ex post facto*.

⁸Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958, 1980). 1:21.

⁹Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 344.

Criticism of Criticism: The Problems of Modernistic Interpretation

This alien isagogics radically alters the meaning of biblical statements by changing the presumed original verbal context and historical setting. But it does not end there. As explained above, the authority of the Scriptures does not depend on church pronouncements, such as canon-fixing council decrees, but on the fact that the Bible issues from a succession of prophets and apostles raised up by God in the course of the history of salvation, as leaders and witnesses to that salvation. We should be wary of constructs such as the "Council of Jamnia" or the "Alexandrian canon of the OT" for which there is no shred of historical evidence.

Since it is the calling of the biblical author, not a church pronouncement, that makes a writing sacred for Protestants, the altered isagogics of the historical-critical system of exegesis has far-reaching consequences. By separating many biblical books and book sections from their connection with the prophetic and apostolic channels of revelation, this system has tended to make belief in the authority of large parts of the Bible impossible, at least in the sense in which the Bible itself defines authority. Only a pale secondary "authority" clings to those sections of the Bible, as a result of the say-so of church pronouncements, in Roman Catholic fashion, or because of individual convictions, in a subjective and non-normative way.

The Rejection of the Historical-Critical Method by Conservative Christians

The historical-critical system, though still widely influential, has not been successful in all areas. As a consequence of its hostility to biblical authority, this system of interpretation is particularly impotent in the areas of doctrinal formulation and practical application. Any faith applications of biblical statements are in fact considered by historical-critical scholars to lie outside the system, in the province of "theology," which is left to fend for itself in finding meaning in the Bible with few tangible benefits from such exegesis. The vital connection between Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology is thus severed. Whatever usable results the system may produce belong in the history of literature, the history of religions, and other human sciences with no supernatural perspective. At its 1986 Annual Council, the Seventh-day Adventist Church approved a report from the Methods of Bible Study Committee, thereby rejecting the historical-critical method of interpretation. Many other conservative Christians have protested against this modernistic and rationalistic method throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Post-modern Systems of Interpretation: Neo-orthodox, Existentialist, and Canonical

Disappointment over the theological impotence of the historical-critical system led to the creation of new systems of interpretation in the post-modern age. We will briefly review the Neo-orthodox, Existentialist, and Canonical methods.

Neo-orthodox Method

The Neo-orthodox school of theology adopted its own system between the World Wars. Even though admitting the results of historical-critical exegesis, the school insisted on the authority of whatever biblical statements the Holy Spirit leads the interpreter to appreciate. For Neo-orthodox theologians, beginning with Karl Barth, God's word is indeed contained in the Bible, though not because God actually speaks, but because the prophet feels He does in the course of an existential encounter with Him. A similar encounter may be experienced by the interpreter, and biblical statements are the medium through which this non-propositional (i.e., nonverbal) revelation is produced. The content of the Bible, then, is not so much God's word as the trigger of an event in which God may be perceived as speaking. However, Neo-orthodoxy allowed some reconnection between systematics and biblical theology, and has been therefore popular among many theology students.

Existentialist Method

The critical consensus about the isagogics of the Pentateuch and other sections of the Bible began to dissolve in the second half of the twentieth century in the hands of its own practitioners, as difficulties in its theoretic framework became more visible. Precisely at that time a radically existentialist system of interpretation arose challenging the supposedly scientific character of modernist exegesis.¹⁰ Historical-critical exegetes recognized the problems their system created for theology, but held that they had to be faced in the name of objective and scientific truth. Theologians who have ignored those results have been branded as having zeal not according to science. In contrast, for existentialist thinkers, no real objectivity is possible, and so the claims of a "scientific" isagogical reconstruction over the acceptance of biblical statements are not valid.

However, that does not make existentialists conservative. The true intention of the biblical authors, according to these interpreters, may not be recoverable with certainty. This is no great loss, because meaning does not exist in objective reality (such as texts), but only in the human mind, just as "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Readers are told to follow the "arrow of sense" (the general direction

¹⁰This position is represented, among others, by Liberation theologians.

in which the text is pointing) to the present situation instead of trying to recover the thing precisely signified by the author in the past. Texts and other cultural works are autonomous and become progressively independent from their authors. While in the historical-critical system scientific exegesis is all-important and the practical application of the text is of little importance, in existentialism the reverse is true.

Like Neo-orthodoxy, existentialist hermeneutics, assumes that God did not really communicate his ideas to the prophets; instead God's word is an idea discovered by them and perceived as divine. The "theology of liberation," in particular, utilizes an existentialist hermeneutic, allowing a socialist-revolutionary interpretation, the so-called "updated reading" of biblical passages, for which it has been widely criticized.

Canonical Method

"Canonical interpretation" was the name given by B. S. Childs to his system. He, like many other twentieth century interpreters, accepts the results of historical-critical exegesis, but tries to find meaning in the "canonical," that is, the final stage of the composition of the Bible as fixed in the canon. This implies that the authority of the Bible is independent from the identity of their human authors, a highly controvertible theological position, though understandable as a reaction to the sterility of the historical-critical exegesis described above.

Conclusion

What key ideas can be gleaned from this brief historical survey? Authorial intention (AI) appears to be the touchstone to differentiate between the various systems of interpretation. In traditional Judaism, that intention is not really important because God himself is the Source of the words and even individual letters of Scripture. In conservative Christian interpretation, divine revelation is always mediated by the authorial intention of the prophets and apostles identified in the Bible itself. In historical-critical exegesis, the author or his purpose is not necessarily the one stated by the Bible, so his intention must be reconstructed by human science. In Neo-orthodoxy, the Bible authors did not just mediate but rather originated the message, while in existentialist hermeneutics the reader, rather than the author, provides the significant message of the text. This may be presented in table form:

SYSTEMS	ATTITUDES TOWARD AI
Traditionalist Conservative Modernist Neo-orthodox Existentialist	God speaks independently from AI AI mediates between God and the reader AI must be reconstructed by human science AI is the source, not the medium of the message Reader derives meaning independently from AI

In order to evaluate these systems, we should return to the root concept of the Bible as the word of God. This concept has two parameters, one human ("the word") and the other divine ("of God"). The traditional Jewish system emphasizes the divine to the exclusion of the human. In contrast, the conservative Christian approach keeps both in balance. The Modernist approach implies questioning the reliability of the self-presentation of the text and, therefore, the reality of mediating God's mind. The Neo-orthodox system gives up such reality expressly, while existentialism points to the reader, rather than the prophet or apostle, as the source of sense. We may well conclude, then, that only the conservative approach sees the Bible truly as the word of God, rather than a magical oracle, an ancient work of literary or religious genius, or a tool for personal meditation.

METHODS, STEPS, AND TOOLS¹ IN INTERPRETATION

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Introduction

Generally, oral communication takes place in familiar situations with familiar people. We are able to assess the context and intention of the speaker as we analyze and comprehend his/her message. A similar, though not identical, situation occurs when we read written documents. Since the writer is usually absent, the words themselves assume a greater importance than in a situation of oral communication. This introduces some degree of difficulty in the interpretation which may be compounded due to two factors: the extent to which the sender (author/editor) and the receiver (reader) share a common world of discourse and experience, and the extent to which the communication and the form in which it occurs involved specialized content and forms of expression.

In biblical studies, other complexities may compound this difficulty in interpretation. These include:

1. The "Third Party Perspective." None of the Bible was originally addressed to the modern reader and interpreter.
2. The Language Gap. None of the Bible was originally composed in a modern language.
3. The Cultural Gap. Modern readers of the Bible and the original readers of these texts were separated by an enormous cultural gap.
4. The Historical Gap. The modern world is separated from the world of the Bible by anywhere from two to over three millennia.

¹The section on tools has been deleted from this paper and will be published in a later issue of the journal.

5. Multiple Texts. For some documents there are several manuscripts that show variation in content, arrangement, and so forth. The oldest copies of the OT and the NT that we possess are copies made some time after the original documents were written. More than five thousand different Greek manuscripts or fragments of the NT are known, including lectionaries. Among these there is a large number of variant readings.

6. Unique Category. Since the Bible consists of sacred text, in some sense it involves more than treating it as good literature or as a classical work. People hold opinions about classical works; they hold convictions about Scripture.

Given this situation, there is need for a proper method of interpretation. The method which best satisfies this need is exegesis.

Definition

Exegesis is a normal activity in which we all engage on a daily basis. Whenever we hear or read something and seek to understand what has been said, we are engaging in exegesis. The term itself is derived from the Greek word *exegeomai*, which basically means “to bring out.” When applied to texts, it denotes the “bringing out” of the meaning. The noun, therefore, refers to “explanation” or “interpretation.” Indeed, “The term *exegesis* (used often by biblical scholars but seldom by specialists in other fields) is a fancy way of referring to interpretation.”²

In this adventure, where “we hear the voice of the living God,”³ we need to note two factors. Positively, the modern biblical exegete has been preceded by centuries of study and interpretations, which he/she can explore for insight and information. Negatively, the Bible has been surrounded by a wide variety of traditions and traditional interpretations. The exegete may be tempted to read the text in light of his/her own tradition without critical judgment or without letting the text speak afresh on its own. To do this is to engage in *eisegesis*, a “reading into,” rather than exegesis, a “reading out of.”⁴

In order to do sound exegesis it is necessary to interrogate the text. The questions formulated must arise as the text is read. The interpreter has to ask questions and listen to the text for answers. This action is often referred to as

²Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Mosés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Manila: OMF Literature, 1998), 19.

³Craig C. Broyles, “Interpreting the Old Testament: Principles and Steps,” in *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*, ed. Craig C. Broyles (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 13.

⁴This leads us to pay extraordinary attention to our presuppositions when we come to explore the meaning of the text. For a discussion of this issue in the wider hermeneutical sphere, see Kaiser and Silva, 28-31, where the major tenets in the development of contemporary hermeneutical theory are presented.

“criticism.” It is a technical term, derived from the Greek word *krinein* (“to judge,” “to discern,” “to discriminate”), which points to certain principles and techniques that are useful in helping the interpreter make discerning judgments and decisions when studying the biblical text. It is not a negative or destructive term.

A basic tenet here is that the Bible is not merely a historical document that informs us about the life, culture, and religious tenets of ancient peoples. It is a living document that is infused with the power of the living God. Hence, “Biblical exegesis—establishing the original meaning of the text—and hermeneutics—proposing a contemporary meaning of that text—are together a *theological work*.”⁵

Steps in the Exegetical Process

It is necessary to point out that these steps are not to be attempted in a linear fashion, that is, completing one before moving to the next. Rather, the exegete must understand that there is necessarily some overlap among these steps and that he or she must revisit and revise each step as discoveries are made and information comes to bear on the passage. This is the spiral approach.⁶

Textual Analysis

The text, which constitutes the only actual data we have, must be considered in its “finished state.”⁷ Therefore, a basic knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary of the text along with its possible original wording are implied here. Textual criticism is engaged when alternative wordings or variant readings of the

⁵Charles E. Carter, “Opening Windows onto Biblical Worlds: Applying the Social Sciences to Hebrew Scriptures,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 446.

⁶Broyles, 20. John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook*, rev. ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 132, say that “the various exegetical procedures are not related to one another in any strict architectonic fashion. That is, no mechanical system of steps or stages in the exegetical process can be set up and rigidly followed. One cannot, let us say, first do the textual-critical analysis, and then proceed to a second step and so on. Frequently, the interests and issues of the various criticisms are interrelated.”

⁷James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 1-18, proposed “rhetorical criticism” as a supplement to “form criticism” (though in practice he basically abandoned the latter). Form critics probe behind the present text in an attempt to uncover its earlier or preliterate (oral) stages of development. Muilenburg rejected this. He treated the text as a unity rather than putting emphasis on the process by which it developed, the stages of that development, and the variety of social settings in which it came into being.

same text exist. These textual differences are usually supplied in the critical apparatus of the Hebrew Bible and Greek NT. The exegete wants to be relatively certain of the original wording of the text, so he or she will consult the apparatus.

The task of textual criticism is threefold: (1) to determine how a text is transmitted and came to exist in variant forms, (2) to find the original wording (if possible), and (3) to determine the best form and wording of that text.⁸ To do this, the interpreter should pay attention to the following:

1. Read the text repeatedly in the original language (where possible). This helps the exegete to “feel” the rhythm of the text. Remember that exegesis is not only a science but an art.

2. Consult the critical apparatus, noting the variants and examining the solutions proposed.

3. Compare the text in various versions, both ancient and modern. For example, compare the MT with the LXX, NIV, NASB, and TEV (to name a few). These factors will help one to leave one’s own notions and presuppositions behind (though not completely) as one reads with “fresh eyes” and hears the text anew.⁹

4. Provide a translation. Any translation into a modern language must match the original in terms of meaning. Be sure to understand that “words don’t have a single meaning, but rather a range of meaning(s). . . . Translation therefore always involves selection.”¹⁰ In order to reach this ideal, use seasoned lexicons.¹¹

A key rule to remember in translation is, Keep it simple. It is not necessary to use so-called “big words” in the receptor language. Also, strive to rid the translation of ambiguous words. But while striving for simplicity, do not neglect clarity and precision in meaning.

It is necessary to continuously revise the translation, especially in the study of key words (see below). Obviously, a finished translation must be provided. The exegete should ensure that the words fit the specific context of the passage at hand. The final edition probably will not come until one is almost finished with the exegesis of the passage, because as new findings which affect the meaning of the text are uncovered, they must be expressed in the translation.

⁸Hayes and Holladay, 38.

⁹For an interesting discussion on this, see R. Bultmann, “Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?” in *New Testament and Mythology and other Basic Writings: Rudolph Bultmann*, ed. S. M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984; London: SCM, 1985), 145-53.

¹⁰Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*, 2d ed., rev. and enlarged (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 23.

¹¹A few good examples include, William Gesenius, ed., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1979); William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1971); Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2d ed., rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (1979).

A special note about poetry is appropriate here, since poetry is not presented as straightforwardly as prose. As Douglas Stuart counsels correctly, we must “arrange the lines of poetry according to parallelism and rhythm (meter). The process of arrangement and the arrangement itself are both referred to as stichometry. The modern English translations usually arrange poetry stichometrically. Consult them as well.”¹²

Linguistic Analysis

As the name suggests, linguistic analysis deals with the mechanics of the language. The interest here is not only the meaning of individual words but also the arrangement of these words in phrases and sentences that “form meaningful sense units.”¹³ Several important elements must be considered.

1. Grammar. Craig C. Broyles comments with clarity here. “Be clear on the grammatical construction of sentences, noting connectives, main and subordinate clauses, subjects (divine, human), objects, verbs (declarative, imperative, etc.), and modifiers (adjectives and adverbs).”¹⁴

2. Syntax. Pay close attention to the sentence structure, examining the arrangement of words, and showing their mutual relationship in a sentence. In short, examine the formal properties of language.

3. Word studies. These form an intricate part of linguistics. A word study may be defined as the systematic analysis of the meaning(s) of one particular word as it is used within the particular context of the passage at hand and in the Bible at large. The goal is to arrive at the specific meaning in a particular biblical text. We should keep in the forefront of our minds that the meaning of the word depends ultimately on the context in which it is used.

The methodology for this study varies, depending on the frequency of the word. For example, if the word is used infrequently or if it is a *hapax legomenon*, that is, occurring only once in the OT or NT, then this affects how one will explore the word. To gain an understanding, one must obtain information from the Hebrew or Greek word itself and its translations.

Consider the following methodology:

(a) Meaning. Use a Hebrew or Greek lexicon (dictionary) to find the basic and secondary meaning(s) of the word. A record should be made with one or two references for each meaning.

(b) Semantic range. Note the full range of meaning, any semantic overlap with other words, as well as synonyms and antonyms.

¹²Stuart, 25.

¹³Hayes and Holladay, 59.

¹⁴Broyles, 21.

(c) Frequency. Use a concordance and record the total frequency of the word, its distribution in a block of writing from that book, in the book itself, in a similar genre, and in that Testament. Make a record.

(d) Syntactical relationship. Note the common subjects, objects, and kinds of action associated with the word, especially if it is a verb.

(e) Cognates. These are words, in another language, with which the Hebrew or Greek word is usually associated. Indicate the frequency of the respective associations as well as their meaning.

(f) Examine both the theological and non-theological usage and function of the word.

(g) Examine how the word is used in the text at hand, and decide on the best meaning in that context.

Make proper use of Bible dictionaries and wordbooks that specialize in the systematic and comprehensive study of these words. These are guides, and the interpreter does not need to become dependent on them.¹⁵

4. Incorporate these findings into the translation. This will help to better understand the overall tenor and meaning of the passage.

Literary Analysis

In the third step, literary analysis, one pays attention to the features of the text as literature. Of course, the text is not to be seen as an ordinary literary composition but, rather, as sacred. In fact, this enhances the seriousness with which we approach the text, as well as the deep respect and humility we bring to the exegetical task. Here we understand that "the Bible must be read *literarily* before it can be read *literally*."¹⁶

Several literary features must be given due attention:

1. Delimitation. The passage should be a self-contained unit or a pericope. Do not depend on the chapter and verse divisions (of modern versions), which were certainly not part of the original text and are sometimes totally wrong

In the delimitation process, look for clues which arise from the text itself. Broyles is instructive:

¹⁵Two excellent examples for OT studies are, R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr. and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody, 1980); and G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 10 vols., trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977-). For NT studies the following are noteworthy: Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-78); and Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76).

¹⁶Broyles, 28 (emphasis his).

Opening and closing formulas may alert us to a passage's limits Changes in genre (e.g., from narrative to law), subject/content, speaker/audience, or situational context may indicate a transition to a new passage. We should also observe grammatical changes in person (e.g., from second-person or direct address, "you," to third-person reference, "he") or tense (e.g., from present to past), and changes in tone/mood.¹⁷

A rather common delimiting factor is the *inclusio*, where what is said in the beginning of the passage is repeated at the end. Sometimes the exact or nearly exact same terms are used. For example, Ps 150:1 exclaims, "Praise the Lord!" Verse 6 ends with the same exclamation.

The Messenger Formula, "Thus says the Lord," is also common. For example, Jer 1:4 declares, "The word of the Lord came unto me . . .," and 1:11 uses the same expression, indicating that vv. 4-10 comprise a complete pericope, while another begins with v. 11.

2. Genre. Technically, this refers to "a shared pattern of communication, usually shaped in a particular social context, that signals expectations of how a text/speech is to be understood and used."¹⁸ In laymen's terms, genre denotes a particular type of literature. Indeed, there are all kinds of literature in the Bible: story or narrative, law, history, genealogy, poetry, prophecy, song, gospel, parable, letter, and so forth. In order to read the text intelligently and interpret judiciously, the exegete must be aware of the characteristics of the particular genre at hand. For example, when reading apocalyptic literature (e.g., Daniel and Revelation), one must note the use of certain literary motifs ("a shared pattern of communication") like numbers, symbols, striking contrasts, dreams and visions, cosmic sweep, and an eschatological emphasis. The social setting of crises and conflicts for both the speaker or writer and his audience must be understood. A defined purpose, showing that the situation of the suffering community is in God's care, must be grasped.¹⁹

3. Theme. This points to the main idea or motif that dominates the pericope. It is the main artery of the river into which tributaries flow. Broyles claims that "a thematic statement serves as a kind of road map for the passage."²⁰ As the passage is read and re-read the exegete should ask, What is the main idea this passage is speaking about? What does it concentrate on? What is the perspective of the passage? What words, ideas, and events in the passage provide hints to this idea?

¹⁷Ibid., 23.

¹⁸Ibid., 32.

¹⁹See Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis*, 2d ed. (Naples, FL: Ann Arbor, 1979), 17-23.

²⁰Broyles, 30.

Where do we see those hints—in the beginning, middle, or end of the passage? Who are the main characters? What are they doing?

4. Structure. The structure delineates the constituent parts of the passage as a whole. The exegete investigates how certain poetic devices serve as key concepts which brighten the specific meaning of the text. The makeup of the particular text or passage under consideration is very important to its critical understanding. One needs to search for the building blocks which the author used to construct the text. Factors such as chiasmus, parallelism, repetition, and the like should be evaluated.²¹ The responsibility of the exegete is to search out “the linguistic structure of the text *as it presently lies before him*.”²² To put it another way, he or she must “explore [the] structural features of individual texts.”²³

When dealing with structure, the following steps should be considered:

(a) Outline the passage. Follow the major units of the pericope. This outline should be a natural outgrowth of the text. It should not be forced. Whenever a new topic, issue, or concept comes into view, the exegete should note this.

(b) Follow patterns. Meaningful patterns may be seen through key features such as key words, parallelisms, development of ideas, resumption of thought, and so forth. Two key issues in identifying patterns are (i) repetitions of concepts, words, roots, and so forth; and (ii) progression of the same or similar thought, issue, or idea.

(c) Note subpatterns. After looking for the major sections, examine the smaller units and see how these fit together.

(d) Identify the central theme. This is the major motif around which the passage is built. It is like the main artery of a river.

(e) Identify sub-themes. These are like the tributaries that flow into the main artery of the river.

The exegete constantly interrogates the text and listens for its answers. Inquiries such as the following should be made: How is the central thought developed from verse to verse? What is the plot of this passage?²⁴ What are the

²¹By paying attention to the artistic features of the text, emphasis is placed on the structure of the pericope, looking for literary devices such as repetitions, key words, strophes (in poetic literature), etc., which signal the structural integrity of the passage.

²²Roy F. Melugin, “Mullenburg, Form Criticism and Theological Exegesis,” in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Martin J. Buss (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979), 93. (Emphasis his).

²³Ibid.

²⁴The plot generally has three parts: (1) the *situation*, which describes the plight and condition of the character; (2) the *complication*, which makes the situation worse, either by some internal or external conflict; and (3) the *resolution*, generally reached through someone or something external to the main character. See David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford Bible Series, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and G. N. Stanton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 102. This plot is often found in the narratives which detail the miracles of Jesus.

constituent points? What are the sub-points? Are there transitions from one part to another? What are these transitions—change in character, speaker, pronoun, or verb types? What kind of verbal expressions indicate the parts—questions, declarations, imperatives, and so forth?

5. Poetic features. This refers not to poetry *per se* but to the figures of speech in the passage. Such poetic qualities add richness, depth, and literary quality, as well as emotional impact, to the passage. They perk up the interest of the reader. Ask, What role do they play? Are they unique to this passage? Where else are they found? Broyles lists the more common figures of speech:²⁵

1. *Simile*: an explicit comparison (x is like y : “Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel,” Exod. 24:17)

2. *Metaphor*: an implicit comparison ($x = y$; “The Lord is my shepherd,” Ps. 23:1)

3. *Synecdoche*: stating a part but referring to the whole ($x \rightarrow X$; “May the LORD cut off all flattering lips [i.e., wicked people],” Ps. 12:3) or vice versa ($X \rightarrow x$)

4. *Metonymy*: referring to something by naming an associated item (“The LORD has established his *throne* [i.e., royal rule] in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all” Ps. 103:19)

5. *Personification*: attributing human qualities to what is not human (e.g., Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly in Proverbs 8-9)

6. *Anthropomorphism*: attributing human qualities to God (e.g., “the arm of the Lord,” Isa. 51:9)

7. *Hyperbole*: overstatement (“every night I flood my bed with tears,” Ps. 6:6)

8. *Irony*: saying one thing but intending the opposite, usually with sarcasm (“Come to Bethel—and transgress,” Amos 4:4).

6. Function and placement. This examines the location of the passage. One should investigate how it fits within the immediate and larger contexts. Stuart questions insightfully,

Is your passage part of a story or a literary grouping that has a discernible beginning, middle, and end? Does it fill in, add on, introduce, bring to completion, or counterbalance the portion or book of which it is a part? What does it add to the overall picture? What does the overall picture add to it?

Just how does it fit within the section, book, division, Testament, Bible—in that order? Is it one of many similar texts in the same book, or perhaps in the OT as a whole? In what sense is it unique?²⁶

²⁵Broyles, 37.

²⁶Stuart, 28-29.

Historical Analysis

Biblical revelation is set in the flesh of human history. The biblical data is comprised not only of statements concerning declarations and instructions but also of real historical people and events. Hence, we must seek to understand the "history in the text."²⁷ This tells us what the text narrates about history—the people, places, events, social situation, and dates—which inform us about the conditions (political, social, and religious) of the period which the text talks about. Scholars also refer to the "history of the text," that is, "the situation out of which the text arose—the situation of the author and the audience."²⁸ This is often called the life situation or *Sitz im Leben*.²⁹ For example, in predicting the destruction of Israel, the prophet Amos uses the funeral dirge (characterized by the 3+3 meter), which was derived from the life situation of funerals. Therefore, the exegete inquires about funerary dirges: How, when, where, why, and in what circumstances did they come into being?³⁰

In order to understand the historical context we need to pay attention to several factors:

1. Background and foreground of the passage. This calls for an investigation of the people or characters mentioned in the pericope itself. We need to understand their identity, behaviors, and background, even the meaning of their names. The event(s) in the passage also need(s) attention. We should examine the factors that led up to that point as recorded in the text. We should also know the major occurrences that gave rise to the specific situation, as well as what was happening both on the national and international scene. Know the major players (kings, warriors, judges, leaders) on the world stage at that time. Examine all passages that may share a parallel or similar historical background in the Bible and see how these may throw light on the text at hand.

In this particular, Stuart asks a series of questions that are helpful to the exegete:

²⁷Hayes and Holladay, 45.

²⁸Ibid., 48-49.

²⁹Some writers make a sharp distinction between these two, placing the latter strictly in literary analysis. But as Hayes and Holladay, 49, note, "In some instances, the situation described in the text and the situation out of which the text arose may reflect the same historical setting."

³⁰Amos 5:18-20 uses the motif of the "Day of the Lord." Scholarship offers various positions about the life situation that gave shape to this form. G. von Rad, "The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Yahweh," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959): 97-108, claims a provenance in Holy War. J. Gray, "The Day of Yahweh," *Svensk exegetisk arsbok* 39 (1974): 5-37, suggests that it was conceptualized in Israel's cult, when Yahweh as King enthroned Himself and wrought salvation for His people. Others place its origin in the theophany. See M. Weiss, "The Origin of the 'Day of the Lord'—Reconsidered," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 37 (1966): 40.

Did major trends or developments in Israel or the rest of the ancient world have any bearing on the passage or any part of its content? . . . What comes next? What does the passage lead to? What that is significant ultimately happens to the people, places, things, and concepts of the passage? Does the passage contain information that is essential to understanding something else that occurs or is said later? Is the passage at the start of any new developments? Where does the passage fit in the general scope of OT history? Are there any implications that follow from its placement?³¹

2. Historical situation. This refers to the particular way in which the author of the composition understood history, that is, his philosophy of history. This is illustrated in the historical bent of the books of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles. They report the same history but from two different foci. Broyles explains:³²

The Books of Samuel-Kings concluded in the exilic period and address the issue of why Yahweh sent his people into exile. The Books of Chronicles concluded with Cyrus's decree allowing the Jews to return to their homeland and to restore the temple, and thus address the issue of restoring the people of God. As a result, the selectivity of each historian differs widely. Samuel-Kings focuses on human rebellion and divine judgment, and Chronicles focuses on human obedience, especially regarding worship at the temple, and divine blessing (i.e., historical patterns that foster restoration).

3. Geography. The Bible is a "land-based" book, that is, its events took place on earth. It is not an extraterrestrial book. Hence, the exegete must pay attention to things such as location, distances between points, and so forth. It is advisable to know where events took place: buildings, regions, cities, villages, tribal territories, and so forth. Does the passage refer to the northern or southern tribes? Is there a particular geographical perspective to the passage?

Attention must also be given to factors such as topography, climate, economy, and so forth, to see how they cast light on the text.

4. Archaeology. This is the attempt to reconstruct human history by using artifacts which have been unearthed. Artifacts include written documents such as cuneiform tablets and stelae as well as a wide range of other material evidence: from jars and sherds to figurines; from houses and hovels to temples and monuments; from single interments to vast graveyards. The science of archeology has grown tremendously in the last several decades. Hence, any archeological data that may illuminate the passage at hand should be investigated.

5. Sociology. In this particular aspect of the life setting we inquire as to the details in Israel's social life which occasioned the text. For example, when you

³¹Stuart, 26-27.

³²Broyles, 43.

study Amos, you must grasp the separation between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in that society, and the resultant evils and excesses, to understand why the prophet condemns the rich. Again, Stuart’s questions are relevant: “What social and civil institutions bear upon the passage? How do they illumine the passage?”³³

6. Culture. The Bible was not written in a vacuum. The people, events, languages, and customs were set in a particular place and time and were influenced or affected by the cultural norms and mores of society. Broyles’s claim is true that the “histories of the ancestors, of the Hebrew people, and of the Israelite nation and its demise are inextricably influenced by ANE [Ancient Near Eastern] cultures and history.”³⁴ Further, his advice is well taken that “for us at great chronological and cultural distance from ancient Israel, we must use every resource available.”³⁵ As we compare the Bible with ANE literature, it is not to see if the Bible borrowed from these sources “but to gain insight into the world to which God spoke.”³⁶ By examining the extrabiblical material and comparing it with the biblical data, the exegete may gain valuable background information. For example, a comparison of the Genesis creation stories and those from ANE literature can inform us about their similarities and differences and help us to understand the nature and context of the biblical text in a much better way than before.³⁷

Concerning culture, several questions may be asked: “What parallels occur in other literature? How close are the parallels? Are they literary, traditional, or cultural?”³⁸ Stuart adds, “Is the passage directly relevant only to an ancient Israelite (i.e., culturally ‘bound’) or is it useful and meaningful today? . . . Are the events or concepts uniquely Israelite, or could they have occurred or been expressed elsewhere?”³⁹

7. Date. Attempt to date the passage. Admittedly, this is easier for historical narratives, where events are often pinpointed, than for poetic pieces. In any event, establishing the approximate time when an event occurred, or when a prophecy was delivered, or when a poem was composed, may be helpful in throwing light on the text.

³³Stuart, 27.

³⁴Broyles, 49. He adds, “By comparison and contrast with these ancient literatures we also gain an appreciation for the uniqueness of the Old Testament revelation.”

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷For a succinct discussion of the polemical nature of the Genesis creation account in contrast to the second-millennium Mesopotamian accounts, see R. W. Younger, “Ancient Texts and the Bible’s Account of Creation,” *Shabbat Shalom*, Spring 2000, 20-22.

³⁸Broyles, 49.

³⁹Stuart, 27. Broyles, 49, compels us to listen when he says, “Revelation is packaged, in part, in a culture. If we claim the Bible is true in all that it affirms, then we must ask which statements are prescriptive of God’s ways and which are merely descriptive of a culture’s.”

Before leaving historical analysis, we must note three important cautions in dealing with history:

1. The primary source for understanding and reconstructing the historical background is the Bible itself. We must compare Scripture with Scripture. When examining the passage, trust its content and context to lead you in uncovering the historical background.

2. Sometimes it is impossible to date a passage. In this case the best approach is to link the message of the passage with other parts of the same testament where there is a similar message that has a clear historical background and (precise?) date. Sometimes one can only situate the passage within the overall historical context of that Testament.

3. Be cautious about secondary literature, as a scholar's orientation may affect how he/she dates a passage. For example, critical scholars may see parts of the Bible as later additions, even non-genuine, and will date accordingly.⁴⁰ This caution holds true also for the use of Bible commentaries. While we can learn from those who have investigated and written on the text, the exegete must not uncritically accept the ideas forwarded in the commentaries, be they conservative, liberal, or any other label we may put on them. It is best for the interpreter to dialogue with these commentaries but not be dependent on them.

Theological Analysis

In theological analysis, we focus on what the passage is teaching us. Two foci come into view: the *descriptive* (what it *meant* to the biblical audience) and the *prescriptive* (what it *means* in building normative faith). In light of this, several factors must be considered:

1. Is there simply a description of cultural practices or a prescription of theological norms? For example, when Jacob worked seven years for a bride, was that descriptive or prescriptive? The same may be said of him (and numerous others) having more than one wife and even several concubines. Or, was Abraham's experience with Hagar a cultural practice or a theological norm? The same question holds for a host of issues, like levirate marriages and betrothal practices.

2. After keen observation of the text, following the steps outlined thus far, one must establish the central idea of the passage. Broyles is right that the "theological emphases should first be driven by the literary theme of the passage."⁴¹ Indicate why this idea is central in the passage, and how the author makes it central. Does

⁴⁰For an example of this, observe the ongoing debate about the date of the book of Daniel. See Gerhard F. Hasel, "Establishing a Date for the Book of Daniel," in *Symposium on Daniel*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 2 (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1986), 84-164.

⁴¹Broyles, 59.

this motif show development of a theological idea? In other words, does it illuminate an issue previously encountered in the biblical data? What priority is placed on this theme in light of theological issues in the Bible? For example, the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) is highlighted again in the NT (Heb 8:10-11), but the issue of Holy War in the OT receives no further treatment in the NT.

3. Situate the idea within the theology of the chapter, a section in the book, the book itself, the overall genre of the pericope, the Testament, and the Bible as a whole. Sometimes the Bible writers themselves reused earlier biblical texts and oracles. This is called "inner biblical exegesis."⁴² The prophets reapplied previous messages to their contemporary situation.⁴³

4. Relate this idea to the classical theological concepts (God, humankind, salvation, judgment, etc.). To what specific doctrine is it related? Is this relation explicitly or implicitly indicated? Where does it fit within the total corpus of revelation that makes up Christian theology?

5. Consideration must be given to the system of Hebrew and/or Greek thinking, since these are the systems in which the biblical material is couched.

6. Examine the passage parallel to the doctrine(s) of your own religious or faith community. Be careful, however, not to allow your own religious traditions to color or blind your vision to what the text is saying.

7. Find the secondary ideas and theological motifs of the passage. Indicate how they are related to the central idea.

⁴²Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Inner Biblical Exegesis as a Model for Bridging the 'Then' and 'Now' Gap: Hosea 12,1-6," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28 (1985): 33-46; S. L. Cook, "Innerbiblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 193-208; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism*, rev. ed., Oxford Bible Series, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and G. N. Stanton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 160-62. A commentary that uses this approach is A. E. Hill, *Malachi*, Anchor Bible, vol. 25D (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1998); see especially appendix C, 401-12.

⁴³C. Patton, "'I Myself Gave Them Laws That Were Not Good': Ezekiel 20 and the Exodus Traditions," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* no. 69 (1996): 73-90; M. Hilton, "Babel Reversed—Daniel Chapter 5," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, no. 66 (1995): 99-112; E. C. Lucas, "Covenant, Treaty and Prophecy," *Themelios* 8 (1982): 19-23.

Relevance

Relevance deals with application and tells us what the text *means* for people living in the twenty-first century.⁴⁴ The text demands a response from the reader or hearer. It calls us to place our priorities within the priorities of the text itself.

In dealing with relevance, we must also be cognizant of our contemporary needs, issues, and circumstances. In other words, in order to meaningfully apply the text to our situation, we must be aware of what is happening in the world around us.

The following factors should be considered when establishing relevance:

1. The main point. The main theme or motif of the passage should be the driving force in helping us to relate it to our situation. We should be able to show how this main motif in the text is useful for us today. Be careful, however, not to force the idea—to make it say more than it intends.

2. General principles. While the biblical passage was directed to a specific person(s) in a historical setting, there are principles which may be derived from it that are applicable today. For example, while John 3:16 was expressed in the context of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus (a historical situation), we cannot deny the principle of the universality of God's love. Exegesis goes even further by taking this general principle and applying it as specifically as possible without doing violence to the text.

3. Life issues. The exegete should determine the aspect(s) of life with which the passage concerns itself. For example, 1 John 1:9 obviously deals with confession. So we must ask if confession is still a vital life issue today. Obviously, it is. As we dialogue with the text we need to ask, "What aspect(s) of life is the passage really concerned with? . . . What do 'I' or 'we' encounter today that is similar or at least closely related to what the passage deals with?"⁴⁵

4. Purpose. Generally, any communication, oral or written, meets one of three purposes with some (considerable) overlapping: to entertain, to inform, to persuade. Obviously, while the biblical narrative may be entertaining,⁴⁶ this is certainly not the main thrust. It is more correct to say that the biblical message informs and educates us so that we may be persuaded or convicted to follow its

⁴⁴Stuart, 40, says that to ignore this factor is to do injustice to the text. He correctly rejects the notion that exegesis is strictly historical, on three grounds: (1) it ignores the purpose of doing exegesis, namely, to hear and obey God's word; (2) it deals exclusively with the historical, thereby refusing to realize that God's word has present-day value; (3) it leaves the passage to the subjective interpretation of the hearer. As he puts it, "The exegete leaves the key function—response—completely to the subjective sensibilities of the reader or hearer, who knows the passage least." Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., 41.

⁴⁶For example, when Moses demanded how the golden calf came about, Aaron sheepishly claimed that he threw the precious metal into the fire, and out walked a golden calf.

mandate. To put it another way, the information fortifies our faith, which propels us to action. Biblical religion is not just head religion; it is a heart response.

5. Audience. To whom is this message most applicable? Is it personal or corporate? Even if a message is given to a corporate body, like the church, ultimately the individual must give a response. But this point is important precisely because the Bible, which is oriental in nature,⁴⁷ appeals largely to the group ethic. Even though individuals are called (e.g., Moses, Samuel, and Samson), they are appointed for purposes of the group. While the exegete must be aware of the "group" idea, he or she must be sensitive to the kinds of individuals to whom the message is most applicable: rich or poor, leaders or followers, Christian or non-Christian, and so forth.

6. Categorization. Stuart's questions are appropriate here:

Is the application directed toward matters that are primarily interpersonal in nature? Matters that relate to piety? To the relationship of God and people? Is the concern social, economic, religious, spiritual, familial, financial, etc.?⁴⁸

We often tend to think that the biblical message is solely spiritual or religious. But we cannot ignore the fact that parts of the Bible deal with social issues,⁴⁹ economic matters,⁵⁰ marriage and the family,⁵¹ and so forth. These must be faced for what they are and not merely spiritualized.

Interpretation

This is where the exegete pulls together the appropriate findings from his or her research. This is a process of integration: the data is gathered from the various steps and brought together in a coherent and logical form. This means that not all of the details must be included. The goal of exegesis is to illuminate the biblical passage. Sometimes, too many details, or extraneous materials, will obfuscate the passage. The goal then is missed. The exegete must be selective with the information. This requires that he or she "deploys rather than reports this information, arranging it into meaningful sections and patterns of argumentation

⁴⁷Zdravko Stefanovic, "For the Asian First and Then for the Westerner," *Asian Journal of Theology* 4 (1990): 412-13.

⁴⁸Stuart, 42.

⁴⁹For example, the book of Amos aims directly at the injustices of the rich against the poor. Cf. Acts 6:1-7.

⁵⁰See Jer 32:6-12; Matt 22:15-22; Mark 12:41-44; 1 Tim 6:10.

⁵¹See Gen 2:24; 24:67; Cant 8:7; Matt 5:32; 1 Cor 7:10-11; Eph 5:28,33; Col 3:19.

so that the passage itself is unfolded in an illuminating fashion."⁵² In working toward this ideal, experts generally suggest three formats:

1. Topical format. This is to mechanically follow the steps outlined above but with some sections rearranged, combined, or adjusted with a view toward presenting the data in the most logical and comprehensible fashion so that the reader may fully understand the meaning of the passage. This is the method I followed in my doctoral dissertation, which does exegesis of sixty-nine passages containing remnant terminology (*ipsissima verba*) in the book of Jeremiah.⁵³ It is reproduced here for the reader's benefit:

Following a close-reading approach, and taking the book as a single unit, all pericopes that contain specific remnant terminology are treated exegetically. This exegetical process incorporates four interrelated steps:

(a) Translation and textual considerations. This analysis of the text attends to grammatical and syntactical relationships, textual difficulties, and variants with ancient versions (notably the LXX), as denoted in *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. In each case, the entire pericope is translated with the text(s) having remnant terminology represented in italics.

(b) Structure. This shows the elemental blocks and framework of the passage in which the remnant passages are found.

(c) Historical background. This examines the situation, circumstances, people, and social milieu surrounding the event in which direct reference is made to the remnant. It also seeks to provide an approximate date for the occurrence.

(d) Interpretation. This is a commentary, integrating the information from all the steps previously described, so as to uncover the meaning of the passage as a whole, with focus placed on the remnant.

2. Commentary format. This is a verse-by-verse explanation of the passage, bringing together the relevant data that arise from each text. Sometimes each text is individually discussed, but at other times a block of texts (derived from the structural analysis of the passage) may be dealt with.

3. Discussion format. This is where the entire text is treated as a single unit and the commentary follows a free-flowing fashion without necessarily sticking to a methodical outline. Sections, subsections, and headings may not be used.

Guidelines for Sermon Development

If the exegete's data is to be used for a sermon, then the following guidelines may prove useful:

⁵²Hayes and Holladay, 136. They add that an exegetical paper "may be full of factually correct information yet fail to illuminate or display an understanding of the passage in any appreciable form." Ibid.

⁵³Kenneth D. Mulzac, "The Remnant Motif in the Context of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Jeremiah," Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1995.

1. Follow the guidelines of sound homiletics. Make sure that the introduction contains the key idea which identifies the theme of the passage. Further, the introduction must have a transitional sentence that contains the key word, which indicates the main points of the sermon.

2. Let each main point arise from the text. Each must be related to the main idea of the passage. Hence, every point drives home the main idea a little deeper into the hearer's mind. The exegete-cum-preacher may use modern words or categories for each point, but they must clearly be related to the text.

3. Do not use the exegetical steps as the sermon outline. Can you imagine a sermon which begins, "Let us look at the textual analysis of the passage?" To a congregation this means nothing. The exegetical data *informs* the sermon. The preacher organizes it so as to best illuminate the meaning of the text.

4. Avoid sensory overload. Do not weigh down each main point with several subpoints and even sub-subpoints. Let the text speak in a simple, dynamic fashion, bringing the full weight of the exegetical data to each point.

5. Use illustrations, stories, examples, and so forth, which help to illuminate the text. In other words, everything serves the interest of the text.

6. Make application. Remember that the task of the sermon is not merely to inform the listener. The hearers must be motivated to apply the biblical mandate to life. It is only when the exegete comprehends the meaning of the passage that he or she can translate to life issues that affect the hearers. Stuart cautions, "Be sure that you construct a sermon that does not neglect a clear, practicable, and exegetically based application."⁵⁴

⁵⁴Stuart, 86.

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THE ISSUE OF GENRE AND APOCALYPTIC PROPHECY

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The study of the book of Revelation presents both challenges and rewards for the end-time people of God. In this enigmatic concluding book of the Bible, God provides both a chart and a compass to His homebound pilgrims as they traverse the final treacherous stretch of their pilgrimage. Amidst many uncertainties, Revelation presents the final generation with one great triumphant certainty—God is in ultimate control of history and will deliver the kingdom to the saints of the Most High.

The Nature of Biblical Apocalyptic

The word "apocalyptic," in its broadest sense, designates the disclosure of God's presence through human agents, bringing to view the divine purpose, presence, and action in the midst of the human situation. Paul S. Minear has pointed out that the term "apocalyptic" in English serves as both a noun and an adjective. As an adjective it is used to qualify any of four different nouns:

1. It may be used to qualify a particular book, type of literature, or genre of speech, whether oral or written. The books of Daniel and Revelation provide the best biblical examples of this usage.

2. The word may be used to qualify the noun "prophecy," thus denoting a dramatic form of prophecy that uses symbolism to portray God's dramatic presence among His people, thus differentiating it from classical prophecy.

3. It can be used to qualify a pattern of thought or a mind-set common to prophets and their faith communities in times of profound crisis and upheaval for the people of God.

4. It may refer to a movement that sees itself as both cosmic and eschatological.¹

From its inception, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has seen itself as an apocalyptic movement, immersed in the thought patterns and world-view of an apocalyptic end-time message. This core self-understanding characterizes both its message and mission. When this self-understanding is removed from focus, Adventism suffers an identity crisis that threatens its unique place and destiny. The discomfort with the concept of “the remnant” as a self-designation of Adventism may, in part, reflect a loss of this apocalyptic self-understanding.

In this presentation I assume that John the Apostle was the author of the Apocalypse. I also assume the Domitianic date of around 96 C.E. for its writing. These assumptions are made with an awareness of on-going scholarly discussion. The focus of my task is to review and establish genre characteristics that impact interpretational methodology. As may be said for all parts of Scripture, but more so for the apocalyptic portions, hermeneutics play a decisive role for the meaning and application of the text.

Revelation is written in a modified epistolary form. There is an opening greeting which reveals the writer and the recipients (“John to the seven churches,” 1:4).² There is the prayer for God’s grace and peace for the churches (1:4) as well as the concluding benediction and final salutations (22:21). In addition to being epistolary, Revelation also assumes a prophetic stance. The writer describes his work as a “prophecy” (1:3) and talks about what must shortly come to pass (prediction). As a prophet, John stands in the tradition of the OT prophets. Like them, he challenges the community of faith with a current, relevant, and divine message. He is not a fortune-teller forecasting the future from a detached position. He is a messenger whose message has an urgent divine moral imperative. His message is not optional and peripheral; it is imperative and central. Thus, in designating his book as a prophecy both in the prologue (1:3) and the epilogue (22:18-19), he requires his readers to respond in faith and action. Indeed, in both passages he urges obedience. Finally, that the book is an apocalypse needs no demonstration. It is the most obvious characteristic of the book. This triple character of the book calls for special hermeneutical considerations.

George B. Caird has pointed out that the name “Apocalypse” not only describes the content of the book but also classifies it into a recognized type of literature.³ This type of literature began with the book of Dan and was followed by many apocalypses all arising in times of great suffering and crises. Many of the apocalypses were written during the period stretching from the hellenizing persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes (167 B.C.E.) to the destruction of the Jewish nation by Hadrian (135 C.E.). The purpose of Jewish apocalyptic was “to

¹Paul S. Minear, *New Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 15-17.

²All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (1995).

³George B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John* (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1966), 9.

encourage the Jewish resistance to the encroachments of paganism, by showing that the national suffering was foreseen and provided for in the cosmic purpose of God and would issue in ultimate vindication."⁴ In a similar vein the function of biblical apocalyptic is to assure God's suffering servants of God's presence, care, and control. This is not a document intended for comfortable Christians sitting in their easy chairs, comfortable with their life situation. The Apocalypse was written to be read on the run, between sobs, with an eye on the text and another eye on the lookout for the enemy. The humble attitude the reader should have is well expressed by Ellen G. White:

When the books of Daniel and Revelation are better understood, believers will have an entirely different religious experience. They will be given such glimpses of the open gates of heaven that heart and mind will be impressed with the character that all must develop in order to realize the blessedness which is to be the reward of the pure in heart. The Lord will bless all who will seek humbly and meekly to understand that which is revealed in the Revelation. This book contains so much that is large with immortality and full of glory that all who read and search it earnestly receive the blessing to those "that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." One thing will certainly be understood from the study of Revelation—that the connection between God and His people is close and decided.⁵

There is a marked difference in the sources and use of symbolism among three categories of apocalyptic literature. The first was pagan in origin. Such were the Sibylline Oracles, documents that were composed by aged women connected with the shrine of a pagan deity. They were apocalyptic in form and drew their symbolism and imagery from Greek religion and culture. Their symbols reflect the superstitions and ideas of their pagan background.

A second category of apocalyptic literature was that composed by Jewish authors who were not inspired. Examples include 1 and 2 Esdras, as well as 1, 2, and 3 Enoch. These drew their symbolism and imagery from the OT and from Jewish culture. They tended to be nationalistic in outlook, using imagery and symbolism which reflected this narrow perspective.

Finally, biblical apocalyptic, while also drawing from the same OT literature and culture as that in the second category, had a cosmic scope in the use and application of the same symbols. Freed from superstitions and narrow nationalistic tendencies, biblical apocalyptic envisions a cosmic God who addresses the whole world with an eternal message.

Therefore, we do not expect to find a one-to-one correspondence in meaning between non-biblical and biblical apocalyptic. What we witness here is what

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 345.

Austin M. Farrer has expressed even by the descriptive title of his book, *A Rebirth of Images*.⁶

We need to constantly bear in mind that, whatever challenges we face in interpreting and understanding the book of Revelation, John the author was a pastor who was writing to his congregations. He was not an ivory-tower mystic, removed from the daily realities of his people. He was not even thinking about future theologians. He was writing with a sense of passion and urgency. He wanted to be heard; he wanted to be understood. He wanted the common work-a-day members of his congregation to hear, understand, and act on his messages. He must have believed that the original readers would understand his book. This suggests that our hermeneutic of apocalyptic must be simple and easy to follow; this does not imply a simplistic approach. It must not be esoteric and contrived, requiring many years of academic preparation to understand. On the other hand, it must not be careless and shallow. The primary level of interpretation and relevance is the congregation.

Caird suggests that we must begin by asking ourselves the question, "What did those early Christians know about this book that we do not know?"⁷ If we can know what they knew, we can begin to make some adjustments in our method of investigation. We may begin to ask the right questions and go to the right places for valid answers. We may begin to hear with simplicity and clarity the powerful message of God to His pilgrim children.

Oftentimes, readers approach biblical apocalyptic from the point of view of mere prophetic or predictive curiosity. Even pastors may inadvertently view Daniel and Revelation not as a required part of their congregation's regular spiritual diet but as a place for optional specialized prophetic studies. The result is that there may be no intentional systematic teaching from these two books. For his part, George R. Beasley-Murray has observed that the purpose of biblical apocalyptic is not mere prediction of the future, even though that is done in each apocalypse. Prophecy "is given always in order to call forth repentance, and faith, and obedience in living. Accordingly, the first of the seven Beatitudes which occur in the book of Revelation pronounces the blessedness of those who 'keep the things written in it' (1:3)."⁸

The book openly declares that this is "the Revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:1). Throughout the book Christ is presented in rich imagery. He is portrayed as the Lamb twenty-eight times.⁹ He is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of

⁶Austin M. Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of the Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre, 1949).

⁷Caird, 3.

⁸George R. Beasley-Murray, Herschel H. Hobbs, and Ray Frank Robbins, *Revelation: Three Viewpoints* (Nashville: Broadman, 1977), 17-18.

⁹See Rev 5:6,8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1,4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:9,14,22,23,27; 22:1,3.

David" (5:5). He is Michael who conquers the Dragon (12:7-9); the Lamb who stands on Mount Zion with the victorious saints (14:1); the Rider of the white horse who is called "Faithful and True," and on whose robe and thigh is written, "King of kings and Lord of lords" (19:11-16). It is easy to see that Christ is the focus of this book. There is no other figure that appears as frequently, as consistently, and as triumphantly as Christ. This has great and special significance for the interpreter. The focus should be to unveil Christ and to establish security in Christ. Amidst our attempts to unravel the mysteries of the beasts, the seals, the trumpets, the harlot, Babylon, Armageddon, and a score of other images, we must never lose sight of Jesus. He is the center-piece of the Apocalypse. The book is a revelation of Jesus Christ, not of beasts and numbers. It is true that we have a responsibility to understand other images that God has revealed. But this must not be at the expense of Christ. Whatever we teach about Revelation, the listener must go away with the sense of a fresh view of Jesus and a sense of greater security in Him.

Minear talks of the wider concept of NT apocalyptic as denoting a movement in which the divinely inspired prophet was involved in a shared vocation with the church. The central element of this movement was the "continuing dialogue between heaven and earth."¹⁰ A proper hermeneutic must take into account the double function of this continuing dialogue to acknowledge the Spirit who possesses the prophet and who also dwells among the believers, guiding them in their understanding of the prophetic message for their time. Thus John tells us that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day to receive the message (1:10). He then says to his audience, "He who has an ear must hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Perhaps we may say that it is not God's requirement that every believer must understand everything about Daniel and Revelation. What God requires is that all shall understand enough to act in accordance with His eternal will and purpose.

It is helpful to see the larger picture in apocalyptic before delving into smaller details. Because apocalyptic is a drama, it is intended to be both seen and heard. The writer uses the expression "I heard" twenty-three times.¹¹ He says "I saw" thirty-five times.¹² He is frequently invited, "Come and see."¹³ It is the gospel presented in drama. But this is not just ordinary ahistorical drama like a play. In apocalyptic the seer sees two dramas. There is a heavenly drama that often portrays a conflict between the powers of good and the powers of evil. These are a reflection of a counterpart conflict going on in the earthly realm. So events in the heavenly view are to help interpret the earthly events. Thus the struggle between

¹⁰Minear, 17.

¹¹ See Rev 4:1; 5:11; 6:1,3,5,6,7; 7:4; 9:13,16; 10:4,8; 12:10; 14:2,13; 16:1,5,7; 18:4; 19:1,6; 21:3.

¹² See Rev 1:12,17; 4:4; 5:1,2; 6:1,2,9; 7:1,2; 8:2; 9:1,17; 10:1,5; 13:2,3; 14:6; 15:1,2; 16:13; 17:3,6; 18:1; 19:11,17,19; 20:1,4,11,12; 21:1,22.

¹³ See Rev 6:1,3,5,7.

Michael and the Prince of Persia mirrors the struggle between the leaders of Greece and of Persia (Dan 10:13). One must understand what is happening *above* in order to understand what is happening *below*. That is the nature of apocalyptic.¹⁴ The interpreter must constantly move between the heavenly portrayal and the corresponding earthly events in order to make sense of the earthly drama. The key to unlock what is happening below is that which the apocalyptist paints as taking place in the realm above—in the realm invisible to us.

Revelation has a clear relationship with Jewish and Christian non-biblical apocalyptic literature. Two errors are often committed in this regard. On the one hand, there is the error that views Revelation as a redaction and adaptation of contemporary apocalyptic documents more or less through a cut-and-paste process. This view would place Revelation side-by-side and on the same level with other apocalypses. It needs to be constantly remembered that John was a called, trained, and commissioned apostle with a prophetic message for his generation as well as for the future. He must not be reduced merely to a copyist or a redactor. As Richard Bauckham observes, "Revelation should not be reduced, by simplistic application of sociological theory, to a sociologically determined function. Justice must be done to its character as a sophisticated literary work of individual genius, embodying a highly reflective vision of the impact of the divine purpose on the contemporary world."¹⁵

A second error treats Rev as a document with no links of any kind to the apocalyptic world of the first century C.E. A comparison of Revelation with contemporary apocalypses shows that it shared much with them. Key characteristics of the genre are common to both. The use of symbolism and the broad cosmic sweep are shared by both. The underlying questions giving birth to the documents are similar. So while John did not expect his readers to study contemporary apocalypses, he knew of their general exposure to apocalyptic thought patterns and modes of expression. By understanding contemporary apocalypses we may discover certain common patterns, and by contrast we may appreciate the divinely inspired creative elements unique to Daniel and Revelation.

Main Schools of Apocalyptic Interpretation

Over the centuries, students of Revelation have attempted to uncover the enigma of this last book of the Bible. Such attempts have resulted, over time, in the development of four major interpretational approaches with some variations in each school. The central issue is whether to view the visions of Revelation as pointing to John's historical period, encompassing the whole Christian era, or

¹⁴Caird, 10.

¹⁵Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), xii-xiii.

pertaining to the final segment of redemption history. For the purposes of this presentation, only the four major schools of interpretation will be summarized.

The Futurist School

Futurism basically views the book of Revelation as being fulfilled in a brief period just prior to the second advent of Christ. This school of interpretation is termed "futurist" because it passes over the whole historical period and applies apocalyptic prophecies only to the immediate period before the Second Advent. The originator of this theory was a Spanish Jesuit priest, Francisco Ribeira, who, in 1585, published a commentary on Revelation in which he worked to turn aside the Protestant application of the apocalyptic antichrist prophecies and symbols from pointing to the Church of Rome. The Protestant interpretation was that the "little horn" of Daniel (7:8, 11, 20-6), the "antichrist" of John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7), the "man of sin" mentioned by Paul (2 Thess 2:3-12), and the apocalyptic "beast" (Rev 13:1-10) were all identical and all pointed to the papacy. All the leading Reformers had believed and taught that Rome met all specifications of the great apostasy specified by Paul and indicated by Daniel and John. Ribeira's commentary on Revelation was a counter-interpretation—part of the counter-Reformation of the Church of Rome. Ribeira applied all of Revelation, except the earliest chapters, to the end time rather than to the history of the Church. Antichrist would be a single evil person who would be received by the Jews and would rebuild Jerusalem, abolish Christianity, deny Christ, persecute the Church, and rule the world for three and a half years.¹⁶

Ribeira was a more careful student of the historical backgrounds of Revelation than many modern futurist interpreters. He interpreted the first five seals to depict various progressive elements of early Christianity. The white horse represented the apostolic age; the red horse stood for the early persecutors; the black horse symbolized the heresies, and the pale horse signified the violent persecution by Trajan. Ribeira saw a gap between the fifth and sixth seals. In the sixth seal he recognized the signs that would precede the second advent of Christ. He saw Rev 1:1-6:11 as having been fulfilled in the time of John or shortly thereafter. The rest of the book is fulfilled just before the second coming of Christ. Revelation, he held, does not speak to the period between Trajan's era and the brief period just before the Second Advent. By this interpretation one cannot identify any part of Revelation with papal Rome.

There is a renewed interest in futurism among dispensationalists and other groups today. But one of the problems of this school of interpretation is that Revelation is made to be irrelevant to the church during that wide historical gap from Trajan (98-117 C.E.) to a brief period just before the Advent—the very time

¹⁶Don F. Neufeld, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Student's Source Book* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1962), 777.

when conditions both in the church and the world would demand an understanding of the messages this book contains.

The Preterist School

Another Spanish Jesuit, Luis de Alcazar (d. 1613), first promoted the idea of preterism in a systematic formulation. In his book, *Investigation of the Hidden Sense of the Apocalypse*, published posthumously in 1614, Alcazar postulated that practically all of Revelation was fulfilled by the time of Constantine the Great.¹⁷ Therefore, the prophecies of Revelation were fulfilled in the historical period of the Early Church. The Reformers had identified the Roman Church as Babylon, and had succeeded in making Revelation a powerful controversial weapon in their favor.

In order to offset this interpretation, Alcazar attempted to show that Revelation had no application to the future, but that its prophecy could be divided into two major sections (chaps. 1-12 and 13-19), which dealt respectively with the church's conflict against Judaism and against paganism. In this way, Alcazar sought to deflect the attacks upon the Roman Church that the Reformers had made so successfully by using the language of Revelation.¹⁸ This approach sees no reflection of papal Rome in Revelation. Thus, by pushing the period of fulfillment either into the distant past (preterism) or the distant future (futurism), Revelation becomes irrelevant either as a pointer to Rome or as a prophetic voice to the church in the historical period, in which the church needs such a prophetic voice.

While preterism correctly emphasizes a focus on the historical setting, a thorough interpretation of symbols, and a deep appreciation of apocalyptic forms of thought and expression, it negates its strength by removing the contemporary relevance of Revelation for the church. The biblical prophetic perspective is lost. Indeed, by localizing the fulfillment both historically in the earliest centuries and geographically in the territory of the writer, violence is done to some key characteristics of biblical apocalyptic—the elements of cosmic sweep and of eschatological focus. Under preterism, the language and symbolism of the book produce what may be called an apocalyptic overkill—using weapons and descriptions that are larger than the targeted event being portrayed. For example, when Antiochus Epiphanes is made the fulfillment of the little horn of Dan 8, or when the beasts of Rev 13 are made to apply to local Roman rulers, they are too small for the broad cosmic description of the visionary portrayal.

¹⁷Kenneth A. Strand, *Perspectives in the Book of Revelation: Essays on Apocalyptic Interpretation* (Naples, FL: Ann Arbor, 1975), 44.

¹⁸*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Student's Source Book*, 777.

The Historicist School

The historicist approach views Revelation as being anchored in and overarching history from the time of the writer to the time of the great consummation. This interpretation, which views the book of Revelation as a panoramic forecast, in symbols, of the history of the Christian church, is sometimes called the standard Protestant interpretation. Henry Alford (1810-71), NT expositor of the nineteenth century, says that it was the view "held by the precursors and upholders of the Reformation, by Wycliffe and his followers in England, by Luther in Germany, Bullinger in Switzerland, Bishop Bale in Ireland, by Fox the martyrologist, by Brightman, Pareus, and early Protestant expositors generally."¹⁹

Rev 12 seems to have served as a starting point in the development and application of the year-day principle in historicism. Joachim of Fiore interpreted the woman of Rev 12 as the Church, the "male Child" as Jesus Christ, and the dragon as Satan. His chief innovation was the interpretation of the 1260 days of the woman in the wilderness as 1260 years. With this new advance in apocalyptic interpretation, the year-day principle was established for future historicist interpreters. The year-day principle had already been applied to the 3½ days of chap. 11 by Tichonius and others, and to the 1290, 1335, and 2300 days of Dan by several medieval Jewish interpreters.²⁰

After Joachim of Fiore adopted the historicist approach to apocalyptic interpretation, his followers in the Franciscan order also adopted historicism. He saw Revelation as portraying prophetic events from John's time down to his own day. This initial discovery led him to anticipate the new Age of the Spirit soon after his own time.²¹ He viewed papal Rome as the fulfillment of prophetic Babylon. Though he loved his church, the Church of Rome, he referred to it as Babylon. He prayed for it and hoped for revival and reformation.²²

While historicists may differ in many details, they generally agree upon certain key features in interpreting Revelation. Within the scope of historical continuity, they all see the antichrist and Babylon as pointing to papal Rome. They view Revelation as portraying certain politico-religious developments leading to suffering on the part of God's saints and to the final consummation. They agree on the relevance of the book of Revelation today.

¹⁹Henry Alford, quoted in Albertus Pieters, *Studies in the Revelation of Saint John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 43.

²⁰"Hisatory of the Interpretation of the Apocalypse," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 7:116-17.

²¹*Ibid.*, 117.

²²C. Mervyn Maxwell, *God Cares*, vol. 2, *The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985), 276.

Because of its application of the Apocalypse to the whole period of history from the writer's time to the end, historicism tries to discover both meaning and relevance for every age. This lends tremendous strength to this method. Clearly, interpreters of this school are concerned with the great details of history in their attempt to compare the symbols of Revelation with the course of history.²³

The Idealist School

The idealist view is the latest of the four to appear on the interpretational scene.²⁴ This position sees the book as being basically symbolic and spiritual in nature. It does not see a historical correspondence for the visions of Revelation. This means that Revelation presents views that refer to spiritual ideas and principles. In this interpretation one is not to look to history for the identification of the little horn of Dan 7 and 8, or the beast of Rev 13, or Babylon of Rev 14 and 17. These symbols only represent spiritual ideas and principles. Do not look to history for their fulfillment; look into people's attitudes and values. Revelation is ahistorical; it is a timeless portrayal of the conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan.

The strength of the idealist school is that it attempts to find personal relevance for the lives of individual readers. Clearly we see the great-controversy theme overarching all human history. The conflict between good and evil is apparent in every generation and in every life. But to take away the historical dimension of Revelation is to remove the historical and moral imperative. Why do I need to respond and repent now? It is because something climactic is about to happen. And how do I know it is about to happen? I see it in the unfolding prophetic-historical drama.

Determinism and Grace in the Apocalypse

The basic outlook of apocalyptic prophecy points to unconditional prophetic outcomes. Since it presents a cosmic sweep which is cast in the setting of the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, there are conditional statements within the larger prophetic profiles. While there is a threat to spit out Laodiceans if they remain in a lukewarm condition (3:16), there are great promises for the overcomers of Laodicea (3:20-22). None of the conditional elements are large enough to change the larger prophetic outcome. Thus we may say that, so far as the larger prophetic outcome is concerned, apocalyptic is bound by a strong element of unconditionality. There are no large variables that can now alter historical forecast. What has been decreed is now unfolding according to the determinate sovereignty of God. Babylon is bound to fall, break up, and come under the final

²³Pieters, 45.

²⁴Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 143-44.

judgment of God. The Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet are bound for divine judgment and punishment. Armageddon is coming with unnegotiable certainty.

Some have seen in the harsh language of biblical apocalyptic an indication of a vindictive divine Sovereign. The language of fire and brimstone is indeed sobering. The fate of the persecutors of the saints is portrayed in grim pictures. But within that determinism of the destruction of the strongholds of evil, there is a persistent conditionality of grace for individuals. In the letters of Jesus to the seven churches, Jesus' self-introduction always inspires hope and implies an invitation. Christ, the author of the seven letters, "holds the seven stars in His right hand "and" walks among the seven golden lampstands (2:1). He is the first and last "who was dead and has come to life" (2:8). He is the faithful and true Witness (3:14). To each church He holds hope and promise for the overcomer. He appeals to all who have ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). This conditionality of grace for individual salvation underscores the tender compassion of the sovereign God of the Apocalypse.

The Thematic Center of Revelation

Some scholars, such as Bauckham,²⁵ have noted the particular difficulty of linking Rev 12-14 to the structure of the whole book. The beginning of chap.12 seems fresh and abrupt, forming no clear linkages to chap. 11. There seems to be both a linguistic and a thematic disjunction with the preceding vision of the trumpet judgments. Rev 11:19 ends the passage: "And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm." Rev. 12:1 announces, "A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."

Bauckham suggests that the reason chap. 11 ends so abruptly may be to give chap. 12 the sense of a fresh start. Something happens in chaps. 12-14. The vision of the woman and the dragon catapults us back to a period before the opening of the book. It sets the stage for the beginnings of the great controversy between Christ (under the name Michael, "the One who is like God") and Satan ("the Adversary"). Thus the chief protagonists are named and the battle lines are drawn.²⁶ Michael Wilcock has titled this section (11:19-15:4) "The Drama of History."²⁷ He points out that this section is flanked by two openings of the temple

²⁵Bauckham, 15.

²⁶Ibid., 15.

²⁷Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1975), 110.

(11:19 and 15:5), highlighting the beginning and ending of the scene.²⁸ C. Mervyn Maxwell refers to these three chapters as the "Great Controversy," which forms "the central theme of the book."²⁴

With reference to the section beginning at Rev 12, G. R. Beasley-Murray observes,

These chapters constitute the most substantial parenthesis in the Revelation. Yet they are more than a parenthesis, for they form the central section of the book. Not only do they come at the midpoint of the work, they provide an understanding of the nature of the conflict in which the Church is engaged, and into which John sees she is to be drawn to the limit.²⁵

In Rev 12-14 the cosmic conflict is set in sharp contrast. There are two protagonists (Christ the champion, and Satan the villain), two forces, and two religious systems fighting for control of the world. At first it seems an unequal match, with righteousness represented by a lamb, a vulnerable woman, and a small remnant, while wickedness is represented by a dragon, beasts, and the majority of earth-dwellers. But the Lamb is victorious. Interestingly, at the opening of the drama in 12:1-3 the dragon's enmity against the Son of God is revealed as the dragon waits to destroy the male Child. Then the drama rewinds to the heavenly beginnings of the great conflict. As a result of the heavenly conflict, heaven is divided and earth is soon divided too. At the beginning of the conflict there seems to be a mismatch in favor of the dragon as he faces the apparently helpless male Child. But Christ is victorious and the dragon is cast out. As the conflict unfolds on earth there seems to be a mismatch again as the beasts stand against the apparently vulnerable remnant. But they overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, and they stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion as victors (14:1-3).

in Rev 12-14 the whole great controversy is played out from its inception to its grand finale. We may therefore refer to these chapters as the thematic key to the whole book. We might even see them as the micro-apocalypse within the macro-Apocalypse. The whole Bible is summed up in these three chapters. The fall of Lucifer, the fall of mankind, the spread of evil, the persecution of the saints, the great commission, the central issues of the great controversy, reformation with regard to the Law and the Sabbath, the collapse of human religion, and the final triumph of the saints are all summed up in a few powerful dramatic strokes. This, surely, among all apocalypses, is the apocalypse par excellence. This unit—the thematic core of Revelation—begins with an expression of wonder: "A great sign

²⁸Ibid., 115.

²⁴Maxwell, 310.

²⁵G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 191.

appeared in heaven" (12:1). The next section also begins with a similar expression of wonder: "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous" (15:1). The opening wonder is the foolish challenge of the dragon against the Son of God. The closing wonder is the triumphant victory of the saints who stand before the throne.

The Use of the Old Testament in Revelation

Of all NT books, Revelation has by far the largest number of allusions to the OT. While it is true that Revelation has no direct quotations of the OT, it makes the richest use of it by employing imagery, symbolism, and a variety of allusions. Such allusions include the use of OT persons, places, events, themes, and language. Thus we find Jezebel, Mount Zion, Sodom, Egypt, Babylon, the Song of Moses, the Exodus theme, and other words and phrases that point clearly to the OT. Perhaps the single most important interpretational key of Revelation is the discovery of its broad use of the OT. This, more than any other, will open new horizons of research and understanding to the diligent student.

John's intended audience was composed of mature believers who shared with him a deep and clear knowledge of the OT. Those believers of his generation were simple, unlearned peasants and artisans, but they studied, knew, and cherished the Scriptures. The numerous allusions that are made to other Scriptures without explanation bear this out. There seems to have been little or no attempt on John's part to explicitly point to certain specific passages that he was alluding to. John expected his readers to know the OT in detail; hence, he made many allusions to it without explanation or direct quotation.²⁶ Even without understanding everything, they must have understood enough to make sense of God's will and direction for them. In this context Bauckham writes correctly,

It is a book designed to be read in constant intertextual relationship with the Old Testament. John was writing what he understood to be a work of prophetic scripture, the climax of prophetic revelation, which gathered up the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament scriptures and disclosed the way in which it was being and was to be fulfilled in the last days. His work therefore presupposes and conveys an extensive interpretation of large parts of the Old Testament prophecy. Allusions are meant to recall the Old Testament context, which thereby becomes part of the meaning the Apocalypse conveys, and to build up, sometimes by a network of allusions to the same Old Testament passage in various parts of the Apocalypse, an interpretation of whole passages of the Old Testament prophecy.²⁷

John's use of the OT is not haphazard or coincidental. There is a clear design and purpose that guides him in his selection of OT passages, events, and allusions. Because he is following a design, the interpreter should understand the design and

²⁶Bauckham, xi.

²⁷Ibid.

be guided by it if he is to come up with the correct interpretation. Thus, passages sharing words or phrases in common with OT passages are to be studied and interpreted in relation to the OT passages.²⁸

G. K. Beale has suggested three categories of allusions to the OT found in Revelation:²⁹

1. Clear allusions are those passages in Revelation that share an almost identical wording with OT passages. They also share a "common core meaning"³⁰ and are not likely to have come from anywhere else.
2. Probable allusions are those that, though not so clear, contain wording or ideas which may be linked to the OT. Sometimes the linkage may be structural. At other points the passages may share a clear thematic link.
3. Possible allusions are those that exhibit only generally similar or parallel wording or thought.

Jon Paulien discusses another category he refers to as "echoes" of the OT.³¹ These would refer to concepts or words no longer bound to specific OT passages, but reflecting a shared motif.

The interpreter of Revelation must have a panoramic view of the text to be able to grasp the broad strokes of apocalyptic movement. The interpreter is then to read the specific passage under review. In the reading of the passage the interpreter must both see and hear the movement taking place. Very often within the passage under study some allusions to the OT become evident. The eyes and ears must be kept tuned to the OT since Revelation has what Kenneth A. Strand calls the "biblical perspective."³²

Foundational Considerations for Interpreting Revelation

Fruitful study of Revelation requires a particular frame of mind. To understand and appreciate the colorful imagery, enigmatic symbolism, and dramatic movement, the reader needs to have an insight into the worldview of apocalyptic. An intentional awareness of the following considerations helps maintain such a worldview.

1. Revelation belongs to a literary genre called "apocalyptic." Apocalyptic comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis* which means "unveiling or uncovering."

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1998), 62.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 175-77.

³²Kenneth A. Strand, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation: Hermeneutical Guidelines, with Brief Introduction to Literary Analysis*, 2d ed. (Naples, FL: Ann Arbor, 1970), 20-23.

It sets out to draw the curtain aside so as to bring to view God's presence, action, and purpose in history.

2. Revelation is God's message for His ordinary children, not just for theologians or biblical specialists. It is written for the comfort and encouragement of the whole church. And only as we give Revelation back to the congregation will the church be edified by it.

3. Revelation brings to view in dramatic fashion God's hand in human affairs. In answer to the question, "How long, O Lord, how long?" (6:10), it reveals the present divine control of history and God's future triumph.

4. Revelation was written for a people in crisis. It is a tract for hard times. The writer was exiled to the Isle of Patmos for his faith (1:9), and many members of his immediate audience were being imprisoned and persecuted in a variety of ways for their faith.

5. Revelation unveils a transcendent continuity, that is, a present vertical dialogue between heaven and earth. The present heavenly activities in behalf of the saints are brought to view. It also presents a linear continuity, that is, a historical thread between the present crisis and the ultimate consummation. God's future decisive actions for the ultimate vindication of His people are unveiled. God sits on the throne. He will write the final line in history.

6. Revelation was written with an eschatological focus, specifically on the end time. The purpose of this is to prepare God's people for the impending crisis of the final drama in earth's history.

7. Revelation is Christocentric, that is, it focuses on the victorious Christ. All beasts and other powers only have significance as they relate to Christ. Therefore, all heaven and all creation are portrayed in worship of the transcendent Christ.

Special Principles for Interpretation of Revelation

Over half a century ago, Louis F. Were began doing some significant work outlining principles of interpreting the NT, and especially Revelation, in light of OT backgrounds. His work has been developed and adapted by many students of Revelation. I am indebted to this history of development for the principles herein presented.³³

1. The symbols are to be traced back to the OT. While there will be some interesting parallels of symbols in Revelation with Greco-Roman practices, John does not intend his readers to go and study that culture to discern his message. The OT holds the richest contextual background for interpreting Revelation. Thus the meaning is to be drawn from the full richness of the OT.

2. The covenant promises made to the nation of Israel in the OT are reinterpreted in the context of the new people of God in Revelation. John does not

³³Louis F. Were, *Bible Principles of Interpretation—Establish Truth and Safeguard Against Last-day Errors* (Victoria, Australia: A. B. Were, 1973).

pick just any promise of Israel and apply it to the church. When we examine the promises he selects, they are found, though given to Israel, to be intended through Israel to benefit the nations. Thus Revelation carries the divine intention to its intended logical conclusion. For example, in the OT covenant claims of God's marriage to Israel (cf. Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14) we discover a reinterpretation of Christ's cosmic marriage to His celestial bride (Rev 19:7-9).

3. What is portrayed locally in the OT is reinterpreted universally in Revelation. A good example of this is David's conquest of Jerusalem against the Jebusites and his standing as victor with his brave soldiers on Mount Zion (2 Sam 5:6-8). Although this is a local victory, it is recast as a cosmic victory of the Lamb over the dragon and evil powers. The Lamb now stands on Mount Zion with the victorious 144,000 (14:1-3). The same principle may be demonstrated in the local triumphs of Deborah at the waters of Megiddo and of Elijah at Mt. Carmel, who slaughtered the prophets and priests of Baal at the Kishon River by the same waters of Megiddo. These local events may be reinterpreted in the cosmic battle of Armageddon, with all the world gathered for a final showdown.

4. Revelation extends to the nations the promises made locally to Israel. A noteworthy example of this is when John views not just the house of Aaron but the entire throng of the redeemed as priests (Rev 1:6). It should be noted that this is not an arbitrary selecting and extending of promises. A careful study will reveal that Revelation brings to a climax a development that was already in the OT. For example, Exod 19:5 states God's intention of making all Israel a kingdom of priests. But through idolatry at Sinai, God's original plan of universal priesthood was frustrated and only the tribe of Levi was consecrated to represent Israel (Exod 32:26-28). Beale refers to this tendency as "universalization" of the OT in Revelation.³⁴

The universalizing process is seen in Zech 12:10, which refers to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem mourning over the Messenger whom they pierced, when the prophet declares, "And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born." When this passage is alluded to in Rev 1:7, it applies to the whole world as it will stand before Christ when He returns the second time: "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so, Amen."

This same universalizing principle may be demonstrated in the song by the Red Sea being transposed to the song by the Sea of Glass (Exod 15; cf. Rev 15:3-4). The fall of the ancient city of Babylon is also transposed into a universal experience (Jer 51; cf. Rev 14:8; 17:1-18:24).

³⁴Beale, 18.

5. The literal in the OT becomes spiritual in Revelation. There is a movement from the concrete and literal to the abstract and spiritual. The literal and concrete city of Babylon of OT times is recast as an abstract and spiritual opponent of the people of God (Jer 51; cf. Rev 17-18). Sodom and Egypt are concrete powers or places in the OT; however, these are portrayed as spiritual realities in Revelation (Gen 18:20-19:25; Exod 1-14; cf. Rev 11:8).

6. The earthly in the OT becomes the heavenly in Revelation. Events that are enacted in the earthly realm are recast on a higher heavenly realm. Jerusalem, the earthly capital of Israel (2 Sam 5:6-10; cf. Josh 15:63), is transposed into the heavenly New Jerusalem (Rev 21:2). Earthly Mount Zion is reinterpreted as the heavenly Mount Zion (2 Sam 5:6-10; cf. Rev 14:1).

7. The law of repetition and progressive enlargement is to be noted. Themes that started in seed form in earlier Scriptures enlarge as they are repeated in later Scriptures. As these themes are repeated, they become larger and ascend higher in spiritual or theological significance. These themes meet their fullest expansion in the book of Revelation. Thus the seed of the woman of Gen 3:15 comes to view in Revelation as the male Child who appears as the victorious leader of the armies of heaven and defeats the devil (Rev 12:7-12; 19:14-15).

Conclusion

Looking at the special hermeneutical principles involved in interpreting Revelation, many readers are daunted by the apparent complexity of it all. The code language of the book seems so otherworldly that we may be tempted to leave the book to highly trained biblical professionals. However, God intended the book to be read with profit by all His faithful children. Ellen G. White has expressed the matter correctly:

Let none think, because they cannot explain the meaning of every symbol in the Revelation, that it is useless for them to search this book in an effort to know the meaning of the truth it contains. The One who revealed these mysteries to John will give to the diligent searcher for truth a foretaste of heavenly things. Those whose hearts are open to the reception of truth will be enabled to understand its teachings, and will be granted the blessing promised to those who "hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein."³⁵

The book of Revelation plays a crucial role in providing an understanding of God's end-time movements as the drama of human history draws to a climactic consummation. It is difficult to imagine how this kind of ending of human history could be adequately expressed in nonapocalyptic language. This genre seems to

³⁵Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 584.

be uniquely fitted to make the necessary broad cosmic sweep that fills the whole horizon with graphic color and movement. This is the revelation of the ages.

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN "WHAT IT MEANT" AND "WHAT IT MEANS" AND THE TASK OF THEOLOGY

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The expression, "What It Meant and What It Means" was used in 1962 by Krister Stendahl to highlight the questions the interpreter must address in deriving meaning from the Bible. The questions in the interpretation of the Bible, according to Stendahl, are "What *did* it mean?" and "What *does* it mean?" Stendahl is of the opinion that biblical theology should answer only the first question.¹ This distinction between the focus of biblical theology and that of systematic and applied theology has been generally followed by theologians.²

However, as Stendahl hinted, in the interpretation of biblical revelation, the challenge is to find the meaning of the Bible on both sides of the question. On the one side is the endeavor to be faithful to the past, that is, to understand the meaning of the text, passage, book, testament, and combined biblical teachings themselves in their time. On the other side is the endeavor to find the present-day significance of that biblical revelation.

It appears to me that most educated Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) are aware of the importance and basic methodology of the first side, that of biblical interpretation: the movement from the writings in their original languages, to exegesis, and to biblical theology. Many, however, even among our seminary students, are not clear on the importance and the methodology of using the Bible on the other side of biblical revelation. The other side, the attempt to be faithful

¹Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:419.

²For example, see George Eldon Ladd's view that "Biblical theology is primarily a descriptive discipline. It is not initially concerned with the final meaning of the teachings of the Bible or their relevance for today. This is the task of systematic theology." George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 25.

to the Bible by arriving at its present-day significance, includes the disciplines of systematic and applied theology. The use of the Bible in applied theology has been addressed by other presenters in this Forum. The area assigned to me is the relationship of biblical studies to systematic theology.

Many years ago I took a course in systematic theology. In that course, the professor asked: "Should we, SDAs, do systematic theology?" His first answer was a strong "No." He then proceeded to give a short explanation why SDAs faithful to the normative authority of the Bible should not do systematic theology. That interchange in the classroom stimulated me to do further reading on methods in theology.³

When I surveyed the methods used in theology, I began to understand why that professor was so emphatic that we should not do systematic theology because of our commitment to be faithful to the Bible in thought and practice. Systematic theology attempts to clarify the contemporary meaning of truth by showing its rationality and relevance. In the attempt to show that Christian teachings are rational, this method of theological reflection often follows the rules of the prevalent philosophy of the period on how knowledge is derived. In other words, what the current philosophy accepts as acceptable sources and evidences, ways of reasoning, thought structures, and the purpose of knowledge, are often adopted into systematic theology.

Indeed, many of the meanings advocated by systematic theology are largely uncontrolled by, and different from, the teachings of the Bible. The ideas taught are based more on human interpretation and philosophy than on biblical teaching. Moreover, in the attempt to build a coherent system of teachings on a central theme, the method and conceptual framework used are *a priori* and forced upon the biblical teachings. What results may be a relevant, rational, and logically coherent system, but the conceptual framework is alien if not contradictory to biblical revelation.⁴

Considering how the above theological directions differ from our church's stand on the Bible as the basis and control of any belief and practice, my professor was right. We should not do that sort of systematic theology. But the question on whether or not we should do systematic theology was posed in a systematic theology class, by a professor of systematic theology, and asked of students who were majoring in systematic theology. Needless to say, my professor had a second answer to his question: "Yes, we do systematic theology, but within the foundation and bounds of the Bible."

³From this point onward, the discussion is on the main focus of the paper, systematic theology. As such, "theology" would henceforth refer to systematic theology, and "theologian" to the systematic theologian.

⁴For a discussion on the problems of systematic theology, especially in relation to the Bible, see Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, Zondervan, 1987), 1:24.

The purpose of this paper is to show the relationship between biblical hermeneutics and theological hermeneutics. The last part of the paper reflects on how this relationship can be applied in the context of the SDA Church. For some, the things to be mentioned here will be very elementary or basic. But the intent of this paper is to give a general picture of the relationship rather than address complex issues in that relationship.

The Nature of Biblical Revelation and Hermeneutics

The nature of biblical revelation determines the tasks of and relationship between biblical and theological hermeneutics. Basic to this nature is the continuing authority of the word of God. Although biblical revelation was given in a particular historical context, it is also intended to be heard in our own times. The content and purpose of biblical revelation endures over time and is transcultural. The task of finding meaning for biblical revelation then implies that the two sides of meaning should not be separated. While the two theological disciplines have their own primary scopes, the connection or interrelatedness of the two sides should be maintained in hermeneutics. Let us look at how this relationship is translated into methodology in the specific disciplines, first by reviewing the task of biblical studies.

The Purpose of Knowing “What It Meant” Is to Arrive at “What It Means”

The movement from “what it meant” to “what it means” is described by Grant R. Osborne as the movement “from text to context.”⁵ This movement begins with exegesis and moves to biblical theology in order to arrive at what the Bible meant.

The exegete studies the author’s meaning on the basis of literary considerations (grammar and thought-development) and historical background (socioeconomic), then the biblical theologian works with the results and compiles patterns of unity behind the individual statements.⁶

According to Osborne, “Exegesis controls the interpretations of the text.”⁷ From the results of exegesis, the biblical theologian “considers underlying larger truths behind the individual expressions.”⁸ Though still within the bounds of biblical studies at this point of the movement, the attempt to put together “patterns

⁵Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 268.

⁶Ibid., 265.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

of unity” means that the biblical theologian is systematizing biblical teachings. Maybe we can call the gathered and systematized biblical teachings about God, salvation, mankind, and so forth, a systematic biblical theology.

But the inseparability of the two sides of meaning means that neither linguistic study and exegesis nor biblical theology constitute the end purpose of biblical hermeneutics. The task of finding meaning is not complete until the present-day relevance of that message is formulated.

At this point in the movement from what the Bible “meant” to what it “means,” the boundary between the disciplines of biblical studies and systematic theology is crossed. As noted, systematization has already taken place in the area of biblical theology. While exegesis, through induction, attempts to arrive at the original meaning of the text, biblical theology, through deduction, draws united patterns of biblical truth from the collective meanings produced by exegesis, which are supra-cultural and enduring. At the point of biblical theology, the original biblical message has been decontextualized from its historical conditioning. Indeed, because biblical theology involves human interpretation, the biblical themes derived do not have the same level of authority as the inspired original biblical data. However, through sound methodology, biblical theology can derive doctrines from the Bible. So at this point of the movement in the continuum of the meaning of biblical revelation, the next step or task falls into the area of systematic theology.

What the Bible Presently “Means” Should Be Rooted in and Controlled by What the Original “Meant”

Again, the nature of divine revelation becomes the foundation both for the direction and method for doing biblical systematic theology. The first consideration is that whatever present-day message we deliver should be rooted in the content and intent of the original biblical message. Theological points should be based on sound exegesis of the text. Doctrines should be based on biblical theology, drawing upon the whole of the Bible, not just a few proof texts. Rather than using individual texts without relating them to other Bible passages, the passages used as the basis for the doctrine should be related to other biblical teachings. The methodology and the connections of the present-day message to the original biblical data must be clear for those who listen to the message. I will limit the discussion on this point because SDAs are generally strong on this part of the method.

The Present-day Meaning Should Be Relevant Even As the Original Messages Were Relevant

The second consideration is based on the quality of historicity or historical conditioning and relevance that characterized biblical revelation when it was

originally given. The implication is that this same quality should characterize the present-day aspect of explicating meaning for the biblical message.

The word of God, even when it was given in the original context, was relevant. The content of the original message and the issues originally addressed have to do with day-to-day matters. As Heb 4:12 states, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."⁹

Even the structure and organization of the presentation of the original message were contemporary. The varied literary forms and genre of the Bible indicate the different ways the persons inspired by the Spirit spoke in thought structures familiar with their listeners. The OT is mostly stories, poetry, sayings, and prophecies, expressed in concrete images and set in a narrative and metaphoric framework. The NT records that Jesus spoke in parables to the crowds, the people of the land. Jesus shifted to the organization of the rabbinic midrash when He was speaking to those exposed to the rabbinic traditions of His day. Paul used the form of Greek speeches, elaboration, and argumentation in his writings. Though Paul's concerns remained evangelistic and pastoral, yet many times the framework of thought was abstract, conceptual, and logical.¹⁰

The words and varied literary forms and genres in both the OT and NT indicate that the inspired writers employed cultural materials and presented their messages in terms of their contemporary language and thought forms. Their messages and the forms they employed to present these messages fitted their context. Indeed, the message of the Bible in its original setting was contextualized.

At the same time, God's intent was that the specific and relevant messages given in their original setting and meaning also become the basis for transcultural and unchangeable truth. Many centuries after the OT was written, the apostle Paul taught that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). Jesus said that His words "are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). The Bible should not only have meaning *then* but also *now*. The word of God was spoken and presented in relevant and contemporary thought structures *then*, challenging faith and resulting in life-changing meaning. Similarly, the word of God must also be spoken and presented in relevant and contemporary thought forms so that it can, in the *present day*, call for faithfulness to God.

The nature of divine revelation necessitates that those "dividing the word of truth" arrive not only at "what it meant" then, but also at "what it means" now.

⁹Scripture quotations are from the NKJV.

¹⁰For the concepts expressed in this paragraph, see James L. Bailey and Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Literary Forms in the New Testament: A Handbook* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992).

David F. Wells explains the relationship between what the Bible “meant” and what it “means,” as well as the implications that arise from the relationship:

Biblical revelation was given in a particular cultural context but it is also intended to be heard in our own context. This revelatory trajectory, then, has a point of origination and a point of arrival. It is the fact of inspiration and the contemporary work of the Spirit which secure a consistency between its *terminus a quo* and its *terminus ad quem*. The work of the Holy Spirit was such that the responsible human agents who were used in the writing of Scripture were able to employ cultural materials and, indeed, to shape the revelation in terms of their own understanding, but what God the Spirit willed should be revealed was exactly what was written, and the content and intent of this revelation were alike transcultural. The biblical revelation, because of its inspired nature, can therefore be captive neither to the culture in which it arose nor to the culture in which it arrives. It was not distorted as it was given, nor need it be distorted as we seek to understand it many centuries later in contexts far removed from those in which it was originally given.¹¹

The two sides then, what the Bible “meant” and what it “means,” are interrelated and should not be separated. The purpose of deriving the correct understanding of what the Bible meant is for contemporary application of meaning. This contemporary meaning and application should be grounded and bound by what the Bible meant in the original setting. The original meaning and intent of the written word of God should control the meaning and intent of present day interpretations and attempts to present the message in a contemporary way. Wells calls this relationship the “bipolar character of revelation.”¹² Having explored the relationship between what the Bible “meant” and what it “means,” let us now explore some of its implications for SDA theology.

Implications of the Bipolar Nature of Divine Revelation for SDA Theology

The term “systematic” in systematic theology can have several meanings. The first is that “it draws upon the whole of the Bible. Rather than utilizing individual texts in isolation from one another, it attempts to relate the various portions to one another, to coalesce the varied teachings into some type of harmonious or coherent whole.”¹³ The second meaning is that a theology is systematic when its teachings are “organized on the basis of educational or presentation concerns. In other words, the prime concern is to present a clear and ordered overview of the main

¹¹David F. Wells, “The Nature and Function of Theology,” in *The Use of the Bible in Theology*, ed. R. K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 176.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, unabridged, one-vol. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 21.

themes of the Christian faith.”¹⁴ The third meaning of “systematic” is that teachings are “organized on the basis of presupposition about method. Philosophical ideas about how knowledge is gained determines the way in which material is arranged.”¹⁵ Using these meanings as levels for devising a framework for doing systematic theology, we may now look into the realm of SDA theology and examine how we have done systematic theology and reflect on its directions in light of the bipolar nature of divine revelation.

The present set of fundamental beliefs voted by the SDA world church expresses our doctrinal positions and understanding. The twenty-seven SDA Fundamental Beliefs constitute a systematized statement of biblical teachings. These are based on sound exegesis and correlated with the entire body of Scripture. Based on the officially approved statements, SDAs do systematic theology on the first level.

However, there are calls within the SDA Church to move on to the next level of systematization, that is, to order the statement of beliefs for a clearer presentation of the Adventist faith. Norman R. Gulley writes that the present arrangement of the doctrinal statements makes it appear that “each belief is of equal value.”¹⁶ There is a “lack of logical order,”¹⁷ with no indication which doctrines are central and which are corollary. Furthermore, the current order in the presentation of doctrines is chronologically disordered. The doctrines are not arranged according to the history of redemption.¹⁸ Gulley’s suggestion is to arrange the present statements according to the order of the six major areas of classical systematic theology: the doctrines of God, humanity, Christ, salvation, the church, and the final events.¹⁹

George R. Knight makes a similar observation about the present list of our fundamental beliefs. Knight says that the present statements follow the “string-of-beads approach.”²⁰ The main problem, according to Knight, is that this approach “indicates no priorities, it doesn’t help people see that some beliefs are more important or more ‘fundamental’ than others.”²¹ He suggests that whatever the system of organization may be, the teachings about a personal knowledge of Christ and the salvation experience must be central or foundational.²²

¹⁴Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), 6.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Norman R. Gulley, “Toward a Christ-centered Expression of Our Faith,” *Ministry*, March 1997, 25.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., 26.

²⁰George R. Knight, “Twenty-seven Fundamentals in Search of a Theology,” *Ministry*, February 2001, 5.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 7.

While there is a need for better clarity and order in the presentation of our fundamental beliefs, in which doctrine is central and foundational, I believe that the present nature of the statements have a crucial theological value. At present, these fundamentals are basically summaries of correlated biblical teachings, expressed in language as close as possible to the biblical language. The fundamentals are neither stated primarily in contemporary theological terms used nor do they state our belief positions in relation to a specific contemporary theological milieu. The official statement of our beliefs is a biblical systematic theology limited to the minimum essentials. It is systematic theology in the first meaning cited above, and not fully developed in terms of organization and framework for a clear and relevant presentation for a specific context. The fundamentals are more like kernels or seeds of doctrinal teachings rather than fully matured plants rooted in the soil of a specific context. This nature of the Fundamental Beliefs has an important effect on the world church.

Leaders of Protestant churches in non-Western nations have noted the ill effects of bringing in systematic theologies to their fields. What is introduced to their churches are full systematic theologies, that is, the "Bible doctrines" are ordered, worded, explained, and made relevant for Western contexts.²³ What is taking place is that another step is introduced in the movement from "what the Bible meant" to "what it means": what the Bible means in North America or Europe.

There are two basic problems with this practice. First is that what is clear, ordered, understandable, and relevant to the West may not be so in non-Western contexts. The qualities of clarity, order, and relevance are culturally rooted. Moreover, the systematic theologies are often taught first before the biblical doctrines. The systematic theologies become interpretative frameworks for interpreting the Bible. A missionary to a non-Western nation alerts us to the second problem of this separation from what the Bible meant to what it means:

There is the danger, possibly an inevitable one, that it [the theological study and knowledge] will be founded upon and continue without, a real biblical base—external elements may become the controlling influences. To say it another way, failure to begin with and continue investigating the biblical text in its own world while studying the Christian faith leaves us without needed 'control'. Consequently, the chosen contemporary cultural or intellectual scheme may become tyrannical and impose extra-biblical influences and criteria upon

²³—"The Seoul Declaration: Toward an Evangelical Theology for the Third World," in *The Bible in Asian Contexts*, ed. Bong Rin Ro and Ruth Eshenaur (Taichung, Taiwan: Asia Theological Association, 1984), 23.

understanding the biblical message while it is simply meant to be a framework for making applications for the modern writer's audience.²⁴

The present nature of the SDA Fundamental Beliefs can spare us from such a problem. With only the basic biblical teachings voted to be the basis for doctrinal unity throughout the world church, theologians working in different contexts can formulate contextualized theologies. In the continuum of the meaning of biblical revelation, the SDA Fundamental Beliefs are just a little beyond the point of a systematic biblical theology. They are the beginnings of a biblical systematic theology. It is left for the theologians who live and think in specific contexts to take up their situation in the light of the Bible and proclaim the biblical message in terms of their specific culture. So the challenge is for pastors, teachers, and evangelists to interpret the Bible, moving from what it meant to what it means for their own specific contexts.

From my observation, the challenge of interpreting the word of God beyond the summarization and repetition of a systematized biblical theology is not emphasized much in the SDA church. I have noticed that even the definition of "theology" in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* does not emphasize much the second aspect of biblical interpretation, that is, the present meaning. It defines theology as "the ordered study of God and His relation to the world, especially by analysis of the teachings of the Old and New Testament Scriptures."²⁵ The definition is strong on what the Bible meant but weak on what it means. What the Bible meant must be systematized or contextualized for present contexts, resulting in a biblical systematic theology.

The continuing challenge to be faithful to the nature of divine revelation by the systematization or contextualization of biblical teachings requires that we do theology in certain directions, that systematic theology must first be biblical. The Bible must be not only the source of content but also the control of methods and frameworks in the presentation of the message. Because systematic theology is derived and fallible, it must have a sure biblical basis.

Beyond the issue of source, there are the methodological elements of form, purpose, framework, and organizing principles, which may be varied as long as they conform to or do not contradict the biblical worldview. Even as there were varied forms, presentation frameworks, and organizing principles in the Bible, so too, present-day biblical systematic theology may take many forms.

I am highlighting the issue of method because the common understanding is that systematic theology is concerned with showing the reasonableness of the

²⁴J. Julius Scott Jr., "Biblical Theology and Non-Western Theology: Some Observations for the Contribution of Biblical Theology for Christianity in the So-called Two-Third's World," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 25 (2001): 246.

²⁵*The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), xxii.

Christian faith. In other words, if it is not focused on rationality, the work is not systematic theology. Harvie M. Conn argues that the concern for rationality in Christian theology arose from a "wrong turn" taken by theologians in the Early Church. Christianity gained inroads in the Roman Empire because, among other things, they successfully correlated the Bible to the contemporary needs and culture of the illiterate masses. However, a change took place. Christian writers addressed more and more the concerns and mindset of a few educated non-Christians. The concern was still the presentation of the gospel, but now the audience was limited to a few. What resulted was a classical theology that primarily concerned itself with rationality, a fact that is true even to this day.²⁶

In light of the bipolar nature of divine revelation, faithfulness to Scripture, not rationality, should be the primary concern of systematic theology. Our concern in both biblical and theological interpretation should be faithfulness: interpreting the Bible so that we can be faithful to the original meaning, and interpreting the meaning of the Bible for the present-day so that people can be faithful in thought, feelings, and actions to the living word of God.

Another methodological issue is the starting point and focus of theology. The starting point of deriving a systematic theology should be what the Bible meant. However, the starting point of communicating a biblical systematic theology need not be what the Bible meant. The concern for faithfulness to the Bible is often translated by making the explanation of biblical passages the starting point and focus of proclaiming, "Thus saith the Lord." However, if we look at the Bible closely, messages, teachings, even sermons did not always begin with an existing passage from a prophetic writing or authoritative oral teaching. In the Bible, the communication of messages from God, as well as explanations about the will of God, often began with the experience of the people. As Alister McGrath reminds us, making experience the starting point does not mean that experience becomes the source or foundation of our theology. What it means is that theology speaks to the human experience. For McGrath, the main concern and focus of a living biblical theology should be the human experience. Christian theology should address, interpret, and transform human experience.²⁷

The proposal of Philip Hughes is similar to that of McGrath. For Hughes, a biblically relevant theology should start with the actual beliefs and actions of the people. For him the relationship between what the Bible meant and what it means is translated into method in the following way:

Christians hold that the Bible is a prime witness to the nature of ultimate reality. It has a normative function for Christians. Yet, that normative function will be

²⁶Harvie M. Conn, "Contextual Theologies: The Problem of Agendas," in *Constructive Christian Theology in the Worldwide Church*, ed. William Barr (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 98-100.

²⁷Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 79-88.

executed effectively only by bringing the Bible teachings and principles into contact with our actual beliefs and patterns of actions. Rather than studying the Bible for the sake of its contents, the theological task should involve the evaluation of our actual beliefs in the light of Biblical principles. Rather than studying answers to questions we never asked, it would be better to take the question which we are asking to the Biblical witness. In these ways, the process of theology must be carried out in cultural contexts.²⁸

Conn properly summarizes the central issue of this paper, namely, the relationship between what the Bible meant and what it means and the task of theology. He writes:

Theology is always theology-on-the-road. And, in this sense, it is not simply a question of relevance or of application. It is not a two-fold question of, first theological interpretation, and then, practical application. Interpretation and application are not two questions but one. . . . Theology must always ask what Scripture says. But it always asks in terms of the questions and answers our cultures raise. And to ask what Scripture says, or what it means, is always to ask a question of application.²⁹

Conclusion

The nature of biblical revelation determines that what the Bible “meant” be not separated from what it “means.” The task of interpreting what it meant should have the present-day meaning as the purpose. What the Bible “means” for present-day life should be rooted in what it “meant.” Moreover, the way the divine revelation was originally communicated by the Bible writers also gives present-day theologians the challenge of presenting the biblical teachings in ways that are relevant to their context. The challenge is for SDA theologians to be faithful interpreters of the Bible so that they can help God’s people to think and live according to the word of God.

²⁸Philip Hughes, “The Use of Actual Beliefs in Contextualizing Theology,” *East Asia Journal of Theology* 2 (1984): 256.

²⁹Conn, 94.

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HERMENEUTICS AND PREACHING

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The Bible teaches that preaching is the first and foremost task of the gospel worker.¹ The call for God's work is primarily for preaching the gospel to the people. Accordingly, it is impossible to be a pastor without being a preacher. In this sense, Carlyle B. Haynes is right in his understanding of preaching as the chief occupation of the pastor. He states,

All that the minister has to do among men centers in preaching. That is his chief business. It is for this that he was called, and chosen, and trained, and equipped. And in his mind it must be always the most weighty and important of all human transactions and efforts. His lifelong endeavor is to be a better, a more effective, preacher.²

The role of the pastor as preacher is to proclaim the word of God, for "preaching is the proclamation of the word of God to men by men under assignment from God. It is the ordained means for the transmission of the word of God to the world."³ But the preacher must remember that "preaching is not a

¹The most prominent examples are the Great Commission of Christ, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15); and Paul's charge to Timothy, "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season" (2 Tim 4:2). All quoted Bible texts are from the NKJV.

²Carlyle B. Haynes, *The Divine Art of Preaching* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1939), 15.

³Carl G. Kromminga, "Preach, Preaching," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 414. The same concept is found in Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, trans. Richard Strachan (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), 371: "Preaching is the proclamation of God's word by those whom the church has commissioned in Christ's name."

simple repetition” of Bible messages, but is to actualize these messages “into the present.”⁴ It means that the task of the preacher is not only “to speak as a personal witness to God’s revelation” but also to interpret and apply it “to the needs of the people.”⁵ Since interpretation is one of the most important elements in preaching, a preacher must be a good interpreter as well as a good speaker.

In every sermon the biblical text should be the basis of the sermon.⁶ The preacher’s role as biblical interpreter is to interpret the text for his or her congregation.

Understanding the text is in many ways the most crucial aspect of preparing the sermon, since what the preacher asks here is precisely the question a member of his congregation will ask: ‘How may I understand this text so that I hear God speaking through it?’ For this reason, among others, the current hermeneutical enterprise is of great importance to the preacher. Understanding is the key to the hermeneutical interest. . . . Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation—a study fundamental to Christian preaching because preaching takes its rise from a given text which is to be interpreted.⁷

Two factors come to the fore: the text is to be interpreted in its original setting; then, it is to be interpreted in the context of the listeners.

Understanding the Original Meaning

Understanding the original meaning of the text is the first step in the task of biblical preaching. As to this matter, Randolph declares,

Once the text has been chosen, the interpreter must attempt to enter into it, to understand it, we may say, on its own terms. The preacher’s willingness to

⁴K. Runia, “Preaching, Theology of,” *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 528. Runia states with greater clarity: “If preaching is to be true and relevant, the message of Scripture must be addressed to people in their concrete historical situation. The biblical message may not be adapted to the situation of today, but it must be accommodated to the situation.” *Ibid.*

⁵J. S. Baird, “Preach, Preaching,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 868. This concept of preaching is well elaborated in the following statement: “Christian preaching is still rooted in the biblical revelation, where it has a three-fold responsibility. It has first to elucidate for the hearers the meaning of the biblical text for those who first wrote it and first heard or read it: the work of exegesis; it has to translate that meaning into the terms and understanding of twentieth-century culture: the work of interpretation; it has to relate the meaning of the text to the contemporary situations, personal and corporate, with which the hearers are confronted: the task of application.” John Stacey, “Preaching,” *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson and John Dowden (London: SMC, 1983), 459.

⁶David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 34.

⁷*Ibid.*, 36-37.

suspend his own interest at this point is not based on the assumption that he can step outside the text's claim on his life into some neutral zone. It is based precisely on the need to hear the text clearly so that his decision may be authentic. The moment of cold and sober analysis takes place within the context of one's personal commitment and for the sake of that commitment.⁸

The goal of entering into the text is to understand its objective meaning,⁹ that is, to grasp "the main line of meaning of the text in relationship to the contours of the Bible itself."¹⁰ This study, though it "may have its dry moments,"¹¹ is one of the most important parts of sermon preparation, for the preacher cannot deliver the right message from the Bible to the audience unless he or she has a clear understanding of "the world of the text."¹²

How can the preacher know this world, that is, the original context and intention of the text? First of all, there should be a careful study of the words of the text. It is important for the preacher to understand the original meaning of individual words of the text because "there is no sense in trying to get at the meaning of a passage without having a handle on unfamiliar words."¹³

Secondly, the text is to be examined in its context in the Bible. Although understanding the original meaning of the words is of great importance in biblical interpretation, it is insufficient for a comprehensive picture of the text. Only when the text is understood in its literary context is its proper meaning comprehended. On this matter, James Cox rightly observes,

⁸Ibid., 38-39.

⁹Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *The Biblical Interpreter: An Agrarian Bible in an Industrial Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 105-6.

¹⁰Randolph, 41.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Walter Vogels, *Reading and Preaching the Bible: A New Semiotic Approach* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986), 19. James W. Cox, *Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 66, puts strong emphasis on this matter: "Know what the Bible meant. . . . The task of the pulpit can be carried out only if we know what the text meant. When this is the case, when the church and its teaching and preaching ministry are exposed to the Bible in its original intention and intensity, then they will be exposed in every way to its 'ever new challenge.' It will not do to read our own way of thinking back into the text. Not until we have let the text speak in its own language are we prepared to translate it into our contemporary tongue."

¹³Lee J. Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study: A Guide to Understanding, Teaching, and Preaching the Word of God* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1995), 49. Concerning the necessity of studying every single word in the text, Gugliotto says, "Although certain words play a key role in the passage, exegesis requires a basic understanding of every word involved—working from root meanings, the initial thrust carried to the sentence—to contextual meanings, the final sense picked up from the sentence and the rest of the Bible context." For a detailed explanation on how to do word studies, see *ibid.*, 49-71.

Interpretation . . . does not proceed so much on atomistic meanings found in individual words and metaphors as on related meanings in a syntactical context. The problem is usually not what this or that word or phrase means, but what the sentence or story as a whole means. Often the meaning of the individual word derives as much, perhaps more, from the immediate context as from the original root from which it sprang or from other contexts in which the word has been used.¹⁴

In the study of the context, not only the immediate context but also the section context,¹⁵ the book context,¹⁶ and the canonical context¹⁷ are to be examined.

Finally, the text and its context are to be understood in their original cultural setting. Every biblical text chosen for preaching was originally given to ancient people in their cultural contexts. It is, therefore, very difficult for the preacher to understand the real meaning of the text unless he or she is acquainted with the culture of that time.¹⁸ Norval F. Pease's comment on this question is worthy of attention:

¹⁴Cox, 67. Gugliotto, 25, concurs: "In your study of God's Word, avoid incomplete conclusions. Don't isolate a passage from what comes before or after it in the text. Instead, get the whole picture. To do this you will need to acquaint yourself with the context, the entire body of text surrounding a passage, which sheds light on its meaning."

¹⁵The preacher needs to focus attention on the natural breaks in the texts that divide the book into sections. The text he or she has chosen for preaching has to be understood in relation to the main idea of the section. For a detailed explanation, see Gugliotto, 29-30.

¹⁶It is hard for the preacher to understand the true meaning of the text unless he or she has a comprehensive understanding of "the overall plan and purpose of the book" from which the text has been selected. The text is to be interpreted in harmony with the general theme of the book. Gugliotto, 28-29.

¹⁷Whenever the preacher interprets a certain passage of the Bible, he or she must keep in mind the theme and purpose of the Bible, that is, the salvation of fallen human beings. In the interpretation of the passage for preaching, the relationship between the text and the great theme of salvation has to be consistently shown. For further details, see Gugliotto, 26-28.

¹⁸On the necessity of the study of ancient cultures, Madeleine S.O Miller and J. Lane Miller state, "The Bible was not written to introduce us to an ancient people with seemingly strange ways. It was written to introduce us to the ways of God Himself. But we live so far away from the people in the Bible, both in distance and in time, that we are puzzled and confused by certain elements that were neither puzzling nor confusing to the writers themselves or to their earliest readers." Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, *Harper's Encyclopedia of Bible Life*, paperback ed. rev. Boyce M. Bennett Jr., and David H. Scott (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 1. Randolph, 106, is very clear: "It is not enough to know that the Gospel of Matthew was written just after the fall of Jerusalem from somewhere in Syria-Palestine. Nor is it enough to know that it may have been written by a Jewish Christian for Jewish Christians. We also need to know if it was written by and for the upper classes. We need to know the sociological context of the characters, the events, the language, and even the form of Matthew's stories. Without this kind of information our ability to understand what the text once meant to say is limited significantly."

Horrible blunders have been made by preachers who neglected to acquaint themselves with the contextual and historical background . . . of the Bible. . . As preachers, we owe it to our listeners and to God to be reverently meticulous in our interpretation of God's Word.¹⁹

For information on the cultures of the biblical times, not only the Bible itself but also the extrabiblical literature and archaeological findings are to be consulted. It is also compulsory to refer to the historical, anthropological, geographical, socio-religious, economical, and political environments of those days.²⁰

Understanding the Contemporary Meaning

Biblical interpretation is not "merely saying what the text once meant" but "includes a concern for the conditions under which the text may say something to us today."²¹ This concept is based on our understanding of the function of the Bible.

Christians contend that their Scriptures are not merely records of past experiences with God but also resources providing insight into human thought, feelings and behavior, and a view of the future. Understanding correctly the message of the Scriptures leads to an understanding of what God is doing in the world and how one can be a Christian in the world.²²

Thus, in hermeneutics "what it means" is no less important than "what it meant." This is especially true for preaching, for what is significant is not "the exposition of the text but its execution,"²³ since "the task of preaching relates the ancient text to the people to whom the preached word is now spoken again as a living word."²⁴

¹⁹Norval F. Pease, "Preaching and Biblical Interpretation," in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974), 259.

²⁰For a detailed expose, see Gugliotto, 72-119.

²¹Rohrbaugh, 106.

²²Raymond Bailey, "Hermeneutics: A Necessary Art," in *Hermeneutics for Preaching: Approaches to Contemporary Interpretations of Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 8.

²³Cox, 68.

²⁴David Dockery, "Preaching and Hermeneutics," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Dudit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 142. Randolph, 44, observes, "Seeing the text in relation to our lives and the lives of our contemporaries is part of the process of understanding the text. This contemporary reference contributes to our primary grasp of the text at the level of discovering the concern of the sermon; it is not something to be added to an already complete understanding of the text. We may achieve some of our most acute insights into the text when we see it in juxtaposition to our life and times."

This work of contemporizing the meaning “in a new and different world-context”²⁵ is well exemplified in the sermons of Christ. The most outstanding example is His Sermon on the Mount, in which He “gave the true interpretation to the Old Testament Scriptures, expounding the truth that had been perverted by the rulers, the scribes, and the Pharisees.”²⁶ On several occasions Christ reinterpreted the OT texts, presenting new meanings relevant to His congregation or listeners.²⁷ Likewise, the modern preacher must make his or her interpretation meaningful to the listeners. The text must be relevant to them.

A preacher’s purpose for interpreting the Bible is different from that of a scholar’s, for the preacher “interprets the Bible in order to persuade people to become Christians and to nurture those who are already Christians.”²⁸ In short, no congregation, no preaching.²⁹ In other words, the preacher should interpret the text so that it becomes meaningful in the context of his or her listeners.³⁰ If he or she fails to do this, the sermon will be nothing but “sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1) to them.

Regarding the preacher’s work of interpreting the Bible in the context of his or her listeners, the following two points are to be emphasized. First, the preacher must know the situation of the listeners precisely and bring out the suitable meaning of the text for them. Achtemeier’s comment is penetrating:

The preacher should not guess at the condition of the people, any more than he or she should guess at the meaning of the text. Visiting in members’ homes and in their hospital rooms, listening to their conversations, paying attention to their comments during committee meetings, counseling, going to church suppers, taking

²⁵Vogels, 20.

²⁶Ellen G. White, “The Teacher of Righteousness,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 6 August 1895, 497.

²⁷Matt 13:14-15 and 15:8-9 are typical examples. On these occasions Jesus reinterpreted Isa 6:9-10 and 29:13.

²⁸Pease, 257.

²⁹This concept is strongly emphasized in Randolph’s definition of sermon: “A true sermon is an address to a particular people at a particular time in a particular place; it is not a general word to the universe.” Randolph, 44-45.

³⁰Elizabeth Achtemeier stresses the importance of the preacher’s task to comprehend the situation of his or her congregation, as follows: “The preacher must know not only the message of the text . . . but also the situation into which the text is spoken. We not only exegete the biblical passage; we also must exegete daily the condition of our congregation. Discerning that difference in the condition of our people is a full-time pastoral job. In other words, the preacher not only listens to a text for himself or herself. He or she also engages in . . . priestly listening—that is, listening to the Word on behalf of the congregation, listening to its specific message for that specific community, at that particular time and place.” Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Creative Preaching: Finding the Words* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 54-55.

part in every form of congregational activity—these are priceless exegetical opportunities, through which the alert preacher learns to know his or her people.³¹

Secondly, whenever the preacher interprets the Bible, he or she must be mindful of the situation of the individual listeners. This is crucial, because those who listen to the preacher are not the congregation as a whole but individual members. Moreover, the preacher needs to understand that “no two people sitting in a congregation share precisely the same social perception of reality, nor do they bring to the hearing of the text the same preunderstanding with which to hear it.”³² Randolph’s observation is suggestive:

Before he was to preach, a certain preacher would go into the empty sanctuary and sit in the pew of first this person and then that. As he sat in each person’s place, he would try to picture the meaning of his text to them. What has this text to say to this man who is old and hard of hearing? To this young girl who is trying to decide whether to go to college or to work at home? To this young man who has felt a call to the ministry but is seriously involved with a girl of another faith? To this man who is a successful executive but who yearns for new life? Such questions as these, questions asked from within the existential situation, can throw light on corners of scripture which remain hidden from other analytical methods.³³

The key for effective biblical interpretation in preaching is to know “the contemporary condition of God’s gathered people.”³⁴ The preacher must remember that his or her task as interpreter is not finished until he or she knows the condition and “hears the text . . . speak to that condition.”³⁵ It seems proper to conclude this section with Cox’s comment on preaching: “Preaching must be as old as the truth it proclaims and as modern as the day it is done. The message emerges from eternity, yet it is as fresh in its application as this morning’s newspaper.”³⁶

The Preacher’s Role in Biblical Interpretation

In preaching, there are three indispensable elements: the text, the listeners, and the preacher.³⁷ In the first section we focused on the text, and in the second section we focused on the listeners. Finally, this section deals with the preacher, giving special attention to his or her role in biblical hermeneutics.

³¹Ibid., 55-56.

³²Rohrbaugh, 108.

³³Randolph, 45-46.

³⁴Achtemeier, 55.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Cox, 29.

³⁷Vogels, 17.

The text and the listeners are in front of the preacher. He or she always stands between these two. The preacher's role as interpreter, in a word, is to connect these two elements. This work of connection can be designated in three different terms: bridging, mediation, and translation.

First of all, the preacher's role as interpreter is to bridge the gap between the text and the listeners. The necessity of the role is based on the fact that there is a great distance between the text and the listeners in time and in culture.

The world of the Bible was different from our world. The language sounds strange (even when translated). The lives of the people were unlike ours. Time, people, and events moved more slowly. People lived in a world without modern conveniences; there were no telephones, automobiles, or airplanes.³⁸

The primary function of a bridge is to give two separated communities opportunities to have intercourse with each other. The bridge allows people to exchange their goods, their ideas, and even their ways of life. In the same manner, the preacher, as a bridge, should provide the opportunities for communication and intercourse to the two communities which are entirely separated from each other: the community of the text and the community of the listeners. By way of this bridge the listeners can travel in the world of the text and share their ideas, lives, and cultures with the people of those days. In this way the ultimate purpose of hermeneutics is achieved.³⁹

Secondly, the preacher's role as interpreter is to mediate between the text and the listeners. The role of a mediator is not only to deliver a message from one party to the other but also "to bring reconciliation between two parties."⁴⁰ Christ was the "Mediator" (Heb 8:6) between God and humanity. His role as the Mediator was not merely to proclaim God's message to people but to reconcile God and humankind. Likewise, the preacher, as mediator, is to be engaged in the work of reconciliation between the text and the listeners. This role of the preacher is well expressed in the following statement,

The preacher's role is to act as mediator. He has to do more than simply present the text to his listeners, after all they can read the Bible themselves. Nor is he reading the text solely for his own personal enrichment—this would be to meditate upon the Bible. He is supposed to give a homily. He has to evoke the world of the

³⁸Bailey, 9. See also Vogels, 18.

³⁹The ultimate goal of hermeneutics in preaching is to help the listeners experience the Bible world and "discover meaning in the past that will affect, perhaps effect, existence in the present." Bailey, 9.

⁴⁰H. W. Hoehner, "Mediation, Mediator," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 701.

text in such a way that the listener is invited to enlarge the horizon of his own world.⁴¹

The most important and indispensable qualification of a mediator is that he or she must belong to both parties or worlds. This is why Christ, who is God, became a man. In like manner, the preacher as mediator “has to belong to the two worlds at the same time: the world of the text and the world of the listener.”⁴² In other words, the preacher should live in both worlds at the same time and experience and witness both.

Finally, the preacher’s role as interpreter is to translate the world of the text into the world of the listeners. A preacher’s job as translator is “much more than translating a Hebrew or a Greek word into a more or less corresponding word in English”⁴³ or in any other modern language. If that was all that was required in preaching, then preaching would be unnecessary, for even individual believers can understand the meaning of the biblical words with the help of lexicons and dictionaries. In relation to this question, Ernest Best states,

The ultimate translation that we make . . . as preachers . . . is not from one set of words in Scripture into another set of words in a sermon or a discussion group, but from one life into another life. Scripture is the crystallization of Christ within certain situations and cultures. Our sermons or our understandings are new crystallizations.⁴⁴

The work of translation in preaching must be from one life to another life and from one culture to another culture. Thus, the ultimate role of the preacher as translator is to translate, not the words of the text into a certain modern language, but the world of the text into the world of the listeners.

Summary

Preaching is the proclamation of the word of God. This proclamation does not mean the mere repetition of the messages of the Word. It must include the interpretation of the Word. For this reason, the preacher is required to be a good interpreter as well as a good speaker.

⁴¹Vogels, 18.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ernest Best, *From Text to Sermon: Responsible Use of the New Testament in Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 112-13. See also Stephen I. Wright, “An Experiment in Biblical Criticism: Aesthetic Encounter in Reading and Preaching Scripture,” in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 257-58.

As biblical interpreter, the preacher has to interpret the given text for preaching; first, in its original context, then in the context of the listeners. Understanding the original meaning of the text is the beginning stage of biblical interpretation. This is important because it is impossible for the preacher to interpret the text in the context of the listeners without a clear and correct understanding of its original meaning. For the proper understanding of "what the text meant," first of all, every word of the text must be carefully studied; then, the text is to be examined in its context in the Bible; and finally, it should be understood in its cultural setting.

Understanding the original meaning is not the end of the preacher's work as interpreter. He or she must reinterpret the text in the modern context, for preaching is not for people of ancient times but for the congregation in the twenty-first century. This work of contemporizing the meaning of the text is exemplified in the sermons of Christ.

In relation to the work of reinterpretation of the text in the context of the listeners, there are two important factors the preacher must keep in mind. One is that the preacher has to know the situation of the listeners precisely. He or she must not guess the situation but experience and witness it firsthand. The other is that those who listen to the preacher are not the congregation as a whole but individual listeners. Therefore, the preacher must understand the situation of each listener and make his or her interpretation meaningful to each.

The preacher's role as biblical interpreter, in general, is to link his or her listeners to the text and vice versa. This role of the preacher requires him or her to be a bridge, a mediator, and a translator. As a bridge, the preacher links the world of the text to the world of the listeners. Via this bridge the listeners travel into the world of the text, sharing the ideas, lives, and cultures of the people in that world. As a mediator, the preacher reconciles the text and the listeners. This role requires the preacher to belong to both worlds. It means that he or she must experience and witness both the situation of the text and that of the listeners. As a translator, the preacher translates not only the words of the text but also the life and culture of the times of the text into the contemporary setting. What is ultimately to be translated by the preacher is not the words of the text into a certain modern language but the world of the text into the world of the listeners.

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ESSENTIALS IN INTERPRETING ELLEN G. WHITE'S WRITINGS TO AN ASIAN AUDIENCE

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Introduction

An incident involving a young couple, which occurred during the early part of my ministry, highlights the issue we will discuss in this paper.

The husband was a metallurgical engineer and an associate professor of metallurgical engineering in one of the most prestigious state universities in Mindanao, the Philippines. The wife was a Certified Public Accountant. She ran a home-based accounting firm serving some of the big businesses in the city. She also taught at the university. This young couple was also active in the local church. They loved the Lord. They loved the church. He served as the youth fellowship president for the entire district which I pastored. She served as the trusted treasurer of a rich suburban Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church.

Both were very intelligent. They had varied interests. The young engineer in particular was not only interested in science, politics, and the like, but he was also interested in religious studies. He subscribed to some journals and magazines on theology. One could say that he was an open-minded person. He even read materials which attacked the teachings and practices of the SDA Church.

One day the engineer invited me to his home because he wanted me to listen to a visiting pastor who was to discuss issues regarding the state of the SDA Church worldwide. I was alarmed. I knew the visiting pastor. He was my supervising minister during my internship. He was a former mission/conference president. A short time before, he had left denominational employment. He had become one of the most effective "evangelists" for an offshoot movement. He eloquently presented his case, arguing that the Church and its leadership had

become corrupted beyond repair. The Church had become "Babylon." He then unloaded his bombshell. He quoted Ellen G. White almost verbatim, saying that the voice of the General Conference, even in session, was no longer to be considered as the voice of the Lord.¹

I was shocked, embarrassed, and angry inside. I knew this pastor. I knew that he loved Ellen White's writings. How could he say those words? But I also wondered, "If Ellen White really said those alleged statements, what did she really mean?"

The incident cited above could be repeated a thousand times elsewhere, in various forms. Many concerned, sincere, committed church members around the world present teachings, even sermons, the way this minister did to my young parishioners. One only has to count the websites established by these people to be amazed at how much energy and effort are spent to call this church to self-reformation. The form and cause may vary. The motives and methods may be suspect. But one thing is common: the majority of these so-called reformers use Ellen White's writings to "prove" their arguments. What is surprising is that even if the proponents rely heavily on the same source, they oftentimes come up with differing emphases or even conflicting conclusions. What could be the problem? Do Ellen White's writings contribute to the problem? The answer is No. The problem lies in how the people use, misuse, abuse, interpret, or misinterpret Ellen White's writings.

This paper discusses the essentials in interpreting Ellen White's writings. The discussion basically employs concepts and representative statements and cases from Ellen White's own writings to illustrate the basic principles. The discussion is presented with the common, cyberspace-age, Asian church member as the ultimate beneficiary of this academic exercise.

The Need for Principles of Interpretation

Can we not just take Ellen White's writings as they are, in plain English? Is it necessary to have rules of interpretation? Roger Coon, longtime Associate Secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, offers half a dozen reasons why basic principles are necessary in understanding and interpreting Ellen White's writings.² Coon's list includes the following:

1. Although the words may be intelligible, the meaning of the statement may still remain unclear. I once saw on a jeepney a sticker mounted over a picture of

¹A statement of Ellen White referring to the General Conference as "no longer the voice of God," is found in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases: From the Files of the Letters and Manuscripts Written by Ellen G. White* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981-93), 17:185. Ellen G. White was one of the founders of the SDA church.

²Roger W. Coon, "Hermeneutics: Interpreting a 19th Century Prophet in the Space Age," *Journal of Adventist Education*, Summer 1988, 17-19.

the body of a sensuous woman. The sticker read, in Tagalog: "*Kung ikaw ay nakasakay, ako ay hinihimatay*" (I faint when you are on board"). Considered in its immediate context, this one-liner might appear to be pornographic. But what the driver really meant to say was, "Welcome! I am delighted to have you on board my jeepney."

There are statements in Ellen White's writings which may have the possibility of double meanings; thus, the need for rules of interpretation.

2. Some make the mistaken assumption of the synecdoche—that a part always equals the whole. George R. Knight, in his book *Reading Ellen White*, quotes a poem by John Godfrey Saxe which illustrates the problem of adapting the synecdoche approach to interpreting Ellen White's writings.³ The well-known poem compares the efforts of six blind men to describe an elephant based on what they feel when they touch one of its parts. Though each correctly describes what he feels, he is wrong in the generalization he makes regarding the whole animal.

3. Words evolve in meaning. As a young man I felt uncomfortable every time I read the KJV of Matt 19:14. Every time I read the passage I asked myself, "Why did Jesus require children to *suffer* before they could come to Him?" It was only in college that I realized that "suffer," in seventeenth century English, meant "allow" or "permit."

Many English words have evolved in meaning. The phrase, "I am happy and gay," indicated a positive attitude several years ago. Not anymore. Announcing that you are "happy and gay" today could result in a lot of misunderstanding. Several English words used in the KJV have narrower meanings today. Take, for example, the word "conversation." Today it means oral discourse between two or more persons. When the KJV was written it meant one's whole way of life. Another example is the word "meat." Today it means flesh food; then, it meant food in general. The same is true with Ellen White's writings. She has employed words which have evolved in meaning; thus, the need for hermeneutical rules.

4. Cultural factors affect meaning. I once heard of a real incident which happened between an American missionary and a Filipino student at the Adventist University of the Philippines. The American missionary was alone in his car going to Manila. The student was waiting for a jeepney to take him to Manila. The missionary stopped when he saw the student and asked, "Can I give you a ride? I am going to Manila." Surprised, the student forgot his English and yelled back, "Oo," in the Visayan dialect, which means "Yes." Hearing the "Oo," the American sped off without the student. The student wondered why the missionary left without him even after he had indicated he wanted to go to Manila. He later realized that "Oo" sounds like "Uh-uh" and really means "No" to some Americans, not "Yes."

³George R. Knight, *Reading Ellen White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1997), 63-64.

5. Circumstances alter meaning. Coon illustrates this point by citing two narratives in the NT, those of the rich, young ruler and the jailer at Philippi.⁴ They both asked virtually the same question (see Mark 10:17 and Acts 16:30). The first asked Christ, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He was told to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and follow Jesus. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas what must he do to be saved, he was told to simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Why the two differing answers to the same question? The circumstances provide the clue. The rich, young ruler asked the question while coveting wealth, while the problem of the jailer was one of belief.

Ellen White died in 1915 when computers, even televisions, were still unknown. Her world and circumstances were definitely different from ours today. Thus, we should read her writings conscious of the difference in circumstances.

6. Lastly, a given act or a given word may be interpreted quite differently by two persons who approach identical data from different perspectives. The following incident took place at one of the Ellen G. White Research Centers, located in an equatorial country. A researcher, browsing Ellen White's diary, happened to read her narration that on a certain Friday evening they were still working late in the farm, up to about eight o'clock in the evening. The student was horrified. He concluded that Ellen White had violated the Sabbath. Eight o'clock is definitely nighttime in his part of the world. Did Ellen White break the Sabbath? Certainly not. A closer look reveals that during that time of the year, at that particular place, the sun sets at about 9:30 p.m. The researcher made a wrong conclusion based on his own equatorial perspective.

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that we need hermeneutical rules for interpreting Ellen G. White's writings. We will now discuss three essential principles for interpreting the wide array of Ellen White's writings.

Three Principles for Interpreting Ellen White's Writings

Understandably, the three essential principles mentioned below may not cover all those demanded in interpreting Ellen White's writings, but they are considered basic if one expects to rightly understand her written works.

1. Establish the authority of Ellen White's writings relative to that of the Bible.

Technically, this is not a hermeneutical principle. But anybody who intends to interpret Ellen White's writings correctly should wrestle with this matter first and foremost. Many faulty conclusions evolving from the reading of Ellen White's writings are caused by inadequate handling of this issue.

⁴See Coon, 18.

Shall we place Ellen White's writings and the Bible on the same level? Can we substantiate the formation of our Christian beliefs by quoting Ellen White? To some, it is even irreverent to ask these questions. By their practice, many have placed Ellen White's writings not only on the same level with the Bible, but even above it.

Two points should be included in discussing this essential. The first is the fact that Ellen White's ministry and writings are a manifestation of the gift of prophecy clearly taught in the Bible. In other words, her ministry and writings are of divine origin, similar to that of the biblical prophets. It may even be hinted that it is a continuation of the biblical ministry of the gift of prophecy.⁵ Further, it is necessary to establish that her ministry is in itself a fulfillment of Bible prophecy (Joel 2:28). As the biblical prophets were called by God for a specific purpose, so was Ellen White called to write and teach. It should be added, however, that although the writings of Ellen White are of divine origin, they cannot be added to the canon of sacred Scripture. Neither can her writings function as the foundation and final authority of faith and practice. Let us allow Ellen White to speak for herself:

In his Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of his will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." Tim. 3:16, 17, Revised Version.

Yet the fact that God has revealed his will to men through his Word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the Word to his servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word.

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.⁶

⁵See A. G. Daniels, *The Abiding Gift of Prophecy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1936). For a homiletical treatment of the same, see Reuel U. Almocera's sermon, "Surviving the Age of Gullibility," for the Spirit of Prophecy Day, 12 October, 2002, Ellen G. White Research Center, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines.

⁶Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan: The Conflict of the Ages in the Christian Dispensation* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1888), 4.

Again, she declares,

Our position and faith is in the Bible. And never do we want any soul to bring in the Testimonies ahead of the Bible.⁷

In 1894, she wrote,

In public labor do not make prominent, and quote that which Sister White has written, as authority to sustain your positions. To do this will not increase faith in the testimonies. Bring your evidences, clear and plain, from the Word of God. A “Thus saith the Lord” is the strongest testimony you can possibly present to the people. Let none be educated to look to Sister White, but to the mighty God, who gives instruction to Sister White.⁸

Seven years later she maintained the same position,

Lay Sister White to one side. Do not quote my works again as long as you live until you can obey the Bible. When you make the Bible your food, your meat and your drink, when you make its principles the elements of your character, you will know better how to receive counsel from God. I exalt the precious Word before you today. Do not repeat what I have said, saying, “Sister White said this,” and “Sister White said that.” Find out what the Lord God of Israel says, and then do what He commands.⁹

As in the days of Ellen White, many are doing exactly the reverse of what she said in the paragraphs quoted above. Thus, as early as 1851, her husband, James White, the editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, the official organ of the SDA movement, cautioned the members to make the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White’s writings clear. He wrote,

Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position. The Word should be in front, and the eye of the church should be placed upon it, as the rule to walk by, and the fountain of wisdom, from which to learn duty in “all good works.” But if a portion of the church err from the truths of the Bible, and become weak, and sickly, and the flock become scattered, so that

⁷Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946), 256. “The Testimonies” is a reference to her own writings.

⁸Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958, 1980), 3:29.

⁹*Ibid.*, 3:33.

it seems necessary for God to employ the gifts of the Spirit to correct, revive and heal the erring, we should let him work.¹⁰

It is clear that Ellen White and the leaders of the SDA movement during her day considered the Bible as the supreme authority, as well as the final test of faith and doctrine. Does this mean that her writings do not have authority? Does this mean that her inspiration is inferior to that of the Bible writers? Ellen White's writings may not be equally authoritative with that of the Bible, but they have authority due to the fact that the source of inspiration is the same. Further, her writings are authoritative because they derive their strength from the authoritative source itself, the Holy Scriptures. As long as her writings exalt the Scriptures and bring people back to them, remaining faithful to the teachings of the authoritative word of God, they should always be authoritative. This concept should lead us to the second point in our discussion of this essential: the purpose, role, and function of Ellen White's writings.

It could be said that Ellen White's writings serve a different purpose than that of the Bible. This is already implied in the statements quoted above. A closer look, however, at the purpose of Ellen White's writings reinforces their authority. She describes their purpose as follows:

I took the precious Bible and surrounded it with the several *Testimonies for the Church*, given for the people of God. Here, said I, the cases of nearly all are met. The sins they are to shun are pointed out. The counsel that they desire can be found here, given for other cases situated similarly to themselves. God has been pleased to give you line upon line and precept upon precept. But there are not many of you that really know what is contained in the *Testimonies*. You are not familiar with the Scriptures. If you had made God's word your study, with a desire to reach the Bible standard and attain to Christian perfection, you would not have needed the *Testimonies*. It is because you have neglected to acquaint yourselves with God's inspired Book that He has sought to reach you by simple, direct testimonies, calling your attention to the words of inspiration which you had neglected to obey, and urging you to fashion your lives in accordance with its pure and elevated teachings.

The written testimonies are not to give new light, but to impress vividly upon the heart the truths of inspiration already revealed . . . Additional truth is not brought out; but God has through the *Testimonies* simplified the great truths already given and in His own chosen way brought them before the people to awaken and impress the mind with them, that all may be left without excuse.¹¹

¹⁰James White, "The Gifts of the Gospel Church," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 April 1851, 70. See also idem, "Time to Commence the Sabbath," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 25 February 1868, 168.

¹¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:664-65.

Ellen White's writings exalt the Bible, bring people back to the Bible, help people understand the Bible, rebuke sin, and encourage obedience to the Bible.¹² Above all, her writings uplift Jesus as the only answer to humanity's problems. These are reasons enough to make her writings authoritative.

Therefore, we must firmly establish the authority of Ellen G. White's writings relative to that of the Bible. This is the first essential. The most concise document which illustrates the present understanding of SDAs on this issue is found in the statement released by the Biblical Research Institute in 1982, entitled, "The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings." I quote a portion of the document to end our discussion on the first essential principle.

The following affirmations and denials speak to the issues which have been raised about the inspiration and authority of the Ellen White writings and their relation to the Bible. These clarifications should be taken as a whole. They are an attempt to express the present understanding of Seventh-day Adventists. They are not to be construed as a substitute for, or a part of, the two doctrinal statements quoted above [Beliefs #1 and #17 of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs].

Affirmations

1. We believe that Scripture is the divinely revealed Word of God and is inspired by the Holy Spirit.
2. We believe that the canon of Scripture is composed only of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments.
3. We believe that Scripture is the foundation of faith and the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.
4. We believe that Scripture is the Word of God in human language.
5. We believe that Scripture teaches that the gift of prophecy will be manifest in the Christian church after New Testament times.
6. We believe that the ministry and writings of Ellen White were a manifestation of the gift of prophecy.
7. We believe that Ellen White was inspired by the Holy Spirit and that her writings, the product of that inspiration, are applicable and authoritative especially to Seventh-day Adventists.
8. We believe that the purposes of the Ellen White writings include guidance in understanding the teaching of Scripture and application of these teachings, with prophetic urgency, to the spiritual and moral life.

¹²Ellen G. White, *The Colporteur Evangelist: Instruction to Colporteurs* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1902), 37. See also idem, *Colporteur Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1953), 125; idem, *Ye Shall Receive Power* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1995), 232; idem, "The End of All Things Is at Hand," *Australian Union Conference Record*, 15 March 1905, 5; idem, "An Open Letter: From Mrs. E. G. White to All Who Love the Blessed Hope," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 20 January 1903, 15; idem, *Evangelism*, 257; idem, *Selected Messages*, 3:30.

9. We believe that the acceptance of the prophetic gift of Ellen White is important to the nurture and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
10. We believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants finds parallels in some of the writings of the Bible.

Denials

1. We do not believe that the quality or degree of inspiration in the writings of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture.
2. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are an addition to the canon of Sacred Scripture.
3. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White function as the foundation and final authority of Christian faith as does Scripture.
4. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White may be used as the basis of doctrine.
5. We do not believe that the study of the writings of Ellen White may be used to replace the study of Scripture.
6. We do not believe that Scripture can be understood only through the writings of Ellen White.
7. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White exhaust the meaning of Scripture.
8. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are essential for the proclamation of the truths of Scripture to society at large.
9. We do not believe that the writings of Ellen White are the product of mere Christian piety.
10. We do not believe that Ellen White's use of literary sources and assistants negates the inspiration of her writings.¹³

2. Gather all data or statements on the subject under investigation, considering each statement's literary and historical context, before drawing any conclusion.

It is very easy to arrive at wrong conclusions if judgments are based solely on isolated statements. Let us consider some examples to prove our point. First, let us take the classic example about eating eggs.

On 6 March 1869, Ellen White told the congregation of Battle Creek Tabernacle, "You place upon your tables butter, eggs, and meat, and your children partake of them. They are fed with the very things that will excite their animal passions and then you come to meeting and ask God to bless and save your children. How high do your prayers go?"¹⁴ In the same year, she wrote a letter to an SDA couple in which she outlined certain problems in their home involving two adolescent children, and she stated flatly: "Eggs should not be placed upon your

¹³Biblical Research Institute, "The Inspiration and Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings," *Adventist Review*, 23 December 1982, 9.

¹⁴White, *Testimonies*, 2:362.

table. They are an injury to your children.”¹⁵ Taking these statements at face value, one might readily conclude that Ellen White did not endorse eating eggs. But did she really advise SDAs in general to abstain from the use of eggs in their diet? If we follow the second principle suggested above, we will hesitate to make an outright conclusion. The following statement appears to be in contrast to the statements quoted above:

Get eggs of healthy fowls. Use these eggs cooked or raw. Drop them uncooked into the best unfermented wine you can find. This will supply that which is necessary to your system. Do not for a moment suppose that it will not be right to do this. . . . I say that milk and eggs should be included in your diet. . . . Eggs contain properties which are remedial agencies in counteracting poisons.¹⁶

Do not eat eggs. Eat raw eggs. These counsels appear to be in opposition to each other. Yet, both come from the same author. Did Ellen White get confused on the topic? Let us take another example.

One Sabbath morning Ellen White was sitting on the platform of the Battle Creek Tabernacle while a minister was about to lead the congregation in a pastoral prayer. As the minister appeared to remain standing for the prayer, Ellen White whispered hoarsely, “Get down on your knees.” In reporting this experience later, she added the comment, “This is the proper position always.”¹⁷ Many have taken this single passage as an injunction to always pray in a kneeling posture. If the second principle suggested above is followed, this practice is not always required. Let us consider other statements on posture in prayer. We find quotations such as the following:

Both in public and in private worship, it is our privilege to bow on our knees before the Lord when we offer our petitions to Him.¹⁸

There is no time or place in which it is inappropriate to offer up a petition to God. . . . In the crowds of the street, in the midst of a business engagement, we may send up a petition to God We should have the door of the heart open continually and our invitation going up that Jesus may come and abide as a heavenly guest in the soul.¹⁹

¹⁵Ibid., 2:400.

¹⁶Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976), 366-67.

¹⁷White, *Selected Messages*, 2:311.

¹⁸Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers: Instruction for All Who Are “Laborers Together with God”* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1948), 178.

¹⁹Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, n.d.), 99.

We must pray constantly, with a humble mind and a meek and lowly spirit. We need not wait for an opportunity to kneel before God. We can pray and talk with the Lord wherever we may be.²⁰

It is not always necessary to bow upon your knees in order to pray.²¹

We will be saved from making inappropriate conclusions if we simply gather all pertinent data regarding the topic under consideration before making final conclusions. But this principle must be pushed further. It is necessary to gather the data in their historical and literary context. This is especially true when there is a perceived superficial inconsistency or discrepancy that appears not to be in harmony with the larger body of data. Ellen White herself encouraged this. She said in 1875, "That which can be said of men under certain circumstances cannot be said of them under other circumstances."²² In 1904 she wrote something in the same tenor: "God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things."²³ And here is the classic quote from Ellen White regarding this provision: "Regarding the testimonies, nothing is ignored; nothing is cast aside; but time and place must be considered."²⁴

There are some things that are true in one context that may not be true in another. Some things that are true at one time may become untrue at another. Thus, there is a need to discover the context of every given counsel before making final conclusions. Let us go back to the issue regarding "the voice of the General Conference" as no longer "the voice of God," mentioned at the beginning of this discussion. Studying the issue in its context saved my budding ministry and the faith of my young parishioners.

In 1875 Ellen White wrote concerning the General Conference in session: "But when the judgment of the General Conference, which is the highest authority that God has upon the earth, is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be maintained, but be surrendered."²⁵ However, in the early 1890s, a new situation developed. In 1891, Ellen White wrote that the advisers to the General Conference president, Elder O. A. Olsen, were blinding his eyes to the truth in regard to the manner in which the work of the church should be properly conducted. "They decided they would have their own way and carry out the matter

²⁰White, *Selected Messages*, 3:266.

²¹Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 510.

²²White, *Testimonies*, 3:470.

²³White, *Selected Messages*, 3:217.

²⁴Ibid, 1:57.

²⁵White, *Testimonies*, 3:492.

as they chose.”²⁶ Thus the proper process for decision making at the General Conference was being thwarted by a few men of questionable motives.

This was the reason I was obliged to take the position that there was not the voice of God in the General Conference management and decisions. Methods and plans would be devised that God did not sanction, and yet Elder Olsen made it appear that the decisions of the General Conference were as the voice of God. Many of the positions taken, going forth as the voice of the General Conference, have been the voice of one, two, or three men who were misleading the Conference.²⁷

The following year, Ellen White explained very carefully the difference between the authority of the General Conference as a body of believers in general session and the authority of a few officers of the General Conference making decisions by themselves. In so doing, she explained the reasons for her statements regarding the General Conference as the voice of God:

At times, when a small group of men entrusted with the general management of the work have, in the name of the General Conference, sought to carry out unwise plans and to restrict God’s work, I have said that I could no longer regard the voice of the General Conference, represented by these few men, as the voice of God. But this is not saying that the decisions of a General Conference composed of an assembly of duly appointed, representative men from all parts of the field, should not be respected. God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority. The error that some are in danger of committing, is in giving to the mind and judgment of one man, or of a small group of men, the full measure of authority and influence that God has vested in His church, in the judgment and voice of the General Conference assembled to plan for the prosperity and advancement of His work.²⁸

In this context, it is not difficult to understand her later statements, frequently cited, in which she supposedly reversed her position and declared that she no longer regarded the voice of the General Conference as the voice of God.²⁹ In 1901, however, when the General Conference was reorganized to decentralize the leadership and make it more representative of the world field, Ellen White was quick to declare that “the Lord Himself interposed to set things in order,”³⁰ and to restore the authority of the General Conference based on the new order of things. Despite the fact that the reorganization of 1901 was to a large degree neutralized by the 1903 General Conference session, she continued to uphold the authority of

²⁶White, *Manuscript Releases*, 17:166.

²⁷Ibid., 167.

²⁸White, *Testimonies*, 9:260-61.

²⁹White, *Manuscript Releases*, 3:205 (1895); *ibid.*, 17:185 (1896); *ibid.*, 17:216 (1898).

³⁰Ibid., 3:205.

the church when assembled as a representative body of believers. Her last statement appeared in 1911: "God has invested His church with special authority and power which no one can be justified in disregarding and despising, for he who does this despises the voice of God."³¹

3. Work sensibly to determine the underlying principles and then apply the principles personally and consistently.

Ellen G. White wrote in 1907, "My writings will constantly speak, and their work will go forward as long as time shall last."³² How can this happen when many of her counsels have now become dated (see the following examples)? How can this happen when she did not directly address many problems we have today, such as violent television programs, pornography on the Internet, and even cloning?

Her writings are still relevant because they contain not only specific counsels but principles which are as applicable today as they were during her time. Ellen White expected that we should treat the inspired writings as relevant and authoritative even today. She wrote in 1909,

The great conflict is right at hand in which all will take sides. In it the whole Christian world will be involved. Daily, hourly, we must be actuated by the *principles* of the Word of God. Self must be sanctified by the principles of the righteousness, the mercy, and the love of God.

At every point of uncertainty, pray, and earnestly inquire, "Is this the way of the Lord?" With your Bibles before you, consult with God as to what He would have you do. *Holy principles* are revealed in the Word of God. The source of all true wisdom is found in the cross of Calvary.³³

Again,

The Bible is the guidebook that is to decide the many difficult problems that rise in minds that are selfishly inclined. It is a reflection of the wisdom of God, and not only furnishes *great and important principles*, but supplies practical lessons for the life and conduct of man toward his fellow man.³⁴

We find the same tenor when Ellen White spoke about her own writings:

³¹Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles in the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 164.

³²White, *Selected Messages*, 1:55.

³³Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks* (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990, 1994), 2:308. Emphasis mine.

³⁴Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1982), 187. Emphasis mine.

I was then directed to bring out *general principles*, in speaking and in writing, and at the same time specify the dangers, errors, and sins of some individuals, that all might be warned, reprov'd, and counseled. I saw that all should search their own hearts and lives closely to see if they had not made the same mistakes for which others were corrected and if the warnings given for others did not apply to their own cases. If so; they should feel that the counsel and reproofs were given especially for them and should make as practical an application of them as though they were especially addressed to themselves.³⁵

Notice that Ellen White said that her writings contain general principles and specific counsels. The specific counsels may not be applicable to us today, but the principles are timeless and universal in application. Let us now proceed to examine three examples illustrating that seemingly dated counsels, perceived to be impractical and even contradicting or confusing, are still relevant for us today.

Teaching Girls to Harness and Drive Horses

In 1903, Ellen White said that “if girls, in turn, could learn to harness and drive a horse, . . . they would be better fitted to meet the emergencies of life.”³⁶ Taking this counsel seriously, some Adventist reformers today decry the lack of teaching girls to harness horses in our schools. They advocate that we should follow the blueprint strictly. Naturally, this view is impractical today. True, this was a specific counsel in 1903. And it was practical, because that was a horse-and-buggy culture. Now, in our cyberspace society, it is no longer practical. But does this mean that we can now discard the counsel? Not at all, because the counsel contains principles which are applicable in our day. At a closer look, what Ellen White was advocating was practical education in our schools. If we should apply this counsel in principle in our days, we may expect Ellen White to say that girls who know how to drive and maintain cars “would be better fitted to meet the emergencies of life.” The counsel is still relevant because of its underlying principle.

Purchasing and Riding of Bicycles

In July 1894, Ellen White sent a letter to the denomination’s headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan, in which she condemned the purchase and riding of bicycles.³⁷ How should we apply such counsel today? Does it mean that SDAs should not own bicycles?

In answering this question we need to examine the historical context (as suggested in essential principle number 2). It is clear from the context that Ellen

³⁵White, *Testimonies*, 2:687. Emphasis mine.

³⁶Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 216–17.

³⁷White, *Testimonies*, 8:50-53.

White was not so much against buying and owning bicycles as she was against the spirit of idolatry, competition, and self-aggrandizement that had become evident in the bicycle craze at Battle Creek. Some of the specifics of the counsel no longer apply, but the principle on which the counsel rests remains applicable across time and space.

And what are the principles behind this particular case? George Knight, in his treatment of the subject, lists the following: (1) Christians are not to spend money on selfish gratification; (2) Christians are not to strive for mastery over one another by doing things that generate a spirit of strife and contention; (3) Christians should focus their primary values on the kingdom to come and on helping others during the present period of history; and (4) Satan will always have a scheme to derail Christians into the realm of selfish indulgence.³⁸

The counsel on the purchase and riding of bicycles is still relevant today. It has underlying principles which could be applicable to anyone in this generation.

Entrance Age of School Children

The issue of the age at which children should enter school is still debated in the church today. In 1872, Ellen White wrote, "Parents should be the only teachers of their children until they have reached eight or ten years of age."³⁹ The word "only" in the statement implies inflexibility. The statement does not have room for exceptions. Does this mean that we cannot in any case send our children to school before they reach at least eight years of age? Even during her lifetime, this issue had already surfaced. In fact, her own grandchildren were involved. So the church leaders arranged an interview with her to determine her definitive interpretation of the statement. Fortunately for us, most of the interview was recorded.⁴⁰

Throughout the document we see that Ellen White is flexible. She is also a realist and, above all, she puts emphasis on underlying principles rather than on the specifics of the counsel. At the beginning of the interview Ellen White readily stated the ideal. The ideal is that the home should be a church and a school for the children. Then she said,

Mothers should be able to instruct their little ones wisely during the earlier years of childhood. *If* every mother were capable of doing this, and would take time to teach her children the lessons they should learn in early life, then all children could be kept in the home school until they are eight, or nine, or ten years old."⁴¹

Unfortunately, today many mothers are not capable. Some are able, but because they need to work, they do not have time to teach their children, even

³⁸Knight, 102-3.

³⁹White, *Testimonies*, 3:137.

⁴⁰White, *Selected Messages*, 3:214-26.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 3:214. Emphasis mine. (Notice the word "If": it shows flexibility).

during this early age. Ellen White recognized this. That is why she said that we should handle this situation sensibly.⁴² In fact, it was in the context of this problem that she wrote with passion,

That is how it is, and my mind has been greatly stirred in regard to the idea, 'Why, Sister White has said so and so, and Sister White has said so and so; and therefore we are going right up to it.' God wants us all to have common sense, and He wants us to reason from common sense. Circumstances alter conditions. Circumstances change the relation of things."⁴³

Notice that she said to use common sense. This implies that we should not grab any counsel blindly without reasoning or common sense. Mindless uses of her counsels are harmful. This is illustrated by a story about missionaries at Solusi Mission, Rhodesia, in 1894. Taking Ellen White's counsel on avoiding drugs seriously and inflexibly, the faithful health reformers never took quinine during a major outbreak of malaria in 1898. Of the seven who arrived in Rhodesia in 1894, only three survived. Two recovered in the hospital. The one remaining missionary was the "unfaithful" one. He had used quinine, arguing that a missionary who uses harmful drugs is better than a dead missionary. He used common sense, though he violated the ideal.

In the same vein, Ellen White was questioned by a missionary in the South Pacific who refused to give his oldest son quinine because of her counsel on harmful drugs. "Would I have sinned," he asked her, "to give the boy quinine when I knew of no other way to check malaria and when the prospect was that he would die without it?" In reply she said, "No, we are expected to do the best we can."⁴⁴

The cases mentioned above show that we are expected to exert effort to understand the counsels sensibly. Frequently counsels represent an ideal situation, but practical realities should be considered. Reason and common sense are necessary in interpreting Ellen White's writings. A balance between faith and God-given reason is necessary. Extremes are harmful. Inspiration should always guide rational thinking.

If the above essential procedures are followed faithfully, Ellen White's writings will still speak to us today. They will still be relevant to Asians even in this cyberspace age. The writings could bring out underlying principles which will help us lead a balanced Christian life in the name of Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord of mankind.

⁴²Ibid., 3:215.

⁴³Ibid., 3:217.

⁴⁴Ibid., 2:281.

Conclusion

By creating a mnemonic device using the initials of the prophetess, we may grasp the essentials needed to interpret Ellen G. White's writings profitably, correctly, and accurately:

1. **E**stablish the authority of Ellen White's writings relative to that of the Bible.
2. **G**ather all data or statements on the subject under investigation, considering each statement's literary and historical context before drawing any final conclusion.
3. **W**ork sensibly to determine the underlying principles, then apply those principles personally and consistently.

When we faithfully, consistently, and honestly follow these essential principles, we will be on the way to better understanding the message of this messenger of God.

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**RESPONSE TO REUEL U. ALMOCERA'S PAPER
"ESSENTIALS IN INTERPRETING
ELLEN G. WHITE'S WRITINGS
TO AN ASIAN AUDIENCE"**

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Dr. Reuel Almocera targets the Adventist populace in his presentation on the essentials for interpreting Ellen G. White's writings to an Asian audience. I understand this audience to be referring to the ordinary, yet important, members of our local churches. I believe Almocera assumes that most of our local church members, particularly in Asia, have very limited access to Ellen White's writings. Because of this, the problem of misuse, abuse, and misinterpretation is a reality. This therefore creates a need for local church members to have the basic knowledge and essential tools for making the study of her writings relevant, dynamic, and beneficial. The paper is geared toward the goal of equipping local church members with the proper frame of reference for the interpretation of the message given to Ellen White.

Almocera's approach in his presentation lends itself more to anecdotal than to propositional realities. His paper enumerates the essential hermeneutical elements intertwined in the short accounts and incidents he cites as examples. This approach is more acceptable to the general reader, for it directly presents what he intends his audience to absorb and internalize. The experiences mentioned intensify the need to possess the essentials enumerated in the process of interpreting Ellen White's writings.

My response is categorized in three areas of concern: strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations.

Strengths

1. Although the paper is intended to cater to the needs of the general membership of the church, the writer maintains a level of professional and scholarly writing using proper documentation of references and ideas borrowed from other published works.

2. Introducing the subject by using a personal experience, the author, I believe, catches the interest and attention of the readers, for his experience is repeated in situations where offshoots and other renegade groups of the SDA church attack, accuse, and trouble local church members.

3. The examples cited from the writings of Ellen White are common ones pointed out by those who want to cause division and create confusion through the issues raised, which are hermeneutical in nature.

4. The emphasis on the need to have the essential principles for interpreting the writings of Ellen White as the central focus of the paper is a necessary emphasis to which church leaders, educators, and theologians must give priority.

5. In his introduction, the author delimits the coverage and contents of the presentation to bring to the consciousness of the readers the essentials for correctly interpreting Ellen White's writings.

6. In presenting his ideas, the writer refuses to use theological vocabulary, which could have served as an obstacle for the popular audience's understanding of the tissues he brings out.

7. Finally, the author employs a good memory device by using the initials of Ellen G. White for his readers to easily remember the three essentials pointed out in the paper.

Weaknesses

1. The essentials for interpreting the writings of Ellen White are borrowed concepts that were originally used by T. Housel Jemison. Roger W. Coon also used the concepts, as reflected in his subtitle, "Three Rules of Hermeneutics." This should have been acknowledged in the footnotes.

2. There is a need to give examples from the writings of Ellen White on the five reasons cited to reinforce and intensify the need for hermeneutical principles.

3. The example of working on a farm on Friday evening, cited under point 6 of needs for principles for interpreting Ellen White's writings, should have been documented for readers to further investigate.

4. It would have been easier for readers to appreciate the third essential had the paper defined "principle" and further included a list of criteria on how to discover a principle from the writings of Ellen White. Differentiating a principle from a guideline or policy would have been beneficial to the common reader.

5. Contextualizing the three essentials in interpreting Ellen White's writings in the Asian context should have been reflected in the paper. The personal training and immersion of the writer in the different Asian cultures should have helped to make the paper relevant to an Asian audience. The title of the paper promises to offer this to the readers.

Recommendations

There is a need to present a macro perspective on the importance of the essentials mentioned in the paper in relation to the theological landscape of the Seventh-day Adventist church. From 29 April to 8 May 2002 some forty-five church leaders gathered to consider the topic, "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church." The General Conference President, Jan Paulsen, gave the keynote address entitled, "The Theological Landscape." The present concern of Almocera's paper would impact two of the ten issues identified by the leadership that are facing the Adventist church today.

The first focus is on the question of identity. It is necessary to continue to create a profile of our Adventist identity in our pulpits, classrooms, and research, even in our printed materials and publications. A better understanding of the ministry of Ellen White and the authority of her writings serve as a pillar and a landmark in maintaining our unique identity as a prophetic movement. The three essentials in the paper would aid our church members in having a common ground of understanding the gift of prophecy exemplified in Ellen White's writings.

The second focus is on the issue of the remnant. Adventists believe that they are special. This remnant concept would always include the perception about the role of Ellen White in the Adventist church. This does not mean exclusivity as perceived by some. Adventist church members need to be constantly aware of the implications of any claim to be the remnant church with a special message for the world. The three essentials for interpreting Ellen White's writings are factors that would help to establish our members on the historic foundation of our faith and direct their focus on the benefits derived from the gift of prophecy given to the remnant church.

My deepest concern, however, is with regard to the role of the ordinary church member who silently inquires on the question of methodology. How can an ordinary church member (a) establish the authority of Ellen White's writings relative to that of the Bible; (b) gather all data on the subject under investigation, considering each statement's literary and historical context before drawing his conclusion; and (c) work sensibly to determine the underlying principles and apply them personally and consistently?

The three essentials call for action on the part of pastoral leadership. First, there is the need for a consistent, systematic, and thorough process of educating and teaching our members on the role of Ellen White in the Adventist Church. There is no substitute for providing our members with the biblical and theological

basis of our faith directly related to our affirmation about the gift of prophecy exemplified in the life and ministry of Ellen White.

Second, greater efforts, coupled with financial appropriations, should be the thrust of the leadership of the church in providing our church members access to the published writings of Ellen White. It is a fact that, generally, local church members only have access to the writings of Ellen White through the Conflict of the Ages Series, *Steps to Christ*, and selected quotations published in morning devotionals. A visit to the homes of our parishioners reveals this reality. It would be very difficult for our members, most pastors included, to personally study the issues raised by reformers and offshoot groups if they do not have full access to the published works of Ellen White.

Third, our members need to be trained in the area of discovering principles in the writings of Ellen White. The paper would have been more beneficial if this concern had been addressed. Those who oppose the leadership of the church are more equipped with published statements and materials, while our workers and members starve because of a lack of information. This need is preceded by a need to develop the habit of reading and studying the available writings.

Fourth, our people should distinguish the minor from the major issues in the writings of Ellen White. Most of the examples cited in the paper are minor ones or without bearing on our personal salvation and relationship with Jesus: eating eggs, the proper position in prayer, the voice of the General Conference, teaching girls to harness and drive horses, purchasing and riding bicycles, and the entrance age of school children. These are not the major themes of the writings of Ellen White. Let us avoid repeating the blunder of majoring in minors.

The Ellen G. White Estate has identified seven major themes in the writings of Ellen White, which are as follows:

1. The Love of God
2. The Great Controversy
3. Jesus, the Cross, and Salvation through Him
4. The Centrality of the Bible
5. The Second Coming
6. The Third Angel's Message and the Adventist Mission
7. Practical Christianity and the Development of Christian Character

These, I believe, should be the basic targets of the essentials pointed out in the paper. Church members will be edified and blessed if the issues related to these themes are thoroughly studied and questions related to them answered and clarified.

One last concern of this response is how the Asian mind will adapt to the three essentials. Here are three suggestions that may serve as a starting point:

1. Discover parallel situations and incidents in the Asian culture that are similar to those incidents in the writings of Ellen White.

2. Avoid creating an issue if the situation is not a concern for church members in Asian churches.

3. Equip church members with materials that can be used in their daily personal study by conducting regular seminars, Bible conferences, and symposia.

Finally, Almocera's ideas apply to us as leaders of the Adventist Church in our dual responsibilities—both pastoral and theological. Shepherding the flock means feeding and instructing them on the basic issues and contents of our faith. Theologically, we are guardians of the truth entrusted to the church by our Lord. This includes securing the correct and proper interpretation of the contents of the Adventist faith. To this end we are called upon by our Lord to be committed and competent in the management of God's people, particularly in Asia.

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Keynote devotional presented during the

AIIAS Theological Forum 2002: Hermeneutics: "How Readest Thou?"

August 14-17, 2002

VISION FOR AN ADVENTIST HERMENEUTIC

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Introduction

As Bible-believing Christians, we Seventh-day Adventists hold the Bible as the basis of our beliefs. "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps 119:105).¹ But many Christians no longer believe in the Bible.

For those who still believe in the Bible, the question remains, "How do we interpret it?" Different Bible interpretations make a whole world of difference.

Challenges in Hermeneutics

There are many different methods of interpreting the Bible: historical criticism, historical-biblical analysis, structuralism, rhetorical criticism, canonical criticism, and so forth. There are different ways of interpreting specific biblical texts: exegetical, theological, and homiletical. Then there is the tendency of depending on human reason and experience in the interpretation of the Bible, such as one finds in some academic disciplines. The influences of culture, history, and tradition also play a role. This was already shown in Paul's time, and he advised us to guard against it: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ" (Col 2:8).

Seventh-day Adventists face the additional challenge of preserving a proper relationship between the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. Are the Bible and Ellen White's writings on the same level of inspiration? Are they also on the

¹All Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

same level of authority? What does it exactly mean when we say that the Bible is “the greater light” and Ellen White’s writings are “the lesser light”?

Finally, there may be other challenges. For example, for some time, even after we had accepted the principles of *sola scriptura*, we did not accept the principle of *tota scriptura*. According to Ellen White,

Many professed ministers of the gospel do not accept the whole Bible as the inspired word. One wise man rejects one portion; another questions another part. They set up their judgment as superior to the word; and the Scripture which they do teach rests upon their own authority. Its divine authenticity is destroyed.²

Need for a Sound Adventist Hermeneutic

My vision for an Adventist hermeneutic is that it will achieve the following two goals. First of all it will achieve doctrinal and theological unity. Paul highlights this in 1 Cor 1:10:

I appeal to you brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thoughts

Ellen White comments,

The spirit in which you come to the investigation of the Scriptures will determine the character of the assistant at our side. Angels from the world of light will be with those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance. But if the Bible is opened with irreverence, with a feeling of self-sufficiency, if the heart is filled with prejudice, Satan is beside you, and he will set the plain statements of God’s word in a perverted light.³

Again she wrote,

We should not engage in the study of the Bible with the self-reliance with which so many enter the domains of science, but with a prayerful dependence upon God, and a sincere desire to learn his will. We must come with a humble and teachable spirit to obtain knowledge from the great I AM. Otherwise, evil angels will so blind our minds and harden our hearts that we shall not be impressed by the truth.⁴

²Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1994), 39.

³Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 108.

⁴Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1969), 4:417.

Secondly, my vision is that an Adventist hermeneutic will reach a deeper understanding of Bible truth than ever before. Paul admonishes, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). And again, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16).

In this regard, Ellen White's writings make great contributions to the deeper understanding of the Bible. This is achieved in three ways. Her writings direct our attention to the Bible; they aid in understanding the Bible; and they help in applying Bible principles to our lives.

Finally, my vision is that an Adventist hermeneutic will examine difficult questions in the spirit of humility and love. The Bible admonishes us to have an overall spirit of humility and love in dealing with each other. "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:2-3).

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Devotional presented during the

AIIAS Theological Forum 2002: Hermeneutics: "How Readest Thou?"

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ARE YOU LISTENING?

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Christians around the world respect the Bible. They may not always listen to it carefully, but they respect it.

One of my ministerial student families in Pakistan had the sad experience of losing their little son. While we were attending the funeral, sitting on grass mats on the ground near their home, I carefully placed my Bible next to me on the mat. As you might know, that was not a culturally correct way to handle the Bible. My colleague in the Religion department quietly informed me that I should put the Bible on my lap or the people would infer that I did not respect the Bible. The village folk in Pakistan would even kiss the Bible when they received one at an evangelistic meeting.

I am sure that most of us were taught while we were young not to put other things on the Bible. The first of our fundamental beliefs as Seventh-day Adventists is that the Bible is a very important and special book. It is not the product of human beings, but the very word of God. People wrote it, but only as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20). As Paul claims, the entire Bible was inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16).

Nevertheless, you will surely agree with me that, to be of any value, the Bible must be more than a carefully handled book that we treat with respect. If it really *is* the word of God, and it is, then we ought to be finding out what it has to say. When God speaks everybody should listen. Today I am going to take it for granted that we all believe that the Bible is God's word. After all, this is a fundamental belief of Adventists. What I want us to consider today is what we are going to do with this word from God.

We have God's word, but people have not always listened very well. We have God's word, but we let others tell us what it says. This *is* God's word, but we fail to really dig to find what it really says. Maybe we do not really want to understand it or apply it to ourselves. Wasn't it Mark Twain who said, "It's not the parts of

the Bible that I don't understand that bothers me; it's the parts I do understand"?

But if we do not really listen to what God has said in His word, how is it ever going to do its work of teaching, rebuking, correcting, and instructing us in righteousness? We need this so that we may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

God has spoken. Are you listening? Let us check out in our own experience whether we are listening to God's word or not. Let us consider three crucial questions.

1. How Much Time Are You Taking to Find Out What the Bible Says?

If we are not reading it, we are not listening very well. It does not take a doctoral degree to figure that one out, does it?

I was re-reading a story in the Bible this week that really amazes me. It is the one in 2 Kgs 22: the story of Josiah, an eight-year old king. According to v. 2, "He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left."¹ Obviously, this king wanted to do what God wanted him to do. That was a definite change from the way things had been done in Judah.

And how did he know what was God's will? He listened. Here are the main story lines from 2 Kgs 22:

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it. (v. 8)

When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us." (vv. 11-13)

[Huldah said to them,] "Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD. 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'" So they took her answer back to the king. (vv. 18-20)

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the NIV.

What amazes me most about this story is the fact that God's word had gone unread for so long. Josiah had a good heart, but he was king for eighteen years before the Scripture was found and read to him. In Deut 31:24-27 Moses had told Israel to keep a copy of the law of God beside the ark in the sanctuary. But I am sure that he never intended that it was to be hidden there and never read. In fact, in Deut 6:1-9 Moses told them that they must keep God's words in their heart and mind, and teach them to their children when they walked, when they sat, when they went in, and when they went out (vv. 1-9). Yet, for years and for king after king, no one bothered to find out what God had to say. What a tragedy!

2 Kgs 23:22 says that they had not even had Passover on a regular basis. Isn't that at least four hundred years? That ceremony was to remind them of God's saving power and grace, and they did not even seem to know they were to celebrate it. Amazing!

I am glad that Josiah, at least, was willing to read the Word and to really listen to it. Notice 2 Kgs 23:1-3:

Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.

If only Israel had done this more often, they would have been rebuked, corrected, and instructed in righteousness by God, the One who loved them, knew them intimately, and wanted the best for them. They would have been thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:17).

God wants to do the same for us. He has spoken to you, too. How much time are you spending with His word? Are you listening?

2. Are You Listening to God's Word Right out of His Book?

Or are you mainly listening to what other people tell you He said?

Now, I do not want you to quit attending these forum presentations. Nor should you stop reading your Sabbath School lesson, or books about the Bible and Bible subjects. They all have their place. But their only proper place is to guide us back to the actual word of God.

You cannot really listen to God if you are mainly listening to what others say He said. That didn't take a doctoral degree, either! But let me tell you something: those of us with theological degrees have had a lot of experience reading what

other people say God says; and it is absolutely amazing what some people can tell you that God supposedly says.

We must listen to God. When you listen to someone speaking for God then you must listen to God to see if He agrees. Go back to the Bible. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20 KJV). That is a good text for Adventists. I suggest we apply it to ourselves more often.

There is a story connected with the one about Josiah that is quite interesting in this regard. About three hundred years before Josiah was born, God told King Jeroboam that Josiah would come and restore true worship. (And some people claim that prophets cannot really tell the future.) In this story, a prophet was sent to tell Jeroboam that he was wrong in starting his own forms of worship in Israel. The prophet gave the prophecy about Josiah; he destroyed the false altar just by cursing it; and he healed Jeroboam's hand, which had shriveled up when he tried to save the altar. You remember the story.

This was a true prophet sent by God. Jeroboam invited him over for dinner but the prophet refused:

Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: "You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came." So he took another road and did not return by the way he had come to Bethel. (1 Kgs 13:8-10)

The prophet was not supposed to tarry there in Bethel. God did not want it to appear that He in any way accepted their false worship. So the prophet headed toward home only to encounter an old prophet. At least that was his claim. Maybe he was a prophet that had lost his way in this new religion of Jeroboam. The rest of the story is found in vv. 15-18:

The prophet said to him, "Come home with me and eat." The man of God said, "I cannot turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the word of the LORD: 'You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.'" The old prophet answered, "I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord: 'Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.'" (But he was lying to him.) So the man of God returned with him and ate and drank in his house.

Should God's man have listened to what someone said God said? At least, he should have checked it out with God. Because he did not, he lost his life.

Look at that whole interesting story sometime, especially if you like stories of prophet-eating lions. But we must move on. The point is well illustrated, though: we must go to God's word to check out any person's idea of what God's word says.

Do you think James White was one of God's men? Sure he was. But for much of his ministry he taught that Jesus was not God. Do you think Martin Luther was one of God's men? I would say so. But, up until just before he died, he taught that people went to heaven or hell when they die. How about A.T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner? Ellen White had to reprove them for some of their faulty theology. How about your favorite Adventist author or preacher or, dare I say, professor? They are human, too.

If we believe that the Bible is God's word to us, we will want to listen to what it says. We will be like the Bereans: "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

If we want to be "thoroughly furnished unto every good work," we need to find out what God says in His word. He has the words of life for you. Are you listening?

3. Are You Listening to God's Word Very Carefully?

If we believe that the Bible is God's word, we will want to really hear what God has to say, not to look for what we want to hear. What we feel God *should* say might not at all be what He *really* says.

May I be open with you? It bothers me how easy it is for us to come to Scripture with our own agenda. Some of our own scholars, some whom we admit are God's people, have become so convinced concerning historical, archaeological, or scientific data and theories that they are inclined to come to the Bible already knowing what the Bible ought to say. That, my friends, is not what Adventists believe, according to our Fundamental Beliefs. We cannot tell the Bible what to say. We must go to the Bible to find out what God says.

Now, you may think that you never go to the Scriptures with your minds made up from science or secular philosophy, as you perceive the "liberals" do. Let me remind you, however, that "conservatives" can just as easily go to the Scripture with their own preconceived ideas and philosophies, tightly holding to what they have been taught.

Jesus said to the Jewish leaders, "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). They studied, but they missed seeing Jesus, because they had other ideas of how it should be. We all know of non-Adventists who just cannot seem to see the truth of the Sabbath in the Bible or figure out that the dead are asleep until the resurrection. We understand that it is because of their past conceptions. It is hard for them to see what God is really saying. Let us not forget that we are humans too. We all have learned ideas that can influence how we hear God's word.

We can safely go to God's word only with the desire to hear what He says, even if it is different from what we expect. We can safely go to God's word only with our hearts open to the Holy Spirit, with a prayer on our lips asking for God's guidance. We cannot just presume that we already know what He will tell us. We cannot trust how we feel about it. As John said, "Dear friends, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God" (1 John 4:1).

What might God want to tell us that we are missing because we think we already know what He will say?

The Bible is God's word. He has spoken to you. He wants to show you that you are going in a wrong way; He wants to correct your errors; He wants to teach and instruct you concerning righteousness; He wants to fully equip you for every good work. He is speaking these things to you. *Are you listening?*

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Devotional presented during the

AIIAS Theological Forum 2002: Hermeneutics: "How Readest Thou?"

August 14-17, 2002

THE STRENGTH OF THE NAME

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Key Text: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; The righteous runneth into it, and is safe." (Prov 18:10 ASV)

I would like to assume that all of us, irrespective of our economic or social standing, our academic or professional positions, are conscious of the fact that life today is full of strain and stress.

The illustrative figures of the inspired writings all remind us of this predicament:

Life is described as a race for the running, and it is necessary that we lay aside all weights, forget the things we pass as soon as they are passed, and earnestly fix our eyes upon the goal (Heb 12:1-2).

Life is described as a voyage, and there is need for a mariner who has skill and constant watchfulness that he may escape the perils of rocks and sandbanks and shoals (Jonah).

Life is described as a battle in which the warrior must be fully panoplied and prepared to withstand all attacks in order that, having done all, he may stand successfully (Eph 6:10-18).

Life is described as a great problem, full of perplexities. Every day brings its new amazement and the pilgrim passes from one mystery to another as he passes this way (Eccl 1-2).

All these figures suggest the strain and stress of life.

We are also conscious that sooner or later, our strength is weakened. I tell you that these are stressful days—days in which we find that of ourselves, and in ourselves, we are unequal to navigating the vessel to prosecuting the battle to finality; to discovering the way along which we should walk, and to continuing therein in spite of difficulty. The day when we have to say, "We cannot," is a day of disaster. But it may also be a victory. That depends entirely on whether or not

we believe our text and have entered into the full meaning of its profound and comforting implications: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower. The righteous runneth into it, and is set on high."

The Forces Against Us

Spiritual Antagonisms

The forces that have been and still are against us, spiritual antagonisms are mystic, strange, and not perfectly understood. We have been conscious that, in the midst of life, there have come sudden assaults of evil. We do not believe that they come from within. They are not part of us. We deny absolutely that they come from God, but we are quite sure of the assault. Over and over we are made conscious, whatever our philosophy may be, that there are spiritual forces, insidious and subtle, which suggest evil; and we are appalled by the overwhelming strength of these spiritual antagonisms.

A study of the life of Solomon brings a big question to my mind as to how such a gifted man would become a victim of spiritual antagonism. I had a very highly respected professor in our Far East Theological Seminary who also became a victim of this assault and is now on the other side of the fence, assaulting this church.

We are perpetually antagonized by one who has been described as "seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8), one who finds his way, if Scripture be true, into the immediate presence of God, there to slander us and to ask permission to test us that he may sift us as wheat (Luke 22:31). The revelation of the antagonism of this evil spirit flames into supreme revelation in the book of Job, where we find one remarkable sentence quoting God as inquiring from Satan, "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" (Job 2:3).

The question reveals an enemy who is patiently watching: watching for the weakest link in the chain that there he may attempt to break it; watching for the least guarded door in the citadels of seminaries, of scholars, that there he may force an entrance.

But there are other forces against us. The age in which we live is full of things that hinder us in our attempt to live the godly life.

The Victory of Evil

There is the fact that there is the problem of the long continued victory of evil in the world, the fact that, time after time, when it seems as though morning were breaking, it suddenly darkens into midnight.

Universal Pain

Then there is the problem of universal pain, the problem that I am always in amazing difficulty as to how to answer. How do we answer a young father whose baby daughter has just died and he asks, "Why?" How do we account for the millions of suffering and starving people? What do we say about wars which disenfranchise and displace millions more? How do we explain the dilemma of the landless poor?

The Old Self

We also have to contend with the persistence of the old self. I often feel that the enemy I dread most is not the devil, nor the problems with which I am surrounded, but myself. The reappearance of the self is perpetual. As soon as one thinks that he or she has gained a victory over it or mastered it, that person discovers that it garbs itself in other vestments and appears anew.

Sorrows

Then there are the sorrows of life, the bereavement that comes to us, the empty chairs and beds in the home, the hope deferred that makes the heart sick, the disappointments that crash the spirit in personal friendships, the hour in which we say: "Yes, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Ps 41:9; cf. John 13:18).

These are some of the forces against us. Individually, they defeat us; united they destroy us. These are among the things that make life strenuous, create a sense of strain, and demand some place of quietness and peace.

The Place of Safety

Now what are we to do? In the midst of a book that is full of the revelations of contrary forces, a book that recognizes spiritual antagonisms, Prov 18:10 blazes brightly. It seems very much alone in this chapter. Yet there is a wonderful fitness that this verse is in the midst of words that seem to have no connection with it. Into the chaos it comes with its suggestion of order; into the darkness it comes with its flaming light; into a sob and a sigh it comes with its song. As the world commemorates the dreadful September 11 attack in America, this verse provides a new hope: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe."

I know you remember the use the Hebrew people made of that name, Jehovah. They never pronounced it as we do. The fact that they never pronounced it has created difficulty as to what the full name really was. On the pages of the Hebrew ancient writings, this particular name, which the proverb calls a strong tower,

stands revealed by four consonants (YHWH) with no vowels. And this indicates a reverent reticence in the pronunciation of a name so full of rich suggestiveness. And we all know from our study of the Hebrew Bible that the name YHWH was never linked with any qualifying or distinguishing adjectives. We never read, "the Jehovah" or "my Jehovah" or "the living Jehovah."

We find "the Lord" (Adonai) or "my God" (Elohim) or "the living God" (Elohim), but never "the," "my," or "the living" Jehovah. The Name always stands alone as the Tetragrammaton, four consonants from which the light seems to break. There was a singular reticence and reverence in the use of the Name, Jehovah, yet it was the very center of Hebrew religion; and the measure in which these people rose to any height of religious life was the measure in which they saw the light of that Name, and took refuge or shelter in its signification, and was made strong by everything it said to them.

I am not certain as to how you interpret the name Jehovah. To my very humble knowledge, Jehovah means, "the One who becomes to His people all they need." To me, it suggests the adaptation of Infinite Being to finite being in order to bring about the strengthening of the finite being with all the strength of the Infinite Being.

It is difficult to follow that line and to discover the meaning of the tetragrammaton, then let us turn to the Name as it is illustrated for us in the OT in five pictures.

The first is that of Abraham on the mountain with Isaac. On that mountain, Mt. Moriah, the heart of the loving father trembles as his hand, grasping the knife to sacrifice his one and only son, also trembles.

The second picture shows Moses on a mountain. In the valley are the hosts that he has led from Egyptian slavery, engaged in deadly combat with the Amalekites. Moses' hands are lifted up in prayer, and while they are so lifted, the Israelites prevail, but when he drops his hands, the enemy prevails.

The third picture focuses on Gideon, the peaceful farmer, suddenly called to national service, commanded to gather an army and to strike a blow that will break the power of Midian.

The fourth picture reveals a prophet in prison. Jeremiah, commissioned to execute a message of judgment, is unjustly imprisoned. There seems to be not one single gleam of hope. But from the prison house he sings a song of hope.

The final picture is of another prophet, an exile from his homeland, Ezekiel. Looking through the clouds and darkness which engulfs him, he records a rapturous vision of hope.

You all know these pictures: Abraham on Moriah; Moses on the mountain with uplifted hands; Gideon fighting the Midianites; Jeremiah in the midst of utter failure; and Ezekiel in exile by the river bank.

All these great men understood fully the meaning of our verse, "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; The righteous runneth into it and is safe."

In connection with these five pictures, I find the name Jehovah properly illustrated:

Abraham on Moriah declared, "Jehovah-jireh," "The LORD will provide" (Gen 22:14).

Moses on the mountain said, "Jehovah-nissi," "The LORD my Banner" (Exod 17:15).

Gideon, facing the conflict roared, "Jehovah-shalom," "The LORD send peace" (Judg 6:24).

Jeremiah, in the dungeon of his prison cell exulted, "Jehovah-Tsidkenu," "The LORD our Righteousness" (Jer 33:16).

Ezekiel, by the bank of the river exclaimed, "Jehovah-shammah!" "The LORD is there" (Ezek 48:35).

Conclusion

You may have your own interpretation of Prov 18:10. All I know is that in these pictures, I find the meaning of the text, which is full of value: "The name of Jehovah is a strong tower; The righteous runneth into it and is safe." I do not know what problems you have; I do not know what difficulties you are in. All I know is that Jehovah never changes. He is still the same Strong Tower for us to take refuge in, even as we continue to struggle with the strain and stress of life. Take Jesus' comforting words to heart, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV).

TESTING AND GROWING

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We need to remind ourselves just how unique each of us is. No two individuals are exactly alike. Even identical twins grow up into unique and different individuals. The factors that shape us are endless: temperament, thought processes, family upbringing, life experiences, geographical location, culture, to name just a few. We are equally as different when it comes to our perceptions, what we see and understand through our senses.

My wife and I can watch the same video and we see different things. "How come you laughed so much? It wasn't that funny." Same movie. Same screen. Yet, despite being exposed to the very same thing, we each interpret and respond to it differently. And these differences occur when we see and hear all the information together, at the same time. Most of the time, however, we do not see the whole picture. We know that there is a bigger picture. We want to know what it is and how we fit into it. Using the limited information available to us, over the course of our lives, we develop a unique framework of personal meanings by which we interpret the world and our place within it. It is like our road map. It helps us find our place in the world, and gets us to where we want to go. But if our map is out of date, it is no longer helpful. So, in our constantly changing world, the more our meanings are tested and updated, the more useful they become. They help us to interpret events around us and to deal with change in effective ways.

People make sense of life in many ways. For Christians, meaning is very much about a deep, intimate relationship with a personal God. This relationship with God is a dynamic and interactive journey involving every part of our being: mind, body, and soul. It also requires us to be actively involved in deeply loving relationships with other people. Jesus stressed the importance of relationship when He gave us the "new commandment," which He repeated sixteen times in the NT. For example, John 13:34 declares, "Let me give you a new command: Love one

another. In the same way that I loved you, you love one another."¹ The map must also involve a regular reading of scripture and an openness to the Spirit.

I would like to illustrate this ongoing nature of our faith journey and the need to continually test our new thoughts and experiences in light of the gospel by referring to the experience of Peter with Cornelius and the early church. According to Peter's spiritual road map, the good news of Jesus was for Jews only, and there were certain Gentile foods that he was forbidden to eat. However, one day he fell into a trance and saw a sheet being lowered full of these forbidden foods. Then he heard a voice telling him to eat. With this new information he had to make a choice. He could have ignored it and stuck with his existing meaning or understanding of the Jewish scriptures or he could reflect on this experience and test out his beliefs. He chose the second of these two alternatives. And a second incident occurred, namely, he was invited to eat with Gentiles. Again, he was faced with a choice that tested his belief system.

Peter believed that the Spirit was telling him to go. So he went, still uncertain as to what all this meant. It was only as he talked with Cornelius and learned how God had also been working in his life, that everything fell into place, and Peter was able to include Gentile Christians on his life map. And that is not all. Other Jewish Christians, who had gone with Peter, were also forced to develop their meanings as they saw the Spirit of God fall on these Gentile believers. Peter then took the corporate dimension seriously by presenting the issue to church leaders in Jerusalem. Although they initially criticized him for his actions, the believers there were also challenged to grow in their understanding as they discussed these late-breaking events.

Peter's experiences describe some important steps in the whole process of interpreting and reinterpreting Scripture.

1. As Christians we start with certain "givens," or scriptural principles that form the basis of our belief system. We then encounter a whole range of experiences that often challenge these beliefs and force us to reinterpret Scripture, or look at it in new ways. Jesus often encouraged His listeners to do this. In psychological terms, this reinterpretation is known as the "loosening" phase, where we question or come to see our traditionally held beliefs in new ways. It affects how we make sense of something.

2. The second phase occurs when we take action on the basis of our understanding. We have before us a range of possibilities but we choose one and act on it. In Peter's case, he not only ate with Cornelius but he took others with him, and finally, he shared the whole experience with the leaders in Jerusalem. This is called "tightening," or committing ourselves to a particular meaning which we then act on. This is typically a real step of faith, where we have to put ourselves on the line. But we must remember that "faith without deeds is dead"

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

(James 2:26). In this cycle of loosening and tightening, our view of God will mature and our faith will grow.

Actually we go through this creative process most days of our lives. At the very basic physical level, it occurs when we try new food. For example, imagine that I am a Jollibee fan and I arrive in a small town with no Jollibee, just one Korean restaurant. Since I have not tasted Korean food before, I look carefully at the menu and explore various possibilities. This is the loosening phase. I am not sure. I just imagine what each dish tastes like. I may look around and see what other people are eating, or I may ask the waiter a few questions. Based on this limited information I decide what might taste good and place my order. Now I have started on the tightening process. Once the meal arrives, I test out my selection. Using all the information available to me, such as my senses of smell, touch, sight, and taste, I decide if I have made a good choice. The proof is, literally, in the eating. If it is tasty, I may order the same meal another time. I may visit another Korean restaurant. If I do not like it, I may choose a different meal next time, or I may just stick to Jollibee. However, while deciding to eat at only Jollibee may be more predictable, it does not help to expand my understanding of food or help me to creatively adapt to circumstances where there is no Jollibee.

Dealing with food is one thing, but dealing with people is quite another. With people there are a lot more uncertainties, since we do not know what people are hiding inside. But understanding, making decisions, and acting in the physical and social realms is relatively easy compared to doing it in the spiritual realm. It is very challenging to build a relationship with God, whom we cannot physically see, hear, touch, taste, or smell.

The nature of the God of the Bible is unchanging and predictable, and the basic principles of our relationship with Him and with others are laid down in Scripture. But we have seen from the example of Cornelius that the ongoing nature of our relationship with God and how we understand the Scriptures are not so predictable. God was revealed to us very clearly through Jesus Christ, and all our spiritual insights must ultimately be tested by Jesus' life and teaching. But God is also revealed to us today through the Bible, prayer, dreams, people, situations, and nature, to name just a few. In other words, through almost everything! So relating to this God whom we cannot clearly see or hear is "a totally different ball game." It involves all our being. Far from being a simple passive process, deepening our understanding of God is a complex and active one. The apostle Paul talks about this in 1 Cor 12:1-2:

What I want to talk about now is the various ways God's Spirit gets worked into our lives. This is complex and often misunderstood, but I want you to be informed and knowledgeable. Remember how you were when you didn't know God, led from one phony god to another, never knowing what you were doing, just doing

it because everybody else did it? It's different in this life. God wants us to use our intelligence, to seek to understand as well as we can.²

To use our intelligence to discern what the Spirit is saying and seek to understand or make sense of things as well as we can is possibly one of the most creative and difficult processes in life. Yet this is exactly what is required if we are to experience full spirituality. And like Peter, we need to be part of a faith community where we can test out what we believe this Spirit is saying to us, always keeping the Scripture as our reference point.

There are two ways for our growth in faith to get stuck. One way is to get too loose or vague as we try to find meaning in God's word. We can get caught up in entertaining endless possibilities, asking question after question, without ever committing ourselves to action. It is sometimes easier to talk about prayer than to actually pray. We can remain students all our lives, not doing anything. Remember, "Faith without deeds is dead." Peter could have developed many D.Min. projects from his vision without ever acting.

The other way to get stuck is to be too tight or rigid, or too set in the way we relate to God. We can get stuck in a narrow doctrinal framework. This is a trap into which Peter would have fallen if he had continued maintaining the letter of the law, that is, if he had refused to enter a Gentile home and continued to say that Christianity was only for the Jews.

If we only experience God in one particular way, it is a little like continually choosing the same item from the menu. If we try anything else it throws us into a state of anxiety. So, to reduce the anxiety levels, we maintain a certain ritual and keep things just as they are, reciting the party line and not trying out any new thoughts or possibilities. We end up only wanting to relate with others who see things exactly the same way we do. This leads us to an "us" and "them" approach to faith. It is not by chance that Jesus asks us to relate to those different from ourselves. How do we keep a balance? How can we avoid the two extremes? How do we become spiritually mature? In order to develop and mature physically and socially we must be involved in the rough and tumble of the world, in which we take risks, can be hurt, and can make mistakes. In order to mature spiritually, we must be willing to risk a real relationship with God. We must listen to Him speaking to us through His word. We must test out new thoughts. We must stick close to a community of faith where we can test our thoughts and meanings. We must be doers of the word. We must play an active part in our relationships with people and with God. We must foster this creative process where we are *part* of the world but not *of* it. We must continually take risks and have the openness to see things differently and test out new possibilities. If we do this, our road map

²Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The New Testament in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994), 356.

will be constantly undergoing revision. Remember, "Faith without deeds is dead."
I challenge you to grow.

AIAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DISSERTATION AND THESIS ABSTRACTS

RICHARD RICE'S ANTICIPATORY THEORY OF DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

Researcher: **Laurent Bisogho Kasay, Ph.D., 2001**

Adviser: **Aecio Cairus, Ph.D.**

The purpose of this dissertation is to describe and evaluate Richard Rice's anticipatory theory of divine foreknowledge. It seeks to answer the question whether this theory is acceptable within the theological framework of the Seventh-day Adventist church to which he belongs. Rice, a proponent of free will theism, rejects the concept of absolute divine foreknowledge because it jeopardizes human freedom, deprives God of interaction with his creatures, and makes Him responsible for evil. To avoid these problems, Rice proposes that future events, especially those related to free human decisions and actions, must remain open or indefinite until they occur. Since they are indefinite, they do not exist and thus cannot be objects of divine foreknowledge. God can only anticipate perfectly from present factors.

The evaluation of Rice's theory compares Rice's open view of God with the view of God by other Seventh-day Adventist writers. It reveals that the main difference between them is Rice's belief in a "limited divine foreknowledge" to which his concept of divine perfection is tied. This limitation is rooted in philosophical presuppositions that confuse epistemological and ontological realms and in an inadequate biblical interpretation. Rice's anticipatory theory of divine foreknowledge relies on philosophy to the detriment of reliance upon scripture. It is highly speculative.

Since Rice's concept of perfect anticipation is speculative and not biblically based, the study concludes that it is unacceptable within the Adventist theological framework.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MINISTRIES TO DISTRESSED PEOPLES: NEHEMIAH TO POST-EXILIC JEWS AND NORTH CONGO MISSION TO PYGMIES

Researcher: **Kasereka Kavinywa**, D.Min., 2001

Adviser: **Kenneth D. Mulzac**, Ph.D.

From their ancestor's time, Pygmies have experienced hardship. Their life is characterized by physical, economical, socio-political, and spiritual crises. Since 1982, North Congo Mission (NCM) has attempted to minister to the Pygmies. Unfortunately, it appears that the NCM did not attain its desired goals.

The book of Nehemiah reports that the post-exilic Jewish community also experienced great distress and disgrace. In ministering to them, Nehemiah was effective. At the end of his ministry the precarious conditions of the people were replaced by honor and celebration.

This study describes and compares the contexts of the ministries to distressed people: by Nehemiah to the post-exilic Jews, and by the NCM to the Pygmies. Research affirms that spiritual and leadership qualities are important factors contributing to the success of ministry to distressed people.

A proposal for an approach to minister to Pygmies is suggested in the study. The statement of its philosophy affirms that the most effective way of helping the poor is to enable them to help themselves. By effecting their own change, Pygmies will be empowered to shift from dependency to self-reliance.

The strategy to effect empowerment requires that Pygmies express their felt needs, determine their own solutions, be encouraged to be financially self-sufficient, implement their own programs, and be trained for local leadership. Through the process of participation and community organization, leadership may be developed. This will foster self-reliance and wise management of local resources. This is true empowerment.

IMPRECATION IN PSALM 137:7-9: AN EXEGETICAL-THEOLOGICAL STUDY

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Adviser: **Aecio E. Cairus**, Ph.D.

Readers are often disturbed by the repulsiveness of Ps 137. The need to resolve the issue and ascertain the meaning of the imprecatory prayer in Ps 137 provides a rationale for its investigation.

Chapter 1 presents the introductory matters of the paper. The focus of chapter 2 is to study the background of imprecatory concepts in the OT. The aim is to understand the role of imprecatory passages and in what context they function. The

results of the analysis reveal consistent traits shared in common by imprecatory prayers.

Chapter 3 is the heart of the paper. It presents the exegetical-theological study of Ps 137:7-9. It shows that those features found to be common in the study of the background are also present in Ps 137. A study of the passage demonstrates that the prayer is in no way an account of brutality or vindictiveness. The psalmist's rejoicing over the doom of his enemies is impelled not by a desire for revenge but by a longing for God's righteous judgment and intervention.

The presence of several terminological allusions, linguistic, and covenantal motifs in Ps 137 provides the context for explaining it. These components emerge from God's righteous actions against the wicked. Thus, the divine perspective of judgment, justice, and righteousness is the focus of Ps 137. Vengeance against enemies is an integral part of God's promise to Israel along with the promised blessings. The prayers of the psalmist issued from a rightful claim on the holy and just Being who promises to avenge His people. The psalmist cannot be denounced for claiming this promise. Imprecation, then, is a call to God to take action and intervene. In God's action, His righteous judgment, justice, and faithfulness are upheld, His honor magnified, and wickedness checked.

Chapter four provides the summary and conclusion of the work.

THE LOCUS OF THE MILLENNIAL REIGN OF CHRIST AND THE SAINTS IN REV 20:1-10

Researcher: **Alfredo G. Agustin Jr., M.A., 2002**

Adviser: **Edwin E. Reynolds, Ph.D.**

Aside from the controversial issue on the temporal aspect of the millennium, the locus of the millennial reign of Christ and His saints in Rev 20:1-10 is an issue on which biblical scholars have not reached a consensus. The majority argues for an earthly locus of the millennial reign of Christ and His saints, but there is a minority that still adheres to a heavenly locus of this reign.

This research analyzes Rev 20:1-10 and the immediate and wider contexts in order to determine whether the millennial reign of Christ and His saints will take place on earth or in heaven. This also helps to answer the question about the temporal aspect of the millennium.

This study analyzes Rev 20, beginning with a structural analysis of chaps. 19-22, which shows a chronological progression between chaps. 19 and 20. This indicates that the millennium follows the Parousia.

A lexical-grammatical, literary and contextual analysis of Rev 20 is presented. Rev 20:1-10, especially the unit vv. 4-6, does not speak explicitly about the locus of the millennial reign of Christ and His saints. The analysis of the literary pattern

shows that 20:1-10 has an earth-heaven-earth pattern. This suggests that 20:4-6 is located in heaven. An analysis of the occurrences of *thronous* (thrones) in Revelation indicates a heavenly locus for this reign. A survey of the passages parallel to 20:4-6 shows a heavenly reign. This is supported by other NT passages.

This research surveys the broader context in the biblical and extrabiblical literature. It considers the verbal, thematic, and structural parallels of Rev 19-22 in some OT, NT, and extrabiblical passages. There are parallels to some OT passages in Rev 19-22, but there are also significant differences between them.

The conclusion of this study is that the locus of the millennial reign of Christ and His saints is in heaven after the Parousia.

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY FAITH AND THE LIFESTYLE BELIEFS OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: SUGGESTED INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE FOR THE NORTH PHILIPPINE UNION MISSION

Researcher: **Benny Barizo Perdon**, D.Min., 2002
Adviser: **Kenneth D. Mulzac**, Ph.D.

This project focuses on a guide of instruction for the lay leaders in the North Philippine Union Mission (NPUM) to rightly present the fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) in the context of righteousness by faith. This study shows that although church members adequately understand justification by grace through faith, the relationship between faith and works in receiving salvation is not clear to many of them. Church members perceive that the observance of doctrines (especially those that are behavioral in nature) constitutes the basis of salvation and assurance. Perhaps many understand sin mainly as wrong behavior.

Data were collected and analyzed concerning the perception of members with regard to righteousness by faith and the need for integration (through questionnaires answered by a representative group of SDAs in NPUM). A brief and descriptive study of the biblical principles of righteousness by faith is presented, as well as an instructional guide designed for teaching the fundamental doctrines of SDAs in the context of righteousness by faith.

By embracing this instructional guide, the NPUM hopefully will gain much in integrating righteousness by faith in presenting the fundamental beliefs as an effective approach to church growth. By placing Jesus Christ at the center of every doctrinal presentation, the presenter should experience increased power, more conversions, more active participation of lay members in evangelism, and greater spiritual enrichment.

A LAY TRAINING PROGRAM FOR PERSONAL EVANGELISM
CONDUCTED BY THE PERSONAL MINISTRY DEPARTMENT,
JAKARTA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS
JANUARY 1997–JUNE 1999: AN EVALUATION

Researcher: **Marolop Sagala, D.Min., 2002**

Adviser: **Reuel U. Almocera, D.P.S.**

The church will not grow or even survive without lay members actively involved in ministry and evangelism. Since most lay members are not professionally trained as ministers and evangelists, lay training programs are necessary in every church. However lay training programs should be fruitful and effective.

This study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the lay training program for personal evangelism conducted by the Personal Ministry Department of the Jakarta Conference (JC) of Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) during the period from January 1997 to June 1999. The significance of the study is based on the fact that it provides recommendations for future lay training programs in JC and a model for other conferences or missions in the West Indonesia Union Mission of SDAs which may undertake similar lay training programs.

The study begins with an analysis of selected records of Christ's and Paul's ministries found in the NT. This was done to determine basic principles by which a lay training program could be evaluated. This portion of the study reveals that the effectiveness of a training program should be judged based on biblical-theological principles of (1) recruitment procedures, (2) curriculum content, (3) process and methods of teaching, and (4) organizational structure.

The study also reports the result of a survey conducted among randomly selected participants of the aforementioned lay training program. The areas evaluated are the effectiveness of recruitment in motivating involvement in personal evangelism, curriculum content, training in teaching procedures, and structure.

The study concludes that the program was generally effective. The concluding chapter also presents suggestions or recommendations for those who plan to conduct lay training programs in Indonesia and elsewhere.

BOOK REVIEWS

Blomberg, Craig L. *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues & Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001. 346 pp.

Craig Blomberg is professor of NT at Denver Seminary and the author of several books, including *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (InterVarsity, 1987), which took a more general and topical approach than the present work. This work is both a commentary on John's Gospel as well as a detailed critique of its historicity.

Blomberg divides the work into two parts: first, an introduction to the Fourth Gospel and to the method he will use in assessing its historicity; second, the in-depth commentary which forms the basis for his critique. In the introduction, Blomberg creates a climate favorable to John's historical trustworthiness by arguing persuasively for John the son of Zebedee as the author. Writing in the late 80s or the 90s, this John wrote as an independent witness to the words and works of Jesus as one who was familiar with the Synoptic accounts and intentionally deviated from them, on the one hand, and interlocked with them, on the other. Blomberg argues that John had unique purposes because he was writing from a unique perspective, that of the second generation, who lived some distance from the original events. He then establishes his methodology for defending the historicity of the Gospel passage by passage in the commentary. His first principle for establishing historicity is what he calls "the burden of proof," namely, that "a historian who has been found trustworthy where he or she can be tested should be given the benefit of the doubt in cases where no tests are available" (63). His second principle is called "the criteria of authenticity." This involves either multiple attestation or singly attested material that coheres with passages authenticated by the double similarity and dissimilarity criterion (64), which recognizes that, although Jesus clearly taught and acted in distinctive ways, He should not be expected to have differed entirely from His Jewish background or to have been completely misunderstood by His followers.

In his commentary, Blomberg asks two questions of each passage studied: (1) What positive evidence via the criteria of authenticity is there that the actions or words of the characters in John's narratives are indeed historical? (2) Is there anything in the text that is implausible within the historical context to which it is

attributed? In the latter, the general historical trustworthiness of the Synoptics is assumed (66). Blomberg is very rigorous in asking these questions in each passage under study, right down to the small details. The result is a compelling argument for the historical reliability of John's Gospel, even if one chooses to differ with him in matters of exegesis or theology here and there.

This is truly a seminal work which deserves broad attention in the field of NT studies. Its rigor and depth should merit a serious response from critical scholarship, which has been notoriously skeptical of the historical reliability of this Gospel. Students and teachers of Johannine studies in particular cannot afford to be ignorant of this work and its challenging conclusions.

Those who read this work, however, need to be intelligent about the issues in Gospel criticism, for Blomberg does not explain things for neophytes. He assumes that the reader has knowledge of the critical issues and addresses them directly, without explanation. If the reader is unfamiliar with these issues, he or she may be left "wandering in the wilderness." In other words, this is a commentary for the well informed, not for the average layperson. It is also not a homiletical commentary by any means. It does not address the usual issues for which one normally selects a commentary, to exposit the meaning of the text and make application. Everything serves the primary purpose of the work, to establish the historical reliability of the Gospel against criticism that would place its reliability in doubt. For that purpose, I highly recommend this volume.

Edwin Reynolds

Broyles, Craig C., ed. *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. 272 pp.

Craig Broyles is associate professor of religious studies at Trinity Western University. This work is a compilation of nine essays on exegesis by leading scholars in the field. The first essay, by Broyles himself, "Interpreting the Old Testament: Principles and Steps" (13-62), briefly examines the nature of the Bible. He believes that the "means we use to interpret an object depend on its nature and function" (13). He then surveys eight steps that are vital in the exegetical process. He does exegesis of Isa 41:21-29 to illustrate each step.

David W. Baker deals with the "Language and Text of the Old Testament" (63-83). In clear and simple language he accomplishes his objective of exploring the implications of Hebrew and Aramaic as the languages God used to reveal Himself since language is the vehicle with which "people express their worldview" (65). Baker insists that it is necessary to determine exactly the meaning of the original text before translating it into modern languages. He then discusses principles for doing textual criticism (69-77), followed by several examples which illustrates these principles (77-83).

In "Reading the Old Testament as Literature" (85-123), V. Philips Long says, "The Old Testament *requires* a literary approach" (86). In light of this, the exegete must listen to the text well. This requires cooperation, that is, taking the Bible on its own terms (91-92), as well as linguistic competence (98-104) and literary competence (104-121). Using 1 Sam 9-11, Long demonstrates a basic plan for reading the OT as literature.

After succinctly weaving through decades of debate on issues such as Israelite origins, the rise of the monarchy, and how we should read the OT narratives, John Bimson ("Old Testament History and Sociology," 125-55) explores the interrelationship between history and exegesis (138-45) as well as that between sociology and exegesis (145-48). Using the book of Amos, he illustrates the use of several sociological approaches. In this way, he accomplishes his initial objective: "Exploring the historical and sociological background of an Old Testament text is a vital aspect of understanding its world" (125).

In the middle chapter of this seminal book, Craig Broyles contends that "a passage also belongs to generations of believing communities who are defined by shared traditions and sacred texts" (157). Hence, he has entitled this essay, "Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon" (157-75). A tradition—"any belief or custom passed on from generation to generation" (158)—may center around "notable persons, events, places, institutions, symbols, or rituals" (159). OT writers appealed to these traditions by way of quotations, allusions, and echoes. Using key passages and personalities, Broyles illustrates this intertextuality. His point is "that biblical writers intentionally use traditions known within their communities" (171) and these traditions were "joined into the same written corpus" (*ibid.*) such that passages may comment on each other. This makes "the Bible's unity all the more remarkable" (*ibid.*).

Using passages from each division of the Hebrew Bible, Elmer A. Martens ("The History of Religion, Biblical Theology, and Exegesis," 177-99), illustrates the usefulness of understanding the disciplines of the history of Israelite religion and OT theology. For him, these two "are integral to exegesis" (177). The first, using information from the Bible itself and archaeology, tells us about "Israel's religious life" (*ibid.*). The contribution of the second, as "a subset of biblical theology, is to present a theological framework for the Old Testament" (180).

Richard S. Hess, in "Ancient Near East Studies" (201-20), deals with the importance of grasping "the cultural context in which the Bible was written" (202) as a way for understanding the meaning of the text. Since many disciplines are involved, Hess discusses a common-sense approach that utilizes several principles which would enable one to handle this discipline. The most profitable part of this chapter is the section dealing with general resources (208-20) that will doubtless aid the exegete in his or her comprehension of this vast field.

Using a variety of texts from Genesis and Exodus, Paul Edward Hughes deals with "Compositional History: Source, Form, and Redaction Criticism" (221-44). Admittedly, no new ground is broken here in terms of methodology. What is

useful, however, is the excellent precis of the historical development of each of these criticisms (224-40). And one cannot help but be moved by the report of Julius Wellhausen's lament of not satisfying the needs of his students (244).

The final essay, written by Jonathan R. Wilson, deals with "Theology and the Old Testament" (245-64). He calls for the theologian to be not distant but intimate with the OT, since it is "indispensable to us today" (246). Realizing the enormity of the task, Wilson deals with practical and theoretical obstacles to blending the two realities, but remains with "the conviction that theology is for life" (254). Wilson presents a fascinating discussion when dealing with the classical "what it meant-what it means" tension in biblical scholarship. He identifies several problems with this approach (255-58) and proposes a replacement approach, called "this is that," derived from Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:16). He argues,

"This is that" calls biblical scholars to be so formed by the Bible—by the biblical world, we might say—that they see that world present today. This scheme calls theologians to see our present situation through the eyes of scripture so that they see God working today. This leads us back to my call for an imaginative-practical view of the nature of doctrine and the work of theology (258).

He closes by using Gen 15 and Amos 5-6 as illustrations of this approach.

The book culminates with a useful Scripture Index (265-68) and Subject Index (269-72).

I highly recommend this book for scholars, pastors, and seminary students, for several reasons:

1. It follows a logical flow and pattern of ideas. In fact, each exegetical step that was briefly discussed in the first essay is covered in detail in subsequent essays.

2. Emphasis is placed on "how to" and not on mere theoretical discussion. Each contributor clearly explicates how that particular exegetical step is to be done by using examples from the OT.

3. The book certainly follow the rigors of excellent research and scholarship with an abundance of footnotes and sources from which the eager student may mine a wealth of knowledge. Further, sometimes scholarship is dull, but the writing here is fresh and interesting, using alliteration and other poetic devices that captivate the attention of the reader.

4. It holds a high view of Scripture, debunking minimalism (153-55) and seeing the Bible as sacred, inspired, and authoritative (243). It urges one to use "interpretive caution" instead of arrogance (224) as one encounters not merely the language of the OT but the God of the OT.

Kenneth D. Mulzac

Doukhan, Jacques B. *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2002. 206 pp.

Jacques Doukhan is professor of Hebrew OT Exegesis and Jewish Studies at Andrews University. A seasoned author and editor, he is also the author of *Secrets of Daniel* (Review & Herald, 2000) and the editor of two journals, *Shabbat Shalom* and *L'Olivier*.

In *Secrets of Revelation*, Doukhan utilizes his Jewish heritage, his skill with the biblical languages, and his expertise in OT exegesis to uncover new significance from the book of Revelation. For those less familiar with the Jewish backgrounds, many of these insights have been previously unmined, but Doukhan brings them to the foreground and enlightens the text. He shows the extent to which the book of Revelation is indebted to OT language and imagery for the key to unlock its mysterious symbolic code. In particular, he demonstrates conclusively the ties between the OT sanctuary services and festivals and the structure of the book of Revelation.

Doukhan divides the book of Revelation into three parts: chaps. 1-11, chaps. 12-14, and chaps. 15-22, a structure seldom articulated, but which I believe is sound. The first part, he says, is historical, reaching to the judgment; the second focuses on judgment, especially in the time of the end; the third is eschatological, from judgment into eternity (141). I am gratified also that Doukhan associates the third part of the book with the Feast of Tabernacles, or *Sukkoth* (169-70, 189-92), though he makes no reference to my article (*Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38 (2000): 245-68) in which I put forward that thesis.

One can get an excellent insight into Doukhan's overview of the book by studying the Table of the Prophetic Events found on page 189. This chart lays out the prophecies of the book of Revelation on a time line identifying certain events from the book with the various prophecies as well as with the Jewish calendar of festivals to which he believes they are thematically related.

There is a unique feature which Doukhan incorporates in this commentary as he attempts to view Revelation through Hebrew eyes. That is to use Hebrew rather than Greek names for key characters in the book: John is called *Yohanan* and Jesus is always *Yeshua*. This may have an appeal to the Jewish audience for whom he is used to writing, but it may frustrate the average reader who is not used to these names. Nevertheless, Hebrew terms appear throughout the commentary, so this use adds to the intentional flavor of the work, if one can appreciate it.

Unfortunately, Doukhan, in his discussion of Armageddon, does not make any note of recent studies linking Harmageddon (the proper transliteration) with *har mo'ed* in Isa 14:13, a seemingly obvious parallel which brings a great deal of meaning to the passage. Whether or not he agrees with this interpretation, it would have been well to at least have taken careful note of it.

All told, this is one of the best commentaries available on the book of Revelation, a truly valuable asset to the library of any student of God's word. I highly recommend it for the remarkable biblical insights Doukhan is able to mine

from his extensive knowledge of the OT and of Hebrew culture and backgrounds. The fact that it is written by an OT scholar rather than an expert in the book of Revelation makes this all the more noteworthy. His expertise in the book of Daniel no doubt was a great asset in bringing additional light to the understanding of Revelation, but he has clearly penetrated the book itself quite deeply.

Edwin Reynolds

Lischer, Richard, ed. *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xviii + 478 pp.

Richard Lischer is James T. and Alice Mead Cleland Professor of Preaching at Duke Divinity School. A preacher, teacher, and scholar, he has also authored several books, including *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Baker, 1993) and the prize-winning *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Word That Moved America* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

The Christian church has a rich homiletical tradition, and this anthology brings together about fifty voices on preaching: from John Chrysostom and Augustine to Martin Luther and John Calvin; from Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley to Martin Luther King Jr. and Gardner C. Taylor.

The book is divided into seven sections. The first (1-53) is comprised of seven essays which address the question "What is preaching?" Alan of Lille (c. 1128-1202) answers, "Preaching is an open and public instruction in faith and behavior, whose purpose is the forming of men" (4). The notable preacher, Philipps Brooks (1835-93), is straightforward: "Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men" (16). Dietrich Bonhoffer (1906-45) sees it as a unique speech form which communicates the *Logos*, who then infuses Himself into the listeners. In a similar vein, Barbara Brown Taylor believes that it is a transforming act of faith.

Section 2, "The Preacher" (55-112), has eight essays. In the first of these, John Chrysostom (347-407) warns about the temptations of seeking popular esteem. George Herbert (1593-1633) holds that holiness, not eloquence, is the hallmark of the preacher. Both Jarena Lee (1783-ca.1850) and Phoebe Palmer (1807-74) speak eloquently and persuasively of gender-inclusiveness in the pulpit. Gardner C. Taylor, the "dean of black preachers," says that the preacher is rooted in the prophetic tradition. Hence, the "proclamation of the gospel [is] a matter of life and death" (109).

The essay by Martin Luther (1483-1546) is the first of seven in section three, "Proclaiming the Word" (113-66). He emphasized Christ-centered preaching. John Wesley (1703-91) believed that preaching must incorporate both the gospel and the law. Both Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) placed emphasis on the directness of preaching to rebuke both the sinner and sin. But I was most intrigued by Henry H. Mitchell's essay, "Preaching on Celebration" (150-55). He states, "Preaching *without* celebration is de facto denial of the good

news, in *any* culture" (150, emphasis his).

Section 4 concerns itself with "Biblical Interpretation" (167-274). The largest of all the sections in the book, it is comprised of eleven essays. Augustine (354-430) outlined rules for discerning between literal and figurative expressions, while John Cassian (ca. 360-ca. 430) demarcated a fourfold reading approach: allegory, anagogy, tropology, and practical knowledge. Martin Luther rejected this, replacing it with the plain, literal sense of Scripture. I was certainly moved by two essays above all in this section. "The Neglected Interpreters" (248-64) by Justo L. and Catherine G. Gonzalez emphasizes that "a purely individualistic reading of Scripture" (249) grossly misappropriates the diversity in the community of faith, especially those who are oppressed, disenfranchized, and marginalized. Richard B. Hays, in "A Hermeneutic of Trust" (265-74), says, "We must consider how to read and preach Scripture in a way that opens up its message and both models and fosters trust in God" (272).

Rhetoric is addressed in nine essays in section 5 (275-351). Two of these were quite stimulating. Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-92) portrayed illustrations as windows which let in light to illuminate a sermon and make it "pleasurable and interesting" (317). He outlined several principles that should govern the choice and use of illustrations. John Sittler (1904-87) underscored imagination as a dimension in preaching. For him, "Imagination is the process by which there is reenacted in the reader the salvatory immediacy of the word of God as this word is witnessed to by the speaker" (334).

Of the eight essays comprising section 6, "The Hearer" (353-416), three were prominent. Augustine's belief that "the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason" (364) is convincing. Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705), speaking about reformation, concluded that preaching should "penetrate to our heart" (374). Phillips Brooks counsels the preacher to know well his congregation in particular, and humanity, at large.

Finally, section 7 deals with "Preaching and the Church" (409-67) in seven essays. Speaking of the relationship between the preacher and the church, P. T. Forsyth (1848-1921) says, "He is to preach to the church from the gospel so that with the church he may preach the gospel to the world" (412). Karl Barth (1886-1968) sums up the task of the preacher as the explication of God's gift of grace. Speaking on the eschatological and communal character of preaching, Charles L. Campbell says that it is for "building up" the church. The most moving part of this section is the last sermon, preached by Archbishop Oscar Romero, who exhorted Salvadoran soldiers not to kill but to obey God's word. The next day he was murdered.

The book ends with an acknowledgment of sources (468-70) and an index (471-77).

I have two concerns about this book:

1. It is hard to perceive how theology was the main criterion for the selection of essays (xiii). Instead, as the sections indicate, the book seems to have been organized thematically.

2. It is surprising that one of the themes is not evangelism, especially in light of Jesus' commission (Matt 28:19-20), which provides the impetus for much of the preaching that goes on in the Christian church.

But the book is also commendable on two fronts:

1. The real contribution of this volume is that it does not teach how to preach; rather, it deals with issues that highlight preaching and encourage excellence in preaching. In this way, it is a refreshing and welcomed reader.

2. Lischer's brief introduction before each essay, largely biographical in nature, is quite useful in setting the historical tone for each essay.

Despite the fine print which made reading laborious and the fact that it may have been better if some essays were not included, I heartily recommend this book for all who have a passion for preaching.

Kenneth D. Mulzac

Mounce, William D. *Pastoral Epistles*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46. Nashville: Nelson, 2000. cxxxvi + 641 pp.

William D. Mounce is the preaching pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship Church in Spokane, Washington. Formerly, he was professor of New Testament at Conwell Theological Seminary and director of the Greek Language Program. He has written extensively on biblical Greek. His book *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar* (Zondervan, 1993) is a standard textbook.

This present commentary, the outcome of thirteen years of study, targets the pastor and all those involved in the life of the church. Mounce concentrates on exposition of the text, leaving the tangential issues to other sources. His translation is idiomatic, while word studies are limited only to those words found in the Pastoral Epistles (PE). He provides an excellent bibliography and notes for scholars and those interested in further studies.

The introduction (xli-cxxxvi) provides a thorough description of the usual isagogical questions. He defends Pauline authorship and reconstructs the PE within Paul's life history. The historical information in the PE should be fitted after Paul's first Roman imprisonment (lvi). The PE were written prior to the second century because more than 450 references to them appear in second century documents (lxv). The heresy addressed in the PE has Jewish, proto-Gnostic, Hellenistic, and other elements.

Mounce does not see the PE as postulating a church organization similar to the one expounded in Ignatius. For him the bishop/overseer and the elder hold the same office and are interchangeable. Further, the theology of Paul in other epistles is not much different from that of the PE. After all, none of the Pauline themes is given priority in all the letters of Paul (1c), not even a concept as large as "justification," which is found only in Romans (15 times) and Galatians (8 times). He sees no evidence of developed orthodoxy in the PE above what we find in other

Pauline epistles. The language of the PE is also Pauline. Mounce demonstrates that the unique words in the PE are related to the circumstances that Paul was facing at Ephesus, such as the theology of his opponents, the use of traditional material, personal influences, and the use of an amanuensis (c-cviii).

The exegesis is done in a well-organized manner. He analyzes each pericope by providing the historical background, structural analysis, contextual and lexicogrammatical studies, and a commentary on each verse. He spends much of his time on 1 Timothy (3-373), discussing the major issues in PE studies. Since many concepts in 1 Timothy and Titus are similar, Mounce has only 84 pages for the exegesis of Titus (compared with 371 for 1 Timothy and 140 for 2 Timothy). His use of ancient and modern secondary sources is commendable.

As expected, Mounce provides extensive discussion on those issues related to women in ministry in the PE. He divides the scholars into two groups according to how they interpret Paul's comments on women: the "complimentarians," who see Paul restricting women on issues of leadership in ministry; and the "egalitarians," who see no restrictions. As a complimentarian, Mounce claims that women cannot teach bishops, but can teach other men, women, and children (123). But this prohibition is only applicable in public places. He sees 1 Tim 2:13-15 as prohibiting women from doing two things: "teaching bishops" and "acting in authority." He considers "acting in authority" as the principle, and "teaching bishops" as the specific application (130). He pleads with the readers not to reject his commentary because of this stand on women in ministry.

While agreeing with him that 1 Tim 2:13-14 is a restriction to women in some aspects of ministry, I think that it is going beyond the evidence to see Paul giving a universal rule from this passage, on the following grounds:

1. The heresy context demands that the passage be seen as trying to solve a local problem, just as in 1 Corinthians.

2. The principle should be not "acting on authority" but submissiveness of women (wives) to men (husbands). Because of heresy, the Ephesian women had broken this principle.

3. "Teaching" and "acting in authority" are the local problems that resulted in the Ephesian women's breaking the principle. Therefore, the rule of Paul in this occasion, as in 1 Corinthians is one of the various ways of applying the principle. Different situations may demand different applications.

Although he has listed the Nag Hammadi Literature in his list of abbreviations, Mounce does not actually use these important modern resources in his research. I was especially disappointed that he did not point to the *Treatise on Resurrection* where he quoted other important documents that deal with resurrection (541). There is also very little attention to Gnosticism in general, though he admits that proto-Gnostic traits are present. Other issues, such as "myth" and "Jannes and Jambres," should have received greater attention. It would also have been valuable to have included a subject index among various indexes, and to have included Nag Hammadi literature in the index of literature.

This commentary, nonetheless, is a great resource not only for the pastor but for the trained scholar as well. It will remain a major resource for studies in the PE for years to come.

Julius Muchee

Naugle, David K. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. xxii + 384 pp.

David K. Naugle, professor of philosophy at Dallas Baptist University, has provided an excellent book covering an area that seems to have been overlooked, for while there are many books dealing with worldviews from different disciplines, there are not many books covering the history of the concept. *Worldview* grew out of a Ph.D. dissertation that Naugle did at the University of Texas, Arlington. The book is lucid and engaging and covers thoroughly the historical development of the concept of worldview in the western world.

Thinking of Christianity in terms of a worldview has been a refreshing development in recent times. It seems self-evident that Christianity presents a theistic interpretation of the universe, thereby shaping our concept of the reality about us. While the term “worldview” only recently came into existence, the concept is much older and may be traceable in the writings of Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the Reformers.

Naugle has divided his book into eleven chapters. The first chapter deals with a worldview shaped by Protestant Evangelicalism. In this chapter he focuses on the pioneering work of James Orr (1844-1913), Scottish theologian, apologist, minister, and theologian, who in a series of landmark lectures presented at United Presbyterian Theological College, Edinburgh, introduced the concept of a Christian worldview to the English-speaking world. Orr followed this up with some equally significant publications. Significant focus is also given in this first chapter to the work of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), founder of the Free University of Amsterdam. Kuyper was a Dutch theologian, journalist, politician, and educator who saw secular modernism and biblical faith as presenting a view of humanity and the universe locked in mortal combat. Secular modernism, he argued, was essentially undermining the foundations of the Christian faith. Other notable modern Christian voices are also reflected on in this chapter.

I wish that Naugle had devoted the first chapter to a treatment of worldview during the biblical era—the times of the OT and NT. Because this is the starting point for the shaping of a Bible-based worldview, a treatment dealing with the view of reality and the universe at the very inception of biblical religion would have laid a stronger foundation for tracing the historical development of the concept.

The second chapter deals with a worldview shaped by Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. The word “worldview” appears less frequently, with fewer books written on the topic in both Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The contribution

to worldview of Pope John Paul II is given major coverage in this chapter. He is described as a “worldviewish pope” (38), and his prolific pen has shaped Roman Catholic thinking about the world more significantly in modern times than any other pope. Eastern Orthodoxy, on the other hand, views life and the world from the perspective of sacrament and liturgy. There seems to be a reticence to discuss and embrace abstract concepts of worldview.

The next few chapters constitute a historical survey. Chapter 3 deals with the history of word studies on *Weltanschauung* (German for “worldview”), the concept in other European languages, and “worldview” in English literature. Chapters 4-6 deal with the history of the development of the concept as a philosophical idea in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and highlight the major contributors. Martin Heidegger’s contribution, for instance, is dealt with at some length. In Heidegger’s analysis, originally provided as a critique of Karl Jaspers’s new “existence philosophy,” he points out that Jaspers based his philosophical formulations about humanity on faulty assumptions. Heidegger argues that philosophy and worldview are the same thing, for philosophy articulates a worldview (134). Thus, in the development of modernism as a philosophical framework, humanity has placed itself at the epicenter of life, providing a radically different way of understanding reality (141).

Chapters 7 and 8 trace the development from the perspective of natural sciences and social sciences. Analyzing Michael Polanyi’s theory of tacit knowledge—a notion that sees epistemology as built on a set of presuppositions that lie just below the “waterline” of conscious awareness—and Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm that all scientific thought and academic endeavor is conditioned by scholarly traditions and an array of intangible historical and human factors (206-7). All these assumptions, Naugle argues, have reshaped the worldview and shifted the understanding of Scripture.

Chapter 9 deals with theological reflections on worldview. Issues of subjectivity and objectivity are dealt with. God provides objective truth in His self-revelation and in all His propositional revelation about the nature of humanity, truth; and the universe. At the same time the *imago Dei* encompasses all human faculties and makes us see reality from a subjective, God-oriented perspective (260-74). Sin and redemption play a part in our view of reality, as does spiritual warfare, which introduces other perspectives of reality.

In chapter 10 Naugle presents philosophical reflections on worldview. Here he posits worldview as a semiotic phenomenon—a network of narrative signs in which humanity sees, understands, and expresses itself and the reality around it. This chapter is more abstract than the preceding ones, and understandably so. Chapter 11 presents concluding reflections on worldview. Naugle summarizes the philosophical, theological and spiritual dangers of worldview, but balances that with affirmations of the benefits of worldview in the philosophical, theological, and spiritual realms.

As a reader from a socio-cultural background that is not Western, I have a sense of being somehow left out. Nothing in the book addresses the concept of

worldview in areas outside Europe and North America. I know that there are other significant worldviews that are shared by major blocks of the world. Much of what is referred to as the “two-thirds world” have a shared view of the world and reality that is somewhat different from the typically Western view. The presence of Christianity in these areas of the world has resulted in the shaping of a worldview that should have a place in the history of the development of the concept. So, in that sense, I feel that there is a missing chapter in Naugle’s book.

David K. Naugle has nevertheless made a very useful and needed contribution to the realm of the history of ideas. His work is readable and at the same time academically stimulating. It is well researched and presents the leading voices in worldview thinking. It makes a most worthwhile addition to the library of both the serious student and the established scholar. It is written from the perspective of a high view of Scripture, and is bound to support the church in its enterprise.

Joel Musvosvi

Sepulveda, Ciro. *Ellen White: The Troubles and Triumphs of an American Prophet*. Huntsville, AL: Oakwood College Press, 2002. 272 pp.

Ciro Sepulveda is the chairman of the History department at Oakwood College. This book is an effort to bring back to life one of the characters in the history of Christianity in the United States. In its twenty-seven chapters, Sepulveda addresses several questions, such as, Who was this American prophet? What was she saying that captured so much attention? and Why was she easily forgotten? Her message inspired thousands and alienated many. Her ideas continue to influence people in all corners of the planet and estrange some, especially those who consider her as less than authentic. Sepulveda observes that, while Ellen White remains a powerful force behind one of the fastest growing religious movements of the twentieth-century, she continues to be mysterious and unknown to the public at large.

Sepulveda not only looks at the contributions of Ellen White and the challenges she encountered, but he places her in the social and historical context that influenced and shaped her life and legacy. He argues that “the traditions and values of New England set the backdrop for the life and times of Ellen White” (15). She was part of nineteenth-century society, which had negative attitudes towards women, attitudes shaped, in part, through the thinking of powerful personalities.

The author not only provides an interesting and insightful story but also reveals vignettes into the religious experiences of the common men and women who shaped the history of the United States. He achieves this through a multifaceted approach: relating captivating stories from Ellen White’s life; forthrightly chronicling the ups and downs of the organizations that consumed much of her time and energy; and outlining the historical nuances of the society in which she lived. One outstanding quality of the book is how it weaves the life of Ellen White

into the larger life and history of the United States. The end-product is an artistic fabric that provides the reader with an enlightened perspective into the life of an educator, religious leader, messenger of God, and change agent that positively impacted her world and even our world today.

Perhaps one of the most useful parts of the book is the bibliography (256-64), especially in terms of its categorizations: (1) works that deal with the life of Ellen White; (2) books on the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its development during Ellen White's lifetime; (3) sources that deal with religious life in the United States in the nineteenth century; (4) books on the social and economic history of the United States; (5) secondary sources on the life and times of workers, mostly blue-collar workers, in the United States; (6) sources on the life of African-Americans in the United States in the nineteenth century; and (7) Ellen White's books and posthumous compilations.

Despite its contributions to studies on Ellen White, I have two observations:

1. Sepulveda seems to relate the now notorious attack on the Twin Towers in New York City on 11 September 2001 as having likely been predicted by Ellen White (7-8). Delbert Baker, President of Oakwood College, also seems to agree with this in his preface to the book. Such a view implies that Al Qaeda served as God's servants to punish the New York Port Authority, who owned the Twin Towers.

2. The author should have placed greater emphasis on special themes in Ellen White's writings. As a religious writer, the motif of salvation pervaded her works. It should have been given due focus. Failure to include this is no mere oversight.

In spite of the many typographical errors, this is an excellent book, which I recommend for students and teachers who wish to understand more of the story of a woman who came from obscurity to become an important figure in a Protestant church which, as a result of her prophetic guidance, has become one of the fastest growing churches in the world. The reader will be inspired and motivated by the way God operated in the life and work of Ellen White.

Caesar Wamalika

Stefanovic, Ranko. *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002. xvi + 654 pp.

Ranko Stefanovic is an alumnus of AIAS and presently serves as associate professor of NT at Andrews University's College of Arts and Sciences. Other than his published doctoral dissertation (Andrews University Press, 1996), this is his first major work, but one would not know it by the quality of the work. Stefanovic has provided the first comprehensive scholarly commentary on the book of Revelation published by a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) scholar. There have been a variety of commentaries before his published by SDAs, but their foci were

different. Most have been largely apologetic, designed to put forward a particular point of view, either what they believed to be representative of the SDA view or their own view. A few have been scholarly but not thorough commentaries, focusing on particular issues. In this work, however, we have a commentary which covers all the issues one would expect of a thorough scholarly commentary. It is suitable for a college or seminary textbook on Revelation.

In his preliminary remarks, Stefanovic offers both an introduction to the book of Revelation and a discussion of the hermeneutic, objectives, and methodology he will follow in the commentary. Specifically, he follows an eclectic method of interpretation which allows the text to determine at each point what kind of interpretation is called for (12). He is interested not only in exegesis of what the text *meant* but also in interpreting what it *means* for today (13-14). He sets forth some guiding principles for interpreting Revelation according to its genre as apocalyptic prophecy (14-22) and for meeting his objectives in the commentary (22-25). Finally, he discusses in great detail the role of the literary structure of the book in its interpretation, which is essential to his methodology (25-45). Unfortunately, his follow-through on this aspect is weak, particularly with respect to the annual cycle of festivals. One finds relatively little mention of it in the commentary section, where it could play a much more significant role.

In each section of the commentary itself, he follows a basic threefold pattern: first, he provides a translation of the passage under study; this is followed by notes on specific words and phrases; finally he offers an exposition of the passage. Before major sections he also adds some introductory remarks. Frequently he adds a "Retrospect" at the end of his exposition to offer some reflective thinking about the passage and its theology in the light of history. Tables and charts are provided as needed to supplement the commentary. Endnotes are included at the end of each major section, interacting with the relevant literature. A bibliography is provided at the end of the book, along with three indexes: modern authors, Scripture references, and extrabiblical references. The index to Scripture references includes references to Revelation itself, which to some extent obviates the need for a topical index.

Stefanovic structures the book of Revelation largely around the seven-sealed scroll of chap. 5, which was the focus of his doctoral dissertation. Apart from the prologue and epilogue, after the messages to the seven churches in chaps. 1-3, he divides the book into two parts: "The Opening of the Sealed Scroll (4-11:19)" and "The Contents of the Seven-Sealed Scroll (12-22:5)." Other than this special focus on the sealed scroll, his structure is relatively unremarkable.

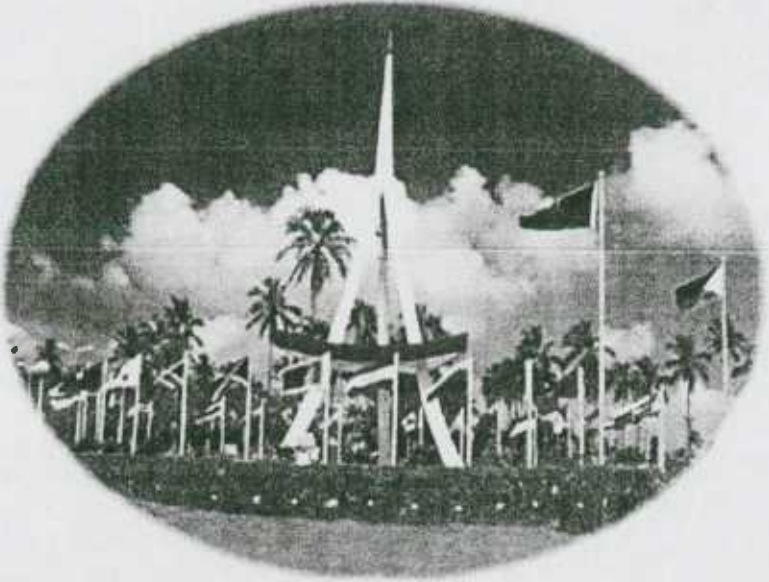
Stefanovic's interpretation is soundly text-based and takes into account the latest scholarly research in Revelation studies. At the same time, he does not generally depart significantly from the broad parameters of traditional SDA interpretation, though he does find a broader interpretation of the Beast from the sea in chap. 13 than that usually made, and he sees the Beast of chap. 17 as the resurrected Beast of chap. 13, namely, ecclesiastical Christianity (507, 512).

Despite some minor questions of interpretation, this commentary is a work of

major importance for scholarship in general and for SDAs in particular. It represents careful scholarship at its best and deserves a place in the library of anyone with a serious interest in Revelation. I recommend it as a textbook for seminary courses in the book of Revelation.

Edwin Reynolds

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