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The Quest for the Biblical Ontological Ground of Christian Theology

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At the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Colorado Springs, a representative group of evangelical theologians expressed their opposition to open view theology by voting against it.¹ Does this vote mean that the open view of God is not a viable option for evangelical theologians? Is the conversation initiated by open view theologians over?

On one hand, it seems that open view theologians have been defeated. Obviously, they have failed to convince a sizable number of fellow evangelical theologians because of two important facts. First, in spite of open view efforts to replace foreknowledge with present knowledge and convince us that Scripture does not teach divine foreknowledge, the fact remains that Scripture unequivocally affirms that God knows the future free actions of humans.² And, since in evangelical theology no theological explanation should ignore or twist biblical data, open view theologians should not be surprised that their explanation cannot be accepted by a large sector of evangelical theologians. Second, in spite of the

¹ Timothy C. Morgan, "Theologians Decry 'Narrow' Boundaries: 110 Evangelical Leaders Sign Joint Statement," *Christianity Today.com*, June 4, 2002; David Neff, "Scholars Vote: God Knows Future," *Christianity Today.com*, January 2, 2002; and, "Foreknowledge Debate Clouded by 'Political Agenda': Evangelical Theologians Differ Over Excluding Open Theists," *Christianity Today.com*, November 19, 2001.

² There are many ways to understand divine foreknowledge (John E. Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* [Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1998], 194-200). Yet, since open view theologians reinterpret divine foreknowledge in a way that denies God knows in advance the content of free human decisions, they are forced to deny clear statements of Scripture. For instance, Gregory Boyd argues that in Rom 8:29, Paul does not mean that God "foreknew" human beings before they existed and the contents of their free decisions, but that God "foreloved" the Church as future corporate entity. "There is no reason to think [explains Boyd] that Paul has information in mind when he speaks of God's foreknowledge, however. In customary Semitic fashion, Paul seems to be using the word know to mean 'intimately love'" (*The God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 48).

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efforts of open view theologians to assure us that their proposal entails only a minor adjustment of the larger traditional framework of evangelical theology, the fact remains that their proposal strikes at the systematic foundation on which evangelical theology has been built and has serious repercussions not only for the doctrines of divine foreknowledge and providence, but also for a broad range of related theological issues.³ On the other hand, the open view of God has great appeal to many evangelical believers because it fits well with their reading of Scripture's revelation of God's working in history and their own spiritual experiences.

Like many evangelicals, I remain unsatisfied with both options, as they are incapable of properly accounting for all data of Scripture. Consequently, we need to move beyond both the classical evangelical and the open view ways as theological paradigms. Because our understanding of divine foreknowledge and providence ultimately rests on the way in which we understand God's being and action,⁴ I have argued that the root cause of the controversy between classical

³ Clark Pinnock recognizes that he "did not for a moment imagine in 1994 that our book on the 'openness of God' would create such interest and provoke such controversy, particularly in the evangelical community" (*Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], ix). A few years later controversy had taught Pinnock that the open view was "challenging assumptions" (ibid.) with broad-reaching paradigmatic consequences. At the end of *Most Moved Mover* he correctly recognizes the far-reaching implications of the open view by affirming that "it is possible that theology has confused the God of biblical revelation with the god of the philosophers and has created an unsound synthesis. It is possible that conventional theism owes a debt to philosophical ideas stemming from the pagan heritage and that reform in the doctrine of God is called for. It is possible that God's nature is deserving of sounder theological reflection, worthy of greater intelligibility, and capable of better existential fit. The open view of God may be a timely reform." However, the open view of God has a long way to go in studying the doctrine of God before the question of divine foreknowledge and providence can be adequately addressed. The ontological question needs to be addressed ontologically from Scripture and not left dangling from a summary explanation of divine foreknowledge that better fits the biblical information about divine providence but does not properly account for the biblical facts on divine foreknowledge. To play one side of the question against the other is not a satisfactory theological methodology for evangelical believers attempting to understand the Bible as a whole.

⁴ In the last decades of the twentieth century, a small group of evangelical theologians have advanced a fresh understanding of the manner in which God relates to human experience. Questions about the reality of intercessory prayer, freedom, personal responsibility, and evil prompted evangelical theologians to "open" God to human history. For many Christians the traditional understanding of God had become increasingly unable to account for biblical data dealing with concrete descriptions of divine activities and daily human experiences. To accommodate them, open view theologians "upgraded" the traditional notion of God from "closed" to human experience to "open" to it. To open the traditional notion of God to human history, open view theologians replaced divine foreknowledge of free human decisions (FK) with present knowledge (PK). This replacement in turn assumed a temporal notion of God and thus a shift from a timeless to a temporal notion of God's being and actions. As it stands today, however, arguments in favor of and against open view theology revolve around foreknowledge and its consequences for evangelical theology. Increased dialogue helped to clarify the points in conflict, but seems to have reached a plateau, bringing the par-

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and open view theologies can be traced back to the philosophical concepts involved in the interpretation of God's nature.⁵ Traditional evangelical thinking, via Calvin, Luther, and Augustine, has been built on a Neoplatonic philosophical ground.⁶ Open view theology, despite the claims of its proponents, stands on a process philosophy philosophical ground.

This paper explores the possibility of developing a different theological project by grounding evangelical theology on a biblically conceived approach to the philosophical notions necessarily involved in its construction. Is such an attempt possible? What does it take to build a new theological paradigm? What would such a project entail?

We will consider how philosophy came to be used in Christian theology and the role that it played in its construction. Next we will explore the question of being from which ontology is built, the ontology on which evangelical theology is built, and the ontological "divide" generated by postmodern philosophy. After this background we will explore the possibility of building the ontological foundations of Christian theology from Scripture.

Evangelicals and Philosophy

It is difficult to characterize with precision the relation that evangelicals have with philosophy because by and large they have little interest in it. Since their theology is biblical, most evangelicals think their thought and teachings have no relation to or contact with philosophy. The fact that philosophy—and particularly ontology—plays a grounding role in their theological beliefs is unknown by most evangelicals, even theologians, who live under the illusion of standing squarely on biblical ground. Very few evangelical theologians have

ties to a theological impasse. Is an agreement possible, or should we recognize the existence of theological divisions at the foundation of our theological understanding?

⁵ See my "Evangelical Theology and Open Theism: Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Macro Hermeneutical Principles of Theology?" *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12/2 (Autumn 2001), 16–34.

⁶ Richard A. Muller explains that Luther and Calvin rejected the explicit, not the implicit use of philosophy in the building of theological understanding. "Both Luther and Calvin were reluctant to develop metaphysical discussions of the divine essence and attributes—though neither disputed the truth of the traditional attribution to God of omnipresence, omniscience, eternity, infinity, simplicity, and so forth" (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 231). Luther's and Calvin's implicit use of philosophical concepts in shaping their understandings of God's nature and actions became the ground for a more explicit use during the protestant orthodoxy period. François Wendel reports Calvin's familiarity with and usage of Plato, Aristotle, Themistius, Cicero, John Chrysostom, Origen, and Augustine. However, Neoplatonism came to Calvin via his dependence on the Augustine's theological project (*Calvin: Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963], 123-124).

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recognized the fact that evangelical theology stands on the same philosophical grounds on which Roman Catholic theology stands.⁷

Usually evangelicals are impacted by philosophical ideas via their acceptance of tradition.⁸ Not surprisingly, many evangelical beliefs stand on ideas one does not find in Scripture but in tradition. We label as “tradition” the instruction of ancient theological teachers we call the “fathers” of the church in order to distinguish them from the inspired writers of Scripture. As evangelicals discover that their beliefs are based on tradition and philosophy, their conviction that their beliefs are based on *sola Scriptura* is strongly challenged.⁹ One way to answer this challenge is to adjust biblical teachings to the theological instructions originated in the writings of influential non-biblical authors in order to keep received definitions of evangelical beliefs without modification. Another way to answer this challenge is to adjust traditionally-received ideas originating in the writings of influential non-biblical authors to the teachings of Scripture, even if that may imply changing received definitions of evangelical faith. So far, implicitly or explicitly, most evangelical theologians have opted to follow the first way in order to avoid revising their traditionally originated teachings. In this way, unbeknown to most of them, they build on the philosophical notions used by the fathers of the church to build their doctrines.

This trend is “baptized” into evangelicalism by accepting the Roman Catholic notion of multiple sources of theology we find at the core of the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral of sources. Once this conviction has been assumed and defended as beyond challenge, the role of philosophy in the construction of

⁷ Norman L. Geisler is a noteworthy exception to this general trend. He is among the few evangelicals willing to openly recognize the philosophical ground on which evangelical theology stands. Attempting to convince fellow believers of the great help Aquinas’ philosophy lends to evangelical theology, Geisler reminds them “that many of our great theistic apologists of the last two centuries—including, William Paley, Joseph Butler, F. R. Tennant, Robert Flint, B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodges, and C. S. Lewis—are to a large degree indebted to Aquinas. Let us not forget the friendly theistic hand of the saintly doctor that has led us.” *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

⁸ That this is the case becomes clear, for instance, in the consensual theology Thomas Oden suggests for evangelical theology. See, for instance, his *The Living God: Systematic Theology I* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); and, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology III* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992). For an introduction to Oden’s methodology and the role he gives to tradition, see Kwabena Donkor, *Tradition as a Viable Option for Protestant Theology: The Vicentian Method of Thomas C. Oden* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2001). Oden does not analyze the philosophical grounds of theology directly, that is to say philosophically, but indirectly via tradition.

⁹ Though open view theologians challenge traditional views on God on the basis of Scripture, they do not accept the *sola Scriptura* principle either, thereby leaving the discussion of the ontological ground of theology open to changeable whims of philosophical trends. For instance, Pinnock unequivocally declares that “Scripture may be *prima* for theology but it is not *sola* because tradition plays a role in interpretation” (*Most Moved Mover*, 21). The question of multiplicity of sources needs to be carefully criticized by evangelical theology in order to clarify the role of Scripture in doctrine and in its interpretation.

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evangelical theology is formally and dogmatically accepted. Thus, millions of evangelicals live under the illusion that their beliefs are totally and solely grounded in Scripture. History and contemporary practice says otherwise. Because of this situation, evangelical theology cannot continue to assume a distant relationship with philosophy. The time has come for evangelical theologians to get as proficient in the generation and criticism of philosophical thought as they are supposed to be in biblical languages and exegesis.¹⁰

There are many historical causes of our present disconnect between the real role that philosophy plays in the construction of evangelical beliefs and theology and the systematic neglect of philosophical issues in the construction and formulation of evangelical beliefs and theology.¹¹ Among them we find the biblicism of the magisterial reformers and the development of the philosophical tradition in North America.

Luther and Calvin reformed a tradition where philosophy played a central role in belief formulation and theological construction. Because they chose to deconstruct the Roman Catholic tradition on the basis of Scripture and build their own alternative understanding also on the basis of Scripture, we find in their writings a profusion of biblical material uncommon in Christian theology. This profusion may produce the impression that their theologies were totally unrelated to philosophy and solely grounded in Scripture. This impression may be a reason why many evangelical theologians assume they are building their theologies only on Scripture as well. The fact is that the theology of the Protestant Reformation reformers assumed the general philosophical framework on which patristic and medieval theologies were constructed. We find the same dependence on philosophical notions in twentieth century evangelical theologies.

In North America, philosophy has developed along the empirical and analytical philosophical traditions which focus on the epistemological questions of philosophy and are critical of the philosophical foundations on which evangelical theology was built. The only influential development in the ontological front is process philosophy, whose neoclassical bipolar approach has fit neither evangelical theological tradition nor Scripture. Not surprisingly, evangelical theologians relate to philosophy mostly in dealing with reason as an instrument involved in the formulation of biblical beliefs, but not as its ontological ground.

¹⁰ For an introduction to the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” see Albert C. Outler, *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991); and Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

¹¹ I am not suggesting there are no evangelical philosophers. The existence of the evangelical Philosophical Society testifies to the contrary. I am, however, suggesting that as far as I have been able to ascertain, philosophical knowledge in the evangelical tradition is used mostly for apologetical rather than constructive purposes. This fact becomes apparent as one reads both sides of the open view debate.

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Deconstructive and constructive developments in the area of ontology taking place in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have not yet become influential in the construction of evangelical theology. Thus, though evangelical authors are aware of Martin Heidegger's ontological thought and the rise of philosophical hermeneutics, they have not yet faced the ontological issue itself and therefore cannot appreciate the challenges they raise for a theology that claims to move within a quadrilateral of sources.¹²

With the passing of time, the general conviction that evangelical theology can be formulated without the need to address the ontological question has set in the mind of evangelical believers and theologians. The dissemination of the charismatic movement throughout evangelical churches has not helped to change this situation. This background, however, helps us understand why not even open view theologians whose claims in regard to divine foreknowledge and predestination assume changes in the ontological realm raise the ontological

¹² We find an example of this situation in the work of German theologians Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann, who build their views on God's relation to time from the equivocal understanding of divine time taken from Karl Barth, who affirms that "Eternity is not, therefore, time, although time is certainly God's creation or more correctly, a form of His creation. Time is distinguished from eternity by the fact that in it beginning, middle and end are distinct and even opposed as past, present and future" (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. 13 Volumes*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, 13 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936], II/1:608). Pannenberg knows about Heidegger's notion of time and being, but does not recognize it as the postmodern ontological divide. On the contrary, it interprets from within the classical timeless understanding of God's being. Pannenberg uses Heidegger's temporal ontology only as a description of human time that parallels Augustine's analysis of time. Moreover, Pannenberg incorrectly neglects Heidegger's view that the notion of being determines our understanding of entities, and among them God (*Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 69). Heidegger, however, is correct in recognizing the logical order of cognitive presuppositions. "Only from the truth of being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only from the essence of the holy can the essence of the divinity be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought and said what the word 'God' is to signify" ("Letter on Humanism," in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. William Barret and Henry D. Aiken [New York: Random House, 1962], 3:294). Following Plotinus's interpretation of Plato's eternity, Pannenberg assumes the timeless understanding of divine eternity as the origin of time that is included within God's simultaneous view of the whole of reality (*Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, 76-77). Following Boethius's and Aquinas' classical definition of timeless eternity as *totum simul* (simultaneous whole) (*Summa Theologica*, Ia., 10-4), Pannenberg defines the eternity of God timelessly by affirming that "the eternal God does not have ahead of him any future that is different from his present. For this reason that which has been is still present to him. God is eternal because he has no future outside himself. His future is that of himself and of all that is distinct from him. But to have no future outside oneself, to be one's own future, is perfect freedom. The eternal God as the absolute future, in the fellowship of Father, Son and Spirit, is the free origin of himself and his creatures" (*Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991] 1:410). Working from the same understanding of being and divine eternity, Jürgen Moltmann describes the way in which human history looks from creation to new creation in *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 280-339. These authors apply the notion of time univocally to humans and equivocally to God. The analogical notion of temporal being I am proposing here is foreign to them.

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question philosophically or biblically. This context may also help us understand the naïve notion that an eclectic use of philosophical notions will exorcise the dangers of philosophy in theological thinking.¹³

Ontology and Theology

Before considering how philosophy has shaped the construction of evangelical theology, we need to consider what philosophy is and how it relates to theology. Historically speaking, “philosophy” was the name used for more than twenty centuries to designate the rational enterprise that in the last two centuries we have come to label “science.” Though at its inception philosophy included within its reach all issues, with time several disciplines began to take shape and become independent from philosophy. Philosophy, in turn, became an umbrella designation for an ensemble of scholarly disciplines attempting to understand the first principles from which we know our world and ourselves. Among the various philosophical disciplines, ontology, metaphysics, and epistemology play the leading role, that is to say, their conclusions become principles of understanding of other philosophical sciences, like hermeneutics, philosophy of science, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of language, philosophy of right, philosophy of history, and the like. This order is determined by the relationship existing between the objects studied by each philosophical discipline. The broader or more inclusive the nature of an object, the more influential and decisive will be the conclusions of the science that studies it. The broadest of all issues philosophy studies is being; therefore, the most influential of all philosophical sciences is ontology. As we observed above, ontology is precisely the science neglected in the construction of evangelical thought.

But in what way does ontology influence theological thinking? To answer this question, we need to consider the object ontology studies. ontology studies the nature of what “is.” Since everything, in one way or another, “is,” ontology is said to study being. Briefly put, ontology studies the general characteristics of

¹³ For instance, while Pinnock identifies philosophy as the root of the theological notions he criticizes, he considers it useful. “For the purposes of theology,” Pinnock cautions, “not all philosophical systems are equally valid, so let us enter with care into dialogue with philosophy, ancient and modern, and make the best use of it that we can” (*Most Moved Mover*, 23). This timid warning does not help much to assure that the use of new philosophical categories will not again lead present theologians to distort biblical truth as they did in the past. It also opens the door to process philosophy as partner and guide in the task of interpreting and constructing evangelical theology. Richard Rice represents a large group of evangelical theologians who recognize the inherent dangers of using philosophy to “communicate” the gospel but have a positive view of natural theology that “forces” them to use it. Rice advises us to “handle philosophical resources with caution.” Specifically, he recommends that theologians should not (1) draw all their philosophical ideas from the same philosophical system, or, (2) allow philosophy to “determine the course of theological reflection” (*Reason and the Contours of Faith* [Riverside: La Sierra UP, 1991], 201). The notion that theologians should draw their ontological understanding not eclectically from a *mélange* of philosophical resources but by using reason to discover from Scripture—and by the light of Scripture—the ontological ideas we should use in Christian theology escapes Rice and the classical approach he represents.

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what is real. It can be divided into general and regional ontologies. While general ontology studies the notion of being, regional ontologies study the general characteristics of specific regions of reality, for instance God, human beings, and the world, assuming the general notion of being outlined by general ontology. Because of the all-embracing nature of its object (being), general ontology plays the macro hermeneutical role, guiding the construction of regional ontologies. Changes in general ontology, then, will necessarily elicit changes in regional ontologies.

Ontology influences exegesis and theology because it defines the nature of the referents of the language and concepts exegetes and theologians study.¹⁴ Since Christian theology speaks about realities covered by general and regional ontologies, an unavoidable overlapping takes place between ontological and theological studies. To summarize, ontology studies the characteristics of realities Christian theology speaks about. Not surprisingly, theologians have discovered and used this disciplinary overlapping assuming that both theology and ontology are true and complementary. On this hermeneutical and methodological basis Christian theology was born and constructed.

In conclusion, we must say that there is an ontological ground of Christian theology because theologians speak of reality and therefore assume an interpretation of it. Methodologically, however, theologians have not traditionally addressed their prowess to dealing with the ontological question from a theological perspective, but have been contented with borrowing ontological views from philosophical ontology. How has the ontological ground been addressed in evangelical theology?

The Question of Being

The ontological ground of theology can be better perceived when theologians speak about God's nature and acts—for instance, when they explain divine eternity. Creatures are not eternal because, being temporal, they pass away. God, on the other hand, is eternal because, being timeless, He does not pass away. Thus, eternity is understood as timelessness.¹⁵ Systematic theologies quote some biblical texts as proof that divine timelessness is biblical.¹⁶ Most Christians are

¹⁴ As biblical theologian G. Ernest Wright correctly observed, modern theologians interpret biblical reality from “a compound of conceptions derived from secular idealism, and not directly from the Bible” (*God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* [Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1952], 18). Of course, idealism is a modern ontological position that is no longer accepted among leading philosophers. We should also bear in mind that idealism is a modern modification of classical ontology which is no better suited to understand biblical thought. Wright's statement suggests that to understand Scripture, we need to take its ontological view seriously.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999), 110-112.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 168-173; c.f. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 274-275. This notion is not a recent development. In the seventeenth century

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attracted to divine timelessness because it explains to them why God is eternal and we are not. Not surprisingly, most believers relate divine timelessness with God's eternity but not with his being or actions. In practice evangelical believers and a majority of evangelical theologians understand God's eternity as timeless but his being and actions as temporal.¹⁷

This incoherence stems from the sources from which our notions of divine eternity and divine actions originated. While the temporality of divine being and activities clearly originate in Scriptural revelation, the timeless understanding of divine eternity is the remnant of an idea extrapolated to Christian theology from Greek philosophical thinking via tradition.

In Greek thinking, however, timelessness was not called to explain God's eternity as one of his attributes, but to describe the "ultimate" nature of all that is real. Parmenides articulated the notion of timelessness when he used it to qualify the nature of being.¹⁸ Inspired by Parmenides, Plato developed a cosmology according to which there are two levels of reality. In the lower level reality was temporal and the duplication of the higher timeless level.¹⁹ Later, Aristotle transformed Plato's dualistic cosmology into a dualistic ontology of matter (temporal) and form (timelessness). Aristotle further developed the notion of being to refer to the broadest, most inclusive notion of which human beings are capable

Francis Turretin revealed its ongoing presence in protestant theology. "Pure eternity has been defined by the Scholastics to be 'the interminable possession of life—complete, perfect and at once.' Thus it excludes succession no less than end and ought to be conceived as a standing, but not a flowing, now" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. Musgrave, Giger, George, 3 vols. [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992], I:203).

¹⁷ For instance, after clearly describing God's being as timeless and incorrectly arguing that His timelessness is present in a few proof texts in Scripture, Grudem proceeds to correctly affirm that "it is evident throughout Scripture that God acts within time and acts differently at different points in time" (*ibid.*, 172). Ontologically that is impossible, unless Grudem wants to side with process philosophy's bipolar notion of God, which I suspect is not the case. We are faced here with a momentous inconsistency at the very root of evangelical thinking.

¹⁸ Parmenides, "Fragments," in Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, "Fragmente der Vorsokratiker"* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948), 7-8; Fernando Luis Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1983), 76-114.

¹⁹ Plato explains that the nature of the ideal world is eternal, while its image in our sensible world is temporal, the "moving image of eternity" (*Timaeus*, 37.d). Plato explains the eternal nature of ideal reality by saying that "there were no days and nights and months and years before the heaven was created, but when he constructed the heaven he created them also. They are all parts of time, and the past and future are created species of time, which we unconsciously but wrongly transfer to eternal beings, for we say that it 'was,' or 'is,' or 'will be,' but the truth is that 'is' alone is properly attributed to it, and that 'was' and 'will be' are only to be spoken of becoming in time, for they are motions, but that which is immovably the same forever cannot become older or younger by time, nor can it be said that it came into being in the past, or has come into being now, or will come into being in the future, nor is it subject at all to any of those states which affect moving and sensible things and of which generation is the cause" (*ibid.*, 37,d-38,b).

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of conceiving.²⁰ being is said in many ways,²¹ but it always refer to what “is,” and, “is” always stands on the timeless side of reality (the form).

Martin Heidegger further explained the hermeneutical role that the interpretation of the notion of being (general ontology) plays in the formation of science.²² Since theology as scholarly enterprise is a science, we should not be surprised to discover that the timelessness interpretation of being adopted by early Christian theologians came to shape their notion of God, and through it, the entire range of exegetical interpretations and theological constructions.²³ This view has been developed and preserved via the tradition of the church.

The Ontological Ground of Evangelical Theology

Many evangelicals think that evangelical theology was born as a pristine reading of Scripture in which no cultural, philosophical, and scientific notions were involved. Such a paradisiacal view is far removed from reality.²⁴ Evangelical theology arose as a partial modification of Roman Catholic soteriology and ecclesiology and should be understood in this context. Modifications in these areas may be summed up in the application of the *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, and *sola Scriptura* principles to Roman Catholic theology.

To understand evangelical theology, then, one has to recognize its origin in Roman Catholic theology. This theology arose and developed under the explicit

²⁰ “There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others deals generally with being as being” (*Metaphysics*, IV; 1, 1003, a.22-23).

²¹ *Metaphysics*, IV, 2; 1003, a32).

²² “The question of being,” explains Heidegger, “aims therefore at ascertaining the a priori conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences which examine entities as entities of such and such type, and, in so doing, already operate with an understanding of being, but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations” (*Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper and Collins, 1962], Int., 3).

²³ John Macquarrie explains that “every inquiry has its presuppositions, and that is true of theological inquiry as of any other. These presuppositions delimit the field of the inquiry, determine its basic concepts, and give it direction. In some way they already determine the result of the inquiry—not the content of the result, but the kind of result that will be obtained. These presuppositions are ontological, that is to say, they consist in a preliminary understanding of the being of the entities into which the enquiry is being made” (John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology: A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann* [New York: Macmillan, 1955], 6–7).

²⁴ Consider for instance that while Luther, the great magisterial reformer, “was confessedly a passionate opponent of Scholasticism, as well as of Aristotle,” he “had purposed a thorough course of Scholastic study, making himself familiar particularly with the Lombard, Occam, D’ailli, and Biel. This schooling is often apparent in the earlier period (e.g., W.1. 367 ff.). But the influence of these studies was a permanent one. He had imbibed the outline and organization of the theological ideas of Scholasticism, and they remained as the points of connection in his theological thinking. In the most of his definitions, the form of construction can be understood only if we bear this fact in mind” (Reinhold Seeberg, *The History of Doctrines* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977], 223).

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hermeneutical and methodological guidance of Greek ontology.²⁵ The guiding hermeneutical role of Greek philosophy has remained unchanged.²⁶ Many theologians have contributed to developing the amazingly coherent and complex system of Roman Catholic theology. Notable among them are Augustine and Aquinas, who developed their separate but closely related theological systems under the macro hermeneutical guidance derived directly from Platonic and Aristotelian ontologies, respectively. Contemporary Roman Catholic theology is still shaped after the general guidelines of the Thomistic approach to theology.

Following the lead of Alexandrian theology, Augustine shaped the notion God's being and actions (not just his eternity) in the light of Greek timeless ontology.²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther²⁸ and John Calvin, the magisterial

²⁵ Adolf Harnack describes the origin of Christian theology as a momentous paradigm shift from a biblically-shaped mode of thought to a mode of thinking shaped by the general ontological structure of Greek philosophy. "We meet with a religious mode of thought in the Gospel and the early Christian writings, which so far as it is at all dependent on an earlier mode of thought, is determined by the spirit of the Old Testament (Psalms and Prophets) and of Judaism. But it is already otherwise with the earliest Gentile Christian writings. The mode of thought here is so thoroughly determined by the Hellenic spirit that we seem to have entered a new world when we pass from the synoptists, Paul and John, to Clement, Barnabas, Justin or Valentinus" (*History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan, 7 vols. [New York: Dover, 1961], I:42, note 1). Jaroslav Pelikan further explains that "whether theologians found Platonic speculation compatible with the gospel or incompatible with it, they were agreed that the Christian understanding of the relation between Creator and creature required 'the concept of an entirely static God, with eminent reality, in relation to an entirely fluent world, with deficient reality'—a concept that came into Christian doctrine from Greek Philosophy" (*The Christian Tradition*, I:53). While the Roman Catholic tradition has openly and consistently recognized and justified building Christian theology on this ideological basis, protestant and evangelical theologies have lived under the illusion that such a paradigmatic shift never took place.

²⁶ This historical fact becomes clear when we learn that "the first edition of John Calvin's *Institutes* in 1536 referred to election in Christ before the creation of the world, along with redemption and reconciliation as the foundation of the 'architecture of Christian doctrine'" (Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971–1989], IV:217–218). But Calvin's dependence on the Augustinian theology of election is based on Augustine's notion of God's will within the context of Greek timeless ontology. Augustine explicitly applied timeless ontology to the will of God, on which predestination and the gospel are based, in the following words: "Will you claim that those things are false which Truth with a strong voice speaks into my inner ear concerning the true eternity of the creator, that his substance is in no wise changed in time, and his will is not outside his substance. For this reason, he does not will now this, now that, but once, and all at once, and forever he wills all that he wills. It is not again and again, now these things, now those. He does not will later on what he once willed against, nor does he will against what he previously willed to do. Such a will is mutable and no mutable thing is eternal. But our God is eternal" (*Confessions*, trans. John K. Ryan [Garden City: Image, 1960], XII, 15.18).

²⁷ Perhaps more than any other theologian, Augustine should be credited with constructing Christian theology on the timeless understanding of being derived from Neoplatonic ontology (*Confessions*, XI–XII).

²⁸ Luther's fight is not against Greek ontology but against philosophy as used in medieval theology (Harnack, *History of Dogma*, VII:173).

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theologians of Roman Catholic and Protestant theologies, built their views on the same ontological assumptions.²⁹

Evangelical theology, as constructed by Luther and Calvin, criticized Roman Catholic theology from the authority of Scripture but constructed its theological understandings following hermeneutical and doctrinal guidelines drawn from Augustine. In so doing, evangelical theology did not depart from Roman Catholic macro hermeneutics and its dependence on Greek ontology. In fact, it implicitly carried over the ontological macro hermeneutical guidance of Platonic ontology via its adoption of key notions from Augustinian theology.

To describe in detail the ontological foundations of Roman Catholic and evangelical theologies falls far beyond the limited purpose of this article. We need only show the basic idea on which Greek ontology, and therefore, the macro hermeneutics of Christian theologies were constructed.

Arguably, ontology originated with Parmenides, who spoke about “being” perhaps for the first time. Among several characteristics he adjudicated to “being” he included its timelessness.³⁰ Around the same time, but with less precise

²⁹ That Aquinas constructed his theological project on a Greek ontological ground is clear. He was not only a theologian but a philosopher. As a philosopher, he adjusted Aristotelian ontology for Christian use. We find a brief outline of his ontological understanding in his *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Garden City Press Co-Operative, 1949). He used this adjusted version of Aristotelian ontology to construct his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Garden City: Doubleday, 1956), and his *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947). That Luther and Calvin built their views on the same basis via Augustine is less visible because they built their views from Scripture. However, they never explicitly rejected, but rather implicitly assumed the basic structure of Greek Neoplatonic ontology. This explains how during the period of protestant orthodoxy that followed, scholastic and philosophical notions became more explicitly used and were not considered as hindrances but helpers in the construction of the protestant system of theology. Richard Muller explains that “reformed orthodox theology is certainly more open to the use of reason than the theology of either Luther or Calvin. Nevertheless, this openness not only had roots in the Reformation itself, but it also carefully retained the Reformer’s sense of the independence of theology from philosophical or metaphysical speculation. The Protestant scholastic use of reason derives not from a desire to create a synthesis of theology and philosophy but rather from a clearly perceived and enunciated need to use the tools of reason in the construction of theological system” (*Postreformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 248). Thus, protestant and evangelical theologies continued to be constructed from the ground of Greek ontology. The independence from Greek ontology was never achieved. That is why authors like Norman Geisler explicitly defends it and calls on the evangelical community to recognize and use it (*Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991]).

³⁰ The meaning of timelessness cannot be understood in a single concept or proposition. That is why Parmenides uses several signs in order to speak about it. “There is only one other description of the way remaining, (namely) that (What is) Is. To this way there are very many signposts: that being has no coming-into-being and no destruction, for it is whole of limb, without motion, and without end. And it never Was, nor Will Be, because it Is now, a Whole all together, One, continuous; for what creation of it will you look for? How, whence (could it have) sprung” (Parmenides, Fragment 7). Even though Parmenides did not speak explicitly about the ground of being or about timelessness; he makes it apparent that his “way of truth” was grounded in the meaning of being and that his understanding of being was grounded in timelessness.

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language, Heraclitus built his ontology assuming that reality was temporal. By adopting Parmenides' view that being is timeless as macro hermeneutical guide, Plato developed his influential cosmology and Aristotle his no less leading ontology and thereby tied the destiny and shape of western philosophy and Christian theology to the notion of timelessness. Heraclitus' option was considered flawed and summarily discarded as nonviable.

Thus we come to uncover the ontological ground of evangelical theology as tied to the notion that ultimate reality is timeless. This ground has not been derived from Scripture, but borrowed from Greek ontology via Augustine and the tradition of the church.

The Postmodern Ontological Divide

So far evangelical theologians have not consistently applied the *sola Scriptura* principle. Instead, many implicitly or explicitly construct their theologies on the assumption that there are multiple theological sources conceptually integrated in the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Methodologically speaking, the present understanding of the ontological ground of evangelical theology stands on the basis of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral rather than on the *sola Scriptura* principle. The Quadrilateral justifies the use of "selected" philosophical ideas in the construction of evangelical theology by minimizing their role in the construction of Christian theology. Reason and philosophy, we are told, only help us to better "express" and "communicate" the gospel and biblical truths.³¹ Among these few and "insignificant" ideas we find the timeless understanding of ontology.

Should evangelical theology continue to build on the ground borrowed from Greek ontology via Augustinian tradition? Two important facts indicate that a paradigmatic change in the ontological ground of evangelical theology may be possible and even necessary. These facts are the postmodern ontological divide and the biblical notion of being.

Ever since Locke and Hume formulated their empiricist epistemologies, a slow but strong criticism of Greek timeless ontology has taken place in the history of western philosophy. This self-critical process of classical ontological foundations was spearheaded by the epistemology of modernity and has produced the hermeneutical revolution of postmodernity. It has also produced a new constructive approach to ontology masterfully conceived by German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In his epoch-making *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues

³¹ To accomplish this task, Stanley Grenz calls not on reason but on "the thought-forms of contemporary culture," which philosophically speaking take place within the postmodern ontological divide and therefore do not have room for the classical timeless ontology on which the evangelical theological synthesis has been conceived (*Theology for the Community of God* [Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994], 19–20). Yet, he still builds on a timeless understanding of God's being (91–92), which he probably derives from "'classic' statements of theological truth . . . which have a special relevance for every age" contained in the tradition of the church (18).

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that being is time, thereby presenting anew Heraclitus' alternative that being is temporal.³² Besides, the bulk of Heidegger's voluminous writings, which are in the process of being translated and published in English, develops the notion that being is temporal and examines the ontological consequences of this in a variety of ways, directions, and contexts. One of the many differences that exists between Heraclitus and Heidegger is that the latter stands at the end of a long and merciless process through which classical timeless ontology has been deconstructed, while the former stood at the beginning, when timelessness was still undeveloped as interpretative option.

The existence of a foundational ontological option between Parmenides' timeless and Heidegger's temporal understandings of being in postmodernity is reminiscent of the epistemological option between Aristotle's timeless intellectualism and Kant's spatiotemporal transcendentalism in modernity.³³ As the latter divided Christianity across denominational lines during the twentieth century, the former has the potential to divide Christianity even further and in unforeseen ways. The existence of an alternative ontology that directly opposes traditional ontology at the foundational level of general ontology calls into question the present timeless ontological ground on which both Christian and evangelical theologies have been built. It also questions the viability of the multiple sources of the theology methodological conviction embraced by the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

Which interpretation of being should evangelical theologians use in their theologies? So far theologians, explicitly or implicitly, have assumed that philosophy presented them with a unified timeless interpretation of being. They choose ideas from divergent ontological views produced by classical and modern philosophers who built on the common assumption that real reality is timeless. A neoplatonic cosmological dualism between the timeless realm of heavenly and spiritual realities and the spatiotemporal realm of humans became accepted as factual. On these ontological and cosmological bases, theologians have constructed their exegesis, systems, and practices. They presume neoplatonic

³² Heidegger makes clear that being is to be understood as time by saying that "Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of Being and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim is the interpretation of time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being" (*Being and Time*, prologue). Later he explained that this was the "reason the treatise which sought to point the way back into the ground of metaphysics did not bear the title 'Existence and Time,' nor 'Consciousness and Time,' but *Being and Time*. Nor can this title be understood as if it were parallel to the customary juxtapositions of Being and Becoming, Being and Seeming, Being and Thinking, or Being and Ought. For in all these cases Being is limited, as if Becoming, Seeming, Thinking, and Ought did not belong to Being. In *Being and Time*, Being is not something other than Time: 'Time' is called the first name of the truth of Being, and this truth is the presence of Being and this Being itself" ("The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics," in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. William Barret and Henry D. Aiken [New York: Random House, 1962], 207–18).

³³ See Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970–1975), 3:309–315).

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cosmological dualism properly describes the nature of the realities Scripture speaks about without taking time to explain it in detail. Postmodernity, however, has forever ended the ontological illusion on which Christian theology as we know it was constructed. Philosophy not only has strongly and convincingly criticized the ontological ground on which Christian theology stands, but has produced a viable alternative system of ontological interpretation based on the radical idea that reality is not timeless but temporal. I cannot imagine a more radical or deeper paradigm shift in philosophical and theological thinking. The two alternatives currently available in the philosophical supermarket from which evangelicals are supposed to draw the philosophical ground for their theology are diametrically opposed to each other.

Will evangelical theology recognize the situation facing it? Sooner or later this paradigmatic ontological change will have to be faced by theologians. This is a shift of monumental proportions, so radical that it shakes the foundations of classical, evangelical, and modern theologies. If taken seriously, these schools of theology will be radically altered. Rather by chance than by design, open view theologians stumbled on the notion of divine temporality without realizing the ontological implications of their affirmation. Explicitly or implicitly influenced by the bipolar view of God advanced by process philosophy, they build their views on an upgraded version of neoplatonic dualism adjusted to contemporary evolutionary thought. Unbeknown to them, they still stand on the classical Greek timeless ground they explicitly reject in their view of divine foreknowledge but include by using the classical view of divine predestination.

Classical, modern, and evangelical theologians feel that because Scripture does not address ontological issues, we are forced to gain information about the nature of the realities Scripture speaks about from extra-biblical sources. Is this conviction deeply ingrained in Christian collective consciousness correct? Is Scripture silent about ontological issues?

Biblical Ontology

A disconnect exists between the timeless ontology Christian theology adopted and the temporal view of reality that pervades biblical thinking. The classical way to deal with this disconnect is to consider the biblical temporal understanding of reality naïve, anthropomorphic, and designed to let us understand at our limited level the eternal truths deriving from the timeless side of reality. This view, however, is no longer mandatory because philosophy has produced a temporal understanding of being. If human philosophical reason can conceive of reality as temporal and simultaneously as timeless, what are we supposed to do? Reason produces alternative and contradictory interpretations of reality, but is incapable of helping us decide between them. Reason unavoidably leads us to irreconcilable views that may divide the church beyond repair. Instead of helping us understand and communicate biblical truths in a clearer way, our reason confuses us. We should attempt to face the postmodern ontological

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divide the evangelical way—that is, by searching the ontological ground of evangelical theology not in the supermarket of philosophical ideas but in the biblical revelation of God.

The evangelical way is to build theology on biblical thinking. While it is true that Scripture does not address the question of ontology in the technical style of academic circles, it certainly has a lot to say about issues such as God, human beings, the world, and knowledge. Why then are we so reticent to build our ontological convictions from Scripture and in harmony with its guidelines? Probably because we are conditioned by the inertia of a tradition built on the assumption that real or ultimate reality is timeless.

What does Scripture say about ultimate reality? Does Scripture teach that God is timeless? The answer to this question is no. Scripture does not teach that God is timeless. In a groundbreaking study, Oscar Cullmann clearly and correctly recognized “the fact that far and wide the Christian Church and Christian theology distinguish time and eternity in the Platonic-Greek-manner.”³⁴ He also knew that “for Plato eternity is not endlessly extended time, but something quite different; it is timelessness.”³⁵ Instead, arguing from the data of Scripture, Cullmann correctly understood that God’s eternity can and must be expressed in “terms of endless time.”³⁶ According to the New Testament, continues Cullmann, “this time quality is not in its essence something human, which first emerged in the fallen creation. It is, moreover, not bound to the creation.”³⁷ Instead, eternity, “which is possible only as an attribute of God, is time, or, to put it better, what we call ‘time’ is nothing but a part, defined and delimited by God, of this same unending duration of God’s time.” It is important to notice that when Scripture speaks of God’s eternity, it is simultaneously speaking about his being. Because Cullmann was an exegete, he was able to avoid philosophical categories.³⁸ He also understood that the New Testament’s conviction about God’s temporal eternity opened the door for the systematic theologian to ask “the question of the relation of God’s redemptive-historical activity and his eternity, in a manner beyond that in which the New Testament asked it. He must not be hindered in his investigating the compatibility of God’s being with the way in which the New Testament speaks of his revelation.”³⁹

Independently from Cullmann, I have probed in Scripture the notion of divine temporality from an ontological perspective. When Exodus 3:14 is questioned from this perspective, it reveals that God’s being is not timeless but temporal in the sense that it is compatible with the future, present, and past flux of

³⁴ *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

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time.⁴⁰ Would evangelical systematic theologians dare to think about ontology while being faithful to the *sola Scriptura* principle? That is to say, would we dare to think about being solely by the light of Scripture? Due to the postmodern ontological divide, I find no other viable option for evangelical theology. As I say this, I recognize that serious constructive thinking from Scripture must be done to biblically understand the most influential notion of God's being.⁴¹ In this way, Biblical exegesis is not the end but the beginning and the light by which biblical ontological reflections should be attempted.

The Analogical View of Divine Time

As we find in Scripture the notion of divine temporality, at least two questions come to mind. How should we understand divine temporality? And what is the importance of this notion in the search for a biblical ontology?

The first thing that comes to mind when we say God is temporal is the limitation of God to the parameters of human finitude. From the background and inspiration gained from process philosophy, open view theologians have understood divine temporality in this sense. They use divine temporality to ground their claim that God cannot know future free decisions. Thus, God is shaped in the image of man.⁴² Here is where neither classical nor open view theologians have thought through the issue of divine ontology from Scripture. Timelessness is not in Scripture, but neither does one find in Scripture the univocal understanding of divine temporality assumed by process and open view theologians.⁴³

⁴⁰ See my *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 10 (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1983), chapter 3.

⁴¹ Philosophers and systematic theologians are of the general conviction that Scripture does not address ontological issues ontologically because they approach the text assuming Greek timeless ontology that is not present in Scripture. The conclusion, then, is that Scripture does not have an ontology. However, Scripture does speak about the being of God and therefore has ontological teachings. This fact is testified by biblical theologians. For instance, Brevard S. Childs remarks that "central to the Old Testament's understanding is its witness to the *reality of God*. To speak of 'the living God' is not metaphorical (cf. Barth *CD* II/1, 263). The God of the Old Testament has made *his reality* known. He is not a projection of human consciousness, but God has entered actively and fully into Israel's life as an exercise of strength, not weakness. *God's being* is not a static substance to which action is subsequently added. Rather *God's being* is known in his creative actions and defined by communion of love" (*Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 358, emphasis mine).

⁴² Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997). However, those who understand God as timeless also make him in the image of human beings. The difference is that while in classical theology the image is made on a timeless canvas, in the open view project it is made on a temporal one.

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The notion of temporality should not be taken from human temporality and extrapolated to God's being in a univocal sense.⁴⁴ We should not start by assuming we know what time is and then proceed to apply our understanding to God by making him fit in the box we have prepared for him. Rather, we should focus on the way Scripture reveals his being and actions and from this starting point attempt to partially understand his being, his temporality, and his relation to our time. This procedure leads us to rethink our preconception of the meaning of time as it relates to God. As we think through this issue from Scripture, an analogical notion of divine temporality comes to view⁴⁵ and helps us understand not so much the mystery of divine being but the reality of his historical redemptive actions in the history of salvation that began in the garden of Eden with the promise of salvation (*protevangelium*) (Genesis 3:15).⁴⁶

The analogical understanding of divine temporality makes the biblical assertion that he knows the end from the beginning possible in a sense different than the traditional Augustinian Calvinistic interpretation based on a timeless

⁴⁴ The issue of temporality has come to prominence. William J. Hill summarizes the main ways in which the notion of time and God have been related by Christian theologians in his *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 80–91. See also Gregory Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); Thomas F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); G. J. Whitrow, *Time in History: Views of Time from Prehistory to the Present Day* (New York: Oxford UP, 1989); Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, Cornell Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991); Don Lodzinski, "Empty Time and the Eternality of God. (St. Augustine's Concept of Time)," *Religious Studies* 31/2 (June 1995): 187; William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

⁴⁵ For instance, in 2 Chronicles we are told that God can dwell in the Sanctuary Solomon built for Him to dwell in, but simultaneously, it affirms that not even the heavens of the heavens can contain Him. This idea points to a God who while being capable of acting within the past, present, and future flux of time and space, is not limited by it. God is not finite but infinite. God is temporal in a sense analogical with our created time because he is the infinite creator. God's being is the highest expression of life and therefore the highest expression of time. While not limited to our time and space, God's being experiences in itself the flow of past, present, and future, and, therefore, is able to experience the limited way in which we experience this flow of life as creatures created in the image of his being. The notion sketched here requires ontological elaboration from and in the light of Scripture before we use it as an assumption to understand God's salvific and providential activities.

⁴⁶ When Clark Pinnock addresses this issue, he visualizes from afar the analogical notion of God without realizing the implications it has for divine foreknowledge. In other words, while arguing the open view of God assuming a univocal notion of divine temporality retrieved from process philosophy, Pinnock begins to perceive the biblical analogical view of divine temporality which he does not use when thinking about divine foreknowledge. Here I find in Pinnock's writings a disconnection between the biblical analogical notion of divine temporality and the univocal notion of divine temporality he assumes, along with open view theologians, in denying divine foreknowledge. If God's analogical temporality does not confine him to the limited way in which creatures experience time whose fullness can only be experienced by God, why should Pinnock and open view theologians continue to assume that God is limited by the future as we are and is not able to know what is not yet there to be known?

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understanding of his being. In short, when we think of divine ontology from and in the light of Scripture, the analogical temporality of God's being comes to view.

The second aspect that comes to mind when we encounter for the first time the notion of divine temporality in Scripture is the role it plays in our understanding of God's being. When most of us discover the timelessness-temporality debate, we side with one of the options presented to us and incorporate it into our overall theological purview as an incidental help in understanding the "attribute" of divine eternity. We do not see how these notions determine our understanding of the ontological ground on which the entire edifice of Christian theology builds. However, whoever becomes familiar with the origin and development of philosophical ontology discovers that timelessness and time are directly and primarily connected as main notions in the understanding of the most inclusive and influential philosophical idea, namely, the notion of being. The timeless or temporal interpretation of the most general idea of being determines philosophical interpretations of regional ontologies. This was how, for instance, Plato created his own epoch-making cosmology and Heidegger his equally epoch-making anthropology and metaphysical sketches.

In the same way, biblically-minded theologians should use the notion of the analogical temporality of God's being as a horizon from which to understand the biblical revelation of his Trinitarian being and salvific actions. From the same horizon we should interpret biblical revelations about other regional ontologies, as for instance human nature and the nature of the world (cosmology).

Conclusion

Evangelical theology was created when the magisterial theologians of the protestant reformation defied tradition from the authority of biblical ideas. However, they did not defy the ontological ground on which the tradition they defied was built. What we call evangelical theology, then, does not flow from the *sola Scriptura* principle but from the quadrilateral of sources that justifies the use of philosophical ontological teachings as ground to define the referent of biblical thought and doctrines. From these sources tradition has drawn several lines of philosophical teachings, of which ontology was the most inclusive and influential.

Christian and evangelical theologies were constructed assuming a neoplatonic worldview built on Parmenides' timeless notion of ultimate reality. Augustine became instrumental in using the neoplatonic ontological framework to interpret God's being and his salvific acts.

By assuming against tradition that God's knowledge is not timeless but temporal, open view theologians unknowingly and indirectly disturbed the traditional interpretation of the ontological ground of evangelical theology. However, they did not derive their understanding of God's temporality from Scripture, but they implicitly assumed a univocal understanding of time from classical and

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neoclassical ontological traditions. The failure of classical and open view approaches to properly account for all biblical data suggests the need to move beyond them by considering the ontological question hidden behind them in a critical and biblical way. This may open the door for a new alternative theological project that might better account for all the data of Scripture and uncover their inner coherence from a biblical ontological foundation.

The advent of the modern epistemological and postmodern ontological divides has shown the limitations of the multiple sources method of doing theology. Reason has produced coherent, convincing, and mutually contradictory ontological proposals based on the timeless and temporal notions of the ultimate nature of reality and God. Yet, reason is not able to choose between them. The postmodern ontological divide forces Christian theologians to deliberately choose between the options philosophical scholarship presents to them.

How should evangelical theology choose its ontological foundation? Neither philosophy nor reason can make the choice. However, a way better than reason is open to evangelical theologians. They may decide to build their theology not from a multiplicity of sources but from the *sola, tota, and prima Scriptura* principle. By revealing the analogical understanding of divine being and the historical nature of ultimate reality, this less explored way has the advantage of building from divine revelation and not from the speculations of the human mind. It may also help us overcome the modern epistemological and postmodern ontological divides.

These findings lead us to the conclusion that the construction of a new theological project providing an alternative to the already existent classical and modern projects is possible by grounding Christian theology on Biblical teachings on being, God, human nature, worldview and knowledge. As theologians wrestle with the ontological foundation required for constructing Christian theology in postmodern times, they should consider giving a chance to the ontological teachings of Scripture as guides from which to define the macro hermeneutical principles of Christian theology.

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The Term תְּהוֹרָא in Genesis 7:2: A Linguistic Study

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The first distinction between clean and unclean animals is found in Gen 7:2, a text that is assigned by historical-critical scholars to the J source.¹ Almost all scholars—Jews or Christians—put the laws about permitted or forbidden animals into the category of ceremonial or cultic law.² J. Moskala, in his review of literature of the Mosaic laws regarding dietary prohibitions, classifies various interpretations thematically and evaluates them in the light of recent exegetical and theological scholarly discussion.³ In today's discussion of the topic, most Jewish and Christian scholars—both conservative and historical-critical—support the abolition of the laws regarding clean and unclean animals/food.⁴

¹See, for example, C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 427–29; G. von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 114–16.

²See, for example, W. C. Kaiser, “The Book of Leviticus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 1:1082; J. Milgrom, “Ethics and Ritual: The Foundations of the Biblical Dietary Laws,” in *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. E. B. Firmage, B. G. Weiss, and J. W. Welch (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 159–91.

³See J. Moskala, *The Laws of Clean & Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale*, ATSDS 4 (Berrien Springs: ATSP, 2000), 112–49. This author outlines the following fourteen theories: The Arbitrary Command explanation, the Cultic explanation, the Sociological explanation, the Symbolic explanation, the Didactic explanation, the Psychological/Repulsiveness explanation, the Taboo and Totemism explanation, the Death-Life Antithesis explanation, the Anthropological explanation, the Nature/Culture Boundary explanation, the Ethical/Moral explanation, the Sacrificial Paradigm explanation, the Economic explanation, and the Hygienic/Health explanation.

⁴There are a few exceptions among Jewish scholars: J. Milgrom, L. R. Kass, and L. E. Goodman; and among Christian scholars: G. F. Hasel, J. Doukhan, R. M. Davidson, A. M. Rodriguez, R. J. Rushdoony, H. B. Rand, and E. A. Josephson (*Ibid.*, 152).

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Our interest is focused on a linguistic study of Gen 7:2 concentrating on the major term of this text in the Hebrew Bible. The purpose of this article is to study the meaning and usage of the Hebrew term *ṭḥôrâ* (“clean”) in ancient Near Eastern literature and in the OT and to ascertain its theological meaning in Gen 7:2.

The Literary Structure of Genesis 7:2

The literary structure of Gen 7:2 presents three alternating microstructures: A B C // A' B' C'.

- A “You shall take with you seven each of” *tiqqah-l'kâ šib^{ecâ} šib^{ecâ}*
B “every clean animal” *mikōl hab^{hēmâ} haṭ^{hōra}*
C “a male and his female” *ʔiš w^ʔištō*
A' “two each of” *hiw' š^{enayim}*
B' “animals that are unclean” *ûmin-hab^{hēma} ʔšer lō ṭ^{hōra}*
C' “a male and his female.”⁵ *ʔiš w^ʔištō*

There is a synonymous parallelism between A “You shall take with you seven each of” [*tiqqah-l'kâ šib^{ecâ} šib^{ecâ}*] // A' “two each of” [*hiw' š^{enayim}*], especially between “seven each of” [*šib^{ecâ} šib^{ecâ}*] // “two each of” [*hiw' š^{enayim}*].⁶ The antithetical, semantic, and a precise positive-negative syntactical parallelism is evident between B “every clean animal” [*mikōl hab^{hēmâ} haṭ^{hōra}*] // B' “animals that are unclean” [*ûmin-hab^{hēma} ʔšer lō ṭ^{hōra}*]. In both cases, at a semantic level, the lines refer to “animals” [*hab^{hēmâ}*]. On the syntactic level, there is a preposition+noun+adjective // preposition+noun+adjective parallelism, but with the components in the positive-negative case.⁷ Finally, we also observe a synonymous, grammatical, and syntactical parallelism between C “a male and his female” [*ʔiš w^ʔištō*] // C' “a male and his female” [*ʔiš w^ʔištō*]. This parallelism can be observed at a grammatical level between the nouns *ʔiš* and *ištō*, *ʔiš* is a noun masculine singular in both microstructures, and *ištō* is also a noun feminine singular construct in both microsections. On the syntactic level, there is a noun+noun construct (+suffix) // noun+noun construct (+suffix) parallelism in both microstructures.⁸

⁵NKJV.

⁶As Watson points out when referring to the parallel types of words: “*synonymous word-pairs* comprise a large class with a broad spectrum . . . Its components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable in character”; see W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOT Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 131.

⁷In Watson’s words: “*antonymic word-pairs* are made up of words opposite in meaning and are normally used in antithetic parallelism” (ibid.).

⁸For a study of biblical grammatical, semantic, and syntactic parallelism, see A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985), 31–102.

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ʿhôrâ in Ancient Near Eastern Literature

Egyptian. Egyptian *w^cb* means both “purify” and “be or become pure”; it is also used as the adjective “pure.” In its transitive sense, the verb is sometimes used concretely—“wash,” “make clean” (e.g. clothing)—sometimes figuratively—“purify” (e.g., the king, priests, a temple, or an altar), that is, make free from impurity or evil. In the sense “be pure,” it is used of persons, parts of the body, clothing, buildings, sacrifices, etc. As an adjective, *w^cb* exhibits a semantic shift from “pure” = “clean” to “pure” = “consecrated, sacred” and to “pure” = “unused.” It is applied to persons, objects of all kinds, buildings, localities, etc.⁹

Akkadian. The Akkadian word for “pure” is *ebbu(m)*¹⁰ or *ellu(m)* I;¹¹ the two are largely synonymous. The former (equivalent to Sum. [DADAG(GA)]) means “gleaming” (metals, gold, precious stones, wood), “clean” (clothing), “sacred” or “pure” (objects, materials, or animals for cultic use; also rituals and divine beings), and “trustworthy.” The latter (equivalent to Sum. [KU; SIKIL]) can also mean “gleaming” (precious stones, light, a face); it can also mean “pure” (gold, naphtha, oil, etc.). It is often applied to objects, materials, or animals used in the cult; it indicates the ritual purity of a person, and it has a meaning that comes close to the concept “holy,” as applied to gods, kings, priests, their acts, dwelling places, etc. Incantations, for example, may be called “pure” or “holy.”¹²

The verb *ebēbu(m)*¹³ “to be (come) bright, pure” and *elēlu(m)* II¹⁴ “to be (come) pure, free” are likewise largely synonymous and often appear together. The former means in the G stem “be clean” of hands, “clear” of illness, impurity, omen, “be free” of claims; it means in the D stem [DADAG] “cleanse,” “purify (ritually),” “keep pure”; it means in the Dt stem [DADAG] “be purified, cleared.”¹⁵ The latter also means in the G stem [KU] of ominous sign “be clear”; “be pure” cultically, of person, incantation; “be free” from claims; it means in the D stem [KU] “purify” weapons in the sea; “body,” mouth, hands; of deity, “purify” humans, heaven by magic; “carry out purely” ritual, offering; “dedicate by purification”; it means in the Dt stem “purify oneself,” “be purified.”¹⁶

⁹A. Erman, and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1926–1931, 1963), 1:280–82.

¹⁰AHW, 1:180; CAD, 4:1–4; J. Black, A. George and N. Postgate (eds.), *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (CDA), SANTAG 5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 64.

¹¹AHW, 1:204f.; CAD, 4:102–06; CDA, 70.

¹²G. J. Botterweck, and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT), trans. D. E. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 5:289.

¹³AHW, 1:180f.; CAD, 4:4–8; CDA, 64.

¹⁴AHW, 1:197f.; CAD, 4:80–83; CDA, 69.

¹⁵CDA, 64; see also J. Huehnergard, *A Grammar of Akkadian*, HSS 45 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 492.

¹⁶CDA, 69; see also Huehnergard, 493.

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Ugaritic. The Ugaritic term equivalent to the Hebrew term *ṭhōrâ* is the root *ṭhr* (var. *zhr*), which appears in Ugaritic literature in the plural form.¹⁷ The basic meaning of adjective *ṭhr* is the same as the Hebrew adjective *ṭhōrâ*, “pure.”¹⁸

The word *ṭhr* appears in the cycle of “the Palace of Baal” in KTU 1.4 V 18–19¹⁹ and KTU 1.4 V 33–35²⁰:

¹⁸*wbn.bht.ksp.whrš* and (so) build a mansion of silver and gold,
¹⁹*bht.ṭhrm.iqnm* a mansion of brilliant stones (and) lapis-lazuli.

*wbn.bht.ksp*³⁴*whrš.* and (so) build a mansion of silver and gold,
*bht.ṭhrm.*³⁵*iqnm* a mansion of brilliant stones (and) lapis-lazuli.²¹

ṭhōrâ in the Old Testament

The term *ṭhōrâ* appears in Gen 7:2²² in the statement: “Of every clean [*ṭhōrâ*] beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female; and of beasts that are not clean [*ṭhōrâ*] by two, the male and his female.”²³ The LXX usually uses *katharos* and *katharizein* to translate *ṭhr* and its derivatives,²⁴ while the Vulgate has *mundis*. All the major English versions translate *ṭhōrâ* with “clean.”²⁵

The root *ṭhr* and its derivatives occur 206 times in the OT.²⁶ The verb *ṭāhar* occurs 94 times (34 times in the Qal, 39 times in the Piel, 1 time in the Pual, and 20 times in the Hithpael), *ṭāhōr* appears 95 times, *ṭōhar* 3 times, *ṭoh^orâ* 13 times, and *ṭhār* 1 time. The adjective feminine singular *ṭhōrâ* has been defined as

¹⁷See S. Segert, *A Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984), 162, 187 (1.4.V:19).

¹⁸See C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, *Analecta Orientalia* 38 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), n^o 1032; Huehnergard, 58, 76, 131. Hurrian: *ṣehali* “pure” + adverbial ending –ae [šī-*h*]a-al-e], hence “purely.” Ugaritic: the form here is probably /*ṭhuru*/ < **ṭahuru* (cf. Arabic *ṭahur*, Hebrew *ṭāhor* < **ṭahur*, Aramaic *ṭahura*) with vowel assimilation around the guttural /h/.

¹⁹See M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin, *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugaritic*, *ALASP* 8 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1995²), 19.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978²), 61; G. Del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y Leyendas de Canaán* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1981), 203. Gibson points out *ṭhr* as “clean, brilliant” (ibid., 147), and Del Olmo Lete as “pure, brilliant” (ibid., 555). See also G. Del Olmo Lete & J. Sanmartin, *Diccionario de la Lengua Ugaritica*, *Aula Orientalis Supplementa* 8 (Barcelona: Ausa, 2000), 2:480, “pure, brilliant.”

²²See W. Gesenius–E. Kautzch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 119w², 138b; P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, *Subsidia Biblica* 14 (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 2:530, 537, 595, 602, 605; and B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 116 n. 6, 276, 289, 333, 660.

²³KJV.

²⁴A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

²⁵ASV; NIV; NKJV; RSV; NRSV.

²⁶A. Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Old Testament* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 409–10.

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“clean, pure,”²⁷ “pure, purified, clean, cleansed, free (of impurity),”²⁸ “clean,”²⁹ “pure, be pure,”³⁰ “pure, be clean, be pure,”³¹ “pure, be pure,”³² and “pure, clean.”³³

Some cultic utensils are to be made of *zāhāb ṭāhôr* (“pure gold”). In the regulations governing the making of the tabernacle³⁴ and the account of its construction,³⁵ the term *zāhāb ṭāhôr* alternates with simple *zāhāb* (“gold”). The ark is to be overlaid with *zāhāb ṭāhôr*;³⁶ the *kappōret* is to be fashioned of *zāhāb ṭāhôr*,³⁷ as is the table.³⁸ Cultic vessels are also to be made of *zāhāb ṭāhôr*.³⁹ Several passages speak of *zāhāb ṭāhôr* as the material of the lampstand.⁴⁰ Finally, the snuffers and trays are of *zāhāb ṭāhôr*,⁴¹ and the incense altar is overlaid with it.⁴² There are also references to *zāhāb ṭāhôr* in the context of the priestly vestments and their fashioning;⁴³ two chains for the ephod,⁴⁴ two chains for the breastpiece,⁴⁵ bells on the skirts of the outer robe,⁴⁶ and a plate with the inscription *qōdeš l'yhwh*.⁴⁷ There are synonyms suggesting that the expression *zāhāb ṭāhôr* refers to pure, unalloyed gold.⁴⁸ Certain cultic objects are referred to expressly as “clean” or “pure.” These include the table for the showbread⁴⁹

²⁷BDB, 373.

²⁸D. J. A. Clines (ed.), *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 3:342–43.

²⁹W. L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 122.

³⁰E. Jenni and C. Westermann (ed.), *Diccionario Teológico del Antiguo Testamento* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1978), 1:895.

³¹E. Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (Jerusalem: U of Haifa, 1987), 240.

³²TDOT, 5:290–91.

³³R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer and B. K. Waltke (ed.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:344.

³⁴Exod 25; 30:3.

³⁵Exod 37.

³⁶Exod 25:11; 37:2.

³⁷Exod 25:17; 37:6.

³⁸Exod 25:23–24 (*ʿāśā*); 37:10–11 (*sph* [Piel] “overlaid”).

³⁹Exod 25:29; 37:16.

⁴⁰Exod 25:31, 39; 37:17, 22, 24.

⁴¹Exod 25:38; 37:23.

⁴²Exod 30:3; 37:26.

⁴³Exod 28; 39.

⁴⁴Exod 28:14.

⁴⁵Exod 28:22; 39:15, 17.

⁴⁶Exod 39:25.

⁴⁷Exod 28:36; 39:30.

⁴⁸1 Kgs 7:50 (*zāhāb sāgūr*); 1 Kgs 10:18 (*zāhāb mûpāz*); 1 Chron 28:18 (*zāhāb m'suqqāq*); 2 Chron 3:5, 8 (*zāhāb ṭōb*).

⁴⁹Lev 24:6; 2 Chron 13:11.

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and the lampstand,⁵⁰ and the incense is to be both *tāhōr* (“pure”) and *qōdeš* (“holy”).⁵¹

thr is applied in the OT to corporal, moral, and religious purity.⁵² Synonyms of *thr* are almost always used to fix moral purity: *brr* Niphal (“be pure, keep pure”),⁵³ *bar* (“pure”),⁵⁴ *barur* (“pure, clean”),⁵⁵ *bōr* (“purity”),⁵⁶ *zkh* Qal (“be pure”),⁵⁷ Piel (“keep pure”),⁵⁸ Hithpael (“to purify”),⁵⁹ *zkk* Qal (“be clean, healthy”),⁶⁰ Hiphil (“make pure”),⁶¹ *zak* (“clean, pure”).⁶² It is evident that pure (*thr*) and holy (*qđš*) appear close joined in the OT texts, while pure (*thr* [clean]) and unclean (*tmʿ*) always appear as opposite terms.⁶³

It is the function of the priests to distinguish (*hibdīl* [*bdl*]) between the clean and the unclean.⁶⁴ There are clean and unclean animals listed in Lev 11. The law governing clean and unclean animals is intended to distinguish *tāhōr* (“clean”), those that may be eaten, from *tāmēʿ* (“unclean”), those that may not be eaten.⁶⁵ The general principle that something unclean does not produce something clean is found in Job 14:4: the unclean human race cannot bring forth a single individual who is clean in the eyes of God; therefore the distinction between clean and unclean is only found in God. Only those who are clean may take part in the cult. All who are clean may eat the flesh of the sacrifice; whoever eats of it while unclean shall be cut off from the community.⁶⁶ Some cultic acts can be performed only by a “clean man” (*tš tāhōr*).⁶⁷ A priest who is clean may eat of the wave offering,⁶⁸ of the firstfruits,⁶⁹ and of the holy things (*qodāšim*).⁷⁰ Cultic ceremonies are to be performed at a “clean place” (*māqōm tāhōr*).⁷¹

In the writings of Qumran, the Manual of Discipline and sometimes the Damascus Document speak of “the purity of the many” (*tohʿrat hārabbim*) (1QS

⁵⁰Exod 31:8; 39:37; Lev 24:4.

⁵¹Exod 30:35.

⁵²Jenni and Westermann, 1:896.

⁵³2 Sam 22:27 = Ps 18:26; Isa 52:11.

⁵⁴Job 11:4; Ps 19:9; 24:4; 73:1; Cant 6:9–10.

⁵⁵Job 33:3; Zeph 3:9.

⁵⁶2 Sam 22:21, 25 = Ps 18:20, 24; Job 22:30.

⁵⁷Job 15:14; 25:4; Ps 51:7; Mic 6:11.

⁵⁸Ps 73:13; 119:9; Prov 20:9.

⁵⁹Isa 1:16.

⁶⁰Job 15:15; 25:5; Lam 4:7.

⁶¹Job 9:30.

⁶²Exod 27:20; 30:34; Lev 24:2, 7; Job 8:6; 11:4; 16:17; 33:9; Prov 16:2; 20:11; 21:8.

⁶³Jenni and Westermann, 1:900.

⁶⁴Lev 10:10; 20:25; Ezek 44:23.

⁶⁵Lev 11:47; Deut 14:11, 20.

⁶⁶Lev 7:19, 20.

⁶⁷Num 19:9, 18f.

⁶⁸Num 18:11; Lev 10:14 adds: “in a clean place.”

⁶⁹Num 18:13.

⁷⁰Lev 22:4.

⁷¹Lev 4:12; 6:11; 10:12–14; 16–18; Num 19:9.

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6:16, 25; 7:3, 16, 19), or “the purity of the holy men” (*ṭoh^orat ṽanšê haqqōdeš*) (1QS 5:13; 8:17), or simply *ṭoh^orâ* (1QS 6:22; 7:25; 8:24; CD 9:21, 23) as something that outsiders are forbidden to touch. The Hodayoth contain several occurrences of the verb *ṭhr*, mostly in the Piel, with reference to cleansing from sin and iniquity *ṽwôn* (1QH 1:32), *peša^c* (1QH 3:21; 7:30; 11:10), *ṽšmâ* (1QH 4:37; 6:8). According to 1QH 3:21, the result of this cleansing is incorporation into the community. Finally, 1QH 16:12 states that the cleansing takes place through the holy spirit of God. The Temple scroll contains many additional occurrences.⁷² To conclude, we must point out that in the Targums, the Talmudic, and the Midrashic literature, *ṭāhōr*, *ṭ^ehōrâ* is interpreted as “clean, pure.”⁷³

The Theological Meaning of Gen 7:2

The setting of all of Genesis 1–11 is universal in outlook.⁷⁴ The distinction between clean and unclean is important in this early time and universal context. Not only were clean animals and birds used for sacrifice (Gen 8:20), but after the Flood, humans were permitted to eat animals (Gen 9:3–5). The implication is that they were permitted to eat only clean animals. Therefore, the distinction between clean and unclean animals is known before the Israelites came into existence, in a universal passage and context. It can, consequently, be maintained that the distinction between clean and unclean animals is applicable to humankind in general. These dates support the idea that the distinction between clean and unclean animals is not the product of Hebrew cultic legislation, but precedes it into antediluvian times. The clean/unclean animal distinction is joined to other fundamental institutions that antedate Israelite times and are traced back to the history of beginnings, such as marriage (Gen 2:8–15), the Sabbath (Gen 2:1–3), and the like.⁷⁵

The distinction between clean and unclean animals in the time prior to Noah was made primarily for the purpose of human food/diet and not for ceremonial or cultic reasons.⁷⁶ Sacrifices were taken only from among the clean animals, but only a few clean animals were used in the sacrificial services.⁷⁷

We think that goodness and holiness constitute the two main concepts of the theology of Gen 7:2.

⁷²TDOT, 5:295–96; see also Jenni and Westermann, 1:901.

⁷³M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica, 1992), 520.

⁷⁴Genesis 1–11 is universally recognized to be “universal” in outlook and to have the whole world in view. See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis, AncB* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), liii; Westermann, 1–64; V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 10; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987), xlii–liii.

⁷⁵See Wenham, 177.

⁷⁶For an analysis of the reasons, see Moskala, 248–49.

⁷⁷Three species of animal (cattle, sheep, and goats: Lev 9:2–4; Exod 29:38–39, 42; etc) and two species of birds (turtledove and pigeon: Lev 1:14; 5:7).

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Goodness. We may observe a goodness background. Goodness is linked to Creation by the use of the Hebrew term *tôb* (“good”) in Genesis 1 (see Gen 1:21, 25), an adjective masculine singular like the adjective feminine singular *ṭhôrâ* (“clean, pure”) of Gen 7:2.⁷⁸ We suggest that surely there is a synonymous parallelism between *ṭhôrâ* (Gen 7:2) and *tôb* (Gen 1). It is very significant that the distinction between clean and unclean animals does not start with Creation in Genesis 1, but was known in the antediluvian world after the Fall. Consequently, we think that the use of the Hebrew term *ṭhôrâ* in Gen 7:2 has to do with those animals called *tôb* in Gen 1:21, 25; it is to say, with the clean animals of Creation, those not affected (or less affected) by the Fall (see Gen 3:14).⁷⁹

Holiness. The second main concept of the theology of Gen 7:2 is a holiness background. We suggest that there is a linguistic connection between Gen 7:2 and Gen 2:2–3 (the Creation account). This suggestion is due to the specific terms used: *šib^{ec}â šib^{ec}â* (“seven pairs”; 7:2), *š^{eb}îṭ* (“seventh”) and *y^{ec}qadēš* (“to consecrate, sanctify, be holy” Piel imperfect; Gen 2:2–3).⁸⁰

The Hebrew terms used in Gen 7:2 are *š^{en}ayim* (“two [pair]”), and *šib^{ec}â šib^{ec}â* (“seven pairs,” lit. “seven seven,” i.e., fourteen animals of each clean species—explicitly stated “the male and his mate”; 7:2). Thus one pair of unclean animals, i.e., two—male and female—and seven pairs of clean animals entered into the ark. The linguistic relationship between *š^{eb}îṭ* (“seventh [day]”) of Gen 2:2–3 and *šib^{ec}â šib^{ec}â* (“seven seven [pairs]”) of Gen 7:2 is very significant. This linguistic connection links holiness, seventh day, and seven pairs of clean animals, and we think it is a strong evidence that this law is a part of universal law.

The concept of holiness is linked to Creation by the use of the Hebrew terms *š^{eb}îṭ* (“seventh”) and *y^{ec}qadēš* (“to consecrate, sanctify, be holy”) in Gen 2:2–3. The root *qdš* is used for the first time in connection with Creation. The Creator made the Sabbath holy. Holiness in relation to the dietary laws means to preserve God’s given order of life within its boundaries.⁸¹ Holiness is thus the

⁷⁸“So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was *good*. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was *good*” (Gen 1:21, 25, NKJV; emphasis added).

⁷⁹“So the Lord God said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, you are *cursed* more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life’” (Gen 3:14, NKJV; emphasis added).

⁸⁰“And on the *seventh* day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the *seventh* day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the *seventh* day and *sanctified* it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen 2:2–3, NKJV; emphasis added).

⁸¹See J. D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 118.

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supreme motive of this law.⁸² It is highly significant that this great emphasis on holiness is not to the same extent found with any other laws.

Genesis 7:2 shows that Noah is presumed to be able to distinguish between clean (edible) and unclean (inedible) animals.⁸³ Ceremonially clean animals would be needed also for the burnt offerings that Noah would sacrifice (Gen 8:20) and for food (Gen 9:3). Consequently, clean animals were saved in seven pairs so that they could be used for sacrifices and for food.

Conclusion

Proceeding from the analysis we have carried out of the literary structure of Gen 7:2 in alternating microstructures, we think we have shown the structural, literary, and linguistic unity of the microsections of this text. Also, we have tried to demonstrate by means of a linguistic and theological study that this verse is key to explaining the distinction between clean and unclean animals as a part of universal law applicable to humankind in general.

As we have seen, the purpose of this article was to study the meaning and usage of the Hebrew term $\text{ṭ}^{\text{e}}\text{h}^{\text{o}}\text{r}^{\text{â}}$ (“clean, pure”) of Gen 7:2 in ancient Near Eastern literature and in the OT and to know the theological meaning of Gen 7:2. It indicated that goodness and holiness constitute the two main concepts of the theology of Gen 7:2. Moreover, we suggest that the concepts of goodness and holiness are both linked to Creation because of the linguistic connection between Gen 7:2 and Gen 1:21, 25; 2:2–3 (the Creation account) by the use of the synonymous and parallel Hebrew terms $\text{ṭ}^{\text{o}}\text{b}$ (“good”; Gen 1:21, 25) and $\text{š}^{\text{e}}\text{b}^{\text{i}}\text{ṭ}^{\text{i}}$ (“seventh”; Gen 2:2–3).

The terminology of clean/unclean animals appears for the first time in the Hebrew Bible in the Flood account in Gen 7:2. This background is very significant, because it shows that the distinction between clean and unclean animals did not originate with Moses and the nation of Israel, but rather with or before Noah (patriarchal period); it is pre-Mosaic, even though the list of clean/unclean animals is specified only in Lev 11 and Deut 14.

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⁸²See Exod 22:31; Lev 11:44–47; 20:25–26; Deut 14:2, 21.

⁸³See Wenham, 176.

A Look at Biblical and Ancient Extra-Biblical Perspectives on Death

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The issue of whether or not there was death before the entrance of sin on earth is actually a very large topic with many fascinating facets, all of which have potentially significant theological implications for us as Seventh-day Adventists.¹ This study will focus briefly on the following inter-related questions: Was there death on earth before the Fall? Was death part of God's original plan for creation before sin entered the world, or was it introduced as a punishment for wickedness after the Fall? Was animal death included in the death sentence at the Fall, or did animals die before the Fall? I will conclude with a few comments on two "problem" texts—Psalm 104 and Isa 65.

Does the Bible Know of Death Prior to the Fall?

One of the ideas we occasionally hear that would "solve" the tension between the Bible's extremely "short" earth history and the deep time that conventional science demands is that there were perhaps two "creations of life." It is suggested that the initial one occurred millions (billions?) of years ago and accounts for the bulk of the geologic column and the fossil record it contains. In view of the evidence of predation and death (including mass mortality layers and the like) in this fossil record, some add the idea that perhaps God permitted Satan to rule over the earth during this period. Then this earth was somehow destroyed, and there was a second "creation." This second creation is supposedly the one we find recorded in Scripture, wherein the earth was created in six days in the more recent past and the current biota, including humans (which appear at the very top of the geologic column), came at about this time.

Concerning the so-called first creation, it is difficult, to say the least, to accept an idea for which there is not a scrap of evidence in Scripture. There is

¹ Marco T. Terreros, *Theistic Evolution and Its Theological Implications*. Ph.D. Dissertation, SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 1994.

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simply no positive Biblical support for such a suggestion (the proposal that some—e.g., C. I. Scofield of Scofield Reference Bible fame (1917; 1967)—have made to change the verb has not been taken seriously by most linguists).²

A Perfect, Completed Creation. Of course, this lack of any reference to an earlier creation has provided an open field wherein speculation can and has run wild without restraint. I would suggest, however, that while the Bible provides no knowledge of a “pre-creation creation,” there are subtle nuances in the Hebrew text that appear to *preclude* it. This conclusion comes in part from a study done by my colleague Dr. Jacques Doukhan.³ Specifically, Doukhan argues that each stage of the creation is unambiguously characterized as good (*tov*). Moreover, both Genesis 1 and 2 teach that perfect peace reigned, not just between the human couple, but between humans and the animal kingdom (I will come back to this point in a moment). The end of the creative process is characterized by the word *wayekal*, generally translated as “finished” or “completed” (NIV). Doukhan argues that this word conveys more than the mere chronological idea of “end.” It also implies the *quantitative* idea that nothing is missing and there is nothing to add, confirming that death and all the evil that will strike later have *not yet* (an important concept in Hebrew) affected the world.

Doukhan then goes on to argue: “At the same time, the biblical text does not allow for speculation or supposition of a precreation in which death and destruction would already have been involved. It clearly indicates that the ‘heavens and earth’ which are presented in Genesis 2a (the conclusion of the creation story) are the same as those in Genesis 1:1 (the introduction of the creation story).” Doukhan concludes, “The event of creation (Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a) witnesses to, and is told as, a complete and total event which admits neither the possibility of a prework in a distant past (gap-theory) nor a postwork in the future (evolution).

Doukhan’s argument becomes even more potent if one accepts Richard Davidson’s analysis of Genesis 1.⁴ Davidson’s work is significant because he argues that the phrase “in the beginning” in verse 1 points back to the “ultimate” beginning of the universe, not simply this earth. Davidson supports Sailhammer’s linguistic argument that Genesis 1:1 refers to this initial creation of the

² The Hebrew verb *hay'ta* in Gen 1:2—“the earth *was* without form and void”—is translated by active gap advocates as “the earth *became* without form and void.” However, this translation goes against *hay'ta*’s normal usage and defies rules of Hebrew grammar (Fields 1976). These folks also translate the Hebrew *asa* (“made”) as “remade,” so that Gen 2:4b reads, “When the Lord God *re-made* the earth and heavens,” rather than the usual translation, “When the Lord God *made* (*asa*) the earth and heavens.” However, the Hebrew verb *asa* cannot be translated that way—it is parallel with “create.”

³ Jacques B. Doukhan, “Where Did Death Come From? A Study in the Genesis Creation Story,” *Adventist Perspectives* 4/1 (1990): 16–18.

⁴ Time and space do not permit a full review of Davidson’s study, but his work is built in part on John Sailhammer’s analysis of Genesis 1 found in his *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters: Multnomah, 1996). I believe Sailhammer has provided a valuable work, but it has some serious weaknesses which Davidson corrects.

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universe and that it is *separate* from the creation found in the rest of Genesis 1, which would have happened more recently. (While this can support an old earth but young life argument, the time between the beginning of the universe and the earth itself was not the focus or even a concern to an ancient Hebrew). Combining Doukhan and Davidson's analyses, the Hebrew writer is arguing that God's creative activity throughout the universe was not completed until this earth, itself, was created. If this analysis is correct, it not only precludes an earthly precreation with its subsequent death, but also denies that death occurred *anywhere* in God's entire created universe prior to the Fall. Nevertheless, even if one rejects Davidson's argument, Doukhan's argument alone maintains that the Hebrew text denies any precreation or death before the Fall.

The "Not Yet" of Creation. Doukhan offers additional arguments why death does not exist before the Fall. One of these parallels my own concerning Genesis 1 and 2 and deals with the Hebrew word *terem*, which conveys the concept of "not yet." As Doukhan points out, the entire Eden story is clearly written from the perspective of a writer who has already experienced the effects of death and suffering and therefore describes the events of Genesis 2 as a "not yet" situation. While I focused on the "not yetedness" of *siah hasade* (thorns and thistles), *esev hasade* (grain plants that make bread), men to cultivate the *ground* to grow the latter (which occurs only after the Fall!—prior to this man is tasked to cultivate *the garden* that God planted), and rain (which does not appear as a source of agricultural water until after the Fall), Doukhan adds other elements that appear in the text and support the idea that Genesis 2 does indeed serve as a prolepsis for Genesis 3. While some are explicit, as I pointed out, many more are implicit. For example, the dust (*afar*) from which man is made anticipates the dust to which he will return after the fall; the assignment of man to keep the garden anticipates his being forced out, whereupon the cherubim are entrusted to keep the garden. Doukhan shows that the *not yet* concept is also displayed in a play on words between *arom* (naked) and *arom* (cunning [of the serpent]), the former "prolepsis" pointing to the latter to indicate the tragedy which will be later initiated through the association between the serpent and human beings, which has *not yet* occurred. Doukhan's conclusions were anticipated by J. T. Wash, who also noted that "there is a frequent occurrence of prolepsis in the Eden account." Taken together, these all point to a great divide in earth's history—a time before sin and death and a time after. Sin and death do not occur until Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve disobey God.

Was Death Part of the Original Creation?

Gilgamesh and the Magic Plant. In many respects, the ancient peoples of the Near East were obsessed with the topic of death, as is evident in their elaborate burial rituals and in many of their writings. However, there is not much in ancient literature on the *origin* of death. The closest such story, perhaps, is a story from the Epic of Gilgamesh, found on Tablet 11 and commonly referred to

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as Gilgamesh and the Magic Plant. The essence of the story is that after the death of his dear friend and companion Enkidu, with whom he had shared many adventures, a distraught Gilgamesh sets off in search of eternal life. Gilgamesh learns that the long-lived hero of the Flood, Utnapishtim, knows the secret of avoiding death. Gilgamesh seeks out Utnapishtim and learns from him that before the Flood there was a plant that kept you alive as long as you would keep eating from it. Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim for the location of the plant and learns that it is now at the bottom of the sea, submerged there during the great flood. Gilgamesh determines to retrieve the plant, obtains a boat, and rows out to the middle of the sea. When he arrives over the spot where the plant is submerged, he takes a great breath, dives down into the depths, finds the plant, and retrieves it. He rows back to shore, where, exhausted from his ordeal, he falls into a deep sleep. While he is sleeping, a snake slithers along the shore, sees the plant, and eats it. When Gilgamesh wakes up, he finds his plant gone! He spies a snake skin nearby and realizes that the snake has deprived him of eternal life!

Various scholars have contemplated what this story might have meant to the ancients. Some have suggested it was intended to answer the question, Why do snakes shed their skin?—they apparently understood this as a way the snake rejuvenated itself. Others note that there were strong traditions among ancient Mesopotamians that the antediluvians had incredibly long life spans. Gilgamesh and the Magic Plant answers the question of why this is so. However, others have pointed out that Gilgamesh begins his quest for the Magic Plant after the death of his dear friend Enkidu, and that the story, perhaps, was intended to answer the question, Why do people die, or conversely, why don't they live forever? The answer seems to be that death had its origins when mankind lost access to the Magic Plant—that we were deprived of eternal life because a nasty snake stole it from us.⁵

Death in the Bible. The imagery and parallels invite comparisons with the Biblical account. Unfortunately, time precludes an examination of how these stories might relate to each other. Nevertheless, we still would like to explore what the Bible says about this subject. According to contemporary critical scholarship, the most authoritative work is probably Lloyd R. Bailey's *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (1979).⁶ Bailey's approach reflects the typical historical critical perspective prevalent at the time of his study. Bailey believes that the Bible's views on death changed through time as first ancient Israel and then the Christian church reacted to specific historical circumstances around them.

Bailey acknowledges that ancient Israel's "canonical" understanding of death is found in the Genesis creation accounts.⁷ However, he suggests, behind

⁵ Ronald A. Veenker, "Gilgamesh and the Magic Plant," *Biblical Archeologist* 44/4 (1981): 199–205.

⁶ Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., *Biblical Perspectives on Death* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). Bailey's work is cited prominently and favorably in the 1992 Anchor Bible Dictionary article on death.

⁷ Bailey, 36.

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chapters 2-3 “there may be two earlier folk explanations (etiologies) of human mortality. The first, according to Bailey, concerns a “protohuman” couple in primeval time warned by their creator not to partake of the fruit from the tree of knowledge. If they did, they “would surely die.” Bailey explains that according to this particular “folk story,” “death would be an intrusion into the Creator’s design, a curse under which humans were of necessity placed, a manifestation of their fallen state.”

The second “folk story” Bailey detects is that humans were intended to be mortal—to die—from the very beginning. The evidence Bailey presents for this folk story are the verses that show that man shares a common essence with the animal kingdom. Since animals died from the beginning—and Bailey assumes this was the case!—so must humans have died. Bailey also assumes that in this folk story humans were always forbidden access to the tree of life. Unfortunately, only a fragment of this second etiology is preserved in the Bible, including only a part of the following verse (Gen 3:22)—“Then the Lord God said, ‘ . . . lest he [humankind] put forth his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever . . .’” Bailey bemoans the fact that at this point the text breaks off, leaving us without the ending of this second story. Nevertheless, this verse fragment shows, according to Bailey, that God never intended to make man mortal from the beginning. This verse fragment was later merged into the first story.

Bailey argues that the idea of death as punishment does not appear in the rest of the OT and, thus, it is etiology #2 that provides the basic perspective of the rest of the OT.⁸ The idea that death was divine punishment did not emerge until the intertestamental period and, especially, the New Testament period.

In a more recent study on death in the Bible that came out in 1992, Kent Harold Richards acknowledges that there seems to be little preoccupation with the origin of death in the OT, that is, few texts directly address this issue, Genesis 3 being the major exception.⁹ However, in contrast with Bailey, Richards notes that “the understanding of death as part of some original plan is far less compatible with the wide range of texts.”¹⁰ That is to say, death was *not* a built-in part of God’s original creation according to the Bible. Rather, Richards argues, the most obvious explanation for the origin of death is as a *punishment for disobeying* God. Whereas Bailey fails to identify any OT texts, apart from Genesis 3, that support the idea that death was the result of divine punishment, Richards identifies numerous such texts. For example, Ezek 18:4, “Behold all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins shall die.” Other such texts include Ezek 18:4; Ps 37:9, 34; Ps 68:2; cf John 3:16; Ps 37:10, 20; Isa 40:24; Mal 4:1. While these latter don’t refer to the

⁸ Bailey, 38.

⁹ Kent Harold Richards, “Death,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 108–110.

¹⁰ Richards, 109.

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original death sentence, they emanate from that judgment and were indeed part of the ancient Israelite understanding.

Is the Death of Animals a Moral Issue?

Is the Bible Concerned Only with Human Death?

These questions are critical to our current discussions, I believe. Norman Gulley has alluded to the theodicy problem—trying to explain how a loving God could or would allow millions of years of death and suffering in the animal kingdom prior to the creation of humankind.¹¹ This seems especially incongruent with the description given of our Creator as a God who assures us of His love and care for us by reminding us that He does not forget even a sparrow (Luke 12:6) and He feeds the ravens (Luke 12:24). Therefore we should not worry about whether He will care for us, for are we not “more valuable than many sparrows?”

It is often suggested that the Bible is concerned only with human death (Rom 5:12)—that the death of animals is not a moral problem. This argument seems to me to be clearly contradicted by Rom 8:19–23:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Time and space do not permit a full discussion of this significant text, but it is important to note that advocates of the idea that death reigned in nature for millions of years prior to the appearance of mankind have given considerable attention to this passage. This is because the common reading of the text suggests that *nature* was directly affected by the Fall. Since this interpretation contradicts the model that holds that death existed in nature for millions of years prior to the seven-day Creation (and hence the Fall), there have been several

¹¹ I am a big fan of Lewis, having read everything he wrote and perhaps a few things he is said to have written, but didn't. Lewis grappled with the problem of animal pain and strove to come up with an answer in his *The Problem of Pain* study and elsewhere. His initial attempt was of a theistic evolution nature and was not very satisfying, as is evidenced in subsequent writings to critics of his position. Lewis at least acknowledged and fully recognized the problem and wrote that we must “turn with distaste from ‘the easy speeches that comfort cruel men’, from theologians who do not seem to see that there is a real problem, who are content to say that animals are, after all, only animals.”

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attempts to reinterpret the passage. The focus of attention has been on the word *ktisis* or “creation.” Opponents of the traditional view argue that *ktisis* can be translated as “creature” (which is true) and that “creature” is the intended meaning here. Moreover, they argue that the creature referred to is not the sub-human creation, but rather is a non-Christian human. They differ on who these individuals are, but the prominent suggestions are either Gentiles or Jews.

There are several problems with this alternate interpretation, in my opinion. For one thing, this translation seems to go against the majority of commentators and translators. However, I will briefly mention one other. For the “creature” interpretation to work, they must deny that the author intended to personify *ktisis* or nature—as far as I can tell, they accomplish this by simply asserting that early Christians did not personify *ktisis* (“creation”). However, this assertion does not appear to be accurate—in fact there is considerable evidence that *ktisis* was indeed personified and represented as a woman in both the Greek and early Christian world. Indeed, there are several mosaic floors that illustrate the personification of *ktisis*. Moreover, the reference in Romans 8 to the *pains of childbirth* (from the Greek root *sunodino*) reinforces the idea that the early Christians did indeed adapt the Greek personification of nature, and that is how *ktisis* is being used here.

However, I believe there are indications within Scripture beyond Rom 8 that indicate that the death of animals *is* a moral problem, and that their death—indeed, their present behavior as manifested in the predator/prey relationship—is tied directly to the acts of humanity, especially the human disobedience that led to the Fall. Insights into this issue come from two studies—the one by Doukhan (mentioned above) and another by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, an Israeli scholar. We will begin with Frymer-Kensky, whose study into the cause of the Flood provides valuable insights into human/animal behavior prior to the Flood. According to Frymer-Kensky:

Genesis states explicitly that God decided to destroy the world because of the wickedness of *man* (Gen 6:5). Although this traditionally has been understood to mean that God destroyed the world as a punishment for mankind’s sins, this understanding of the passage entails serious theological problems, such as the propriety of God’s destroying *all life* on earth because of the sins of man.¹²

She is arguing that rather than the sins of man, it was the shedding of blood—the flood was not so much punishment as a cleaning act.

However, Frymer-Kensky goes on to answer this dilemma by noting that “Genesis also states that God brought the flood because the world was full of *ḥāmās*.” The word *ḥāmās* is a fascinating word. It may sound familiar because its Arabic cognate is essentially the same word as the name for a militant branch

¹² Tikva Frymer-Kensky, “The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1–9,” *Biblical Archeologist* 40/4 (1977): 150.

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of a Palestinian political group that employs terrorism to achieve its political goals. This word is usually translated into English as “violence,” but as Frymer-Kenski points out, the term is very complex, with a wide range of meanings that render normal lexical analysis insufficient. Rather, she employs a semantic analysis to more fully grasp the nature of this evil that was so great, it necessitated the Flood. Semantic analysis includes a close examination of the context in which the word is used. This includes the context of not only the biblical text, but also its extra-biblical parallels, such as the Atrahasis Epic.

Frymer-Kenski points out that in both the Atrahasis Epic and Genesis 1–11 “solutions” are proposed to deal with “the problem of man” to keep these problems from reoccurring.

However, since the problems are perceived as quite different in each of these primeval histories, the solutions are likewise different. In Atrahasis, the problem is overpopulation, and the solution involves ways of inhibiting human reproduction.¹³ In Genesis the problem is *ḥāmās*, and the solution involves inhibiting the reoccurrence of *ḥāmās*. What, precisely, is *ḥāmās*? Frymer-Kenski shows us that the answer to the problem is in the solution. In the case of Gen 1–11, the solution is provided in the laws that God established immediately after the Flood—the so-called “Noahide” laws.

According to Genesis 9, God issued three commandments to Noah and his sons immediately after the flood: (1) he commanded man to be fruitful, to increase, multiply and swarm over the earth; (2) he announced that although man may eat meat he must not eat animals alive (or eat the blood, which is tantamount to the same thing—Gen 9:4); and (3) he declared that no one, neither beast nor man, can kill a human being without forfeiting his own life, providing for the execution of all killers, “whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed.”¹⁴

That animals are included in the new law implementing capital punishment is an indictment of the role they played in bringing *ḥāmās* into the world. In short, *ḥāmās* involved violent bloodshed. The world had descended into an environment of wanton mayhem, indiscriminate killing, wherein humans were killing humans, humans were killing animals (and eating them alive), and animals were killing humans (and no doubt eating them!). While the text does not specifically address this, animals were no doubt killing and eating other animals. It had literally become a dog eat dog world.

Frymer-Kenski’s emphasis is on how blood shed through violent acts—*ḥāmās*—pollutes and how the flood cleansed the earth from the pollution of

¹³ Anne Kilmer, “The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and its Solution as Represented in the Mythology,” *Orientalia* 41 (1972): 160–77; William J. Moran, “The Babylonian Story of the Flood [review article],” *Biblica* 40 (1971): 51–61; cited in Frymer-Kenski, 149.

¹⁴ Frymer-Kenski, 152.

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ḥāmās—the blood spilled through acts of violence. However, the point I would like to highlight is that this act of *ḥāmās* was *not* perpetrated solely by mankind—rather, it was also perpetrated by the animal kingdom. It is the actions of man *and* beast that call forth the judgment of the Flood—not simply that of man alone. Neither are acting in the manner ordained to them by God at the time of their initial creation. What was this manner?

My colleague Jacques Doukhan describes both the relationship of man and animal and the nature of their behavior as they were ordained by God during Creation week.¹⁵ Doukhan points out that the Hebrew verb *radah* (to have dominion), which is used to express man’s special relationship to the animal, “is a term which belongs to the language of the suzerain-vassal covenant without any suggestion of abuse or cruelty. In the parallel text of Gen 2, man’s relationship to nature is also described in the positive terms of covenant. Man gives names to the animals and not only indicates thereby the establishment of a covenant between him and them, but also declares his lordship over them. That death and suffering are *not* part of this relationship is clearly suggested in Genesis 1, where man’s dominion over the animals is directly associated with the question of food source. The food provided, both for man and animal, is to be that produced from plants, not animals (cf. Gen 1: 28–30). In Gen 2 the same peaceful harmony lies in the fact that animals are designed to provide companionship for man, even if neither complete nor adequate (Gen 2:18).

In view of the acknowledged polemic nature of Gen 1–11 vis-à-vis Mesopotamian primeval histories, it is interesting to note that the nature of the man/animal relationship in Genesis is just the *opposite* of that of the Sumerian account (known as the Eridu Genesis). According to the latter, it is said that before the Flood, mankind “did not have to fear attacks from animals; however, there was no control of animals” (i.e. domestication).¹⁶ This is quite the opposite of how the Bible describes the antediluvian world—a world in which the animal kingdom is in rebellion, and the peaceful relationship between man and beast and beast with beast has broken down—not only were humans killing each other, but animals were killing humans as well.

In essence, *ḥāmās* represents the complete breakdown of the covenant that God had established between *man and the animal kingdom* in Genesis 1:28–30. Rather than the peaceful, non-predatory world where man rules over the animals as a benevolent lord and the only food sources for both are plants, *ḥāmās* signals a planet in rebellion in which man no longer rules and the animals no longer submit; both are now locked into a mutually aggressive relationship of kill or be killed, and the mouths of both are stained with the blood of each other. This is not to say that the violence did not include humans killing each other (murder);

¹⁵ Doukhan, 16–18.

¹⁶ William J. Moran, “The Babylonian Story of the Flood [review article],” *Biblica* 40 (1971): 51–61.

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it certainly included that, but the bloodshed goes well beyond that, extending into the animal kingdom itself. It also includes the emergence of a carnivorous appetite—a taste for blood—on the part of both man and beast. Hence we can understand the stern new prohibitions that God places upon both man and beast after the Flood subsides.

God attempts to reduce the aggressiveness of the animal kingdom towards man by proclaiming: “The fear of you and terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea . . . “ God condescends towards man by allowing him to eat flesh, “every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you as I gave the green plant.” However, God prohibits the eating of animals alive or eating their blood, “only *you shall not eat flesh with its life—that is the blood.*” God then institutes capital punishment for *both man and beast* in the event that either kill a human being, “Surely I will require your life blood; [and] from every beast I will require it. And from every man, from every man’s brother I will require the life of man: whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made man.” As Frymer-Kensky points out, these latter commands are to reduce the possibility that *ḥāmās* —the polluting of the earth by the indiscriminate and wanton shedding of blood—will again appear on the earth.

I would also emphasize that the significance of this OT understanding of *ḥāmās* from the time of Noah did not simply fade away in later biblical times. Indeed, it continued to be embedded within later OT laws and, according to Frymer-Kensky, was still significant during the time of the New Testament church—they were seen as Pre-Jewish and, hence, universal.¹⁷

It is important to note that these Noahide prohibitions did not restore earth to its pre-Fall state. The benevolent lordship and peaceful relationship between man and beast described in Gen 1:28–30 no longer existed—the covenant was broken. The strife and competition that emerged between man and the former subjects of his kingdom continues, although animals now fear mankind. The food source for both man and beast was no longer restricted to plants—*both* now

¹⁷ According to Frymer-Kensky, in Acts 15, when the early church is wrestling with the problem of whether or not Gentiles who wish to join the Christian church should be circumcised, the decision of James is that circumcision will not be required; however, Gentiles are still instructed to abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from eating blood, from things strangled, and from fornication. Many commentators carelessly assume that James has made a compromise solution here—the Jewish ritual of circumcision will be dropped, but other Jewish requirements will be continued. However, these three continuing requirements were not merely Jewish ritual laws that the church was slow to drop. Rather, they were understood by the early Christian church to transcend Judaism; they originated not with Moses, but in the earlier Noahide commandments and were believed to be applicable to all peoples and cultures. They were certainly to be required of all believers as long as sin reigns on the earth. The Jews understood these three prohibitions to protect against the “three cardinal sins . . . offenses from which all the nations must refrain”—“murder, idolatry, and sexual abominations” (154).

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ate flesh, although mankind was prohibited from eating the blood—and the killing of humans by both other humans and animals was explicitly prohibited and to be punished by death. These latter restrictions were intended to reduce the negative impact of the Fall on nature by restricting in the strongest possible way (through capital punishment) the savagery of *ḥāmās*.

The emergence of *ḥāmās* introduces a *new* element that appears in the post-Fall world that was *not* part of the original creation. The repeated pictures throughout the OT of a New Earth must be seen within the context of *ḥāmās*. The new world order is a world in which man no longer strives with nature. Rather, the peaceful coexistence that pertained to the edenic world is seen as restored. It is not just coincidence that these utopian descriptions are linked to yearnings for deliverance from a strife-torn world. Thus, we read passages such as Isa 11:6–9:

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy shall lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Post-script—Two “Problem” Texts

Isaiah 65. Some suggest that Isa 65:20 indicates that the ancient Hebrews believed there would be death in the New Earth:

No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his days; For the youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred will be thought accursed.

The key to understanding this passage is (as is often the case) the context. The expressions in Isa 65 are not really metaphorical; rather, they are idiomatic. That is, they are idioms that are familiar and appropriate to the historical circumstances that Israel found itself in, when this passage was penned. What was that situation? Israel was facing annihilation from invading powers (due to their rebellion against God).

Idioms can contain literal elements with regards to the immediate historical context. For example, building houses and having others inhabit them, or planting a vineyard and having another reap the harvest was a very real concern in Iron Age Israel, which found itself constantly under attack from outside invaders. Premature death was also associated with warfare and siege conditions. The key is verse 23, where it summarizes the preceding verses by proclaiming that God's people will *not* labor in vain or bear children for calamity. The threats of the past—including very real threats that Israel was confronting, such as siege

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warfare—will *not* exist in the new earth. Verse 20 is not saying people won't live forever in the new earth; rather, it is saying they will not be subject to the ravages of conflict that characterized their present existence.

The anti-strife message of verses 19–22 is capped off in verse 25, where the wolf and the lamb will graze together and the lion will eat straw like the ox. This verse stands apart from 19–22 in that it is not describing the ravages of war; rather it is simply describing a new world order that will *not* be characterized by strife. It is interesting that it does not say the Babylonian will get along with the Israelite—even though this is certainly included. But the new world order extends to *all* aspects of God's domain, including *nature*—"they will do no evil or harm in *all* My holy mountain," says the Lord.

By failing to view this passage in its historical context, I believe critics miss the idiomatic characteristic of the verses. The point is *not* that we might or might not build houses in the New Earth, but that others won't take them from us *in battle*. The point is *not* that we might or might not plant vineyards in the New Earth, but that others won't deprive us of the fruits of our labors *through conflict*. And finally, the point does *not* concern the nature and/or length of life in the new earth, but that the *deadly conflict* that typified Israel's existence *will no longer claim life*.

In short, the nature and/or length of life in the New Earth is *not* the point of Isa 65—only that life won't be lost through conflict. The reference in v. 22b to the days of his people being like the lifetime of a tree can actually be viewed as a symbol of eternal life. To argue that Isa 65 envisions death in the New Earth is not only incorrect, but is completely missing the point of the passage. Other passages, of course are more explicit about eternal life.

Isaiah 25:8: He will swallow death forever. He will wipe the tears from all faces. The reproach of his people he will remove from all the earth.¹⁸

Daniel 12:2–3: Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.¹⁹

Psalm 104. There is no question that Psalm 104 is a Creation Psalm. Some suggest, however, that Psalm 104 teaches that *death* was a part of the original creation (the implication that animal death is not tied to the Fall and could have, therefore, existed for some considerable time [millions of years?] before the Fall, which then brought death to humans as well). One of my problems with this interpretation is that it erroneously (in my opinion) assumes that Psalm 104 is describing the *pristine* creation—God's creation as it was after the first week, but before the Fall. I disagree. There is no doubt that Psalm 104 is a Creation

¹⁸ Some critics, not surprisingly, suggest that the line "He will swallow death forever" is not original in this passage (Bailey, 73). Bailey himself questions whether this line was a literal expectation or simply poetic exaggeration.

¹⁹ Again, most critics dismiss this passage as a late 2nd century text.

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Psalm, but its intent was *not* to describe the pristine, pre-Fall creation. Rather, its point is simply to give God credit for the Creation as it was at the time of the Psalmist!

There are several indicators that it is the Psalmist's *contemporary* world of creation that is being described: (1) the reference to the Cedars of Lebanon (v. 16), which would only be important and of interest to Israel during the Iron Age; (2) ships sailing on the seas (v. 26)—ships were certainly not part of the original pristine creation, but were a major component of Iron Age Israel's economy; (3) earthquakes and volcanoes (v. 32) were typically instruments of God's judgment in the *post-Fall world*—many earthquakes were well known during the time of Israel, although these would certainly not be limited to that time period (the Psalmist is giving credit to God for His *power* over His own creation here); (4) the writer's appeal to God that sinners, who were unfortunately part of God's creation as it was at the time the Psalmist was writing, be consumed and the wicked be no more (v. 35). This latter statement makes no sense in a pristine, pre-Fall world.

Within the context of these indicators that show it is the *Psalmist's world* that is being described and *not* the pristine, unfallen world, the references to "beasts of the forest that prowl" about and "young lions roaring after their prey" make perfect sense. God's creative acts penetrate the fallen world—He is still the Creator, even of this Fallen world.

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A One-sided Trinity in Theology: Its Continuing Impact

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In the early centuries theologians expended much time and energy combating heresies about God, including major treatises on the Trinity, but mostly in defense of the divinity of Christ, with much less said about the Holy Spirit. They defended the divinity of Christ and the Spirit from the perspective of their unity in the one God. We will present some highlights of major contributors during the first four centuries, not attempting to be exhaustive but representative, and evaluate their thinking and its subsequent impact on theology.

The Trinity in Patristic Theology: The West

We begin our journey in early patristic theology by considering how the Trinity was presented in the West and then later how it was presented in the East. We will see differences, but a common focus and a common deficit as far as a biblical understanding of the Trinity is concerned.

Irenaeus (120–202). Heresies entered the early church “like locusts,” and Irenaeus spent his life combating them. Bishops of Rome were caught up in these heresies, such as Eleutherus, who accepted the Montanist heresy, and his successor Victor. Irenaeus stood up against both of them. In his books *Against Heresies* Irenaeus discusses multiple heresies (more than twenty-two) attempting to replace the truth (Book 1), after which he refutes them with reason (Book 2), and then from revelation (Books 3–5), a “reason-revelation” sequence that was repeated by Catholic theologians like Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*).

Of these heretics, Irenaeus said, “These men falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation.” They claimed superior knowledge beyond that revealed in the Scriptures. Irenaeus said these

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errors are “blasphemy against Christ”¹ as “agents of Satan, sent forth for the purpose of overturning the faith of some, and drawing them away from life.”² Irenaeus said, “there are as many schemes of ‘redemption’ as there are teachers of these mystical opinions,” which compares well with postmodernism, where rampant relativism calls into question revealed truth. When Satan was defeated at Calvary, in anger he made war with the church (Rev 12:9–13,17). In other words, we must keep the cosmic controversy in mind to grasp what is going on in the battle over the Trinity. God wants to reveal what He is like. Satan seeks to distort this revelation with contrary claims. Calvary revealed God as love, as suffering for humans, but Satan would counter this with a false view of God.

Irenaeus keeps in view the controversy that Satan is waging against God. With great patience God wants humans to realize their dependence upon Him, for (1) they receive immortality from Him, and (2) it is not theirs apart from Him. Satan counters claiming that (1) incorruptibility is natural to humans, and (2) not a supernatural gift. In doing so Satan made man “more ungrateful towards his Creator, obscured the love which God had towards man, and blinded his mind not to perceive what is worthy of God, comparing himself with, and judging himself equal to, God”³

Irenaeus rejected the heretical idea that Jesus “was merely a receptacle of Christ” who came upon Him in the form of a dove, so that “He merely suffered in outward appearance, being naturally impassible.”⁴ He pointed to Christ’s baptism as proof of the Trinity.⁵ The Son “is in the Father” and the Father is in the Son.⁶ These words anticipated the future articulation of the *perichoresis* (mutual penetration) between the Persons of the Trinity. Irenaeus gained from Scripture an apparent insight into the relationship between the divine and the human natures in Jesus which was not even achieved in the Nicean (A.D. 325) or Constantinople (A.D. 461) Councils. Irenaeus said Christ “became man in order to undergo temptation, so also was He the Word that He might be glorified; the Word remaining quiescent, that He might be capable of being tempted, dishonoured, crucified, and of suffering death.”⁷ For a thousand years this insight was lost in theology, for theologians said Christ lived on earth as the Son of God, not as the Son of Man.

Evaluation. Irenaeus was right to go to Scripture to answer the heretics, but he also felt a need to go to the teachings of the church at Rome to counter the

¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 315 (Preface).

² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 440 (3.16.1); cf. “this class of men have been instigated by Satan.” ANF 1, 345 (1.21.1).

³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 450 (3.20.1).

⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 440 (3.16.1). “Christ remained impassible . . . it was Jesus who suffered” ANF 1, 428 (3.11.7).

⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 423 (3.10.3).

⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 419 (3.6.2).

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 449 (3.19.3).

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numerous heresies. We must remember that this was not the Roman Catholic Church we know today, whose importance began under emperor Constantine in the 4th century, and with its later rise to prominence in the 6th century. (1) A. Cleveland Coxe rightly questions the importance of Rome in the early church period,⁸ and (2) Irenaeus repudiated the teachings of two bishops of Rome.⁹ This background must be kept in mind when Irenaeus refers to the Church of Rome as “very ancient” and writes that “every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority” (founded by Peter and Paul).¹⁰

Looking to both Scripture and to the church would one day lead to church tradition being placed above biblical revelation, which is the hallmark of Roman Catholicism. Perhaps the view of Irenaeus that the episcopate is a “succession from the apostles” and their reception of “the certain gift of truth” was one influence that led to the alleged importance of the Magisterium over Scripture.¹¹ However, in fairness to Irenaeus, the truth about the Trinity was kept alive in the early churches in their conquest against these numerous heresies. The important thing is that their understanding was based upon Scripture, which Irenaeus demonstrated so well (*Against Heresies*, Books 3–5). So on this topic the churches concurred with Scripture.

Irenaeus had a grasp of the controversy between God and Satan and keeps this in mind in his two recapitulations made by Christ and Satan. He finds both recapitulations running throughout history, and in this sense he is a historicist. He rightly says Adams’ disobedience at the tree led to Christ’s obedience at another tree (the cross), yet adds that Eve was disobedient to God’s word while Mary was obedient to God’s word, “in order that the Virgin Mary might become the patronness (*advocata*) of the virgin Eve. And thus, as the human race fell into bondage to death by means of a virgin so is it rescued by a virgin.”¹² This comparison of the two virgins was unfortunate, because it detracted from the comparison of the two Adams and may have influenced the later elevation of Mary, which proved to be a heresy as great as any Irenaeus confronted.

Irenaeus presents the Trinity as the “one God” who is Father, Word, and Wisdom, and it is this oneness that denies the diversity of heretical teachings about God. Throughout, he mentions how these three in the Trinity are related in an external sense, for example, (1) the Son and the Spirit are the two hands of God in creation, and (2) all three participate in the plan of salvation, as seen at Christ’s baptism. Irenaeus even speaks of their relationship as friends to humans. He does not, however, speak about their inner-relationship as three Persons of the Trinity. In these five books of Irenaeus there is no relational Trinity

⁸ A. Cleveland Coxe, *ANF* 1, 309–313.

⁹ A. Cleveland Coxe, *ANF* 1, 309, 310.

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, *ANF* 1, 415 (3.3.2).

¹¹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, *ANF* 1, 497 (4.26.2).

¹² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, *ANF* 1, 547 (5.19.1).

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because he concentrates on the one God in answer to the multiple heresies about God.

Tertullian (145–220). Tertullian, a native of Carthage, in Africa, was a convert from paganism and became the founder of Latin Christianity. In later life he left the Church and became a Montanist. This departure from primitive Christianity was to be repeated many times in the future.¹³ Even in the early church there were forces at work to derail the church from truth. An example is found in Tertullian's use of Scripture. He used the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Septuagint; LXX) instead of checking the Hebrew. In most cases the texts he used differ from the Hebrew text. Furthermore, he used an old Latin version, or versions, popular in the African church of the second and third centuries, so his work was founded on some faulty translations, and he didn't check their accuracy in the Hebrew or Greek originals. One unfortunate reason for checking the Greek was because most of the heretics were Greeks or Greek-speaking, and he thought the Greek copies of the Scriptures were corrupted by them.¹⁴

One example of this is his interpretation of Isaiah 45:14, 15 from the Septuagint. In the Greek text it says various non-Jews will come to Judah pleading, "because God is in thee; and there is not God beside thee, O Lord. For thou art God, yet we knew it not, the God of Israel, the Saviour." In Hebrew it reads, "Surely God [E]l is with you, and there is no other god [Elohiym]. Truly you are a God [E]l who hides himself, O God [E]l and Savior of Israel." Tertullian extrapolates the Trinity from this passage. The non-Jews "'shall worship Thee, because God is in Thee: for Thou art our God, yet we knew it not; Thou art the God of Israel.' For here too, by saying 'God is in Thee,' and 'Thou art the God,' he sets forth Two who were God: [in the former expression *in Thee*, he means] in Christ, and [in the other he means] the Holy Ghost."¹⁵

Tertullian wrote on the Trinity in his *Against Praxeas* (c. 208). Praxeus defended the unity in the Trinity and did so by saying that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were one and the same. This Modalistic or Monarchian view alleged that "the Father Himself came down into the Virgin, was Himself born of her, Himself suffered, indeed was Himself Jesus Christ." Tertullian observed that in

¹³ St. Bernard and later the Schoolmen "separated themselves far more absolutely than ever Tertullian did from the orthodoxy of Primitive Christendom. The schism which withdrew the West from Communion with the original seats of Christendom, and from Nicene Catholicity, was formidable beyond all expression, in comparison with Tertullian's entanglements with a delusion which the See of Rome itself had momentarily patronized. Since the Council of Trent, not a theologian of the Latins has been free from organic heresies, compared with which the fanaticism of our author was a trifling aberration. Since the late Council of the Vatican, essential Montanism has become organized in the Latin Churches; for what are the new revelations and oracles of the pontiff but the *deliria* of another claimant to the voice and inspiration of the Paraclete?" Introductory Note, *ANF* 3, 4.

¹⁴ Introductory Note, *ANF* 3, 5–7.

¹⁵ *Against Praxeas*, *ANF* 3, 607 (chap. 13).

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so doing “the *old* serpent has fallen out with himself, since when he tempted Christ after John’s baptism, he approached Him as ‘the Son of God,’” indicating the Father had a Son as Scripture attests.¹⁶ In other words, the serpent destroys truth by defending it, so that the Trinity is destroyed by defending the unity of God. The “Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are the very selfsame Person.”¹⁷

Praxeas took credit for worshipping the one God rather than two or three gods. Tertullian counters by saying God is one, for the Son derives from no other source than the substance of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from no other source than the Father through the Son.¹⁸ He calls these “*emanations*” so that the Son and the Spirit are emanations from the substance of the Father. All three are one God and yet are three distinct Persons in the one God. Before creation the Father was not alone, for He created everything through the Word, a Person distinct from Himself, and the Spirit is a Person distinct “from God and the Son.” Though distinct, they are not diverse. “For the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole, as He Himself acknowledges: ‘My Father is greater than I’” (John 14:28), and “his inferiority is described as being ‘a little lower than the angels’” (Psa 8:5). He grants a difference in the mode of their being, but not in their divine substance.¹⁹

The idea of the Father as the “entire substance” and the Son as a “portion” was not a helpful way of expressing the unity of God. But Tertullian used an analogy that better expressed the distinction within the unity by stating that “in order to be a husband, I must have a wife; I can never myself be my own wife,” and “I never can be a son to myself; and in order to be a son, I have a father, it being impossible for me ever to be my own father.” Here Tertullian was crystal clear, for these analogies called into question Praxeas’ view that the Father is His own Son, and the Son is His own Father, an impossible unity in the Trinity. Tertullian said it is irrelevant to say “‘with God nothing is impossible’ for then we make out God to have done anything we please.”²⁰ Then follow many biblical texts to prove the distinction of the divine Persons in the Trinity, such as “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Psa 2:7), “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Psa 110:1), and “Let us make man in our own image, and after our own likeness” (Gen 1:26).²¹

Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit, who would receive from Him as He had received from the Father. “Thus the connection of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Paraclete, produces three coherent Persons, who are yet distinct One from Another. The Three are one essence, not one Person, as it is said, ‘I

¹⁶ ANF 3, 597 (chap 1).

¹⁷ ANF 3, 598 (chap 2).

¹⁸ ANF 3, 599, 600 (chaps 3, 4).

¹⁹ ANF 3, 601–604 (chaps. 6–9).

²⁰ ANF 3, 604–605 (chap. 10).

²¹ ANF 3, 605–621 (chaps. 11–24).

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and my Father are One,' in respect of unity of substance, not singularity of number." In saying this Tertullian met Praxeas on his own ground where he misinterpreted "I and my Father are One."²² He further pointed out that Praxeas distinguished between the Son of man in the flesh and Father as Spirit, and so did divide them rather than uniting them, which he apparently overlooked.²³

Having distinguished the Persons in the Trinity, Tertullian next distinguished the two natures in Christ. It was the human nature of Christ that died, because mortal, whereas the divine nature of Christ didn't die, because immortal. By contrast, for Praxeas Christ is the Father, so the Father suffered on the cross (so called Patripassianism), but Praxeas says the Father was only a "fellow sufferer." Tertullian rightly points out that this admits that there are two who suffered, and thus undermines the unity (or identity) argument of Praxeas. Tertullian stated that neither the Father nor the Spirit suffered, for God only suffered in the Son. This leads to the dereliction cry, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Tertullian rightly says this was the cry of the humanity of Christ, suggesting "it was uttered so as to prove the impassibility of God, who 'forsook' His Son, so far as He handed over His human substance to the suffering of death."²⁴

Tertullian concludes by saying that the unity view of Praxeas was like the One God of the Jews. He suggests that in the new covenant, "His Unity might be believed in, after a new manner, through the Son and the Spirit, in order that God might now be known openly, in His proper Names and Persons, who in ancient times was not plainly understood, though declared through the Son and the Spirit." Praxeas and his followers denied the Son when they supposed Him to be the same as the Father and needed to realize that "'whosoever shall confess that (Jesus) Christ is the Son of God' (not the Father), 'God dwelleth in him, and he in God.'"²⁵

Evaluation. Gerald O'Collins, S.J., of the Gregorian University in Rome, notes that Tertullian, in "writing of one divine substance (*substantia*) in three persons," was "the first Christian writer to exploit the term *person* in theology, the first to apply *Trinity* (*Trinitatis*) to God."²⁶ Tertullian borrowed the term from the heretic Theodotus, who first used it around A.D.150.²⁷

Tertullian's idea that the Father and the Spirit were unable to suffer with the Son during His cry on the cross doesn't protect the uniqueness of God from intelligent created beings as he supposed, but denies the inner-Trinitarian love of

²² ANF 3, 621 (chap. 25).

²³ ANF 3, 623 (chap. 27).

²⁴ ANF 3, 623–627 (chaps. 27–30).

²⁵ ANF 3, 627 (chap. 31).

²⁶ Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (Mahway: Paulist, 1999), 105.

²⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, tr. Phillip Barryman (Maryknoll: Orbis, Portuguese 1st 1988, 4th 2004), 5.

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each member of the Trinity for the others as Scripture teaches. How could the Father who loved the world by sending His Son to save it (John 3:16) be so unloving to the Son when He fulfilled His mission in death? If the Father said at Christ's water baptism, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17), what would you expect Him to say at His death baptism?

Novatian (c. 210–280). The Italian Novatian presided over the Roman presbytery about A.D. 250 and wrote His Treatise on the Trinity about A.D. 257. This work is based on Scripture alone, whose texts appear throughout the document. With clear reasoning from Scripture, Novatian skillfully meets Sabellianism's claim that there is only one God who appears in three modes of being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thus denying three Persons in the one Godhead. According to Sabellianism, Christ must be the same as the Father. Novatian meets this error—like a lawyer who has arranged all his evidence—in a barrage of biblical texts that convincingly prove that Christ and the Father are both God as two distinct Persons, but not as two Gods. The Holy Spirit is mentioned first in chapter 24 (there are only 31) with respect to Christ's incarnation, and only chapter 29 presents Him as a member of the Trinity. So clearly Novatian's treatise on the Trinity is mostly about Christ and the Father. He spends much of his time proving the divinity of Christ, then brings in the Holy Spirit just before the end.

He presents God as Creator, the founder of all that is (chapters 1–8). God contains all things, and there is no room for a superior God.²⁸ He is the judge of evil, but He is not the originator of it.

He is immutable (unchanging), for "there is never in Him any accession or increase of any part or honour, lest anything should appear to have ever been wanting to His perfection, nor is any loss sustained in Him, lest a degree of mortality should appear to have been suffered by Him." To propose any change in God means to cease "to be that which it had been, and consequently begins to be what it was not."²⁹ God is perfect and cannot be added to, so therefore He must be unchanging. Anger doesn't corrupt divine power as it does for humans.³⁰ God doesn't have any diversity in Himself, for He is simple, which means nothing like a tabernacle or temple can contain Him because He is fully present everywhere.³¹ Hence, no figures of speech—such as love, Spirit, Light, or Fire—do justice in describing all that He is and all that He does. "He embraces all things, and contains all things," so "His care will consequently extend even to every individual thing, since His providence reaches to the whole, whatever it is."³²

In chapter 9, Novatian begins the argument that Jesus Christ is the Son of this God described in the previous chapters. Christ fulfills the expectations of

²⁸ ANF 5, 612 (2).

²⁹ ANF 5, 614 (4).

³⁰ ANF 5, 615 (5).

³¹ ANF 5, 615, 616 (6).

³² ANF 5, 616–618 (7, 8).

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the Old Testament by being also truly human as well as truly divine. He did not merely take an appearance of human flesh, for there is no salvation in Him if He was not also human. That's why "blood flowed forth from His hands and feet" and "He was raised again in the same bodily substance in which He died." When it says "flesh and blood do not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 16:50), it means "the guilt of the flesh."³³ Novatian presents Jesus Christ as God and man in One Person. He asks, "If His sufferings show in Him human frailty, why may not His works assert in Him divine power?" He affirms, "He is both, lest if He should be one only, He could not be the other." In other words, "in the same manner as He is born as man subsequent to the world, so as God He is manifested to have been before the world."³⁴

In the next six chapters (12–17), Novatian defends the Divinity of Christ and repeatedly asks, "If Christ was only a man," how did he make the world, how is He present whenever called upon, how can He say "I and the Father are one?" how can He say that belief in Him means believers will never die, how can He say the Holy Spirit will declare things given to Him by Christ, and many other such questions. He allows the biblical evidence to effectively call into question those doubting Christ's divinity. In three chapters (18–20) he recites Old Testament texts where the pre-incarnate Christ appeared as an angel and is called God. He argues that Christ was God because He had the power to lay down His life and to take it up again (21) and thought it not robbery to be God when He became human (22).

He describes the divine-human in Jesus Christ as follows: "reasonably the Son of God might be made by the assumption of flesh the Son of man, and the Son of man by the reception of the Word of God the Son of God."³⁵ Novatian speaks against those who see no difference between the Son of God and the Son of man in a modalistic sense. He says there is a "mingling of association," but this resulted in the Son of man becoming what He was not, namely the Son of God (24). The distinction between being God and being human is argued from Christ's death, where His humanity, not His divinity, died. This he likens to other humans' bodies that die, but not their soul. If "the soul has this excellence of immortality that it cannot be slain, much more has the nobility of the Word of God this power of not being slain."³⁶

Although Christ is God, He is not God the Father, for "the person of the Son is second after the Father." Novatian demonstrates this from texts like the Father having the Son sit at His right hand until He defeats His enemies (Psa 110:1); "Father, glorify me with that glory with which I was with Thee before the world was made" (John 17:5); "I have glorified Thee upon earth; I have finished the world which Thou gavest me" (John 17:4); and "All things are delivered to me

³³ ANF 5, 618–620 (9, 10).

³⁴ ANF 5, 620, 621 (11).

³⁵ ANF 5, 634 (23).

³⁶ ANF 5, 634–636 (24, 25).

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by my Father” (Luke 10:22).³⁷ The text “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30) is interpreted as “the Father and Son are one in agreement, in love,” which he calls the “loving association.” He continues that the Son of God is “inferior to the Father” because the Father sanctified Him (set Him apart) and sent Him into the world (John 10:36). He cites Christ words, “If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I go unto the Father: for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).³⁸

Finally Novatian comes to the Holy Spirit (29) and speaks about the things He does, His “different kinds of offices.”

This is He who places prophets in the Church, instructs teachers, directs tongues, gives powers and healings, does wonderful works, offers discrimination of spirits, affords powers of government, suggests counsels, and orders and arranges whatever other gifts there are of *charismata*; and thus makes the Lord’s Church everywhere, and in all, perfected and completed.

He then speaks of enablings that the Spirit gives to sinners.³⁹

Evaluation. Although Novatian conclusively demonstrates from Scripture that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, that He is not the Father, and that He and the Father are not two Gods, but two Persons as one God, and gives small mention to the Holy Spirit, there seems to be a serious weakness in his presentation. When he says Christ is “inferior” or “second” to the Father he doesn’t mention that most of the texts he cites are from the context of Christ’s mission on earth, and there’s no mention of their eternal equality before the incarnation. Nevertheless, Novatian rightly states that Christ in His human mission is God. What he is really speaking about is the economy of function among the Trinity by which they have various responsibilities in their saving mission of humans. This is important, but what is apparently missing is the inner relationship of love between them. It is true that passing mention is made of the love between the Father and the Son, but it is not developed, nor is there any similar reference to the relationship that the Holy Spirit holds to the other two, nor about their relationship with Him. But wouldn’t the eternal loving relationship among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be the strongest argument against modalism?

Hilary of Poitiers (300–367). Neoplatonism influenced Hilary when he was a pagan, and philosophy gave him a desire to understand truth, which he finally found in Christianity and its Scriptures. As a Christian he wrote in Latin, with knowledge of Greek but no knowledge of Hebrew. He used the Greek Septuagint (LXX) for the Old Testament and the Latin for the New Testament. Looking beyond the letter of the text, he used a mystical method of interpretation. Tertullian and Origen influenced Hilary, who learned most of his theology

³⁷ *ANF* 5, 636, 637 (26).

³⁸ *ANF* 5, 637–640 (27, 28).

³⁹ *ANF* 5, 640–641 (29).

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from eastern sources. Although an original thinker, especially in Christology, he never wrote out his views in a systematic way, which may be the reason he is not as well known as he might have been. However, his thinking influenced Augustine (354–430), Ambrose (340–397),⁴⁰ and “all later theologians.”⁴¹

Hilary’s *De Trinitate* (On The Trinity) was written to refute Arianism, which claimed that Christ was merely a created being, even though created far back in eternity. Hilary’s entire focus is to defend the full divinity of Christ,⁴² and thus the Holy Spirit does not get equal coverage in the twelve volumes. In fact, Hilary concentrates on the Father and the Son and their relationship to each other, with no comparable space given to the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son.⁴³ Hilary presents the eternal generation of the Son,⁴⁴ a fact denied by Arianism. He opposes Sabellius, who “makes the Son an extension of the Father,” and Hebion, who says the Son’s beginning was through Mary, and thus “represents Him not as first God and then man, but as first man then God.”⁴⁵ It was not just the *will* of the Father to create the Son, because the Father and the Son had an eternal mutual indwelling (*perichoresis*), for they are co-eternal with each Other by *nature*. They had an inseparable co-existence, which means they are One God and not two God’s as the Arians wrongly charged.⁴⁶

There is a unity of nature and distinction of Persons in the names “Father” and “Son.” For Hilary the Son is equally divine with the Father, and He is more a Revealer of God than a Redeemer of humans. The incarnation of God, viewed as an assumption of humanity into His divinity, was a plan that preceded human sin and would have taken place even if humans hadn’t sinned.⁴⁷ The purpose of

⁴⁰ *NPNF 2nd Series* 9, i–lxi.

⁴¹ *NPNF 2nd Series* 9, xxxvii.

⁴² “We proclaim in answer, on the evidence of the Apostles and Evangelists, that the Father is eternal and the Son eternal, and demonstrate that the Son of God of all with an absolute, not a limited, pre-existence,” *De Trinitate*, *NPNF 2nd Series* 9, 50 (1.34), after as *De Trinitate*.

⁴³ He speaks of the Holy Spirit as Divine, and proceeding from the Father and Son, he indwells believers and “cannot be cabined or confined” as He “is omnipresent in space and time, and under all conditions present in its fullness.” He is sent as an Advocate and guide into all truth, to give enlightenment. He is a “most needful gift” that “we must seek and must earn” *De Trinitate*, 60, 61 (2. 29–35). He speaks of Spirit as “sent from the Father by the Son” *De Trinitate*, 143 (8.20).

⁴⁴ “The mind of men is powerless with the ordinary resources of unaided reason to grasp the idea of an eternal birth, but they attain by study of things Divine to the apprehension of mysteries which lie beyond the range of common thought” *De Trinitate*, 49 (1.34); Creation” and “birth from everlasting are two entirely different things” *De Trinitate*, 50 (1.35).

⁴⁵ *De Trinitate*, 52 (2.4).

⁴⁶ *NPNF 2nd Series* 9, lvii–lxv. cf. The “one faith is, to confess the Father in the Son and the Son in the Father through the unity of an indivisible nature, not confused but inseparable, not intermingled but identical, not conjoined but co-existing, not incomplete but perfect. For there is a birth not separation, there is as Son not an adoption; and He is God, not a creature.” *De Trinitate*, 149 (8.41).

⁴⁷ *NPNF 2nd Series* 9, xcvi.

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the incarnation was to meet the human need for progressive revelation, and it was also God's plan to elevate human nature through uniting human nature with the divine nature.⁴⁸ In fact, the relation of Christ's divinity and assumed humanity is more central than Calvary as the means of human salvation in Hilary's thinking. Some theologians (including Hilary) who consider creation as only a first step to the incarnation include Irenaeus (c. 130–200),⁴⁹ Hilary of Poitiers (c. 300–367),⁵⁰ Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395),⁵¹ John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308),⁵² Immanuel Kant (1724–1804),⁵³ Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–),⁵⁴ Gordon D. Kaufman,⁵⁵ Hans Urs Von Balthasar,⁵⁶ and Karl Barth (1886–1968).⁵⁷

Hilary believed Christ lived on earth as God, so even in the cradle He upheld worlds. This echoed the omnipresence of Christ during incarnation presented by his contemporary Athanasius (293–373)⁵⁸ and later adopted by John Calvin (1509–1564).⁵⁹ This view of Christ led Hilary to de-emphasize Christ's sufferings. He claimed that Christ was impassible to suffering because feelings were absent to Him. The assumption of human nature into His divinity means that Christ is humanity and not just a human, a view later held by Karl Barth throughout his *Church Dogmatics*.

⁴⁸ "God the Word became flesh, that through His Incarnation our flesh might attain to union with God, the Word" *De Trinitate*, 43 (1.11).

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, ANF 1, 546–547 (5.18.3). This is the recapitulation (*recapitulatio*) view that God intended to deify humans from the beginning through Christ's incarnation, but sin interrupted the plan for a later continuance when Christ became the God-man, adopting humanity within Himself, to deify it. See also Adolf Harnack, *The History of Dogma*, tr. Neil Buchanan (Eugene: Wipf, 1997, German, 1894), 2, 239–243.

⁵⁰ Hilary of Poitiers, *NPNF 2nd Series*, 9, xivi.

⁵¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *NPNF 2nd Series*, 5, 20, 21.

⁵² Richard Cross, "John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308)" in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, gen. ed., Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 166.

⁵³ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), 54.

⁵⁴ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, Ger. 1988), 1:327.

⁵⁵ Gordon D. Kaufman, *Systematic Theology: A Historicist Perspective* (New York: Scribner's, 1968), 383. He has an evolutionary progress of history, in which the purpose of human creation is the kingdom of God arriving in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

⁵⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, trs. Erasmio Leiva-Merikakis, et al (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982–1991), vols. 1–9; *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, tr. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988–1998). See Kevin Mongrain, *The Systematic Thought of Hans Urs Von Balthasar: An Irenaean Retrieval* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2002), 53–73.

⁵⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3/1: 228–329.

⁵⁸ Athanasius, *Incarnation of The Word*, *NPNF 2nd Series* 4, 45.

⁵⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke, 1962), 1.414, (2.13.4).

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Assumption of humanity to become divine compared to *adoption of one human* into divinity is one way of expressing the difference between Hilary and Arius. Salvation for Hilary seems identified more with the effect of Christ's divinity on the humanity He assumed, rather than on His work in the believer. Yet, paradoxically, he thinks more about salvation by works than by grace.⁶⁰

For Hilary, the Father

transcends space, and time, and appearance, and all the forms of human thought. He is without and within all things, He contains all and can be contained by none, is incapable of change by increase or diminution, invisible, incomprehensible, full, perfect, eternal, not deriving anything that He has from another, but, if ought be derived from Him, still complete and self-suffering.⁶¹

Further, he says, "God, I am sure, is subject to no change; His eternity admits not of defect or amendments, or gain or of loss."⁶² Therefore Christ is not a "severed portion" of the Father's substance, for God, being "impassible, cannot be divided."⁶³ Hilary therefore opposed Valentinus, who maintained "that the Son is a development of the Father," and Manichaeus, who declared that the Son is a "consubstantial part of the Father."⁶⁴

Whereas Arians opposed seeing Christ as divine because the Father and Son would be two Gods, Hilary replied, "We must confess Father and Son before we can apprehend God as One and true"⁶⁵ because they are "inseparable in nature, not in Person."⁶⁶ For "there is no other way to eternal life than the assurance that Jesus Christ, God the Only-begotten, is the Son of God."⁶⁷ In short, Hilary presents the Father and Son as "One in name, One in nature, One in the kind of Divinity which they possess," with "no confusion of Persons."⁶⁸

Evaluation. Hilary successfully refutes Arianism's claim that Christ had a beginning. In Hilary the eternal divinity of the Son is clear, yet a problem remains. Whereas Arius overemphasizes Christ's humanity at the expense of His divinity, Hilary overemphasizes Christ's divinity at the expense of His humanity. Christ's assumption of humanity to unite with divinity is said to be God's plan even if there had been a Fall of humans. Thus, a plan to divinize humanity

⁶⁰ *NPNF* 2nd Series 9, lxvi–xcvi.

⁶¹ *De Trinitate*, 62 (3.2).

⁶² *De Trinitate*, 65 (2.13).

⁶³ *De Trinitate*, 72 (4. 5); cf. God would be changeable if He "extended or developed a part of Himself to be His Son," *De Trinitate*, 103 (6.17).

⁶⁴ *De Trinitate*, 74 (4.12); cf. The church believes the Son exists (against Sabellius), that He is God by nature (against Arius), and that He created the universe (against Photinus) *De Trinitate* 120 (7.6).

⁶⁵ *De Trinitate*, 95 (5.35).

⁶⁶ *De Trinitate*, 96 (5.35).

⁶⁷ *De Trinitate*, 106 (6.24).

⁶⁸ *De Trinitate*, 121 (7.8).

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is prior to the plan of salvation. Hence, the assumption of humanity into divinity is God's ultimate plan for humanity, which seems to suggest that the assumption of humanity in Christ's life is more important than the substitution for humanity in Christ's death.

The incarnation, for Hilary, is the uniting of the omnipresence of God with the universal presence of humanity. But how can that be accomplished in the light of the self-emptying of Philippians 2:5–11 and His birth as one human person by the Holy Spirit through Mary (Matt 1:20–23)? With respect to the Trinity, Hilary emphasizes the unity between the Father and Son, being one in name, nature, and divinity, but he does not spell out the inner relationship between the three Persons of the Trinity.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Augustine spent nearly thirty years (400–428) in later life writing fifteen books on the Trinity. The first seven books are biblical and the last eight rational. There is repetition and some tedious segments in the latter section. At times the clarity of the argument is hindered by Augustine's going into some non-related topics. In contrast to John Calvin's *Institutes* where the Reformer strove for brevity,⁶⁹ which helped his argument, Augustine was too lengthy. This is one reason that his writing, so extensive in the different issues he presented, sometimes has sufficient data for both Catholics and Protestants to select and use in support of their contrary views. Augustine appropriately completes his work with a prayer and an apology for his verbosity. It gives insight into the fact that his active mind could have written more. He prays, "Set me free, O God, from that multitude of speech which I suffer in my soul, wretched as it is in Thy sight, and flying for refuge to Thy mercy; for I am not silent in thoughts, even when silent in words."⁷⁰

But it must be said that Augustine is an original thinker, and his reasoning about the Trinity is clearer than that of his predecessors.⁷¹ For Augustine, the Trinity is "not three Gods, but one God"⁷² Therefore Christ is God, but He is also human. A theme that runs through several books is the importance of making the distinction between Christ "in the form of God" and "in the form of a servant," based on Philippians 2:5–11. When critics deny Christ's divinity because He expressed dependence upon His Father, they ignore the fact that Christ speaks "in the form of a servant," and His speech doesn't negate the fact that He is also "in the form of God." He is not one without the other, but both.

Augustine put it this way: "In the form of God He is the Word, 'by whom all things are made' [John 1:3]; but in the form of a servant He was 'made of a

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, tr. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clark, 1962), 1:250 (2.3.2).

⁷⁰ Augustine, *NPNF 1st Series 3, On The Trinity*, 228 (15.28.51). After as *On The Trinity*.

⁷¹ *On The Trinity*, 55 (3.0.1). Augustine was not able to read the contributions made in the Greek language. He says, "we are not so familiar with the Greek tongue" as the Latin tongue.

⁷² *On The Trinity*, 21 (1.5.8). Biblical references are placed in the text. They are in footnotes in the original.

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woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law' [Gal 4:4, 5]. In like manner, the form of God He made man; in the form of a servant He was made man."⁷³ He enumerates a number of other examples.

According to the form of God, He and the Father are one [John 10:30]; according to the form of a servant He came not to do His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him [John 6:38]. According to the form of God, 'As the Father has life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself [John 5:26]; according to the form of a servant, His 'soul is sorrowful even unto death;' and, 'O my Father,' He says, 'if it be possible, let this cup pass from me' [Matt 26:38, 39]. According to the form of God, 'He is the true God, and eternal life' [1 John 5:20]; according to the form of a servant, 'He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' [Phil 2:8]; According to the form of God, all things that the Father hath are His [John 15:15], and 'All mine,' He says, 'are Thine, and Thine are mine' [John 17:10]; according to the form of a servant, the doctrine is not His own, but His that sent Him [John 7:16].⁷⁴

In taking the form of a servant, "the unchangeable form of God remained,"⁷⁵ for He did not "lose His immortality" when "He took mortal flesh."⁷⁶ What was the result of this union? Augustine says, "By joining therefore to us the likeness of His humanity, He took away the unlikeness of our unrighteousness; and by being made partaker of our mortality, He made us partakers of His divinity."⁷⁷ Being sent to this world, Christ is not inferior to the Father who sent Him, for He is "consubstantial" and "co-eternal with the Father," for "He is sent, not because He is unequal with the Father, but because He is 'a pure emanation (*manatio*) issuing from the glory of the Almighty God."⁷⁸ The Holy Spirit is one with the Father and the Son and proceeds from both. In this context, "the Father is the beginning (*principium*) of the whole divinity" or "deity,"⁷⁹ for the Father, Son, and Spirit are "one and the same from eternity to eternity, as it were eternity itself."⁸⁰

The appellation Father and Son "is eternal and unchangeable." "Wherefore, although to be the Father and to be the Son is different, yet their substance is not different; because they are so called, not according to substance, but according to relation, which relation, however, is not accident, because it is not changeable."⁸¹ In other words, they are both divine in substance, and only Father and

⁷³ *On The Trinity*, 24 (1.7.14)

⁷⁴ *On The Trinity*, 30 (1.11.22,23).

⁷⁵ *On The Trinity*, 41 (2.5.9).

⁷⁶ *On The Trinity*, 44 (2.9.15).

⁷⁷ *On The Trinity*, 71 (3.2.4).

⁷⁸ *On The Trinity*, 83 (4.20.27).

⁷⁹ *On The Trinity*, 84, 85 (4.20.29).

⁸⁰ *On The Trinity*, 85 (4.21.30).

⁸¹ *On The Trinity*, 89 (5.5.6).

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Son in relationship. Hence the Trinity are “one essence or substance and three persons.”⁸² The Trinity is not a triplex. In fact, “the Father alone, or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone, is as great as is the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit together.”⁸³

In Books 9–15 there is much said about the imaging of the Trinity within the human realm which need not detain us here.⁸⁴ More important is what Augustine says about God as love. Along with believing each of the three members of the Trinity is love, Augustine suggests that the “Holy Spirit should be specially called Love.”⁸⁵ He gives two reasons why this is so: (1) because He is common to both the Father and the Son, proceeding from both,⁸⁶ and (2) because it is through the Holy Spirit that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by which love the whole Trinity dwells in us.”⁸⁷

Evaluation. Augustine properly speaks of the eternal oneness of the Trinity, that they are in a reciprocal relationship, and that God is love, and through the Holy Spirit God’s love is spread abroad in our hearts. What is needed is to spell out the implications of that relationship as fundamental to the Trinity, for if God was only one Person, how could He be a God of love? The greatest evidence for God being more than one Person is the fact that God is love, and so His love within the inner-Trinitarian Being of the Godhead is the foundational evidence for the Trinity.

Augustine’s singling out of the Spirit to especially be called Love because He is common to both Father and Son and proceeding from both began a tradition that dominates theology in the West, continued by a number of theologians, such as Richard of Victor (d. 1173), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and Karl Barth (1886–1968). It was unfortunate because it detracted from the love that each Person has in the Trinity for each other, and to that extent calls into question the reciprocal love of the Trinity, and thus questions the relational Trinity.

Augustine was the major influence on Trinitarian understanding in Western theology. He passed on problems that didn’t help clarify the doctrine. Augustine introduced (1) a tendency to separate the being of God as He is in Himself (ontology, imminent Trinity) from what He is in His acts in history (economic Trinity); (2) the actions of God outwards as undivided (*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*), not stating the different functions of each Person in the Trinity; (3) an inadequate concept of “person” with respect to the person of the Father, Son, and Spirit, so that Augustine presented God “*unipersonally*, with his personhood

⁸² *On The Trinity*, 92 (5.9.10).

⁸³ *On The Trinity*, 101 (6.8.9); 115, 116 (8.1.1–2).

⁸⁴ For example, myself, that which I love, and love itself, 126 (9.2.2); mind, love, knowledge, 128 (9.5.8); memory, understanding, and will, Book 10; in the mind as remembering, understanding, and loving itself, Book 14.

⁸⁵ *On The Trinity*, 216 (15.17.29).

⁸⁶ *On The Trinity*, 219 (15.19.37); cf. 225 (15.26.47).

⁸⁷ *On The Trinity*, 217 (15.18.32).

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located in his oneness, not his threeness.”⁸⁸ Augustine failed to appropriate and appreciate the Trinitarian contributions of his predecessors since Origen because of viewing their writings with his neoplatonic assumptions. He failed to distinguish between the threeness (*hypostasis*) and oneness (*ousia*) of God, which was central to the Cappadocians (Basil, Gregory Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa).

Augustine failed to see that the oneness of God cannot be separated from the threeness of God in the economy of salvation. For the Cappadocians, the three persons are what they are in their relations (ontology). This *ontological reality* was overlooked by Augustine because he stressed the *logical reality* of the one God, which ended up focusing on alleged analogies of the Trinity in the world.⁸⁹ Apparently the analogies of the Trinity in the world were more influential in Augustine’s theology than the Trinity in the economy of salvation.

The Trinity in the Early Church: East

It is true that Western theology is oriented towards the “imminent Trinity,” whereas Eastern theology is oriented towards the “economic Trinity.”⁹⁰ One could also argue that Western theology is more interested in sacramental soteriology, whereas Eastern theology is more interested in deification soteriology (Gr. *theosis*).⁹¹ They were both interested in the “God who is” and the “God revealed in human history.” It is important to hold together the *reality of God* (imminent Trinity) and the *revelation of God* (economic Trinity), for it is the reality of God that is revealed, and the revelation is the reality of God.

Origen (c. 185–254). To introduce Origen, we first mention his teacher and then colleague Clement of Alexandria (150–214), whom he succeeded as the leader of the Alexandrian school of theology at the age of eighteen. Clement believed Christianity is the ultimate of the truths found in various philosophical doctrines. As such, he was the founder of speculative theology and is alleged to have reduced Christ to a mere creature in a lost work titled *Hypotyposesis*. The first principle in his theology is that “the Father of the universe,” who has no parts, is indivisible, with “nothing antecedent” to Him as “the Unbegotten.” The idea of the Logos is central to Clement’s theology, though he failed to create a scientific theology because the supreme idea in theology is not the idea of the Logos but the idea of God. Clement claimed that it is through the Logos that

⁸⁸ Colin E. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 3, 4.

⁸⁹ Gunton, 38–42. On the analogies, see 42–48.

⁹⁰ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, new ed., 1994), 284.

⁹¹ See Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary P, 2002), 196–216; Christoforos Stavropoulos, “Partakers of the Divine Nature,” in *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Daniel B. Clendenin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999, 1st 1995), 183–192; Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man*, trans. Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary P, 1984); and Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: The Nature of the Human Person* trans. Norman Russell (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary P, 1997, 1st 1987).

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humans are deified.⁹² This deification idea has dominated Greek Orthodox theology for centuries.

Origen's *De Principiis* (First Principles) was one of the first Christian systems of theology, and Origen's most important work (220–230).⁹³ In it he states that truth doesn't differ in any respect "from ecclesiastical and apostolic tradition."⁹⁴ So what the church says as well as what Scripture says is the tradition in which he writes. We will focus only on what he says about the Trinity. He says Christ "was born of the Father before all creatures." He assumes a body like ours, except that He was born of a virgin and the Holy Spirit, and He "did truly suffer" and die.⁹⁵

So he had a beginning as the begotten Son (divinity) as He later did as the begotten Son (humanity). Yet Origen can say, "His generation is as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun. For it is not by receiving the breath of life that He is made a Son (i.e., like Adam) by *an outward act*, but by His own nature."⁹⁶

As such, the Son is not an emanation of the Father, as if only a part of Him.⁹⁷ Origen says, "primal goodness is to be understood as residing in God the Father, from whom both the Son is born and the Holy Spirit proceeds, retaining within them, without any doubt, the nature of that goodness which is in the source whence they are derived."⁹⁸ So the divine nature of Christ is the same as the Father's divine nature, even though it is unlike His nature in having a beginning, which means it isn't as eternal as the Father, and so to that extent must be different. Origen seems to infer that because Christ was begotten of the eternal Father, receiving His nature, that in some way He shared in that eternity with the Father. This seems to be supported in Origen's interpretation of the Father's omnipotence. He says that God the Father can only be omnipotent if other things exist from the beginning with Him over which He is omnipotent, or else He was not omnipotent before their existence, and so became omnipotent, which is contrary to God being unchangeable. Furthermore, the Father brought into existence everything through the Son. He concludes that "the existence of the Son is derived from the Father, but not in time, nor from any other beginning, except, as we have said, from God Himself."⁹⁹

⁹² Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 2, 5–36.

⁹³ Rufinus translated the four books (God, World, Freedom, and Revelation), omitting any ideas that seemed contrary to Origen's other written opinions, or "to our own belief," considering "such passages as being interpolated and forged by others." He also omitted some repetitions. See *ANF* 4, 237–238, 301.

⁹⁴ *ANF* 4, 239 (Preface).

⁹⁵ *ANF* 4, 240 (Preface).

⁹⁶ *ANF* 4, 247 (1.2.4).

⁹⁷ *ANF* 4, 248 (1.2.6).

⁹⁸ *ANF* 4, 251 (1.2.13).

⁹⁹ *ANF* 4, 251 (1.2.11).

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Origen claimed that the Father and Son work in saints and sinners, in rational beings and in dumb animals; whereas the Holy Spirit works in persons who are “walking along the way which leads to Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁰ Things derive their existence from the Father, their rational nature from the Son, and their holiness from the Spirit.¹⁰¹

For Origen, “God is altogether impassible,”¹⁰² which means He is above feelings. On this basis, one would expect this to be true of Christ’s divine nature, but Origen even sees this to be true of His human nature, for “there existed in Christ a human and rational soul, without supposing that it had any feeling or possibility of sin.”¹⁰³

Evaluation. Contrary to Tertullian, Christ is not an emanation of the Father, for Christ is not a part of Him, but has His nature. Yet Origen seems to have a logical contradiction at the heart of His view of God, for how can Christ be the “only begotten Son” far back in the eons of eternity and at the same time be the One through whom the Father created all things, which he says needed to be from all eternity in order for the Father to be unchangeably omnipotent over all things? Furthermore, how could Christ’s divinity and humanity be impassible when He can “sympathize with our weaknesses . . . one who had been tempted in every way, just as we are” (Heb 4:15)?

Basil (c. 330–379). Basil’s *De Spiritu Sancto* (On The Spirit) was published in A.D. 364 and was written against Eunomius. Whereas Basil considered “being begotten” the essence of the Son, Eunomius considered “ingenerateness” the essence of the Divine, for the Father could never “impart His own proper nature to the begotten.” Hence the Son is neither begotten of the essence of God nor begotten from eternity. So Eunomius gave great dignity to Christ, but only as a creature.¹⁰⁴

Basil described the Eunomian heresy against the Trinity as follows: “There is one nature of Cause; another of Instrument; another of Place. So the Son is by nature distinct from the Father, as the tool from the craftsman; and the Spirit is distinct in so far as place or time is distinguished from the nature of tools or from that of them that handle them.”¹⁰⁵ Basil further states that the “object of the apostle in thus writing was not to introduce the diversity of nature, but to exhibit the notion of Father and of Son as unconfounded.”¹⁰⁶

The Eunomians placed the Father above the Son and the Son below the Father or at His right side. Basil rejects the location emphasis because Scripture speaks of the omnipresence of God (Psa 139:7–10), and the expression “right

¹⁰⁰ ANF 4, 253 (1.3.5).

¹⁰¹ ANF 4, 255 (1.3.8).

¹⁰² ANF 4, 277 (2.4.4).

¹⁰³ ANF 4, 283 (2.6.5).

¹⁰⁴ Prolegomena, NPNF 2ND Series 8, xxxiii–xxxvii, after as *De Spiritu Sancto*.

¹⁰⁵ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 5 (4.6).

¹⁰⁶ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 5 (5.7).

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hand' does not . . . indicate the lower place, but equality of relation," or "equality of honour."¹⁰⁷ The Eunomians also claimed that the nature of the Spirit is different, and His dignity inferior to that of the Father and the Son. But Basil replies that this isn't so because baptism is equally in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, "it is impossible to worship the Son, save by the Holy Ghost; impossible to call upon the Father, save by the Spirit of adoption."¹⁰⁹

Basil says the Spirit is ranked with God "on account of the natural fellowship" between them.¹¹⁰ In creation all three members of the Trinity were involved, so that the Father was the *original cause*, the Son the *creative cause*, and the Spirit the *perfecting cause*. It follows that "there is no sanctification without the Spirit." Besides this, the Spirit brought Christ into His incarnation, descended upon Him in His baptism, led Him into the wilderness of temptation, and empowered Him to cast out devils. He also imparts various gifts to the Church.¹¹¹ The Spirit is called "holy" and "good," as are the Father and the Son, and "He gets these titles from His natural and close relationship," for "He existed; He pre-existed; He co-existed with the Father and the Son before the ages."¹¹² The surpassing excellence of the nature of the Spirit isn't only seen through the shared titles with the Father and the Son and the "sharing in their operations, but also from His being like them "unapproachable in thought."¹¹³ Therefore Basil denounces the Eunomians for shrinking "from the fellowship of the Spirit with the Son and the Father."¹¹⁴

Evaluation. Athanasius equated the Greek words *ousia* and *hypostasis*, as if both meant "being." It was Basil who first distinguished between the terms, stating that in the Trinity there is one being (*ousia*) with three *hypostases* (manner of being). Put another way, the Trinity share one essence (*ousia*) as three Persons in the Trinity. In this way Basil made a significant contribution to the Doctrine of the Trinity and to its definition in the Council of Chalcedon (451).¹¹⁵

In his letter #235, Basil writes that we believe God from His works. "For as we perceive His wisdom, His goodness, and all His invisible things from the creation of the world (Rom 1:20) so we know Him." He goes on to state that He knows "what it is which is beyond my comprehension" and refers to God's essence through an analogy. The analogy is what one knows about Timothy: "I know him according to his form and other properties; but I am ignorant of his

¹⁰⁷ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 8–10 (6.13–15)

¹⁰⁸ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 16 (10.24).

¹⁰⁹ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 18 (11.27).

¹¹⁰ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 19 (13.30).

¹¹¹ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 23–25 (16. 37–39).

¹¹² *De Spiritu Sancto*, 30 (19. 48,49).

¹¹³ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 34 (32.53).

¹¹⁴ *De Spiritu Sancto*, 44 (38.70).

¹¹⁵ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1990), 3:228–230.

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essence.”¹¹⁶ In so doing he departs from Athanasius and prepares the way for later Eastern view that we know God through His energies, not His essence.¹¹⁷ It is the same focus, in part, that Immanuel Kant postulated in rejecting knowledge of God as He is in Himself, with its great influence on subsequent theology.

Basil’s defense of the Trinity is persuasive, and his reference to the “natural fellowship” between the three Persons of the Trinity is important. If He had developed this insight and placed it as the greatest proof of the equality of the eternal three members of the Trinity, it would have strengthened his otherwise good case.

Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330–389). Gregory of Nazianzus (or Nazianzen) was the greatest orator of the Greek or Eastern church, perhaps with the exception of Chrysostom, and was called the “Christian Demosthenes,” so influential were his orations. The famous Jerome traveled from Syria to Constantinople to hear him. While Bishop of Constantinople, in the summer or fall of 380, Gregory delivered five theological orations on the Trinity. In them he defended the Nicene faith of his congregation, speaking against the Eunomian and Macedonian arguments,¹¹⁸ which are sometimes tedious for contemporary thinkers.¹¹⁹

Gregory Nazianzus begins by stressing the incomparable mystery of the Trinity. “It is impossible to express Him and yet more impossible to conceive Him.” His nature is “Incomprehensible and Illimitable.” It is not enough to say what God *is not*, but what *He is*.¹²⁰

He states that God is not circumscribed in a body, and yet “comprehension is one form of circumscription.”¹²¹ It is no more possible to apprehend the “Divine Nature” than for a man to step over his own shadow or a fish to glide about outside water.¹²² For what “God is in nature and essence no man ever yet has discovered, or can discover.”¹²³ In short, the subject of God is more difficult in proportion to being more perfect than any other.¹²⁴

For Nazianzus, the Trinity is “an equality of Nature and a Union of mind.” In it, “The Father is the Begetter and the Emitter; without passion of course, and

¹¹⁶ Basil, *NPNF*, letter 234, 1–2, 275.

¹¹⁷ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, Worship* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2004), 153.

¹¹⁸ Gregory Nazianzus, *NPNF* 2nd Series, vol. 7, 284–328 (after as Nazianzus, *NPNF*); Quasten, 3:236–242. Macedonius was bishop of Constantinople from 342–360 and so left that position twenty years before Gregory assumed the office. The Macedonians were fighters against the Spirit (*pneumatomachi*), saying He was less than God because nowhere in Scripture is He called God. Yet there is no certain evidence that Macedonius had anything to do with the cause of Macedonians. See Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 146–148, particularly for bibliographical data on the Eunomians.

¹¹⁹ Many of his 4th century oratorical techniques are also foreign to us today. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 3:918, 921.

¹²⁰ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 289–291 (28.2. 4–5, 9),

¹²¹ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 290, 292 (28.2. 7,10).

¹²² Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 292, 293 (28.2.11, 12).

¹²³ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 294 (28.2.17).

¹²⁴ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 296 (28.2.21).

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without reference to time, and not in a corporeal manner. The Son is the Begotten, and the Holy Ghost the Emission.” There never was a time when the Father, Son, and Spirit were not.¹²⁵ Nazianzus says he was unable to discover anything on earth to compare to the nature of God (e.g., the sun, a ray, and light). “I was afraid in the first place that I should present a flow in the Godhead, incapable of standing still.” For “there is nothing prior to God which could set Him in motion; for He is Himself the Cause of all things, and He has no prior Cause.”¹²⁶

Speaking about the Son, he notes biblical passages that speak of His divine nature and other passages that speak of His human nature. He claims that His divine nature is superior to sufferings, but not His human nature. The union of the “Higher nature” with the “inferior Nature” was “in order that I too might be made God so far as He is made man.” He was tempted as a Man but conquered as God; He hungered but fed thousands; He asks where Lazarus was laid as a Man, but raises Him as God.¹²⁷

He notes that the Spirit is called “the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Mind of Christ, the Spirit of The Lord, and Himself the Lord, the Spirit of Adoption, of Truth, of Liberty; the Spirit of Wisdom, of Understanding, of Counsel, or Might, of Knowledge, of Godliness, of the Fear of God” and the “Finger of God.” Nazianzus says the Spirit deifies a person in baptism and gives spiritual gifts, making Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers.¹²⁸

In his *Oration on Holy Baptism* (preached at Constantinople in January 6, 381, a few months after the other five), he gives a good summary of his thinking on the Trinity:

This is given you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones, Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together; Each God because Consubstantial; One God because of the Monarchia. No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One.¹²⁹

Another summary which speaks more of the relations between the three Persons of the Trinity is given in *Oration on the Holy Lights*: “For to us there is but One God, the Father, *of Whom* are all things, and One Lord Jesus Christ, *by*

¹²⁵ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 301 (28.3.2–3).

¹²⁶ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 328 (28.5.31, 33).

¹²⁷ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 307–309 (28.3. 17–20).

¹²⁸ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 327 (28.5.29).

¹²⁹ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 375 (40.41).

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Whom are all things; and One Holy Ghost, *in Whom* are all things” (Italics added). Here are three “personalities of a nature which is one and unconfused.” Nazianzus goes on to describe the relationship between the three.

The Father is Father, and is Unoriginate, for He is of no one; the Son is Son, and is not unoriginate, for He is of the Father. But if you take the word Origin in a temporal sense, He too is Unoriginate, for He is the Maker of Time, and is not subject to Time. The Holy Ghost is truly Spirit, coming forth from the Father indeed, but not after the manner of the Son, for it is not by Generation but by Processions (since I must coin a word for the sake of clearness); for neither did the Father cease to be Unbegotten because of His begetting something, nor the Son to be begotten because He is of the Unbegotten (how could that be?), nor is the Spirit changed into Father or Son because he proceeds, or because He is God—though the ungodly do not believe it.¹³⁰

Evaluation. Gregory of Nazianzus is right to conclude that nothing in creation can adequately illustrate the Trinity. For the Trinity is one of a kind. His understanding of the Trinity presents the separateness and unity of the Trinity, so that they are equally the One God, while each having separate individuality as Persons. In spite of his recognition of the difficulty of describing the reality of the Trinity, he gives a clear and balanced description. Johannes Quasten says, “It is Gregory’s great merit to have given for the first time a clear definition of the distinctive characters of the divine Persons.” Whereas Basil could not express properly the Holy Spirit, and would only do so when in His presence in eternity, Nazianzus clearly described Him in the present. Compared to Basil, Nazianzus emphasized more strongly the unity of God and a clearer definition of the divine relations.¹³¹ As Nazianzus pointed out, he coined the word processions to accomplish this, and this word is used by subsequent writers on the Trinity.

Although Nazianzus made a contribution on the processions of the three Persons of the Trinity, more clearly than anyone before him, he did not speak of the reciprocal love in their internal relations. With focus on an immovable and immutable God, there is no room for a relational Trinity in his theology.

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395). The two Gregoryses (Nazianzus and Nyssa), with Basil the Great (c. 330–379), are the three theologians from Cappadocia, Asia Minor (Turkey), who formulated the doctrine of the Trinity which largely contributed to the orthodox view. In doing so they defeated the Arian challenge to this doctrine, which Eunomius supported. Gregory of Nyssa’s two books “Against Eunomius” (382–383) defend his master (and brother) Basil, and present the eternal existence of all three members of the Trinity.

Eunomius stated that the “whole account of his doctrines is summed up in the Supreme and Absolute Being, and in another Being existing by reason of the

¹³⁰ Nazianzus, *NPNF* 7, 356 (39. 12).

¹³¹ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 249, 250.

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First, but after It though before all others, and in a third Being not ranking with either of these but inferior to the one as to its cause, to the other as to the energy.”¹³² Gregory rejects this distinction between the Father as proper and supreme, with the Son and Spirit as inferior to Him.¹³³ He points out the similarity of this position with that of the Jews, for the “Jews thought to honour the Almighty by excluding the Son from equal reverence: these men, by annihilating the glory of the Son, think to bestow more honour on the Father.”¹³⁴ Gregory considers it absurd that Eunomius gives an elaborate recitation of degrees and differences within the Trinity with reference to their works and energies.¹³⁵

Gregory goes to the heart of the problem—how this reasoning effects the relationship of the Trinity. He says,

since this heresy parts the Son from any essential relationship with the Father, and adopts the same view of the Spirit as estranged from any union with the Father or the Son, and since it also affirms throughout that the Son is the work of the Father, and the Spirit the work of the Son, and that these works are the results of a purpose, not of nature, what grounds has he for declaring that this work of a will is an “order inherent in the matter,” and what is the drift of this teaching, which makes the Almighty the manufacturer of such a nature as this in the Son and the Holy Spirit, where transcendent beings are made such as to be inferior the one to the other?¹³⁶

Gregory points out that, according to Eunomius, the Father was alone before the Son, and later the Spirit existed, and their relationship was such that “the next being is dependent, and the third more dependent still.” He expresses in his own words the two views of Eunomius:

He attacks the community of substance with two suppositions; he says that we either name as Father and as Son two independent principles drawn out parallel to each other, and then say that one of these existencies is produced by the other existence; or else we say that one and the same essence is conceived of, participating in both names in turn, both being Father, and becoming Son, and itself produced in generation from itself.

Gregory responds with Christ’s words, “I and My Father are one” (John 10:30). He states that Christ “conveys by that confession of a Father exactly the truth that He Himself is not a first cause, at the same time that He asserts by His union with the Father their common nature.” This counters Sabellius, who confused the individuality of the members of the Trinity, so that the One God comes

¹³² *Against Eunomius*, 1, *NPNF* 2nd Series, 5, 50 (1.13). After as *Against Eunomius*.

¹³³ *Against Eunomius*, 51–59 (1.14–20).

¹³⁴ *Against Eunomius*, 60 (1.21).

¹³⁵ *Against Eunomius*, 65–67 (1.24).

¹³⁶ *Against Eunomius*, 73 (1.28).

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in three modes of existence as Father, then as Son, and finally as the Holy Spirit in different periods of history. It also counters Arius, who considered Christ a created being and thus inferior to the Father.¹³⁷

Gregory quotes Christ's great commission as important to the topic. For he said, "Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Repeatedly he notes that all three share the "one Name." Gregory says, "we should believe on the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. For the differentiation of the subsistences makes the distinction of Persons clear and free from confusion, while the one Name standing in the forefront of the declaration of the Faith clearly expounds to us the unity of essence of the Persons."¹³⁸

Gregory ends his first book by saying of Eunomius, "Do ye not perceive that he stirs himself up against the Name at which all must bow, so that in time the Name of the Lord shall be heard no more, and instead of Christ Eunomius shall be brought into the Churches? Do ye not yet consider that this preaching of godlessness has been set on foot by the devil as a rehearsal, preparation, and prelude of the coming of Antichrist? For he who is ambitious of showing that his own words are more authoritative than those of Christ, and of transforming the faith from the Divine Names and the sacramental customs and tokens to his own deceit,—what else, I say, could he properly be called, but only Antichrist?"¹³⁹

Evaluation. Gregory was a speculative theologian, a mystic, and the most gifted of the three Cappadocian theologians. No other Church Father of the 4th century used philosophy as much as he did. He was profoundly influenced by Plato. It should be noted that Gregory was influenced by Origen more than any other theologian of the Nicene age, even though he differed from him in some ways. Like Origen, he used the allegorical method of biblical interpretation. They both believed Christ's humanity was assumed into His divinity so a "fully human" nature ceased to exist.¹⁴⁰ This impacts Gregory's understanding of salvation and his understanding of the Trinity in relation to humans.

Like Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory teaches that the Fall did not, of itself, necessitate the incarnation of Christ, for it was the original plan of God that Christ become human in order to take humanity up into Himself to divinize it through the union of the divine and human.¹⁴¹ As in Hilary of Poitiers, this calls into question the purpose of Christ's death, and hence His saving mission through death and resurrection. By contrast, Gregory of Nazianzus said humans are deified in their baptism.

¹³⁷ *Against Eunomius*, 81 (1.34).

¹³⁸ *Against Eunomius*, 101–103 (2.1,2).

¹³⁹ *Against Eunomius*, 239 (11.5).

¹⁴⁰ Quasten, 3:254, 283, 284. To note the comparisons between Gregory and Origen, see NPNF 2nd Series 5, 14–23. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3:907.

¹⁴¹ NPNF 2nd Series 5, 20, 21.

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In his treatise to Eustathius (*On the Holy Trinity, and the Godhead of The Holy Spirit*), Gregory of Nyssa appealed to Scripture: “Let the inspired Scripture, then, be our umpire, and the vote of truth will surely be given to those whose dogmas are found to agree with the Divine words.”¹⁴² Yet, like Origen, he brings many ideas into his theology that are not based on Scripture. His theological system, *The Great Catechism*, is full of human reasoning, often taking things of this world as analogies, and he only gets to Scripture at the end. So the principle about Scripture is good, but not carried out. Origen also produced a theological system *On First Principles*, and so in this respect also Gregory was like Origen.

In his treatise to Ablabius titled *Not Three Gods*, Gregory states why the Trinity are One God and not three Gods. He compares the Trinity with three men. Three men perform an action, and you have three acts. But when the Trinity act, there is only one action. For example, each member of the Trinity is involved in the work of salvation. There is only one plan of salvation, and there are not three Saviors. So every operation from God to creation “has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴³

In his treatise *On The Holy Trinity*,¹⁴⁴ Gregory states that the identity of operations between the Trinity indicates a “community of nature,” from which he argues the inseparability of the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son. The focus is on their shared external involvement with others, but nothing is said about their inner-relationship with each other. In his writings, Gregory does speak of the procession from Father through Son and Holy Spirit, but their external acts and processions are not the same as speaking about how each relate to the other two in eternal and reciprocal love.

Council of Nicea (325)

The Council of Nicea (325) was the first ecumenical Council in Church history, with over three hundred bishops from the East and a few bishops from the West. It was largely an Eastern Council because the problem of Arianism was in the East. It was called by the emperor Constantine to unify the empire following a schism caused by Arianism. The Council was a religious matter due to doctrinal divisions, but it was equally a matter of state, and the emperor gave the opening address on the importance of unity.

Arius (b. 250). As mentioned previously, Satan hates Christ, and even more so after his defeat at Calvary (Rev 12:9–10). So the devil “is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (v. 12b). “When the dragon (Satan, v. 9) saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had

¹⁴² Gregory Nyssa, *NPNF*, 2nd Series, 5, *On The Holy Trinity*, 327.

¹⁴³ Gregory Nyssa, *NPNF*, 2nd Series, 5, *Not Three Gods*, 331–339.

¹⁴⁴ *On the Holy Spirit*, 326–330.

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given birth to the male child” (v.13). The male child is Christ, who ascended to heaven (v. 5). The woman of Revelation 12 represents believers in Christ, for she wears a *stephanos*, a crown of victory (v. 1). The woman of Revelation 17 represents a counterfeit church system, for she is seated on “a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names” (Rev 17:3b). Both women are in the desert (Rev 12:6, 14; 17:3). True believers flee to the desert after Christ’s ascension (Rev 12: 6, 14), the dragon (Satan, Rev 12:9) pursues them (Rev 12:13), and God takes care of them (Rev 12:14). Here are the two sides of the cosmic controversy after Christ’s ascension and hence in the Christian church.

It is not surprising, in this context, to see how much controversy there was about Christ in early patristic theology. Satan was doing everything he could to diminish Christ, to make him less than God, to bring him to the human level, in order to make His life and death of no significance. Satan could not deny that Christ defeated Him in not giving in to his temptations and defeated him on Calvary. Satan could not change these facts about Christ, so he works to change the way humans view Christ.

One divisive issue was the relation of the Son to the Father. As early as Justin Martyr (c. 114–165) in his *First Apology*, we find Christ referred to as “the first-born of the unbegotten God”¹⁴⁵ What did “first-born” mean? For Origen (c. 185–254), it meant (1) Christ was the Son of the Father from eternity, and (2) the Son and Spirit are subject to the Father. This latter idea led to the problem of subordinationism, which influenced Arius.¹⁴⁶ For Arius, God is immutable, and therefore Christ had to be made out of nothing by God, so there was a time when He was not. So Christ is not eternal and does not proceed from God’s substance. In arriving at these two conclusions, Arius goes much further than Origen in diminishing Christ to not much more than any other created being.

Athanasius (293–373). Gregory Nazianzen, in his oration *On The Great Athanasius*, says he was “first in the holy Synod of Nicea, the gathering of the three hundred and eighteen chosen men, united by the Holy Ghost, as far as in him lay, he stayed the disease [of Arius]. Though not yet ranked among the Bishops, he held the first rank among the members of the Council, for preference was given to virtue just as much as to office.”¹⁴⁷ It may be instructive to gain an insight into the Arian views through the words of Athanasius.

¹⁴⁵ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, ANF 1: 180 (53).

¹⁴⁶ C. C. Kroeger, “Origen,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 2nd ed., 870.

¹⁴⁷ Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration 21: On The Great Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, NPNF, 2nd Series, 8, 273 (21:13, 14), words in brackets added. See footnote: “Athanasius was present as theological assistant to Alexander of Alexandria.” By contrast, V. L. Walter says Athanasius was at Nicea, but didn’t take part much in the Council that met on May 20, 325. Three years later (328), Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria and played a major role in defeating Arianism, which lived on after the Council. See V. L. Walter, “Arius, Arianism,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 95, 96.

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“God was not always a Father. When he was God alone he was not yet a Father; later he became a Father.” “The Son was not always,” for since all things came into being from nothing, and all existing creatures and works came into being, even the Word of God himself “came into being from nothing,” and “there was once when he was not,” and “he was not before he came into being,” but even he himself had a “beginning of his own creation. Arius said God was alone, and the Word and Wisdom were not yet. Then God, wishing to fashion us, made a certain one and name him Word, Wisdom, and Son, in order that through him he might fashion us . . . Arius dared to say, ‘The Word is not true God . . . in all respects the Word is alien and unlike the substance and property of the Father . . . The substances of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are divided in nature, estranged, detached, alien, and nonsharers in one another.’”¹⁴⁸

In his *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, Athanasius said, “It is more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call him Father, than to name him from his works and call him Unoriginate.”¹⁴⁹ In focusing on the relationship between Father and Son, rather than on the works of the Son, Nicea followed the lead of Athanasius.¹⁵⁰

Eusebius, the church historian, was present at the Council, and in writing to his church included the statement issued at the close of the deliberations which condemned Arius.

We believe in one God, Father, all-sovereign, maker of all things seen and unseen, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, that is only-begotten from the substance of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, *homoousios* with the Father, through whom all things, those in heaven and those on earth, came into existence, who on account of us men and on account of our salvation came down and was made flesh, was made man, suffered, arose on the third day, went up into heaven, is coming to judge living and dead. And in the Holy Spirit. And those who say, ‘There was once when he was not’ and ‘Before he was begotten, he was not’ and that ‘he came into existence from nothing,’ or those who allege that the Son of God is ‘from another *hypostasis* or substance’ or is created or mutable or different, the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Athanasius, *Orations Against the Arians*, Book 1 in *Sources of Early Christian Thought: The Trinitarian Controversy*, tr. & ed. William G. Rush (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 66–68.

¹⁴⁹ Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against The Arians*, *NPNF* 2nd Series, 4: 326 (1.34).

¹⁵⁰ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 6.

¹⁵¹ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Letter to His Church concerning the Synod at Nicea*, in *Sources of Early Christian Thought: The Trinitarian Controversy*, 58, 59

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Arius was banished to Illyricum, where he continued writing and appealed to a growing “circle of political and ecclesiastical adherents of Arianism.” Emperor Constantine, who was not theologically equipped, made contact with Arius in 332 or 333, which led to a meeting of the two in Nicomedia in 335. Arius handed the emperor a confession that Constantine considered sufficient to have him reinstated, and this reinstatement took place. Hence, “instead of resolving the issues, the Council of Nicea launched an empire-wide christological debate by its condemnation of Arius.”¹⁵²

Living subsequent to the Council of Nicea, one could be persuaded that Arianism would defeat the biblical view of Christ.

Beginning with Constantius, the court was often Arian. Five times Athanasius of Alexandria was driven in to exile, interrupting his long episcopate. A series of synods repudiated the Nicene symbols in various ways: Antioch in 341 and Arles in 353. In 355 Liberius of Rome and Ossius of Cordoba were exiled, and a year later Hilary of Poitiers was sent to Phrygia. In 360 in Constantinople, all earlier creeds were disavowed and the term *ousia* (substance) was outlawed. The Son was simply declared to be “like the Father who begot him.”¹⁵³

The Cappadocians (4th Century)

The final resolution was made through the Cappadocian theologians Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus. They “divided the concept of substance (*ousia*) from that of person (*hypostasis*) and thus allowed the orthodox defenders of the original Nicene formula and the later moderate or semi-Arian party to unite in an understanding of God as one substance and three persons. Christ therefore was one substance with the Father (*homoousion*) but a distinct person.”¹⁵⁴ Nicea did not address the issue of God’s impassibility, and the Cappadocians only acknowledged a *relation of origins* in the Trinity, and in so doing did not penetrate to the biblical history that reveals the *relation among the three Persons* of the Trinity.¹⁵⁵

This led to the Council of Constantinople (381), which reaffirmed the Nicene Creed and added an article on the divinity and personality of the Holy Spirit. So the Nicean-Constantinopolitan Councils presented the official understanding of the Trinity as it was understood near the end of the 4th century.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Walter, 95.

¹⁵³ Walter, 95.

¹⁵⁴ Walter, 96.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: The Triune God* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 108. In her chapter “God in Communion with Us: The Trinity,” Catherine Mowry LaCugna notes that the Cappadocians made “*person rather than substance*” the primary ontological category. See *Freeing Theology: The Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective*, ed. Catherine Mowry LaCugna (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 86.

¹⁵⁶ Schaff, 3:349, 350.

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even though Arianism was not finally absorbed by Orthodoxy until the 7th century.¹⁵⁷ The theology of the West and the East shifted focus after Nicea from questions of function (what God does) to ontology (what God is).¹⁵⁸

The Cappadocians contributed to the final defeat of the Arians, who believed Christ was not an eternal equal with God. Kenneth Scott Latourette writes, “The difficulty with the Cappadocian effort was that it tended to make God a somewhat vague, colorless abstraction.” In other words, “For one not schooled in Platonism, this conception of God might place an obstacle to that love of God which is both the primary obligation and high privilege of men.”¹⁵⁹ Here is another example of a failure to grasp the fact that God is a relational God.

Summary

Various heretical views about God were promoted in the early centuries,¹⁶⁰ and theologians responding to these heresies even spawned some heresies of their own. Some of these include (a) the plan for God to unite humanity to Himself, even if the Fall of humans hadn’t taken place; (b) this union was considered a divinization of humanity which challenged the unique divinity of God; and (c) salvation through Christ assuming humanity called into question salvation through Christ’s substitutionary atonement, as did (d) a human’s divinization in baptism. All these had to do with *God*, for the cosmic controversy is against God.

This is no surprise to students of Scripture, for Christ said to His disciples, “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3), and Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29–31). Paul announced to the Thessalonian church that “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thess 2:7a).

We did not include John of Damascus (c. 675–749) in this chapter because he comes after the first four centuries. Nevertheless, as the last great Father of

¹⁵⁷ Walter, 96.

¹⁵⁸ Catherine Mowry LaCugna, “The Trinitarian Mystery,” in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 1:171.

¹⁵⁹ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500* (Peabody: Prince, 1997), 163.

¹⁶⁰ Irenaeus (120–202) names some of them (Valentinus, Ptolemaeus) with their history in his *Against Heresies*, Book 1, *ANF* 1 315–358. He refers to other heretics such as Marcion, Cerinthus, and Basilides. They based their views on human ideas and not on the Scriptures. They claim to have “discovered the unadulterated truth” and “have knowledge of the hidden mystery.” Irenaeus appropriately calls them “slippery serpents” (*Against Heresies*, Book 3, *ANF* 1, 414–415).

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the Eastern church,¹⁶¹ his *magnum opus*, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, is the first volume to bring together the views of preceding theologians.¹⁶² It seems the sole attention was given to the Father's *causation* of the Son and the Spirit to prove their deity, but nothing is said about their eternal loving fellowship with each other as the God of love. This is the greatest lack in Western and Eastern theology. They lacked comprehension of a relational Trinity.

The classical view of God's immutability, that He does not change, is the key to the way early theologians argued to combat heresies that denied the divinity of Christ and later those that denied the divinity of the Spirit. Because God is immutable, He could not become the Father of the Son in the incarnation, for that would be a change that would question the fact that He is God. Therefore it was necessary to present the idea that there is an eternal generation of the Son by the Father in order to support the divinity of both, that they were both eternal and both beyond change. They said God the Father is eternally unoriginate (without origin, self-existent, without dependence upon any other), and God the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. In coming to God the Spirit, they said He eternally proceeds from the Father through the Son, or the Spirit and the Son proceed from the Father (the *Filioque* debate).

It was the view of an unchanging God that forced theologians to go back into the Trinity and suggest these *two eternal and internal movements of generation and procession*, whereas Scripture is silent about these two movements to protect the divinity of all three Persons of the Trinity.

Biblical View of God

Christ came to reveal the Father (John 14:9b) and bring Him glory (John 17:4). The Holy Spirit comes to reveal truths not given by Christ and bring glory to Christ (John 16:12–14). Both Christ and the Spirit reveal the loving relation among the Trinity in their missions on behalf of the Father and the Son. Christ prayed that His followers “may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I in you” (John 17:21a). The Father loves the Son (Matt 3:17; John 10:17; 17:24b), which reveals the loving relationship among the Trinity. It is no wonder “the fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal 5:22, 23), for “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

¹⁶¹ Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 237.

¹⁶² John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, *NPNF*, Second Series, 10, vii. In Book 1, John of Damascus spells out the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit only in the context of generation from the Father (for the Son) and procession from the Father through the Son (for the Spirit). It is clear that the *generation and procession are presented to prove the divinity of the Son and the Spirit*. Classical theism emphasizes the immutability of God (He is unchanging). Hence, it is argued, if God the Father only became the Father of the Son, then He would change from what He was before He became the Father of the Son, and this “is the worst form of blasphemy.” It is admitted that “the nature of the generation and the procession is quite beyond comprehension.” The generation/procession language is about causation, for the Father is the cause or origin of the Son and the Spirit, and the generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit are simultaneous. *NPNF*, Second Series, 10, 1–10 (1.1–9).

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The Trinity are in an eternal, reciprocal relationship of love. But how can this biblical view of God be possible when God is immutable and impassible, unmoved by the feelings of others? How can God so love the world, and each Person of the Trinity have a part in Christ's coming to this world to demonstrate their love? The idea of God's immutability (except for His character as unchanging) and impassibility is not biblical, but comes from Greek philosophy. Classical Greek philosophy denies the possibility of an incarnation, for God cannot come across an unbridgeable gulf (*chorizmos*) that separates the world of gods from the world of humans.

This same kind of aloof God, detached from things human, with no empathy for human needs, is the God of classical theology, even though theologians believed in the incarnation. This lacks logical consistency. It is the God who elects a few and rejects the rest of humans and casts them into unending hell. By contrast, Christ says to the Father, you "have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23b), and John says, "our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3b), for God so loved the world that He gave Jesus to become the Savior of the world (John 3:16). "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

Continuing Impact

The relational Trinity is absent in early western and eastern theology. Early theologians sought to defend the divinity of Christ and the Spirit through the one God, believing that aloofness is compatible with God. If classical theism had penetrated past the one God to the relational Trinity in eternal reciprocal love, their theology would have been dynamic, not static, and would have precluded the need for contemporary theism (Process and Openness theology), which reacted against the static, immutable, and impassible views of Classical theism.

Contemporary views of God are little better than classical views of God because they do not think through the implications of a relational Trinity. Whereas classical theism makes God too transcendent, contemporary theism makes God too imminent. The answer to both is the biblical view of a relational Trinity, with a balance between transcendence and imminence that does justice to God's love in both internal and external relations.

Conclusion

So there are two internal relations in the Trinity before us: (1) the eternal generation of the Son from the Father, and the eternal procession of the Spirit from either the Father through the Son, or from both Father and Son; and (2) the eternal reciprocal relation of love between the three Persons of the Trinity. The former says nothing about God being a relational God, as the God of love.

It is logical that the enemy would do all he could to destroy belief in the Trinity, because once a divine Trinity is accepted, then God must be a God of

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love, for no “single divine Person” could be a God of love. It serves the enemy’s purpose well to portray God in a way that calls into question His love, for this helps his claim that God is not love. It serves Satan well to have theologians speak of God as immutable and impassible because this is compatible with the non-biblical internal relations of generation/procession, but incompatible with the biblical internal relations of love. Thus error triumphed over truth. Therefore, it is the *eternal relationship of love between the Father, Son, and Spirit that provides the most important biblical evidence that they are a Trinity, while at the same time they are One God of love.*

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“Eating” and “Drinking” in the Book of Revelation: A Study of New Testament Thought and Theology

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Eating and drinking not only represent basic human needs for life sustenance, but are important elements in biblical narrative, prophecy, and apocalyptic literature.¹ They provide life sustenance (Gen 47:24; 1 Sam 28:20) and are often used in symbolic or theological contexts.² Metaphorical usage of the eating/drinking activity is also fairly common in both the OT and NT context,³ as can be seen in Num 21:28, where fire “eats” cities, or where invading armies “eat up” territories (Isa 1:7). Jeremiah “eats” the word of *YHWH* (Jer 15:16; also Rev 10:10), and an evil-doer can “drink” evil like water (Job 15:16).⁴

¹ The present study has been presented in 2002 at the *Fifth Biblical-Theological South American Symposium*, held at the campus of UNASP, São Paulo, Brazil, July 28, 2002.

² Israel was not to eat the blood of the slaughtered animals, since blood represented life (Lev 7:26; 17:10–11, 14; Deut 12:23). The prohibition is already present in the post-diluvial narrative in Gen 9:4. The theology of the prohibition of eating blood involves reverence for life. Compare here also Jiri Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, and Rationale: An Intertextual Study* (Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 4; Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000), 235–7. A discussion of Gen 9:4 can be found in Marc Vervenne, “‘The Blood is the Life and the Life is the Blood’: Blood as Symbol of Life and Death in Biblical Tradition (Gen. 9,4),” in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East. Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th April of 1991* (ed. J. Quaegebeur; Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 55; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1993), 451–70.

³ Alan W. Jenks, “Eating and Drinking in the Old Testament,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; 6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:252.

⁴ Jenks suggests that “no Bible translation can succeed in conveying the prevalence of “eating” and “drinking” in the Hebrew. After all, the semantic range of the words is much broader in Hebrew than in English.” This phenomenon is not only known from Hebrew, but also from other Semitic languages (such as Akkadian; cf. Jeremy Black et al., eds., *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* [2nd ed.; SANTAG. Arbeiten und Untersuchungen zur Keilschriftkunde 5; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz

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As can be seen by the few examples cited above, in order to understand the usage of these elements, their symbolic or metaphorical quality needs to be appreciated firstly, and secondly, the very nature of metaphors in biblical texts needs to be addressed. Thus, the first section of this paper will discuss concisely the questions of metaphors and symbols in the biblical text.⁵ This is followed by a brief introduction to the functions of “eating” and “drinking” in the OT, which in turn will lead to a discussion of “eating” and “drinking” in the book of Revelation. Finally, having acquired the necessary tools and background, the intertextuality of the “eating” and “drinking” metaphor (including the communal meal) will be presented. A conclusion will summarize the results of this study.

Metaphors, Symbols, and Others

The study of metaphors and symbols is an important field in biblical and theological studies, since without access to these ciphers it is nearly impossible for the modern exegete to satisfactorily understand and read biblical texts utilizing these techniques. Metaphors⁶ and symbols⁷ have been discussed prolifically

Verlag, 2000], 9, and the references provided there). For a good introduction to translation technique and the linguistic problems involved in translating the Bible, see the chapter “Theories of Modern Bible Translation” in Edward L. Greenstein, *Essays on Biblical Method and Translation* (Brown Judaic Studies 92; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 85–118. Compare also Weston W. Fields, “The Translation of Biblical Live and Dead Metaphors and Similes,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1981): 190–204, and recently, Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “On Bible Translation and Hermeneutics,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Craig G. Bartholomew et al.; The Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Zondervan/Paternoster, 2001), 284–311.

⁵ David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism 4; Leiden-Boston-Köln: Brill, 2001), 1, has suggested correctly that the term “figurative” is a general description to indicate non-literal expressions, including irony, sarcasm, cynicism, allegory, hyperbole, and metaphor.

⁶ See, for example, Stephen Bigger, “Symbol and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Creating the Old Testament: The Emergence of the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Stephen Bigger; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 51–80; Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, “Israel in the Mirror of Nature: Animal Metaphors in the Ritual and Narrative of Ancient Israel,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 2 (1988): 1–30; U. Rüter-swörden, “Erwägungen zur Metaphorik des Wassers in Jes 40ff,” *Scandinavian Journal of Old Testament Study* 2 (1989): 1–22; Willem A. Van Gemeren, “Prophets, the Freedom of God, and Hermeneutics,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990): 96; Brigitte Seifert, *Metaphorisches Reden von Gott im Hoseabuch* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 166; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 11–86; Marc Zvi Brettler, “Incompatible Metaphors for YHWH in Isaiah 40–66,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 78 (1998): 97–120; Samuel Terrien, “The Metaphor of the Rock in Biblical Theology,” in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (eds. Timothy K. Beal and Tod Linafelt; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 157–71; Martin G. Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting From Heaven: God As Warrior and As God of Heaven in the Hebrew Psalter and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 169; Fribourg/Göttingen: University P/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 9–28; Andrew Dearman, “YHWH’s House: Gender Roles and Metaphors for Israel in Hosea,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 25 (1999): 97–108; Ian Paul, “Metaphor and Exegesis,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, 387–402; David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*; J. Gordon McConville, “Metaphor, Symbol and the Interpretation of Deuteronomy,” in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Inter-*

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in the past two decades in biblical hermeneutics. Besides the more or less frequent reference to metaphors in general introductions to hermeneutics, there have been several recent important contributions that need to be referred to. Brigitte Seifert published her dissertation on metaphorical speech about God in the book of Hosea in 1996. This grew out of her realization that "metaphors seem to be especially well suited to make the message of God understandable for modern human audiences."⁸ After providing a good review of current metaphor theory, covering the contributions of Paul Ricoeur⁹ and Eberhard Jüngel¹⁰ she focuses upon the theory of theological metaphor, distinguishing between metaphor, symbol, allegory, and analogy.¹¹ Seifert suggests that metaphor is the verbal form of analogy¹² and that it is not always "touchable" or "describable" in terms of the modern scientific paradigm.¹³ The possibility of utilizing and understanding metaphors about God implies a certain "intimacy"¹⁴ with God. In other words, metaphors about God used in Scripture need to be read against the background of faith and the recognition of revelation. While metaphor as a literary device deals in language as currency, theological metaphor deals in theology, i.e., a reality outside our limited "earth-bound" existence. Seifert's work is commendable and provides a good review of what is happening regarding theological metaphors. The challenge that she leaves with the potential interpreter of

pretation, 329–51. Brief introductions in the context of biblical hermeneutics include Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1989), 299–302; Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (rev. and exp. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 78, 84–5 [where the author suggests that metaphors are a stylistic means to achieve "semantic change"]; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 227–30, 299–303; and also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 93–94.

⁷ T. Fawcett, *The Symbolic Language of Religion: An Introductory Study* (London: SCM, 1970); R. Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973); Lothar Ruppert, "Symbole im Alten Testament," in *Freude am Gottesdienst. Aspekte ursprünglicher Liturgie* (ed. Josef Schreiner; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1983), 93–105; E. T. Lawson and R. N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

⁸ Seifert, *Metaphorisches Reden*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33–37. Ricoeur suggests that metaphors not only represent a semantic change or innovation, but actually by means of language structure express and "realize" new realities.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45–50. Jüngel looks at metaphors from the systematic-theological angle, whereby the metaphor (as part of the basic structure of language) connects two distinct horizons of reality. By means of a dialectic (connecting the "known" with the "unknown"), the new content of the Christian *kerygma* can be described.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 60–75.

¹² *Ibid.*, 75.

¹³ "Wer das durch empirische Wissenschaft Erforschbare zur Norm für Wirklichkeit überhaupt erhebt, wird schon bei solchen Metaphern hilflos sein, die menschliche Grunderfahrungen wie Liebe und Leid, Glück oder Angst benennen, erst recht bei Metaphern für Gott." *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁴ German "Vertrautheit," *ibid.*, 77.

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metaphors about God or involving God in Scripture is (a) a needed intimacy or experimental knowledge of God and (b) the realization that talking about God always is limited and bound to specific concepts whose transfer may or may not provide new insight into his nature.

Martin G. Klingbeil published his revised doctoral dissertation in 1999, focusing upon the divine warrior metaphor (including the God of Heaven metaphor) in the Psalms. He includes a helpful introduction to metaphor theory¹⁵ with pertinent bibliography. Klingbeil posits metaphor in both the semantic and the pragmatic field, suggesting that in order to understand a given metaphor one needs to understand the meaning of the term (both original and “shifted”) as well as its reception in a given cultural context (covering the pragmatic aspect).¹⁶ He opts for an “intermediate theory of metaphor”¹⁷ which suggests that metaphors are more than the sum of their literal descriptions and are connected to the represented reality and the context (of both metaphor and communicator). While Klingbeil focuses upon metaphors of God, his classification and underlying metaphor theory are helpful in deciphering other metaphors in the biblical texts. He places the metaphor away from the sphere of mere semantics¹⁸ into the much broader context of pragmatics, which takes into account the way the ancient and modern readers (or listeners) perceive and associate a specific term or concept in their different social and cultural contexts.¹⁹

Another important effort discussing metaphor in the context of biblical interpretation was published in a new series by Zondervan, entitled *Scripture and Hermeneutics*, which focuses upon the theoretical and linguistic underpinnings of 21st century biblical hermeneutics, seeking to be faithful (in the true sense of

¹⁵ Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting From Heaven*, 9–28. Compare also an updated concise version in Martin G. Klingbeil, “‘De lo profundo, Jehová, a ti clamo’: Conocer al Dios de Israel a través del himnario veterotestamentario,” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: hacia una eclesiología adventista: Estudios teológicos presentados durante el IV Simposio Bíblico Teológico Sudamericano en honor a Raoul Dederen* (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil et al.; Libertador San Martín: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002), 45–48.

¹⁶ Klingbeil, *Yahweh Fighting From Heaven*, 12–14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15–16, over against the *literal substitution theory* (where each metaphor can be explained by literal descriptions) and the *universal theory of metaphors* (which sees metaphors as standard part and parcel of our conceptual system).

¹⁸ This reminds one of Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, 84–5 and his rather mechanical definition of metaphors as techniques resulting in “semantic change”.

¹⁹ A good introduction to the neglected field of pragmatics in biblical studies can be found in Chantal J. Klingbeil, “Mirando más allá de las palabras: pragmática lingüística y su aplicación a los estudios bíblicos,” in *Entender la Palabra: Hermenéutica Adventista para el Nuevo Siglo* (ed. Merling Alomía, et al.; Cochabamba: Universidad Adventista de Bolivia, 2000), 123–35. Compare also Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringen, “The Reader in Genesis 22:1–19: Textsyntax–Textsemantics–Textpragmatics,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 53 (1995): 289–304. A general introduction to the important topic from an extra-biblical perspective can be found in Jens S. Allwood, *Linguistic Communication as Action and Cooperation: A Study in Pragmatics* (Gothenburg Monographs in Linguistic 2; Göteborg: U of Göteborg, Department of Linguistics, 1976).

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"faith") to the claims of the biblical texts. Ian Paul, in his discussion of metaphor and exegesis, takes as his point of departure the often difficult to comprehend nature of metaphors in biblical texts and hymns.²⁰ After providing a brief historical overview of metaphor theory in philosophical thought, Paul quotes Kant's distinction between useful ("scientific") and aesthetic ("literary") categories of knowledge. Clearly (at least for Kant), metaphor falls into the later one.²¹ Paul basically adopts Ricoeur's theory of metaphor, which understands the metaphor as the expression of the fullness of human existence. Thus, by formulating a metaphor and observing the process of that formulation and its interpretive changes in history, we understand more about ourselves.²² The imprecise nature of metaphors,²³ transmitting more than is visible on the mere surface, is important in this imaginative process, which in turn provides new cognitive space (= space to understand) for the reader. Paul formulates two important aspects of the exegesis of metaphors in biblical studies: (1) A diachronic analysis of language and (2) recognition of the "semantic impertinence of metaphors."²⁴

The final important theoretical contribution, entitled *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery*, was published in 2001 by Brill in the Brill Reference Library of Ancient Judaism series.²⁵ Aaron's main concern is parallel to Klingbeil's and focuses upon the biblical metaphorical talking about God. While Klingbeil studies mainly the iconographical comparative material from the ancient Near East, Aaron seeks to elucidate the linguistic characteristics of figurative language. Aaron does not suggest an a-historical reading of the biblical text—something quite fashionable in recent literary or narrative studies. For him, the understanding of the metaphor involves not only the reader's perspective, but also the perspective of the author and the specific historical context.²⁶ Aaron suggests that one of the main characteristics of any metaphor is its ambiguity, i.e., its openness to varied interpretations and associations.²⁷ He

²⁰ Paul, "Metaphor and Exegesis," 387–8. Interestingly, Klingbeil, "De lo profundo Jehová, a ti clamo," also focuses upon hymns and hymnology in the context of metaphors, which—being poetry—lend themselves to employing metaphors.

²¹ Paul, "Metaphor and Exegesis," 389–90.

²² "The creation of metaphor in language thus stands at the furthest point of the 'long path' or 'detour' through hermeneutics by which the self gains self-understanding by understanding the world around." *Ibid.*, 391.

²³ Paul calls this the "semantic impertinence"; *ibid.*, 393.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 394–6. It should be noted that Paul is not interested in a general diachronic study of literature, which is more the domain of the general critical method, but rather in the specific diachronic study of language and its use. Some interesting applications of Ricoeur's theoretical framework to exegetical studies can be found in Elmer B. Smick, "Semeiological Interpretation of the Book of Job," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 135–49; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Lamp In The Labyrinth: The Hermeneutics Of 'Aesthetic' Theology," *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987): 25–56; *idem*, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990).

²⁵ Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4–6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5–15.

dedicates a very helpful chapter to the discussion of metaphors and non-metaphors in the biblical text.²⁸ However, the most technical discussion of a metaphor can be found in chapter six and emphasizes—in our present context—two relevant observations.²⁹ Firstly, biblical metaphors about God cannot always be explained in clear-cut binary terms, i.e., distinguishing readily and easily between the literal and the figurative (or metaphorical). In Aaron's opinion, the worldview of the ancient authors was more characterized by some type of *continuum* than by straightforward distinctions. Secondly, as resulting from his suggestion of the *continuum* involving distinct grades of metaphorical meaning, the perception of the worldview of the biblical author becomes an urgent necessity if one would like to grasp the meaning of the employed metaphor(s).

A brief review of recent discussion of metaphors in the context of biblical hermeneutics has provided the following points: (1) Metaphors are a much more complex literary device than understood earlier and need to be read by looking simultaneously at meaning and usage.³⁰ (2) Metaphors in theological texts (especially when talking about God) presuppose not only rationality, but also an experimental response (= faith) to that metaphor if it is to be understood adequately. (3) Ambiguity in metaphors is part and parcel of their literary function in the text. Often a metaphor cannot be explained satisfactorily in one or two sentences. (4) The understanding of metaphors presumes a thorough knowledge of the author's cultural, social and contextual circumstances. (5) Metaphors lend themselves to a multiplicity of meanings, which makes a fruitful intertextual (= use and re-use of motifs in different biblical books separated by time and/or geography) usage more probable.

“Eating” and “Drinking” in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East

As opposed to modern 21st century utilitarian society (especially in the western hemisphere), eating and drinking in the ancient Near East and in the OT had multiple important functions which went beyond the mere quick, impersonal, and pragmatic fulfillment of bodily needs.³¹ Eating and drinking created

²⁸ Ibid., 23–42.

²⁹ Ibid., 101–124.

³⁰ This corresponds to the categories of semantics and pragmatics.

³¹ The following literature should be noted: Hans-Jürgen Greschat, “Essen und Trinken: Religionsphänomenologisch,” in *Das Heilige Essen: kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zum Verständnis des Abendmahls* (ed. Manfred Josuttis and Gerhard Marcel Martin; Stuttgart-Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1980), 29–39; Jenks, “Eating and Drinking in the Old Testament,” 2:250–4; Rudolf Smend, “Essen und Trinken—ein Stück Weltlichkeit des Alten Testaments,” in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walter Zimmerli* (eds. Herbert Donner et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 446–59; idem, “Essen und Trinken,” in *Neues Bibel-Lexikon* (eds. Manfred Görg and Bernhard Lang; 6 vols.; Zürich: Benziger, 1991), 1:601–2; Adele Reinhartz, “Reflection on Table Fellowship and Community Identity,” *Semeia* 86 (1999): 227–33; Diane M. Sharon, “When Fathers Refuse to Eat: The Trope of Rejecting Food and Drink in Biblical Narrative,” *Semeia* 86 (1999): 135–48; Robert P. Carroll, “YHWH's Sour Grapes: Images of Food and Drink in the Pro-

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community (Job 1:4–5; 1 Kgs 18:19; Gen 38:23–25),³² often involved political dimensions related to contracts (Gen 26:28–31 [Isaac and Abimelech]; 31:51–54 [Jacob and Laban]; Exod 18:12 [Jethro and Moses]; Josh 9:3–27 [Israel and the men of Gibeon]; and 2 Kgs 6:23 [Arameans led into Samaria by the prophet Elisha are invited to partake in a feast])³³ or covenants in the religious sphere

phetic Discourses of the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 113–31. More specific studies include Deborah A. Appler, "From Queen to Cuisine: Food Imagery in the Jezebel Narrative," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 55–73; Judith E. McKinlay, "To Eat or Not To Eat: Where is Wisdom in this Choice?" *Semeia* 86 (1999): 73–84; Athalya Brenner, "The Food of Love: Gendered Food and Food Imagery in the Song of Songs," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 101–12; Kathryn L. Roberts, "God, Prophet, and King: Eating and Drinking on the Mountain in First Kings 18:41," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62 (2000): 633–44; Stephen Alan Reed, "Food in the Psalms," (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate School, Faculty of Religion, 1987). One of the most complete general works is Eleonore Schmitt, *Das Essen in der Bibel: Literaturethnologische Aspekte des Alltäglichen* (Studien zur Kulturanthropologie 2; Münster/Hamburg: LIT Verlag, 1994). Discussion of extra-biblical material connected with eating and drinking and communal meals can be found in Eleanor Ferris Beach, "The Samaria Ivories, Marzeah, and Biblical Text," *Biblical Archaeologist* 56/2 (1993): 94–104; John L. McLaughlin, "The marzeah at Ugarit: A Textual and Contextual Study," *Ugarit Forschungen* 23 (1991): 265–81; Philip J. King, "The marzeah: Textual and Archaeological Evidence," in *Yigael Yadin Memorial Volume* (ed. A. Ben-Tor, J. C. Greenfield and A. Malamat; Eretz Israel 20; Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society with the Institute of Archaeology, 1989), 98*–106*; Philip R. Davies, "Food, Drink and Sects: The Question of Ingestion in the Qumran Texts," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 151–63; Matiahui Tsevat, "Eating and Drinking, Hosting and Sacrificing in the Epic of Aqht," *Ugarit Forschungen* 18 (1986): 345–50; Wilfried G. Lambert, "Donations of Food and Drink to the Gods in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the International Conference organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17th to the 20th April of 1991* (ed. J. Quaegebeur; Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1993), 191–201; and Jean Bottéro, "Boisson, banquet et vie sociale en Mésopotamie," in *Drinking in Ancient Societies: History and Culture of Drinks in the Ancient Near East: Papers of a Symposium Held in Rome, May 17–19 1990* (ed. L. Milano; History of the Ancient Near East Studies 6; Padua: Sargon, 1994), 3–13. More general discussion on food can be found in Jean Soler, "The Semiotics of Food in the Bible," in *Food and Drink in History* (ed. R. Forster and O. Ranum; Annales: Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations 5; Baltimore/London: John Hopkins UP, 1979), 126–38; Jay M. Eidelman, "Be Holy for I am Holy: Food, Politics, and the Teaching of Judaism," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 14/1 (2000): 45–51; Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, "'Not by Bread Alone . . .': The Ritualization of Food and Table Talk in the Passover Seder and in the Last Supper," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 165–91; Peter J. Tomson, "Jewish Food Laws in Early Christian Community Discourse," *Semeia* 86 (1999): 193–212; and also Veronika E. Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting: The Evolution of Sin: Attitudes to Food in Late Antiquity* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996). A study of the importance of the communal meal in the text of 1/2 Kings and their ritual dimension can be found in Gerald A. Klingbeil, "Momentaufnahmen of Israelite Religion—The Importance of the Communal Meal in Narrative Texts in 1/2 Kings and Their Ritual Dimension" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, *Israelite Religion in its West Asian Context* section, Denver, Colo., November 19, 2001).

³² Jenks, "Eating and Drinking in the Old Testament," 252–53; compare also Greschat, "Essen und Trinken: Religionsphänomenologisch," 32–33, for a good explanation of the social component of eating and drinking with some modern examples. Most probably, the bonding and community creating function of eating and drinking together originated in the shared meal of families and extended families. The experience of being suckled by one's mother may also play an important role.

³³ Schmitt, *Das Essen in der Bibel*, 102–4.

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(Exod 24:11), were part and parcel of standard cultic procedure in the context of religious feasts (Exod 12 [eating of the Passover]; Lev 23:9–22 [feast of first fruits was celebrated with a meal])³⁴, and belonged to the general sphere of social interaction, such as marriages or non-specific events. Eating and drinking expressed joy—often in the context of groups or community (1 Sam 1:3–15 [Elkanah celebrates the annual pilgrimage with his family]; 1 Sam 9:12–13 [festal meal after sacrifice, presided over by Samuel]).³⁵ Lack of food and consequently lack of eating and drinking together could indicate climatic problems (such as a famine; cf. Ruth 1), emotional affliction (2 Sam 1:12 [David and his men fast until evening after hearing the news of the death of Saul and his sons]) or military conflicts (2 Kgs 6:24–30 [Aramean siege of Samaria]).³⁶ Food (or lack thereof) determined population patterns, city planning, and migration patterns.³⁷ Mourning was expressed by the abstinence of food, or fasting, as one of its primary markers and often had cultic or ritual connotations.³⁸ Thus, eating and drinking (and connected to this, communal meals) had a much wider semantic range than as mere physiological processes and often involved metaphorical meaning. A very typical OT end-time metaphor is the great banquet (Isa 25:6–8), overflowing with the joy of salvation.³⁹ Another typical metaphor for the end-time eschatological reality of peace and unthreatened community involves the Israelite sitting safely under his own vine and under his own fig tree (Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10; similar Joel 2:22). The same metaphor is used by the Assyrian king Sennacherib when threatening the inhabitants of Jerusalem, involving a promise of peace (with vine and fig trees) when the city would surrender (2 Kgs 18:31=Isa 36:16). Furthermore, it is interesting to see the negative use of the vine/fig tree metaphor in prophetic contexts of judgment, often eschatological in nature (Isa 34:4; Joel 1:12).

Function of “Eating” and “Drinking” in the Book of Revelation

New Testament Greek includes a large number of terms indicating “eating,” “drinking,” or “meal” (and the resulting fellowship). The fairly recent work on

³⁴ Ibid., 97–9.

³⁵ Gary A. Anderson, *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991), 19–26.

³⁶ Ibid., 106–7.

³⁷ A good discussion of this can be found in Øystein S. LaBianca and Randy W. Younker, “The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan (ca. 1400–500 BCE),” in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land* (ed. Thomas E. Levy; London/Washington: Leicester UP, 1998), 399–415, who base their observations upon the research undertaken by the Madaba Plains Project.

³⁸ Anderson, *A Time to Mourn*, 49–53. Other expressions included sexual continence, audible lamentations, putting ashes or dust on one’s head, and the wearing of sackcloth or torn clothing. Compare also Grimm, *From Feasting to Fasting*, 14–33, for the OT and Jewish background of feasting and fasting.

³⁹ Jenks, “Eating and Drinking in the Old Testament,” 254.

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Greek semantics based upon distinct domains by Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida is of great benefit in this respect,⁴⁰ since it provides a convenient collection of the relevant data. It is interesting to note that of the many Greek terms indicating "eating," "drinking," "sharing a table" or "meal," none relating to the specific act of lying at a table is utilized in Revelation.⁴¹ However, more summary statements do appear in Revelation, including the following terms (including both verbal forms, nouns, and adjectives):⁴² ἐσθίω, "eat, consume" (Rev 2:7, 14, 20; 10:10; 17:16; 19:18);⁴³ τρέφω, "feed, provide with food, nourish, sustain" (Rev 12:6, 14); κατεσθίω, "eat up, devour, consume, prey upon" (Rev 10:9, 10; 11:5; 12:4; 20:9);⁴⁴ χορτάζω, "feed; *pass.* be satisfied, eat one's fill" (Rev 19:21); δειπνέω, "eat, dine" (Rev 3:20); δειπνον, "meal, feast, banquet,

⁴⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2 vols.; Cape Town: Bible Society of South Africa, 1989), 1:218–19, 248–54, 447, 450, 519, 521, 2:285–86, and 2:304. Concerning the concept of semantic domains in biblical research, see Johannes P. Louw, "Semantics," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; 6 vols.; New York-London-Toronto-Sydney-Auckland: Doubleday, 1992), 5:1077–81. A more dated, but still important reference, is James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1961). For an application of these principles to Aramaic extra-biblical texts, see Gerald A. Klingbeil, "A Semantic Analysis of the Aramaic Epigraphical Material of Syria-Palestine During the Persian Period," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35 (1997): 33–46.

⁴¹ This includes the following Greek terms: συνανάκειμαι, "sit at table with, eat with" (Matt 9:10); ανάκειμαι, "reclining at a table, eating" (Mark 14:18); ἀνακλίνω, "sit down [at table to eat]" (Matt 8:11); κατάκειμαι, "be sick; sit (lit. recline) at table, dine" (Mark 2:15); κατακλίνω, "sit down, sit at a table, dine" (Luke 7:36); and ἀνααπίπτω, "sit, sit at a table, lean" (Matt 15:35). This is most probably due to the fact that the book of Revelation does not necessarily describe actual events in a narrative frame, but rather utilizes symbols and metaphors to portray the apocalyptic vision. Compare here also similar observations in W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 136–39. Tate suggests the presence of the following characteristics in apocalyptic literature: (1) Cosmic scope; (2) dualistic cosmology (i.e., the fight between good and evil); (3) generally (although not exclusively) eschatological; (4) mode of communication is usually dream or vision or other supernatural experience; (5) important presence of symbolic language. For more general recent introductions to Jewish and Biblical Apocalypticism, see Andreas Bedenbender, *Der Gott der Welt tritt auf den Sinai. Entstehung: Entwicklung und Funktionsweise der frühjüdischen Apokalyptik* (Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte 8; Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 2000) and Christopher Rowland, "Apocalypticism," in *The Biblical World. Volume I* (ed. John Barton; London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 129–48. A good introduction to the specifics of symbolism in Revelation can be found in Jon Paulien, "Interpreting Revelation's Symbolism," in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies. Book 1* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6; Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 73–97.

⁴² It should be noted that the semantic field of "eating" and "drinking" includes not only references to the two actions, but also involves the opposite of "not having to eat and drink," i.e., be hungry, since hunger is the result of lack (or abstaining from food).

⁴³ The translations following the Greek terms are taken from Barclay M. Newman, Jr., *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993). For this study I utilized the digital version of the dictionary as provided and tested by *BibleWorks for Windows 5.0* and the University of Pennsylvania (CCAT).

⁴⁴ The verb is sometimes used in connection with birds (Matt 13:4; Mark 4:4; Luke 8:5).

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supper” (Rev 19:9, 17); πεινάω, “be hungry, hunger” (Rev 7:16); λιμός, “hunger, famine” (Rev 6:8; 18:8); πίνω, “drink” (Rev 14:10; 16:6; 18:3); ποτίζω, “give to drink” (Rev 14:8); μεθύσκομαι, “get drunk” (Rev 17:2); and διψάω, “be thirsty” (Rev 7:16; 21:6; 22:17).⁴⁵

The “eating,” “drinking,” and “meal” metaphors are often used in a positive context: Rev 2:7 promises those that “overcome” from the church of Ephesus food from the tree of life, a clear reference to the first three chapters of the book of Genesis. It is interesting to note that John utilizes the same verbal root ἐσθίω, “eat, consume,” in negative contexts as well: in the messages to the church of Pergamon (Rev 2:14) and the church of Thyatira (Rev 2:20), those that eat food dedicated to idols are reprimanded. It seems clear that the “eating” referred to here is not necessarily referring to the physical process of food intake (and thus should not automatically be read against the background of 1 Cor 8:1–13), but rather refers in symbolic language to spiritual “fornication” or prostitution.⁴⁶ The immediate context and reference to Balaam confirms this interpretation (cf. Num 22:5–25:3; 31:8, 16).⁴⁷

The same verb is also utilized in Rev 10:10 in connection with the eating of the scroll, which is at first sweet in the mouth but later on turns bitter in the stomach. The OT background of this metaphor can be found in Ezek 3:1–4, where the prophet receives his message and “eats” the “scroll from the Lord,”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Other Greek terms such as μετέχω, “share in, eat, live on” (Heb 5:13); τρώγω, “eat, chew” (Matt 24:38); βιβρώσκω, “eat” (John 6:13); βρώσις, “eating, food” (1 Cor 8:4); βρώσιμος, “eat-able [adjective]”; ψομίζω, “feed, give food away” (Rom 12:20); ἐκτρέφω, “feed, raise (children)” (Eph 5:29); θηλάζω, “nurse” (Matt 21:16); βόσκω, “graze, feed” (Matt 8:30); συνεσθίω, “eat with” (Luke 15:2); συναλιζομαι, “eat with, stay with” (Acts 1:4); συνευωχέομαι, “eat together” (Jude 12); ἐμπιπλάω, “fill, satisfy, enjoy” (Luke 1:53); ἀριστάω, “eat a meal” (Luke 11:37); κλάω ἄρτος, “break bread” (Acts 2:46); ἀνάκειμαι, “be seated at a table, be a dinner guest” (Mark 16:14); κατάκειμαι, “lie, sit, recline at a table; dine” (Luke 7:37); ἄριστον, “meal, feast” (Luke 11:38); βρώσις, “food, meal” (Heb 12:16); ἀριστάω, “eat breakfast, eat a meal” (John 21:12); τράπεζα, “table, fig. meal” (Acts 16:34); δοχή, “banquet, reception” (Luke 14:13); πρόσπεινος, “be hungry, hungry” (Acts 10:10); νῆστις, “hungry, without food” (Matt 15:32); νηστεία, “fasting, going without food” (2 Cor 6:5); ἀσντία, “lack of appetite” (Acts 27:21); ἄσντος, “without food” (Acts 27:33); πόσις, “drinking, a drink” (Col 2:16); συμπίνω, “drink together” (Acts 10:41); ὕδροποτέω, “drink water” (1 Tim 5:23); κημόω, “prevent from eating” (1 Cor 9:9); φιμόω, “muzzle (the oxen)” (1 Tim 5:18); παρασκευάζω, “prepare a meal” (Acts 10:10), do not appear in the book of Revelation.

⁴⁶ Both Rev 2:14, 20 include the verb πορνεύω, “to commit sexual immorality,” which should be understood against the OT background of the verbal root פָּרַן, which indicates in connection with religious activity, idolatrous action and attitudes (e.g., Jer 3:2, 9; 13:27; Ezek 23:27; Hos 4:11–15; 6:10) in terms of playing the whore or committing adultery.

⁴⁷ Compare here also the comments by G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1999), 248–50.

⁴⁸ See here C. Hassell Bullock, “Ezekiel, Bridge Between the Testaments,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25/1 (1982): 23–31; esp. 23. Compare also Beale, *Revelation*, 550–53.

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although it goes beyond the original alluded text and transforms it, a technique well known in intertextuality.

In Rev 17:16 ἐσθίω, “eat, consume,” is used in the context of judgment against the whore. Here, the metaphor is employed to indicate complete destruction.⁴⁹ A similar usage can be found in Rev 19:18, where the beast and its supporters are eaten by birds of the sky. This metaphor is well known from the OT and is connected to judgment. 1 Kings 14:11 predicts that the descendents of Jeroboam will be eaten by dogs in the city or birds of the air in the fields (cf. 1 Kgs 16:4 [Baasha]; 21:24 [Ahab]; Jer 15:3). The eating of the corpse by dogs and birds indicates the shame of the lack of a proper burial,⁵⁰ which according to common ANE belief would signify a denial of rest in the afterworld.⁵¹ The application of this principle to both Rev 17:16 and 19:18 would indicate that the destruction is not only complete, but also final—nothing to remember either the prostitute or the beast will remain.

Revelation 12:6 and 12:14 utilize the Greek verb τρέφω, “feed, provide with food, nourish, sustain,” in the context of the provision for the woman in the wilderness. William Shea has correctly recognized the *inclusio* character (= parenthesis) of both verses around the central section of the chapter (Rev 12:7–12),⁵² namely the conflict between Michael and the dragon in heaven. The metaphor of “providing food” or “nourishing” in this context goes beyond the mere physical sustenance of providing food, but points to the fact of complete dependence of the woman (= church)⁵³ upon the Lord in the context of the desert, which in itself is a place of both trial and protection in Scripture.⁵⁴

Κατεσθίω, “eat up, devour, consume, prey upon” is used five times in the book of Revelation (Rev 10:9, 10; 11:5; 12:4; 20:9). It appears twice in the already discussed section of Rev 10 connected to the metaphorical consumption of

⁴⁹ This is also visible in the parallel verbal action of burning the remains with fire (gr., κατακάουσουσιν ἐν πυρὶ). For a brief discussion of the OT use of burning by fire as a means of judgment (and resulting purification), see Gerald A. Klingbeil, “Entre individualismo y colectivismo: hacia una perspectiva bíblica de la naturaleza de la iglesia,” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy*, 14, and the additional references provided there.

⁵⁰ Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (New International Biblical Commentary 7; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 117–18, and Peter R. House, *1, 2 Kings. An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (New American Commentary 8; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 192. Compare here also the pertinent remarks by Appler, “From Queen to Cuisine,” 63–67, concerning the dog and bird metaphor.

⁵¹ For comparative ANE material, see Mordechai Cogan, *1 Kings* (The Anchor Bible 10; New York-London-Toronto-Sydney-Auckland: Doubleday, 2001), 380.

⁵² William H. Shea, “The Parallel Literary Structure of Revelation 12 and 20,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23 (1985): 41.

⁵³ For a discussion of the identity of the woman in Rev 12, see William Riley, “Who is the Woman in Revelation 12?” *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 18 (1995): 15–39, who argues that she should be interpreted as Jerusalem. Beale, *Revelation*, 625–32, has convincingly argued for the community of believers as the legitimate interpretation of the woman of Rev 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 645–46 and the references provided there.

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the scroll. In Rev 11:5 fire comes from the two witnesses and “eats” their enemies,⁵⁵ indicating their tremendous power.⁵⁶ In Rev 12:4 the term is used to describe the destructive intent of the dragon, who, standing before the woman in childbirth, is ready to devour her child. “Eating” in this context refers to complete destruction. Ironically, the dragon’s intent is thwarted by God, who then proceeds to “feed” the woman in the desert.⁵⁷ This could be interpreted as a typical occurrence of *reversal*, a narrative technique well known in the literature of the OT.⁵⁸ The final occurrence of the term in Rev 20:9 again points to the judgment character, whereby fire from heaven devours (“eats”) the enemy armies fighting against the saints of the Most High.

Revelation 19:21 employs χορτάζω, “feed; *pass.* be satisfied, eat one’s fill,” in the context of total annihilation, referring again to the birds which are “fed” by the flesh of the enemy army. Again, the metaphor points to the utter destruction of the enemy, with no remainder to be left and no memory to be found. They are not buried, but shamed and utterly destroyed.⁵⁹

Revelation 3:20 and 19:9 both utilize the “eating” metaphor in a positive context. The promise to the overcomer of Laodicea is a reciprocal shared meal with God. “I will eat with him and he will eat with me.” The fact that the verbal form is a cognate of the noun δείπνον, “meal, supper,” is a further indication of the connection to the all-important eschatological last supper (Luke 22:20; John 13:2, 4; 21:20) and communion meal (1 Cor 11:20, 21, 25).⁶⁰ The invitation given to all those invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9) is again a reference to the great culmination and completion of the Lamb’s ministry and

⁵⁵ See Num 21:28 for an OT example.

⁵⁶ This theme is continued in Rev 11:6 with references to the shutting up of heaven (= no rain), which is reminiscent of 1 Kgs 17:1, where it is YHWH who closes the heavens for three and a half years. Furthermore, they can turn the water into blood and can strike the earth with any kind of plague. Again, these attributes remind one of YHWH’S conflict with pharaoh in Exod 5–12.

⁵⁷ John utilizes two distinct Greek terms. The action of the dragon is described by κατασθίω, “eat up, devour, consume, prey upon,” whereas the divine act of protection and provision is expressed by τρέφω, “feed, provide with food, nourish, sustain.”

⁵⁸ On the usage of some specific reversals in OT literature, see Zdravko Stefanovic, “Daniel: A Book of Significant Reversals,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 30 (1992): 139–50; idem, “The Great Reversal: Thematic Links Between Genesis 2 and 3,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32 (1994): 47–56; Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., “Ganzheitsdenken in the Book of Ruth,” in *Problems in Biblical Theology: Essays in Honor of Rolf Knierim* (ed. Henry T. C. Sun et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 192–209; Moshe David Simon, “Many Thoughts in the Heart of Man . . . : Irony and Theology in the Book of Esther,” *Tradition* 31 (1997): 5–27; and Rick R. Marrs, “Amos and the Power of Proclamation,” *Restoration Quarterly* 40 (1998): 13–24.

⁵⁹ Richard Lehmann, “The Two Suppers,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies, Book 2* (ed. Frank B. Holbrook; Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 7; Silver Spring: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 207–23, has provided an interesting study of the two-supper motif in Rev 19:7–9 and 19:17–21. However, he does not adequately explain the meal metaphor and its importance in the social context of the ancient world (both OT and NT).

⁶⁰ Beale, *Revelation*, 309.

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mission on this planet. The feast metaphor implies eating and drinking. It presupposes tranquility and peace, since there is no real joy in feasting in the face of impending doom (as can be seen in Dan 5). Interestingly enough, Rev 19:17 describes the final judgment over God's enemy (in all his incarnations) utilizing the same verbal form. Τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ, "the great supper of God," is prepared. The special guests are the birds flying in midair. The metaphor clearly indicates judgment, and a final one at that.

In Rev 7:16, the multitude of the redeemed is described. They will neither experience hunger nor thirst any more.⁶¹ Again, food and the worry of providing it (or rather the abundance and lack of that worry) play an important role in the redemption metaphor. Food, so precious to the ancients and so difficult to secure,⁶² is abundantly present for the redeemed. This is clearly not written for the modern supermarket shopper with easy access to any type of foodstuff, from the exotic to the mundane. This is a metaphor that specifically speaks to (and spoke to) a people in an agriculturally based society.⁶³

Revelation 6:8 and 18:8 utilize the noun λιμός, "hunger, famine," that is an important part of destruction prophecies, the first one being part of the fourth seal and the second one pronouncing the fall of Babylon. In OT literature, hunger is often connected to curses or agents of punishment (Deut 28:48; Isa 29:8; Lam 2:19).⁶⁴ On the other end of the spectrum, God is the one who gives bread from heaven and thus alleviates hunger (Exod 16:1–36; Neh 9:15; John 6:31, 49, 58).

Up to now, the focus of the discussion of meal/eating metaphors has been on the "eating" aspect. However, drinking is also part of the meal metaphor. The verb πίνω, "drink," appears three times in the book (Rev 14:10; 16:6; 18:3) and is always connected with judgment images. This kind of drinking is not refreshing, but rather depressing. Revelation 14:10 describes the third angelic message, introducing the judgment of all those who "worship the beast and his image" (Rev 14:9). They will "drink the wine of God's wrath." Ironically, Rev 14:10

⁶¹ The two Greek verbs utilized include πεινῶ, "be hungry, hunger" and διψῶ, "be thirsty."

⁶² The true fulfillment of the curse of Gen 3:17–19.

⁶³ It is interesting to see that this may speak even more powerfully to readers or listeners from third world countries. Concerning the importance of cultural context in biblical interpretation, see Justin Ukpong, "Inculturation Hermeneutics: An African Approach to Biblical Interpretation," in *The Bible in a World Context: An Experiment in Contextual Hermeneutics* (ed. Walter Dietrich and Ulrich Luz; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 17–32. Another important collection of essays on the subject can be found in Heikki Räisänen et al., ed., *Reading the Bible in the Global Village: Helsinki* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000). Compare also from a more conservative perspective Dennis E. Johnson, "Between Two Wor(l)ds: Worldview and Observation in the Use of General Revelation to Interpret Scripture, and Vice Versa," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 (1998): 69–84, and Craig L. Blomberg, "The Globalization of Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38 (1995): 581–93.

⁶⁴ 2 Chr 32:11 describes the Assyrian king Sennacherib's propaganda during his invasion of Palestine.

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utilizes the same combination (Gr. τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ, “the wine of the wrath”) as Rev 14:8, which describes the actions and attitudes of Babylon in the second angelic message.⁶⁵ Babylon gave to drink the wine of the wrath of her fornication and in turn has to drink the wine of the wrath of God. Rev 16:6 again focuses upon judgment. Those who have shed the blood of the saints and prophets of God will have to drink blood, i.e., will receive the punishment according to the crime committed. Clearly, no literal drinking of blood is envisioned.⁶⁶ They are to die, since no one can survive drinking blood, but even more, they are impure, entirely out of the race. The final reference of verb πίνω, “drink,” can be found in Rev 18:3 in the context of the prophecy about the fall of Babylon, who gave to drink to all nations from the “wine of the wrath of her fornication” (NRSV). To drink in this context refers to partaking, to getting involved, and is rooted in the ancient concept of sharing a meal. Actually, the principle behind this prophecy is reciprocity. What you provide will be provided to you. What you give will be given to you. If you eat with me, I will protect you and receive you under my “umbrella” of influence.⁶⁷ Although the Greek vocabulary utilized is distinct,⁶⁸ the concept is similar. John sees one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls and who is about to show the prophet (and with him his later readers as well) the impending judgment of the great prostitute (the opposite of the faithful church), who made the inhabitants of the earth drink from the wine of her fornication.⁶⁹

The final verbal form connected to the semantic domain of “eating” and “drinking” is διψάω, “be thirsty,” and can be found in Rev 7:16; 21:6; 22:17. Interestingly enough, it is only used in the context of final victory. The great controversy has come to an end (at least proleptically!), and as a result, the multitude of the redeemed is described as those “who have been through the great tribulation,” who “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14, *NKJV*). As a result of this final victory⁷⁰ there is no more hunger, thirst, or threats of the (supposed deity) sun.⁷¹ In Rev 21:6 the reader

⁶⁵ However, the Greek term here is ποτιζω, “give to drink” (Rev 14:8).

⁶⁶ See also note 1 of this essay concerning the biblical prohibition of not drinking blood.

⁶⁷ Gary Stansell, “The Gift in Ancient Israel,” *Semeia* 87 (1999): 65–90, has provided a fascinating discussion of the nature and importance of gifts in ancient Israel that is—to some degree—also pertinent for the discussion of reciprocity in meal sharing.

⁶⁸ Rev 17:2 uses μεθύσκομαι, “get drunk.”

⁶⁹ The prostitute is connected to Babylon (Rev 17:5); meanwhile, the bride of the Lamb is connected to Jerusalem.

⁷⁰ Compare here the interesting comments of H. Kelly Ballmer, “Revelation 7:9–17,” *Interpretation* 40 (1986): 288–95, who suggests Isa 49 as the basis of this great hymn of victory. Isa 49:10, with its references to the non-existence of hunger and thirst, corresponds to Rev 7:16.

⁷¹ See here also the discussion of Gerald A. Klingbeil, “Sun and Moon in Psalm 121:6: Some Notes on their Context and Meaning,” in *To Understand Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea* (ed. David Merling; Berrien Springs: Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Archaeological Museum/Andrews University, 1997), 33–43, concerning “sun” and “moon” as divine threats and representations in the OT context. A similar interpretation could be applied to Rev 7:16.

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witnesses a similar scene. Jesus, sitting on the throne in the new Jerusalem, proclaims the final victory. There is no more death (Rev 21:4), no more tears (Rev 21:4); everything is new, and the access to the water of life is freely available for the thirsty (Rev 21:6). As will be shown below, there is a clear intertextual connection between the tree of life (Gen 2–3) and the spring of the water of life (Rev 21:6), although one can also note a link to Isa 49:10.⁷² Rev 22:17 repeats this water-of-life metaphor in the epilogue.⁷³ However, there is a distinct and important addition. Everybody thirsting for this water of life can and will receive it—“for free, as a gift” (Gr. δωρεάν).

Eating and Drinking as Intertextual Connectors

The past fifty years have witnessed an explosive increase in interpretive methodologies, leaving the uninitiated reader, student, or even scholar often stunned by the immensity of material, methodologies, and applications.⁷⁴ One just cannot keep up-to-date anymore in biblical studies.⁷⁵ One of more promising efforts represents the study of intertextuality. Intertextuality studies the inner-biblical use and re-use of biblical texts by contemporary or later biblical authors. Instead of focusing solely upon direct quotes, it looks at allusions, recurring motifs and known patterns, or the opposite to those known patterns.⁷⁶

⁷² Roberto Badenas, “New Jerusalem—The Holy City,” 268, presents other OT references, such as Exod 17:1–7 and Isa 55:1.

⁷³ Beale, *Revelation*, 1122–57, has identified Rev 22:6–21 as the epilogue of the book. Compare also Badenas, “New Jerusalem—The Holy City,” 243.

⁷⁴ Compare also Kaiser and Silva, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 247–8, for a similar evaluation of the hermeneutical “landscape”.

⁷⁵ See here the important William R. Telford, “Modern Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Biblical World: Volume II* (ed. John Barton; London-New York: Routledge, 2002), 427–49, providing a useful taxonomy and description of most methodologies. For a discussion of some specific new areas of research, see Gerald A. Klingbeil and Martin G. Klingbeil, “La lectura de la Biblia desde una perspectiva hermenéutica multidisciplinaria (I)—Consideraciones teóricas preliminares,” in *Entender la Palabra: Hermenéutica Adventista para el Nuevo Siglo* (ed. Merling Alomía et al.; Cochabamba: Universidad Adventista de Bolivia, 2000), 147–73.

⁷⁶ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 1–19, was one of the first to emphasize the continued life-cycle of Scripture in later biblical (or extra-biblical) authors, although he did not coin the term “intertextuality,” but rather spoke of inner-biblical exegesis. Other relevant general literature concerning this method includes Craig C. Broyles, “Traditions, Intertextuality, and Canon,” in *Interpreting the Old Testament: A Guide for Exegesis* (ed. Craig C. Broyles; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 157–75; S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. L. North* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 189; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000); Robert W. Wall, “The Intertextuality of Scripture: The Example of Rahab (James 2:25),” in *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation* (ed. Peter W. Flint; Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001), 217–36; Christopher D. Stanley, “The Social Environment of ‘Free’ Biblical Quotations in the New Testament,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series/Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 148/5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 18–27; Christopher D. Stanley, “The Rhetoric of

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The meal metaphor (involving “eating” and “drinking,” and being “hungry” and “thirsty”) is an important marker in this context. As has been shown above, the meal motif has many facets in Scripture. Two are especially noteworthy in the book of Revelation. *Firstly*, it introduces final judgment. Birds of the sky will eat the flesh of the enemy and his allies (whatever form and shape they take).⁷⁷ God’s enemies will drink the wine of his wrath. Clearly, the use of the metaphor does not point to the literal meaning of eating and drinking, but rather points to the complete destruction, shame and disappearance (with no hope of returning!) of the evil and its protagonists in the cosmic conflict depicted in the book. The cosmic dimension is of utmost importance in apocalyptic literature, which is underlined by the use of this metaphor.⁷⁸ Rev 17:16 and 19:18 have their textual anchor in 1 Kgs 14:11; 16:4; 21:24; and Jer 15:3. They re-use well known prophetic oracles of total annihilation and apply those to God’s enemy and his allies.

The *second* important usage of the meal metaphor is diametrically opposite to the first. Meals are connected with final victory: banquets and free food and drink.⁷⁹ The overcomer will dine with Jesus, who has been knocking on the door to be let in (Rev 3:20). But strangely enough, it is not the overcomer who will supply the needed food and drink, but Jesus who takes the initiative. The final wedding feast demonstrates similar overtones: Rev 19:9 emphasizes the invitation to the meal. Not everyone can participate, but only those who have been invited.⁸⁰ It is this invitation and the eating and drinking aspect that connects this

Quotations: An Essay on Method,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel*, 44–58; and Stanley E. Porter, “The Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament: A Brief Comment on Method and Terminology,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel*, 79–96. More specific intertextual studies of the book of Revelation include G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998); S. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); D. Muñoz León, “La proclamación del reinado de Dios y de su Cristo sobre el mundo en Ap 11,15: contactos con Targum de Éxodo 15, 18,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 57 (1999): 441–57; Jacques van Ruiten, “The Intertextual Relationship between Isaiah 65,17–20 and Revelation 21,1–5b,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 51 (1993): 473–510; idem, “Der alttestamentliche Hintergrund von Apokalypse 6:12–17,” *Estudios Bíblicos* 53 (1995): 239–60; G. K. Beale, “Solecisms in the Apocalypse as Signals for the Presence of Old Testament Allusions: A Selective Analysis of Revelation 1–22,” in *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders; Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series/Studies in Scripture in Early Judaism and Christianity 148/5; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 421–46; and Roger D. Aus, “The Relevance of Isaiah 66:7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thessalonians 1,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 67 (1976): 252–68.

⁷⁷ Rev 6:8; 14:10; 16:6; 17:16; 19:17, 18, 24; and 20:9 include this concept.

⁷⁸ See here Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 136.

⁷⁹ Rev 2:7; 3:20; 7:16; 11:5; 12:6, 14; 19:9; 21:6; and 22:17 should be interpreted in this sense.

⁸⁰ The literal translation of the verb καλέω is “to call, name, address.” The verb is used frequently in the LXX and in the NT (623x according to *BibleWorks 5.0*) in such a crucial context as

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second metaphorical usage to the creation and fall account in Gen 1–3. Eating from the tree of life has destroyed the perfect relationship between creation and creator, and it is eating that ushers in the new re-creation. A wedding feast, a banquet, an echo of the last supper, but this time the invitation is not done underhanded by the enemy in the guise of a snake, but by the victorious Lamb on the throne of God. No more hunger, no more thirst, no more doubts. Revelation points to the final outcome of the cosmic controversy. Humanity does not have to toil hard to be able to eat and provide for itself (Gen 3:17–19). It is free again, although not entirely, since only those who washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:9–14; 22:14) have access to the banquet. However, there is an important reworking of the well-known Genesis text of creation. While Rev 22:14 mentions the tree of life,⁸¹ the offer has been somewhat transformed. It is the fountain of the water of life that appears with more frequency in the main text (excluding the epilogue [Rev 7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17]). Clearly, Jesus' statement in John 7:37 is in John's mind as he pens those final chapters of Revelation. The incarnate water of life that transformed the hopeless desert of lost people welcomes home his redeemed.

Conclusion

The study of biblical metaphors is rich and often challenging. One needs to seek to understand what the ancient authors and their audiences heard and understood when connecting to the metaphor. In the case of the meal/eating/drinking metaphor, many aspects are not clearly understood by modern 21st century readers. Meals in the ANE were much more important in terms of their social dimensions. Meals connected groups and individuals. Meals cemented loyalties. Plenty of food meant security, and freely available foodstuff was like heaven in a society that was agricultural in its outlook and projection. John's meal metaphors must not be read with our supermarket and fast-food mentality in mind.

Another important outcome of this study involves the intertextual relationship of the meal metaphor. Clearly, John (like many other NT writers) lived and breathed in the inspired OT text. However, NT intertextuality often goes beyond the original meaning of the OT text alluded to. An example of this can be seen in the newly introduced water of life metaphor that is absent from the creation record in Genesis. Undoubtedly, John wants to make room for some additional, theologically important feature of Paradise restored (or better, re-created). The seed of the woman, the Messiah (Gen 3:15) who would crush the head of the serpent, has come. He is the true water of life (John 7:37) who has provided for free access to the wedding banquet. His blood is the necessary (and absurd!)

Gen 1–2, where God "calls" (i.e., names) planets, plants, and animals. In Gen 3:9 he "calls" to man: "where are you?"

⁸¹ Also mentioned in Rev 2:7; 22:2, 19.

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detergent to clean the robes of the redeemed. It is this paradox and addition that makes intertextual study so rich and promising for future biblical research. “And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17, *NKJV*).

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The Role of the Statement of Beliefs and Creeds

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (16th ed., rev. 2000) presents a summary of doctrinal beliefs “especially prepared for the instruction of candidates for baptism.”¹ What this set of doctrines underscores is that Seventh-day Adventists subscribe to a set of teachings which defines them and sets them apart from other Christian denominations. The use of this set of doctrines for the instruction of baptismal candidates reminds one of the classical creeds of Christendom. There seems to be near universal agreement on the fact that early Christian confessions of faith were employed in part for the instruction and baptism of new converts.² In this particular sense, the Adventist statement of doctrines appears to take on the character of a creed. Yet, throughout the development of their Statements of Fundamental Beliefs, Seventh-day Adventists have insisted on the fact that they have no creed but the Bible.

Seventh-day Adventists’ reluctance to subscribe to a “creed” seems to be based on the tendency of creeds to lead to authoritarianism, calcification of beliefs, and the stifling of fresh searches for biblical understanding and truth.³ Apparently, this is the reason why the church prefers the use of the title “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs,” although others, such as Baptists, with similar disposition toward creeds, prefer the title “Confession of Faith.”

The Enlightenment of the 17th century, however, introduced its own depreciation of creeds, though based on different concerns. The Enlightenment, embodying a general aversion to “authority,” and capitalizing on the disaffection

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 16th Edition (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 209–213.

² E. Glenn Hinson, “Confessions or Creeds in Early Christian Tradition,” *Review and Expositor* 76 (1979), 6.

³ See Fritz Guy, “Uncovering the Origins of the Statement of Twenty-seven Fundamental Beliefs,” *Spectrum* 32/3 (2004), 20.

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with Protestant scholasticism, introduced a radical subjectivism that remains a defining characteristic of our times. From Adolf von Harnack through Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Gordon Kaufmann to many contemporary postmodernists, there is a decided contempt for officially defined systems of doctrine. Evidently, contemporary aversion to officially defined systems of doctrine goes beyond the historic creeds of Christendom to include confessions of faith and statements of beliefs of more recent vintage.

We cannot enter into a full discussion of the reasons for the contemporary depreciation of officially defined systems of doctrine, but it may be worth noting some of them at this point. Among the reasons for the decline in confidence in creeds, confessions, and statements of beliefs are the following: belief in the subjective nature of truth in the post-enlightenment climate, the stress of orthopraxis over orthodoxy, the appeal to cultural relativism, and a revised concept of revelation (i.e., revelation as an ongoing reality) that leads to a new over-emphasis on understanding doctrine as an organism that ever evolves and matures.⁴

The question regarding the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is raised in the context of the foregoing background. In other words, what may be said in favor of a statement of fundamental beliefs as an officially defined system of doctrines in the context of the contemporary penchant for subjective truth? In view of the significance of the subject, it is critically important that any meaningful comment on the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the church be preceded by an adequate analysis of the phenomenon. The analysis of the nature or phenomenon of a statement of fundamental beliefs in this paper will involve three issues: its *formal* essence, its *material* connection to the Scriptures, and its efficiency, i.e., what it is that makes it what it is. Each of the issues raised will be discussed in turn, then a concise definition of the statement of fundamental beliefs will be formulated, and finally some specific conclusions on the place and role of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist church as a community of faith will be provided.

Before examining the three issues raised above, it may be useful to define more clearly the question about the role of a statement of fundamental beliefs.

Clarifying the Role of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

The following discussion is guided by a certain understanding of the issue regarding the role of a statement of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist church. This understanding of the issue needs to be spelt out. It is of some importance that while we speak of the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs, a couple general distinctions be made. First, a simple distinction could

⁴ See Bruce A. Demarest, "Christendom's Creeds: Their Relevance in the Modern World," *JETS* 21/4 (1978), 352-56.

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be made between those who see value in the development of a statement of fundamental beliefs and those who oppose it as an altogether unnecessary development. The latter might argue along the following lines: “if we have the Bible, why do we need a statement of fundamental beliefs?” Secondly, a more subtle distinction could be made between those who see the development as a *necessary* process and those who see it in less absolutist terms as *legitimate and valuable*. While those in the first category may seek to ensure the continuation of the development of such statements in every situation, the latter group may question its continuing validity or seek to clarify how the Statement of Beliefs which functioned in an earlier era may function in a contemporary situation. The ensuing discussion intends to keep the two concerns outlined in view.

The Formal Essence of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

The first part of the analysis of the nature of a statement of fundamental beliefs will deal with its essence. By referring to the *essence* of the statement of beliefs, a very formal idea is in view. Technically, the issue relates to the *formal cause* of a statement of fundamental beliefs. Some of the points that will be raised in this section of the paper may come up subsequently for further consideration, but at this point the focus will simply be on a formal analysis of the nature of the statement of fundamental beliefs. The reference made earlier concerning a statement of fundamental beliefs as an instrument of instruction speaks to this *essential, formal* nature of the document.

First, one of the primary formal things that may be said about the nature of a statement of fundamental beliefs is that it is a set of doctrines or teachings; *didaskalia*. Here, the focus is *not* on teaching as an activity but on teachings as in a system of beliefs. Two important points emerge from a biblical understanding of *doctrine* or *teaching*. On the one hand, unlike the Greek usage of *didaskalia* outside of the Bible, which emphasized the communication of intellectual or technical knowledge, the New Testament usage stresses *content*, usually of ethical instruction. Thus, “sound doctrine” in the pastoral epistles is contrasted with immoral living (1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 2:1–5). Furthermore, the ethical dimension of biblical *doctrine/teaching* is connected to preaching as the means by which people are brought to faith in Jesus and instructed in the ethical principles and obligations of the Christian life.⁵

On the other hand, since God’s will is the focus of ethical instruction in the Bible, *doctrine/teaching* becomes closely identified with the “essential data of the faith,” taking on a meaning which includes the essential beliefs of the Christian faith.⁶ Yet, knowing doctrine in the Bible is not a mere accumulation of pieces of data; rather, knowing doctrine results in the love of God (2 John 6–10).

⁵ G. D. Fee, “Doctrine,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 2:152.

⁶ *Ibid.*

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Christ as the Ultimate Essence of the Statement. Care should be exercised to note that biblical teaching is useful only as it leads to conversion.⁷ The goal of the Bible and its teachings is to lead people to a saving knowledge of God through Christ. Biblical teaching and truth all aim at building a community into Christ. We are told that by “*speaking the truth in love,*” we may grow into Christ (Eph 4:15–16). It is in this sense of growing up in Christ in “all aspects or things” (v. 15) that the statement of fundamental beliefs is so wholistic in its reach into all aspects of life. Yet, a statement of beliefs remains a help along the way in pointing to Christ as the center of belief and practice. Clearly, Christ should remain the ultimate essence of the statement of fundamental beliefs, since in reality He is *die ursprüngliche Lehre* (John 14:6).

First, then, an implication of understanding the statement of fundamental beliefs as a set of *didaskalia* is that it belongs to the very essence of such a statement to have *content*, comprising data of the faith which, when embraced, eventuates in love and obedience to God through Jesus Christ.

Second, the use of a statement of fundamental beliefs by a group as an instrument of instruction implies the anticipation of some measure of “sameness” with regards to belief within the ranks of the group. In other words, a statement of fundamental beliefs reflects a group’s corporate faith-consciousness. It is a consensus document that mirrors the belief commitments the group regards as essential to its identity and mission. The historical development of the Seventh-day Adventist fundamental statements of beliefs bears out this point. As early as 1872, the press at Battle Creek issued a pamphlet embodying 25 doctrinal propositions with the following introductory comment:

In presenting to the public this synopsis of our faith, we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible. We do not put forth this as having any authority with our people, nor is it designed to secure uniformity among them, as a system of faith, but *is a brief statement of what is, and has been with great unanimity, held by them.*⁸

The foregoing statement ought to be understood in the context of the newly developing group’s experience with “established religion” and its creeds. The reference to the propositions as not “having any authority with our people” or not being “a system of faith” may be read as a critique and a reflection of the

⁷ “All, high or low, if they are unconverted, are on one common platform. Men may turn from one doctrine to another. This is being done, and will be done. Papists may change from Catholicism to Protestantism; yet they may know nothing of the meaning of the words, ‘A new heart also will I give you.’ Accepting new theories, and uniting with a church, do not bring new life to anyone, even though the church with which he unites may be established on the true foundation. Connection with a church does not take the place of conversion. To subscribe the name to a church creed is not of the least value to anyone if the heart is not truly changed. . . .” (Ev 290).

⁸ Quoted in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 2d rev. ed., 2 vols. (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1996), 464. All emphasis throughout this paper is mine.

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new group's disdain of established churches' use of creeds and systems of belief. Thus, E. G. White wrote:

Though the Reformation gave the Scriptures to all, yet the selfsame principle which was maintained by Rome prevents multitudes in Protestant churches from searching the Bible for themselves. They are taught to accept its teachings *as interpreted by the church*; and there are thousands who dare receive nothing, however plainly revealed in Scripture, that is contrary to their creed or the established teaching of their church. (GC 596)

Be that as it may, the preceding observation on consensus or "sameness" is not particularly insightful or even distinctive for Christian communities since secular communities also develop statements of commitment as a symbol of their life together.⁹ We must, therefore, move on to make a third point by qualifying the quality of consensus in a Christian statement of beliefs as a symbol of community life.

While a statement of fundamental beliefs reveals an underlying consensus, what is portrayed is not mere "group prejudice." The underlying consensus reflects a consensus on "truth." This point is of pivotal importance as we seek to reflect on the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Presently, there are two views that are detrimental to attempts to define and formalize truth the way a Statement of Fundamental belief does. On the one hand, the view is fairly widespread in contemporary theology that the *task* of theology is a *second-order reflective enterprise* that focuses on the Christian faith to clarify the *particular* idea of God *peculiar* to the Christian community. In the postmodern version of this idea, it is commonly understood and taken for granted that different Christian communities, and indeed religions, reflect particular ideas of God in those particular communities. The question of truth is not directly addressed in these formulations of the theological task and consequently is left unanswered. Furthermore, this view of the theological task presupposes an understanding of revelation not as propositional, in the sense of having a cognitive content, but as an encounter between God and man in which no content as such is communicated.

On the other hand, it has been argued that "a 'true' doctrinal statement . . . can, it may be admitted, never lose its truth, but it can lose its relevance."¹⁰ The validity of this argument is based on the premise that the logic of doctrinal statements means that their meaning is connected to a total world-view of God and His relation to the world. Therefore, a change of world-view could render a doctrine which used to be true no longer relevant.

⁹ Hinson, 5.

¹⁰ Maurice Wiles, *The Making of Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967), 9.

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Comment on the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the Seventh-day Adventist church must require a prior assessment and clarification of the relationship between the statement of beliefs and the question of truth. In other words, does the statement of beliefs represent the church's consensus on "truth," or is it an "in-house" understanding of reality? Underlying this question is the issue of whether there is any such thing as "the truth" at all. The position taken on this question has profound implications on one's valuation of the statement of fundamental beliefs. In addressing this question, another issue should be pointed out. There are those who take the critical view that diversity in doctrine inheres in the Bible itself.¹¹ From this perspective, it is pointless, for example, to talk about a uniform teaching in the New Testament, let alone in a subsequent confessional document. Of course not only does this view run contrary to Tertullian's view (about A.D. 200) that there was an orthodox doctrine that Jesus taught the apostles, which they in turn passed on, and that heresy represents a departure from orthodox doctrine summarized in creedal confessions,¹² but it runs against Scripture's admonition to keep the faith delivered (1 John 2:23–24; 2 Thess 3:6).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into the continuing debate on the unity of the Bible broached above. From the Seventh-day Adventist perspective, however, it appears that from the very beginning, a definite conception of "truth" underlay the effort to formulate a statement of fundamental beliefs. James White's 1853 response to a query from an official of the Seventh-day Baptist Central Association is seen as a precursor to the current Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs.¹³ In response to the query about the faith of Seventh-day Adventists, White wrote:

As a people we are brought together from divisions of the Advent body and from various denominations, holding different views on some subjects; yet, thank Heaven, the Sabbath is a mighty platform on which we can all stand united. And while standing here, with the aid of no other creed than the Word of God, and bound together by the bonds of love—love for the truth, love for each other, and love for a perishing world—"which is stronger than death," all party feelings are lost. We are united in these great subjects: Christ's immediate, personal second Advent, and the observance of all of the commandments of God, and the faith of his Son Jesus Christ, as necessary to a readiness for his Advent.¹⁴

¹¹ On this issue, see Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 140ff.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³ Guy, 20.

¹⁴ James White, "Resolution of the Seventh-day Baptist Central Association," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Aug. 11, 1853, 52.

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One of the significant observations about this “proto” statement of fundamental beliefs is that although the believers held different views on some subjects, love for *the truth* led them to a consensus on certain fundamental topics.

A final point on the essence of the statement of fundamental beliefs comes out of James White’s comment cited above. White spoke of a three-fold love that drove the unity of the Millerite group. The pursuit of *the truth* was not a mere scholastic enterprise, but one that was based in *mission*, expressed here as love for one another and love for a perishing world. This is an important aspect of the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the statement of fundamental beliefs that should distinguish it from authoritarian *creedalism*, which Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally despised.

Every point that has been made so far about the *formal* essence of the statement of fundamental beliefs—that it implies content, reflects a consensus on truth, and is based in a context of mission—requires a material grounding. In other words, having a consensus on truth is one thing, but to ask for the nature and source of the truth is a completely different matter. The critical point here is that the content, the truth, and the mission-context of the statement of fundamental beliefs must have a *material* referent. That is the subject of the next section.

Fundamental Beliefs and Scripture

The second part of the analysis of the nature of a statement of fundamental beliefs has to do with its *relation* to Scripture. The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the statement of fundamental beliefs presupposes an ongoing dynamic relationship with Holy Scripture. Not only does the church see its statement of fundamental beliefs as grounded in the Bible, but it explicitly and purposefully subordinates the statement of beliefs to the Bible by giving the Bible magisterial oversight on its future expressions. The statement of fundamental beliefs in the 16th edition of the Church Manual is prefaced as follows

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.¹⁵

The church’s holding certain fundamental beliefs and at the same time affirming the Bible as its only creed may seem contradictory. Nevertheless, this seemingly contradictory position highlights the derivative nature of the statement of fundamental beliefs. How is this possible? When it is kept in mind that the word *creed* comes from the Latin *credo*, which simply means “I believe,” it

¹⁵ *Church Manual*.

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becomes immediately apparent that, technically, there is no contradiction here. But behind the Seventh-day Adventist expression of the phrase “no creed but the Bible” is a particular understanding of the relation between the church’s expression of doctrine and beliefs and the Bible. How may this relationship be expressed?

The Bible as the Creed of Seventh-day Adventists. A classic expression of Adventist psyche on the relation between doctrine and the Bible is provided by E. G. White:

When God’s Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God’s Word is infallible. (1 SM 416)

Together with other statements in her writings, the statement above begins to disclose Adventists’ evaluation of creeds, and for that matter a statement of fundamental beliefs, with respect to its relation to Scripture. The quotation evidences a few concerns with regards to the Word of God in the Christian’s life: openness to reception of new truths and bonding to Jesus. The implication from the statement is that on both of these fronts, the Bible and not a creed should be depended upon. Other statements evidence other concerns, such as the need for heart conversion over against intellectual belief in truth (EV 290) as well as the maintenance of the interpretive authority of Scripture in defining truth over against human interpretive authorities, such as papal authority (FW 77). The concern over heart conversion in this regard is an insightful one in view of the comment that “Accepting new theories, and uniting with a church, do not bring new life to anyone, even though the church with which he unites *may be established on the true foundation*” (EV 290). Here again we see a concern among the early Adventists with regards to an authentic Christian life for which a creed may be found wanting. It seems clear from these statements that Adventists’ resistance to a creed taking the place of the Bible arises from the realization that only the Bible as God’s inspired word, and not a creed, albeit a sound one, is able to address the concerns noted above.

The notion of “No creed but the Bible” is certainly not unique to Seventh-day Adventists, but their perspective on the idea is to emphasize the need to go to the Bible for new vistas on truth, as well as to help us be “individual Christians” (FW 77).

In spite of the foregoing, Seventh-day Adventists have also emphasized the need for correct doctrine and truth, a fact which is expressed in their adoption of a statement of fundamental beliefs. This is not designed in any way to diminish the role of Scripture in the life of the Adventist community of faith. Indeed, the very fact of the *adoption* of a statement of fundamental beliefs brings out two

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implications of their stand on Scripture. On the one hand, quite contrary to the sentiment behind one use of the slogan “No creed but the Bible,” which scorns responsible reflection on Scripture, the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not in any way take away from the authority or supremacy of the Bible. Rather, the fact that the church has taken a definite stand on certain *biblical* fundamental beliefs reflects its responsible commitment to the *sola scriptura* principle and its continuing trust in the Bible as the inspired Word of God. On the other hand, the church’s adoption of a statement of fundamental beliefs that is derivatively connected to the explicit teachings of the Bible demonstrates an approach which runs contrary to the sentiment behind an equally popular slogan, “No creed but Christ.” This tends to emphasize the subjective element of the Christian religion over against the objective, cognitive, and doctrinal aspects of it. Whereas the slogan “No creed but the Bible” sometimes reflects a fundamentalist disposition towards the Bible, the slogan “no creed but Christ” sometimes represents a liberal reductionist approach to the Bible. Underlying the fundamentalist’s disapprobation of creed-like documents is the fear that such documents undermine the sufficiency of Scripture.¹⁶ The liberal dissatisfaction with creed-like documents, however, sometimes results from a concern for non-coercion and freedom of belief, but other times from a relativistic, existential perspective.

Both the liberal and fundamentalist tendencies mentioned above will need to be addressed when we examine the value and role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the life of the church. At this point, we only wish to point out that subscription to a statement of fundamental beliefs, while on the one hand not inconsistent with scriptural primacy and sufficiency, on the other hand prevents a decline into relativism that may deny Scripture its legitimate authority in

¹⁶ The point should be made that there is more to orthodoxy or correct doctrine than the slogan “No creed but the Bible.” While the slogan on its face may sound pious, it does indeed evidence different dispositions. Traditionally, Adventists have also made the claim, “No creed but the Bible”; so have Jehovah’s Witnesses, as well as some Church of Christ denominations. On the one hand, when Seventh-day Adventists make the claim, they are defending the normative status of the Bible over against any interpretations of men that are set up to interfere with the Bible from functioning as ultimate authority. As E. G. White noted clearly about Protestant churches of her time, “They are taught to accept its teachings *as interpreted by the church*; and there are thousands who dare receive nothing, however plainly revealed in Scripture, that is contrary to their creed or the established teaching of their church” (GC 596). The following statement by E. G. White again shows that the concern was to ensure that the Bible has the final word. “But God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support” (GC 595). On the other hand, a fundamentalist may make the claim sometimes to defend a crude literalism over against responsible interpretation.

the church. This point will be picked up when the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs is specifically discussed.

Efficiency of the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs

Before we discuss more directly the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs in the church, we need to explore one more aspect of our analysis of the nature or phenomenon of the statement of fundamental beliefs. Here we ask the question about the efficiency of a statement of fundamental beliefs, namely, the power that enables it to be what it is and to accomplish its desired goal.

In the word creed there is already a suggestion of authority¹⁷ that the statement of fundamental beliefs, as a creed-like document, shares. The range of views on the nature and scope of the authority of a statement of fundamental beliefs may be quite broad and sometimes raise difficult questions, but its power will rarely be denied. The question is in what does the authority and power reside? An understanding of what makes it have the authority it has will be helpful in determining its role in the church.

One of the sources of the power that attends a statement of fundamental beliefs seems to be the fact that it is partly rooted in history.¹⁸ The rootedness in history that is of interest here relates specifically to the faith community's perception of God's action in their midst and in their history. Such were the confessions and declaratory affirmations of Israel about God's activity in history (Deut 26:5–9; Deut 6:4–5) which it is believed form the basis of Christian creeds.¹⁹

The power of a statement of fundamental beliefs as a reflection of its rootedness in the history of the faith community is manifested in the fact that once they come into being, as Leith observes, "they begin to shape history also."²⁰ Creeds, confessions, and statements of beliefs shape history by providing the context for future theological decisions as well as defining denominational practice.

Obviously, the comment made above raises the question of tradition in doctrinal definition. Tradition, however, must be distinguished in its various meanings. It is important to distinguish tradition as the teaching and practice of a church, as this teaching and practice has been carried on continuously from the beginning, from tradition as defined, for example, by the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545–63).²¹ No denomination can exist without tradition in the former sense. Whereas the former may be a helpful, even an unavoidable and indispensable theological resource, the latter has been rejected by Protestants as contrary to the *sola scriptura* principle. Even within an acceptable view of tradition, care

¹⁷ John H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, "Creeds," in Alan Richardson and John Bowden, *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 131.

²⁰ Leith, 3.

²¹ R. P. C. Hanson, "Tradition," in Richardson and Bowden, 574.

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ought to be taken to avoid a “rule of faith” sense of tradition where tradition as the church’s interpretation of Scripture is made to necessarily equate with Scripture.²² Using the statement of fundamental beliefs as a theological resource in the sense of tradition defined above does indeed shape history, but the church ought to be constantly vigilant to guard against the temptation to necessarily equate tradition and Scripture.

Among Seventh-day Adventists, for example, the events prior and subsequent to 1844 were instrumental in their “creedal” development, which in turn informed and continues to inform Adventist theology, worship, and mission today. For Adventists, this rootedness in history shapes their philosophy of history and their place in it along cosmic lines in what is generally known as the Great Controversy motif. In that sense, the statement of fundamental beliefs is not any mere collection of biblical truths. It represents rather “present truth” in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of history.

The relation between a statement of beliefs and history, however, ought to be a dialectical relationship. While they shape history, it is also the case that a statement of fundamental beliefs in the sense of Adventists’ understanding ought to be judged by history—the history of the faith community. This is the case because as the expression of how the faith community understands God’s Word, the statement of fundamental beliefs is examined, clarified, and confirmed in the history of the community. It is important to emphasize that the community’s historical reflection and clarification is an attempt to more accurately reflect the will of God expressed in Scripture. Thus we are pointed back to the ultimate source of the authority of the Statements of Fundamental Beliefs, namely, the Bible. The statement of fundamental beliefs is really the church’s reading and reception of Scripture, and it is truly authoritative to the extent that it accurately depicts the message of Scripture.

Historical rootedness, however, is not the only source of the power of a statement of fundamental beliefs. Indeed, it is not the most significant source of its authority. The faith community ascribes authority to the statement mainly because as the community sees in it an expression of God’s activity among them, they find Christ’s promise regarding the Holy Spirit fulfilled among them (John 16:13). In this sense, the Statement of Beliefs is regarded as one of the results of the work of the Spirit. The consensus expressed in the Statement is seen as a Spirit-directed consensus. To say that the statement is a Spirit-guided consensus is to acknowledge in the same breath an attitude of openness to the Spirit’s further leading in doctrinal expression.

²² Such, for example, is the view taken by Thomas Oden when he argues that “It is not necessary to decide between Scripture and what the church historically teaches in order to define the rule of faith. For what the church, at its best, teaches is precisely what the Scriptures teach.” See *The Living God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 344.

The Usefulness of a Statement of Beliefs and Creeds

From the analysis carried out so far, how may the phenomenon, whose usefulness is about to be outlined, be succinctly defined? The following outline of the role of a statement of beliefs should be read in the context of the preceding analysis. Synthesizing that analysis, we may formulate the understanding of a Statement of Beliefs that underlies this discussion as follows: *a statement of fundamental beliefs may be defined as a faith community's Spirit-directed consensus on the truth at any one time, based on its interpretation of inspired Scripture, which then defines the community's identity and mission.* The question we face now is the following: what possible value does such a statement have for the community, in this case the Seventh-day Adventist church? The value of the statement of fundamental beliefs to be discussed below flows from the analysis of its nature given above.

Statement of Beliefs and Hermeneutical Concern. The nature of a statement of beliefs as the community's reading of Scripture points to one of its key roles, namely, as an indicator of the community's concern for hermeneutics. By putting out a statement of beliefs, the community is declaring that "this is the way we read Scripture"; "we are not indifferent to any reading of Scripture." Furthermore, the statement of beliefs, as a *system* of beliefs, becomes collectively the principle or framework of interpretation for the community in organizing the disparate data of Scripture. Speaking about Adventists' reading of Scripture, E. G. White has drawn attention to the centrality of the sanctuary by observing that "It opened to view a complete system of truth" (GC 423). Fernando Canale has also shown that hermeneutically (methodologically), the sanctuary provides for Adventists guidance in interpreting foundational philosophical principles regarding the nature of reality (God, man, and the world) and the place of historical knowledge as we go about the theological enterprise.²³

In this way, the statement not only declares the interpretational stance of the community in the past, but provides a guide for present interpretational efforts. At a time in the history of theology, and even in the Seventh-day Adventist church itself, when things appear uncertain and changing, the methodological value of a statement of beliefs in providing theological identity cannot be underestimated.

It should be quite evident that in fulfilling the foregoing role, the statement begins to function as a "rule." Anti-creedalism takes some of its objections from this role of officially defined doctrinal systems. Edward Farley, for example, objects to this function of a creed, arguing that we should refuse "to make anything human and historical a timeless absolute, dwelling above the flow of contexts and situations." Indeed, "one refuses to give this status . . . to one's denomination, to one's confessions, to one's heritage, even to one's Scripture."

²³ Fernando Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *AUSS* 36/2 (1998): 183–206.

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For him, this stance is a positive expression of the “conviction that God’s presence and truth come through human, but historical and fallible vessels.”²⁴ Farley’s assessment is even more radical: “If we need certainty about salvation, modernism would direct that to God and God alone, not to the vessels that deliver it.”²⁵ If our analysis of the nature of a statement of beliefs is correct, then two divergent, but equally inappropriate attitudes on this issue need to be pointed out. As Bruce Demarest has correctly noted with regards to creeds, “If we desist from divinizing the creed, neither do we depreciate its intrinsic worth and relevance.”²⁶

Similarly, the statement of beliefs should be viewed as *norma normata*, “a rule that is ruled,” but nonetheless a “rule.” The indispensability of biblical interpretation means that at any time the role of Scripture will be as interpreted. To the extent that a statement of beliefs represents what has been dubbed “the precipitate of the religious consciousness of mighty men and times,” a record of the “central convictions” of earlier generations, it deserves a wider utilization in the church. Individual explorative interpretations, as important as they are, may not, without some risk, treat officially defined doctrinal systems lightly. We should not be unaware that, as in the case of Farley, some voices of “anti-creedalism” may be due to a loss of confidence in Scripture’s authority or uniqueness due to its inspiration. Equally, such positions may be the result of a loss of confidence in human ability to know “*the truth*.”

On the other hand, a statement of beliefs is still a rule that is ruled. The desire to maintain this principle has always been the cornerstone of the Seventh-day Adventist apprehension about creeds. Thus, however closely the statement purports to represent biblical teaching, the *sola scriptura* principle should be maintained that, in matters of doctrinal controversy, inspired Scripture is the ultimate court of appeal. Obviously, in the eventuality of any such process of appeal, the critical issue becomes the science of hermeneutics. It is for this reason that a broad-based community effort in establishing hermeneutical principles beforehand is indispensable to the community’s theological health and existence. The General Conference Committee of the Seventh-day Adventist church’s action in voting a document on “Methods of Bible Study” at the 1986 Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro should be evaluated in this context.²⁷

The Statement of Beliefs and the “Critical” Task. Closely related to the role of the statement of fundamental beliefs as an indicator of the community’s hermeneutical concern is its role in the detection of doctrinal error.

Traditionally, the rise of heresy was one of the reasons why the need for creeds arose. The statement of beliefs provides a standard by which to judge

²⁴ Edward Farley, “The Modernist Element in Protestantism,” *Theology Today* 47(1990): 141.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Bruce A. Demarest, “Christendom’s Creeds: Their Relevance in the Modern World,” *JETS* 21/4 (1978): 355.

²⁷ For the full text of the document see *Adventist Review* (January 22, 1987), 18–20.

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new teachings arising in the church. Of all the roles that a statement of beliefs may play, this is the one that attracts the greatest fear and concern. The history of the Christian church is filled with inquisitions and persecutions of all sorts that were carried out on the basis of creedal formulations. Hence, a fear of the critical use of a statement of beliefs is well-founded. Still, in assessing a statement of beliefs in this regard, the question that lies close to the heart of the matter is the following: Is the question of heresy still askable?²⁸ If the answer is yes, then we seem to be faced with a situation where in spite of the potential for abuse, the critical role of officially defined systems of doctrine cannot be avoided. The biblical perspective is quite clear, for the Bible places a high priority on maintaining sound teaching and on avoiding heresy by guarding the pure content of the true gospel (1 Tim 1:3; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 1 Cor 11:2; Gal 1:8).

Quite understandably, contemporary anti-creedal concerns expressed on this matter often embody a certain degree of ambivalence. While the value to the faith community of theological self-definition is applauded, apprehension is entertained about what may happen to those whose theological convictions may fall short of what is officially and consensually defined. Some have detected an irony in the situation. “A creed can be appropriately ‘authoritative’ in the sense of representing the church family as a whole and expressing its theological consensus. A church needs to define itself theologically; this is a matter not only of identity, but also of ‘truth in advertising.’ . . . But—and here is the irony— . . . as soon as we produce a statement of belief . . . some people will use the statement to judge others, and to try to exclude from the community those who don’t measure up . . .”²⁹

The real question is whether there is an irony here in the sense that the acts of *judging* and *excluding* are unexpected results of the act of theological self-definition in formulating a statement of beliefs. In other words, does theological self-definition in formulating a statement of fundamental beliefs *necessarily* involve the judging and exclusion of those who do not accept the terms of self-identification? Historically, with regard to creeds, the answer appears to have been yes. Leith observes, “The task of the creed was to defend the Church against heresy. The creed has the negative role of shutting the heretic out and setting the boundaries within which authentic Christian theology and life can take place.”³⁰ It appears that formally, judging and exclusion may belong functionally to a statement of beliefs. It is in its nature to exclude and judge, at least noetically.

²⁸ S. W. Sykes, “Heresy,” in Richardson and Bowden, 249. Sykes observes that “The radical denial that heresy could exist, or if it existed, could be identified, seems to be based on a sociological misunderstanding. The fact that the boundaries of a religion may be difficult to determine with precision does not mean that a religion has no boundaries. Religious commitment depends upon both affirmations and denials”

²⁹ Guy, 28.

³⁰ Leith, 9.

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However, the foregoing conclusion needs to be nuanced in a couple of ways by virtue of the nature of a statement of fundamental beliefs as discussed above. First, it has been shown that the Adventist use of the slogan “no creed but the Bible” expresses a desire that even a sound statement of beliefs should not interfere with the believer’s continuing interaction with Scripture as the source of new insights as well as the guarantor of “individual Christianity.” Therefore, in providing this critical role, the statement of beliefs must be seen primarily as the *locus* of the community’s consensus without in any way stifling the need to go back to the Bible in the “critical” process. Second, one may conceive of a few possible material conditions under which theological variance with a statement of beliefs may not necessarily lead to “personal” exclusion. First, one could make a case for a distinction in a statement between *common* and *essential* features so that one could disagree on a *common* feature without being a heretic. This distinction has been made in other contexts.³¹ The issue in this situation revolves around the legitimacy of making such a distinction in the context of a statement of beliefs. Second, it may be possible to argue that one ought not become the subject of exclusionary action the moment one’s theological reflection yields something contrary to what has been consensually expressed in the statement of fundamental beliefs. In the interest of encouraging creative thinking and forestalling the danger that the pioneers perceived in creeds as “setting the stakes, and barring the way to all future development . . .”³² theological difference from the statement of fundamental beliefs ought not to lead to exclusion unless the circumstances surrounding the variance go to the very condition of endangering the existence of the community. Such could be the case where, for example, a “new light” is peddled in a manner that threatens the unity of the community of faith.

The point being made here is that a statement of fundamental beliefs has what may be seen as a legitimate *juridical* role in settling doctrinal disputes as well as even possibly avoiding them. Whether this role always leads to exclusion raises questions beyond this basic point. But the significance of the statement of beliefs in fulfilling this juridical role needs to be underlined. The question is simply this: In our postmodern context, does the church subscribe to belief in *the truth*? Is this question still a legitimate one? At this point, the question has very little to do with the material expression of our doctrines in the twenty-eight fundamental beliefs. It is a formal one about the other side of the question about heresy. It appears the answer is positive, for the fact that the church opens itself up for future redefinition and clarification of truth does not mean that it

³¹ Thomas Morris has made the distinction between essential and common properties in discussing the attributes of God in connection with the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Using the human being as an example, Morris refers to having ten fingers as a common human property. Yet having ten fingers is not essential to being a human being. See Thomas V. Morris, “Understanding God Incarnate,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 43 (1988): 64–65.

³² James White, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* (October 8, 1861), 148.

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may not express itself definitively on questions of truth at any one time.³³ To take such a stance would amount to a virtual “agnosticism”³⁴ which would undermine the very existence of the church.

Statement of Beliefs: Church Unity and Mission. The negative role of a statement of beliefs in detecting heresy necessarily highlights its positive role in promoting unity. This role of officially defined doctrines is noted as its *constitutional* use. The relationship between heresy and unity is clear because *hairesis* denotes schism or faction (1 Cor 11:19; Gal 5:20), and Paul’s use of the adjective *hairetikos* (Titus 3:10) characterizes the heretic as a divisive or factious person. The absence of heresy, then, is conducive to the promotion of unity. Stated positively, the statement of fundamental beliefs serves as a rallying point for all those who make the same confession of the truth.

Of course, the total unity of the church goes beyond theological concerns to include matters that may be more appropriately described as ecclesiological, as well as even cultural and sociological issues. Nevertheless, the fundamental dependence of denominational unity on doctrine cannot be denied, since it is usually the case that theological matters create separate denominations in the first place. Herein lies the importance of affirming the statement of fundamental beliefs. It is one of the strong evidences of the unity of the church. Since the document is put together on the basis of definite historical, hermeneutical, and methodological presuppositions, affirming such a document signals not only a unity and continuity with the faith community’s historic past, but with its present theological and missiological goals.

Important as theological unity is, achieving that goal is not an end in itself. The initial analysis of the essence of a statement of beliefs made the connection between the biblical concept of “teaching” and ethics. It was noted that the ethical dimension of biblical *doctrine/teaching* is connected to preaching as the means by which people are brought to faith in Jesus and instructed in the ethical principles and obligations of the Christian life. Thus, the role of a statement of belief in preserving the church’s theological unity is significant because that unity contributes to the promotion of the mission of the church. It is quite evident that community effort is better performed in that community that possesses

³³ The following comment by E. G. White may be worth noting: “In our churches we should not act as though we were groping our way in the dark. Clear light has been given to us. We are not left in uncertainty . . . A complete system of faith has been revealed, and correct rules of practice in our daily life have been made known” (RH, July 22, 1890). Even more challengingly she observes regarding the third angel’s message “that those who are seeking to understand this message will not be led by the Lord to make an application of the Word that will undermine the foundation and remove the pillars of the faith that has made Seventh-day Adventists what they are today” (2 SM 103).

³⁴ It has been noted that agnosticism may not only be identified with denial of belief, but could be compatible with “that strand in Christian thought recognized in an earlier age through stress on the *via negativa*, or throughout the history of theism in recognition of the transcendence and mystery of God”; see Steward Sutherland, “Agnosticism,” in Richardson and Bowden, 10.

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a homogenous faith. E. G. White certainly saw the “truth-unity-mission” connection:

God is leading out a people to stand in perfect *unity upon the platform of eternal truth*. Christ gave Himself to the world that He might “purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” This refining process is designed to purge the church from all unrighteousness and the spirit of discord and contention, *that they may build up instead of tear down, and concentrate their energies on the great work before them.* (4T 16)

The statement of beliefs not only unifies the church for mission, but is itself a witness to those outside the church. It appears that this role of the statement is what motivates some of our churches to print the statement of fundamental beliefs at the back of their regular worship programs. The statement, as a document, performs this function in a number of ways: it clearly outlines and expounds on the fundamental assertions of the faith; it witnesses to the unity and systematic nature of the faith; and it demonstrates the rational, objective biblical content of the truth as believed in the community. It does all these things in such a systematic, yet concise manner that what the community believes is made readily clear to those who stand outside the community of faith. In this way, the statement of fundamental beliefs performs an invaluable *apologetic* function.

Statement of Beliefs and Theological/Biblical Education. From a wider theological perspective, the role of a statement of beliefs as a theological resource has been noted. After warning against the temptation to reduce the history of Christian doctrine to a list of formulae to be memorized for the sake of avoiding heresy, Richard Muller observes, “The issue in studying the formulae is to understand their interpretive relationship to the Christian message and the way in which they have served in particular historical contexts to convey that message and, in addition, to preserve it into the future.”³⁵ The statement of beliefs discloses intent on the part of the faith community to interpret and apply the biblical message. For contemporary theologians, understanding the interpretational dynamics of the intent of the statement of beliefs provides useful insight into how it may be preserved for both the present and future.³⁶

At a popular level within the community of faith, the statement of beliefs is an invaluable pedagogical aid to believers. It has often been noted that the sheer volume of the Bible presents challenges of comprehension for many believers.

³⁵ Richard A. Muller, *The Study of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 114–115.

³⁶ The discussion over the wording of Fundamental Belief #11 at the recent General Conference Session in St. Louis, Missouri, highlights this point. Critical to the debate over the correct semantic formulation of the statement was the principle of striking a responsible balance between theology and mission. Underlying the whole discussion on phraseology was a difference of opinion in expressing the intent of the statement, a difference that indicated perceptions of how far it was thought that statement should correctly reflect biblical teaching or whether it was felt that “relevance” to mission should be the proper intent of the statement.

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The statement of beliefs, by compiling, systematizing, and summarizing biblical teaching on many subjects, makes it easier for the church to fulfill its instructional mandate within the faith community.

Yet it is important to observe that based on our analysis of the nature of a statement of beliefs, its pedagogical role should not be understood to eclipse the role of Scripture, in which case it would begin to smack of creedalism. In this regard, it is worth drawing attention to the format of the statement of fundamental beliefs as presented, for example, in the Church Manual. At the end of each statement is a list of Bible texts which serves as an invitation to a personal, biblical exploration of the particular doctrine. It seems that in a unique sense, the statement of beliefs in performing its pedagogical role functions as a *sign* to the Bible.

With particular reference to children and new believers, Philip Schaff's comment on creeds in general is relevant. Referring to creeds in the form of catechisms, he writes, "In the form of Catechisms they are of especial use in the instruction of children, and facilitate a solid and substantial religious education, in distinction from spasmodic and superficial excitement."³⁷ The value of a statement in facilitating biblical education is premised on the fact that a growing understanding of the Bible comes with reading it, systematizing it, and applying it. The statement of fundamental beliefs, as a distilled exposition of biblical themes as understood by the faith community, facilitates education in Scripture.

Statement of Beliefs and Baptism. The teaching role of the statement of beliefs in the case of new believers requires further comment. The role of the statement in baptismal rites is especially in view here. On the basis of Rom 10: 9–10, E. Glenn Hinson has made a connection between the creed as a confessional statement and the new believer's covenant initiation into the family of God. In Hinson's view, it is only natural that the first step towards Christianity would entail a confession of some kind, however rudimentary. His conclusion is that the confession with the lips that Jesus is Lord, and the belief with the heart that God raised Him from the dead (Rom 10:9), "represented in an external and visible way the making of an inward covenant: 'For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved.'"³⁸ In Hinson's view, it is this connection between confession and the personal covenant-making process that made creeds a *sine qua non* of the initiation rites in the early church.³⁹ Thus, although the creed was only one part of the initiation process, it played a critical role in the convert's total cognitive and affective commitment to be faithful in all circumstances.

The significance of this role of a statement of beliefs goes back to our analysis of it as "teaching." One of the implications of that analysis was that

³⁷ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker), 1:8.

³⁸ E. Glenn Hinson, "Confessions or Creeds in Early Christian Tradition," *Review and Expositor* 76 (1979): 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

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“content” is of the essence of a statement of beliefs. The use of a statement of beliefs as a means of incorporation into the body of Christ is an indication of how the Seventh-day Adventist church understands the nature of the Christian life and experience. The Christian life is nourished and flourishes mainly through the Word and not in a sacramental manner. A proper use of the statement of fundamental beliefs offers a powerful avenue for an individual’s personal incorporation into and private appropriation of the ethos of the faith community.

The role of the statement of beliefs in the baptismal rites of the Seventh-day Adventist church is recognized by the Church Manual. The Revised 2000, 16th edition of the Manual requires those who are being baptized or received into fellowship by profession of faith to publicly affirm their acceptance of the doctrinal beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Although the practice of incorporation into the body may vary, the connection between belief and incorporation into the body of Christ is, in principle, acknowledged.⁴⁰ Indeed, as noted at the beginning of the paper, the Manual gives the impression that the statement of beliefs was primarily prepared for baptismal instruction.

Other Uses of a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. There are a few other uses that may be derived from a statement of beliefs, such as for homiletical and liturgical purposes. Thus, there are Seventh-day Adventist ministers who have developed preaching schedules around the fundamental beliefs of the church. The purpose of such preaching has always been to set forth in the church the truths that are held together in the community, and thereby to ground the people of God in the truth. Similarly, portions of a statement may be incorporated into the worship of the church as “affirmations of faith.” It is possible that a few other roles of a statement of beliefs may be found, but what have been presented above are probably its major uses.

Is the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs Infallible? The nature of the statement of fundamental beliefs and its role has been discussed. The question must now be faced whether such a document is infallible. In analyzing the nature of a statement of fundamental beliefs, we discussed its relation to Scripture. Both the analysis and the Church’s official pronouncements show that the

⁴⁰ The recently voted amendment to the Manual on “Baptismal Vows and Baptism” introduces some degree of flexibility in the administration of the vow in the baptismal service. Whether a public, detailed, verbal affirmation of *all the contents* of the statement of beliefs should be required will probably continue to attract theological discussion. On the one hand, while the recently voted alternate vow does not expressly and specifically spell out the teachings of the statement, it does require a full, formal, and public affirmation of “the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” On the other hand, although the existent vow expressly spelled out specific teachings in the statement of beliefs, it fell short of outlining all the beliefs in the statement. While the existent vow appears to create a hierarchy of beliefs, the alternate vow seems to fall short of details. It may be that in all of this, the principle to preserve is a reasonable measure of both cognitive and affective elements in the initiatory service.

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statement is not infallible. But what does that mean for the statement of fundamental beliefs in the life of the church?

To begin with, the above discussion of the usefulness of a statement of fundamental beliefs was not presupposed on its infallibility. In other words, infallibility is not a necessary requirement for the usefulness of a statement of beliefs. Consequently, the issue around the status of a statement of beliefs with respect to infallibility is perhaps not fundamentally an issue about usefulness. It appears that the issue concerns the possibility of error in the statement. In other words, what if the statement is wrong or inaccurate in some parts?

It should be kept in mind that, theologically, every allegation of error regarding a point in The statement of fundamental beliefs represents a difference of interpretation between the church's consensual position as expressed in the statement and the position of the one/s making the allegation. Whether the statement actually contains error or not is an evaluation that will have to be made on the basis of principles of interpretation and theological effort. Formally, however, the consensual nature of the statement of beliefs would appear to require that amendments, clarifications, redefinitions, etc., ought to be pursued consensually. At this point, care should be exercised so as not to give the impression that the statement of fundamental beliefs as we have it now is *actually* erroneous since the question about "what if" really has to do with potentialities.

Conclusion

The statement of fundamental beliefs as a "phenomenon" has been analyzed in order to discern what legitimate role it may play within the community of faith. A statement of beliefs clearly serves a useful role, but it is not without shortcomings. Primarily, the resistance among Adventists to a creed replacing the Bible resides in its inability to facilitate "individual Christianity" as well as its tendency to block further biblical insights. Indeed a litany of objections that have been raised about creeds may also be true of a statement of beliefs.

It is objected that they obstruct the free interpretation of the Bible and the progress of theology; that they interfere with the liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment; that they engender hypocrisy, intolerance, and bigotry; that they produce division and distraction; that they perpetuate religious animosity and the curse of sectarianism; that by the law of reaction, they produce dogmatic indifference, skepticism, and infidelity . . .⁴¹

Schaff's observation on these objections is quite on target. "But the creeds, as such, are no more responsible for abuses than the Scriptures themselves, of which they profess to be merely a summary or an exposition."⁴² Consequently,

⁴¹ Schaff, 1:9.

⁴² *Ibid.*

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history shows that both creedal and non-creedal churches are equally exposed to division and controversy. The reality seems to be that the statement of fundamental beliefs, although imperfect, is an indispensable instrument of the church as it seeks to accomplish its mission in an imperfect world.

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From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—Part II

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In the first article of this three article series, we traced the more salient turns in the development of the Adventist hermeneutical vision from its origins to the present. This summary overview brought to light some important facts about the way Adventists do theology. For early Adventists the Sanctuary doctrine became the hermeneutical vision guiding the discovery of a complete system of theology and truth. This system of theology, in turn, guided the practice of ministry and led to the growth and worldwide expansion of the Adventist church.

1. Review

During the second half of the twentieth century, Evangelical Adventism rejected the Sanctuary doctrine because it contradicted their theological understanding of justification by faith drawn from the Protestant system of theology. Consequently, they abandoned the pioneers' historicist interpretation of prophecy, the Sanctuary doctrine, and the understanding of salvation as historical process. Simply put, this sector in Adventism became convinced that the pioneers' prophetic interpretation and eschatological understanding of theology was wrong. We need to recognize this fact and move on.

Another casualty in this process of theological development was the replacement of the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle by the multiple sources of theology matrix. Evangelical Adventism, then, does theology from the hermeneutical light of justification by faith.¹ Progressive Adventism uses the hermeneutical

¹ This is the hermeneutical approach followed by Luther's approach to biblical interpretation and the construction of Christian doctrines. Jaroslav Pelikan explains, "Luther could sometimes dwell upon the centrality and the authority of the gospel with an almost obsessive intensity, testing liturgical practice, ethical precept, and even theological dogma by this criterion rather than by the norm of conformity to the literal meaning of the biblical text" (*The Christian Tradition: A History of*

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light provided by a combination of the gospel and science (historical-biological evolution).² These paradigmatic changes in the macro hermeneutical level of Adventist theology spun dramatic changes in the practice of ministry, leading to the charismatization of Adventism and the willingness of these sectors to join spiritually in the ecumenical movement.

During the same period, Biblical Adventists reaffirmed the *sola-tota Scriptura*³ principle and the Sanctuary doctrine⁴ but failed to use it as hermeneutical guide to do theology and practice ministry. The results of this paradigm shift in the macro hermeneutical level of Adventist theology has produced irreconcilable theological pluralism in Adventist theology and practice. This pluralism affects not the periphery or nonessentials of belief but their core and foundations. Through them, it extends to the entire range of beliefs and practices of the church. However, the existence and mission of the church requires unity in the way we do and teach theology in seminaries, universities, and churches around the world. Without unity of thought, there can be no community or explosive mission.⁵ Because the cause that generated theological pluralism is intellectual in nature, we need to overcome it intellectually.

the Development of Doctrine, 5 vols., [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971–1989], 4:181). This methodology makes the *sola Scriptura* principle subservient to the justification by faith principle (Luther's understanding of the gospel). Stephan Pfürtner tentatively concludes, "the Reformers, with their theologically influential supporters and their communities, pursued a highly intensive 'study' of the new paradigm, in its interpretative framework" ("The Paradigms of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther: Did Luther's Message of Justification Mean a Paradigm Change?" in *Paradigm Change in Theology*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy [New York: Crossroad, 1991], 130–160). See also Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 1995), 539–577.

² "Adventist theological thinking should be dynamically tripolar—that is, related to three bases or 'poles,' three fundamental concerns that mutually support and limit one another in a creative spiritual and theological interaction. In other words, our thinking about our religious experience, practice, and beliefs should be a kind of three-cornered conversation" (Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* [Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1999], 225). Immediately, Guy identifies the three poles that mutually interact with each other in shaping our theological understanding of what we believe. They are, "The *Christian gospel*, which is our spiritual center; our *cultural context*, which is where we live, worship, witness, and serve; and our *Adventist heritage*, which is the foundation of our theological identity" (ibid.).

³ For an affirmation and explanation of the *tota Scriptura* principle, see Gerhard Hasel, "The Totality of Scripture versus Modernistic Limitations," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 30–52; and Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 60–61.

⁴ For affirmations of the Sanctuary doctrine and solutions of contended issues see, for instance, Richard Davidson, "In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 93–114; William H. Shea, "When did the Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24 Begin?" *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 115–138; C. Mervin Maxwell, "In Confirmation of Prophetic Interpretation," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 139–151.

⁵ By "unity" of thought, I do not mean "identical" understanding of every text, doctrine, and practice. Instead, I am speaking about agreement in the basic principles of theological methodology. We should recommit Adventist theology to the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle of early Adventism. From this base, we should discuss and agree on the way we will interpret the macro hermeneu-

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Are Evangelical and Progressive Adventists right in their views about scholarly honesty, truth finding, and evangelistic outreach to secular postmodern audiences? Are we compelled to follow the lead of Evangelical and Progressive Adventists to be intellectually honest? Can we be “intellectually honest” while still doing theology from the hermeneutical light beaming from the Sanctuary doctrine and the historicist interpretation of prophecy as the pioneers did? If we can, what should we do at the theological level to see the complete system of theology and truth they saw? What will happen if the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary doctrine conditions theological methodology? Should we use a new understanding of theological method⁶ rather than following a supposedly universally accepted theological method?⁷ Are there scholarly areas that need further development in the theology of the Church? What are the repercussions of paradigm changes in the theological methodology and system for the unity and mission of the church? Is it possible to reach contemporary secularized persons within and without the church community with an intellectually compelling, spiritually fulfilling, and experientially satisfying message?

2. Introduction

To answer these questions, we need to explore the role of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision from which to discover a complete and harmonious system of truth at the scholarly level of scientific research in postmodern times. Yet, before considering this broad issue in the next article (third article), we need to turn our attention in this article to the disciplinary landscape. This will help us to understand where we stand and give us a broad overview about

tical principles of theology, notably, the principle of reality (being, God, human nature, and the world), articulation, and knowledge. Agreement in the interpretation of these two apriori conditions of the theological method is necessary for the unity and coherence of any theological program. Once a community reaches implicit or explicit agreement on these issues, theological research will produce different but complementary and harmonious views. Difference will not be divisive, but will progressively add to the perfection of our understanding of divine truth. Ellen White also saw variety as essential to perfection and expressed it by way of a brief metaphor. “There is variety in a tree, there are scarcely two leaves just alike. Yet this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole” (*Selected Messages*, 3 vols. [Washington: Review and Herald, 1958, 1980], 21).

⁶ Because Fritz Guy thinks there is no Adventist theological method, he freely borrows from classical and modern theological methodological principles. Adventism “does not have its own separate way of thinking theologically” (ix).

⁷ Theological method correlates to the specific theological system of Christian theology it supports. Each specific theological system depends on the concrete decisions taken at the grounding level of the theological methodology. “Conceptions of method emerge only in the context of an interrelated web of beliefs. Method is not simply a self-sufficient programmatic enterprise that can be readily abstracted from the rest of theology. Rather, decisions made about the method of theology both *inform* the entire conceptualization of the theological model and are themselves *informed* by the theological conclusions that emerge from that model” (Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 12). Thus, there is no universal theological method, but various competing methodologies producing competing theological systems.

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the unfinished business of Adventist theology. In a fourth article, we will look at the role that theology plays in the ministry and mission of the church.

Why was the use of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision from which to understanding Scripture and its complete system of truth forgotten, neglected, and replaced in contemporary Adventist theological scholarship?⁸ As with all historical events, we must assume that contemporary forgetfulness, neglect, and replacement springs from a variety of causes. Here, I want to explore briefly the possible role that the disciplinary matrix of scholarly Adventist theology has in this situation. Besides, to understand the role that the hermeneutical vision has in scholarly theology, we need to consider the status of the disciplinary matrix in Adventist theology.

To gain an introductory awareness of the disciplinary matrix in Adventist theology under the hermeneutical guidance of the Sanctuary doctrine, I will take the following steps. We will start by considering (1) “the new playground” for theological activity by highlighting some features of the scholarly theological research ongoing in Adventist universities and seminaries. Then, we will see how (2) the parting of theological ways shows in the controversy regarding the historical-grammatical and historical critical methods of biblical exegesis. Next, we will explore (3) the limits of exegetical methodology, and, (4) the nature, center, and limits of biblical theology. Finally, we will turn our attention to systematic theology as a biblical theological discipline.

In the midst of theological pluralism, Evangelical, Progressive, Historical, and Biblical Adventisms seem to share one common unsaid and probably unthought assumption: We have all the truth we need. Thus, most Adventists do not see the need for Bible study or theological research. Contemporary Adventists do not see that further discovering and understanding biblical truth will foster unity and mission. What will unite the church and foster her mission is applying the truth we already have to our contemporary situation, they think. In time, “applying” became “adapting.” Adapting is shaping us into the image of Protestant Charismatic Christianity.

In this and the following article, I would like to suggest that this assumption is wrong. Instead, we need to further discover and understand biblical truth. In the Scriptures, early Adventist pioneers discovered the hermeneutical basis for a

⁸ In 1980, Fritz Guy explained with clarity that the experience of the pioneers with the Sanctuary doctrines “was 136 years ago, in a historical situation that was very different from ours. In terms of technological and cultural change, we are as far removed from 1844 as 1844 was from the time of the New Testament. Ours is a time of hand-held electronic calculators, instant global communication (audio plus video in color) and jet lag” (Fritz Guy, “Confidence in Salvation: The Meaning of the Sanctuary,” *Spectrum* 11/2 (1980): 44). He continues explaining why, according to him, the pioneers’ understanding of the Sanctuary doctrine was lost for his generation. “We have not lived through the Advent expectation of 1844 or its bitter disappointment; *however much we respect the Adventist pioneers and want to identify with their experience, it remains their experience, not ours.* So we must ask the question, What does the doctrine of the sanctuary mean for us today, in 1980?” (ibid., emphasis provided).

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Copernican revolution in theological methodology and the understanding of Christian theology. They only started a revolution that following generations have left unfinished through forgetfulness, replacement, and neglect. Discovering the hermeneutical role the Sanctuary doctrine plays in theological methodology and how its application opens to view the complete system of theology will help Adventism overcome present theological divisions. Completing the theological task the pioneers left unfinished will generate unity in the worldwide church and motivate it to engage in the final mission.

3. The New “Playground”

When Adventist theology moved to the university setting, it entered a new “playground” with new rules to play the theological “game.” This playground includes various independent theological disciplines, each with their own methodologies, presuppositions, and goals. They form the “disciplinary matrix” of scholarly Christian theology. Theological disciplines as we know them today originated during the Enlightenment in the middle of the eighteenth century when biblical theology was born as independent discipline.⁹ Yet, we can trace the first attempt to do theology from the *sola Scriptura* principle back to the Protestant Reformation.¹⁰ Before the Reformation, theologians interpreted Scripture and constructed Christian teachings following what we today know as systematic theology.¹¹ Among the disciplines involved in the task of doing theology

⁹ In the historical process that gave rise to biblical theology as an independent discipline, Gerhard Ebeling sees a decisive turning point taking place with the publication of *Gedanken von der Beschaffenheit und dem Vorzug der biblisch-dogmatischen Theologie vor der alten und neuen scholastischen* [Reflexions on the Nature of Biblical Dogmatic Theology and on Its Superiority to Scholasticism Old and New] (1758), by Anton Friedrich Büsching [*Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 87]. By this step, biblical theology has moved from being a discipline subsidiary of dogmatics to becoming “a rival of the prevailing dogmatics [scholastic theology]” (ibid.). Biblical theology “set itself up as a completely independent study, namely, as a critical historical discipline alongside dogmatics” in 1787 with a programmatic lecture by Johann Philipp Gabler (ibid., 88; Anthony C. Thiselton, “Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford [Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997], 520). Gerhard Hasel gives a slightly earlier date for the independence of biblical theology from dogmatics. “As early as 1745 ‘Biblical theology’ is clearly separated from dogmatic (systematic) theology and the former is conceived of as being the foundation of the latter” (*Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, rev. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 18).

¹⁰ Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 82. “In fact [explains Ebeling], one is bound to say that Reformation theology is the first attempt in the entire history of theology to take seriously the demand for a theology based on holy scripture alone” (ibid.). For a scholarly overview of the post-Reformation Reformed theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 251–276.

¹¹ Thus, in the prolegomena to his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas did not speak about how various theological disciplines may work together, but about how theology should relate to philosophy (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. [New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947], I, 1, 1 and 4).

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we find biblical theology, systematics, practice of ministry, missiology, ethics, history of theology, history of the church, philosophy, and a number of related sciences involved in the practice of ministry and missiology.¹²

As we saw briefly in the first article, Adventist theology began as lay theology.¹³ Initial intellectual endeavors engaged the disciplines of history¹⁴ and chronology.¹⁵ Early in its intellectual history, Adventist scholarship emphasized “biblical theology rather than the systematic theology of the general Protestant seminaries.”¹⁶ Systematic theology was suspect because of its disciplinary ties to non-biblical philosophical principles. Back then, Adventists thought this disciplinary emphasis would help to keep their beliefs and experience closely tied to Scripture. We can understand the emphasis placed on biblical theology easily if we keep in mind the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle on which Adventist theology stands.¹⁷ The disciplinary emphasis in biblical theology characterizes Adventist theological education around the world to the present time. Studies in systematic theology were mere summaries of biblical teaching.

Emphasizing Old and New Testament studies came naturally to Adventists. Involvement in biblical scholarship seems the continuity and crowning of their commitment to the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle. Newfound scholarship will help check Adventist teachings generated by the “lay” reflection of Ellen White and the pioneers. The new way to study Scripture was exegesis, “the branch of theology which investigates and expresses the true sense of Sacred Scripture.”¹⁸

¹² Ekkehardt Müller describes briefly the theological encyclopedia in Adventist Education, “Theological Thinking in the Adventist Church,” *DavarLogos* 1/2 (2002): 128–129.

¹³ This does not mean they did not have a method or apply careful reasoning to the study of Scripture. William Miller’s method was influential in early lay Adventist theology. Shortly put, he distrusted traditional interpretations, adopted the *sola Scriptura* principle, followed a literal interpretation unless the context requires otherwise, drew its categories of interpretation from Scripture, and followed an historical interpretation of Prophecy. For a brief comment on his Bible study method, see Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Textbook for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1979), 32.

¹⁴ In this area, the work of Le Roy Edwin Froom is notable. See his *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers: The Conflict of the Ages over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1965–66); and, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1971).

¹⁵ In this area, see, for instance, Sylvester Bliss, *Analysis of Sacred Chronology: With the Elements of Chronology and the Numbers of the Hebrew Text Vindicated* (Boston: J. V. Himes, 1851); and Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

¹⁶ Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, 489.

¹⁷ See Fundamental Belief 1, in General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1988), 4.

¹⁸ J. J. Maas, “Biblical Exegesis,” in *New Advent: Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. K. Knight (Online edition: <http://www.newadvent.org/>, 2003). “The term *exegesis*—explains Moises Silva—is a fancy way of referring to interpretation. It implies that the explanation of the text has involved careful, detailed analysis. The description gramatico-historical indicates, of course, that this analysis must pay attention both to the language in which the original text was written and to the specific

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Scholarly exegesis is “scientific” because it results from the application of method.¹⁹ Adventists found scholarship using two different exegetical methodologies: the grammatical-historical method originating in Luther and the Reformation and the historical critical method originating in the Enlightenment.²⁰ Biblical Adventists follow the grammatical-historical method, while Progressive Adventists follow a “modified” version of the historical critical method.²¹

During the last fifty years, biblical studies have developed extensively throughout Biblical Adventism. Exegetes, using mainly the grammatical-historical method of the Reformation, have examined carefully the biblical texts from which the pioneers derived the Adventist pillars and sanctuary vision. Thanks to ongoing research, we know these doctrines stand on solid biblical ground and have richer and deeper meanings than previous generations understood.²²

cultural context that gave rise to the text” (Walter C. Kaiser, and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 21).

¹⁹ Thus, Richard Davidson defines exegesis as the application of what he calls the “historical-biblical hermeneutical method.” Exegesis, then, is “the attempt to understand the meaning of the biblical data using methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone” (“Biblical Interpretation,” 94).

²⁰ Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 3–6.

²¹ Jerry Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism: Adventist Biblical Scholarship in the Land of the Giants,” *Spectrum* (April 1988): 19–34. As a result of this affirmation, “we have among Adventists today more or less two hermeneutics, one the historical Seventh-day Adventist approach with minor modifications, the other a hermeneutic based on substantially differing foundations as we have described above. This latter involves modalities prominent in historical criticism (or the historical-critical method) but which claims to have purged its most obvious humanistic presuppositions, such as denial of the supernatural” (“Another Look at Adventist Hermeneutics,” *JATS* 2/1 [1991]: 72). Gladson argues that we should accept the historical developmental dynamics of historical criticism and reject its naturalistic assumptions (ibid., 22). This proposal, however, is a straw man. Historical criticism in biblical theology has always accepted divine transcendence. Transcendence, however, belongs to the timeless spiritual realm, not to the historical realm where historical criticism rewrites biblical history, stripping it of divine actions in historical sequences in time. For a careful study of the development of the historical critical method, its dependency on philosophical categories, and the way it accommodates divine transcendence while rewriting history, see, Raúl Kerbs, “El método histórico-crítico en teología: En busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte 1),” *DavarLogos* 1/2 (2002): 105–123; and, “El método histórico-crítico en teología: En busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte II),” *DavarLogos* 2/1 (2003): 11–27. George Reid correctly remarks, “The crux of the question is whether a blending of the historic Adventist approach with historical criticism is possible. Some argue that much in historical criticism is helpful in exegesis and theology. Ultimately a great deal rests on whether historical criticism is actually a system or whether it is simple a pool of isolated techniques that can be drawn upon pragmatically according to individual usefulness” (ibid., 73). Unfortunately, method cannot be an isolated pool of techniques. Even affirming transcendence, Gladson’s proposal still stands on the philosophical foundations of historical criticism.

²² See, for instance, the scholarly dialogue on the interpretation of the veil in the heavenly sanctuary according to the book of Hebrews. Davidson presents the view of Biblical Adventism in response the Young’s arguments from the Evangelical Adventist perspective. Roy E. Gane, “Re-

4. Watershed

History is essential not only to the Adventist understanding of prophecy but also to its understanding of Christian teachings. In prophetic interpretation, Biblical and Historical Adventisms still work within a historicist interpretive tradition.²³ Theologically, Adventism also thinks historically from within the Great Controversy dynamics. Both trends assume the real historical presence and direct activities of God within the spatiotemporal flux of human history. As we will see in the next article, in both fields, Adventist theology stands alone. No other tradition or school of Christian theology shares the Adventist view on prophetic interpretation and the Great Controversy matrix for systematic theology. Why is this so? Are there methodological reasons behind this unique approach to Christian theology?

The Historical-grammatical Method. Exegetically, Biblical Adventism operates with the historical-grammatical method. This method assumes Scripture speaks about real historical events in space and time. The procedures involved in the historical-grammatical method help to determine the meaning of biblical texts better than to establish the historical reality of their referents. Mainly, exegetes assume Scripture describes historical events as they really took place in history. Thus, the historical-grammatical method was helpful in establishing the meaning of biblical events but did not help much in the theological arena. A theological method supplemented the exegetical one in determining in what sense the actions of a timeless, non-historical spiritual God are real. In an implicit sense, then, the historical-grammatical method was incomplete and open to correction from theological and philosophical reflections. Because of the limits of exegesis (see below, section 5), the historical-grammatical method is not enough to ground the historicist interpretation of prophecy and the Great Controversy approach to systematic theology. This methodological limitation may be one of the factors contributing to the rise of Evangelical Adventism.

The Historical Critical Method. With the advent of modernity and historical consciousness, exegetes adopted the historical critical method of biblical

opening Katapetasma ('Veil') in Hebrews 6:19," *AUSS* 38/1 (2000): 5–8. Norman H. Young, "Where Jesus has Gone as Forerunner on our Behalf (Hebrews 6:20)," *AUSS* 39/2 (2001): 165–173. Richard Davidson, "Christ's Entry 'Within the Veil' in Hebrews 6:19–20: The Old Testament Background," *AUSS* 39/2 (2001): 175–190. Norman H. Young, "The Day of Dedication or the Day of Atonement?: The Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19–20," *AUSS* 40/1 (2002): 61–68. Richard Davidson, "Inauguration or Day of Atonement? A Response to Norman Young's Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19–20 Revisited," *AUSS* 40/1 (2002): 69–88.

²³ Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism?: Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part One]," *JATS* 14/2 (2003): 15–43; see also, Reimar Vetne, "A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation," *JATS* 14/2 (2003): 1–14.

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interpretation.²⁴ Modernity generated paradigmatic changes in epistemology that, in turn, produced a new way to study historical events. On the surface, the modern emphasis on history seems to affirm the historicists' approach to prophetic interpretation, Bible interpretation, and systematic theology operating in Adventism.

Is historical critical methodology compatible with biblical thinking and Adventist theology? Should Adventists use the historical critical method or avoid its conclusions and criticize its operations epistemologically?²⁵ Briefly put, because the application of the historical critical method leads to a reinterpretation of *what actually took place in history*, Adventist theology cannot use it without forfeiting the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle and the complete system of theology and truth the Sanctuary hermeneutical vision opens to view.²⁶ Let us remember that the historical critical method reinterprets not only the "History of Israel"²⁷ but also God's salvific acts in the Old and New Testaments. As a result, two different accounts of the same history stand side by side: the "scientific" account of what "*really took place*" stemming from the application of the historical critical method to biblical history, and the biblical account of what "*really took place*" from the perspective of the common everyday experience of history. Because Bible history presents God acting within the flow of history as an agent among others, science cannot accept it as real, but only as a mythological product of religious imagination.²⁸ In fact, empirical science unleashes the modern

²⁴ I have found Steven MacKenzie and Stephen Haynes, ed., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application* (Louisville: John Knox, 1999) to be a very useful and comprehensive introduction to the complex matrix of historical critical exegetical methodologies.

²⁵ For a negative answer, see Edward Zinke, *Historical Criticism* (<http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/historicalcriticism.htm>: Biblical Research Institute, 1981); for a positive answer, see Gladson.

²⁶ For a critical treatment of the historical critical method, see, for instance, Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St Louis: Concordia, 1977); and Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22–25.

²⁸ Answering a charge that his position involves relativism, Troeltsch explains that he is not speaking of a process "immanent in human history" (*ibid.*, 67). In the evolutionary process of history, argues Troeltsch, each moment has "a direct relationship to God which belongs only to it. They are temporally discrete, and yet also approximations to the Absolute Life" (*ibid.*). From this metaphysical objective non-historical ground, "religious thought unfolds in its own unique manner. In so far as it seizes upon every means of stimulation and expression, religious thought most closely resembles the artistic imagination, yet it remains distinct from it by the experience of a compelling superhuman reality revealing itself everywhere. Every expression is mythical, symbolic, poetic; but in the expression something is grasped that bears within itself in a specifically religious manner its own inner necessity and compelling power" (*ibid.* 57). In this way, religious language originates. In this way, Scripture originated. Clearly, Troeltsch's historical criticism for biblical investigation and *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* (history of religions methodology) is not "naturalistic." That is to say, it accounts for the "transcendence" presuppositions Gladson requires as necessary conditions

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reinterpretation of Christianity that reaches the ground, the method, and the system of Christian theology. From the scientific perspective, the Scriptures are myths generated by human imagination and labeled *Heilsgeschichte* (History of Salvation).²⁹ One cannot miss the fact that historical criticism follows from a strict understanding of reality that prevents us from accepting the biblical account of God's acts in history as "real." Yet, is the scientific view of reality absolute? Is there another understanding of reality that may ground the historical facticity of biblical *Heilsgeschichte*? We will return to this question in our next article.

Instead of exploring this possibility in the areas of ontology and epistemology, Progressive Adventists argue in favor of a "modified" version of the historical critical method. Jerry Gladson suggests, "The Adventist biblical scholar should make use of a modified version of historical criticism, so long as it does not remove the transcendent level or challenge the theological authority and inspiration of Scripture." His plea, however, falls short on two counts. First, Troeltsch's rendering of historical critical methodology does not build on naturalistic presuppositions but assumes divine transcendence.³⁰ Second, there are varied ways to interpret the inspiration of the Bible. For instance, Paul J. Achtemeier suggests that the Holy Spirit's inspiration acted not on individual authors but on the community following the evolutionary process described by historical critical scholars.³¹ According to his view, the "inspiration" of Scripture means the leading of the Holy Spirit in the community as it formed the contents of Scripture and formulated it in writing.³² Thus, the historical critical method can work, assuming the transcendence of God and the inspiration of Scripture, without requiring any substantial modification.

for an Adventist appropriation of the historical critical method. Obviously, we need more than Gladson's suggestion that we can use the historical critical method only by assuming "transcendence" instead of Troeltsch's "naturalism" (27).

²⁹ Describing the way in which traditional dogmatics deals with history, Ernst Troeltsch explains, "the dogmatic method also claims to be based upon 'history.' But this is not the ordinary, secular history reconstructed by critical historiography. It is rather a history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*), a nexus of saving facts which, as such, are knowable and provable only for the believer. These facts have precisely the opposite characteristics of the facts that secular, critical historians can regard, on the basis of their criteria, as having actually taken place" (*Religion in History* trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 21).

³⁰ Troeltsch builds on Kant's transcendentalism and Schleiermacher's encounter account of revelation. He speaks of an "irrational" apriori in human reason. There is "a concentration of the religious consciousness upon itself by virtue of the objective-religious element included in subjectivity" (*Religion in History*, 59). Later on, he identifies "irrational" apriori in human reason with God. "The present [affirms Troeltsch] is completely filled by the immediate nearness of God" (*ibid.*, 66).

³¹ The evolutionary thinking of Hegel plays a structural role in the interpretation of Scripture gestation, according to the historical critical method matrix (Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, 59).

³² *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 118–121.

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Though Gladson makes some good observations about ad hoc uses of “soft core” aspects of historical criticism by some Adventist authors, he does not succeed in explaining the differences between the modified Adventist version he envisions and the actual academic practice of historical criticism in contemporary scholarship. Short of drawing a clear methodological line on the sand, Adventist scholars adopting a not yet clearly defined “modified version” of historical criticism will unavoidably adopt conclusions that distort biblical thinking, break the flow of God’s historical actions, and run against the Great Controversy dynamics of Adventist theology. As explained above, the application of historical criticism to the interpretation of Scripture and the understanding of Christian doctrines requires paradigmatic changes³³ in not only the understanding of the inspiration of Scripture and the *sola Scriptura* principle that ground Adventist theological thinking, but also in the interpretation of God’s being and actions assumed in the hermeneutical vision of the Sanctuary doctrine.

In Search of an Alternate Method. We need to distinguish between historical criticism proper and the broader “historical criticism” umbrella designation. The former refers to the historical criticism of the events described in Scripture to ascertain their historical reality.³⁴ The latter becomes the label that congregates a variety of related studies of biblical texts, all assuming the results of the historical critical method proper. In this broader sense, the historical critical method includes a multiplicity of components or interrelated investigations of Scripture usually known as “criticisms.” Among them we find, for instance, historical criticism proper, and building on it, source, form, tradition, redaction, social-scientific, canonical, rhetorical, structural, narrative, reader-response, poststructuralist, feminist, and socioeconomic criticisms.³⁵ At least theoretically, this distinction allows us to adumbrate the possibility that the criticisms enunciated above may render different results when applied from a different approach to the historical investigation of Scripture. What Biblical Adventism finds objectionable and unscientific³⁶ is the historical critical method proper and its open enmity against the historical reality of biblical events.

³³ “Give the historical method an inch and it will take a mile. From a strictly orthodox standpoint, therefore, it seems to bear a certain similarity to *the devil*. Like the modern natural sciences, it represents a complete revolution in our patterns of thought vis-à-vis antiquity and the Middle Ages. As these sciences imply a new attitude toward nature, so history implies a new attitude toward the human spirit and its productions in the realm of ideas” (Ernest Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, 16; emphasis mine).

³⁴ “Historians seek objectivity. They are interested in discovering and reporting what really happened in the past, as opposed to collecting and passing on fanciful stories, writing ‘docudramas,’ or producing revisionist accounts of the past for propagandistic or ideological purposes” (Mackenzie and Haynes, 18).

³⁵ Mackenzie and Haynes, table of contents.

³⁶ Ian W. Provan correctly explains that the modern scientific historiographical model that the historical critical method of biblical investigation applies has collapsed (“Knowing and Believing: Faith in the Past,” in *Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew

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If Adventist exegetes continue to solve the methodological question by choosing between the historical-grammatical and historical critical methods, present divisions in Adventism will multiply and become stronger. Yet, are these the only possible alternatives? Could Adventist thinkers address the methodological question critically, seeking to ground, articulate, and formulate a new exegetical methodology? Finishing the unfinished task of Adventist theology requires rethinking the issue of exegetical methodology. We need to find a new methodological alternative responsive to all the characteristics of the biblical texts. Overcoming the present theological pluralism in the church requires a deconstructive task of epistemological criticism of the historical critical method proper. Moreover, we also need to engage in the constructive task of grounding and devising a new scientific historical method of biblical interpretation.³⁷

However, how do we do it? How do we study and produce exegetical methodologies? Is there a theological discipline where we can analyze, criticize, and formulate new methodological approaches? I will argue below that to deal seriously with methodological issues, Adventist theology needs to enter new scholarly territory. We need to engage in a fundamental theology to study the scholarly status of theology, its methodology, the disciplines required to process its data and achieve its goals, internal and external interdisciplinary relationships, the origin of theological knowledge, the general structure of interpretation, etc.

The question remains. Why do some Adventist scholars feel so strongly that we should use the historical critical method in Adventist theology while others feel the opposite with the same passion? The answer to this question is not simple. Part of the answer revolves around the explicit or implicit theological and philosophical preconceptions we bring to the task of exegesis. Before considering them, we need to become aware of the limits of biblical methodology and biblical theology.

et al. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 244). Therefore, its patterns, presuppositions, and procedures we cannot take seriously any longer. Unfortunately, biblical scholars continue to build on methodological views postmodern historiography has criticized and abandoned. So, what is next in historiography? Provan correctly interprets “the crisis with regard to the scientific model of historiography—and indeed the self-defeating postmodernist response to this crisis—as an invitation to revisit some fundamental questions about epistemology” (ibid.). In other words, one has to suspect that problems in the modern scientific historiographical model stem from errors in the broader level of epistemological and ontological presuppositions. We need to reassess our understanding on these issues, and from them generate a better scientific historiographical model we can apply to the study of history in general and biblical history in particular.

³⁷ Perhaps this is what Gerhard Hasel and Richard Davidson had in mind when they spoke, respectively, of a “theological biblical method” and a “historical biblical method.” See Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today*, 113; and, Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” 94.

5. The Limits of Exegesis

Although the application of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis and the development of biblical theology have strengthened Biblical Adventism, their *modus operandi* does not have room for a consistent application of the Sanctuary doctrine as a vision from which to discover the complete system of theology and truth present in Scripture. Understanding these methodological and disciplinary limitations of exegetical scholarship may help us understand further the forgetfulness of the Adventist vision and its related system of theology among Biblical Adventists. As our preset methodological and disciplinary limitations come into view, we will be able to adumbrate the task that remains ahead: to finish the unfinished business of Adventist theology and overcome the present pluralism and stagnation in the thinking and mission of the church.

I would rather have one of my esteemed and wise exegete colleagues write on the limits of biblical theology. I know this is a sensitive issue for many involved in Adventist theology. The reason is simple. From the limited perspective of my personal experience, I have not found Adventist exegetes expressing the need for support, complementation, and correction from other theological disciplines, such as systematic or fundamental theologies. My exegete colleagues and students should realize that this proposal does not attempt to challenge but to complement what they are already doing. Some years ago, after speaking about the limits of biblical exegesis to the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary doctoral club at Andrews University, a group of Old and New Testament students found the notion threatening to their scholarship and Adventism. They did not explain the reason for their feeling. I imagine their reaction might be somehow connected to our common fear of the unknown.

Biblical Adventism largely equates exegetical methodology with theological method. This implicit disciplinary mindset assumes we do theology exegetically. By rigorously applying exegetical methodology to the biblical text, we discover truth and apply it to our present situation. Shortly put, to discover biblical truth we only need exegetical methodology. Consequently, many are convinced that for the discovery of biblical truth, we do not need disciplines such as systematic and fundamental theology. At best, systematic theology may be useful in presenting in an orderly way the results that biblical theology achieves through exegetical methodology.³⁸ Overall, we should avoid them because they can harm our attempt at faithfully building our theology on the *sola Scriptura* principle and the hermeneutical guidance of the Sanctuary doctrine. There are many reasons for disciplinary suspicion of systematic theology and fundamental

³⁸ If a tradition decided to build Christian theology on the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, one wonders about the role of systematic theology. If biblical theology not only discovers what the biblical writers meant back in their day, but also decides what the text means for us today and presents us with a complete report of the interconnected theology of Old and New Testaments, is there any need of systematic theology? The answer seems to be no. In this regard see my, "Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology," *JATS* 12/2 (2001): 110–131.

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theology built on the multiple theological sources matrix. This suspicion should not diminish in Adventism. On the contrary, it should motivate an intensive project of theological deconstruction.

Here, however, we need to concentrate on the limitations of biblical exegesis, calling for complementary disciplinary methodologies to join it in the discovery of biblical truth. For our purposes in this article, we need only to consider briefly two limitations. One comes from the side of the hermeneutical presuppositions and the other from the data and object of exegetical method.

Presuppositions. We need to bear in mind that method is a way we follow to achieve some goals.³⁹ Bernard Lonergan correctly describes method as “*a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.*”⁴⁰ In a technical sense, method is a set of procedures or rules prescribed with the purpose of facilitating the achieving of a goal.⁴¹ As scientific method, theological method also has conditions that regulate its activities, procedures, and operations. Besides the concrete (1) goals it attempts to reach, theological method also requires (2) data and (3) the necessary hermeneutical presuppositions and criteria to process the data and reach its goals. Goals are issues requiring theological interpretation and explanation. Data are the information about God required to spark issues that require explanation, produce interpretation, and construct theological explanations. Necessary hermeneutical presuppositions are the principles that guide theological interpretation and construction.⁴² In short, method’s goals are its teleological condition, data its material condition, and the ideas it assumes its hermeneutical condition. All conditions in close interaction shape the concrete profiles of theological and scientific methods.⁴³

³⁹ Fernando Canale, “Evolution, Theology and Method Part I: Outline and Limits of Scientific Methodology,” *AUSS* 41/1 (2003): 65–100. 70–71

⁴⁰ *Method in Theology* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990), 5. He further explains that “there is method, then, where there are distinct operations, where each operation is related to the others, where the set of relations forms a pattern, where the pattern is described as the right way of doing the job, where operations in accord with the pattern may be repeated indefinitely, and where the fruits of such repetition are, not repetitious, but cumulative and progressive” (Ibid., 4). Consequently, Lonergan organizes his discourse on method as an identification and explanation of the operations involved in the task of doing theology (ibid., 6–25). John Macquarrie agrees with Lonergan’s definition of method, but goes on to apply it in a different way to the task of theology (*Principles of Christian Theology*, 33).

⁴¹ René Descartes explained that “By method I means certain and simple rules, such that, if a man observe them accurately, he shall never assume what is false as true, and will never spend his mental efforts to no purpose, but will always gradually increase his knowledge and so arrive at a true understanding of all that does not surpass his powers” (“Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952], 5).

⁴² By “construction,” I mean the procedure from which we arrive at conclusions and teachings by connecting texts and ideas. That takes place in exegesis but in a larger degree in biblical and systematic theologies.

⁴³ For further clarification on the conditions of theological method, see my “Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systema-*

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The data in biblical exegesis are the texts of the Old and New Testaments. The goal is to understand them. However, where do the hermeneutical conditions or presuppositions come from? Some years ago, an official statement of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Annual Council addressing the issue of Bible study identified some of the presuppositions we carry to the task of biblical interpretation and that therefore form part of our method of biblical studies.⁴⁴ This document affirms that (1) the divine inspiration of Scripture, (2) its authority over reason, and (3) the role of the Holy Spirit are necessary presuppositions arising from the claims of Scripture. The document only enumerates and outlines the content of these basic presuppositions without explaining how we get to know they are in fact presuppositions and arrive at their contents.

Thus, it becomes evident that exegetical methodology and studies are limited because they require the identification and interpretation of some broad and influential notions exegetes assume. Since the goal of exegetical method is the understanding of biblical texts, and they do not address the question of method or its presuppositions, its dependence on non-exegetical reflection becomes apparent at the very grounding hermeneutical level where it originates. Because, traditionally, exegetes and theologians have derived their hermeneutical presuppositions from philosophy, the General Conference's statement on "Methods of Bible Study" advises Adventist scholars to draw their presuppositions from Scripture itself.⁴⁵ There should be a scholarly way, then, to analyze, discuss, discover, describe, and decide what presuppositions are necessary for biblical exegesis and how we should understand them on the basis of the *sola Scriptura* principle.⁴⁶ This task requires the involvement of a different theological discipline, namely, fundamental theology. We will come back to this issue in the next article.

Textuality. Let us consider the limitation that appears from the side of the objective of theology, namely, the understanding of the text. One of the methodological procedures exegesis must follow derives from the nature of its data, the biblical texts. Both the historical-grammatical and historical critical methods agree that texts flow from within an historical matrix. Thus, determining the

tische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie 43/3 (2001): 371–375; and, Kwabena Donkor, *Tradition, Method, and Contemporary Protestant Theology: An Analysis of Thomas C. Oden's Vincentian Method* (Lanham: U P of America, 2003), 43–74.

⁴⁴ General Conference Committee Annual Council, "Methods of Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles and Methods" (Rio de Janeiro: Biblical Research Institute, 1986).

⁴⁵ See footnote 44.

⁴⁶ Gerhard Hasel correctly indicates that in Adventist theology, "presuppositions must be open constantly for modification and enlargement on the basis of Scripture. Any preunderstanding that is bound to concepts such as naturalism with its closed universe of an immanent cause-and-effect network, to evolution with its developmental axioms, or to scientism, humanism, rationalism, or relativisms is alien to the Bible. The Word of God must not be forced to fit such foreign concepts or their presuppositions" (*Biblical Interpretation Today*, 104).

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historical context provides a grounding frame of reference for understanding all biblical texts.⁴⁷ The historical nature of biblical writing prohibits exegetes from interpreting any biblical text on the basis of ideas found in later biblical texts. The exegete must attempt to look at the text from the author's and the original audience's ideological perspective. This shows another limitation of exegetical methodology. We will never be able to reconstruct the full historical context. Exegesis always produces partial understanding of texts. For instance, exegetical methodology does not allow us to use the cosmic conflict presented in Revelation 12:7-9 as a historical context for Genesis 1:3.⁴⁸ Adventist theology works within the Great Controversy dynamics. It understands Scripture and salvation in the context of the cosmic conflict preceding the creation of our planet (Genesis 1-2), continuing through earth's history, and ending with the final purification of the planet and its recreation. When rigorously applied, the exegetical approach (historical-grammatical and historical critical methods) does not allow for such a reading of Scripture. It conflicts with the historical sequence of the texts and the development of biblical thinking.

The historical limitation of exegetical method and the implicit scholarly assumption that there is no other scholarly way available to deal with Scripture may have contributed to forgetting and replacing the Sanctuary doctrine as the hermeneutical light of Adventist theology.

6. Biblical Theology

When we define the theological enterprise from the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, the need for and role of exegetical methodology and biblical theology are not in question. Without them, Adventist theology cannot exist. Yet, does Adventism need to develop its own biblical theology, or can it rely on the biblical theologies produced by the academy and other Christian denominations? Moreover, do the limitations of exegetical methodology also limit the results that biblical theology can achieve?⁴⁹ Specifically, is the scholarly discipline of

⁴⁷ Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," 70-74.

⁴⁸ It is true that Old Testament scholars cannot completely ignore the existence of the New Testament as they interpret the Old Testament (Gerhard F. Hasel, "Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology," *AUSS* 34/1 (1995): 25-26. Old Testament scholars cannot use New Testament theology and data as hermeneutical presuppositions to find the theological historical meaning of the Old Testament text. Biblical theologians, however, can use Old Testament motifs, types, and theology to ascertain the meaning of New Testament passages. For instance, Richard Davidson uses convincingly the inauguration ceremony of the Old Testament Sanctuary to ascertain the meaning of Christ's entrance into the heavenly Sanctuary after his resurrection as presented in Hebrews 6:19-20 ("Christ's Entry 'Within the Veil' in Hebrews 6:19-20: The Old Testament Background," 175-190; and, "Inauguration or Day of Atonement? A Response to Norman Young's Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19-20 Revisited," 69-88.

⁴⁹ So far, we have considered only a few instances of limitations in exegetical method. Later we will address other limitations coming from the side of the objective of exegetical methodology and biblical theology.

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biblical theology the beginning and the end of our search for the meanings and truth of Scripture? Does it share its task of discovering biblical truth with systematic theology?

Nature. Let us start first by considering the nature of biblical theology. As a theological discipline, biblical theology attempts to understand the text of Scripture. It starts with individual texts and then moves on to biblical authors and books. The ultimate goal is to bring together the broad theological motifs and teachings of the Old and New Testaments to outline the theology of the entire Bible.⁵⁰ Since this brief enunciation of the nature and task of biblical theology seems to fit the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle of Biblical Adventist theology, one would expect that Adventist scholars could freely use biblical theologies produced by the academy or other Christian denominations.

Old Testament scholar Gerhard Hasel thought differently. In his last publications, he outlined a new approach to biblical theology as a scholarly discipline. The reason for Hasel's proposal is methodological. He correctly understood that all models of biblical theology are built on a "functional" view of Scripture.⁵¹ Thus, his proposal revolves around the nature and role of Scripture, "understood to be the norm of biblical theology."⁵² According to Hasel, biblical theology should not follow the view of reality and Scripture we find as the basis of the historical critical method and most approaches to biblical theology.⁵³ Instead, it "calls for a theological-historical approach which takes full account of God's self-revelation as embodied in Scripture with all its dimensions of reality."⁵⁴

Hasel works at the level where biblical theology as intellectual enterprise generates the meaning of the biblical texts. As an Adventist, he is not satisfied with what he finds in the scholarly world because existing models of biblical theology work on the assumption that Scripture is the product of human imagination and tradition.⁵⁵ A different scholarly approach to Scripture appears when

⁵⁰ Ekkehardt Müller reports that biblical theology "starts with the theology of a biblical book or author, e.g., the theology of Mark. Which theological emphases can be found in his gospel? How are they developed? What did the author want to express? From the theologies of individual biblical books, students of Scripture move toward a theology of the OT and a theology of the NT respectively and finally toward a biblical theology. Biblical theology stays strictly with the biblical text and does not raise issues that are of importance today but are not directly addressed in the Bible" ("Theological Thinking in the Adventist Church," *DavarLogos* 1/2 [2002]: 129).

⁵¹ For an extended explanation grounding the "functional" view of Scripture, see, for instance, Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

⁵² "Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology," *AUSS* 34/1 (1996): 23.

⁵³ For brief scholarly introductions to various models of Old Testament theology, see Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 11–51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁵ Including Childs' "canonical approach to biblical theology" (*ibid.*).

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we change our understanding of the material condition of method,⁵⁶ that is, the nature of Scripture.

Hasel correctly sees that biblical theology “has the dual task of (1) providing summary interpretations of the final form of the individual biblical documents or groups of writings and of (2) presenting the longitudinal themes, motifs, and concepts that emerge from the biblical materials.”⁵⁷

Center. At this point, a structural limitation of biblical theology as a scholarly discipline comes to mind. Arriving at an integrated summary of the entire Bible as a coherent whole has proven difficult due to the textual nature of exegetical methodology. Finding the elusive “center” of Scripture that may bring all the pieces of the biblical puzzle together has been a major source of disagreement among scholars. Biblical scholars searching for the center of biblical theology find little help in exegetical methodology. Apparently, they look for it by trial and error. They identify an important biblical motif and play it as center to see how it works out in practice.

Consistent with his affirmation of the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, Hasel remind us that the search for the center or key that may help us weave all parts of Scripture into a coherent whole must grow out “of the biblical materials themselves.”⁵⁸ For this reason, biblical theology should not follow the “God-man-salvation” grid systematic theologians use to bring together the contents of Scripture.⁵⁹ Moreover, Hasel reviews the suggestions for the center of biblical theology that leading Old Testaments scholars have formulated to play the integrative role of “center” of Old Testament theology. He finds them wanting because “they are too narrow a basis on which to construct an OT [or biblical] theology which does not relegate essential aspects of the OT [or biblical] faith to an inferior and unimportant position.”⁶⁰

According to Hasel, “God is the dynamic, unifying center of the OT.”⁶¹ All the other suggestions for “center” have in common an aspect of God or his activity for the world or man and so, inadvertently, point to God as center.⁶² However, since God is not only the center of Old Testament theology but also, simultaneously, the center of both biblical and systematic theologies, a disciplinary limitation of biblical theology comes to view. Let me explain. By the word “God,” we refer to both meaning in biblical texts and a reality that operates in life. The first belongs to the textual field of investigation that biblical theology

⁵⁶ On the material condition’s place in theological method, see above and footnote 43.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁸ *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 98.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Some of the proposed centers for biblical theology Hasel reviews are “covenant” (Eichrodt), “election” (Wildberger), “communion” (Vriezen), “promise” (Kaiser), “the kingdom of God” (Klein), “the rulership of God” (Seebass), “holiness” (Hänel), “experience” of God (Baab), “God is Lord” (Köhler). *Ibid.*, 99.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 99.

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explores. The second belongs to the ontological field of divine operations that fundamental and systematic theologies explore. In Biblical Adventism both biblical and systematic theologies connect via their data (*sola-tota Scriptura*) and their center (God).

The “God” that is the center of biblical theology is not the meaning of a word but the nature and action of a reality. Biblical theology helps us understand the meaning of texts. Systematic theology helps us use our understanding of biblical texts (we gain through exegetical methodology) to understand the reality and actions of God. In this way, biblical and systematic theologies connect via their data (Scripture), object (God), and methodological limitations. The method of biblical theology helps us understand the meanings of texts through which we receive the information about God’s reality and actions. The method of systematic theology helps us use ideas transmitted in texts to understand the meaning of realities. Systematic theology depends on exegetical methodology to understand its data, namely, the biblical texts that reveal the reality and actions of God. Biblical theology depends on systematic methodology⁶³ to understand the meaning of the center it assumes in gathering all the materials of Scripture.

We started this section by asking if Biblical Adventism can rely on biblical theologies produced by scholarship. Because Biblical Adventism operates from the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, it cannot freely adopt the approaches of the academy or of other Christian denominations as long as they assume the contents of Scripture are the product of human imagination and follow the historical critical method. Faithfulness to the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, then, requires a rethinking of biblical theology as a scholarly discipline along the lines of Hasel’s theological-historical proposal. Yet, even Hasel, a strong supporter of the historicist interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy and the Sanctuary doctrine,⁶⁴ did not call for the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary doctrine as vision from which to understand a complete system of theology and truth as Ellen White did. This brings us to the limitations of biblical theology as scholarly enterprise.

Limits. Do the limitations of exegetical methodology considered above also limit the results biblical theology can achieve? The answer to this question seems to be affirmative. By definition, biblical theology is a textual discipline. It works by way of the exegetical method. The limits of exegetical methodology are also limits of biblical theology. This limitation came to view in the search

⁶³ As we will see below, both biblical and systematic theology depends on philosophical methodology, helping both to determine the kind of reality we assume for the God of Scripture.

⁶⁴ Gerhard Hasel, “The Identity of ‘The Saints of the Most High’ in Daniel 7,” *Biblica* 56 (1975): 173–192; *The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24–27* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1976); “Studies in Biblical Atonement I: Continual Sacrifice, Defilement/Cleansing and Sanctuary,” in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, ed. A. V. Wallenkampf (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), I: 87–114; “The ‘Little Horn,’ the Saints, and the Sanctuary in Daniel 8,” in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, 177–220.

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for a center that might connect the analytical results of exegesis. Thus, the limits of exegetical methodology seem to impinge on the theological outcome of biblical theology.

Biblical theology is not the place where the Sanctuary doctrine opens to view a complete system of theology and truth. Instead, it is the place where biblical data on the Sanctuary doctrine are processed, understood, and connected to the rest of biblical materials through texts about God. The fact that Adventist scholarship has developed mainly as biblical theology may be one contributing factor in the progressive forgetting and replacing of the Sanctuary doctrine as the Adventist hermeneutical vision.

If biblical theology is the only way to discover and understand biblical truth, the hermeneutical role that the Sanctuary doctrine played in the formative thinking of early Adventist pioneers may find no place in scholarship. The search for the center of biblical theology, however, suggests that biblical theology shares with systematic theology in the discovery of biblical truth.

7. Systematic Theology

So far, we have not found the scholarly discipline or disciplines in which the Adventist pioneers' use of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision that opens to view a "*complete system of truth, connected and harmonious*"⁶⁵ may be articulated and utilized in a scholarly way. Perhaps the idea of "system" may be the key to finding a scholarly home for the hermeneutical role the Sanctuary plays in Adventist theology. Could the system help us understand biblical materials better and discover the inner logic of biblical thinking? Could systematic theology be the scholarly home for the complete system of truth our pioneers "saw" in Scripture with the hermeneutical "vision" the Sanctuary doctrine opened before them? With these questions in mind, let us turn our attention briefly to systematic theology.

If systematic theology is the natural scholarly home to the complete system of truth early Adventist pioneers adumbrated through the hermeneutical vision of the Sanctuary doctrine, we have serious theological catching up to do. George W. Reid reports, "We Adventists are known for our intensive work in biblical studies, from which we have secured a strong grasp of the Bible's teachings, giving special attention to eschatology. This emphasis means our doctrinal understandings tend to be colored by an end-time anticipation of Jesus' return. We have not distinguished ourselves, however, in systematic theology, that enterprise which seeks to integrate biblical truths into a single overall comprehensive system."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 423 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁶ "Review of Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*," *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter* <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>, no. 6 (2004): 8.

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Here we will introduce ourselves only briefly into the scholarly field of systematic theology to assess whether it is (1) related to the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary doctrine experienced in early Adventist theology; and (2) needed in finishing the unfinished task of Adventist theology. With these goals in mind for this section, we should explore the following questions. What is systematic theology? How does it compare and relate to biblical theology? How does systematic theology work? Can the Adventist hermeneutical vision flowing from the Sanctuary doctrine find its disciplinary scholarly home in systematics? Does the unfinished business of Adventist theology require pioneering work in this area of scholarship?

These questions are important because the scholarship of Biblical Adventism has developed mainly within the biblical theology discipline. Progressive Adventism, on the contrary, has developed both biblical and systematic theologies. They develop biblical theology studying biblical texts from the general perspective and hermeneutical guidance of the historical critical method and systematic theology in close relation to religious studies.⁶⁷ Since systematic and religious studies combine a multiplicity of sources, we can call them biblical only in an indirect derivative sense. In contrast to this approach, Biblical Adventism needs to consider seriously whether the discovery of biblical truth requires the methodology and contributions of a biblically conceived systematic theology.

Nature. Different theological schools and traditions understand the relationship between biblical and systematic⁶⁸ theologies in different ways. Within the broader field of classical and modern traditions, Brevard Childs perceived the existence of “an iron curtain” separating biblical theology from systematics.⁶⁹ In the biblical evangelical and Biblical Adventist traditions, however, the problem is quite different. Instead of differentiation without relation, there is identification without distinction. In other words, many Biblical Adventists and evangelicals have a difficult time distinguishing between biblical and systematic theologies.⁷⁰ They are not to blame. Traditionally, Adventist scholars teaching

⁶⁷ Religious studies attempt to study the phenomena of religion rather than divine revelation. This discipline grows from the application of the historical critical method to theology. As the historical experience and imagination of the community replaces divine traditional understanding of revelation and inspiration, historical studies of religious phenomena replace systematic studies of biblical teachings. In Progressive Adventist circles, Christianity is also studied from the perspective of religious studies.

⁶⁸ “Systematic” theology corresponds to what other schools call, “dogmatics,” or simply, “theology.”

⁶⁹ “Soon I became painfully aware that an iron curtain separated Bible from theology, not just at Yale, but throughout most of the English-speaking world. I am sure that the fault lay with both disciplines, but deep suspicion and disinterest prevented any serious interaction” (Childs, xvi).

⁷⁰ For an introductory attempt at distinguishing between them, see, Fernando Canale, “Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology?” *JATS* 12/2 (2001): 110–131.

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Christian doctrines did not clearly explain the difference between biblical theology and systematic theology.

According to Wayne Grudem, for instance, systematic theology studies what the Bible teaches today on any topic.⁷¹ The task of systematics consists in “collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.”⁷² There is little difference between the definitions of the task of systematic theology and the task of biblical theology as described above.⁷³ Millard J. Erickson’s notion that systematic theology “contemporizes” the raw material it takes from biblical theology helps even less.⁷⁴ After all, biblical theologians claim not only to produce a summary of all biblical materials but also to tell us what they mean for us today.⁷⁵

Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis bring the issue to a clearer focus by recognizing that while biblical and systematic theologies share the same source of data, Scripture, they differ in *aim* and *organizing principle*.⁷⁶ In aim, while biblical theology focuses on understanding texts, systematic theology focuses on understanding reality. They also differ in organizing principle. While biblical theology follows the historical organization of the text,⁷⁷ systematic theology follows a “topical” and “logical” organization.⁷⁸

Recently, Norman Gulley broke new ground “by producing the first true systematic theology to come from an Adventist hand.”⁷⁹ He brings the task of systematic theology into sharper focus. To Demarest’s and Lewis’ “aim” and “organizing” principle, Gulley adds the “hermeneutical guide of biblical metanarrative,” which he also calls “worldview.” The biblical metanarrative operates as a guiding light orienting our interpretation of Scripture and biblical doctrines. It also identifies and “corrects any interpretation that does not fit in

⁷¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 21.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See above, 131.

⁷⁴ *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 26.

⁷⁵ This notion also seems ingrained in Adventism; see, for instance, Ekkehardt Müller, “Theological Thinking in the Adventist Church,” 130.

⁷⁶ *Integrative Theology*, 2 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 1:23.

⁷⁷ Biblical theology, “aiming to be a descriptive science, is organized around the chronological and cultural development of a given biblical writer’s own terms, categories, and thought forms in his historical and cultural context” (ibid.).

⁷⁸ Systematic theology “aims to produce normative guidelines to spiritual reality for the present generation; it organizes the material of divine revelation topically and logically, developing a coherent and comprehensive world view and way of life” (ibid.). However, perusing Childs, one discovers the same topical organization in biblical theology. Fritz Guy also believes that the difference between biblical and systematic theologies revolves around the way they organize their materials (*Thinking Theologically*, 203–219).

⁷⁹ George W. Reid, “Review of Norman R. Gulley. *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*,” 8. Actually, only the first volume of a multivolume works is in print.

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with the biblical worldview.” Finally, it guides us in understanding the inner logic of biblical thinking.⁸⁰ The metanarrative-worldview Gulley has in mind is the “Great Controversy” between God and Satan.⁸¹ Finally, Gulley correctly concludes, “*the center of a theological system must be the same as the underlying center of Scripture, if the system is to be true to Scripture.*”⁸² In this way, the centers of biblical and systematic theologies are identical.

According to Hasel, the center of Scripture is God. God, then, is the center of both biblical and systematic theologies. How should we understand the relation of this center and the Great Controversy “metanarrative-worldview” about which Gulley speaks? Moreover, what is the scholarly discipline dealing with the role and contents of the metanarrative systematic theology assumes?

Method. We are now in a position to understand further the way in which systematic theology operates. At least we have “on the table,” so to speak, some components of the systematic approach to theology. Systematic theology results from the interplay of several factors, namely, data, their interpretation, and an objective. These are the material, hermeneutical, and teleological conditions of the theological method.⁸³

When we approach Christian theology from the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle as Biblical Adventism does, biblical and systematic theologies share the same data (Scripture) and hermeneutical principles.⁸⁴ The difference requiring different scholarly disciplines, therefore, comes from the teleological condition of method. Briefly, biblical theology is textual (it attempts to understand biblical texts), while systematic theology is ontological (it attempts to understand reality). Since we have explored briefly the textual nature of biblical theology, we will turn our attention to the ontological nature of systematic theology.

Systematic theology tries to understand the integrated interrelation of living beings with God as the center of life. As such, it is not a textual but an ontological scholarly enterprise. The difference in aim calls for difference in methodological activities and procedures. Through its history, Christian theology has

⁸⁰ “A systematic theology [explains Gulley] penetrates the biblical material and reaches the foundational story of Scripture in which all other stories are best understood. This is the metanarrative. It enables each doctrine to be understood within this biblical worldview and thus corrects any interpretation that does not fit in with the biblical worldview. It therefore allows the biblical worldview to be better understood and to act as a hermeneutical guide in a consistent interpretation of all biblical doctrines. It provides a framework in which the various biblical doctrines can be thought through in their inner-relationship and inner-coherence” (*Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* [Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003], 140).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 713. The origin, interpretation, and role of metanarrative in the construction of systematic theology require scholarly analysis and method—in other words, the operation of a scholarly discipline. We will address these issues in the next article.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 146 (italics in the original).

⁸³ See above, page 127.

⁸⁴ We will deal with hermeneutical principles in more detail in the next section.

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approached systematic theology from a multiplex of sources matrix and a hermeneutical vision drawn from human philosophical teachings.

Biblical Adventism, instead, builds its understanding of reality and the manifoldness of life as it relates to God from Scripture as its sole source of light, wisdom, and information and takes its hermeneutical vision from the Sanctuary doctrine. From this base, systematic theology does not attempt to understand the doctrines⁸⁵ of Scripture or church beliefs,⁸⁶ but nature and life as they relate to God. While biblical theology carefully follows textual evidence and links, systematic theology follows ontological evidence and links present in the texts of Scripture.

As the ontological aim leads the systematic search for the meaning of reality, a theological interpretation and construction takes places by interlinking the manifold interactions of the various beings Scripture describes. The center of such interactions is God's reality and actions. The result is the conception and formulation of the teachings of the Church. The systematic method does not conceive Christian teachings as an isolated, disconnected string of beads.⁸⁷ The hermeneutical vision and the focus on reality allow systematic theology to discover the inner logic of Christian thinking. Following the way God interrelates with reality as a whole brings to view the inner logic of Scripture and Christian teachings.

⁸⁵ Understanding doctrines is not the task of systematic theology. Biblical theology helps us understand biblical doctrines. Historical theology helps us understand church doctrines. Systematic theology is the process though which we understand created realities in the light of Scripture and in relation to God (the center of theology). From this understanding, systematic theology constructs the doctrines or teachings of the Church.

⁸⁶ This is the modernistic view of systematic theology derived from the history of religions tradition. Fritz Guy's way of "thinking theologically" seems to correspond to the modern notion of systematic theology. "As the interpretation of faith, *thinking theologically is thinking as carefully, comprehensively, and creatively as possible about the content, adequacy, and implications of one's own religious life*" (*Thinking Theologically*, 10 [emphasis in the original]). Guy proposes that theology studies religious life. I propose that we study life in the light of Scripture.

⁸⁷ "Seventh-day Adventists need an integrated theology! Don't get me wrong. Adventism's 27 fundamental beliefs are well defined and adequate in what they attempt to do as individual statements. It is not the 27 that I am questioning, but the way they are presented. To put it bluntly, the 27 fundamentals are set forth as a list somewhat like a string of beads with each bead having the same size, shape, and weight" (George R. Knight, "Twenty-seven Fundamentals in Search of a Theology," *Ministry* 74/2 [2001]: 5. This article shows the unfinished task of Adventist theology affecting the practice of the ministry. Unfortunately, Knight bypasses the question of theological integration that requires the development of systematic theology and deals with the question of presenting the 27 Fundamental Beliefs to the church. Thus, his models to "organize" the 27 Fundamental Beliefs divide them into three areas: Christ [Christian experience], doctrines [understanding of Bible teachings], and lifestyle [ethics]. The relative importance of these areas begs the question of their theological integration. Moreover, the models presented assume an implicit systematic theology. Since systematic theology attempts to understand reality from the perspective of biblical thought, it should reveal the way in which Christian doctrines understand the integration of experience, theory, and doing.

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Limits. One limitation of systematic theology derives from the ontological nature of its object. Because systematic theologians see their objects through the text, their methodology is not suited for the scholarly understanding of texts. This limitation leads to distortion in the understanding of the data. As exegetical methodology allows seeing “less” in the texts because of its accountability to the historicity of the writing process and the dynamics of textual communication, systematic methodology allows seeing “more” in the text because systematic theologians see it from the perspective of the ontological nature of their intended referents. Unfortunately, this seeing is accountable to the reality the texts speak about and not to the text itself as structure communicating meaning. Thus, systematic theologians “see” in biblical texts not only meanings not supported by them, but, at times, also meanings that contradict what they explicitly say. This limitation of systematic methodology calls for exegetical corrections. Systematic methodology builds on the results of exegetical methodology. Biblical systematic theologians should use it to process their data and to deconstruct traditional doctrinal constructions.⁸⁸ Thus, biblical theology is the basis and the permanent corrective of a biblical systematic theology.

Another limitation of systematic theology comes from the side of its hermeneutical presuppositions. As biblical theologians, systematic theologians assume the interpretation of the hermeneutical presuppositions. Biblical and systematic methodologies do not generate the interpretation of the methodology and hermeneutical principles they assume. Traditionally, the philosophical disciplines of ontology and epistemology have generated the interpretation of the hermeneutical principles guiding theologians in the construction of Christian doctrines. In the next article in this series, I will argue that theologians should not leave to philosophers the interpretation of this fundamental area of Christian theology. Instead, they should address the criticism and interpretation of theological methodology and its hermeneutical conditions in a new independent scholarly discipline.

Hermeneutical Vision. In classical and modern traditions of Christian theology, the hermeneutical light guiding theological interpretations and constructions is some philosophical or scientific idea.⁸⁹ In Biblical Adventism, however,

⁸⁸ On the role of biblical theology in theological deconstruction, see Fernando Canale, “Deconstrucción y teología: Una propuesta metodológica,” *Davar/Logos* 1/1 (2002): 3–26.

⁸⁹ For instance, consider the purpose of the scholastic method of theology. “When the dogmatic material with the help of the historical method has been derived from its sources, another momentous task awaits the theologian: the philosophical appreciation, the speculative examination and elucidation of the material brought to light. This is the purpose of the “scholastic” method from which “scholastic theology” takes its name. (J. Pohle, “Dogmatic Theology,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (Online Edition, 1912). This “philosophical appreciation” of the material (data) brought to light corresponds to the hermeneutical vision or role the Sanctuary doctrine plays in Biblical Adventism.

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the hermeneutical light guiding biblical and systematic theologies in their interpretations and constructions flows from the Sanctuary doctrine.⁹⁰

Let us consider briefly an example of the way in which the Sanctuary doctrine functions as hermeneutical vision guiding the interpretation of Scripture and the construction of Christian teachings. When we read Scripture with the ontological aim of systematic theology, we attempt to understand the Sanctuary doctrine as a reality.⁹¹ As early Adventists studied the biblical doctrine of the Sanctuary, they understood its heavenly reality historically. This broadly departed from classical and modern readings that understood heavenly realities as timeless and spiritual.⁹² The historical temporal reality of the heavenly Sanctuary played a decisive hermeneutical role in understanding Daniel 8:14. After the death of Christ, the Old Testament Sanctuary met its antitype. Hebrews and Revelation show that after Christ's resurrection, God's redemptive actions flow from the heavenly Sanctuary. Thus, it became obvious to Adventists that the purification of the Sanctuary ontologically referred not to a spiritual reality already contained in God's eternal being or his death on the cross, but to a new redemptive historical act God actually performed in favor of the saints in heaven around our year 1844. This insight had not only prophetic but also theological implications. It led Adventists to understand the doctrine of salvation as a historical process still in progress.

8. Summary

During the last fifty years, Adventist theology has entered a new playground where theologians approach the study of Scripture and Christian doctrines by using carefully defined rules (methodology).⁹³ Theologians have divided the playground into disciplines. Because Adventism is strongly committed to the *sola Scriptura* principle, the scholarly discipline of biblical theology has attracted the imagination and efforts of most Adventist theologians. Soon, disagreement on exegetical methodology divided Adventist biblical scholars. Evangelical and Progressive Adventists sided with what they call "a modified version" of the historical critical method.⁹⁴ Biblical Adventists are implicitly

⁹⁰ Norman Gulley speaks of a "metanarrative" or "worldview" as the guiding hermeneutical light of systematic theology. I will address the way the biblical metanarrative of the Great Controversy relates to the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical light in the next article.

⁹¹ As we will see in our next article, the ontological referent (reality in life) of biblical thinking can be interpreted in ways that differ widely.

⁹² For a brief introduction, see, Fernando L. Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *AUSS* 36/2 (1998): 183–206.

⁹³ We will discuss theological methodology in the next article. See also Fernando Canale, "Evolution, Theology, and Method, Part 3: Evolution and Adventist Theology." *AUSS* 42/1 (2004): 5–48.

⁹⁴ I am not aware of any Adventist study on exegetical methodology clarifying the nature of the "modifications" Evangelical Adventists and Progressive Adventists bring to the historical critical method. Replacing the naturalistic bias of scientific empiricism with divine transcendence and the

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working on a methodological alternative to the historical-grammatical and historical critical methodologies Gerhard Hasel called “theological biblical” and Richard Davidson calls “historical biblical.”⁹⁵ As Adventist scholars further develop a comprehensive alternative to exegetical methodologies standing on the *sola Scriptura* principle, young Adventist scholars will find a better way to navigate the scholarly world and use it to unite the theology of the church and share it at the highest scholarly levels. God may use these efforts to spread the Adventist theological revolution across denominational barriers.

Exegetical methodology has limitations. First, it requires the use of presuppositions. We need to carefully study, evaluate, and select the presuppositions involved in exegetical methodology. Fundamental theology provides the tools and disciplinary space for such a task. Second, the textual nature of the data it attempts to understand also limits exegetical methodology. Because exegetical methodology is closely tied to the history of the generation of the texts, it cannot explore the history of salvation the texts uncover. Systematic theology provides the tools and disciplinary space for such a task.

The extra-biblical sources from which all biblical theologies define the conditions of exegetical methodology has left the door wide open for a new approach building from a biblical interpretation of the conditions of method. Such an approach is consistent and fully supports Biblical Adventist theology. However, biblical theology requires a center from which to bring together the vast variety of issues, histories, and teachings present in biblical texts. Exegetical scholarship has not yet agreed on what biblical motif should be the center. Hasel correctly discards all biblical motifs and chooses God as the center of biblical theology. By tying the centers of biblical and systematic theologies together, we implicitly recognize their structural disciplinary limitations and interdependence. Thus, the proper expression of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision of a complete and harmonious system of truth requires the contributions of new approaches to biblical and systematic theologies.

Systematic theology attempts to understand reality as it relates to God. In Biblical Adventism, systematics differs from biblical theology because of its aim. While the aim of the former is ontological (nature and life as they relate to God), the latter is textual. Biblical systematic theology explores the inner logic of biblical thinking by discovering the interrelation of events related and interpreted in Scripture. Such an ambitious task requires the hermeneutical guide of broad hermeneutical presuppositions about reality Gulley groups under the “metanarrative” and “worldview” labels. The task of systematic theology reveals the presence and hermeneutical guidance of broad and far-reaching ideas about reality (hermeneutical conditions of theological method) working throughout all

inspiration of Scripture, as Gladson suggests, does not modify the historical critical method, but it shows the reasons why his application does not contradict classical and Protestant systems of theology.

⁹⁵ See above, footnote 37.

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traditions and schools of theology. Christian scholarly tradition has interpreted the far-reaching ideas it uses as hermeneutical light from philosophical and scientific ontologies. From the perspective these broad ideas open to view, Christian theologians have advanced their interpretations of Scripture and constructed the teachings of Christianity. Biblical Adventism interprets the same far-reaching ideas from Scripture. From this foundational level, the Sanctuary doctrine becomes the hermeneutical light guiding in the interpretation of these far-reaching ideas (hermeneutical conditions of theological method) and in the understanding of the complete and harmonious system of Christian theology.

While the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary vision of early Adventist pioneers finds its scholarly home in fundamental theology, the complete system of truth connected and harmonious finds its scholarly home in systematic theology. As we suggested in passing, the same hermeneutical vision also operates, though in a more implicit than explicit way, in biblical theology. We will consider the role of the Sanctuary doctrine in fundamental theology in our next article of this series.

9. Conclusion

Our brief review of the basic scholarly disciplines involved in the task of doing Christian theology at the academic level of the university allows us to answer partially the questions that framed our search.

Evangelical Adventists and Progressive Adventists are not correct in their view that scholarly honesty requires the adoption of a universally accepted methodology, tradition, and science. Because method involves conditions we can interpret in different ways, Adventist scholars do not need to consider academic and traditional approaches to theology binding. On the contrary, Adventist commitment to the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle requires a departure from the traditional multiple sources of theology matrix and the hermeneutical guide drawn from philosophical and scientific ontologies. Biblical Adventists are not compelled to follow the lead of Evangelical and Progressive Adventists to be intellectually honest. They need, however, to give close attention to methodological, traditional, philosophical, and scientific questions to ground, formulate, and explain their theological positions in the wider world of scholarship.

Biblical Adventism can be “intellectually honest” while doing theology from the hermeneutical light beaming from the Sanctuary doctrine and the historicist interpretation of prophecy, as the pioneers did. This requires extensive scholarly work that Adventism has not yet produced. To see the complete system of theology and truth the pioneers saw at the academic level of scholarly research, Adventism needs to develop its own scholarly approaches to fundamental, biblical, and systematic theologies. Biblical theology has the tools to understand the biblical text. Systematic theology has the tools to discover and formulate the biblical system of truth. Fundamental theology has the tools to discover and formulate the hermeneutical vision and methodological conditions

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biblical and systematic theologies assume. Paramount among these tools is the hermeneutical light of the Sanctuary doctrine. Contemporary Adventists need to incorporate it in the hermeneutical conditions of theological method. The formulation of an Adventist approach to biblical and systematic theologies, then, calls for groundbreaking scholarly work in these areas. From this hermeneutical vision, Adventism will be able to see the complete and harmonious system of biblical truth and formulate it as a viable scholarly alternative. We will turn our attention to fundamental theology in our next article of this series.

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Is God Present in the Song of Songs?

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Many commentators on the Song of Songs find no reference to God nor the sound of God's voice in the Song.¹ It is understandable that against the background of pagan fertility cults, when the very air was charged with the divinization of sex, the divine presence/voice would have to be muted in the context of sexuality. Nonetheless, I am convinced that God is clearly present in the Song—and he is not silent!

The Echo of God's Name

A veiled but clear and striking allusion to God appears in the thrice-repeated adjuration spoken by Shulamit: "I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or by the does of the field, do not stir up nor awaken love until she pleases" (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). In the first two occurrences of this refrain, Shulamit asks the women to bind themselves by the oath *bišəbā'ôt 'ô be'ayəlôt haśśādeh* ("by the gazelles or by the does of the field"). Scholars have widely recognized the play on words between this phrase and the names for God: *bē'lōhē šəbā'ôt* ("by Elohe Shabaoth, the God of hosts") and *bē'el šadday* ("by El Shaddai, the Mighty God").² The inspired poet has substituted similar-sounding names of animals (symbolic of love)³ for the customary divine names used in oaths. Contrary to those who see this as a "secularization" of the Song, I find this a strong

¹ See, e.g., the recent commentary by J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 64, 70.

² See, e.g., Robert Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations: A Study, Modern Translation, and Commentary* (New York: Ktav, 1974), 28; Roland E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs: A Commentary on the Book of Canticles or the Song of Songs*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 133; Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Random House, 1995), 152.

³ For discussion of the love symbolism of these animals in the Song, other biblical wisdom literature, and in the ANE parallels, see, e.g., George M. Schwab, *The Song of Songs' Cautionary Message Concerning Human Love* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 43, 47–48.

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affirmation of God's presence in the Song. Though his name is muted, to be sure, as a safeguard against any attempts to divinize sex after the order of the fertility-cults, it is actually heard even more distinctly through the animals of love that echo the divine appellations. The poet surely would not have even included the oath formula that regularly throughout Scripture employs the divine name ("I adjure you by . . . [divine name] . . . if you do not . . .")⁴ if he did not intend to allude intertextually to the divine presence behind the Song. And he would certainly have not used verbal echoes of the divine names if he were seeking to remove any reference to God in the Song. By substituting similar-sounding names of animals symbolizing love for the divine name and then incorporating these into a divine oath formula, the refrain succeeds in inextricably linking Love (personified in the oath) with the divine presence without thereby divinizing sex.⁵

George M Schwab has accurately captured the use of circumlocutions for the divine name in this verse:

In the Bible, there is no case where one swears by zoological specimens. . . . The girl desires the daughters of Jerusalem—and the author desires the reader—to swear by God not to stir up love until it pleases. . . . The girl wants the young women to take an oath by the gazelle and doe. These terms serve as circumlocutions for God Almighty, the Lord of Hosts. But they are also used as symbols throughout the Song for sexual endowment, appeal, comeliness, and fervor. The words, then, exist with three referents: animals in a symbolic forest, the divine warrior God Almighty and his Hosts, and ardent affection. . . . Thus the terms combine the concept of God with the concept of love and its power. The girl desires the daughters of Jerusalem to swear by sexuality and God—and these two concepts are fused into a single image. The Song should then be read as if love were conceived as a divine attribute of God. . . . Love is not simply a matter of feelings, social contracts, or trysts in the wood.⁶

The Voice of God

Let us move from the dominant recurring refrain of the Song to its twin apexes. There is wide scholarly agreement that the two high points of Canticles are 4:16–5:1 and 8:5–7. One is the structural/symmetrical center of the Song; the other is the thematic peak. Landy refers to these passages as "the two central foci: the centre and the conclusion."⁷ Ernst Wendland calls them the "middle

⁴ See, e.g., Gen 24:3; cf. Gen 14:22–23; Josh 9:19; Judg 21:7; 1 Sam 24:21; 28:10; 2 Sam 19:7; 1 Kgs 1:30; 2:8, 23, 42; 2 Chron 36:13; Neh 13:25; Isa 48:1; 65:16; Jer 12:16; Zeph 1:5.

⁵ Note that the ancient versions recognized the link with God in this verse. The LXX translates "by the powers and forces of the field," and the Targum, "by the Lord of Hosts and by the Strength of the land of Israel."

⁶ Schwab, 43, 47–48.

⁷ Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 51.

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climax” and “final peak” of the Song respectively,⁸ and amasses a persuasive display of literary evidence to support the choice of these passages as the Song’s twin summits.⁹

Many scholars recognize that Song 4:16–5:1 comes at the very center of the symmetrical literary structure of the Song. I concur with those commentators who also conclude that it is probably the Voice of God himself that resounds in the climactic last line of this central apex to the Song, giving his divine benediction upon the marriage and its consummation: “Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!” (5:1e). Many suggest that it is the groom extending an invitation to the guests to join in the wedding banquet. But this is improbable since the two terms “friends” (*rē’îm*) and “lovers” (*dôdîm*) used in 5:1e are the terms used elsewhere in the Song for the *couple*,¹⁰ not for the companions/guests. If the terms in 5:1e refer *to* the couple, they could not be spoken *by* either bride or groom. The “omniscient” narrator/poet at this high point in the Song seems to have a ring of divine authority and power—to be able to bestow a blessing and approbation upon the consummation of the marriage of the bride and groom. I find it most likely that the Voice of 5:1e is that of Yahweh himself, adding his divine blessing to the marriage, as he did at the first Garden wedding in Eden. In the wedding service, only he has the ultimate authority to pronounce them husband and wife. On the wedding night, only he is the unseen Guest able to express approbation of their uniting into one-flesh.¹¹

God’s voice is the central, and yes, the omniscient Voice. His authoritative voice here at the climax to the Song returns us to Eden, to another divine approbation upon the sexual union he already had proclaimed “very good” in the beginning. By speaking here at the focal point of the Song, and speaking to both lovers, he underscores that sexual fulfillment is in the center of the divine will for *both* partners.

The Covenant Name of God: Yahweh

The *echo* of God’s names resonates in the dominant recurring refrain of the Song (2:7; 3:5; cf. 8:4), and the actual *voice* of God resounds from the Song’s

⁸ Ernst R. Wendland, “Seeking a Path Through a Forest of Symbols: A Figurative and Structural Survey of the Song of Songs,” *JOTT* 7/2 (1995): 41.

⁹ Wendland, 41–46.

¹⁰ Cant 5:16; 1:13–14, 16; 2:3, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17; 4:10, 10, 16; 5:2, 4, 5, 6, 6, 8, 9 (4x), 10, 16; 6:1, 1, 2, 3; 7:10 (ET 9), 11 (ET 10), 12 (ET 11), 13 (ET 12), 14 (ET 13); 8:5, 14.

¹¹ Here I concur with Joseph C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex: The Biblical Guide to Married Love* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1977), 86: “The poet seems to say this is the voice of God Himself. Only the Lord could pronounce such an affirmation. He, of course, was the most intimate observer of all. Their love came from Him (Song 8:7). Thus, the Lord pronounces His full approval on everything that has taken place. He encourages them to drink deeply of the gift of sexual love.” So also S. Craig Glickman, *A Song for Lovers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976), 25: “In the final analysis this must be the voice of the Creator, the greatest Poet, the most intimate wedding guest of all, the one, indeed, who prepared this lovely couple for the night of his design.”

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central summit (5:1). But when one moves to Canticles' thematic climax and conclusion, the great paean to love (8:6), the actual *name* of Yahweh makes its single explicit appearance in the book, and his flaming theophanic presence encapsulates the entire message of the Song. Song 8:6 reads:

For love is as strong as death,
Ardent love as relentless/intense as Sheol;
Its flames [*rēšāpeyhā*] are flames of fire [*rišpēy ʿēš*]
The very flame of Yah(weh) [*šalhebetyā*].¹²

Wendland demonstrates that “A host of Hebrew literary devices converge here [Cant 8:6] to mark this as the main peak of the entire message. . . . In this verse we have the fullest, most sustained attempt to describe (or is it evoke?) the supreme subject of the Song, namely ‘love.’”¹³ He also incisively points out that the Hebrew word selected by the inspired poet to occupy the “ultimate, climactic position”¹⁴ of this verse—and thus of the final peak of the Song—is *šalhebetyā* (“the flame of Yah[weh]”).

Some have suggested that this Hebrew word be excised from the text as a gloss,¹⁵ but there is no manuscript evidence for such emendation, and the word fits the context precisely. Murphy provides a sound assessment of the situation: “Some commentators have questioned the integrity of the text, but without substantial support from the ancient versions. Although the colon is short, with only four syllables, one need not conclude that the construction is a gloss.”¹⁶

The word *šalhebetyā* is a compound term, composed of the noun *šalhebet* (“flame”) and the suffix *-yā*. While the Ben Asher text of the MT does not separate this compound term, the Ben Naphtali tradition (as well as many manuscripts and editors [BHK]) divides the term into two words, *šalhebet-yāh*.¹⁷ The probable 3 + 2 rhythm of the poetry here may lend support to this separation of

¹² My discussion below will give the evidence for this translation.

¹³ Wendland, 43–44. The literary devices include, among other things: “strict parallelism (the first two lines); syntactic placement (the utterance—final key terms, ‘love’ and ‘ardor’); imagery (simile and metaphor); symbolism (death and fire); paradox (the compelling power of death [destructive] v. love [creative]; condensation (esp. the last line); an even rhythmic pattern (3 + 3 + 3) with variation (the last word/demi-line [?]); alliteration (the repeated [*s*] of lines 2–3) with possible onomatopoeia (imaging the hi-ss-ing of a fire); and an apocopated mention of the divine name (*-ya*) in ultimate, climactic position” (ibid.).

Schwab states a conclusion similar to Wendland’s: “What is expressed in Cant 8:6–7 can serve as a lens to bring into focus the whole Song of Songs’ conception of love” (61).

¹⁴ Wendland, 44.

¹⁵ E.g., Marvin H. Pope, *Song of Songs*, Anchor Bible, vol. 7C (Garden City: Doubleday, 1977), 670 (who lists various suggested emendations).

¹⁶ Murphy, 192.

¹⁷ See Michael V. Fox, *Song of Songs and Ancient Egyptian Love Songs* (Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1985), 170.

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yāh as an independent word.¹⁸ Whether separated or not, commentators are generally agreed that the *-yā* (or *yāh*) connected with *šalhebet* is the Hebrew for “Yah,” the shortened form of the Tetragrammaton, YHWH (Yahweh). The pointing of the MT clearly suggests this conclusion. This fits the pattern of other words which have the apocopated suffix *-yā*, “Yah(weh).” The apocopated form of Yahweh, Yah, often has the *mappîq* dot in the final *he* esp., when appearing by itself (e.g. Ps 118:5) or joined by a *maqēf* (e.g., Ps 117:2), but not necessarily when it is part of a longer word. See, for example, Jer 2:31, *ma’pēlyā* (“the darkness of Yah[weh]”), and many names with the theophoric ending (e.g., *yēdāyā* [Jedaiah, 2 Sam 12:25]; *yēkonyā* [Jeconiah, 1 Chr 3:16]; *hizqîyā* [Hezekiah, 2 Kgs 18:1]; etc.). The LXX apparently took *-yā* as a third person feminine singular pronominal suffix, but there is no good reason to abandon the MT pointing in favor of the LXX reading esp., since the Aramaic Targums apparently understood it along the lines of the MT, as referring to the divine name.

Yah(weh) As an Indication of the Superlative?

Although it is generally conceded that the name of Yah(weh) appears in this passage, many insist that this is simply another instance of the Hebrew idiom for expressing the superlative, i.e., “A most vehement flame.”¹⁹ This is a theoretical possibility, although valid examples of using a divine name to express the superlative in the Hebrew Bible are not nearly as common as has been claimed,²⁰ and any instance of the covenant name *yāh* (or the full Tetragrammaton YHWH) ever being used as a superlative has been questioned. So, e.g., the statement of A. M. Harman: “Many modern discussions assume that ‘flames of Yah’ is yet another instance of the divine name being used as a superlative. It is true that *’elohim* may be used in this way but not the covenant name *yah* which occurs here (similarly the use of *yahweh* in Gen. 35:5 and 1 Sam. 26:12 need not be

¹⁸ See Raymond Tournay’s note in *Le Cantique des Cantiques*, ed. André Robert and Raymond J. Tournay (Paris: Gabalada, 1963), 453; idem, “Les Chariots D’Aminadab (Cant. vi 12): Israël, Peuple Théophile,” *VT* 9 (1959): 307; cf. Murphy, 192.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Duane Garrett, “Song of Songs,” in Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 23B (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 255, who argues that the term “should not be taken as an actual reference to the name of God. The ending here has virtually lost all theological significance, and it simply functions adjectivally for ‘mighty’ or the like.” Cf. Bloch and Bloch, *Song of Songs*, 213; and Gordis, *Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 26, n. 90; and various modern versions (RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, NIV [although the margin reads “like the very flame of the Lord”], etc.).

²⁰ I concur with Landy when he writes: “While I concede that the name of God may sometimes be used idiomatically, as a vague connotation of grandeur, the instances most commonly referred to are not always convincing [sic] e.g. Nineveh was a very great city before God (Jonah 3.3); it is the concern of God for the great city that is the point of the parable” (Landy, 315, n. 114). Landy then points to other passages (Ps 36:7 and Ps 80:11) that he argues are not superlatives but indicate the “divine domicile.”

explained as a superlative).”²¹ Carey Walsh states categorically, “While the generic term for god does function as a semantic device for superlatives, this [Song 8:6] verse would be the sole case where the proper name of Yahweh does. And it would be a surprising use, really. Considerable care [was] taken around the divine name in the Bible, illustrated by the Third Commandment, which prohibited the wrongful use of the divine name (Exod 20:7). . . . The reverence toward the divine name makes it unlikely that it was used as a mere stylistic device in the Song.”²²

šalhebetyâ as “the Flame of Yahweh”

A number of crucial considerations have led me to the conclusion that I share with dozens of commentaries and translations²³—that the expression *šalhebetyâ* in this context moves beyond the superlative to describe “the very flame of Yahweh.” I summarize the evidence under seven points.

First, the *šapʿel* or causative verbal root of *šalhebet* (common in Aramaic/Syriac), suggesting the meaning “causing to flame,” supports the conclusion that the construct relationship here is best interpreted as a subjective genitive, with Yah(weh) the cause or source of the flame.²⁴ As Christian Ginsburg notes, “this predicate does not state the flames of love are ‘most vehement,’ but affirms that they emanate from the Eternal . . . [*Yāh*] is the genitive of cause or origin.”²⁵

Second, the single occurrence of a precise terminological parallel to *šalhebetyâ* in the Hebrew Bible—*maʿpēlyâ* (“darkness of Yah” [Jer 2:31]), also (like *šalhebetyâ*) a compound term with apocopated suffix *-ya*—most probably should not be taken as an example of a superlative usage, but rather be seen as referring to darkness originated by Yahweh. The only other occurrence of *maʿpēl* “darkness” in the Hebrew Bible (but without the *-yâ* suffix) is in Josh 24:7, where Yahweh reminds his people that “He put darkness [*maʿâpēl*] between you and the Egyptians” at the time of the Exodus by the Red Sea. After briefly describing the drowning of the Egyptians, the verse concludes: “And your eyes saw what I [Yahweh] did in Egypt. Then you dwelt in the wilderness a long time.” The passage in Jer 2:31, by utilizing a term used only once more in

²¹ A. M. Harman, “Modern Discussion on the Song of Songs,” *RTR* 37 (1978): 71. See the discussion of this point below.

²² Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 205.

²³ For a full bibliographical listing, see my forthcoming monograph, *Flame of Yahweh: A Theology of Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, forthcoming).

²⁴ See Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs: Three Volumes in One*, trans. M. G. Easton, vol. 6 of Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, repr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 3:147.

²⁵ Christian David Ginsburg, *The Song of Songs and Coheleth [Commonly Called Ecclesiastes]: Translated from the Original Hebrew, with a Commentary, Historical and Critical* (1857 and 1861; repr.; New York: Ktav, 1970), 188.

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the Hebrew Bible, appears to be an intertextual echo of the Joshua passage: it is also set against an Exodus backdrop (cf. Jer 2:2, 6, 18), and the single v. 31 has the same terms/motifs of Josh 24:7: *midbar* (“wilderness”), *ma’âpêl* (“darkness”), and “Israel/my people.” Both passages allude to the incident recorded in Exod 14:19–20, where God himself was the pillar of darkness to the Egyptians and a pillar of light to Israel. The Joshua passage captures this divine causation of the darkness by explicitly stating, “your eyes saw what I, Yahweh, did in Egypt.” The compressed Jeremiah allusion likewise captures the divine connotations to the darkness by adding the suffix *-yâ* to the word *ma’âpêl* (“darkness”). The resulting compound term *ma’pēlyā* is not just the superlative “deep darkness,” but in actuality “darkness of Yah,” a darkness originating with and caused by Yahweh.²⁶

Third, the *immediate context* of the term *šalhebetyâ* in Song 8:6 seems to clearly go beyond the superlative meaning of “most vehement flame” or “lightning.” Mark Elliot points out that “Either this is a poor choice of metaphor, or it is claiming a supernatural quality for love. We are at this moment hearing something about the divine aspect of Love.”²⁷ As Landy writes, “To interpret ‘salhebetya’ as chance lightning does not do justice to it in the context of the Song as a whole or of this verse, with its confrontation of eternal forces.” Landy also points out (citing Lys) that since lightning was considered as divine fire, interpreting as “divine fire of the divine” would be tautologous. He notes further that *šalhebet* does appear twice more in the Hebrew Bible (both without the prefixed divine name): Job 15:30 and Ezek 21:3 [ET 20:47], where it could refer either to lightning or a forest fire.²⁸

The “eternal forces” of love, death, ardent love, and Sheol in this passage call for reference to another “eternal force”—i.e., Yahweh—not just common lightning-bolts. In fact, it has been pointed out that this passage is an implicit contrast (I might add even polemic) between Yahweh and the other prominent Canaanite/Ugaritic “deities” over whom he shines supreme: Death (*māwet*), Sheol (*šē’ôl*), Blazes (*rešep*), and Many Waters = primeval chaos (*mayim rabbîm*).²⁹

Fourth and fifth, the *structural position* of the term *šalhebetyâ* in the passage, and the *heightened literary artistry* that accompanies it here, points beyond a mere superlative usage. As Wendland states, these points, “the clipped and

²⁶ For this point I am indebted to one of my Andrews University Theological Seminary students who wrote a paper in my seminar on the Song of Songs: Ronaldo D. Marsollier, “Cant 8:6–7: Love as a Divine Gift: The Crown and Climax of the Song of Songs” (paper presented for the class OTST668 Psalms/Wisdom Literature: Song of Songs, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Mich., Winter 1999).

²⁷ Mark W. Elliot, “Ethics and Aesthetics in the Song of Songs,” *TB* 45 (1994): 147.

²⁸ Landy, 127, 316, n. 118.

²⁹ See Wendland, 44; cf. John G. Snaith, *The Song of Songs*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 121–122.

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suffixed reference to ‘Yahweh’, while it could be a mere idiomatic substitute for the superlative (i.e., the ‘hottest/brightest’ flame), in this structural position [the “ultimate, climactic position” of this verse] . . . and in conjunction with so much stylistic embellishment, definitely seems to signify something more [i.e., the flame of God].”³⁰ Landy shows how the structural placement of *šalhebetyâ* in the phrase *reššāpēhā rišpē ʿēš šalhebetyâ* (“its flames are flames of fire—the very flame of Yahweh”) gives this word the role of resolving the suspense built up earlier in the credo: “Rhythmically the phrase is characterized by compression: from ‘*reššāpayhā*’ to ‘*rišpē*’ to the monosyllable ‘*ʿēš*’. . . In fact, the double stress ‘*rišpē ʿēš*’ can only be followed by a pause, a moment of suspense, resolved in the long climactic apposition: ‘*šalhebetyâ*.’”³¹

Sixth, the larger canonical context points to Yahweh’s presence here in Song 8:6, for “fire betrays God’s presence throughout the Bible; substanceless, and shapeless, it is his element, the nearest approach to his image.”³² The presence of God in theophany is connected with flames of fire in numerous places in Scripture. See, e.g., already in Gen 3:24 (the use of the verb *škn* to describe the “placement” of the cherubim with “the flame of the whirling sword” may allude to the Shekinah presence in their midst; the “smoking oven” and “burning torch” that passed between the pieces of the covenant sacrifices in Gen 15 clearly represented the divine presence (Gen 15:17); God appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:2); and the pillar of fire definitely symbolized Yahweh’s presence (Exod 13:21; 40:38; Num 9:15).

So in the Song, love “is portrayed here as an amorous phlogiston, an unappeasable holocaust, Yahweh’s fire. Coming into love is like coming into God’s presence. . . .”³³ The closest and most crucial connection between fire and God’s presence is with regard to the sanctuary in Israel’s midst. Landy does not fail to grasp this connection with the sanctuary, and the application to love as the flame of God:

For in Israel, in the dialectics of king and kingdom, the flame of God is constantly alight only on the altar at its center; it communicates between heaven and earth. . . . In the sanctuary, the union and differentiation of lovers is a collective process; there, symbolically, the wealth of the kingdom is reduced to ashes, merged with the divine flame, and renewed. God, the source of life, is indwelling in the land, and guarantees its continuance. The shine is thus the matrix, an inner confine, and the hearth, the generative flame. There the king and the Beloved participate in the creative current that infuses the lovers at the centre of their world.³⁴

³⁰ Wendland, 44.

³¹ Landy, 129.

³² *Ibid.*, 127.

³³ Schwab, 63.

³⁴ Landy, 127.

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Landy is on the right track in connecting the flame of Yahweh with the divine flame on the altar of the sanctuary, but he has not gone far enough. He needs to go “further up and further in” (to use C. S. Lewis’ phrase)³⁵—further up to the heavenly sanctuary, and further in to the inner sanctum.

As a seventh and final point, I call attention to specific intertextual linkages with Song 8:6—even closer intertextuality than alluded to by Landy. In the divine theophanies related to the sanctuary, there is fire, flames of fire, not just at the altar, but also, and especially, in the very throne room of Yahweh. In the earthly sanctuary the pillar of fire hovered over the “Tent of the Testimony” (Num 9:15; Exod 40:38). The blazing glory of God filled the tent at its inauguration (Exod 40:34), and the Shekinah dwelt between the cherubim in the holy of holies (Exod 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4; 6:2; Pss 80:1; 99:1; Isa 37:16). In the heavenly temple the seraphim “burning ones” surrounded the throne (Isa 6:2), antiphonally singing “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and the whole temple was filled with smoke (Isa 6:4); there on the holy mountain of God the anointed cherub walked in the midst of “stones of fire” (Ezek 28:14, 16).

But beyond all this general intertextual background, there is one (and only one of which I am aware) OT passage that equals Song 8:6 with as much concentrated reference to flames/fire, and this passage describes the very throne of Yahweh, the Ancient of Days. Daniel 7:9–10, the intertextual twin of Song 8:6, overflows with fiery flames! In immediate succession, three times flames/fire are mentioned, matching (in Aramaic) almost precisely the three-fold (in Hebrew) mention of fiery flames in Song 8:6. (1) Dan 7:9—“His [the Ancient of Days’] throne was a fiery flame” (= the *reššāpêhā* [“its flames”] of Song 8:6); (2) Dan 7:9—“Its wheels a burning fire” (= the *rišpê’ēš* [“flames of fire”] of Song 8:6); and (3) Dan 7:10—“A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him” (= the *šalhebetyâ* [“flame of Yah(weh)”] in Song 8:6). These texts appear to be intertextually related, with Dan 7:10 as a parallel description of “the flame of Yahweh.” In canonical perspective, the “flame of Yah” in Song 8:6 is none other than the fiery stream that comes forth from the enthroned Yahweh himself. The Song’s Flame of Yahweh thus brings us into the heavenly Holy of Holies!

Objections Rebutted

In light of the multi-dimensional evidence supporting the acceptance of *šalhebetyâ* as an integral part of the text and constituting an explicit mention of Yahweh, the various arguments against this position fall to the ground. Landy cogently summarizes the main points of opposition and diffuses them by going to the root causes for such resistance to the presence of the divine Name in this passage. To those who wish to emend the text, he chides: “the postulation of glosses seems to me questionable, since it is uncomfortably like an excuse for eliminating anything inconvenient. Numerous and ungainly are the emendations

³⁵ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: MacMillan, 1956), 161–177.

proposed for ‘šalhebyâ.’” To those who do textual surgery as well as to those who attenuate the divine name into hyperbole, he cuts to their unstated (and perhaps unconscious) motivation: “misguided prurience.” To those who argue that this would be Yahweh’s sole entry in the book and therefore it cannot refer to Him, he replies that this “is no argument . . . it is equally as valid to say that its uniqueness reinforces its solemnity.” To those who maintain that sexuality is inconsistent with sanctity, he both reminds and reprimands: “References and comparisons to divinity are found in the love-literature of all ages . . . It is a remarkable irony that just those commentators who populate the Song with concealed deities refuse to recognise his presence there when he comes to the surface!”³⁶

Significance and Implications

Landy has rightly assessed the importance of *šalhebyâ* in the wisdom credo of Song 8:6–7 and of the entire book. He states it dramatically: “‘šalhebyâ’ ‘the flame of God’ is the apex of the credo, and of the Song.”³⁷ LaCocque concurs: “‘a flame of Yah[weh].’ . . . The whole of the Canticle is encapsulated in this phrase.”³⁸ And Wendland summarizes the profound implication from this phrase: “YHWH is the Source not only of love in all its power and passion, but also of the paired, male-female (= marriage) relationship in which love is most completely and intimately experienced.”³⁹

If the blaze of love, ardent love, such as between a man and woman, is indeed the Flame of Yahweh, then this human love is explicitly described as originating in God, “a spark off the Holy Flame.” It is therefore, in a word, *holy* love.⁴⁰ Such a conclusion has profound significance for the whole reading of the Song of Songs—and for the quality and motivation of human sexual love. I explore this significance more fully in a forthcoming monograph,⁴¹ but I briefly state here that Song 8:6 makes explicit what was already implicit in the woman’s adjurations of her companions not to awaken love until it is ready (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). As already hinted in these verses by the play on words with the names of God, love is not ready capriciously or randomly, but according to the will of him from whom this holy love originated.

³⁶ Landy, 127, 315–316.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁸ André LaCocque, *Romance She Wrote: A Hermeneutical Essay on the Song of Songs* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), 172.

³⁹ Wendland, 44.

⁴⁰ John P. Richardson writes: “whilst the *Song of Songs* is certainly a celebration and endorsement of human eroticism it is surely also in some sense a sacralization of it” (“Preaching from the *Song of Songs*: Allegory Revisited,” *ERT* 21 [1997]: 256). This is not in the cultic sense, as with the sacralization of sex in fertility cults, but “holy” as God is holy—unique, “set apart” *from* the secular and *for* relationship.

⁴¹ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, chap. 14.

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Song 8:6 also makes explicit what was implicit in the divine approbation of the lovers' consummation of their marriage on their wedding night (Song 5:1e). The love between husband and wife is not just animal passion, or evolved natural attraction, but a love approved—yes, even ignited—by Yahweh himself! The love relationship within the context of marriage is not only beautiful, wholesome, and good, but holy. Lovers then will treat each other with godly self-giving because they are animated by a holy, self-giving Love.

To put it another way, if human love is the very Flame of Yahweh, then this human love at its best—as described in the Song—points beyond itself to the Lord of love. The human “spark off the Eternal Flame” reveals the character of that Divine Flame. The love relationship of male and female, made in the image of God, reflects the I-Thou love relationship inherent in the very nature of the triune God. The various characteristics and qualities of holy human love that emerge from the Song of Songs—mutuality, reciprocity, egalitarianism, wholeness, joy-of-presence, pain-of-absence, exclusivity (yet inclusiveness), permanence, intimacy, oneness, disinterestedness, wholesomeness, beauty, goodness, etc.—all reflect the divine love within the very nature of God's being. By beholding the love relationship within the Song, and within contemporary godly marriages reflecting the relationship depicted in the Song, one may catch a glimpse of the divine holy love. These marriages “preach” to us of the awesome love of God!

In the final analysis, then, the allegorical interpretation of the Song may be right in its *conclusion* that the Song reveals God's love for his people, although wrong in the *way* in which the conclusion is reached. The human love relationship between Solomon and Shulamit is not the worthless “husk” to be stripped away *allegorically* to find the kernel, the “true” meaning, the love between God and his covenant community. Rather the love relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, described in the Song, has independent meaning and value of its own to be affirmed and extolled, while at the same time this human love is given even greater significance as, according to the Song's climax (8:6), it *typologically* points beyond itself to the divine Lover. Far different from the *allegorical* approach, with its fanciful, externally-and-arbitrarily-imposed meaning alien to the plain and literal sense, the Song itself calls for a *typological* approach,⁴² which remains faithful to, and even enhances, the literal sense of the Song, by recognizing what the text itself indicates—that human love typifies the

⁴² For the distinction between allegory and typology, see the author's discussion in *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs: Andrews U, 1981), 20, 81, 100–101. Since the appearance of my initial article on the theology of sexuality in the Song of Songs (Richard M. Davidson, “Theology of Sexuality in the Song of Songs: Return to Eden,” *AUSS* 27 [1989]: 1–19), others have (independently, it seems) pointed out the need for recognizing the typological (not allegorical) approach to the Song based upon the *šalhebet* (“Flame of Yahweh”) in Song 8:6. See esp., Wendland, 51, 53; and Murphy, 104.

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divine. Thereby human sexual love, already so highly esteemed elsewhere in Scripture, is here given its highest acclamation.

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God's Eternal Covenant and the Sabbath

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Traditionally, covenant has been defined as a formal agreement¹ between God and his people consisting of God's promises to them of blessings and salvation. The people were then required to perform some actions that in the Old Testament mostly related to rituals in connection with the sanctuary. It was ratified or confirmed through an oath and/or sacrifice. Failure to perform these rituals was seen as a breach of the covenant. Unfortunately, little by little the popular emphasis became focused on the actions: if you performed them, you were right and acceptable, but if you didn't, you had failed. Ultimately, in the eyes of the people, perfect performance came to mean acceptance or salvation, while failure meant rejection or being lost.

The problem with this understanding is that salvation by works has never been a part of God's plan, neither in the Old nor the New Testament. No human being has ever been saved by his/her works . . . "for in thy sight no man living is righteous" (Psa 143:2)² and "by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom 3:20). But the Jewish leaders failed to understand this and therefore misapplied God's instructions and began to see the activities as an end in themselves, the performance of which would lead to acceptance by God. That attitude resulted in one of the key messages of the prophets: "Stop this empty performance. God is not interested in it" (see Isa 1:11–14; Amos 5:21–22). It was not because they were doing something wrong or because God had suddenly changed his mind, but in many cases the performance had become an empty ritual and was no longer an expression of the people's inmost desires. God had always wanted all their actions to be an expression of their hearts' desire; even an external act such as circumcision was to be an expression of an inner attitude of love and servitude (Deut 10:16; 30:6).

¹ Cf. *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary*, "A written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action."

² All scriptural citations are taken from the NASB.

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What does this have to do with the covenant? “Covenant” is translated from the Hebrew term *berit*, the basic meaning of which is still uncertain. Scholars generally believe, however, that it refers to some kind of a bond or a binding agreement between two partners.³ The English word “covenant” conveys quite well what it is all about: *co[n]*, meaning “together,” and *venant*, from the Latin *venire*, meaning “to come.” Covenant is thus the formalization of a decision by two partners to “come [and stay] together,” based on a preceding action of goodwill by the initiator through which he shows his care or concern for the recipient.

Recently, the attention of scholars has been drawn to this relational aspect of the covenant. In what has been referred to as a “groundbreaking article,” one scholar has pointed out that rather than being a dry formality between strangers, covenants are about kinship and originated as a “legal means by which the duties and privileges of kinship may be extended to another individual or group,” and it is in that context that we should also understand ancient Israelite marriage: it is the means by which a bride enters a kinship relationship with the groom’s kin.⁴

As God introduced his plan of redemption to Moses, he expressed the essence of the covenant—“I will take you for my people and I will be your God” (Exod 6:7).⁵ This expression and variations of it is repeated more than thirty times in the Bible, usually with the concept of the covenant being either explicit or implied in the context.⁶ It expresses a close personal relationship similar to that of a family. In many respects a covenant is like a marriage. Both involve a commitment, which is expressed by the man when he, in effect, says to his partner, “I want you to be my wife, and I will be your husband,”⁷ which, again, is parallel to the covenant formula: “I’ll be your God, and you will be my people.” This is why marriage is the most frequently used illustration in the OT of the

³ See M. Weinfeld, “ברית·*berith*” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 253–56.

⁴ Frank M. Cross, *From Epic to Canon* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998), 3–21. See also Nelly Stienstra, *YHWH is the Husband of His People* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993); Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics As Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); and Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

⁵ See also Deut 29:12–13.

⁶ Most frequently found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel (seven times in each book).

⁷ See Jer 3:14 and Ezek 16:8 and its opposite divorce formula in Hos 2:2. The same formula is also found in documents from a Jewish community at Elephantine in Egypt from the 5th century BC: “I have come to your house and asked of you the woman Yehoyisma, your sister, for marriage. And you gave her to me. She is my wife and I am her husband from this day and forever. . . . If tomorrow or another day Anani shall rise up . . . and say, ‘I divorce my wife Yehoyisma, she shall not be to me a wife’ the divorce money is on his head. . . . And if Yehoyisma divorces her husband Ananiah and says to him, ‘I divorce you, I will not be to you a wife’ the divorce money is on her head” (Papyrus 7, lines 3, 4, 21, 22, 24, 25).

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relationship between God and his people,⁸ and unfaithfulness is seen as adultery.⁹

The day on which this commitment is formalized then becomes a reminder/memorial of that relationship. In the case of marriage that day is the wedding day; in the case of the covenant the Scriptures identify it as the Sabbath, the sign of the covenant (Exod 31:13, 17).¹⁰ These days represent historical facts that nothing or no one can change any more than they can change a birthday. No day or institution can replace a wedding day for two lovers as long as they remain in a faithful relationship with each other. It is only if either partner decides to shift his/her loyalty to a different partner that the "memorial" of their union can be changed. The same is true of the Sabbath. As long as people recognize and accept what the covenant stands for, nothing and no one can replace the significance of the Sabbath, which represents the essence of the covenant—"I am your God, you are my people."¹¹ Even the Roman Catholic Church, which assumes the credit for having transferred the sanctity of the Sabbath to Sunday, sees this significance of the Sabbath and also acknowledges that the seventh day is the Biblical memorial of creation and redemption.¹²

God has always worked with humanity within the context of a covenant, from the time of Adam at Creation (Hos 6:7) to the Earth made new (Rev 21:7). Its essence has always been the same: "I am your God; you are my people."

⁸ See, for instance, Jer 31:32, "... my covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them."

⁹ A good example is Ezek 16:15–59 and Hos 2:2–13.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Meredith D. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 18–19: "[I]t is tempting to see in the sabbath sign presented in the midst of the ten words the equivalent of the suzerain's dynastic seal found in the midst of . . . the international treaty documents. . . . By means of his sabbath-keeping, the image-bearer of God images the pattern of that divine act of creation which proclaims God's absolute sovereignty over man, and thereby he pledges his covenant consecration to his Maker." It is also interesting to note the sequence and timing in Exod 24. In view of E. G. White's comment in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 313, that Moses was summoned to meet with God on the mountain on the Sabbath (vs. 16–18), it appears that the formal ratification of the covenant (vs. 4–8) may have taken place on the previous Sabbath.

¹¹ See Kline, 18–19: "By means of his sabbath-keeping, the image-bearer of God images the pattern of that divine act of creation which proclaims God's absolute sovereignty over man, and thereby he pledges his covenant consecration to his Maker. The Creator has stamped on world history the sign of the Sabbath as his seal of ownership and authority."

¹² See the Papal Letter *Dies Domini*, 1998 §§ 12, 14: "[T]he Old Testament . . . links the 'sabbat' commandment not only with God's mysterious 'rest' after the days of creation (cf. Ex 20:8–11), but also with the salvation which he offers to Israel in the liberation from the slavery in Egypt (cf. Deut. 5:12–15). The God who rests on the seventh day, rejoicing in his creation, is the same God who reveals his glory in liberating his children from Pharaoh's oppression. Adopting an image dear to the Prophets, one could say that in both cases *God reveals himself as the bridegroom before the bride* (cf. Hos. 2:16–24; Jer. 2:2; Isa. 54:4–8)." "If God 'sanctifies' the seventh day with a special blessing and makes it 'his day' *par excellence*, this must be understood within the deep dynamic of the dialogue of the Covenant, indeed the dialogue of 'marriage'."

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Therefore it is referred to as the eternal covenant.¹³ But whenever there has been a major change in human experience that has affected humanity's relationship with God, God has adjusted some of its application details to meet human needs at that time.¹⁴ That is why we find God establishing a covenant with Noah at the time of the flood, a time of new beginnings in a new world environment (Gen 9:9–17). Then God adjusted it to meet a new situation as he called Abram to be the father of a great nation (Gen 15:18), and again as he called Israel out of Egypt and formed it into his special people at Mt. Sinai (Exod 19–24). Later, when Israel no longer wanted to be under the direct control of God through his prophets and judges but requested to be led by a king like the other nations, God confirmed his covenant with David (2 Sam 7:4–17). Again, as the monarchy was coming to an end, God indicated that the Jewish nation would no longer be his special covenant people, and the access to the covenant would be extended to all nations on an individual, personal basis. He proclaimed a “new” covenant with his people because of *their* failure to be faithful to God, even though he was their “husband” (Jer 31:31–33). It was then ratified and accepted by Christ on man's behalf when he came to live among men,¹⁵ and it would be open for anyone who wished to “enter”/join through acceptance of Him.¹⁶ The ultimate purpose of the covenant will be achieved when God completes the re-creation of the earth at the end of the age (Rev 21:7).

Many believe that the Sinai covenant, or the Old Covenant as it is usually called, was made exclusively with the Jewish nation and limited to it alone. Closer investigation, however, reveals that God meant for it to be more inclusive. As Moses reviewed the history and experience of Israel before entering the Promised Land, he said about the Sinai experience:

You stand today, all of you, before the Lord your God: your chiefs,
your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel,

¹³ Fifteen times in the Old Testament: in Gen 9:16; 17:7, 13, 19; Lev 24:8; 2 Sam 23:5; 1 Chron 16:17; Psa 105:10; Isa 24:5; 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 37:26; and once in the New Testament, in Heb 13:20. It is also significant to note that the Old Testament never speaks of covenants in the plural—only singular, even though it is associated with various individuals, which supports the idea that God only had one covenant which he adapted to the needs of the different individuals and times.

¹⁴ These “adjustments” did not affect the contents of or the commitment to the basic, eternal covenant of which the Sabbath is a sign.

¹⁵ Cf. Luke 1:72–74 and Heb 8:6. It is interesting to notice that the word for “make (a new covenant)” in Heb 8:8 is *synteleo*, one of the key meanings of which is “carry out or bring into being something that has been promised or expected,” which implies that the covenant already existed, but was now “fully realized” or “consummated” in Christ in fulfillment of the prophecy in Dan 9:27 that the coming Messiah would “confirm a covenant with many in one week.”

¹⁶ Cf. Paul's “in-Christ” theology, such as: access to God being available in him (Eph 2:12); forgiveness of sins only available in him (Eph 4:32); and the totality of salvation only being available in Christ (2 Tim 2:10; Acts 4:12). See also G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 481–83.

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your little ones, your wives, *and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water,* that you may enter into the covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath which the Lord your God is making with you today, in order that *He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God,* just as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God and with those who are not with us here today. (Deut 29:10–15, emphasis added)

This is also confirmed in texts like Isa 56:1–8, which points out that the Sinai covenant¹⁷ was to be open for everyone to join by personal choice—even those who were usually classified as outcasts, such as eunuchs and foreigners. Both they and their sacrifices were to be fully accepted in the temple, and the temple itself was to be “a house of prayer *for all the peoples*” (v. 7, emphasis added), and not just for the Jews alone. Unfortunately, many of the Jewish leaders failed to recognize this fact and saw the covenant as a proof of *their* exclusive status with God to the exclusion of everyone else.

The “old” covenant at Sinai is also usually associated with works, sometimes even spoken of as a covenant of works,¹⁸ referring mostly to the external ritualistic requirements related to the sanctuary, but also including many aspects of daily life. The Biblical picture, however, is somewhat different. The Sinai covenant was not just about sanctuary rituals and works; it was much more inclusive. According to Deut 4:13, 9:11, and Exod 34:28, it was written on “two tablets of stone” and consisted of ten “commandments.”¹⁹ This means that what we usually perceive as requirements or commandments in actual fact are primarily statements about a relationship. This agrees with what we have already seen, that the covenant is primarily about a relationship between individuals or nations.

The basis for the covenant is love being revealed in actions that precede the covenant-making (see Deut 7:6–8) and call for a response of love (see Deut 6:4–9). As God prepared the people for entering into the covenant with him, he reminded them, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Exod 19:4). Scholars have also noted that the “ten words” come as a response to the introductory

¹⁷ See the comments by E. G. White in *Review and Herald*, June 23, 1904: “I have been instructed to direct the minds of our people to the 56th chapter of Isaiah. This chapter contains important lessons for those who are fighting on the Lord’s side in the conflict between good and evil. . . . ‘and taken hold of my covenant’. This is the covenant spoken of in . . . [Exod 19:5–9]. . . . God includes in his covenant all who will obey him.”

¹⁸ See for instance Ralph Allan Smith, “The Covenant of Works: A Litmus Test for Reformed Theology?” <http://www.berith.org/essays/litmus/>, 2003.

¹⁹ The Hebrew does not actually refer to them as “commandments” but rather as “words,” “expressions,” or “statements.”

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statement in Exod 20:2—"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"—and the grammatical form used in the "commandments" can either be translated as commands ("You *shall* not . . .") or as descriptors ("You *will* not . . ."), thus describing what God expects to see in the life of individuals who accept the reality that God has redeemed them from their place of slavery. They are thus not restrictive requirements or demands, but rather a guideline or a list of expectations as to what would be an appropriate response to the experience of having been redeemed.²⁰

The Ten Words are not commands, nor are they couched in command (i.e., imperative) language. They are simple future indicative verbs that indicate the future action that is the expected consequence of the preceding prologue: 'I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt . . . , (and therefore) you will have no other gods before me . . .' etc.²¹

The Sinai covenant did contain regulations concerning various external actions and activities, mostly associated with the sanctuary—among them circumcision. These acts, however, were never meant to be an end in themselves or even a means to an end. Rather, they were to be an external evidence of inward attitudes. This is clear from texts such as Deut 10:16, where God says of circumcision, "Circumcise then *your heart*, and stiffen your heart no more" (emphasis added). This is further clarified by Moses as he says, "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, [i.e.] to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut 30:6).²²

A similar holistic instruction is found concerning the Sabbath. The parallelism in Isa 56:2 indicates that "keep[ing] from profaning the Sabbath" is about "keep[ing one's] . . . hand from doing *any evil*" (emphasis added). Ezekiel confirms the same when he says "they [the people] . . . profaned my sabbaths, for their heart *continually* went after their idols," and "they profaned my sabbaths, [as] their eyes were [fixed] on the idols of their fathers" (Ezek 20:16, 24; emphasis added). These texts indicate that any neglect of the ideals of the covenant is regarded as a breach of the Sabbath in the same way as any marital unfaithfulness is a breach of the marital vows given on the wedding day. Observance of a fixed day does not replace failed relationship. Being unfaithful to God in the

²⁰ See Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), 297. On the role and function of the ten "words" he makes the following observation: "The God whose saving will is manifested in history has already made Himself a people. This is what history is about. What is wanted is a means of response, a commitment to the sovereign, and a response which can be lived. Hence the stipulations which serve to define the already extant relationship so that it can be lived out in one's ordinary life. One does not earn a contracted reward, one lives a covenanted relationship. As a faithful vassal one gives tribute, a mark of submission, and willing service."

²¹ George E. Mendenhall and G. A. Herion, "Covenant," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1184.

²² See also texts such as Deut 6: 5–6; and 10:12.

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week negates the bond of which the Sabbath is a sign. True Sabbath-keeping is thus not limited to 24 hours of not-working or church attendance on Sabbath morning. It involves more than that. It actually involves a particular kind of a lifestyle, influenced by a close personal relationship with God, of which the Sabbath-day is a weekly memorial. The way the Sabbath-day is observed becomes a reflection of one's relationship with God through the week, in the same way as a celebration of a wedding anniversary is a reflection of the relationship married partners have had with each other through the year, but is not limited to their "feeling" on the anniversary itself. Also, observing the Sabbath is not something that *has* to be done *in order to obtain* something from God or to please him, but it is kept in recognition of the fact of having been saved (cf. Exod 20:2), and in *response* to the benefits being enjoyed from the relationship with Him. At the same time, it is also a sign of *God's* commitment to the covenant—He is, and will remain, our God-Creator-Husband-Redeemer.

The question might be rightfully asked as to where the "new" covenant fits in.²³ A theologian has pointed out that what was new about the "new" covenant was not its contents, but the fact that the people had lost sight of what God's eternal character was all about.²⁴ A superficial reading of Jer 31 and Heb 8 seems to indicate that the "old" covenant was to be replaced by a "new" one because the former was faulty. A more careful reading, however, reveals that this was not the case. There was no problem with the covenant that necessitated its replacement. The problem was with the people—they failed to remain faithful to God, their "husband" and savior.²⁵ The essence or substance of both—"I will be their God, and they shall be my people"—is the same (Jer 31:33; cf. Deut 29:12–13); so also is their purpose and expectations. The purpose of both is the people's salvation, well-being, and acceptance/forgiveness,²⁶ and both expect obedience to God's statutes and ordinances.²⁷ Their differences are usually found to be mainly in the people to whom they were directed and where they were recorded. It is true that the "old" was given to the nation of Israel,²⁸ whereas the "new" was directed to mankind in general because the wall of separation had been broken down.²⁹ However, as has been pointed out above, the "old" was meant to be open for all, even though it was to be mediated through

²³ It is not within the scope of this paper to deal with a detailed comparison/evaluation of these covenants, but only to highlight some key issues as they relate to God's "eternal" covenant.

²⁴ E. G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1955), 74. The same is true about the "new" commandment. Its contents were already present in the Old Testament (see Lev 19:18 and Deut 6:5), but had been largely forgotten by the people by the time of Jesus.

²⁵ "My covenant which *they* broke" (Jer 31:32); "... finding fault with *them*" (Heb 8:8; emphasis added).

²⁶ Compare Exod 6:7; 20:2; Deut 6:24; Jer 31:34; Ezek 36:26–27.

²⁷ Compare Exod 19:5; Deut 4:13; and Ezek 36:27; 11:20.

²⁸ Exod 19:1–6;

²⁹ See Eph 2:11–15.

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the nation of Israel. But because of their failure to do so, the “new” was no longer to be committed to or mediated through a single nation. It is also true that the “new” was to be written on the heart,³⁰ whereas the “old” was written on two tablets of stone,³¹ but God expected the people to “transfer” it to their heart, so that their obedience would be from their heart and not just a blind following of an external list of requirements.³²

God has always wanted a heart religion, not just external conformity (see Deut 6:6; 11:18).³³ When the people failed to internalize God’s instructions but held on to the required rituals detached from their original relational roots, they were no longer acceptable to God—they had become meaningless, just as an anniversary is meaningless if there is no relationship to commemorate (see Isa 1:11–15; Hos 2:11; Amos 8:4, 5, 10). Paul seems to emphasize the same truth in Col 2:17, where he points out that any festival or religious ritual is just an empty shadow if Christ (“the body”) is not in it, for Christ is the one who gives meaning to whatever we do.³⁴ Apart from him, everything is meaningless—no matter how well or how long it is “performed.” Therefore, Paul says, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

Sabbath is like a wedding anniversary that only has meaning for those who are married and have a loving relationship with their spouses. And the closer the relationship, the deeper significance the wedding anniversary will have. In the same way, the closer the relationship is with God, the deeper and more significant meaning will the Sabbath and any other “covenant-activity” have. Also, within God’s eternal covenant there is life and blessings, but outside there is death, for God alone is the source of all life and bounty. The plan of salvation, however, is about God’s efforts to bring man back from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of his Son (Col 1:14). Then the purpose of the covenant will be fully realized; God shall finally dwell among men forever, they shall be his people, and he will be their God (Rev 21:3, 7), a fellowship they will commemorate

³⁰ Jer 31:33.

³¹ Deut 4:13; 9:9–10; Exod 34:28.

³² See Deut 11:18, 16; 8:2; 10:12.

³³ This was also true of the ancient Near Eastern international treaties, the structure and vocabulary of which probably formed the basis for the biblical covenant. The word for love, for instance, was part of diplomatic parlance in these treaties. In a treaty of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, vassals had to swear concerning Ashurbanipal, his heir, to “love him as yourselves.” In a document from king Ashurbanipal he speaks about someone “whose heart is whole to his master, (who) stood before me with truthfulness, walked in perfection in my palace . . . and kept charge of my kingdom. . . . I took thought of his kindness and decreed . . . his gift” (see Weinfeld, I:253–279).

³⁴ The concept of a “shadow” does not necessarily imply “type vs. antitype” but is often used in Greek to contrast what is empty by itself to that which is real and gives meaning to the empty shell (cf. a house and its shadow). See also Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian UP, 1977), 339–369; Herold Weiss, “The Law in the Epistle to the Colossians,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 34 (1972): 292–314; and Roy Yates, “Colossians 2,14: Metaphor of Forgiveness,” *Biblica* 71/2 (1990): 248–259.

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weekly “from sabbath to sabbath [as] all mankind will come to bow down before [him]” (Isa 66:23) in eternal thankfulness.

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The Divine Authority of Preaching and Applying the Word: Ellen G. White's Perspective in Relation to Evangelical Viewpoints

Nestor C. Rilloma

Rarely in an Adventist theological journal do we speak about preaching, the great work of the ministers of Jesus. Such a theme, though only occasionally suitable, should be full of interest to all, especially to the people of God. In what way should the gift of preaching be performed? What constitutes the special qualifications for it? How shall it be made most successful? How shall it best secure the blessing of God and aid in the advancement of His kingdom? These are inquiries which, while they may be of more special interest to those inducted into the full office of a minister of Jesus, should also interest those who look to the ministry as one of the highest sources of their instruction and are required to obey in the gospel those whom God has thus put over them.

By a careful investigation of the contemporary evangelical literature on preaching and the published writings of Ellen G. White, this article will answer two important questions. First, what is the general tenor of her writings in relation to the present evangelical point of view about the necessary components of preaching? Second, what is the importance of personal application in preaching, as seen in recent homiletical literature and White's writings? It is imperative that before these two questions are answered, the real picture of abuses in preaching be understood by all who thirst and hunger after the pure Word of God.

Abuses in Preaching Then and Now

In the field of homiletics there is a term to express abuses in preaching: "dis-exposition." We have all experienced dis-exposition as listeners. We can easily recall a Sabbath service in which a biblical text is presented, only to fade from view, never to return. Dis-exposition causes Sabbath indigestion. It is a natural feature of dis-exposition not to engage the text and its context. There is no attempt to convey the true meaning of the passage.

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Dis-exposition invites many abuses of the text. Peter Adam lists some of these in his book *Speaking God's Words*.¹ Kent Hughes adds to his list.² First, there is the de-contexted sermon. This occurs when the Scripture is wrenched from its surrounding context and mistakenly applied. An example of this is the preacher who used Revelation 11:10 as a Christmas text: "And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another." That preacher completely ignored the last part of the verse, which says, "because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth." That doesn't sound like a merry Christmas!

Second is the lensed sermon. The preacher sees every text through the lens of a favorite theme. That lens could be psychological, therapeutic, political, chauvinistic, social, or domestic, to name a few. No matter what the text, the preacher always ends up preaching a sermon on the home, social activities, or moral issues.

Third is the moralized sermon, in which every sermon has a moral. Take, for example, Paul's words in Philippians 3:13. The apostle's phrase "one thing I do" is stretched to teach the importance of having goals and goal-setting. Thus, personal and professional goals become the center piece of the sermon. Forget the next phrase in which Paul outlines his primary desire: "forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

In the fourth type of dis-exposition, the doctrinalized sermon, the Scriptures are used as proof-texts for the doctrinal preferences of the preacher. Every sermon champions the preferred theological leaning.

The fifth abuse comes from silenced sermons. The preacher actually preaches on details that the Scripture does not address. The sermon goes something like this: "Now the Bible does not tell us how Mary felt, but we can be sure she felt this way. Therefore, we ought to feel the same." We have even heard of sermons that have been preached from the animals' perspective at Jesus' birth.

While these five abuses are frightening, the most common type of dis-exposition today occurs because of the "homiletics of consensus." In this type of preaching, the preacher determines the congregation's need from the pollsters' analysis of felt needs and then bases the preaching agenda on those feelings. Certainly, all biblical exposition must be informed by and sensitive to perceived needs. But the problem with preaching to felt needs is that our deepest needs often go beyond our perceived needs. For example, most Christian couples feel the need for teaching on marriage and family, but they may have a far deeper need of understanding Romans 1-3, because a profound understanding of the

¹Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 102-103.

²Kent Hughes, "The Anatomy of Exposition: *Logos, Ethos, and Pathos*," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3/2 (Summer 1999): 44-58.

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human predicament will inform and give wisdom with regard to marriage and parenting.

William H. Willimon, dean of the chapel of Duke University, wrote an article entitled, “Been There, Preached That.” In it he asked rhetorically,

Do you know how disillusioning it has been for me to realize that many of these self-proclaimed biblical preachers now sound more like liberal mainliners than liberal mainliners? At the very time those of us in the mainline, old-line, sidelined were repenting of our pop psychological pap and rediscovering the joy of disciplined biblical preaching, these “biblical preachers” were becoming “user-friendly” and “inclusive,” taking their homiletical cues from the “felt needs” of us “boomers” and “busters” rather than the excruciating demands of the Bible. I know why they do this. After all, we mainline-liberal-experiential-expressionists played this game before the conservative evangelical reformed got there.³

A few paragraphs later, after warning against allowing the world to set our homiletical agenda, Willimon concluded the section by saying, “The psychology of the gospel—reducing salvation to self-esteem, sin to maladjustment, church to group therapy, and Jesus to Dear Abby—is our chief means of perverting the biblical text.”⁴

Ellen G. White never used the homiletical term “dis-exposition,” but her writings point to abuses mentioned above. In the chapter “Snares of Satan” in *The Great Controversy*, she points out:

In order to sustain erroneous doctrines or unchristian practices, some will seize upon passages of Scripture separated from the context, perhaps quoting half of a single verse as proving their point, when the remaining portion would show the meaning to be quite the opposite. With the cunning of the serpent they entrench themselves behind disconnected utterances construed to suit their carnal desires. Thus do many willfully pervert the word of God. Others, who have an active imagination, seize upon the figures and symbols of Holy Writ, interpret them to suit their fancy, with little regard to the testimony of Scripture as its own interpreter, and then they present their vagaries as the teachings of the Bible.⁵

White calls this process of homiletical dis-exposition a willful perversion of the Word of God. This perversion includes the following faulty practices in preaching: (1) using passages out of context, (2) quoting a text to prove a point, (3) imagining symbols and figures, (4) interpreting text to suit one’s opinion, and (5) presenting personal vagaries as teachings of Scriptures.

³William H. Willimon, “Been There, Preached That,” *Leadership Magazine* (Fall 1995): 75–76.

⁴Ibid., 76.

⁵Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1911), 521.

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The chapter “A Spiritual Revival” in *The Story of Prophets and Kings* points out the faults of present-day preaching. White admonishes church members in general and those who stand to preach to avoid the pitfalls of “dis-exposition.”

Christians should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise, and this preparation they should make by diligently studying the word of God and striving to conform their lives to its precepts. The tremendous issues of eternity demand of us something besides an imaginary religion, a religion of words and forms, where truth is kept in the outer court. God calls for a revival and a reformation. The words of the Bible and the Bible alone should be heard from the pulpit. But the Bible has been robbed of its power, and the result is seen in a lowering of the tone of spiritual life. In many sermons of today there is not that divine manifestation which awakens the conscience and brings life to the soul. The hearers cannot say, "Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?" Luke 24:32. There are many who are crying out for the living God, longing for the divine presence. Let the word of God speak to the heart. Let those who have heard only tradition and human theories and maxims, hear the voice of Him who can renew the soul unto eternal life.⁶

True Components of Preaching

Dis-exposition, as previously described above, is not a straw man that can be blithely torched. It is a serious problem that deserves careful thought. These abuses increasingly dominate the pulpits. These approaches to Scripture are not going to be replaced quietly and easily. Therefore it is necessary, as Adventists, to expound the true components of biblical preaching in the writings of Ellen G. White. This investigation will be seen in the three classical rhetorical categories of *Logos*, *Ethos*, and *Pathos*. These terms will not be used in their strict definition. Nevertheless, these categories, broadly understood and given Christian qualification, provide helpful headings in approaching the published writings of Ellen G. White in relation to the contemporary evangelical literature in homiletics.

Logos: The Preacher's Conviction About Scripture

Biblical preaching is preaching in service to the Word. To do this, a preacher must believe in the authority of Scripture and recognize the inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit. It presumes a belief in the authority of Scripture, but it is something more: a commitment to biblical preaching is a commitment to hearing God's Word. Christian preachers today have authority to

⁶Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1917), 626.

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speak from God only so long as they speak His words. Preachers are not only commanded to preach, they are commanded specifically to preach *the Word*.

The Authority of Scripture

Ellen White adheres to the position that the authority we attach to Scripture will determine the weight and prominence we give Scripture in our preaching. For preachers to present biblical sermons, they must recognize the infallibility, the sufficiency, and the potency of Scripture.

Infallibility

Biblical exposition comes only from those with a high view of the infallibility of Scripture. White recognizes the Bible as the infallible Word of God. On December 15, 1885, she wrote an article in *The Review and Herald* expressing her high regard for the Bible as infallible.

When God's Word is studied, comprehended, and obeyed, a bright light will be reflected to the world; new truths, received and acted upon, will bind us in strong bonds to Jesus. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed, the sole bond of union; all who bow to this Holy Word will be in harmony. Our own views and ideas must not control our efforts. Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible. Instead of wrangling with one another, let men exalt the Lord. Let us meet all opposition as did our Master, saying, "It is written." Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.⁷

Three years later she wrote an article entitled "The Faith That Will Stand the Test." She points out, "Had the Bible been received as the voice of God to man, as the book of books, as the one infallible rule of faith and practice, we would not have seen the law of Heaven made void, and the swelling tide of iniquity devouring our land."⁸ She further explains the authority of Scripture when people recognize its infallible nature, stating,

In order to exercise intelligent faith, we should study the Word of God. The Bible, and the Bible alone, communicates a correct knowledge of the character of God, and of his will concerning us. The duty and the destiny of man are defined in its pages. The conditions on which we may hope for eternal life are explicitly stated, and the doom of those who neglect so great salvation is foretold in the most forcible language.⁹

⁷Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, Book One (Washington: Review and Herald, 1958), 416.

⁸Ellen G. White, "The Faith That Will Stand the Test," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 10 January 1888, par. 11.

⁹Ellen G. White, "The Faith That Will Stand the Test," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 22 September 1910, par. 2.

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She concludes the article in a negative tone, pointing out the result of not recognizing the Scripture as the infallible Word of God to men. She says,

As men wander away from the truth into skepticism, everything becomes uncertain and unreal. No thorough conviction takes hold of the soul. No faith is exercised in the Scripture as the revelation of God to man. There is nothing authoritative in its commands, nothing terrifying in its warnings, nothing inspiring in its promises. To the skeptic it is meaningless and contradictory.¹⁰

The summary of White's position on the authority of Scripture is at the introduction of her famous book *The Great Controversy*. She balances the importance of explaining and applying the teachings of Scriptures. She writes,

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. . . . 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.¹¹

Sufficiency

While a high view of the infallibility of Scripture is essential to biblical preaching, it is not enough by itself. Preachers must wholeheartedly believe in the sufficiency of Scripture and embrace Scripture's own claim about this matter. They must personally own the conviction of Moses, who said, "Take to your heart all the words with which you shall command your sons to observe carefully, even all the words of this law. For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life" (Deuteronomy 32:46, 47). Such a belief is essential to a preacher's heart. The Scriptures were life to Moses and food to Jesus (Matthew 4:4; cf. Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3).

In the chapter "Later Reformers" of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, volume IV, White reviews the position of some of the reformers about the sufficiency of Scripture. She points out that "The grand principle maintained by Tyndale, Frith, Latimer, and the Riddleys, was the divine authority and sufficiency of the Sacred Scriptures. . . . The Bible was their standard, and to this they brought all doctrines and all claims."¹² She adds the name of John Trask and points out the deep conviction of the reformer about the sufficiency of Scriptures. She commends Trask for declaring "the sufficiency of the Scriptures as a guide for religious

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ellen G. White, "Introduction," *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1888), vii, viii.

¹²Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4 (Washington: Review and Herald, 1884), 173.

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faith” and that he “maintained that civil authorities should not control the conscience in matters which concern salvation.”¹³ White further believes that “As we search the Scriptures we find ground for confidence, provision for sufficiency.”¹⁴

Potency

Combined with a high view of the infallibility of Scripture and a belief in its sufficiency, we need confidence in the Bible’s potency. There is a passage in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress* where the warrior-heroes Mr. Great-heart and Mr. Valiant-for-truth converse during the respite after a battle. The two spiritual warriors sit to catch their breath following the fight. Mr. Great-heart gestures approvingly to Mr. Valiant-for-truth and says,

“Thou hast worthily behaved thyself. Let me see thy sword.” So he showed it to him. When he had taken it into his hand and looked thereon awhile, he said, “Ha! It is a right Jerusalem blade.” Then said Mr. Valiant-for-truth, “It is so. Let a man have one of these blades, with a hand to wield it and skill to use it, and he may venture upon an angel with it. . . . Its edges will never blunt; it will cut flesh, and bones, and soul, and spirit, and all.”¹⁵

This passage illustrates the unbridled potency of God’s Word. The author of Hebrews writes, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Hebrews 4:12, 13). His Word can penetrate the hearts of the greatest sinners of our age. It can cut away our own religious façade, leaving us flayed, exposed, and convicted. His Word is so powerful that when He wills it, it will pierce anyone!

In her writings, White never uses the word *potent* as far as the Bible is concerned. She employs a simpler term, *powerful*. Relating it to preaching, White strongly believes the Bible possesses power to change people’s lives through the working of the Holy Spirit. She points out,

While we are to preach the word, we can not impart the power that will quicken the soul, and cause righteousness and praise to spring forth. In the preaching of the word there must be the working of an agency beyond any human power. Only through the divine Spirit will the word be living and powerful to renew the soul unto eternal life. This is what Christ tried to impress upon His disciples. He taught that it was nothing they possessed in themselves which would give suc-

¹³Ibid., 181.

¹⁴Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1964), 228.

¹⁵John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1974), 283.

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cess to their labors, but that it is the miracle-working power of God which gives efficiency to His own word.¹⁶

Inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit

In addition to recognizing that the Word has authority, it is also important to recognize that the Word and the Spirit are closely connected. In a 1995 *Festschrift* article in honor of British preacher R. C. Lucas, Australian Old Testament scholar John Woodhouse made a compelling argument for preaching based on the inseparability of the Word of God and the Spirit of God. He says, “in biblical thought, the Spirit of God is as closely connected to speech.”¹⁷ Woodhouse concludes, “Precisely for this reason Scripture is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness: it is in the Word that God Himself speaks today. Therefore, the surest way to recover the ‘living’ Word of God is to recover preaching that truly expounds the Scriptures.”¹⁸ When the Word of God is expounded, there the Spirit speaks.

White agrees in stressing the inseparability of the Word and the Holy Spirit. She makes clear the role of the Spirit of God in relation to His Word. She writes,

You have the word of the living God, and for the asking you may have the gift of the Holy Spirit to make that word a power to those who believe and obey. The Holy Spirit's work is to guide into all truth. When you depend on the word of the living God with heart and mind and soul, the channel of communication will be unobstructed. Deep, earnest study of the word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will give you fresh manna, and the same Spirit will make its use effectual. The exertion made by the youth to discipline the mind for high and holy aspirations will be rewarded. Those who make persevering efforts in this direction, putting the mind to the task of comprehending God's word, are prepared to be laborers together with God.¹⁹

White explains the process that takes place when a preacher proclaims the Word of God. The process is under the supervision of the Holy Spirit as the Word reaches the avid listener. She reminds,

It is the efficiency of the Holy Spirit that makes the ministry of the word effective. When Christ speaks through the minister, the Holy Spirit prepares the hearts of the listeners to receive the word. The Holy Spirit is not a servant, but a controlling power. He causes the truth to shine into minds, and speaks through every discourse where the minister surrenders himself to the divine working. It is the

¹⁶Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1952), 64.

¹⁷John Woodhouse, “The Preacher and the Living Word: Preaching and the Holy Spirit,” in *When God's Voice is Heard* (Leicester: Intervarsity, 1995), 55.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6 (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, 1901), 163–164.

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Spirit that surrounds the soul with a holy atmosphere, and speaks to the impenitent through words of warning, pointing them to Him who takes away the sin of the world.²⁰

White advocates that the Spirit plays a major function in preaching. To her, the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of power to make preaching a life-changing force. She points out,

The preaching of the word is of no avail without the presence and aid of the Holy Spirit; for this Spirit is the only effectual teacher of divine truth. Only when the truth is accompanied to the heart by the Spirit, will it quicken the conscience or transform the life. A minister may be able to present the letter of the word of God; he may be familiar with all its commands and promises; but his sowing of the gospel seed will not be successful unless this seed is quickened into life by the dew of heaven. Without the co-operation of the Spirit of God, no amount of education, no advantages, however great, can make one a channel of light. Before one book of the New Testament had been written, before one gospel sermon had been preached after Christ's ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon the praying disciples. Then the testimony of their enemies was, "Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine." Acts 5:28.²¹

Ethos: The Preacher's Integrity

Ethos is simply what preachers are. It is their character. It is who they are as people. *Ethos* has to do with the condition of their inner life and with the work of the Spirit within, especially as it relates to their preaching. Biblical preaching is enhanced when preachers invite the Holy Spirit to apply the text to their own soul and ethical conduct.

The Preacher's Character

Phillips Brooks, the famous Episcopal bishop of Boston and the author of "O Little Town of Bethlehem," touched on this subject when he gave his famous definition of preaching in the 1877 *Yale Lecture on Preaching*. He said, "[P]reaching is the bringing of truth through personality."²² He then elaborated,

²⁰Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1915), 155.

²¹Ellen G. White, *The Desires of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1940), 671–672. See also Ellen G. White, "Who are the Sanctified?" *The Signs of the Times* (February 28, 1895), who writes, "When the Spirit of God moves upon the heart, it causes the faithful, obedient child of God to act in a manner that will commend religion to the good judgment of sensible-minded men and women. The Spirit of God illuminates the mind with the word of God, and does not come as a substitute for the word. The Holy Spirit ever directs the believer to the Word, and presents its passages to the mind, to reprove, correct, counsel, and comfort. It never leads its possessor to act in an unbecoming way, or to manifest extravagant and uncalled-for developments that bear not the least resemblance to that which is heavenly, and lower the standard of what is pure and undefiled religion in the minds of men."

²²Phillips Brooks, *Lecture on Preaching* (Manchester: James Robinson, 1899), 5.

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“Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching. The truth must come really through the person, not merely over his lips, not merely into his understanding and out through his pen. It must come through his character, his affections, his whole intellectual and moral being. It must come genuinely through him.”²³

In the early 1900s, William Quail carried the idea further by asking a rhetorical question: “‘Preaching is the art of making a sermon and delivering it?’ He himself answered it, ‘Why no, that’s not preaching. Preaching is the art of making a preacher and delivering that.’”²⁴

Ellen White also stresses the importance of the preacher’s character. She insists that living preachers should reflect the character of the Chief Shepherd. She writes,

The same Bible that contains the privileges of God's people, and his promises to them, sets forth also the sacred duties and solemn obligations of the shepherd who has charge of the flock of God. By comparing the living preacher with the divine picture, all may see whether he has the credentials from heaven,—likeness of character to him who is the Chief Shepherd. God designs that the teacher of the Bible should in his character and home life be an illustration of the principles of truth which he is teaching to his fellow-men.²⁵

She further emphasizes that a preacher should possess the same characteristics manifested by the Good Shepherd. She also points out that motive is the show-window of character. She states,

The preacher who bears the sacred truth for these last days must be the opposite of all this and, by his life of practical godliness, plainly mark the distinction existing between the false and the true shepherd. The Good Shepherd came to seek and to save that which was lost. He has manifested in His works His love for His sheep. All the shepherds who work under the Chief Shepherd will possess His characteristics; they will be meek and lowly of heart. Childlike faith brings rest to the soul and also works by love and is ever interested for others. If the Spirit of Christ dwells in them, they will be Christlike and do the works of Christ. Many who profess to be the ministers of Christ have mistaken their master. They claim to be serving Christ and are not aware that it is Satan's banner under which they are rallying. They may be worldly wise and eager for strife and vain-glory, making a show of doing a great work; but God has no use for them. The motives which prompt to action give character to the work. Although men may not discern the deficiency, God marks it.²⁶

²³Ibid., 9.

²⁴Quoted in Paul Sangster, *Doctor Sangster* (London: Epsworth Press, 1962), 271.

²⁵White, *Gospel Workers*, 243.

²⁶Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, Vol. 4 (Battle Creek: Review and Herald, n.d.), 377.

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The Preacher's Affections

However, nothing is more powerful than God's Word when it is expounded by one whose heart has been harrowed and sanctified by the Word he is preaching. Puritan Williams Ames said it exactly:

Next to the evidence of truth, and the will of God drawn out of the Scriptures, nothing makes a sermon more to pierce, than when it comes out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation. To this purpose it is very profitable, if besides the daily practice of piety we use serious meditation and fervent prayer to work to those things upon our own hearts which we would persuade others of."²⁷

Every appropriation of the truth preached will strengthen the preacher for preaching. Every repentance occasioned in his soul by the Word preached will be said of him, "His sermon was like thunder because his life was like lightning."²⁸

Theologically, Jonathan Edwards in his *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* has given us the best explanation of what must take place within us. Edwards did not use the word "affection" as we do to describe a moderate feeling or emotion or a tender attachment. By affection, Edwards meant one's heart, one's inclination, and one's will.²⁹ Edwards said, "For who will deny that true religion consists in a great measure in vigorous and lively actings and the inclination and will of the soul or the fervent exercises of the heart?"³⁰ Edwards then goes on to demonstrate from a cascade of Scriptures that real Christianity so impacts the affections that shape one's fears, one's hopes, one's loves, one's hatreds, one's desire, one's joys, one's sorrows, one's gratitudes, one's compassions, and one's zeals.³¹

White, in an article she wrote in 1881 entitled "Sanctification, The Life of John," makes a similar emphasis about the importance and necessity of the preacher's affection. She comments,

John's affection for his Master was not a mere human friendship, but the love of a repentant sinner, who felt that he had been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. He esteemed it the highest honor to

²⁷Quoted in Art Lindsley, "Profiles in Faith: William Ames, Practical Theologian," *Tabletalk* 7/3 (June 1983): 14.

²⁸Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount* (New York: Harper, 1960), 161, who quotes Cornelius A. Lapse, *The Great Commentary of Cornelius A. Lapse*, trans. Thomas W. Mossman (London: John Hodges, 1876) I:317.

²⁹Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (1747; rpt. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 24, where he explains: "This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the inclination; and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the will; and the mind, with regards to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart." Cf. 24–27.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 27.

³¹*Ibid.*, 31. Cf. 31–35.

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work and suffer in the service of his Lord. His love for Jesus led him to love all for whom Christ died. His religion was of a practical character. He reasoned that love to God would be manifested in love to his children. He was heard again and again to say, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." "We love him because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" The apostle's life was in harmony with his teachings. The love which glowed in his heart for Christ, led him to put forth the most earnest, untiring labor for his fellow-men, especially for his brethren in the Christian church. He was a powerful preacher, fervent, and deeply in earnest, and his words carried with them a weight of conviction.³²

Indeed, sermon preparation requires humble, holy, critical thinking. It allows the truth to harrow the preacher's heart. It is asking the Holy Spirit for insight. It is an ongoing repentance. It is utter dependence.

Pathos: The Pastor's Passion

The preaching event must also be an exercise in Spirit-directed *Pathos* or passion. A false passion can have much subtler roots. As Dr. Martin Lloyd-John observed,

A man prepares a message and, having prepared it, he may be pleased and satisfied with the arrangement and order of the thoughts and certain forms of expression. If he is of an energetic, fervent nature, he may well be excited and moved by that and especially when he preaches the sermon. But it may be entirely of the flesh and have nothing at all to do with spiritual matters. Every preacher knows exactly what this means. . . . You can be carried away by your own eloquence and by the very thing you yourself are doing, and not by the truth at all.³³

White, with a similar emphasis, reminds her readers that many preachers have preached a Christless sermon and are not affected by the truth they present before the people. With a rebuking tone, she says,

The preaching the world needs is not only that which comes from the pulpit, but that which is seen in the everyday life; not only Bible precepts, but Christlike characters and heaven-born practices; the living, loving disciples of Jesus who have felt that it was more precious to commune with Jesus than to have the most exalted positions and praise of men; hearts that are daily feeling the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, that are made strong and tender by inward con-

³²Ellen G. White, "Sanctification, The Life of John," *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 15 February 1881, par. 4.

³³D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959-60), II:266.

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flict and secret prayer, and whose lives though humble are eloquent with holy deeds—these are the kind of workers that will win souls to Jesus. In our ministry we must reveal Christ to the people, for they have heard Christless sermons all their lives.³⁴

In the chapter “The Message and Its Presentation,” White makes the distinction between those who preach with passion and those without. She makes the contrast when she writes:

There are men who stand in the pulpits as shepherds, professing to feed the flock, while the sheep are starving for the bread of life. There are long-drawn-out discourses, largely made up of the relation of anecdotes; but the hearts of the hearers are not touched. The feelings of some may be moved, they may shed a few tears, but their hearts are not broken. The Lord Jesus has been present when they have been presenting that which was called sermons, but their words were destitute of the dew and rain of heaven. They evidenced that the anointed ones described by Zechariah (see chapter 4) had not ministered to them that they might minister to others. When the anointed ones empty themselves through the golden pipes, the golden oil flows out of themselves into the golden bowls, to flow forth into the lamps, the churches. This is the work of every true, devoted servant of the living God. The Lord God of heaven cannot approve much that is brought into the pulpit by those who are professedly speaking the word of the Lord. They do not inculcate ideas that will be a blessing to those who hear. There is cheap, very cheap fodder placed before the people.³⁵

Passion and Personality

Passion can be demonstrated when a preacher raises his voice and flails his arms as if he is going to fly. But it can be equally present when the preacher talks quietly and slowly, calmly, and measurably.

According to John Piper, Sereno Dwight asked a man who had heard Jonathan Edwards preached if Edwards was an eloquent preacher. The reply was,

He had no studied varieties of the voice, and no strong emphasis. He scarcely gestured, or even moved; and he made no attempt by the elegance of his style, or the beauty of his pictures, to gratify the taste, and fascinate the imagination. But, if you mean by eloquence, the power of presenting an important truth before an audience, with overwhelming weight of argument, and with such intenseness of feeling, that the whole soul of the speaker is thrown into every part of the conception and delivery; so that the solemn attention of the whole audience is riveted, from the beginning to the close, and impressions

³⁴Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 17 (Maryland: E. G. White Estate, 1993), 73–74.

³⁵Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1946), 209.

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are left that cannot be effaced; Mr. Edwards was the most eloquent man I ever heard speak.³⁶

In 1897, White wrote an article, “Preach the Word,” revealing the need for preachers to be eloquent in proclaiming the truth and correcting errors. This is a good summary of her perspective on the right passion of a preacher reflected in his personality. She explains,

Satan can furnish men with endless excuses and evasions to cause them to neglect the duty of speaking words of warning to those who are erring, and of presenting the truth as it is in Jesus to souls who are perishing. The minister who loves to sermonize will be in danger of preaching to a great length, as though a multitude of words was all-essential, and thus he will become so weary that he will have neither disposition nor strength to engage in personal effort when he has an opportunity of coming heart to heart with his hearers. The minister should be ready to open the Bible, and according as circumstances shall require, read reproof, rebuke, warning, or comfort to those who listen. He should teach the truth, rightly dividing the word, suiting out portions that will be as meat in due season to those with whom he associates. Too many ministers neglect to deal faithfully with those with whom they come in contact. They leave plain dealing to be done by other ministers: for they do not want to run the risk of losing the friendship of those for whom they labor. If ministers would deal at the right time with those who err, they would prevent an accumulation of wrong, and save souls from death. If the work of reproof is neglected by one minister, and taken up by another, those who are reproofed, receive the impression that the minister who did not point out their errors was a good minister. But this is not the case; he was merely a preacher, not a worker together with God for the suppression of sin. In the meekness of Jesus, you should do the work which will give full proof of your ministry. You should show a heartfelt sorrow for sin, but manifest no unholy passion in reproofing the error. All your efforts must be made with long-suffering and doctrine; and if you see but meager results of your work, do not be discouraged. This experience will call for the manifestation of long-suffering and patience. Keep working, be discreet, be discerning, understand when to speak and when to keep silence.³⁷

The Necessity of Personal Application

While those committed to biblical preaching, including Ellen G. White, are convinced of the truth and the power of the biblical text, many are unclear as to the question: Are preachers responsible only for *explaining* the meaning of the

³⁶As cited in John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 49–50.

³⁷Ellen G. White, “Preach the Word,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 28 September 1897, par. 10.

text, or are they also responsible for showing their hearers how the passage *applies* in the life of the saved?

Objections to Application in Preaching

Contemporary evangelicals are not the only ones to struggle with this question. Karl Barth, reflecting his transcendent view of God and theology of revelation, questioned whether it was possible for any human being to apply Scripture. He insisted that being faithful to the text and also true to life in this age is “a serious difficulty” that has “no solution.”³⁸ Rather, the task of bridging the gap between the Bible and the life today remains in the hands of God alone. For Barth, application in preaching is merely talking about the text and contemporary life, while insisting that God must bridge the gap between the two. Application is inferential, not direct. An individual’s response results from an encounter with God Himself, regardless of the preacher’s work. Any attempt by the preacher at direct application might prejudice the encounter between God and the individual listener.³⁹

Dennison criticizes any emphasis on application in preaching, because many do so by attempting to find a point of contact between the text and the audience. He states,

Rather than seeing the hearers of the Word called and placed by grace within that Word and its flow of the drama of salvation, this approach, as unintentional as it may be, allows the contemporary situation to determine the Word’s relevance. Moreover, instead of seeing the hearers living by grace out of the heavenly world into which they have been introduced by God’s sovereign activity in the Word, this approach finds no place for the present eschatological and transcendent environment of the people of God, the very environment that sets them *above* their culture.⁴⁰

Dennison disdains the notion that preachers are responsible in determining Scripture’s relevance. On the other hand, he asserts,

Good preaching makes us and our contemporary situation meaningful in the text. In other words, good preaching doesn’t pull the Word into our world as if the Word were deficient in itself and in need of applicatory skills. Instead good preaching testifies and declares to us that we have been pulled into the Word which has its own marvelous sufficiency.⁴¹

³⁸Karl Barth, *Prayer and Preaching* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 108.

³⁹Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 20.

⁴⁰Charles G. Dennison, “Some Thoughts on Preaching,” *Kerux* 4 (December 1989): 8.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

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John MacArthur, Jr., though not opposed to the preacher developing general application in his sermons, rejects any obligation to do so. He downplays the need for sermon application, arguing that the Word of God has inherent power.

True expository preaching is actually the most effective kind of applicational preaching. When Scripture is accurately interpreted and powerfully preached, the Spirit takes the message and applies it to the particular needs of each listener. Apart from explicit general application in principlizing the main points in the exposition, the expositor is not compelled to give a set number of points of specific application before a sermon can have an applicational impact. This is not to say he should not make applications, but if the text is allowed to speak fully, applications will multiply far beyond what he can anticipate as the Spirit of God takes His Word and applies it to each listener.⁴²

The Need for Application

Despite the above criticisms and objections, we are convinced that biblical preaching which includes direct and explicit application to the lives of the hearers is the most effective. Some believe that application and translation of the text into contemporary life and specific situations is the work of the Holy Spirit. Such reasoning seems disingenuous at best. Why would the Holy Spirit require a preacher to explain the meaning of the text, but not to apply it? What biblical or moral principle makes exegesis the work of the preacher and application the exclusive province of the Spirit? More plausible is the belief that the Holy Spirit uses human means to accomplish both tasks involved in preaching.

Haddon W. Robinson notes, “Many homileticians have not given accurate application the attention it deserves.”⁴³ J. I. Packer admits that the present-day pulpit is weak in practical preaching.⁴⁴ Jerry Vines laments that the “subject of application in the work of exposition has not received sufficient attention.”⁴⁵ Harold T. Bryson predicts that “more than likely the concern for relevancy of

⁴²John MacArthur, Jr., “Moving from Exegesis to Exposition,” in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, ed. Richard Mayhew (Dallas: Word, 1992), 300.

⁴³Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Bakers, 1980), 89. Robinson also comments that “No book has been published devoted to the knotty problems raised by application” (90). Adams, however, takes up his challenge in *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*. While not fully addressing the reasons why application is necessary in preaching, Adams nevertheless states that it is. He bases his explanation solely on the nature of the task of preaching: “Is application necessary? Absolutely. And the reason is that preaching is heralding. It is not mere exposition. It is not lecturing on history—even redemptive history. It is not ‘sharing.’ It is authoritatively declaring both the good and the bad news of the Bible. It is forcibly bringing home to God’s people God’s message from God’s Word” (32).

⁴⁴J. I. Packer, “From the Scriptures to the Sermon,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 22 (1990): 49.

⁴⁵Jerry Vines, *A Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 97.

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the text will produce more books on application or interpretation and more emphasis in sermons on applying the biblical text to life in today's world."⁴⁶

Why would any preacher object to a focus on application? David Veerman suggests that critics do not understand what others mean by application.⁴⁷ He says application has the following elements: First, application is not additional information; it is not giving more facts in the sermon. Second, application is not mere understanding. Grasping the sermon or scriptural content mentally is far different from the ability to apply it properly in one's life. Third, application cannot be equated with relevance since listeners need specific and concrete admonitions. Fourth, application does not mean that the preacher provides illustrations. Although sermon illustrations are a necessary ingredient in proclamation, by themselves, they are not to be equated with sermon application.

Ellen G. White strongly stresses the need for application in preaching. She agrees with the above authors that it is not mere exposition which is the main concern of any preacher, but equally important is the application of truth in the lives of the hearers. She writes:

It is not enough that we merely give an exposition of the Scriptures, but we must have the Word of God abiding in us; and Christ has said that unless "ye eat of My flesh and drink of My blood, ye have no part with Me. None but those who eat of My flesh and drink of My blood shall have eternal life." (See John 6:53-56). Then He goes on to explain what it means. Why, He says, "the flesh profiteth nothing; it is the Spirit that quickeneth" (see verse 63), and He says that His flesh is meat indeed and drink indeed. Therefore, we are not to merely open the Bible and read something to the people and then go away out of the desk and carry no burden of souls with us.⁴⁸

In this portion of her writings, White emphasizes two major points. First, exposition of the Scriptures is important, but it is not enough as far as preaching or teaching is concerned. Opening the Bible and reading from it is basic in biblical preaching, but it does not end there. Second, she implies that each hearer of the Scriptures should "eat His flesh and drink His blood."

In her book *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, E. G. White has a chapter entitled "The Kind of Sermons Needed." She includes in the focus of the sermon the need for application of solemn truths discovered in the Scriptures. She asks a question at the beginning of the chapter and answers it by giving her personal comments. She writes:

⁴⁶ Harold T. Bryson, "Trends in Preaching Studies Today," *Theological Educator* 49 (Spring 1994): 119.

⁴⁷ David Veerman, "Sermons: Apply Within," *Leadership* 11 (Spring 1990): 121-122.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, "The Minister's Relationship to God's Word," *Sermons and Talks*, Vol. 1 (Maryland: E. G. White Estate, 1990), 62.

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Will our brethren bear in mind that we are living amid the perils of the last days? Read Revelation in connection with Daniel. Teach these things. Let discourses be short, spiritual, elevated. Let the preacher be full of the word of the Lord. Let every man who enters the pulpit know that he has angels from heaven in his audience. And when these angels empty from themselves the golden oil of truth into the heart of him who is teaching the word, then the application of the truth will be a solemn, serious matter. The angel messengers will expel sin from the heart, unless the door of the heart is padlocked and Christ is refused admission. Christ will withdraw Himself from those who persist in refusing the heavenly blessings that are so freely offered them.⁴⁹

Defining Application

So what is application in preaching? Several definitions exist, each having its own merit. John A. Broadus, in his seminal work on expository preaching, begins his chapter on application as follows: “The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but it is the main thing to be done.”⁵⁰ Broadus defines application as “part, or those parts, of the discourse in which we show how the subject applies to the persons addressed, what practical instructions it offers them, what practical demands it makes upon them.”⁵¹

Application thus includes three items: 1) application proper, showing the hearers how the truths of the sermon apply to them; 2) practical suggestions as to the best way and means of performing the duty urged upon him; and 3) persuasion in the form of moral and spiritual appeal for the right response.⁵² Ramesh Richard states, “The application is when you move your audience from just receiving to exhortation and implementation of God’s truth.”⁵³ Adams defines application as “that process by which preachers make scriptural truths so pertinent to members of their congregations that they not only understand how those truths should effect changes in their lives but also feel obligated and perhaps even eager to implement those changes.”⁵⁴ Veerman asserts that application

⁴⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1944), 337, 338.

⁵⁰John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, new and rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1944), 210. John F. Bettler (“Application,” in *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, Jr. [Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986], 332–333) envisions an even greater role in application: “Application, no matter how skillfully structured or helpfully delivered, must never be viewed as an ‘add-on.’ It is not a skill to be developed merely as part of a good preaching repertoire. It is not frosting. It is rather the cake—the entire enterprise, from picking a text to post-sermon discussions, must be understood as *application*.”

⁵¹Broadus, 211.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Bakers, 1995), 116.

⁵⁴Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*, 17.

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is “answering two questions: *So what?* and *Now what?* The first question asks, ‘Why is this passage important to *me?*’ The second asks, ‘What should I do about it today?’”⁵⁵ Wayne McDill claims,

Application is more than just taking the sermon truth and attacking the congregation with it. Application presents the implications of biblical truth for the contemporary audience. It is a call for action, putting the principles of Scripture to work in our lives. It deals with attitudes, behavior, speech, lifestyle, and personal identity. It appeals to conscience, to values, to conviction, to commitment to Christ.⁵⁶

For McDill, sermon application can be either descriptive or prescriptive. Descriptively, application applies the principles of Scripture to contemporary life, pointing out examples of obedience and disobedience and the results that follow.⁵⁷ Prescriptively, the preacher may use Bible truth as guidelines and applications for behavior.⁵⁸

Hermeneutics and Application

Evangelical scholars distinguish hermeneutics from exegesis. In such a view biblical hermeneutics involves explaining a passage of Scripture, but is not complete after that process. V. C. Pfitzner comments on the difference between these two concepts:

The task of exegesis is to ascertain exactly what the author wished to say in the precise historical situation in which he was, in which he was himself translating the message of the Gospel. The hermeneutical question already begins with the task of translating the original words of the text, of understanding what they meant then, but it is really felt only when the exegetical task is completed and we are left with the task of understanding this text for ourselves, of understanding its message in our precise historical situation. The hermeneutical problem thus involves not only our understanding of the original text, but also the problem of bridging the historical time-distance between the original text and that which it proclaims and ourselves.⁵⁹

Therefore, preachers, as interpreters of a biblical text, must move beyond what a Scripture passage meant then to what it means now both for themselves and their congregations. Hermeneutics as a process includes application as well.

⁵⁵Veerman, “Sermons: Apply Within,” *Leadership II*, 122.

⁵⁶Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 187.

⁵⁷Ibid.: “The implications of biblical truth are thus used as a measure for life, not to tell the hearer what he should do but to show him what is actually taking place.”

⁵⁸Ibid.: “Our hearers want to know in concrete terms how they are to live out the implications of biblical truth.”

⁵⁹V. C. Pfitzner, “The Hermeneutical Problem and Preaching,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 (June 1967): 348.

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In other words, the preacher must apply his biblical text in order to complete the task of hermeneutics. Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard acknowledge that

Despite the importance of application, few modern evangelical scholars have focused on this topic. In fact, most hermeneutics textbooks give it only brief coverage, and many major commentary series only mention application with passing remarks to help readers bridge the gap from the biblical world to the modern world.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, in their opinion, while proper application is dependent upon establishing the meaning of a text, “the process of interpretation is incomplete if it stops in the land of the meaning.”⁶¹ Furthermore, they “insist that the goal of hermeneutics must include detecting how the Scriptures can impact readers today.”⁶²

White admonishes those who sit in the pews who listen to preaching to diligently study the Scripture and weigh the interpretation being proclaimed in the homily. She points out,

By searching the Scriptures we are to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent. The Bible has not been given for the benefit of ministers only; it is the book for the people; it is the comfort of the poor man. It is a great mistake for ministers to give the impression to the people that they should not read the Bible because they cannot understand its sacred teachings, and should be content with the interpretation given by those whose business it is to proclaim the word of God. Ministers who thus educate the people are themselves in error. The Bible and the soul were made one for the other, and through the agency of the word and the Holy Spirit, God moves upon the heart. To him who receives the love of the truth, the word of God is as a light that shineth in a dark place, pointing out the path so plainly that the wayfaring man though a fool need not err therein. He realizes that “the entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”⁶³

The “Gap” Between Then and Now

As noted earlier, those who object to application in preaching voice their most strident objections to the metaphorical “gap” between the biblical text and the contemporary audience. In their zeal to defend the timeless and transcendent nature of the Word of God, they ignore the very real differences between the world of the Bible and the world of the hearer. To ignore application for fear of

⁶⁰William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 403.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 401.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 18.

⁶³Ellen G. White, “The Bible to be Understood by All,” *Signs of the Times* (August 20, 1894), par. 02.

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rendering the Word of God unapproachable or incomprehensible, however, is a needless fear.

The need to study and contextualize certain cultural references is obvious, and so should be the need to make contemporary application. There is indeed a chasm “between two worlds” which is traversed by application.

This “distance” between the context of the Bible and a contemporary setting can be seen in four areas.⁶⁴ First is the distance in time. Second, the distance in culture widens the gap. The geographical distance is the third difficulty. And finally, the greatest difficulty is the linguistic difference. If translation and exegesis are legitimate means to bridge the distance between the text and us, then application of the text is legitimate as well.

Sidney Greidanus and John R. W. Stott both write extensively about this thorny issue of biblical interpretation. Greidanus first approaches the issue of this chasm in terms of a gap between stages of redemptive history that makes application necessary.

The sermon, therefore, still consists of explanation and application—not because the Word is objective, but because the Word is addressed to the church at one stage of redemptive history while the preacher must address this Word to the church at another stage of redemptive history. The Word, to be sure, is addressed to the church of all ages, but this confession should not cause us to lose sight of the fact that it is first of all directed to a particular church at a certain stage of redemptive history. There is, certainly, continuity in redemptive history; there is continuity in the church of all ages; but the discontinuity between then and now should not be overlooked.⁶⁵

John R. W. Stott develops the metaphor of preaching as bridge-building. According to Stott, the enormous cultural changes that have occurred since the Bible was written have caused a “deep rift . . . between the biblical world and the modern world.”⁶⁶ Stott compellingly writes that the preacher’s responsibility is to build bridges that “enable God’s revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of men and women today.”⁶⁷

Some application zealots sow misunderstanding when they use terminology that suggests that it is the preacher’s task to “make the Bible relevant.”⁶⁸ To be sure, the Bible is relevant, first because of the nature of the Bible itself. But

⁶⁴Ibid., 13–18.

⁶⁵Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1970), 158.

⁶⁶John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 138.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Compare Nolan Howington (“Expository Preaching,” *Review and Expositor* 56 [January 1959], 63), who states, “To make biblical truth clear, there must be explanation; to make it relevant, there must be application.”

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while the Bible is “amazingly contemporary,”⁶⁹ its relevance is not always apparent. That is why preaching must faithfully apply it.

Vines notes the link between the relevant nature of the Bible and the task of application: “To fail to make practical application of the Word of God is to do injustice to the Bible’s purpose. God’s truth is timeless. God was thinking of us when He wrote the Bible.”⁷⁰ Scripture is relevant because it has the ability to speak to issues of contemporary human beings despite the distance between them. Olford correctly notes, “It would be safe to say that there is no part of Scripture that is unrelated to some aspect of faith and life.”⁷¹ Preachers, therefore, should note Kaiser’s understanding of the Bible’s ability to address the needs of people today. He writes,

The relevancy and adequacy of the Bible to meet the needs of a modern age are easily demonstrable. In fact, sermons that feature the latest pop psychology or recovery plan are settling for less than they could or should. In almost every contemporary issue the Church faces today, she would have been better off a thousand times over had she gone with a systematic plan to go through the whole Bible in an expository way.⁷²

Application is necessary in preaching a sermon because of the distance in time, culture, geography, and language between the ancient text of Scripture and the preacher. Nevertheless, preachers do not need to *make* Scripture relevant. They must, however, *demonstrate* its relevance; that is, they must appreciate the task of “transferring a relevant message from the past to the present.”⁷³

Bridging the gap between these two worlds is a matter of properly applying the message of a given passage to the preacher’s audience.⁷⁴ It is not an easy task for preachers, but one that is essential in order to fulfill the demands of the sermon. All Adventist preachers should stand with Stott,

⁶⁹Stott, 141. See also Keith Willhite, “Audience Relevance in Expository Preaching,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (July-September 1992), where he comments that “nothing is more relevant for human beings than the revealed Word of the living God” (356).

⁷⁰Jerry Vines, *Practical Guide to Sermon Preparation* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 96.

⁷¹Stephen F. Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, & Holman, 1998), 256.

⁷²Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Crisis in Expository Preaching Today,” *Preaching* 11 (September-October 1995): 8. William Ward Ayer (“The Art of Effective Preaching,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 [January-March 1967], 31) makes a similar call: “The man behind the sacred desk must have studied to show himself approved as he handles the truth, adapting it to the needs of today, needs which are basically the same as for all days, but especially for our day when surface situations have been so radically changed in a rapidly changing world.”

⁷³Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 158.

⁷⁴Willhite, however, believes it is an argumentative task, that the preacher must take into consideration aspects of argumentation to bridge the gap to audience relevance (356).

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Praying that God will raise up a new generation of Christian communicators who are determined to bridge the chasm; who struggle to relate God's unchanging Word to our ever changing world; who refuse to sacrifice truth to relevance or relevance to truth; but who resolve instead in equal measure to be faithful to Scripture and pertinent to today.⁷⁵

Benefits of Application

At least five benefits to the congregation are recognizable. First, the listeners are urged to respond as a result of hearing the demands made upon them by the biblical truth presented in the sermon. Second, application reaches the whole person. Application touches the mind, will, and emotion of the individual. Third, application develops Christlikeness in the listeners. Fourth, it develops moral discernment in an amoral environment. Finally, application allows hearers to grasp the biblical message as relevant to their contemporary needs.⁷⁶

White makes clear the outcome of truth applied in the life of a believer in the article she wrote entitled "Our Duty as Christians." She concludes:

Through the application of the truths of the Gospel, men become laborers together with God. But those who while claiming to believe the Bible fail to practise the truth it contains, are blind and can not see afar off. This is why so many men and women live at cross-purposes with God. They do not live and work upon the Gospel plan of addition. Their religious experience is dwarfed.⁷⁷

Application is the vital link between God's eternal Word given in antiquity and the concepts of men and women in the present.⁷⁸ Preachers need not discuss the option of "needs-based preaching" because the biblical revelation is more than adequate to touch hearers across the spectrum of humanity. The role of the preacher is to make biblical truth plain enough for listeners to understand its meaning and to demonstrate its relevance. Louis Lotz masterfully characterizes preaching which succeeds at both explanation and applications:

Good preaching begins in the Bible, but it doesn't stay there. It visits the hospital and the college dorm, the factory and the farm, the kitchen and the office, the bedroom and the classroom. Good preaching invades the world in which people live, the real world of tragedy and triumph, loveliness and loneliness, broken hearts, broken homes,

⁷⁵Stott, 144.

⁷⁶Hershael W. York and Scott A. Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3/2 (Summer 1999): 70-84.

⁷⁷Ellen G. White, "Our Duty as Christians," *Signs of the Times* (September 12, 1900), par. 06.

⁷⁸Howington understands this role of application, stating, "The preacher will throw the light of divine revelation upon human need and will present the resources of grace that are sufficient for that need. His sermons will thus disclose the vital relation between the passage and actual life. Though the setting of the text is ancient, the living word through it speaks to personal need and in the present tense" (63).

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and amber waves of strain. Good preaching invades the real world, and it talks to real people—the high-school senior who's there because he's dragged there; the housewife who wants a divorce; the grandfather who mourns the irreversibility of time and lives with a frantic sense that almost all the sand in the hourglass has dropped; the farmer who is about to lose his farm, the banker who must take it from him; the teacher who has kept her lesbianism a secret all these years; the businessman for whom money has become a god; the single girl who hates herself because she's fat. Good preaching helps them do business with God; it helps them interpret their own human experience, telling them what in their heart of hearts they already know, and are yearning to hear confirmed⁷⁹

Conclusion

Logos, Ethos, and Pathos are the key components of biblical preaching. What you believe about the Word is everything. As a preacher, Ellen G. White strongly believes the Scripture as wholly infallible, totally sufficient, and massively potent. She gives herself to the conviction of biblical preaching. She allows the Word of God to course through her being, inviting the Holy Spirit to winnow her soul in order to conform her life to the truth she preaches. It is her strong conviction that God's Word must come out of the inward affection of the heart without any affectation. In her time, when she stood to preach, she was drenched in an authentic passion that caused her to speak with utmost earnestness. In her life and ministry she combined the *Logos*, the *Ethos*, and the *Pathos* of preaching the Word, and the wind of the Holy Spirit was in her sails. God's name is lifted up, and God is glorified.

To White, application is inherent in the definition of biblical preaching. It is impossible to preach a true biblical message without relating the biblical text to the contemporary hearers. She points out that application is also included in the task of hermeneutics, which involves the whole process of interpretation. Furthermore, application is the mechanism to bridge the metaphorical gap between the world of the biblical text and the world of the preacher's audience. But she cautions her readers against viewing application as a human endeavor alone. It is definitely not a task to be undertaken apart from the preacher's assurance of the inherent power of God's Word (Isaiah 55:10) and the ultimate role of the Holy Spirit to apply that Word to human hearts. As daunting a task as it may be, application nevertheless is requisite in preaching a sermon in order to change lives.

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⁷⁹Louis Lotz, "Good Preaching," *Reformed Review* 40 (Autumn 1986): 38.

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Philippines. His dissertation was titled, "Ellen G. White's Model of the Person of Jesus Christ from the Framework of the Chalcedon Formula." He pioneered the forging of the first Filipino adult devotional book *Living by Grace* and was one of its major contributors. His scholarly articles in theology have been published by *JATS*.
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“Not a Tame Lion”¹: An Exposition of the Wrath of God as Exemplified in Deuteronomy 28:63

Eric Ellison
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וְהָיָה
כְּאֲשֶׁר-שָׂשׂ יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם לְהִיטִיב אֹתְכֶם וּלְהַרְבּוֹת אֹתְכֶם
כֵּן יִשִׁישׂ יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם לְהַאֲבִיד אֹתְכֶם וּלְהַשְׁמִיד אֹתְכֶם

**And it will come to pass:
Just as the Lord rejoiced over you to prosper you and to make you great;
So will the Lord rejoice over you to destroy you and to bring you to ruin.**
Deuteronomy 28:63a

Such a passage is seldom read for church services, devotional thoughts, or bedtime stories, largely because it seems to be completely incompatible with the loving God most Christians have come to know and love. Words like this call to mind the ancient gods of mythology, selfish and spoiled, yet endowed with superhuman powers. Causing mischief, playing favorites, and making life miserable for humans were some of the ways that the Greek, Scandinavian, and Mesopotamian gods passed their time. A statement like the one in this passage would be no surprise at all from one of these gods, as it would only reflect the kind of casual, destructive whim that was almost a daily occurrence. Words like this are another matter when they are found in the Bible, spoken by the Creator, the Lord of Hosts, the almighty and loving God.

The fact is, however, that it is almost impossible to avoid such expressions of divine wrath, and the judgments resulting from it, when one reads the Bible

¹ A reference to the unpredictability of God in C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), e.g. 19, 25, 31, 36.

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(Gen 6:13; 7:23; 19:14, 24–25; Exod 4:14; 32:10; Deut 11:17; 2 Sam 6:7; Ps 78:58–62; 85:5; 88:16; 89:46; 90:9; Ezek 7:3, Rom 1:18, etc.). Such references to God's anger can be "embarrassing for those who regard the Old Testament texts as holy and decisive for their own concept of God."² Those who believe in a God who is consistently tender and predictably loving may even find them offensive.

It is not only modern readers who have had difficulty reconciling their conception of God with his wrath. Early Rabbinic Jews saw possible dangers in such anthropomorphic concepts of God and tried to avoid them by speaking about angels of wrath. The Talmud, commenting on Psalm 5:5, says, "Only angels of peace stand in the presence of God, but angels of wrath are far away from him."³ This not only removes anger from God and gives it instead to angels, but it even removes the angels of wrath from His presence. Pamela Jean Owens has argued that even the author of Lamentations, in extreme grief over Jerusalem's destruction, found it difficult to integrate the opposing feelings of God as comforter and persecutor, treating them almost like two separate personalities.⁴

Historical Solutions

Because it is so difficult to assimilate the concept of an angry and omnipotent God into a sophisticated theology of a loving God, it should come as no surprise that people have tried different tactics over the ages to circumvent this dilemma.

1. Ignore the Problem. If theologians refuse to discuss the problem and preachers omit the topic, then few will ever be troubled by it. Ferdinand Weber has shown that the Greek fathers, those of the western-Augustinian theology, and the older dogmatics avoided discussions of the wrath of God, fearing that it would result in a God unworthy of their worship.⁵

One might suspect that this evasion is something theologians would attempt to foist upon the public only before the advent of the printing press, when most people were illiterate and Bibles were scarce, but this course of action continues well after illiteracy has been nearly eliminated. Schleiermacher taught that "we have no cause or directive for setting up this idea of the wrath of God as something grounded in Christianity, as something essential to faith, or even as a

² Seth Erlandsson, "The Wrath of YHWH," *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 111.

³ My own translation of: "Vor Gott stehen nur Engel des Friedens, aber Engel des zorns אַנְגֵּלֵי שְׁלוֹמִים sind fern von ihm." Hermann L. Strack & Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 3 (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926), 30.

⁴ Pamela Jean Owens, "Personification and Suffering in Lamentations 3," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 105 (Spring 1990): 75–90.

⁵ Ferdinand Weber, *Vom Zorne Gottes* (Erlangen: Diechert, 1862), 7.

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proper doctrine.”⁶ Such policies in the face of the copious texts referring to God’s wrath are reminiscent of children who think themselves invisible to all others when they cover their own eyes.

2. Deny Its Possibility. Thomas Aquinas dealt with the issue by saying: “Anger and the like are attributed to God on account of the likeness in effect. Thus, because to punish is properly the act of an angry man, God’s punishment is metaphorically spoken of as his anger.”⁷ Knowing Aquinas’ propensity for quoting Aristotle more than the Bible, one may well ask whether this mindset is what Christians should draw from when approaching the Scriptures. The idea that God is not capable of getting angry “seems to have come into Christianity from the Greek philosophic view,”⁸ which is a culture well known for believing in unpredictable gods who frequently needed appeasement. This leaves one to ponder whether such a view is more of a philosophical reaction to pagan views of God than an objective, biblically based view of the nature of God.

3. Reinterpret Wrath. There is evidence to support the fact that the wrath of God as it is referred to in the Bible is not always an emotion, but rather an anthropomorphic expression for natural laws as well as cause and effect. “Men have generally attributed to God such characteristics as anger, wrath, tempting, evil, sending fire, and hardening of hearts of men, when in reality, such semantics are used to establish God as the first cause, thus, the sovereign of the earth.”⁹ One wonders, since God has occasionally chosen to reveal Himself as a wrathful individual, how wise it is for humans to speak of the reality being quite different. Notwithstanding, while this might explain away many of the judgment passages in the Bible, it cannot be applied to all places where God’s wrath is found. Deuteronomy 28:63, as a case in point, speaks of God rejoicing in the activity of destruction, which goes far beyond the mere action of cause and effect. The verb used here for rejoice is *וַיִּשְׂמַח*, a word overflowing with emotion, used elsewhere to describe the feelings of a groom when he is married (Isa 62:5) or someone who stumbles upon great spoil (Ps 119:162). This is much more than figurative language representing God’s unemotional arbitration of justice, and it deserves careful attention.

⁶ Friedrich Schleiermacher, “The Wrath of God,” *Servant of the World: Selected Sermons of Friedrich Schleiermacher*, trans. Dawn DeVries (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 153.

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, “Treatise on God,” *Summa Theologica*, Question 3, Article 2, Reply Objection 2 (English Dominican Translation).

⁸ Edwin Bevan, *Symbolism and Belief* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938), 210, quoted in Leon Morris, “The Wrath of God,” *Expository Times* 63 (1952): 144.

⁹ Morris D. Lewis, “An Interpretation of the Wrath of God,” *The Stature of Christ* (Festschrift, Loma Linda University, 1970), 212. For an excellent treatise on this theory, see the rest of Lewis’ article.

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The Value in Curses

Deuteronomy 28 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible for understanding how God relates to those who are true to His covenant and those who are not. It gives the reader a peek behind the scenes of political, religious, social, and economic interplay, showing how God affects and is affected by them.

The significance of this chapter, in which our text is set, was understood by George Washington, who took the very first American presidential oath of office on April 30, 1789, with his hand on a Bible open to Deuteronomy 28. In his inaugural address, he said:

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency . . . We ought to be no less persuaded that the propitious smiles of Heaven can never be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right which heaven itself has ordained.¹⁰

Strangely, such an important chapter seems to have been all but passed over completely by biblical scholars and commentators. At best, it is referred to as background material for more recent texts, or a few general comments are made in passing, but almost no original research at all has been focused on this chapter. Perhaps most find the 55 consecutive verses outlining one curse after another uninteresting or the wrathful God pictured here not one with whom they are comfortable.

Abraham Heschel has noted that people in our time are increasingly “moved by a soft religiosity, and would like to think that God is lovely, tender, and familiar, as if faith were a source of comfort, but not readiness for martyrdom.”¹¹ All humans have habits, surroundings, and beliefs with which they are comfortable, and it is a risk to move outside of these familiar boundaries. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C. S. Lewis, Susan and Lucy first find out that Aslan (representing God) is a lion and ask if he is safe. The reply comes, “Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”¹² One is left to consider what kind of a God we really want: a safe and predictable one, or one who is good, even if that puts us at odds with Him.

There is very little that could move me out of my comfort zone more than to envision God as one who actually rejoices in destroying people and bringing them to ruin. The temptation is strong to turn the page and leave such a picture

¹⁰ Paul M. Angle, ed., *By These Words* (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1954), 128–131.

¹¹ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 2 (Peabody: Prince, 2001), 76.

¹² C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: Harper Trophy, 1994), 86.

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buried where few ever go and move back to the familiar, tender God who always weeps when pronouncing judgments (cf. Luke 19:41–44). Since it is the same God pictured in both cases, perhaps one should not so much judge divine wrath on its presence, however, as by the nature of the God that exhibits it and its impact on His relationship with humans.

Wrath for a Good Reason

Although others may question God's nature because of the verses portraying His wrath, the Bible writers certainly do not. The prophet Nahum asks, "Who can stand before the wrath of the Lord," and in the same breath asserts that "the Lord is good" (Nah 1:6–7). The Psalmist can declare that "God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day" (Ps 7:11), without contradicting himself. It is one thing when one sits down thousands of years after the fact and determines that just judgments cannot be carried out in wrath and quite "another thing if the Old Testament texts also find such a combination impossible."¹³ On the whole, it seems that the Bible writers meant to communicate that these were compatible with one another, even complementary. In fact, there are times when the Bible writers feel that God would be more loving to His people if He were not so slow to anger (Ps 69:24; 79:6).

The main danger with human anger is that irrationality easily comes right along with it and leads people to do and say things from which their higher reason would normally restrain them. Human wrath is always centered upon self: the damage done to self, justifying self by blaming others, revenge, etc. In our modern world, especially, the justifiableness of anger has been clouded in the morass of media violence, which "has driven out of the culture any general understanding of what makes violence necessary, not gratuitous, in a story."¹⁴ In the case of humans, even in the most altruistic of circumstances, one cannot easily discern if action taken in anger is done merely because of justice and necessity, or because it satisfies a less rational desire for vengeance. On the other hand, one must guard against throwing the baby out with the bath water merely because it is so often misused. The value and even necessity of wrath was recognized many centuries before Deuteronomy was ever written. Back in the Middle Kingdom, Egyptians believed that "the inability to summon up indignation at wrongdoing is clearly a characteristic of weak rulers, whether the creator himself or the king."¹⁵ In portions of the ancient world, at least, wrath was essential in just administration. Perhaps we should learn a lesson from the ancients and be less concerned with whether God is angry and more concerned with whether this contributes to the just administration of the world.

¹³ Erlandsson, 115.

¹⁴ Catherine Madsen, "Notes on God's Violence," *Cross Currents* 51/2 (Summer 2001): 230.

¹⁵ Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 144.

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When we consider God's wrath, we see that it "is not an implacable blind rage. However emotional it may be, it is an entirely reasonable and willed response."¹⁶ The divine wrath is completely separated from self-interestedness, not focused upon what has offended God, but upon the need of the individual against whom it is directed. When we see it manifested, its purpose is to clarify that "God takes human sin with utmost seriousness, sympathizes with the victims of human cruelty, and is moved to work for the liberation of those suffering from all types of human oppression."¹⁷

Returning to Deuteronomy 28, perhaps it is easier now to understand this initially offensive statement. When God speaks of rejoicing over the destruction that He causes, one may rest assured that it has an altruistic purpose, and love is its motivation. One can hardly fault a ruler for delighting in activities that establish justice and uphold true order in the world.

Provoked Wrath

In every case in the Bible where God is spoken of as being angry, there is a definite cause. God does not wake up on the wrong side of the bed, as humans sometimes seem to; something has to be done to earn His ire, which is "not a fundamental attribute, but a transient and reactive condition. It is a means of achieving the intents of His mind."¹⁸ In this way, God's wrath is fundamentally different from His love. God initiates every relationship in the Bible with love and care. Unlike His wrath, nothing needs to be done to cause God to love His creation because a relationship of love is God's default.

Some have noted that the immediate context of our verse, Deut 28:58–68, is a description of how God will systematically undo all of the good things that He has done for His people.¹⁹ This itself reminds us that God's covenant relationship with Israel began with blessings (e.g., freeing them, making them into a nation, etc.). He even promises to continue to bless them endlessly if they will only be true to their covenant (Deut 28:1–14). The covenant includes responsibilities on both sides. If Israel does not fulfill its responsibilities, God is entitled to remove the blessings He has taken the responsibility to give. Instead of portraying the wrath of God as the wrath of an enemy, the Bible pictures it like a

¹⁶ Donald A. Carson, "God's Love and God's Wrath," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (October–December 1999): 389.

¹⁷ George M. Landes, "Some Biblical Theological Reflections on the Wrath of God," *Living Pulpit* 2/4 (October–December 1993): 11.

¹⁸ Heschel, 69.

¹⁹ See Peter M. Head, "The Curse of Covenant Reversal: Deuteronomy 28:58–68 and Israel's Exile," *Churchman* 111/3 (1997): 218–226; John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton: Victor, 1983); D. A. Carson, D. Guthrie, J. A. Motyer, *New Bible Commentary*, 4th ed. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1970).

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rejected bridegroom taking back his engagement ring and other things he has already given his bride to be.²⁰

Reexamining our passage with this in mind, we see that God's condition of rejoicing over Israel's destruction is not natural or inevitable; rather, it is provoked and out-of-character (Deut 28:15), hence it tells us not so much about the basic nature of God as about the extremities to which He is willing to go in an emergency.

The Necessity of Wrath

Wrath is God's righteous reaction to the presence of sin in the world. The fact that we are sinful is what makes our interaction with God an unsafe proposition. If God were to be a completely wrathless, unemotional being (as Aquinas and Schleiermacher, etc. would have us believe), the entire biblical picture would implode upon itself. If we excise or ignore the biblical references to God's anger, soon we will lose the meaning of rich theological concepts such as sin, judgment, and the cross. "Without the one, the others lose their meaning. Wrath measures sin, produces judgment, and necessitates the cross. Once we have abandoned wrath, the whole Bible becomes unintelligible."²¹ As there is definitely sin in the world, we must consider that if God were not at all wrought up over it, sin could not be so very bad after all.

The fact remains that the Bible is full of God's wrath precisely because sin is atrocious in His eyes. The gospel that the apostles proclaimed across the world is what has the power to save people from death in their sins. If God was never angry about it in the first place, we have been deprived of the good news that it has been turned away.²² If God did not have any wrath to be turned away, then all the horrors we see on the news and the appalling things that happen every day are the summation of all that we can ever expect, and the Christian hope is useless.

The gospel would also be robbed of its power if we were saved from death, but our lives were not at all changed. The very word reconciliation implies a progression closer to one another. An inseparable part of this activity "is the revelation of his hostility to sin so that his children know with unmistakable clarity what his attitude is to sin so that he may teach them to be hostile to it."²³ As we grow to become more like God, it is hard to envision a greater day than

²⁰ Already in the Pentateuch there is clear evidence that the jealousy of God is linked to a view of the covenant relationship between God and Israel as a marriage relationship. See Aron Balorda, "The Covenant of Phinehas as a Reward for the Jealousy of Numinal Marriage," M.A. Thesis, Andrews University, 2002.

²¹ William D. Eisenhower, "Sleepers in the Hands of an Angry God," *Christianity Today* 31/5 (March 20, 1987): 26.

²² Fleming Rutledge, "Cover-ups," *Christian Century* 116 (November 17-24, 1999): 117.

²³ J. Benjamin Bedenbaugh, "Paul's Use of 'Wrath of God,'" *Lutheran Quarterly* 6 (May 1954): 156.

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when Christ comes and we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2) or any greater joy than the fact that sin will be destroyed forever. Thus, at least part of the reason why God would rejoice so much over destroying wicked people is understandable.

Wrath Consists of Love

Most refer to Justice and Mercy, Law and Grace, or Wrath and Love as separate entities or qualities that balance and complement one another. To compare them this way is like dissecting a brain: you may learn more about the different functional aspects of the cerebrum and cerebellum, but you kill the organism as a whole when you cut it apart. Wrath and Love are not so much complementary organisms as they are two aspects of the same organism.

1. Love Leads to Wrath. One cannot, in reality, function without the other. Charles Cranfield illustrates it this way: “A man who knows, for example, about the injustice and cruelty of apartheid and is not angry at such wickedness cannot be a thoroughly good man; for his lack of wrath means a failure to care for his fellow man, a failure to love.”²⁴ If you want to eliminate the possibility of any wrath, you must eliminate all love for anything or anyone. One must be totally indifferent if one is to be free from wrath.²⁵ However, indifference to evil is a worse option than involvement: “it is more universal, more contagious, more dangerous. A silent justification, it makes possible an evil erupting as an exception becoming the rule and being in turn accepted.”²⁶

There is a masquerade some people call love—though it is really cowardice—whereby people cannot muster the courage to do what is best for others because it might damage their relationship. If we did not have such references to the wrath of God, He “would cease to be fully righteous and His love would degenerate into sentimentality.”²⁷ I once attended a wedding where the minister turned to the friends of the couple, charging them to do everything in their power to strengthen this marriage, even to the point of jeopardizing their own individual friendships with the couple. Heschel has noted: “For love to function, the suppression of sympathy may be necessary. A surgeon would be a failure if he indulged his natural sympathy at the sight of a bleeding wound. He must suppress his emotion to save a life, he must hurt in order to heal.”²⁸ Were God unwilling to display his anger for the good of the sinner, at the risk of people disliking Him when they read about it, His love would merely be a sentimental charade.

²⁴ Charles Cranfield, “Romans 1:18” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 21 (September 1968): 333.

²⁵ Such is the aim of eastern religion—to free oneself of all that might cause pain or disturb—which is the exact opposite of the Christian God, who opens Himself up to being disturbed. Cf. Kosuke Koyama, “God is Disturbed,” *Frontier* 7 (Summer 1964): 107–110.

²⁶ Heschel, 64.

²⁷ Erlandsson, 116.

²⁸ Heschel, 76–77.

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2. Wrath Leads to Mercy. There is one other consideration that should be brought to bear upon the discussion of God's *true* love as the Bible depicts it. The nature of happiness is that those who pursue it for themselves never find it, but those who pursue it for others receive it in abundance. The former shoulders the impossible burden of guaranteeing only pleasurable events for self and banishing all negative things. The latter, however, is free to take pleasure in the much more manageable task of bringing some joy to the lives of others. When one considers the overarching principle behind the stipulations of the covenant outlined in Deuteronomy, keeping or breaking it places a person in one or the other of these two categories. One who has chosen as a pattern for life the selfishness inherent in not following this covenant will never be truly happy. Given time (say, eternity?), life would degenerate into torture. The wrath of God manifested on that individual would be an act of mercy and love for the person concerned. In Mary Shelly's treatise on creator versus creation, she speaks of a creature abandoned by his creator to a life of crime, devoid of love, in which his own misery spreads to all around him. Because of these repeated sins, his life spirals downward into continual remorse and self-loathing, and at the end, he cries to his creator, "If thou . . . yet cherished a desire of revenge against me, it would be better satiated in my life than in my destruction."²⁹

A similar conclusion can be drawn from a perspective building on logic and philosophy instead of heaven and eternity: "So the unjust man, like the man who possesses bad things, is pitiable in every way, and it is permissible to pity such a man when his illness is curable . . . but against the purely evil, perverted man who cannot be corrected, one must let one's anger have free rein. This is why we declare that it is fitting for the good man to be of the spirited type and also gentle, as each occasion arises."³⁰

Thus, it seems that a valid reason for which God would rejoice to destroy a sinner would be that true love calls for it, and it may be the only merciful thing to do under the circumstances.

The Evanescence of Wrath and a Changing God

One of the most remarkable things about God, as He reveals Himself to us throughout the Bible, is that He is willing to change. He specifically states that He can and will change His plans for destruction (Mal 3:6). One would expect that every decision would be final from an all-seeing, all-wise, all-knowing God. There is no better example of change than we find here.

The word *שׂוּח*, used here to describe God rejoicing, appears in only two verses of the Pentateuch. Almost the exact same sentence, with one major change, appears only 44 verses after this verse: "And you shall again obey the Lord and observe all His commandments, which I command you today. Then

²⁹ Mary Shelly, *Frankenstein* (New York: Dover, 1994), 166.

³⁰ Plato, *Laws*, 731d.

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the Lord your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers” (Deut 30:9 NASB). Here we see almost the same formula, but now God no longer rejoices to destroy them, but again rejoices over them for good. As soon as Israel is true to God again, all is well, and there is no hint of lingering anger or resentment. This not only tells us that the wrath of God is manifested objectively and rationally, as we saw before, but also that God has wrath for the specific purpose of bringing about repentance. When certain conditions (i.e., disobedience) exist, God’s wrath is fully active; however, when those conditions are no longer met (i.e., a return to obedience), God’s anger evaporates. As Jason Locke puts it, “He is not like humans who resort to fury out of hatred. He does not desert his people when they are disobedient and rebellious. He tries to bring them back into the proper relationship with him.”³¹ Could this be another part of the joy that God gets out of his wrath, namely, He knows that even though the process is painful for both parties involved, in many cases, the result will be a restored relationship?

Knowing that God’s wrath is not necessarily a permanent institution, things that seem ridiculous elements of God’s interaction with humans can become a reality. From a sophisticated, western mindset, stories like the one found in Exodus 32:7–14, where Moses talks God out of being angry, are seen as unbelievable and even quite silly.³² An infinite God allowing Himself to be out-debated by a finite creature is unthinkable, unless there is a deeper motivation and consistency behind the anger than we normally see demonstrated by humans.

God’s wrath, despite its intensity, “may be averted by prayer. There is no divine anger for anger’s sake. Its meaning is instrumental: to bring about repentance; its purpose and consummation is its own disappearance.”³³ Moses had the opportunity to cause God’s wrath against an entire nation of people to dissolve.

It is such an amazing story, and yet there is an opportunity in it for everyone. In Ezek 22:30–31a, we are told what happened when there was not a person like Moses to stand up for God’s people: “I searched for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand in the gap before me for the land, so that I would not destroy it; but I found no one. Thus I have poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath.” Here is pictured the intercessory, human part in the wrath of God. Like Moses, others can stand before God and speak on behalf of those whom God would destroy. God’s anger never reaches the point where discussion is useless. In fact, “it is rather directed

³¹ Jason W. Locke, “The Wrath of God in the Book of Isaiah,” *Restoration Quarterly* 35/4 (1993): 227.

³² Edward P. Ross, “That God Might Remember the Good Times . . .” *Witness* 67/8 (August 1984); Richard C. Brand, “The Reputation of God,” *Expository Times* 105 (1994).

³³ Abraham J. Heschel, “The Wrath of God,” *Witness* 76 (March 1993): 21.

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against those who refuse to step into the breach, against those who neglect justice, who try to protect their lives instead of risking them for others."³⁴

Thus, the passages about the wrath of God that so many throughout history have found offensive or unrealistic are less the story of an angry God and more of an invitation to talk with God about the sins of His children. Deuteronomy 28:63 of all places demonstrates this as it juxtaposes the two possibilities, begging listeners to give God a reason to rejoice over them for good again, as He has done in the past.

God Rejoices to Destroy the Destroyers of Happiness

The very out-of-character response a naturally loving God has against sin testifies to its horrendous nature. Although it is inherently self-destructive, "evil can't be counted on to destroy itself, it must be fought every step of the way."³⁵ Luckily, we have infinite power on our side. In Rom 8:31, the apostle Paul asks the rhetorical question: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" The sad truth is that there is one group that does try to oppose God and those on His side. That is the group God will rejoice to destroy.

In our passage, it says that God rejoiced over and will rejoice over the people of Israel, both for good and bad. If God takes joy in destroying Israel and bringing her to ruin, it would be helpful to know what other things God takes joy in throughout the Bible. Eight times in the Bible, שׂוּעַ is used with God as the subject, each time the object is His people (Deut 28:63 (2x); 30:9 (2x); Isa 62:5; 65:19; Jer 32:41; Zeph 3:17). Deuteronomy 28:63 is unique in this list in that it is the only place where God rejoices over a negative activity with regard to his people, which affirms the above principle that God's natural state is love and wrath only arises when there is a problem. Ezekiel 33:11 relates a similar idea: in the words of God, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked." Furthermore, in Jeremiah 9:24, the Lord declares: "I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth, for I delight in these things." This establishes a significant pattern. Something drastic must have happened to make God do an about face from looking upon them as objects of joy to objects of wrath.

All the curses of chapter 28 are predicated upon one assumption: the people have chosen to neither obey the Lord their God, nor observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which Moses charged them (v.15). Back in chapter 4:6–8, we are told that a result of keeping the covenant would be that the people are drawn *noticeably* closer to God. Conversely, one who does not keep the covenant instructions in Deuteronomy is, therefore, moving visibly away from God. If the differences between the two groups are so readily apparent,

³⁴ Christoph Schroeder, "'Standing in the Breach': Turning Away the Wrath of God," *Interpretation* 52/1 (January 1998): 20.

³⁵ Miroslav Volf, "Washing Away, Washing Up," *Christian Century* 116 (Aug 25–Sep 1, 1999): 820.

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perhaps their comparison, based on the covenant stipulations in Deuteronomy just prior to this curse, will shed some light on why God would rejoice to annihilate them. What does a person God rejoices to destroy (i.e., a covenant breaker) look like?

If a new neighbor moved in next door and you soon got a notice in the mail that this person was a convicted murderer (5:17; 19:11–13), rapist (22:23–26), and you observed him holding spiritualistic (18:10–11) midnight bonfire meetings in the back yard, would you still feel safe? What if the only babysitter in town was a convicted kidnapper (24:7), prostitute (23:17–18), and murderer of her own children (12:31)—would you still have a night on the town? The list could go on, but the point is that God loves creating a world that is wonderful in every way for His created beings to live in. His greatest desire is their happiness; therefore, “because He loves us, He’s angry at people who seek to hurt us: our blessedness is his glory and our joy. God’s loving anger on our behalf nourishes and encourages our faith. God’s beloved children hope and trust that at the return of Christ, His anger will make things right.”³⁶

God takes no greater joy from anything than making the world perfect for His children again, even if that means getting rid of some of the people that would ruin it. The message of Deuteronomy 28:63 is a solemn one: Follow the Lord and live within His covenant relationship, lest you become a roadblock to someone else’s happiness.

Conclusion

Many factors (especially examples from humans) lead our contemporary culture to view anger as an emotion entirely incompatible with a God of love; however, the Bible portrays the two aspects of God as complementary and necessary for one another’s existence, and even asserts that God rejoices in the destructive nature of His wrath. While strategies for avoiding the issue are plentiful, several important lessons can be gained by a straightforward examination of the information. First of all, God’s indignation does not preclude His rationality, but grows out of it, motivated by His ultimate goodness. Second, it characterizes the tension humanity lives in with the presence of sin in the world, without which salvation and hope for a better future could not exist. Third, under certain circumstances, a lack of anger reveals a lack of love, for the two are inextricably intertwined. Were some to receive their wish of a wrathless God, they would be left with an entirely loveless, merciless God as well. Fourth, it is fueled by a desire to accomplish a purpose by it: namely, the repentance of His people, and the willingness of an omniscient God to change His plans for the future is an astounding illustration of this. Finally, God is able to rejoice in the pouring out

³⁶ David Powlson, “Anger Part 1: Understanding Anger,” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14/1 (Fall 1995): 42.

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of His anger not because He takes joy in destruction, but because it results in greater joy and security for those who love and follow Him.

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Checking Your Brain at the Church Door?

Allen Shepherd

When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?
Psalm 11:3

While I was in my teens, my father subscribed to the journal *Scientific American*. I loved science and read it avidly and continue to read it to this day. However, the magazine uniformly condemns Creationism, a cherished tenant of my faith. John Rennie, the editor, characterizes creationists as irrational, superstitious, benighted, ignorant, and obstructionist.¹ He also likened us to ostriches with our heads in the sand, fearing we might see something that conflicts with our faith or shatters our treasured beliefs. Recently he wrote an article describing fifteen ways to expose “Creationist Nonsense.”²

Is that how we as Seventh-day Adventist creationists come across? Do we indeed stop thinking when we read our Bibles or darken the doors of the sanctuary? Are we afraid of the truth? Or do we have a reason (not mere conviction) for the hope within us (1 Pet 3:15)? In the following two-part essay, I have written about how I personally have dealt with this dilemma. I am a physician, but I am untrained in any of the biologic sciences except medicine (I do have a BA in Chemistry). So this is the work of a nonprofessional who has grappled with these issues.

The first part will cover reasons for my belief that a God created the universe, in contrast to atheism, and the second will be an examination of the evidences pro and con for the two theories of the origin of life’s diversity: Divine Creation and Darwinian Evolution.

¹ John Rennie, “A Total Eclipse of Reason,” *Scientific American* 281/4 (October, 1999): 124. The terms used are Rennie’s.

² John Rennie, “Fifteen Answers to Creationist Nonsense,” *Scientific American* 287/1 (July, 2002): 78–85.

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Evidences for Theism?

Just how many have fallen for this “irrational, superstitious, nonsense”? The vast majority of Americans believe that God created the heavens and the earth. About 50% hold to a literal 7-day creation, though this theory is excluded from the schools and ridiculed by the media and scientific community. Another 35% believe in God-directed evolution. About 10% do not believe that God had a hand in it, and another small percentage do not know.³ Among scientists, the percentage of believers is less, but even among them, 40% believe in a God who answers prayer.⁴ Throughout history almost all humans have believed in a god, whether Babylonian mystics, Baal worshipers, Greeks thinkers, human-sacrificing Mayans, or fundamentalist Christians. It is as if it were (to put it in evolutionary terms) selectively bred into us. Atheism has held little attraction for the vast majority.

But perhaps this huge multitude simply longs with all its heart to believe, and “brave new world” atheists are the only ones willing to face the cold hard facts of reality.⁵ Are the rest of us just attempting to ameliorate the anxiety caused by the harsh meaninglessness of the universe?

Or are there evidences for belief in a Creator? Despite what several prominent members of the scientific community say, there are *logical* reasons for believing that God created the heavens and the earth. The most amazing are the characteristics of our universe favoring human existence.

The Fine Tuning of the Universe. Over the past century it has become apparent that the universe is finely tuned to the needs of life on earth. Although several have written on this topic, called the anthropic principle, a recent and easily readable book is “Just Six Numbers,” by Rees.⁶ In this small tome, he tells of six qualities of the universe described by six fundamental physical constants. Each seems to have been honed to the finest of tolerances so that humans might exist. The most amazing is Ω , (Omega), the number describing the expansion rate of the universe, or the balance between gravity and outward expansion. This number is accurate to one in a million billion (1,000,000,000,000,000; 88)!

³ Gallop Poll web site. The most recent poll on this topic was February of 2001. The question asked was regarding the origin of humankind.

⁴ Edward J. Larson and Larry Witham, “Scientists and Religion in America,” *Scientific American* 281/3 (Sept. 1999): 81–85.

⁵ John M. Robinson, ed., *Origin and Evolution of the Universe: Evidence for Design?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 1987), 23-25. This is a compilation of rather ponderous essays by scientists who wish to explain away the evidence for design and the very small probability that the universe could have occurred by chance. At the end, at least one (Hugo Meyness) allows that all the speculation might not stand the test of Ockham’s razor (255). (Ockham’s razor: the best explanation of an event is the one that is the simplest.) However, the essays show the thinking of an atheistic group addressing these issues. The pages noted are the conclusions reached by Robert H. Haynes in his essay, “The ‘Purpose’ of Chance in Light of the Physical Basis of Evolution.”

⁶ Martin J. Rees, *Just Six Numbers: The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

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This is incredible precision. He discusses this astonishing finding and how each of the numbers impacts life on our planet. We could not exist without this accuracy.

He does not subscribe to belief in a deity, but his reason for skepticism is telling (148-150). He gives no logic for his rejection of this idea, but merely states a preference and begins to speculate about “multi-verses” (other universes besides ours). However, there is no evidence presented to support the existence of other universes. In fact, we are unable to know of them, even if they do exist. So his thinking is based on speculation he chooses to believe and a presupposition that eliminates God (see also Robinson, 247-257).

This fine-tuning is the strongest evidence for God’s existence (aside from Scripture). Order, elegance, design, and the big bang also point to a Creator.

Order and Elegance. There is much order seen in the universe and in living organisms. The laws of physics and life show thoughtful synthesis. But I find most impressive the order inherent in the Periodic Table of the Elements. This arrangement of the 92 naturally occurring atoms (along with the several man-made ones) was discovered by Mendeleev in the mid 19th century. He grouped the families of elements together from lightest to heaviest by examining their shared characteristics and realized there was a repetitive sequence. He then placed them in an order that predicted some that had not yet been discovered. Discovery of these confirmed the table’s truth.

The whole material universe is made of these elements. We humans are made of the same stuff as the stars. The elements’ electron properties allow for the construction of a wonderful array of chemical compounds (as especially seen in the chemistry of life: proteins, DNA, etc), while characteristics of the nucleus allow fusion to release massive amounts of energy, giving light and warmth (the stars burn hydrogen in their nuclear reactors, forming helium and heavier elements).

But these diverse elements with all their amazing combinations and derivations are concocted using three forms of matter: protons, neutrons, and electrons; and three forces: the weak and strong nuclear forces and the electromagnetic force. A few basic laws govern their actions. This is an elegant order. Such beauty and complexity from such simplicity!

During my career as a surgeon, I have seen some who operate with finesse and others who, shall we say, perform with lesser skill. I know the thinking and planning and experience it takes to make an operation look easy. It does not happen by accident. It is deliberate and intentional. And we praise surgeons who devote their lives to perfecting their craft in the service of others.

The elegance and beauty in the order of the very atoms of our being do not give the appearance of the workings of chance, but rather of careful thought and

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intention, like a well planned operation. I see this as strong evidence for a Creator who knew the nature of his medium and used it with grace and skill.

The Big Bang. Although not all would agree with various details of the Big Bang theory, it has been accepted by most cosmologists as a fairly accurate description of the origin of the universe. It has a very interesting feature: a beginning. This theory of origins is consistent with Genesis 1:1. It also argues against an eternal or cyclical universe. This makes atheists uncomfortable. Arthur Eddington, a British physicist and atheist who experimentally confirmed Einstein's general theory of relativity in 1919, said, "Philosophically, the notion of a beginning to the present order is repugnant to me. I should like to find a genuine loophole." If the universe has a beginning, who initiated it? A Creator outside the universe itself is a logical deduction.

Design. The biological realm shows amazing design. The eye has most often been cited to demonstrate this property of nature. But there are many examples: wings, hands, social structures, etc. Michael Dickinson recently reviewed experiments on insect flight.⁷ This extremely complex skill is carried out by a creature with the proverbial brain of a fly. And yet these tiny living machines can maneuver like nothing else known to man. How did they develop the ability to do these astounding feats? The belief that this could happen by gradual change through natural selection (this is no explanation mind you, but mere assertion) is a true act of faith.

Skeptics have claimed that the design argument is of itself not strong enough to support belief in the existence of God. I do not hold to that view. As my partner in practice said, "Things just look too good to have happened by chance." In combination with the order and accuracy seen in the deep realities of the universe, a very strong *cognitive* position can be taken and defended.

Three Further Points. Some atheists, after listening to these points, have said, "Why doesn't God reveal himself to us? Why doesn't he just show himself (as one suggested) by writing his name in the sky so that we could know? Why isn't it simple?"

God *has* revealed himself in nature and Scripture and has given us minds to see and eyes to read. The example of the Israelites at Sinai warns us (Exod 32). They saw the smoke and fire and heard God speak, but in forty days they were worshiping a golden calf. Jesus cautioned those that were looking for a sign (Matt 12:39) and said that they would not believe even if someone rose from the dead (Luke 16:19–31). Apparently God feels that people must decide on the basis of evidence and the witness of another who writes what he has seen. And who said life would be simple?

⁷ Michael Dickinson, "Solving the Mystery of Insect Flight," *Scientific American* 284/6 (June, 2001): 48-55.

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Second, some have said, “How can we know which God this creator is? There are many gods. How do you know it is the Christian God who creates?” The implication is that since it is impossible to know, it is of no consequence.

This is shallow thinking. Man has explored the atom and sent probes deep into space. Is he unable to search out the most significant Being in the universe? Besides, we can simplify the quest by considering only those gods that claim to be Creator. Even the Phoenician sailors taking Jonah to Tarshish knew that the Creator was of a different order. Let questioners examine the various gods’ claims. I think it will be clear.

And third, some have said, “Well then, who created God, and who created him, and who created him, etc.? This is called an endless regression, and it side-steps the issue. The question under consideration is whether the universe shows signs of *intentional* creation or the mere *workings* of chance. It shows the characteristics of intention by its fine-tuning and design. From our experience in daily life with cause and effect, only one entity we know can be intentional, a mind. Therefore it is the product of Mind. If we have established this, then we can discuss by what means and where the Mind came from, etc. However, these musings do not change the answer to the primary question: the appearance of intention.

Conclusion. This evidence leads me to believe in a Creator, one who possesses consummate ability. I have excellent evidence for this belief and can stand without shame when called on by my God to do so. I do not fear the purveyors of purposelessness that some in modern science would endorse.⁸

However, atheism’s strongest scientific argument is Darwin’s theory.

The findings of science support belief in a Creator. But belief in a literal 7-day creation is not so clearly sustained. Scripture says that our knowledge of this comes through faith (Heb 11:3). This, though, does not mean that there is *no* evidence. We will look at this in the next part of this essay.

Checking Your Brain at the Church Door? (Part II)

In the first part I presented the evidence for theism. There are good reasons for believing in a Creator God, including the order and fine-tuning of the universe and the evidence from design. Einstein (no dummy) believed an intelligence had made the cosmos.⁹ Defending this proposition is not difficult, nor does it involve the denial of the scientific evidence. The evidence indeed *points* to a Creator.

But God calls Adventists to take a biblical position: We are to warn the world of the near coming of our Lord, admonishing them to return to their Creator and show their allegiance by keeping the 7th day holy as a memorial of a lit-

⁸ Richard Dawkins, “God’s Utility Function,” *Scientific American* 273/5, (November, 1995): 80–85.

⁹ Robinson, 273-275.

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eral 7-day creation. Holding this ground requires something more than scientific evidence, for even believing scientists by and large subscribe to an ancient earth and Darwin's theory of evolution. The Catholic church and most Protestant bodies no longer accept the literal truth of the story in Genesis 1.

Can we defend our position logically? Below I present evidences pro and con for each theory. Although not exhaustive, I have tried to look at the issue from many perspectives. Creation will be presented first, followed by Darwin's theory of evolution, followed by my conclusions.

There are some who hold to various combinations of these two systems (theistic evolution, for example). Any combination will share in the strengths and weakness of each and may involve internal contradictions. I have therefore chosen to view them separately so the contrasts will be cast in sharp relief.

For those interested in a very candid discussion of the problems facing Creationists, Ariel Roth's book *Origins* is the best I know.¹⁰ He gives a thorough presentation of the weaknesses and strengths of each position. Leonard Brand's *Faith Reason and Earth History* also takes a creationist stance.¹¹

Creation: Pro

The Bible Supports this Theory. Although this may seem elementary, the Bible has great persuasive power, so much so that it stands, in spite of the assaults of atheists and agnostics for centuries. As mentioned in the first part, about 50% of Americans believe in a literal 7-day creation, despite the reported evidence against a literal reading of Genesis 1, and even though the media and most scientists reject it.¹² Two pillars of objective reality support the Bible: The changed lives of those who believe¹³ and the fulfillment of prophetic predictions, such as those found in Genesis 12, Daniel 2, 7, and 9, and those describing the character and work of the Messiah.

Jesus, the Disciples, and Paul Assumed the Truth of this Theory. See Matt 19:4–6; Mark 10:6–9; Acts 17:24; Col 3:16, 17; Heb 11:3; 2 Pet 3:3–7; Rev 4:11; and 14:7. For some Christians and Jews, their endorsement is pivotal.

The Story of Redemption Seems to Make No Sense Without the Stories of Genesis 1–3. Bultmann, in his small book *New Testament and Mythology*,² noted the close relationship between the story of the fall and the need for salvation. If there were no fall, why need there be salvation and atonement?¹⁴ By rejecting a creation and fall, Darwin's theory undermines the doctrine of salvation.

¹⁰ Ariel A. Roth, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1998).

¹¹ Leonard Brand, *Faith, Reason, and Earth History* (Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1997).

¹² Gallop Poll web site; 2001 poll regarding human origins.

¹³ See Armand M. Nicholi, Jr., *The Question of God* (New York: Free Press, 2002). This fascinating book by a Harvard psychiatrist compares the lives of Freud the atheist and C. S. Lewis the believer.

¹⁴ Rudolph Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, 1941.

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The Story Gives Purpose. In Genesis 1, God works with intention and deliberation to make a world suitable for the crown of creation, humankind. Humans have a role to play, and God has given them a work to do and a place under the sun. They are the children of the Most High, rather than the offspring of the scum of the earth. They are legitimate beings, not an accident. God comes at eventide each day to speak to the man and woman. He talks personally to them at the fall. All this shows more than casual concern. This contrasts starkly with the purposelessness at the foundation of evolutionary theory, where there is only chance and ultimate meaninglessness.¹⁵ Stories of redemption are present throughout all great literature and have an appeal to all that is good and great in the human spirit.¹⁶

There Is a Certain Incompatibility Between Evolutionary Theory and the Character of God Revealed in Scripture. Natural selection ruthlessly culls the infirm and weak, while Jesus stoops to care for the “least of these my brethren.” Millions of years of death by an uncaring universe, contrasted with numbered hairs and heaven’s interest in fallen sparrows.

Notice that these “pros” are not based on evidence that is strictly scientific in nature. But there is other evidence besides that which can be tested using the scientific method. The claims of God in the Bible are of such a character. God challenges the other gods to tell the future (Isa 41:21–24). This is evidence that can be checked against history but does not fall under the rules laid down by science. The testimony of a changed life is outside the ways of science, yet remains a powerful incentive to belief.

Creation: Con

The Creation Story in Genesis Is Not a Scientifically Stated Theory. It is, rather, more like rhythmic prose. It does not lend itself to dissection by using the scientific method, as this technique was not practiced by the ancients. Moses knew nothing of radiometric dating, fossils, sedimentary layers hundreds of feet thick, or pseudogenes. Of course, no one was present at the beginning, so neither theory is demonstrable, nor, in the strictest sense, refutable (a scientist has to repeat an experiment to tell whether it is true or false). All arguments on each side are inferences from the data.¹⁷ There is, however, one statement in the creation story that can be tested: God said that all the animals and plants would produce after their kind. The theory of evolution disputes this statement, asserting that over long periods of time, a “kind” will gradually change into another: that is, it will become a different “kind.” Strictly speaking, the fossil record seems to

¹⁵ Richard Dawkins, “God’s Utility Function,” *Scientific American* 273/5 (November, 1995): 85.

¹⁶ See Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), a fascinating book by the son of missionaries to China. He describes the conflict in worldviews between science and religion. See particularly chapters 3, 12, and 14.

¹⁷ Colin Patterson, *Evolution*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Comstock, 1999), 45.

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support the creationist view.¹⁸ In other words, few transitional forms are found (macro-evolution has not been demonstrated). Geneticists have been exploring the very edges of the genetic makeup of some “kinds” (we used fruit flies in biology lab) to see if they can show where transition into another “kind” occurs. Yet they come to a boundary they cannot cross.¹⁹

The Creation Theory Has Minimal Explaining Power. Let me give an example. An occasional whale is caught that has vestigial legs.²⁰ These do not seem to have a specific purpose. Creationists would say that God just made them that way, while evolutionists would postulate that the ancestors of whales must have had useful legs and walked on land. The theory of evolution thus has power to explain something that seems strange and is unaccountable according to the creation theory. Situations such as this put creationists in a defensive position. There have been some successes here, but the overall impression is a kind of tentativeness and jury-rigging that makes for embarrassment. (See, however, Behe for an excellent discussion of this problem.²¹ Behe argues that we cannot plumb all the reasons why a Designer would do what He does and therefore cannot use so-called design flaws or apparent abnormalities to postulate the lack of a Designer. See also Roth, 108-109).

The Earth Appears Old. This and reason No. 4 under Evolution: Pros below are the most serious criticisms of the theory. Huge layers of fossil-containing sediment, moving continents, radiometric dating, fossil magnetic imprints, etc., all seem to speak of an ancient earth.²²

Almost No Scientists Accept a Literal 7-Day Creation as a Viable Theory. The intellectual elite of the world do not even consider creation a “real” theory. Even believing while working in an unrelated area of science has caused “banning.”²³

Evolution: Pro

The Theory Is Accepted as Truth by the Scientific Establishment. There is a broad consensus that there is no other explanation for the facts of biology. Those who accept this theory can avoid conflict with scientific thought and literature. I have not seen a mainstream scientific article defending creation.

¹⁸ See Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge, “Punctuated Equilibria: The Tempo and Mode of Evolution Reconsidered,” *Paleobiology* 3 (1977): 115–151. Though evolutionists, these two scientists showed that the fossil remains do not record smooth transitions between groups. Rather, each species was distinct. They postulated that evolution occurred rapidly in isolated groups that were not preserved. This explained the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record.

¹⁹ See Roth, 178-190.

²⁰ Kate Wong, “The Mammals that Conquered the Seas,” *Scientific American*, 286/5 (May, 2002): 70-79. The chart on page 74 of this article shows the various purported whale ancestors, but documents no transitional forms between the fossil species.

²¹ Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 222-227.

²² Roth, 233-261, gives a creationist answer to this problem.

²³ Behe, 237.

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The Many Evidences for the Great Age of the Earth. A long age for the earth is no problem for evolutionary theory.

The Continuity of Life or Common Descent. The plants and animals all have the same genetic code and use the same basic molecules to construct their bodies, trunks, fibers, etc. Creationists would say that God did it that way, while evolutionists point to this as evidence that all came from a simple common ancestor.

The Geologic Column. The fossils begin as less complex organisms at the deepest layers and become more complex as one ascends to shallower levels. There seems to be a more or less orderly progression. It is not smooth, but it does not seem to be random, nor does order progress from more complex to simpler. If geologists could find a dinosaur bone firmly and unmistakably embedded in the Precambrian layer (one of the earliest fossil layers—the dinosaurs are thought to have lived hundreds of millions of years later), it would be strong evidence that both existed at the same time. This would destroy the theory. As far as I know, no one has found such a fossil.²⁴

Evolution: Con

This Theory Tends to Support Materialism and Atheism. Dawkins, the prominent British evolutionist, feels it became much easier to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist after Darwin's theory. Those theists who accept this theory accept a God who is more distant and more peripherally involved in his creation. Atheists will enquire of them, why do you need God if it all works without him (see Patterson, 118)? Some might argue that philosophy is irrelevant to this discussion. This is not so. Atheism and materialism are not attractive, in spite of what their proponents say. These theories, when taken to their logical conclusion, embrace a purposeless existence or fatal relativism. The Governments with the worst human rights records have been atheistic (the French Revolution, Communism, and Nazism). Atheists have often accused theists of grave atrocities, not without some justification, but their own hands literally drip with blood. The world has seen no greater and more efficient murderers than atheists in power. The Marxist and Nazi experiments of the 20th century are sobering evidence of the bankruptcy of atheistic social theory.

The Origin of Life. Evolution has no theory for the origin of life. Much speculation is presented as if it were true, but there is no good theory. See *Origins of Life* by Freeman Dyson for a discussion of each of the three proposed possibilities.²⁵ They all have fatal flaws, but speculation abounds.

An article in the April 2001 issue of *Scientific American* demonstrates this.²⁶ The author, Robert Hazen, argues that certain minerals may have been

²⁴ Roth has a good discussion of this problem from a creationist viewpoint, 147-175.

²⁵ Freeman Dyson, *Origins of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

²⁶ Robert Hazen, "Life's Rocky Start," *Scientific American* 284/4 (April, 2001): 77-85.

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essential in the formation of life. He suggests one of them, calcite, as a catalyst that would have helped sort the amino acids in the primordial organic soup. But careful thinking shows that this mineral is inadequate for the task. There is no way that more than one protein could form by the chance sorting of amino acids.²⁷

There is nothing wrong with speculation. It has opened up vast areas of knowledge unknowable without these flights of imagination. But the above idea has strong arguments against it. However, whenever the popular scientific press reviews new “evidence” on the origin of life, from Stanley Miller’s bell jar experiments in the 50’s to Hazen’s “Mineral Stars in the Movie of Life” in 2001, there is wild optimism about the “breakthroughs” that have been made. These are uniformly overstated.

Design. Darwinians tell us that we are not using our minds when we believe that there is a Creator. But they must deny the use of their senses when viewing the cosmos. The universe and the life on our planet have a purposeful look. They appear as if they were made the way they are for a reason.²⁸

Social Darwinism. A few years after Darwin, Herbert Spencer described ideas to harness the theory to improve the human species. If the rule is: “survival of the fittest,” why not help survival along with a little cognitive input? Thus we saw the birth of eugenics and the “Super Race.” This thinking was one foundation of Hitler’s social program to exterminate “defective races and individuals”

II Peter 3:3-7 seems to describe the doctrine of uniformitarianism that has been held by many scientists since the beginning of the 18th century and is a basic assumption of Darwin’s thesis. This theory states that the processes we see active on earth today are the only ones that have operated in the past. Many scientists now include some forms of catastrophism (such as meteors striking the earth), though few believe in a universal flood. These verses tell us that in the last days, men would be scoffers, saying the world has lasted a great length of time and that the flood story is a myth. They thus seem to confirm the description found in Scripture.

Darwin Said: “If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed, which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”²⁹ Behe seems to have demonstrated this with his ideas about irreducible complexity.³⁰

Synthesis

So How Do I Put This All Together? I have met God. I have seen him work in my life and in the lives of others. I particularly remember experiences as

²⁷ A creationist said: “What do you get after cooking primordial soup for a billion years? Very old primordial soup.”

²⁸ See Roth, 94-112, and Behe.

²⁹ Quoted by Patterson, 117.

³⁰ See Behe, 232-253, for a discussion on choosing one’s philosophical foundations.

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a colporteur in central California between my first and second years of medical school. God's Spirit appealed to the people through us as we went from door to door. This answered any lingering doubts in my mind about his existence. The reasoned responses to atheism's arguments came later, but confirmed my experience.

I have seen God speak to the most basic human needs through His Word, the Bible. There is a solace there that exists nowhere else. I have also seen that if the church had only adhered firmly to Scripture, much error and many conflicts could have been avoided. This is not an anti-intellectual position, for study of the Bible requires careful thought, and its deepest secrets open only to the diligent seeker.

I have seen how the theory of evolution has shaken the faith of old and young alike in the truth of the Bible. Some recover and rethink their doctrine of the Bible or adjust their view of science. But others are unable to do this and leave the church in body or, if unable to do so, in mind. This theory causes such destruction of faith that I cannot see that it is part of the truth of God.

I therefore give more weight to the evidences for creationism and set aside those interpretations of science that support Darwin's theory. I have made a conscious decision to give greater weight to arguments supporting Scripture than to the findings of science that conflict with revelation. I have not ignored science nor denied its findings, but accept revelation as a higher, more complete knowledge. This is an informed decision after looking at all the evidence, including that of the scientists and my own experience. There have been days and nights of prayer and struggle.

Both theories have gaps in their science that must be bridged by belief in something that cannot be proven. Creation has difficulties with the apparent age of the earth, the continuity of life, and the geologic column. Evolution has problems with the origin of life, the order seen in living things, and the origin of the laws of the universe (molecular laws, etc.). Both are logical if certain assumptions are accepted. Each depends on a leap of faith of some kind. The Bible is up front about this. It confesses that belief in creation is an act of faith (Heb 11:3). There is evidence, but faith is required. Many scientists are less transparent, refusing to see that their position also requires faith: faith that science will in the future be able to answer all the questions of life for which it has no answer now.

For those struggling with science, John, in his first letter, describes Christ as One seen, heard, and touched, that is, scientifically examined. He then writes his thesis on the findings: God is light, and there is no darkness in him (1 John 1:5).

And what is the conclusion of the skeptics after all their careful research? "The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but pitiless indifference."³¹

³¹ Dawkins, 85.

SHEPHERD: CHECKING YOUR BRAIN AT THE CHURCH DOOR?

I have chosen a life colored by faith. Habitual faith is a treasure I have fought for. It requires exercise to become strong and to remain healthy. We cannot let the world rob us by its sophisticated arguments and caustic ridicule.

The majority of evolutionists would not be convinced by these arguments, but I think it is clear that creationists are still using their brains, in contrast to Mr. Rennie's contention. Not as atheists use theirs, but using them nevertheless.

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