Sola Scriptura: A Comparison of Luther and the Adventist Understanding

Ellen White’s Portrait of Martin Luther

Jesus in the Archives
EDITORIAL
The enduring legacy of the Protestant Reformation
by Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy

FIRST PERSON
Following Jesus unreservedly
by Berenice Cheng

ACTION REPORT
“You did it to Me”: What a youth team in Temuco, Chile, is doing to witness for God’s glory
by Paula Castillo

PROFILE
Maximilian Jantscher
by Kurt Piesslinger

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THE ENDURING LEGACY OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

This issue of Dialogue commemorates the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther’s nailing of the 95 Theses onto the door of the church at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, which in effect launched the Protestant Reformation that changed the world and history. The main goal of Luther and other Reformers was not to defy church authority, but rather to reaffirm the primacy of Scripture and to redirect the how and why of redemptive history in the lives of believers. “The word of God, by which Luther tested every doctrine and every claim, was like a two-edged sword, cutting its way to the hearts of the people. Everywhere there was awakening a desire for spiritual progress. Everywhere was such a hungering and thirsting after righteousness as had not been known for ages. The eyes of the people, so long directed to human rites and earthly mediators, were now turning in penitence and faith to Christ and Him crucified.”

For his unflinching stand, Martin Luther paid a price: his excommunication in 1521 by Pope Leo X. When Luther was pressured by the Imperial Diet to recant his “heretical” ideas, he took his historic stand: “Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

Luther stood his ground against emperor, pope, and church councils not out of pride or German nationalism, but because of his absolute conviction about the primacy of the Scriptures, including its crucial teaching that salvation is by grace through faith, and not through works. He accepted the authority of Scripture over his personal life as well, even when its requirements were not politically expedient or personally convenient. For example, Luther came to believe from his study that it was unbiblical to require clergy not to marry. And so, in 1525, Luther married Katharina von Bora, a former nun, who in her own way became an important part of the Reformation and helped spread the principles behind that great movement, particularly with regard to what constitutes the Protestant family life and the principles that should govern clergy marriage.

Although some of his colleagues were opposed to his marriage for fear of it creating a scandal that would unsettle the Reformation, Luther concluded that “his marriage would please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep.” He believed marriage and family life were established at Creation and ordained by God as a school for character. The dinner table at the Luther home was full and busy, with six children of their own, the adopted children of relatives (four and by some accounts as many as six), and students who came to study at Wittenberg under theology doctor and professor Luther.
Luther lectured at the University of Wittenberg on the Psalms and the books of Romans, Hebrews, and Galatians. He became convinced that the doctrine of justification—that “the just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11, Hebrews 10:38, NKJV), “is the chief article of the whole Christian doctrine” and sola fide became the rallying cry of the Reformation.

Luther also held that the Bible was not to be the privileged domain of the learned clergy alone but should be made accessible to all in their mother tongue. As a singular contribution to opening the eyes and hearts of every believer to the revelation of God’s grace and goodness, Luther translated the Bible into vernacular German and encouraged its translation into other languages, based on the principle of ad fontes ("back to the sources") of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. In time, many others would capture the same vision that everyone should be able to read and hear the Bible in his or her native language.

Consider the example of Mikael Olau (Mikael Olavinojka in Finnish), and how that vision motivated him already as a university student. He was born around 1510 in Pernà (Pernaja) in Finland, which was then part of the medieval Swedish Empire. To reflect his agricultural parentage, he took on the surname Agricola while a student in Viborg (Viipuri) Latin School where he was first exposed to the ideas of the Protestant Reformation. He went on to become a scribe to the bishop in Åbo (Turku) and in 1536, the bishop sent him to study in Wittenberg, the center of the Lutheran Reformation. The very next year, Agricola started to translate the New Testament into Finnish.

Agricola earned a Master’s degree in 1539 and left Wittenberg to become the rector of Turku (Cathedral) School where he remained until 1548. This was a productive period of writing where among other works, he produced a prayer book with 29 hymns for the new Lutheran Church in Finland, which brought the Reformation into the worship experience with a vernacular liturgy. (Luther himself was a prolific hymn writer). After a five-year approval period, Agricola's New Testament in Finnish was finally printed in 1548. In 1554, Swedish King Gustav Vasa had him consecrated as bishop of Turku parish (without papal approval) and thereby, the Reformation became firmly rooted in this part of Scandinavia. Agricola also endorsed marriage for the priesthood and married, and his only son, Christian, followed in his father’s pastoral steps and in 1583 became the bishop of Tallinn and Haapsalu (Estonia). But Mikael Agricola’s enduring legacy was translating the New Testament into Finnish and developing the language’s orthography so that ordinary people could study the Bible in Finnish. He is still called the “father of literary Finnish,” and in 2016, Finland was ranked the most literate country in the world.

But of what lasting gain is literacy apart from God? Teaching the next generation to value the supremacy of Scripture and making it available in vernacular around the world are works that continue the spirit of the Reformation. The Word of God is still something to stake one’s life on as it orders everyday life, shapes our relations to others, and leads us to Christ and the salvation that is ours through faith—sola fide. 

Lisa M. Beardsley-Hardy
Editor-in-Chief of Dialogue

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Sola scriptura means the Word of God is the ultimate standard and norm, as well as the proper touchstone and final authority for faith and practice. All other authorities must be judged and evaluated in the light of Scripture. The Word of God is self-sufficient.
Seventh-day Adventists affirm the *sola scriptura* principle. They are known as “the people of the Book” and place a high regard upon Scripture. But what Luther meant by *sola scriptura* is a contested subject among church historians and theologians. This chapter explores and compares the meaning of the *sola scriptura* principle by Luther and as understood by Seventh-day Adventists.

**LUTHER AND SOLA SCRIPTURA**

Several recent studies maintain that it is a misconception, or at least an oversimplification, to argue that Scripture was the sole authority for the Reformers and that tradition had no role. For example, Irena Backus states, “It is by now a well-known fact that the reformers did not reject the tradition of the Early Church, which in their eyes was to be sharply distinguished from the corruptions of mediaeval ecclesiastical structures.” These developments necessitate a more careful look at what the term *sola scriptura* meant for Luther. To understand this phrase, it is necessary to place the issue in its historical context.

**SOLA SCRIPTURA PRINCIPLE IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

During Luther’s time, the issue was not the authority of Scripture itself but rather to what extent this authority has *vis-à-vis* the Roman Catholic Church and its leaders. Catholic leaders taught “the unwritten tradition could be just as authoritative as Scripture.” At times, it could even be superior since it was the church’s creation. Luther, as priest, adhered to this belief during his early life. Even after posting his 95 Theses, he maintained a high regard for the writings of the church fathers and papal decrees. He declared, “First, I testify that I desire to say or maintain absolutely nothing except, first of all, what is in the Holy Scriptures and can be maintained from them; and then what is in and from the writings of the church fathers and is accepted by the Roman church and preserved both in the canons and papal decrees.”

In addition, another common understanding maintained that the pope or a church council represented the ultimate authority to determine the meaning of the Bible.

**LUTHER’S VIEW OF THE CHURCH FATHERS AND THEIR TEACHINGS**

Luther did not altogether discard tradition. He fought against the Radical Reformers who wanted to eliminate all church traditions. He warned, “One needs a more cautious, discreet spirit, which attacks the accretion which threatens the temple without destroying the temple of God itself.” And to those who accused him of rejecting all the teachings of the church fathers, he answered, “I do not reject them. But everyone, indeed, knows that at times they have erred, as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they give me evidence for their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred.”

Luther, after several disputations with papal representatives, rejected the common understanding that “the teaching of the Scripture and the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church were necessarily identical.” He wrote, “What else do I contend for but to bring everyone to understand the difference between the divine Scripture and human teaching or custom.” The Holy Scriptures are “more reliable than any other writings” and by which one can judge all other writings, for it is the only “true lord and master of all writings and doctrine on earth.” He advised that “the Sacred Scriptures must be sharply distinguished from those that have been invented by men in the Church, it matters not how eminent they be for saintliness and scholarship.”

Luther argued for the primacy of the Scriptures over the writings of the church fathers, but at the same time he upheld their value. In 1539, he wrote, “We Gentiles must not value the writings of our fathers as highly as the Holy Scripture, but as worth a little less.” He added, “The teachings of the Fathers are useful only to lead us to the Scriptures, as they were led, and then we must hold to the Scriptures alone.” Furthermore, he explained, “The writings of all the holy fathers should be read only for a time, in order that through them we may be led to the Holy Scriptures. . . . The dear fathers wished, by their writings, to lead us to the Scriptures, but we so use
them as to be led away from the Scriptures, though the Scriptures alone are our vineyard in which we ought all to work and toil.”

LUTHER AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

Luther did not despise church authority without qualification. His strong objection was against the pope’s claim that the church has authority above the Word of God and therefore must be its arbiter. For him, Scripture is its own interpreter, and therefore it must be interpreted by comparing Scripture with Scripture. He protested against the Catholic teaching that Scripture is insufficient “apart from the treasury of popes and councils.” Contrary to the popular belief of his time, he disagreed that the church is above Scripture. Instead, he believed that the Word of God bore and nourished the church. Thus, he claimed that the Word of God is incomparably superior to the Church, and in this Word the Church, being a creature, has nothing to decree, ordain, or make, but only to be decreed, ordained, and made.

Arthur Wood attests that Luther quoted profusely from the church fathers, but he subjected their authority to Scripture and refused to accept them whenever they appeared to contradict the Word of God. According to Luther, “All the holy fathers, when they speak apart from the Scriptures, are as fallible as anyone else.” He added, “I will not listen to the Church or the fathers or the apostles unless they bring and teach the pure Word of God.” In his Sermons on the Gospel of John, he referred to apostle Paul’s message to the Galatians (Galatians 1:8) when he emphasized that any person (regardless of his or her status or rank) and even angels would be suspect if they preached contrary to the Word of God. Professed prophets who work wonders and miracles also must be judged “in the light of God’s Word.”

SUMMARY OF LUTHER AND SOLA SCRIPTURA

The idea of sola scriptura for Luther did not mean that Scripture was the sole religious authority. It is evident that the above statements were not intended to mean that Luther despised all the teachings of the church fathers. Although he made it clear that Scripture must be above creeds and papal decrees, his acceptance of church authority and the creeds depended upon their biblical authority.

James R. Payton Jr. aptly summarizes Luther’s understanding of sola scriptura by stating that, for Luther, “Scripture was the only unquestioned religious authority. It did not mean that Scripture was the only religious authority—as has often been assumed or misunderstood in subsequent Protestantism.”

For Luther, sola scriptura meant that the Word of God is the ultimate standard and norm, the proper touchstone, and the final authority for faith and practice. All other authorities must be judged and evaluated in light of Scripture. Moreover, for him, the Word of God was self-sufficient. It is its own interpreter and should never be beholden to any other authority for authentication.

“The dear fathers wished, by their writings, to lead us to the Scriptures, but we so use them as to be led away from the Scriptures, though the Scriptures alone are our vineyard in which we ought all to work and toil.”

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING OF SOLA SCRIPTURA

Seventh-day Adventists adhere to the sola scriptura principle. The first fundamental belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church states, “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.” Yet Adventist thinkers have differed in their understanding of sola scriptura. In order to grasp the Adventist understanding of the sola scriptura principle, I will examine the writings of Ellen G. White in order to establish an Adventist baseline view. It is important to note that when she referenced the idea of sola scriptura she connected the idea to the Reformation understanding on this topic. She wrote, “In our time there is a wide departure from their doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty.”

ELLEN G. WHITE AND SOLA SCRIPTURA

Ellen White consistently affirmed the sola scriptura principle. For her, “the Bible, and the Bible alone, is our rule of faith.” In another place, she wrote, “The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject,
viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident.”

Contrary to her detractors’ assertions, Ellen White never claimed that her writings should ever be considered as equal to Scripture. She was emphatic on this point: “God’s Word is the unerring standard. The Testimonies [her writings] are not to take place of the Word. . . . Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.” In comparison to the Bible, she claimed that her writings were a “lesser light” to lead people to the “greater light.” She penned that “if the Testimonies speak not according to the word of God, reject them.” She also wrote, “Our position and faith is in the Bible. And never do we want any soul to bring in the Testimonies ahead of the Bible and that the Testimonies would not be necessary if God’s people diligently studied the Scriptures.”

Ellen White understood sola scriptura principle does not mean that she never considered other sources. She cautioned, “Many think that they must consult commentaries on the Scriptures in order to understand the meaning of the word of God, and we would not take the position that commentaries should not be studied; but it will take much discernment to discover the truth of God under the mass of the words of men.” She consistently maintained that Scripture is the ultimate gauge of faith and practice. Furthermore, she affirmed “the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms” and all other teachings and practices must pass the test of the Scriptures.

ELLEN G. WHITE AND THE USE OF OTHER SOURCES

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SUMMARY OF ELLEN G. WHITE’S UNDERSTANDING OF SOLA SCRIPTURA

Ellen White understood sola scriptura to mean that the Bible and the Bible alone is the foundation of Christian faith and practice. Yet, this does not mean she disregarded other religious material. She claimed that her writings did not have the same function as Scripture but instead were intended to lead people back to the Word of God. Even though she maintained the principle that Scripture interprets itself, she allowed for the fact that other biblical tools and resources can be helpful as an aid to study the Bible. She emphasized that Scripture must always be given priority over other sources of authority in order to determine the meaning of the text.

CONCLUSION

“Luther and Seventh-day Adventists share two main commonalities about the principle of sola scriptura. First, both decisively affirm that the Bible is the only infallible and final touchstone of faith and practice. It means that all doctrine must pass the test of Scripture in order to be considered valid. The Bible is the only source of religious knowledge. Second, both agree that Scripture is its own interpreter. It is not dependent upon external authorities or science to authenticate its claim. A difficult Scriptural passage must be understood in the light of the witness of Scripture as a whole. Finally, in application of the sola scriptura principle, any teaching or doctrine that does not pass the test of the Scripture must be rejected.”

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sola scriptura is generally accepted to mean that the Bible alone is the authority in matters of faith and practice. The other two principles that complete the three solas are sola gratia ("grace alone") and sola fide ("faith alone").
3. Wood labors to explain that Luther is indebted in many ways to his predecessors, especially Augustine of Hippo and William of Occam, and to later Occamist theologians regarding his view of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, sola scriptura as a theological formula is a byproduct of the Reformation rather than its presupposition. See Bernhard Lohse, Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 153; cf. Bernhard Lohse, Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development, trans. and ed. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2011), 22, 23. The phrase sola scriptura per se is not found in the works of Luther. Nevertheless, the idea that Scripture stands supreme in authority over the church and other religious authorities is central in his more developed theology.
4. Lohse, Martin Luther’s Theology, 123.
7. Payton, Getting the Reformation Wrong, 153.
8. Irena Backus, “The Disputation of Baden, 1526, and Berne, 1528: Neutralizing the Early Church,” special issue, Studies in Reformed...


10. Wood, Captive to the Word, 120.

11. The Radical Reformers or Anabaptists were more consistent in applying the sola scriptura principle. See Alister E. McGrath, Reformation Thought: An Introduction, 3rd ed. (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 155.

12. Martin Luther, Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings, Timothy F. Luell and William R. Russell, eds. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 346.

13. Luther, Luther's Works, 32:11.

14. Wood, Captive to the Word, 120; cf. Lohse, Martin Luther's Theology, 188. According to Ernst Zeeeden, "Luther was not breaking new ground when he turned to the Bible, but only when he cut the Bible off from the pope and Church, or subordinated them." Ernst W. Zeeeden, The Legacy of Luther: Martin Luther and the Reformation (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1954), quoted in Wood, Captive to the Word, 119.


16. Luther, Luther's Works, 32:11.

17. Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," quoted in Kerr, A Compend of Luther's Theology, 12.

18. Martin Luther, On the Councils and the Church, 1539, in Selected Writings of Martin Luther, 1529–1546, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2007), 243.


25. See Wood, Captive to the Word, 125.

26. Martin Luther, quoted in the introduction to Luther’s 1521 Avoiding the Doctrine of Men, in Tappert, Selected Writings of Martin Luther, 1529–1546, 204.

27. Luther, Luther’s Works, 26:67.

28. See Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, vol. 23, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 6–8, Hilton C. Oswald, ed. (St. Louis, Mo.: Concordia, 1959), 191, 192.

29. Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, vol. 24, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 24–26 (St. Louis, Minn.: Concordia, 1961), 75; cf. Luther, Luther’s Works, 26:583.

30. See Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, vol. 41, Church and Ministry 5, Eric W. Gritsch, ed. (Philadelphia, Penna.: Fortress, 1966), 123.


32. Although Luther asserted the sola scriptura principle, it is evident that he did not agree with the principle of sola scriptura—the idea that all Scriptures are equally inspired. He calls the book of James the "epistle of straw" for the reason that it seemingly contradicts the idea of righteousness by faith alone. Luther wrote, “Away with James.” His authority is not great enough to cause me to abandon the doctrine of faith and to deviate from the authority of the other apostles and the entire Scripture.” Martin Luther, quoted in Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, Robert C. Shultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Penna., Fortress, 1966), 81. On the other hand, Adventists assert sola scriptura in consideration that "all Scriptures" are equally inspired and are profitable to the believer.

33. See Hasel, “Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” 36.


38. Ellen G. White, Fundamentals of Christian Education (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub.: Assn., 1925), 187. In line with Ellen G. White, Hasel comments that to take sola scriptura as a hermeneutical principle does not mean to “exclude the help of other sources in the task of interpretation, such as biblical lexicons, dictionaries, concordances, and other books and commentaries. However, in the proper interpretation of the Bible, the text of Scripture has priority over all other aspects, sciences, and secondary helps. Other viewpoints have to be carefully evaluated from the standpoint of Scripture as a whole.”—“Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture,” 1:36.


41. White, Testimonies for the Church (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 5309.

42. White, Evangelism, 256.

43. Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1948), 2,605. 606. She claimed that her Testimonies are to point people to the Scriptures that they have neglected (White, Evangelism, 257).

44. White, Testimonies for the Church, 2,605.


47. According to Ellen G. White, “The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creed 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.”– The Great Controversy, 595, cf. White, Testimonies for the Church, 5,575.
Luther and Ellen White highlighted the ultimate authority of Scripture for faith and practice, the importance of Scripture as its own interpreter, the close relationship between the Old and New Testaments, and the central role of Jesus Christ. They strongly held that salvation from sin is accomplished only in the merits of Christ’s atoning sacrifice on the cross, and that it is a gift of God’s grace, and that it is received by the sinner by faith alone, and not by any works. In addition, for both Luther and White a conspicuous, eschatological outlook accompanied salvation.
Ellen G. White (1827–1915) viewed Martin Luther as the Protestant Reformer par excellence and the historical example for those living at the time of the end. She held this view despite the fact that the most obvious roots for Seventh-day Adventist theology come from the Wesleyan-Methodist and Restorationist traditions. White mentions Luther more than four times as often as Philip Melanchthon, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, John Knox, and John Wesley combined. Ellen White certainly saw something very special in this German Reformer.

On the surface, it might seem that Ellen White did not have much in common with Luther. Not only did three hundred years and a large ocean separate them, they also came from very different cultural, educational, philosophical, and theological backgrounds. Despite such obvious differences, they shared a number of common experiences that, in one sense, might have created a spiritual kinship between them.

Both Martin Luther and Ellen White were at the forefront of religious reform and revival movements in their own nations and beyond. They were expelled from the churches of their early years for circulating their religious convictions. Both highlighted the ultimate authority of Scripture for faith and practice, the importance of Scripture as its own interpreter, the close relationship between the Old and the New Testament, and the central role of Jesus Christ. They strongly believed in the merits of Christ’s atoning sacrifice as the provision for the justification of the sinner by faith; yet for both Luther and White, a conspicuous eschatological outlook accompanied salvation. Their theological framework has influenced their fellow believers and is still held in high regard by their respective denominational traditions to the point that it continues to impact the broader surrounding culture.

Ellen White’s chronological sketch of Luther’s life is characterized by an interlacing of the motifs of the central role and authority of Scripture, justification by faith in Christ, God’s providential working in Luther’s experience, and Luther’s gradual separation from Roman Catholicism. This chapter describes her appropriation of each of these motifs.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

Ellen White, throughout her description of the life of Martin Luther, emphasized the growing importance that the Bible played in his experience. She highlighted that upon finding a Latin Bible in the University of Erfurt’s library, he felt deeply moved as he could read “the words of life” for the first time for himself. Angels came close to Luther and illumined his understanding as he sighed, “O that God would give me such a book for myself.” As a result, he became deeply convicted of his own sinfulness. Luther greatly delighted to study the Bible that was “chained to the convent wall.” The growing conviction of his own sin caused him to seek forgiveness by earning it through his own works. Johann von Staupitz, Luther’s confessor, eventually explained the Bible to him and pointed him to Jesus.

Later, in Wittenberg, he was able to study the Bible in its original languages and soon began to lecture on biblical books. Ellen White stressed that Luther nevertheless still felt unworthy to preach the Word of God and needed Staupitz’s encouragement. After earning his doctoral degree in 1512, he became a professor at the university, so that he could “devote himself, as never before, to the Scriptures that he loved.” It was at this point that White saw him making the crucial resolution to study Scripture carefully, receive only such doctrines that rested upon its authority, and faithfully teach others in it. That resolution points already to the later “vital principle of the Reformation.” Theologians have termed it the formal principle (the authoritative source) of the Reformation. Luther was sure that a person’s intellect and research were insufficient to obtain a proper understanding of the Bible. What a person needs is to pray with an open heart for God, the Author of Scripture, to provide a better understanding of it. Ellen White emphasized that he perceived Scripture as the only rule of faith and practice; this is a motif that appears throughout her own writings and the publications of other early Seventh-day Adventists and contemporary American Protestant writers.

After the inception of the Protestant Reformation, Luther even “urged” his detractors to “show him his errors from the Scriptures.” Writing about his stay at Wartburg Castle from May 1521 to March 1522, White stated that Luther was “filling his lamp from the storehouse of truth.” Indeed, it was there that he “performed a most important service for his countrymen by translating the New Testament into the German tongue.” (Published six months after his return from Wartburg, it became known as the September Testament.) From this “rocky Patmos,” Luther issued a host of tracts that proclaimed the gospel and rebuked the errors of his time. Yet, instead of turning only against Roman Catholicism and rationalism, he also opposed the spiritualizing fanaticism of the Zwickau prophets and Thomas Müntzer, who stressed the significance of spiritual communications, thus diminishing the authority of the written Word. Neither Luther nor White saw any value in the Catholic rite of the Mass; she sided with Luther in his rejection of its violent abolishment.
because she believed that the power of the Word of God was more effective than the use of force in turning people away from both apostate worship and fanatical excitement. Ellen White perceived Martin Luther as the prime advocate of “true Christianity” because of the role and authority he placed upon Scripture.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN CHRIST

The second motif running through Ellen White’s narrative on Luther is “the great truth of justification by faith . . . a mighty beacon to guide repentant sinners into the way of life.” Denis Fortin, a historical theologian, notes that Ellen White credits Martin Luther with “the greatest role in restoring the second distinctive doctrine of Protestantism: salvation through faith in Christ.” In addition, Hans Heinz states that by discovering that teaching “Luther established the material principle [the central doctrine] of the Reformation.”

As mentioned before, Ellen White pointed out that Martin Luther was searching for forgiveness and peace through discipline and spiritual exercises when his confessor, Staupitz, eventually asked him to “look away from himself” and the “infinite punishment for the violation of God’s law, and look to Jesus, his sin-pardoning Saviour.” She first mentioned Staupitz’s statement in an article in late May 1883. Interestingly, at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists session less than six months later, she repeatedly emphasized the need to refrain from focusing on one’s own lack of perfection and to look firmly to Christ for one’s personal salvation. As her sermons were published, she impressed on her readers the thought to look away from self and focus on the cross—“Look and live.”

Luther’s new insight had a positive impact on his life, yet it did not necessarily transform his view of salvation. Thus, Ellen White described Luther in the winter of 1510–1511, together with other pilgrims, as “devoutly climbing the Scala Sancta in Rome when ‘suddenly a voice like thunder seemed to say to him: ‘The just shall live by faith.’” She wrote that Luther left the scene in horror and that text never lost its power over his soul. He realized “more clearly than ever before the necessity of constant faith in the merits of Christ.”

Commenting on the nature and impact of his teachings on those listening to him from 1512 to 1517, White wrote, “The glad tidings of a Saviour’s love, the assurance of pardon and peace through His atoning blood, rejoiced their hearts and inspired within them an immortal hope.”

Since 1904, Reformation scholars have emphasized Luther’s Reformational breakthrough, the Turmerlebnis (tower experience), an event that Ellen White never mentioned. Nevertheless, scholars disagree on the time of that event. Some place it about three years before the beginning of the Reformation, while others suppose that it did not happen until 1518. More recently scholars assert that Luther’s Reformational insight may have been a process rather than a single event, suggesting that earlier scholars may have failed to do justice to his complex development between 1510 and 1520. This reasoning is in harmony with Ellen White’s view of his experience. Luther himself may not have ascribed too much significance to the Turmerlebnis because he mentioned it only once in his writings (and even this lone reference was about 30 years later).

Talking about Luther’s response to those who had purchased indulgences from Johann Tetzel (1465–1519), she wrote, “Nothing but repentance toward God and faith in Christ can save the sinner. The grace of Christ cannot be purchased; it is a free gift. He [Luther] counseled the people not to buy indulgences, but to look in faith to a crucified Redeemer. He related his own painful experience in vainly seeking by humiliation and penance to secure salvation, and assured his hearers that it was by looking away from himself and believing in Christ that he found peace and joy.”

On his way to the Diet of Worms in 1521, Luther preached a sermon at Erfurt in which he made a similar remark, “We are saved by His [Christ’s] work, and not by our own,” and that “since God has saved us” through Him, we are to live as redeemed people and show unselfish love to the needy. Ellen White perceived his sermon as “the bread of life . . . broken to those starving souls.” As Luther tried to present Christ as “the sinner’s Redeemer,” “he hid behind the Man of Calvary,” and he “lost sight of self” and the peril of his situation.

DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN LUTHER’S EXPERIENCE

Ellen White was convinced that God was deeply interested in Martin Luther’s destiny and God’s providence was actively operating in specific events and circumstances in his life. She believed that God placed people in Luther’s life who became instrumental to his personal development and the cause of reform. According to her, “God raised up” Staupitz as a friend and helper for Luther. She similarly perceived God’s providence at work when Melanchthon came to Wittenberg, because he and Luther complemented each other and strengthened the Reformation.

Even some enemies of the Reformation spoke and acted in ways that Ellen White could explain only by divine providence. Thus, she equated Emperor Charles V’s call
for Luther to present his views at the Diet of Worms in 1521 with God’s call. Similarly, the appearance of Jerome Aleander (1480–1542), “the abler of . . . [Rome’s] orators,” at the diet was calculated by God to bring both positions to a direct encounter. She further believed that God must have worked on the heart of Duke George of Saxony (1471–1539), who was “a determined enemy” of the Reformation, when he offered one of the most eloquent critiques of the papal tyranny.

White described several experiences as God’s means to educate Luther and further his efforts. Thus, the despondency Luther experienced at Worms was permitted by “an all-wise Providence.” He was “to realize his peril, that he might not trust to his own strength and rush presumptuously into danger.” Like Jacob, he was to wrestle with God and fasten his faith “in his utter helplessness . . . upon Christ, the mighty Deliverer.” Luther being asked to present his speech not only in German but also in Latin was another circumstance that Ellen White perceived as God’s providence, because it allowed many of the attendees to understand the force of Luther’s argument who had not felt it the first time. Luther’s planned abduction from the diet was, in White’s view, a divine “way of escape.” Besides preserving his life, God had more significant goals in mind. To prepare Luther for walking again “upon the dizzy heights to which he had been so suddenly exalted,” God saved him “from the pride and self-confidence that are so often caused by success” by shutting him out from public and human praise and therefore preventing the endeavors of the Reformation from being thwarted.

**LUTHER’S SEPARATION FROM ROME**

As Luther grew in his understanding of the Bible and its gospel message, he grew increasingly apart from the church of his childhood. Ellen White’s first chapter on Luther in *The Great Controversy* is aptly titled “Luther’s Separation From Rome,” thus encapsulating the theme of an extended process of dissociation from the Roman Catholic system. The following chapters on the Reformation in Germany illustrate the widening gap between Luther and his former church. White stated that Luther found joy in studying the Bible as well as relief in Staupitz’s advice; yet for years, he was “still a true son of the papal church” and “had no thought that he would ever be anything else.” His visit to Rome in 1510–1511 made him aware more than ever before that one was to rely on the merits of Christ rather than one’s own works for salvation. White wrote, “His eyes had been opened, and were never again to be closed, to the delusions of the papacy. When he turned his face from Rome he had turned away also in heart, and from that time the separation grew wider, until he severed all connection with the papal church.”

After Luther completed his doctoral degree in October 1512, Ellen White saw him resolve “that Christians should receive no other doctrines than those which rest on the authority of the Sacred Scriptures”; this was a principle that “struck at the very foundation of papal supremacy.” That resolution did not make him a Protestant, however, for she pointed out that even when he learned of Tetzel’s “blasphemous assumptions” in 1517, he was “still a papist of the straitest sort.” And even after his return from the Diet of Augsburg in October 1518, White saw him as “a supporter of the Roman Church,” who had “no thought that he would ever separate from her communion.” Luther’s final and outward separation came as a result of a terrible inner struggle, manifested in the burning of the papal bull in December 1520.

The events during and surrounding the Diet of Worms in the spring of 1521 (about two months) compose about one-third of Ellen White’s sketch on Luther. She may have given such prominence to that event because it brought face-to-face the conflict between Rome and Luther—between darkness and light. The character and foundation of each side were revealed more directly than ever before. She perceived Luther’s appearance before Emperor Charles V, the papal party, and the German nobility as a showdown between the two sides. It signaled the success of the Reformation: A condemned heretic was not only granted safe conduct but was even permitted to present his teachings before the assembly, thus disregarding the authority of the pope who had just condemned him.

Despite the stark contrast that Ellen White saw between Catholicism and Protestantism, she nevertheless perceived a paradox in the lives of Luther and others. Although he moved away from Rome by placing his faith on the authority of Scripture and salvation by the merits of Christ, he was still a strict supporter of the papal system. She saw each person being swayed by two great principles—divine, self-sacrificing, other-oriented love versus selfish, self-oriented love. That struggle entered “into every phase of human experience” and influenced people to make choices in one or the other direction. Instead of judging people based on their “occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds,” she stressed the significance of “the tendency of the habitual words and acts.” Luther’s example illustrates the paradox that some people may be led by God’s Spirit and progress in their understanding despite their loyalty to a particular religious system.
CONCLUSION

Interestingly, the above motifs do not just characterize Ellen White’s Luther narrative but harmonize with her writings in general. Throughout her writings, she stressed the authority of Scripture, salvation by faith in Christ, and the Great Controversy theme between good and evil. Luther was the epitome of revival and reform. In fact, she thought that Luther’s courage in preaching “present truth” in the face of opposition seemed to be an example for those called by God to promote the “present truth” in the end. White remarked that as “there was a present truth in the days of Luther—a truth at that time of special importance; there is [similarly] a present truth for the church today.” The term present truth was and still is highly significant for Seventh-day Adventists, yet many readers may be surprised to learn that Ellen White used that term only two times in the Great Controversy and both times in connection with Luther.14 Ellen White’s Luther narrative was an illustration of the tension between the two contending principles that are present in the life of each person. They are, therefore, an example for those preparing themselves for coming events. The experience of clinging to Jesus and His Word in the midst of the universal, global, and personal conflict is not just an experience reserved for Martin Luther or Ellen White but an experience in which each person is invited to participate.15

NOTES AND REFERENCES


4. Ibid., 125, 126.

5. Ibid., 152; cf. 186.

6. Ibid., 138. See also 156, 157, 159, 160, 166–168.

7. Ibid., 168.

8. Ibid., 169. See also 193, 194.


10. Ibid., 189.

11. Ibid., 193.


15. White, The Great Controversy, 123.

16. ———, “Martin Luther—His Character and Early Life; Signs of the Times (May 31, 1883): 242.


19. Ibid., 126.


23. Ibid., 152.

24. Ibid., 123.

25. Ibid., 134, 135.

26. Ibid., 146.

27. Ibid., 147.

28. Ibid., 150. See also ibid., 149.

29. Ibid., 156.

30. Ibid., 159.

31. Ibid., 168, 169.

32. Ibid., 124.

33. Ibid., 125.

34. Ibid., 126.

35. Ibid., 128.

36. Ibid., 139.

37. Ibid., 142.

38. Ibid., 145–170, esp. 146.


40. ———, Steps to Christ (Battle Creek, Mich.: Review and Herald, 1896), 58.

41. ———, The Great Controversy, 143.
When I was beginning my doctoral studies in Early Modern History, one of my academic mentors, a Christian, told a group of us that we shouldn’t become academics if we didn’t think that our pursuit was just as important to us as the study of medicine to those who wish to become physicians. That made me think. How could I really and truly serve God by doing academic research that perhaps only a few people would read or be influenced by? These are questions that all people who are engaged in research could ask themselves: What are we doing here? We are Christians, studying and researching a whole range of issues. But aren’t there starving people? Aren’t there people perishing for lack of knowing the gospel? Shouldn’t we be out there helping them? How

The Incarnation provides value and interest to our study and research. As we do with the Incarnation, we can know some things, but our knowledge is limited. We keep seeking and also accept that we need humility and scholarship in our work because we still see through a glass dimly.
All study can be an act of worship. When I choose to ask God into my study, what I’m doing is a service of acknowledgment of Him.

do we justify being here, tracking down information and putting together esoteric arguments based on bits of small studies that we are managing to develop? Fortunately, we are not the first to ask such questions. In 1939, as World War II was beginning to tear apart the world, Christian students of the already-influential C. S. Lewis asked him how and why they should continue studying. Lewis responded that to a Christian, living in wartime was no different from living with the constant knowledge that we live in a world that will be destroyed—that all of us are fiddling on the brink of hell, so to speak. How can we think of anything except the hereafter? I will end this essay with Lewis’s response to his students, but first let me share what I’ve learned about being a follower of Jesus and living the life of the mind.

BEING A CHRISTIAN AND LIVING THE LIFE OF THE MIND

Doing research has made me a better Christian. Regardless of whether I become famous or change the field of history or convert anyone to my faith by my scholarship, working as a historian has been and is a way that I follow Jesus. Because of Jesus, everything we study has value. Jesus gave this world value through becoming flesh, becoming part of our world. So when we study anything, we are studying the world God made. When I study, I grow in my appreciation of our Creator God and His complex world.

In other words, all study can be an act of worship. When I choose to ask God into my study, what I’m doing is a service of acknowledgment of Him. Part of worship is paying careful attention to, and listening for, God’s Spirit and guidance. And since attentiveness is what is crucial for research, my practice of study and research is helpful for character formation. Because the gift of paying close attention is an act of love and requires discipline, it is important in many aspects of life.

Another element of scholarship is the willingness to be surprised, or to find out that I am wrong about an event or issue I thought I understood. When I started studying 17th-century English Catholics, I had a lot of prejudice in my heart against them, but over time I found that some of my assumptions needed correction.

This taught me the character trait of humility. In fact, sharing scholarly conclusions always requires humility because even if I do good research now, future study may lead me to change my mind. So research is always held lightly, with the possibility of further development. This doesn’t mean I don’t publish conclusions, just that I know they aren’t going to be unassailable forever.

A recent book by Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind*, has inspired me to think more about Christian scholarship. He points out a story in Jesus’ life which reveals that He gave academic study even more importance, sometimes, than service. The story of Mary and Martha is not just of someone wanting to be with Jesus and someone needing help doing the housework. Mary was engaged in scholarship—the whole phrase “sitting at Jesus’ feet” means that she was being a student. She was not Jesus’ disciple—at least, not yet. And, like Mary, when we choose to take time to study, it sometimes means we don’t have the time to engage in all the immediate acts of service that are available around us.

Noll points out that this is hard partly because in our modern culture, we’re all about the present, the here and now. Study means preparation for the future. It has long-term significance, and we often feel better if we are doing something tangible that can be measured right now. But Jesus encourages us to confront the fact that because of Him, because God became flesh, because of the Incarnation, we can resist the constant pull to invest only in what is immediately around us. We can work for the long haul.

INCARNATION—LESSONS FOR THE SCHOLAR

The act of studying takes long, hard work—we don’t wait for lightening to strike—we have to seek out knowledge, labor for it. Think about the way Jesus worked with His disciples. The first Epistle of John talks about the fact that the disciples saw, heard, and touched (1 John 1:1)—this was experiential, experimental, exactly what it means to study and know something. The Incarnation was long, hard, slogging work—it would have been a lot easier for God to radically reveal Himself to all the world at once in His transcendence. Instead, He did it in a really “inefficient” and time-consuming way.
The Incarnation means that Jesus was both fully God and fully human. This is really hard to understand and never easy to study. And the dual nature of Jesus should teach us that many things have to be approached from different angles. There are multiple perspectives to many different issues we might study. This should make us excited about searching out and being comfortable with truth in other elements of creation—and holding their paradoxical patterns together in our minds (light as a wave and a particle, the balance between free will/choice and biological origins of actions). We won’t expect things to be simple—like Jesus, much of His creation is multi-layered and complex. We will know things primarily by experiencing them outside our minds and heads—through experiment, you might say. Again, God didn’t reveal Himself primarily as a list of creeds/dogma, but as a Person in time and space. The Incarnation happened in history, and people testified to it and told other people and wrote it down. It isn’t something that we just have or know about in our minds, but also experience through our senses and through scholarship. This is life—experiences, our senses, our interaction with the world and people around us. And it is in this world and this life that Jesus came to and testified through.

Because of the Incarnation, materiality and the physical world that we study have dignity: the fields of biology, chemical sciences, and engineering give us understanding and have value, and even buildings and structures are important to the world that God visited in the form of His Son. Because of redemption, we have the potential of delight in this material world and in human engagement with it. Because of the Incarnation, studying human culture has value and interest—the social sciences, systems thinking, policy. We also understand, as we do with the Incarnation, that we can know some things but that our knowledge is limited. So we both keep seeking and also accept that we need humility and scholarship in our work because we still see through a glass dimly.

Because Jesus was a particular human as well as the universal God, human particularity and personality are worthy of study; and we can thus enjoy the humanities, history, and psychology. We hold the dichotomy in our hands that humans are both flawed and broken and that they are redeemed and therefore have worth. We don’t expect that we will study people and find the one law for all time regarding how people should be in the world, for how human society is constructed, but we may find some particular truths that are useful. We aren’t going to find the one thing that solves everything, but we may be able to look closely at something small and extrapolate in generally useful ways from it.

Back to C. S. Lewis, that quintessential Christian scholar of the 20th century, and how he encouraged his students to invest in research and study. In a sermon, “Learning in War-Time,” preached in Oxford in 1939 as the Second World War was emerging, he pointed out that war simply revealed the ways the world always is—this is the true nature of how we really are. And it is quite dull and boring. He referred to his experience as a soldier in World War I. When he joined that war he thought it would be all excitement and fighting. On the contrary, he found for the most part that the war was petty frustrations and boredom. Having said that, he drew a significant point: Pastors find out the same thing—they think they are going to be helping souls all the time, but most of the time they are working on organizing church meetings and social events and showing up to the church tent at the local fair. But scholarship and cultural work must be done, even in these situations, for the long-term good of our own souls and the societies in which we live.

Lewis’s argument is powerful: All of the universe is God’s work, and there is no real separation between the secular and the sacred: “If we thought we were building up a heaven on earth [with our scholarship], if we looked for something that would turn the present world from a place of pilgrimage into a permanent city satisfying the soul of man, we are disillusioned, and not a moment too soon. But if we thought that for some souls, and at some times, the life of learning, humbly offered to God, was, in its own small way, one of the appointed approaches to the Divine reality and the Divine beauty which we hope to enjoy hereafter, we can think so still.”

That, in spite of war, soaring technology, or the imminence of the end of time.

My investment in the slow and sometimes thankless work of study and research, done to the glory of God, is as important to Him as the work that I also do in serving my community, making food for potluck, taking in a homeless young person, or giving a Bible study. It honors His world, and teaches me more about the Incarnate God that I follow. [1]

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REFERENCES
FOLLOWING JESUS UNRESERVEDLY

BERENICE CHENG

I was born into a family that was deeply committed to healing ministry. In fact, my family converted to Adventism when I was an infant, and their conversion was largely due to the Adventist health message. I grew up with a firm love of Adventism and with a deep desire to engage in a healing ministry. I was quietly ambitious, aiming for medical service alone. Having grown up around Seventh-day Adventist doctors, I made it my aim to understand the fast pace of a doctor’s life and how I could still be active in ministry throughout the study and long training path and beyond. I had it all worked out.

My path to medical school seemed on track. God was gracious in helping me complete my high school studies. I obtained excellent grades, paving the way for a full government scholarship at any one of the several medical schools in Australia—except the one in my home state. That came as a shock. I listed a couple of other options, including dentistry, never imagining that I might really become a dentist. Only one choice faced me: to stay in my home in Melbourne and study dentistry or to move to another state to pursue medicine.

Around that time, I became aware that God had called me to specific ministries in my home town. I was helping to organize national youth conferences in close association with my home church, and God had placed several younger Christians in my care. What should I choose? Where did my heart lie? Where would I best be able to serve—and continue to do so? Before long, I knew God had called me to minister locally. At the same time, the opportunity to study dentistry in my hometown came my way, and that settled it for me.

Institutions of higher education entice us with promises of excellence and distinction, and the opportunity to change the world through the acquisition of knowledge. Jesus’ model is drastically different: Come. Follow Me. Be nothing. And I will use you.
Having focused on medicine for most of my life, I knew almost nothing about dentistry. Upon graduation, I would be entering the workforce at one of the worst economic times in an area oversaturated with dentists. As a recent graduate, I was expected to work on weekends. In addition, a vast majority of continuing education/professional-development courses were held on Saturdays. I was offered several lucrative jobs, but all of them required work at least on Saturday mornings, if not all day Saturday.

After I had gone through months of interviews and had declined many offers, God led me to a rural position, about an hour and a half out of Melbourne. While this provided me with valuable work experience, I struggled to continue being active in ministry. Was it worth being so involved in my profession if I was only a nominal church member? Was caring for teeth all that God expected of me, without any active involvement in the souls of people? What would be the benefit of giving an occasional health talk or participating in service projects if I did not ultimately see the contacts through to nurturing people's love for Jesus? The central question that kept coming to me was: Would I be a dentist or a Christian, or if I was both, in what order?

I moved back to metropolitan Melbourne, and discovered that the job situation was similar to when I graduated. Of the available positions, perhaps only one out of 20 offered Sabbath privileges. I felt hamstrung on every side, unable to develop as I would have liked to in my dental practice or even in taking professional-development courses. It was tempting to think that God was not living up to His end of the deal—after all, I had done all the right things: kept the Sabbath, remained diligent in my studies, and put off fame and fortune. All I wanted to do was to use my profession to serve the world for Him. Why wouldn’t God bless me, at least in some small way? A friend who listened to my emotional rollercoaster in job hunting said something I’ll never forget: “You are the type of person who would be willing to be made everything for God. But are you willing to be made nothing?”

At one job interview, the well-meaning interviewer wished me luck in my career if I were not prepared to work on Saturdays. She was certain that it would be incredibly hard for me to progress professionally if I was determined to stay true to my Sabbath convictions.

At that moment, it struck me. I had always viewed Sabbath-keeping as the hallmark of my faith to unbelievers, whilst failing to embrace the fundamental principle that honoring God’s Sabbath was merely an expression of my relationship with Him. Ultimately, God’s principles call me higher in my work ethic and relational approach to patients—and this was what an Adventist should stand for. As servants of God, we are called to make the best use of our talents, while at the same time remaining faithful to His requirements, not in our own strength but in His. We are to keep our commitments to Him, propelled by the perennial question that probes our minds: What can I do that will best reflect His glory?

It was a time for soul-searching. I formulated a list of non-clinical avenues for professional development. I began to volunteer for oral-health promotional activities with the Australian Dental Association. I also joined a clinical-based research group and developed my love for dental mission.

Still I was not satisfied. But God has His way of directing. During this time of soul searching, the case of the rich young ruler impacted me with powerful force. Remember that story in Mark 10:17–22 (cf. Matthew 19:16–22; Luke 18:18–23) of the young man who came to Jesus with a question that deeply troubled his inmost self: “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (NKJV). Jesus told him to keep the commandments. The young man was quick to answer that he had faithfully kept the law all his life. And the
young man may have expected an answer that would put the Savior’s stamp of approval upon him. Instead, Jesus, who can read the depths of one’s heart and intention, told him: “One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 10:21). What Jesus was saying was simply this: “Don’t be a slave to your riches; sell them, and serve the poor, and take up your cross and follow Me.”

Ellen White’s comment regarding this story touched me a great deal: “The ruler’s possessions were entrusted to him that he might prove himself a faithful steward; he was to dispense these goods for the blessing of those in need. So God now entrusts men with means, with talents and opportunities, that they may be His agents in helping the poor and the suffering. He who uses his entrusted gifts as God designs becomes a co-worker with the Saviour.”

The rich young man came to Jesus for approval of his pre-planned answer. But Jesus showed him a way that shocked him, and he went away sad. When I applied the story to my own life, the contrast was striking. Jesus’ plans would provide for me in ways I could not see.

Yet, the rich young ruler came to mind once again. When Jesus told him to take up the cross and follow Him, the young man had two choices: Jesus or self. My new job offers demanded hours during the week that would force me to sacrifice my ministry obligations, as well as several other clinics, were happy to accommodate.

For a long time, I didn’t think there was anything to share about my story—after all, there are people who have sacrificed and suffered so much more for God. As Adventists, we are sometimes so used to hanging out for that happy ending that we forget the real aim is happiness in Christ. We grow up listening to stories of surrender to God: a friend who gives up a job, only for God to give him a better one; or a girl who gives up the relationship of her dreams, only for God to give her another, perhaps a better one. Would I still praise God even if He chose otherwise?

Some time later, I was scheduled to present a research project at an Australian Dental Association conference on behalf of a team with which I had been working for a year or so. I walked into a hall full of emeritus professors, directors of research foundations, and academics. Feeling inadequate and unprepared, I gave my presentation and sat down in my chair, ready to make a swift exit.

Before I could make a beeline for the door, the president of the dental association greeted me and thanked me for my presentation. The pleasantries continued, but I was eager to go. The president then told me he had read my résumé and been sitting on it for about a year before recently appointing me to the association’s Oral Health Committee. Quizzically, he asked, “I notice you do quite a lot with your church and faith, in addition to various dental pursuits. Why do you do what you do?”

I thought for a few seconds, and then shared a little about my pro bono work. God inspired a response that surprised even me: “I never imagined I would be in this position. Now that I am a dentist, my ultimate aim is to be a better dentist today than I was yesterday. This means I will strive to do my best in my career, to learn more about my profession, but also to learn more about the hearts of the people I treat. My faith is one of the best ways I know how to do that.”

He chuckled, and then said: “I don’t necessarily share the same religious values you hold dear, but I appreciate your motivation. I want you to keep doing what you’re doing. One day we’d like you to represent our association at the highest level. You are the kind of person we want representing our profession.”

I always thought being a witness for Jesus was the greatest offering I could give Him. Institutions of higher education entice us with promises of excellence, distinction, and the opportunity to change the world through the acquisition of knowledge. Jesus’ model is drastically different. Come. Follow Me. Be nothing And I will use you (Mark 8:34). That is radical following.

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REFERENCES
1. All Scripture references in this article are quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible.
“YOU DID IT TO ME”: WHAT A YOUTH TEAM IN TEMUCO, CHILE, IS DOING TO WITNESS FOR GOD’S GLORY

PAULA CASTILLO
J uly 2016. Youth of the Pioneros Seventh-day Adventist Church in Temuco, Chile, began a series of prayers. They were praying not for success in their studies, not for new doors opening in their career aspirations, not for specific needs in their families, and not for the personal needs of their friends. They were praying for God’s leading to locate a family they could help. There were many needy people around, but they wanted guidance to locate a specific family where God’s care, human needs, and their commitment to the helping ministry could converge.

The youth prayed that the Holy Spirit would reveal to them at the right time one specific family whose needs their helping ministry could meet. For three years now, God has been leading this group of Adventist college and university students and young professionals to become fully involved in their helping ministry—to the least of God’s people, those in need. The project is named “A mí lo hicisteis” (“You did it to Me”). It began in 2014 when a church elder challenged the youth to get involved in the ministry Jesus expected His followers to undertake. Matthew 25:40 defines that ministry: “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me’” (NKJV).*

The goal of the Adventist youth team in Temuco was to put Christ’s expectation into practice in a way that would cause the town to take note that Adventists care. The group chose one project: remodeling a home in the area. But first, they had to raise funds. This seemed almost impossible: How would cash-strapped college students and young professionals ever be able to fund a project of that kind? But the young people knew that their God is not limited in anything; they needed only to believe, and the doors would open. They believed God’s promises and that He would stand by them. They just needed to exercise faith: “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear” (Isaiah 59:1).

The youth group’s first “You did it to Me” project took place in Trovolhue, a small town in southern Chile, where they painted and remodeled the house of a low-income senior couple living together with their grandchildren. They also built a greenhouse so that the family could grow their own vegetables, even in winter.

AN EXPANDING PROJECT

In 2015, students decided to assist a family living in Correntoso, a village near Lonquimay, up in the Andes Mountains. This time, they helped a couple that included a wife who was wheelchair-bound. The young people replaced the siding on the house, installed insulation in the walls, built a new bathroom, and hung new drapes. The renovation included complete wheelchair access, inside and outside.

In August 2016, as the youth team was waiting for God’s answer for that year—both in terms of a new project and funding—the whole church family, having seen what the youth had already done in previous years, decided to join the young dreamers. Together they all prayed and planned, and came up with a new idea: Instead of renovating, why not build a new home? To begin with, the idea seemed farfetched, but no one doubted the power of prayer, remembering Jesus’ promise: “‘All things are possible to him who believes’” (Mark 9:23).

Many of the college students who launched the project in 2014 were now working as professionals. So in 2016, the group could not only put the natural excitement of the young people to work, but also use the expertise of their skills in engineering, building, nursing, dentistry, and communication. The young people could also contribute more than when they set out three years ago. What could ever go wrong? Heaven was on their side.

Spring was just around the corner, and the logistics part of the project was already under full steam. As they worked on the details, new challenges appeared. They needed all the help they could get, since they had to
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Maximilian Jantscher is a born artist. From childhood he has developed a love for the paint and the brush, and put both to work to bring the artistic genius within him to transform a plain canvas into a flaming painting or an inspiring portrait. Born in 1966 in Graz, Styria, in Austria, he spent only nine years in formal education, but the artistic tug on his soul turned his attention to beauty and creativity. Before long, his name became established as an artist.

As a young person, Maximilian worked at an inn, where he was able to achieve financial success, and eventually bought the business. Although well secured in his personal and family life, he felt constant fear for the future. This problem affected his normal living, particularly his ability to obtain regular sleep. His fear for the future and a continuing problem with insomnia made life difficult, and he yearned for a resolution. It was at this time, in the midst of his struggles, that an Adventist literature evangelist stopped by his house. The colporteur assured him that his struggles were not beyond solution, and he yearned for a resolution. It was at this time, in the midst of his struggles, that an Adventist literature evangelist stopped by his house. The colporteur assured him that his struggles were not beyond solution, and all that he needed to do was to place his burdens before God. When the colporteur suggested that the Bible could help him combat his fears, Maximilian gladly bought one.

Sometime later, the colporteur happened to pass through the town again, and stopped to visit his earlier contact. A disappointed Maximilian told him that the Bible had not been of any help. The colporteur learned that Maximilian had simply placed the Bible under his pillow, hoping his sleeplessness would slowly disappear. The colporteur took the opportunity to explain to Maximilian that there is no magic cure in keeping the Bible as a resting place for one’s head. Instead, the Bible should be read. The colporteur taught Maximilian how to read the Scriptures and pray, asking the God of the Bible to help him with his sleep issues and in handling his fear of the future.

Maximilian began reading the Bible regularly. Some local Adventists studied with him and guided him into the most basic truths of the Bible. As the studies progressed, and he made Bible study and prayer a regular part of his life, Maximilian found peace in Christ. The promise of Jesus, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28, 29, NKJV), became very real to him. His fear of the future was gone, and he was able to sleep.

Eventually he became a new person and was baptized into the Adventist Church. He sold the inn and started a new life. He is married to Caribic, a fellow Adventist. The couple have two adult sons, two adult daughters, and one grandchild.

One day, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor visited Maximilian in his home and was surprised to see...
many beautiful paintings by his host. Maximillian’s artistic gift was clearly evident. The pastor urged him to paint biblical themes from the Book of Revelation. Over the next decade, Maximilian produced 30 paintings of John’s visions on Patmos.

Painting takes a lot of time. Whenever a piece of art is finished, Maximilian feels that he is “paid” for his efforts when people stop by to see his artwork, and show an interest in the subject that he has chosen to paint. To those who aspire to be painters, he advises, “Be diligent. Never give up. Read the life of Jesus as in the Gospels; meditate upon it for an hour a day; and you will discover there in an inner peace. And if you have artistic inclination, you will find the inspiration and guidance you need to begin your painting.”

Last year, Maximilian painted some of the famous figures of the Reformation in time to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017. Fifteen of his large paintings on this subject are now on tour through Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. Currently, he is engaged in a series of paintings that will portray the themes in the Book of Daniel.

Maximilian is currently a professional painting-therapist to help people find and resolve problems by painting certain scenes of their life. He invites people for painting classes and tells them that they can only find peace when they make Jesus their friend and Savior. That witness is from experience: Jesus Christ changed Maximilian, a young man with no future, into a follower of Christ with the best possible future.

The artist has shared some of his paintings with Dialogue readers in this issue.

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4. JOHN HUSS: THE MARTYR OF BOHEMIA

John Huss, a martyr of immovable faith, fearless witness, and firm commitment to the truth that God speaks only through His Word and not through any human authority, was taken to the stake on July 6, 1415, at Constance, Germany, and set aflame. As tongues of fire leaped up to consume the body of the great martyr, his martyrdom sent out a global witness that the gospel of righteousness by grace through faith would neither fail nor founder.

5. THE CHANGE: LUTHER BECOMES A MONK

In 1505, when Luther was 21, he chose to study law at the University of Erfurt. A little later, he dropped law school and entered St. Augustine’s Monastery. Luther attributed this decision to a frightening experience he had when he was riding from home to the university on horseback. A severe thunderstorm and lightning produced in him a fearful trauma. The incident so terrified him that he vowed to become a monk, if only God would save him.

6. THE 95 THESIS: LUTHER NAILS THE 95 THESIS TO THE CHURCH DOOR

Five hundred years ago, on October 31, 1517, Luther nailed his now-historic 95 Theses on the door of the All Saints’ Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. The Theses assert Luther’s rejection of indulgences, whereby the Roman Catholic Church offered forgiveness of sin of both the dead and the living for a price. In the process of rejecting this unbiblical doctrine, Luther began his great scriptural presentation of how sinners are saved—by faith alone in the divine act of God’s grace through Jesus Christ.

7. THE DIET OF WORMS: “I CANNOT AND WILL NOT RECANT”

When on April 18, 1521, the Diet of Worms—convened by the rulers of Germany, attended by priests and prelates, and a vast number of people—demanded that Martin Luther recant his stand against the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church and all his writings and teachings in “a clear and precise answer,” the Reformer gave this precise reply: “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything... May God help me. Amen.” From that hour on, the landscape of Christendom was forever changed.

8. THE WARTBURG: LUTHER AND THE GERMAN BIBLE

Upon his refusal to recant, the Edict of Worms pronounced Martin Luther a dangerous heretic, banned his writings, and declared that anyone from that point on could kill the Reformer without having to face any charges. While Luther’s life was at stake, Prince Frederick III, Elector of Saxony, ordered him to be brought to Wartburg Castle. There he was kept safe and produced the first translation of the New Testament into German.
9. THE PROTEST: PRINCES HELP ESTABLISH PROTESTANTISM
While Charles V, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, wanted to force the five princes of Germany to adopt Roman Catholicism again, the princes risked their lives to resist the emperor’s demand, and helped establish the Lutheran Church. Because of these protesters, the movement that began was called Protestantism.

10. ULRICH ZWINGLI: REFORMATION IN ZURICH
Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer, “submitted himself to the Bible as the word of God, the only sufficient, infallible rule. . . . He dared not attempt to explain Scripture to sustain a preconceived theory or doctrine, but held it his duty to learn what is its direct and obvious teaching”—White, The Great Controversy, 173. The Reformer convinced the councillors of Zurich to remove all of the images, statues, and relics in the city. God’s law was restored to its original format, including the third commandment against idols.

11. ULRICH ZWINGLI: THE LAST MOMENTS
In 1531, civil war broke out in Zurich between the large and well-prepared Roman Catholic army and the ill-prepared and ill-equipped small army of the Protestants. Zwingli, true minister and servant of the churches of Zurich, was found wounded on the battlefield along with his flock (with whom he remained until his death). When he refused to call on the saints to plead with God on his behalf, a Catholic captain ran him through with a sword, killing him. Zwingli died at the age of 47, having served as a faithful shepherd of his flock until the end of his life.

12. JOHN CALVIN: THE REFORMATION IN GENEVA
John Calvin, born in France July 10, 1509, was a Catholic humanistic lawyer who broke from Catholicism in 1530 after seeing the church’s violence against Protestants. Because of government intolerance, he fled from France to Basel in Switzerland. There he began his famous Institutes of the Christian Religion and commentaries on most of the books of the Bible. Congregational, Reformed, and Presbyterian Churches took to Calvin as their principal theological and doctrinal anchor. He died May 27, 1564 in Geneva, later known as the city of Calvin.

13. THE REFORMER: REFORM IN GENEVA
Upon arrival in Geneva, Calvin became not only a preacher of reformed doctrines, but also and more importantly, attempted to reorder society according to Reformed Christian principles. This attempt to make the Reformation not only a matter of theology but also of daily living made Calvin unpopular among the noblemen and libertines in the city. Calvin denied Communion to them, and as a result was exiled.
HERNÁN FERNÁNDEZ LOBOS
Dialogue with an Adventist leader of religious affairs in southern Chile

INTERVIEW BY EDGAR ARAYA BISHOP

Hernán Fernández Lobos was born in Santiago, Chile, and currently lives in Temuco, 415 miles south of the capital, in the Araucanía region, a land of forests, lakes, and volcanoes.

When Fernández was 14, an Adventist church member visited his family, wanting to share his faith. The visitor left him some audio transcriptions of the Voice of Hope radio program, along with an invitation to attend an evangelistic campaign being held in a nearby facility. Fernández attended the meetings for almost a year, after which he was baptized. A little later, his mother and a sister also joined the church. So began Fernández’s Adventist faith journey.

Fernández’s father was a police officer whose job required frequent transfers, so the family moved often. As a result, he obtained his primary and secondary education in different cities, which gave him an opportunity to travel widely and get to know the state well. After completing secondary school, he joined the State Technical University, later known as the University of Santiago, Chile, where he completed a bachelor’s degree in advertising and business communication, afterward working for years in that field and launching a consultancy agency with two other partners in Santiago. As part of this service, he has, since 2004, been deeply involved in political and religious dialogue, offering services to various Evangelical and Protestant organizations, entities, and communication outlets. His agency offers services in communication management and developing internal and external communication flows among the church entities.

In 2014, the government of Chile invited him to be the coordinator of the National Office of Religious Affairs for Southern Chile, with the office’s main mandate being the promotion of religious liberty. The appointment came from the office of Her Excellency Michelle Bachelet, the president of Chile. Fernández was given the mandate of managing the government’s programs for all religious bodies and assuring the equality of every organization and entity before the state. While doing this, he also serves as the government’s representative to all the religious entities in the Araucanía Region managing inquiries or concerns they may have, and advising regional government leaders about issues related to an egalitarian freedom of worship throughout the region.
You are currently serving as coordinator of the National Office of Religious Affairs for Southern Chile. What does this involve?

This is the first time that a National Office of Religious Affairs was established outside the capital city. The goal was to develop and promote cordial relationships with every religious denomination in the region. We have developed interreligious panels where we have Evangelicals, Catholics, Anglicans, other Christian entities, Muslims, Jews, and Bahá’ís come together to exchange ideas and give expression to the problems they face.

Through this work, I have learned interesting facts about the religious history of Chile. For instance, as a result of the interreligious dialogue we have been having, I have discovered many facts that have helped foster my appreciation of the country’s religious ethos. At an interreligious dialogue not so long ago, we were excited to discover the history of the Sephardic synagogue in the city of Temuco, in southern Chile. The synagogue has preserved its history well. According to their records, the first Israeli community to settle in the city arrived in 1917, and 11 years after that, the Sephardic Synagogue Temuco was completed. For almost a century now, that synagogue has been a part of the city’s historic landscape, bringing meaning and vitality to the city and to the country.

My greater responsibility is the promotion of religious liberty, an essential human right included in the Constitution of Chile that represents something very dear and deep to humans, which in itself provides a specific identity. As that illustrious Italian jurist Arturo Carlo Jemolo has noted, “It is the first liberty, after the right to life.”

How did you became interested in religious freedom? What importance does it have for you?

I began my professional career by starting a consultancy service for Evangelical and Protestant religious entities and media outlets with respect to their communication and management practices. I had to study and get training in the history of state and church relationships, focusing on the essential principle of religious liberty and respect for minorities. A country’s national conscience remains strong and credible only to the extent that it treats and relates respectfully to the minorities in its midst, particularly religious minorities. Beyond the freedom to practice one’s faith and beliefs lies the nation’s commitment to honor the religious values of all varying communities. I strongly believe that without a national commitment to freedom of religion and worship for all—both the majority and the minorities—a nation cannot remain strong and vibrant. Every citizen must feel assured of the freedom to publicly express his or her faith, together with the needed guarantees that belong to a democratic nation.

What is the religious profile of Chile? What role do Seventh-day Adventists play in this religious mosaic? What changes have occurred over time in religious freedom and tolerance?

The religious portrait of Chile began with Catholicism as its chief and almost only religion, with full support from the government. Around 1833, when European Protestants began to migrate into the country, their efforts to establish churches and organize Christian schools were recognized, resulting in an amendment to the constitution. Later, in 1925, the separation of church and state was recognized. By 1999, all religions and denominations were given full rights to practice and propagate. This 1999 national move to guarantee religious freedom marked Chile as the first country in Latin America to assure religious freedom to the nation as a whole. Up to that point, only Catholic and Orthodox churches enjoyed that freedom.

Now we have statutory bodies, such as the National Office of Religious Affairs and Interreligious Advisory Board from our office, composed of representatives from different expressions of faith to ensure the guarantee of religious freedom and practice.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church fully cooperates with other religious entities and with the responsible government bodies to make Chilean society a tolerant and flourishing one insofar as religious liberty is concerned.

Have you faced any obstacle or criticism in your work because you are an Adventist? Have you had any Sabbath problems in the performance of your job?

Chile is committed to ensuring that all its citizens practice and profess their religion freely, without any hindrance. I have not had any Sabbath-keeping problems in my job. Citizens can freely exercise their faith and observe a day of rest as their beliefs indicate. Modifications to Law 19.638, called “Law of Worship” provide this guarantee as one of its articles.

Since I accepted this position as coordinator of the National Office of Religious Affairs for Southern Chile, I have had some opposition from certain groups who opposed my nomination because of my being an Adventist; however, the outcome was the opposite of what they wanted because the authorities not only supported me, but also rejected any segregationist attitudes creeping into general promotion of religious liberty and practice.

Do Adventist students face Sabbath problems in Chile? If there is, how do you resolve them?

There have been some problems at the university and college level in the past. However, this is no longer an issue. The National Office of Religious Affairs has adopted a “Code of Ethics for Dialogue in Democratic Coexistence,” prepared by the Interreligious Advisory
Board, which has received the approval of the country’s president. In part, the code says:

“Consequently, it is fundamental that the [Chilean] society safeguards the respect of spiritual and religious practices and their respective sacred founding texts, whether they be written or oral tradition. In the institutions themselves, faith communities and religious groups should promote the appreciation of differences, avoiding expressions or practices that can suggest intolerance in regards to the beliefs of others. That way there can be a climate of mutual respect and peace among believers and non-believers, and also among believers of different traditions in order to appreciate what unites them without failing to recognize mutual differences. That way there will be a sense of mutual respect and peace in order to promote initiatives that will help encourage knowledge and dialogue among the plurality of options.”

How does your office promote religious liberty and tolerance among the varied faith communities?

The issue is not easy. We at the National Office of Religious Affairs focus on education, interreligious meetings, and seminars to promote appreciation of varied worldviews embraced by different religious bodies. Such an appreciation can lay the foundation for mutual respect and cooperation among differing religious communities.

Today, Chilean society is marked by multiculturalism and multiple religions. The country can prosper and move ahead only when there is mutual respect, appreciation, and support among different cultures and faith systems. It takes many to build one. The country can assume the position of being guarantor and facilitator of a harmonious and democratic coexistence and development only when all work together.

To cite an example: In the Araucanía Region, the native Mapuche people with their traditional religious faith and practices have often felt somewhat isolated from the national mainstream. Whether this is true in fact or not is not the issue, but the feeling is there. So our office set out with meetings and seminars both for the Mapuche people and for other communities in order to ensure that there is an understanding of the differing worldviews of the Mapuche ancestral faith and the Mapuche Christian worldview, since there are some groups of Mapuches who say that Christians have robbed them of their culture. Such dialogues among different groups promote tolerance and better understanding.

What do other religious organizations think of the fact that you are a Seventh-day Adventist?

Many years ago, I heard a Seventh-day Adventist leader say, “The best public relations Seventh-day Adventists take part in are those they don’t take part in.” Today, the situation is very different. The Department of Religious Liberty and Public Affairs at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has done much internationally to promote a better understanding of our stance on religious liberty and to ensure interdenominational cooperation. When people know that I am an Adventist, there may be some initial reservations,
but with dialogues and sharing each other’s faith and community concerns, there is a natural opening up. The important point is friendship, conversations, and communications. I have tried to foster these among and between all religious groups. After finding out that I was an Adventist, my other Christian friends were anxious to know why I believed the way I do about the Trinity, the Sabbath, and salvation by grace. In such situations, dialogue helps. Once, after praying with another Christian group, the leader of that group exclaimed almost in wonder: “Why, he even prays just the way we do!” Dialogue does promote understanding and tolerance.

What counsel do you have for Seventh-day Adventist youth who may be considering getting involved in public office?

For a person of faith, serving in a government position to help promote religious tolerance and freedom is a great privilege. Since the days of Joseph and Esther, serving the state can be turned into a saving opportunity and a means to share one’s faith. My experience shows that with the faith Adventists have and with our stance for human equality and freedom, we can contribute much to a better understanding of human and inter-faith relationships. I feel very satisfied to see the development of Chile as a nation that guarantees all citizens the right to religious liberty. The country is committed to be an observant facilitator of a harmonious and democratic coexistence among all religious groups across the country. To have a role to play in such a national development is both an opportunity and a privilege.

Do you have a message to Dialogue readers to promote the overall cause of religious freedom and practice?

Get involved in the great conversation of faith with other communities. They should never feel isolated from you as a faith group. The more we work toward unity and inclusion in understanding one another—our faith, our culture, our religious and intellectual pursuits—the more unified and better understood world we will construct.

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FIVE hundred years ago, on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. Historians refer to that event as the launching of the Protestant Reformation, which shook the church to its very foundation, challenging the Christian world to face what has since been considered as foundational to the New Testament theology and practice: sola scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide. In commemoration of that 500-year-old event, 27 scholars, of whom 25 are Seventh-day Adventists, have produced a monumental work on the meaning, missiological importance, and enduring legacy of the Protestant Reformation.

From George Knight’s preface, we learn why Luther still matters: His major contribution respected in Adventism is his insistence on the absolute religious authority of the word of God in the Scriptures—not councils, the papacy, or tradition. The issue of religious authority was critical in the primitive Adventist Church and is crucial today.

Timothy J. Wengert gives a historical review of the distinctiveness of Luther’s theology and its reaction to medieval religious thinking, practices, and piety, especially through a careful analysis of the 95 Theses. Remwil R. Tornalejo and John C. Peckham remind us of the compatibility between Luther’s and Adventists’ understanding of the sola scriptura principle as well as its unique dynamic nature, while Michael Sokupa, Darius Jankiewicz, and Joel Klimkewicz discuss Luther’s position on the priesthood of all believers and his distinctive predestination theology. Jiří Moskala captures the differences and similarities between Luther’s and Adventists’ understanding of the Decalogue as the “permanent lifestyle of God’s people.”

Woodrow W. Whidden II presents Luther’s sola fide principle [salvation by faith only] and recognizes what Adventists owe to Luther, specially our historic teaching on soteriology, with special emphasis on sanctification. Some of the essays in the book refer to a liturgical-theological aspect of the Lord’s Supper, the state of the dead, and the “principle” of the Sabbath (Michael W. Campbell, Trevor O’Reggio, and Sergio Becerra). Reinder Bruinsma reminds us what Adventist ecclesiology owes to Luther.

A few articles point out the importance of mission and education, and Sigve K. Tonstad affirms the Adventist commitment to the key point in Romans, launched so powerfully by Luther as justification by faith. Eschatology and the nature of state-church relationships are presented in the context of Luther’s understanding of last things and the prophetic responsibility of the church. The historical approaches of Nikolaus Satelmajer (Luther on Islam), and Douglas Morgan and Richard W. Müller (Luther and Anabaptists, including Sabbatarian Anabaptists) prompt us to rethink our Adventist identity within the historical and theological challenges of church development.

Daniel Wildermann offers an intriguing discussion on images and iconography in Luther’s experience and in Adventism, while Nikolaus Satelmajer and Dan Schultz develop the idea that Luther’s advocacy of the translations of the Bible in the language of the people (not just in the language of liturgy) and his passion for music were catalysts for the Reformation. Finally, Denis Fortin analyzes the current ecumenical interpretation of Luther, especially from the Roman Catholic perspective. According to Fortin, unity in diversity seems to be the only safe ecumenical path.

To conclude: Here We Stand: Luther, the Reformation, and Seventh-day Adventism offers balanced and fair scholarly engagement with the germane issues in Luther’s background, theology, liturgical practice, life, and piety as well as how these issues have shaped and impacted Seventh-day Adventism. Being an experimental project, there are some weaknesses in the organization of chapters and ideas, and perhaps the depth of theological analysis.
The book, in general, is asking the key question: How has the Reformation influenced the Seventh-day Adventist Church? The influence is quite clear on Adventist positions on religious authority, sola scriptura, sola gratia, and sola fide, the priesthood of all believers, etc., whatever the theological nuances may be. Some other issues, however, are still and will remain controversial from the Adventist perspective, such as the state of the dead, the Sabbath, the Eucharist, apocalyptic vision, etc.

The key question, however, in my opinion, is still successfully addressed. Together with the contributors of this important volume, I believe Adventism should follow the Lutheran principle of free exercise of theological reflection, such as Scripture and conscience-bound faith and religious practice, piety based on the living faithfulness and encounter with Christ, and the vibrant presence of our faith within the public sphere for the common good, as we expect the glorious second coming of Christ. All in all, this is a serious current theological reflection on issues that go back to New Testament times, and still challenge our reason and faith today.

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THE REFORMATION AND THE REMNANT: THE REFORMERS SPEAK TO TODAY’S CHURCH


Reviewed by Nsengumuremyi Ananie

Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church experiencing an identity crisis? In its undergirding theology rooted in the Great Controversy? In its call to be faithful to the creation narrative? In issues of ordination that seem to rock the church amidst polarizing viewpoints? In its approach to the study of the sanctuary, atonement, and related issues? In the question of Sunday laws and other last-day issues? In its ecclesiology and its approach to inter- and intra-organizational issues?

The issues may be a call to calm discussion, or they could be a drive to polarized debates. Against such a background as that comes one author’s sober, Spirit-filled, Bible-based, and love-oriented discussion of such issues that are pertinent to the future of Adventist theology and mission. That author is Nicholas P. Miller, a lawyer who argues his points with clarity. Miller is a church historian at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan, U.S.A.) who uses the tools of history tenaciously to bear upon the challenges of the past and the present to preserve the central mission of the church. His book, The Reformation and the Remnant: The Reformers Speak to Today’s Church, looks at how the Reformers 500 years ago turned the history of the church upside down to return God’s ecclesia to its original calling of being faithful to the Word and the Word only and to carry on a worldwide mission, proclaiming that salvation from sin comes by faith alone without any “plus” of anything.
Within that perspective, the author applies the three basic Protestant principles of scriptural authority—sola scriptura, prima scriptura, and tota scriptura—to his discussion of a series of contested topics in the church today, and does so from a perspective informed by historical insights from the Protestant reformers as well as Adventist pioneers. He argues that taking a historical view can be a great asset in searching for today’s Adventist identity, which is often obscured by the competing influences of Fundamentalism and Liberalism.

The author begins his book by arguing that the truth we inherited from our pioneers comes from their commitment to the Bible. The Protestant principle of sola scriptura was their guiding principle. While Scripture was their highest and most central authority, the pioneers made broad use of truths from nature, history, and experience in constructing their theological view of the world.

The book’s second chapter deals with the doctrine of the Great Controversy as understood by both the Reformers and Adventist pioneers. The presentation contains a warning to today’s Adventists who tend to narrow it into the story of the Sabbath day and Sunday, rather than seeing it in its big picture, which is the story of good and evil, revealed within the moral government of God.

In the third chapter, using the views of the Reformers and Adventist pioneers regarding the moral government of God, Miller deepens the reader’s understanding of the Great Controversy doctrine along with the doctrine of atonement. He also shows the connection of the moral government view to advocacy for a variety of social justice issues, such as abolition of slavery, temperance reform, and other issues of public morality.

In chapters four to eleven, the author, using as his foundation the moral government of God, enters into polemic discussions relating to current issues within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the fourth chapter, he addresses the issue of theistic evolution. He warns that Adventism cannot remain consistent with its center of the moral government of God and embrace a view that God created a “good” creation using the pain, suffering, and mass death required by macro-evolutionary processes. He also warns supporters of the doctrine of creation to avoid dogmatic and aggressive behavior in contending with their opponents as though they really do believe in survival of the fittest.

Having made that point, Miller takes up in his fifth chapter the problem of how liberals and fundamentalists within the church relate to the issue of liberty and public morality. He argues that both groups have wrongly abdicated a Christian role in morality and public policy: the liberals because they think morality is purely subjective; the fundamentalists because they think that morality can only come from the Bible, which cannot serve as the basis of public policy. Both groups overlook the importance of moral philosophy in informing public affairs.

The sixth chapter of the book focuses on the responsibility of the church to promote the importance of the other institution from Eden—marriage—especially in the United States, where same-sex marriage, under the umbrella of liberty, is now a constitutional right.

The seventh chapter addresses the issue of women’s ordination, which the author sees as a dividing issue and pleads for tolerance based on the principle of religious liberty, for the unity of the church.

Chapter eight addresses the fear of ecumenism, making clear that what is to be rejected is negative ecumenism, but affirming that its positive aspects of issues-based cooperation and advocacy are to be undertaken in the same way as our pioneers did.

In chapter nine, the author warns Seventh-day Adventists that the issue of Sunday laws does not stand alone; rather, it will have its roots in other violations of civil and religious liberty—which also violate divine laws and principles.

In his tenth chapter, Miller warns Adventists against modern-day conspiracy peddlers. Chapter eleven deals with his understanding of perfection and argues that the church needs to rediscover its heritage of holiness.

Readers will appreciate the way Miller combines history and theology to support his arguments. In addition to that, the topics he chose call for the attention of every member of the Adventist Church.

How I wish that every Adventist preacher would especially read chapter ten, which addresses modern conspiracy theories. In my opinion, the solutions proposed by the author relating to the doctrine of creation and women’s ordination could use greater clarity, within the ambit of charity that he so well advocates throughout the book. We need to unashamedly and firmly speak in defense of the doctrine of creation, without yielding to relativism or abandoning a core belief. Miller does agree that a clear view of a seven-day creation, a few thousand years ago, is a vital underpinning to the moral government of God. The tolerance referred to in the discussion of women’s ordination—laissez faire—in my opinion could lead to confusion and divisions rather than to the unity of the church.

But Miller’s point about not allowing secondary and non-central points to consume the church’s attention is a valuable one. If we see the bigger picture of God’s moral government of love, and if we keep in focus the primary reason for our existence as a church—to proclaim and practice that love—some of these smaller questions will be put in their proper perspective.

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CQ (Collegiate Quarterly) is a devotional Bible-study guide for young adults, ages 18–35, published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The topics for each quarter are based on the same topics as the adult Bible study guide published by the church.

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