believers’ legal standing with God remains despite the sins in their lives. Another view credits Luther with saying that justification is a heavenly declaration of a simultaneous spiritual transformation. Justification causes sanctification. Luther interpreted Paul as using imagery of the law courts and Jesus as using the imagery of the new birth; but they were both teaching salvation. Until Adventists come to unanimity on the teachings of Paul and Luther, how can they see themselves as “the children of Luther,” inviting the Christian world to return to “the spirit of the Reformation”?

Erwin R. Gane
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On “I Rest My Case” (PD 2008:1)

I am glad that Richard Davidson comes out with confidence in Christ as he faces the judgment of Daniel 7.

He says this was not always the case. “While growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I used to shudder at the mention of the investigative judgment.”

Davidson is not the only Adventist who gives this testimony. Many others share his experience. I raise the question as to the basic reason for this testimony. I suggest that it comes from an early concentration on the chapter, “The Investigative Judgment” in The Great Controversy.

A failure to understand the growing Ellen White with her fuller presentation of righteousness by faith is often the root cause of our problem. As early as 1889, Ellen White comes out with gems in “Joshua and the Angel” in volume 5 of the Testimonies. “He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. . . . We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. . . . He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on his own.”

If we accept Ellen White as a lesser light, only a panoramic view of her writings will spare us from despair.

Eric Webster
Cape Town, South Africa

What is a Christian to do about God’s very specific instructions that appear throughout Scripture?

Are Christians expected to keep any of the biblical laws, or are there any from which we would gain benefit by voluntarily observing them? We are not talking about a legalistic, works-oriented approach to salvation, but about people who are already saved enjoying fuller “new covenant” life and service by following divine guidance and thereby revealing God’s character to others.

For many centuries, Christians have followed a simplistic approach: “The early Church Fathers dealt with Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and chunks of Exodus very simply: We keep the Ten Commandments, and the rest of the Law and Commandments do not apply to Christians. One might ask how they squared that with what Jesus himself

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had to say about Torah, that he did not come to change a single ‘jot or tittle’ of it; further, when asked what were the greatest of the commandments, Jesus gives two, neither of which comes from the ten. Rather, one is from Deuteronomy, and the other from Leviticus. Nevertheless, the Church Fathers deemed those extra 603 laws to be superfluous. There were those who thought they should be removed from the Christian canon entirely, but fortunately they did not prevail.

For the purpose of determining if or how various kinds of Old Testament laws apply today, it is traditional for Christians to divide them into categories, such as the following:

1. Moral laws, consisting of the Ten Commandments, which express timeless and universal principles governing relationships with God and other human beings.

2. Ritual laws that served as “types” or “shadows” until they met their fulfillment at the Cross.

3. Civil laws applicable only under the Israelite theocratic government.

4. Health laws that have ongoing value because human bodies function the same today as they did in ancient times.

While such categories have some validity and usefulness, the understanding of them as just summarized needs major nuance and qualification. Careful examination leads to a paradigm shift and opens up a treasure trove of practical guidance for daily living.

To begin with, we should recognize that the Bible does not delineate categories such as those outlined above. They are more recent analytical constructs. Biblical law does not even make the sharp distinction between religious and secular categories to which we are so accustomed.

Since every aspect of life of the people of God came under His jurisdiction, laws belonging to what we would classify as the religious and secular domains often appear together. For example, the “religious” laws of Exodus 28a-30; 23:10-19a appear in contexts primarily relating to secular life. The remarkably diverse mixture of laws in Leviticus 19 gives the impression that distinctions between religious and secular are largely irrelevant; what is important is that God’s people keep all His commandments.

In the ancient Near East, this wholistic approach to life under God is unique to Israel. Only in biblical law collections “are moral exhortations and religious injunctions combined with legal prescriptions; elsewhere . . . these three distinct spheres are found in separate independent collections.”

Moral law expresses principles that modern people would regard either as religious, e.g., the first four of the Ten Commandments regarding responsibilities primarily to God (Ex. 20:3-11), or secular, e.g., the last six of the Ten Commandments covering responsibilities primarily to human beings (vss. 12-17).

Two points should be clarified regarding moral law:

First, any command that God requires a given group of people to obey could be viewed as a moral law for them in the broad sense that it is relevant to their divine-human relationship.

Second, though the Ten Commandments are towering expressions of timeless, universal moral law, they are not the only moral laws in the Bible. Exodus 23:9, for example, contains another one: “Do not oppress an alien.” This works out part of the overarching principle of love for fellow human beings (compare Leviticus 19:18; John 15:12), on which the last six of the Ten Commandments are also based (Matt. 22:39, 40; Rom. 13:9). Another example is Leviticus 19:11, where the comprehensive commandment against lying is found, rather than in Exodus 20:16.

Ritual law regulates a ritual system, by means of which human beings interact with entities that are ordinarily inaccessible to the material domain, such as to God (e.g., by offering sacrifices) and ritual impurity (by removing it through purification). The Old Testament ritual laws that were required to be carried out at the Israelite sanctuary/temple, where the Aaronic priests officiated (see e.g., Leviticus 17:3-9), can no longer apply because this institution is gone.

Laws having to do with regulation and treatment of ritual impurities to keep them from contacting the holy sphere of the earthly sanctuary with its resident divine Presence are also obsolete for the same reason: The sanctuary no longer exists. Since the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, Christian worship is focused toward God’s temple in heaven, where Christ has been ministering (Heb. 7–10). Nev-
Nevertheless, the Old Testament ritual laws teach us much about the nature and character of God and humanity, the dynamics of divine-human interaction, and God’s plan of salvation through Christ.

The ritual of circumcision originated long before the Israelite sanctuary was constructed and was never dependent upon its function (Genesis 17). However, this requirement was removed for Gentile Christians when the new covenant was transformed from a covenant of Israelite election, as Jeremiah originally prophesied (31:31-34), to a universal covenant without ethnic boundaries (Acts 15; Gal. 3:26-29).

Civil law can embody and exemplify timeless moral/ethical principles within the ancient Israelite context. Consider, for example, the following civil law from the “Covenant Code” of Exodus 21–23: “Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death” (21:12). This contextualizes the sixth of the Ten Commandments, which reads: “You shall not murder” (20:13).

There are two basic differences between the two laws. First, the civil law is narrower in scope, limited to striking that results in death. But this is still a timeless principle. Second, the civil law attaches a penalty, namely, capital punishment, that would be administered by the Israelite system of jurisprudence within the theocratic covenant community. We can no longer count on this court system to enforce the law in this way because the system no longer exists. So we have found that the law contains both ongoing and temporary elements. If we simplistically dismiss it as a civil/Mosaic law and therefore no longer applicable, we miss the timeless moral element: You must not hit a person in such a way that he or she dies. A modern court in any country would undoubtedly agree that such striking is a crime, although it may or may not impose the same penalty.

In civil laws, timeless principles come to us in various layers of cultural garb. When we get below the specifics to the underlying dynamics, we can find helpful guidelines to clothe in modern dress. For example: “If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal will be his” (Ex. 21:33, 34). Although this could literally apply today, most of us do not have oxen or donkeys. We do have cars and trucks.
A venerable Christian fallacy is the idea that the more Christian we want to become, the less Jewish our religion must be. This anti-Semitic notion, which has wreaked havoc on Jewish-Christian relations for more than a millennium and a half, is not supported by Scripture.

from observing all of His commands.

Now we are in a better position to grapple with the question of whether the prohibition in Leviticus 17:10-14 against eating meat with blood (compare 3:17; 7:26, 27) still applies. Is it a moral, ritual, civil, or health law? The fact that eating meat with blood has to do with diet implies that health could be involved, and modern science confirms that blood carries disease.

This could be reason enough to abstain from meat with blood. However, in 17:11 the Lord’s reason for the prohibition is: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you on the altar to ransom your lives; for it is the blood that ransoms by means of life.”

Mention of the altar indicates a ritual element in the law. Indeed, because God assigned the blood of certain species of animals for application on His altar, the Israelites were not permitted either to offer their sacrifices anywhere else or to eat the blood of well-being offerings. But does this mean that the law has no application now that the ritual system is gone?

In Leviticus 17:11, the most basic reason for the prohibition is that the blood represents life. This is why God selected the blood of certain animals for the function of ransom. Even where ransom through animal sacrifice did not apply, as in the case of a game animal not appropriate to sacrifice, the Israelites were forbidden to eat meat with blood because the blood of any animal represented its life (vs. 13, 14). That this was the basic reason is confirmed by Genesis 9:3, 4, where the Lord first allowed human beings to eat meat just after the Flood (vs. 3), but withheld permission to eat meat with its lifeblood still in it (vs. 4). The next two verses read: “For your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” (vs. 5, 6).

The prohibitions of blood and of murder are both based on the time-less moral principle of respect for God-given life that is expressed in the sixth of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:13). So although the blood prohibition in Leviticus 17:10-14 has health and ritual implications, it is more fundamentally a moral law. This explains several pieces of biblical data:

1. In Genesis 9, God gave the prohibition to Noah for the entire human race before the Israelite nation and its ritual worship system existed.

2. In Ezekiel 33:25 and 26, eating meat with blood is listed with moral faults such as murder, idolatry, and adultery.

3. Although the early Christian council in Jerusalem recognized that the ceremonial requirement of circumcision was nonbinding upon Gentile Christians, the prohibition of eating meat with blood was included in the “bottom-line” lifestyle requirements that were laid upon Gentile Christians among other tests of fellowship (Acts 15:20, 29). Notice that Acts 15 refers by implication to the Old Testament, where the only biblical requirement for preventing ingestion of blood along with meat is to drain it out at the time of slaughter (Lev. 17:13; Deut. 12:24; 1 Sam. 14:32-34).

Although it is impossible to remove every bit of blood in this manner, just as draining the oil out of a car leaves a small amount of oil lining parts of the engine, basic drainage fulfills the divine command. If this is done, as is often the case in modern butchering, it is not necessary for Christians to follow additional traditional practices of salting and roasting to get more blood out.

Can we boil the above discussion into a single, simple rule of thumb to determine whether the Bible intends for Christians to keep a given Old Testament law? Here is an attempt: A law should be kept to the extent that its principle can be applied unless the New Testament removes the reason for its application. G. Wenham concluded that “the principles underlying the OT are valid and authoritative for the Christian, but the particular applications found in the OT may not be.”

But if we overcome our neglect of biblical law, won’t this lead to legalism? Not if we understand the purpose of God’s law. It is a standard of acting and thinking in harmony with God’s character of love. It is not, cannot be, and never was intended to be a means to salvation. Doing right can never redeem us from our mortality or past sins. Only God’s grace through Christ’s sacrifice, received by faith, can do that. God’s commandments are for people who are already delivered, as demonstrated by the fact that He gave Noah covenant stipulations after bringing him through the Flood (Gen. 9:4-6), and He pro-
claimed the Ten Commandments to the Israelites after deliver ing them from bondage in Egypt (Ex. 20).

A vener able Christian fallacy is the idea that the more Christian we want to become, the less Jewish our religion must be. This anti-Semitic notion, which has wreaked havoc on Jewish-Christian relations for more than a millennium and a half, is not supported by Scripture. Rather, the more Jews and Christians absorb and live up to the essential ideals of our respective biblical holy books, the more common ground we will discover.

God’s law is a precious gift to protect human beings for our own good. Moses explicitly stated this: “Now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?” (Deut. 10:12–13; italics supplied; compare 32:46, 47).

Jesus agreed, saying of the Sabbath: “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27, NRSV).

In teaching his barber how to pray through the Ten Commandments, Martin Luther emphasized their positive protective function. For example, on “You shall not bear false witness,” he commented, “Thus a wall has been built around our good reputation and integrity to protect it against malicious gossip and deceitful tongues.”

In their profound and practical book Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God, H. T. Blackaby and C. V. King speak of the gift of God’s law: “God loves you deeply and profoundly. Because He loves you, He has given you guidelines for living lest you miss the full dimensions of the love relationship. Life also has some ‘land mines’ that can destroy you or wreak your life. God does not want to see you miss out on His best, and He does not want to see your life wrecked. Suppose you had to cross a field full of land mines. A person who knew exactly where every one of them was buried offered to take you through it. Would you say to him, ‘I don’t want you to tell me what to do. I don’t want you to impose your ways on me?’”

Properly viewed within a covenant framework of love and grace, God’s law is not legalistic, and obedience to it is not legalism. People are legalistic when they put His law in place of His grace as a means of salvation, as in Jesus’ story of a Pharisee who despised a tax collector (Luke 18:9–14).

He failed to discern God’s free grace.

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and right to which individuals and groups should conform and which judicial authority should enforce. Rules will necessarily play some role in this order, but there also will be principles and values which form a consistent system, cover all possible situations, and belong to the collective conscience of the community. By this definition, explicit rules—laws—are only the tip of the iceberg of the phenomenon of law.”

Patrick does not deal with the reasons for justice, right, and order, but the possible situations covered by law are involved in relationships. Relationships can be harmonious only if the respective parties show proper respect for one another’s well-being. Thus the orderly, just, right principles of law are based on the foundational principle of love (compare Matthew 22:36–40), which is also the basis of God’s grace (see John 3:16). Without love, external law-keeping is meaningless (compare 1 Corinthians 13).

Comparison between biblical and other ancient Near Eastern laws has led J. H. Walton to the conclusion that the laws given to Israel were not, for the most part, presented as a new mode of conduct: “Israel had laws before to insure the smooth functioning of society, and it is logical to believe that they would have been heavily dependent on other cultures of their day for those guidelines. The revelation, though, had to do with providing a foundation for those norms (the covenant) and establishing YHWH as the source of those norms. One does not refrain from adultery merely because adultery disrupts society. Rather, adultery is prohibited because it goes against an absolute standard of morality by which YHWH himself is characterized.”

We need absolute standards. Can you imagine listening to an orchestra in which the players have not agreed that A = 440 vibrations per second? What about transforming plans into a building if the construction workers interpret the basic
units of measure differently? So why shouldn’t we enjoy the security of absolute moral standards, which help us to get along with one another smoothly rather than having our harmony disintegrate into a cacophony of chaos?

If standards were continuously left up to agreement between people, they would suffer from variability and circularity, as when a man who blew the noon whistle at a factory regularly set his watch to a clock in the window of a shop, only to learn that the shopkeeper set his clock every day by that whistle. This is why we have Greenwich Mean Time and a Bureau of Standards. It is also why we have the Bible. Only God is big, wise, and good enough to set our moral standards.

In addition to the attempt to make God’s law into a means of salvation, another misuse is to employ it as a political tool by making artificial human interpretations into the standards to which others must adhere. There is no question that setting standards can generate power and/or wealth (e.g., Bill Gates and Microsoft computer operating systems). But putting subjective human authority in place of God’s absolute authority is nothing short of blasphemy (compare John 10:33), and it is even worse to do this for gain by preying on people’s legalistic fears that they will be eternally damned unless they measure up to the dictates of a human voice that they mistake for the voice of God.

If we disregard the Bible, our moral compass may appear logical and self-consistent, but it lacks an external reference point. It would be like the woman who was traveling by plane over a large body of water at night. To calm her apprehension, she asked the pilot how he could navigate in the dark. “You see that green light on that wingtip?” he replied. Yes, she saw it. “You see that red light on the other wingtip?” he continued. “Yes,” again. “I just steer the plane straight between them,” he assured her.

Absolute moral standards are out of vogue in our postmodern world. We are supposed to listen to whatever voices we feel comfortable with, as long as they do not claim to be absolute. Respect for others demands that we recognize anyone else’s source of moral guidance (or lack thereof) as equal to our own. Value judgments are strictly forbidden.

Respect for others is crucial. But must we purchase it by relinquishing our right to absolute moral standards and assenting to a polytheistic moral culture that puts anything claiming divine authority (including human beings) in place of God? Masquerading as enlightenment, moral subjectivity is not only inconvenient and irritating; it is also terribly dangerous, as Rabbi Stewart Vogel points out with startling passion: “If each of us creates his own meaning, we also create our own morality, I cannot believe this. For if so, what the Nazis did was not immoral because German society had accepted it. Likewise, the subjective morality of every majority culture throughout the world could validate their heinous behavior. It comes down to a very simple matter: Without God there is no objective meaning to life, nor is there an objective morality. I do not want to live in a world where right and wrong are subjective.”

Postmodernism refuses to recognize the possibility that a person sincerely following his or her religious or cultural norms, whatever they may be, could perpetrate something that should be characterized as evil. So what was it that stared us in the face on September 11, 2001, through the eyes of Mohammed Atta?

This article is adapted by permission from Roy Gane, Leviticus, Numbers, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), pp. 305-314.

REFERENCES

3 Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references in this article are drawn from the New International Version.
**HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH CONTEXTUALIZE FOR MUSLIMS?**

When Muslims accept Christianity, how much of Islam should the church expect them to leave behind?

By Carlos G. Martin *

A new Adventist missionary baptizes a Muslim who continues to repeat several times a day that “Mohammed is the prophet of God” and prays for blessings on the “prophet” and his family. A newly baptized convert attends the mosque on a regular basis, where the divinity of Christ is consistently denied. Another convert still participates in the “feast of the sacrifice.” How far can we go with contextualization among Muslims? This is a matter of intense debate within some sending organizations due to the fact that many believe that some approaches have led to syncretism.

Contextualization refers to the process of making the biblical text and its context meaningful and applicable to the thought patterns and situations of a given people. It covers the cultural adjustments that have to be made in cross-cultural evangelism. Syncretism is the fusion of two beliefs. Frequently, syncretism is born of a desire to make the gospel relevant. To avoid syncretism, Seventh-day Adventists are admonished to “agree

Doctrines are supracultural, and any attempt to contextualize must preserve their integrity. An acceptable contextualization will not change doctrines. Doctrines are divine truths that should not be confused with theology.

At its bare minimum, theology is what humans think about what God said. Theological formulation never happens in a religio-cultural vacuum, but a theology that begins with culture will unavoidably lead to syncretism. An acceptable theology does not begin with the context but with the text. An acceptable theology will always be characterized by faithfulness to the Scriptures.

In the “Contextualization Spectrum,” the “C-Scale” measures the level of contextualization from 1 through 6 among “Christ-centered communities” found in the Muslim context:

- **C-1:** Traditional church using outside language.
- **C-2:** Traditional church using inside language.
- **C-3:** Churches using inside language and religiously neutral inside cultural forms.
- **C-4:** Contextualized Christ-centered communities using inside language and biblically permissible cultural and Islamic forms.
- **C-5:** Muslim communities that affirm they are followers of Isa the Messiah. They still live legally and religiously within the community of Islam.

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C-6: Secret/underground believers who are believed to be Muslims by the Muslim community and say themselves that they are Muslims.

The question is, At what point in this scale is the integrity of the gospel compromised? “Faith Development in Context” (FDIC) ministries is a new name for Adventist efforts using C-5 strategies.

This categorization is incomplete in the sense that it does not describe well the mindset of both outsiders and insiders. It will be helpful to identify and differentiate between three approaches to the Contextualization Spectrum. They could be described as the “perspective of an insider,” the “perspective of an outsider,” and the “strategic perspective.”

C-5 Muslims—An Insider’s Perspective

It is possible to consider the C-Scale from the perspective of an insider. Some believers are in a stage at which they are still doctrinally, socially, and legally within Islam (C-5). Others, however, have decided to remain culturally within the boundaries of Islam but are aware of the implications of their decision to follow Christ (C-4).

People arrive at a point of conversion through different paths. From an evangelical perspective, conversion is understood as a change of heart that takes place when a person accepts Jesus as Savior. The understanding of what conversion is all about differs greatly among Adventists. Some tend to equate it with a rational acceptance of a set of doctrines, after which a person is ready for baptism or for a change of denominational preference. Others think of it as a sudden, immediate, complete, radical, absolute, final change of life. Yet others may see it as a process.

Conversion of a non-Christian to Christianity may require a change of assumptions in several areas. We may argue about doctrines, but we cannot argue about assumptions. How can a Hindu become persuaded that there is only one God without using the Bible? The natures of God, of man, and of sin as shown in the Qur’an are different from the Christian understanding based on the Bible.

To change the assumptions of a worldview, a non-Christian may require more time than a non-Adventist Christian does to accept the Sabbath. A Muslim who is in a slow process of conversion needs time to understand the gospel and its requirements. A missionary must begin where the non-Christian is. “Christ drew the hearts of His hearers to Him by the manifestation of His love, and then, little by little, as they were able to bear it, He unfolded to them the great truths of the kingdom. We also must learn to adapt our labors to the condition of the people—to meet men where they are.”

Instead of beginning with Bible studies, a Muslim may need to receive “Qur’anic studies.” This person and his or her community may take a slow path toward Christianity. In time he or she will study the Bible. The transition from full acceptance of the Qur’an to full acceptance of the Bible may take years. The process of change might be multi-generational, meaning that it will begin with individual conversions, possibly with persecution and martyrdom.

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mosques.” Just as the early church flourished in a spiritually hostile climate, C-4 communities may also emerge in an Islamic context.

C-5: Non-baptized believers who still refer to themselves as Muslims who are followers of Isa the Messiah. The believers remain “legally, culturally, and religiously within the Muslim Ummah.” They may attend the Muslim mosque on a regular basis, while at the same time worshiping with fellow believers on Sabbath.

C-6: Secret/underground believers who are believed to be Muslim by the Muslim community and who themselves say that they are Muslim.

An important difference is that C-4 believers are aware of the fact that they have become Christians and have joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. C-5 believers still refer to themselves as Muslims. They are in a different stage in the process of conversion, with different levels of understanding of the gospel. C-5 believers are still legally within the community of Islam, meaning that they would repeat many times a day and at the mosque that “Muhammad rasul Allah” (“Mohammed is the messenger of God”).

C-5 communities are considered a Muslim offshoot by the Muslim community, and they do not see themselves as being part of the church, the body of Christ. “The work being facilitated by the Study Centers [sponsored by FDIC] is resulting in new believer groups which are not able, for various reasons, to integrate into the existing local church. This has resulted in the establishment of new structures in order to provide nurture and allow for new growth among the new believers.”

C-5 believers still maintain many beliefs and practices that are contrary to the gospel or, perhaps, have not yet understood the requirements of the gospel. This kind of believer needs further instruction and correction (Acts 18:24-26). Even though during a few decades of early Christian history, believers worshiped in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1) and attended Jewish synagogues until they withdrew either voluntarily (19:8-10) or under duress (Acts 13:45, 50; 18:5-7, 14-17), the New Testament also records the rebaptism of an entire community of believers that was baptized without knowing the essential aspects of the Christian doctrine (Acts 19:1-7).

Scripture refers to the church as a body (Eph. 1:22; 4:15, 16; Col. 1:18). C-5 believers, however, “are by definition not linked to the local church.” As a result, and against the advice of the Global Mission Issues Committee, most baptized C-5 believers are not aware “of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” This is unethical and against the explicit instructions of Ellen G. White.

**C-5 Missionaries—An Outsider’s Perspective**

Another adaptation of the C-Scale can be used to describe different levels of willingness to adapt in the missionary’s mindset. This section describes the C-Scale from the perspective of the outsider, i.e., the missionary.

C-1: Missionaries make no attempt at contextualization at all.

C-2: Missionaries offer a Western church service using inside language.

C-3: Missionaries show appreciation for the local culture by incorporating into worship as many neutral inside cultural forms as possible, such as music, artwork, and ethnic dress.

C-4: Missionaries create contextualized Christ-centered communities that not only use local language and incorporate neutral cultural forms in worship, but also biblically permissible Islamic forms, such as praying with arms raised, touching the forehead on the ground while praying, and separating men from women.

C-5: Missionaries believe that a Muslim can be saved without leaving Islam. Some baptize Muslims who are not even aware that they are joining the body of Christ. Some missionaries go so far as legally to become a Muslim by repeating the Shehadah in front of witnesses.

C-6: Secret/underground believers who are believed to be Muslims by the Muslim community and who themselves say that they are Muslims.

Missionaries with a C-5 mindset have developed a theology that proposes that God created all religions in which there are kernels of truth. As the result of a subsequent apostasy, however, a remnant must be raised to restore the truth (just as happened with Christianity). God “desires a remnant in the Hindu community, in
the Buddhist community, in the secular developed community, in the Muslim community. Each of these must be culturally relevant and communicating effectively the truth for this time to that community.”

The implication is that, following the Muslim pattern, a Hindu could be baptized without leaving Hinduism, and a secular person could be saved in the remnant that God is calling out in the secular community. This concept is based on an assumption for which there is no solid biblical support. The remnant concept of the C-5 approach is a radical departure from the historical Adventist understanding of the remnant as a body of believers who have “come out” of their religious communities (Rev. 14:6-12; 18:1-4) and have identified with a separate and visible group of people who have determined to be loyal to everything God has revealed—the remnant church (12:17). A missionary with a C-5 mindset reduces the church to only within this context that the concept of a remnant within Islam after a “falling away” makes sense. This reasoning begins with a wrong assumption—that God created different religions.

A correct assumption, however, is that 600 years after Christ, Satan deliberately raised a movement that mixed truth and error in order to create an alternative religion to Christianity that currently has nearly 1.5 billion followers who deny what Jesus did on the Cross.

Since the days of Cain and Abel and throughout history, Satan has been very effective in using the approach of raising alternative religions. “In all ages, philosophers and teachers have been presenting to the world theories by which to satisfy the soul’s need. Every heathen nation has had its great teachers and religious systems offering some other means of redemption than Christ. The trend of their work is to rob God of that which is His own, both by creation and by redemption. And these false teachers rob man as well. Millions of human beings are bound down under false religions, in the bondage of slavish fear, of stolid indifference, toiling like beasts of burden, bereft of hope or joy or aspiration here, and with only a dull fear of the hereafter.”

Cain’s offering had a kernel of truth in it, but his alternative approach missed the mark. Though kernels of truth may be found in various religious systems, they are not proof that the movement was raised by God, but an evidence that God was at work in spite of Satan’s efforts to lead people away from the truth in its entirety.

A second implicit assumption in the paragraph is that God revealed truth through the writings of chosen messengers. At the end, this is a justification for a Muslim legally to remain in the mosque by repeating that “Allah is the only God and Mohammed is the messenger of God.”

The simple fact that Mohammed was exposed to Christianity and rejected it, and that his teachings contradicted previous inspired New Testament writings should be enough evidence for his rejection as a prophet (messenger) of God.

A third assumption behind that statement is that the Qur’an, written by a messenger of God and preserved under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is as inspired as the Bible. This assumption also provides the foundation for a remnant within Hinduism, Buddhism, and virtually any religious or secular movement in which kernels of truth may be found. A vague and wide understanding of inspiration may lead Roman Catholics to justify the role
People who are still at a stage in their process toward conversion at which they are not ready to make a responsible decision to join the body of Christ are not ready for baptism. Of course missionaries must meet people where they are. But they should not baptize Muslims who still believe that Islam is the true religion, accept the Qur’an as the Word of God, believe that Mohammed was a true prophet, and think they are still Muslims—just to help them move toward Christianity.

of “tradition,” or Mormons to stay in their church even after having known the gospel. This does not mean that kernels of truth found in the Qur’an may be utilized to attract Muslims to the message of Isa the Messiah.

Missionaries with a C-5 mindset do not represent the Adventist mission and message. A C-5 missionary (who believes that Islam is a true religion, that Mohammed was a messenger of God, and that the Qur’an is one of the holy writings) is a theological contradiction. A missionary with a C-4 mindset may, however, use C-5 strategies to lead non-believers to a point at which they may make a responsible decision for Jesus and His truth.

C-5 Strategy—The Strategic Perspective

A third way to see the C-Scale is from a strategic perspective. Different strategies should be followed for people in different stages of growth. The approach suggested in this article does not eliminate the usage of Islamic forms. A C-4 missionary (someone who wants to be faithful to the Scriptures and is not willing to compromise the integrity of the gospel) can use C-5 strategies (such as use of the Qur’an) to help a C-5 Muslim (who is still attending the mosque).

In an extended conversation in 2004 with an Adventist who works within the C-5 scale, he insisted that we should not aim to make an Adventist out of a Muslim and that his converts would remain in Islam. This person has theological problems relating to the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of the remnant, the doctrine of inspiration and revelation, and the doctrine of baptism. Though sometimes this is not clearly spelled out, this is in the background of the FDIC approach.

Biblical examples do not justify the approaches of a C-5 missionary. Paul did use the synagogue to launch evangelism, and he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:1-3). But 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 indicates that this does not mean that if Paul were alive today, he would advise Muslims to “remain in the condition in which [they were] called.” Though the doctrine of the synagogue was valid, the doctrine of the mosque is wrong. Though the teachings of the Law and the Prophets were the foundation for the New Testament, the teachings of the Qur’an negate biblical doctrines. Though Paul’s writings were based on teachings of the Old Testament, Mohammed’s writings were not based on the teachings of the New Testament. Islam cannot be equated with Judaism, nor the assumptions of C-5 missionaries with Paul’s mindset.

Missionaries could use the C-5 strategy in the Contextualization Spectrum to help Muslims arrive at an understanding of the gospel where they can make a responsible decision for Jesus and His church. When addressing the Epicurean and Stoic Greek philosophers, Paul began where the Athenians were as he made references to “the unknown God” (Acts 17:23, KJV); then he used C-5 strategies as he quoted from pagan Greek poets (vs. 28). Then he moved to the C-4 level as he forcefully confronted his hearers with the death and resurrection of Jesus, even at the risk of suffering persecution.

A C-5 strategy is not an end in itself, but rather a transitional approach that aims to help Muslims (C-5 believers) become Christians (C-4 believers). These “followers of Isa the Messiah” still live within the community of Islam, legally and religiously. Eventually they may arrive at a point at which, individually or as a community, they will become aware that their identity as “followers of Isa” makes them part of the universal body of Christ and, specifically, Seventh-day Adventists with a Muslim background.

People who are still at a stage in their process toward conversion at which they are not ready to make a responsible decision to join the body of Christ are not ready for baptism. Of course missionaries must meet people where they are. But they should not baptize Muslims who still believe that Islam is the true religion, accept the Qur’an as the Word of God, believe that Mohammed was a true prophet, and think they are still Muslims—just to help them move toward Christianity.

Only people who understand the implications of their baptism should be baptized. According to Mark 16:15, Christians must “preach the gospel to every creature” (KJV). In the “Great Commission,” however, Jesus asked His followers to make disciples by “teaching them to observe all things”
In obedience to the Great Commission, Paul states, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27, KJV). As a result of evangelism in the early church, baptized believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (2:42, NKJV). Those who were being saved were “added to the church” (vs. 47, KJV). The guidelines from the Church Manual are in harmony with the Scriptures. All polices related to the General Conference should be in harmony with them.

There is an appropriate use of C-5 strategies. These strategies should be viewed, however, as catalysts for movement into the next stage of the scale. The underlying issue is whether the use of C-5 strategies is an outreach technique or is the mindset of the missionary. A mindset that seeks and is willing to accept and baptize converts who remain at this level is not faithful to the Scriptures or to the church. An Adventist missionary or an Adventist sending organization should not compromise the integrity of the gospel for pragmatic purposes (i.e., to see church growth where there has been no success). A missionary with a C-5 mindset does not adequately represent the Seventh-day Adventist theology and message. The search for and use of strategies should be creative, but they should be based on a solid foundation—faithfulness to the Scriptures.

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The last half of the 20th century provided a continuation of the debate in the Adventist Church over the nature of inspiration.

A significant number of publications came out during the 1950s uplifting the reliability of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. Of the books dealing with Ellen White, Francis D. Nichol’s Ellen G. White and Her Critics (1951) was the most outstanding. In this 702-page volume, Nichol responded to almost all charges raised against Ellen White since the days of Canright.

It was also during the 1950s that a group of Seventh-day Adventist scholars combined their efforts to produce a Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (1953-1957). With the help of such groups as the Committee on Bible Chronology and the Committee on Problems in Bible Translations, the commentary integrated in a single project the views of its various contributors. It was stated that while rejecting the position that “the writers of Scripture wrote under verbal dictation by the Holy Spirit,” the commentary was carried out under the assumption that the writers of Scripture “spoke and wrote according to their own individualities and characteristics, as is indicated by the varied styles of writing that they display, but free of
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*Alberto R. Timm, Ph., D., is Director of the Brazilian Ellen G. White Research Center and Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Brazil Adventist College (Central Campus).
The first edition of the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (1966) came off the press with a specific entry on the “Inspiration of Scripture.” After quoting the statement on the “Holy Scriptures” of the Fundamental Beliefs that had been officially accepted since 1931, the entry stated that Seventh-day Adventists “do not believe in verbal inspiration, according to the usual meaning of the term, but in what may properly be called thought inspiration.”

the errors found in other writings.

In the mid-1950s, Carl W. Daggy completed his M.A. in which he explicitly suggested that Seventh-day Adventists were not in full agreement with the Fundamentalist view of inspiration. According to Daggy, “Fundamentalists and Seventh-day Adventists are in agreement that the Bible is the Christian’s sole unerring rule of faith and practice. They sharply disagree, however, on the question of verbal inspiration. The Fundamentalists generally take the position that the words of Scriptures, as such, were inspired by God. Seventh-day Adventists, on the other hand, believe that inspiration functioned in the minds of the Bible writers, but that their choice of words was their own. At the same time, they insist that this choice was guarded so that the writers did not express error.

In 1957, the book Questions on Doctrine came out affirming that Seventh-day Adventists believed that the Bible “not merely contains the word of God, but is the word of God.”

In the following year (1958) Ellen White’s Selected Messages, Book 1, came off the press with an insightful section compiled from the author’s writings on inspiration.

Although Seventh-day Adventists had traditionally held the propositional view of revelation, a perceivable move toward the encounter view of revelation was taken by Frederick E. J. Harder in his 506-page Ph.D. dissertation, “Revelation, a Source of Knowledge as Conceived by Ellen G. White,” defended in 1960 at New York University. In this dissertation, Harder studied Ellen G. White’s concept of revelation in the light of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Augustus Strong, and Emil Brunner.

In interpreting Ellen White’s concept of revelation, Harder suggested that “White agreed with Brunner’s emphasis on the personal content of revelation—that it consists in an ‘I-Thou’ relationship in which God communicates Himself to man. She did not share Brunner’s hesitancy to accept the revelation of specific truths, for these, she believed, contribute to the ultimate reconciliation between man and God.”

While acknowledging that Ellen White recognized the communication of specific truths in the process of revelation, Harder did not emphasize her understanding of that communication as an actual impartation of propositional truths. Although “the line between the natural and the supernatural is almost nonexistent so far as the attainment of knowledge is concerned,” there is still a need for the Word of God because that Word was “communicated by methods less subject to the distortions of sin” than in natural revelation.

In regard to the inspiration of Scripture, Harder stated that for Ellen White “inspiration reveals thought, but it does not set the mold for its form of expression.” Harder recognized, however, that for Ellen White the Bible was “a correct record” of biography and history because (1) “the scribes wrote under direction of the Holy Spirit,” and (2) “this influence counteracted the human biases which cause biographers to gloss over many derogatory facts about their heroes and thus present only a partial truth.” “Inasmuch as both science and the Bible have the same author, there can be no conflict between them when they are rightly understood.” Varieties of “styles and subject matters” are seen by Ellen White as “a strength rather than weakness,” because they provide “varying emphases” to the many aspects of truth “which would not be presented in a toughly uniform work.”

Another slight move toward encounter revelation was taken by Jack W. Provonsha, professor of Christian Ethics at Loma Linda University, in his article “Revelation and Inspiration,” published in 1964 in the Andrews University Seminary Studies. In this article, Provonsha spoke of encounter revelation in a much friendlier way than previous traditional Seventh-day Adventists. The overall tenor of the article seemed even to suggest a certain via-media position between the propositional concept of revelation and the encounter revelation theory.

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The years 1950 to 1970 saw the emergence of some moves toward encounter revelation and a thought view of inspiration that was largely informed by a particular understanding of Ellen White’s phenomena. Not until the 1970s and early 1980s, however, did these trends reach their climactic expression.


While conflicting views of inspiration had been previously nurtured within Seventh-day Adventism, it was in the early 1970s that Seventh-day Adventist scholars became more controversially divided on this particular doctrine. The main forums to foster those discussions were the Association of Adventist Forums (officially established in the fall of 1967) and its Spectrum magazine (first issued in the winter of 1969).

As a non-official church publication, Spectrum assumed a revisionist-critical stand, which would eventually be denounced by Neal C. Wilson, General Conference president, at the 1984 Annual Council of the General Conference. Several articles advocating encounter revelation and the use of the historical-critical method came out in Spectrum, setting the agenda for many discussions on inspiration during the period 1970-1991.

Encounter Revelation. The theory of encounter revelation was a neo-orthodox reaction to the traditional concept of propositional revelation. It perceives revelation as a subjective personal divine-human encounter rather than as an objective communication of propositional truth. The Bible is, therefore, reduced to a mere human testimony of that encounter.

The Autumn 1970 issue of Spectrum came out with several articles dealing with Ellen White. Among those articles was one by F. E. J. Harder, dean of the School of Graduate Studies at Andrews University, in which he further elaborated some basic concepts of his Ph.D. disserta-
Dederen read a paper entitled “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration” at the 1974 Bible Conference. In this paper, Dederen again pointed out that revelation “is more than a mere meeting or encounter, it is also a knowing, it implies a knowledge of the Lord and of His will.”

...tion (1960). Seventh-day Adventists were challenged by Harder’s article to move beyond the 19th-century Protestant view of special revelation “as propositionally embedded within an ancient book.” For Harder, special revelation was a “continuing conversation and communion between God and living people” in personal and communal bases.18

In 1975, Herold Weiss, chairman of the Department of Religious Studies of St. Mary’s College, Indiana, and former assistant professor of New Testament at Andrews University, moved even more explicitly toward the encounter theology of neo-orthodoxy in his Spectrum article entitled “Revelation and the Bible: Beyond Verbal Inspiration.” Under the assumption that “both revelation and inspiration take place outside and prior to the Bible,” Weiss argued that “to equate God’s Word with a book is the work of a corrupted faith that sets up for itself an idol. The words of the book are the words of the prophets which only tangentially reflect the Word of God. Nothing on earth is the ultimate expression of God. To make the Bible such is bibliolatry, just another form of idolatry.”19

Weiss rejected the “verbal inspiration” idea that “the Bible has one Author” because “historical, grammatical and literary” studies have shown that “it is impossible to lump all the books of the Bible under one author.” Based on such an assumption, Weiss argued that “the Bible as a book can and must be studied as any other book.”20

Meanwhile, the most significant Seventh-day Adventist critical responses to the encounter revelation theory were penned by Raoul Dederen during the 1970s. In a paper entitled “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics,” which came out in the Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics (1974), Dederen qualified the idea of setting “revelation-encounter over against revelation-doctrine” as a false dichotomy. While admitting that revelation is indeed “an event, an encounter,” Dederen also explained that “one’s encounter with Christ is effected only through hearing the prophetic and apostolic proclamation consigned to Scriptures. These fragile words of Scripture passed down to us from the OT and the NT writers are intrinsic to the revelational process. They are as true as the Christ event they explain, and they share in the ‘once-for-all’ character of the divine revelation.”21

After describing how “the age of enlightenment” questioned the Christian traditional view of Scripture as “a divine communication to man cast in written form under the express inflow of the Holy Spirit,” Dederen qualified any attempt to reject “the testimony of Scripture regarding itself” as “unscientific.”22

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The Historical-Critical Method. The historical-critical method is a method of literary analysis used to study documents from the perspective of their indebtedness to the particular socio-cultural milieu in which they were produced. The method grew out of the Enlightenment assumption (or basic presupposition) that history can be understood without taking into consideration supernatural intervention.

The question whether the method is adequate for the study of “inspired” writings divided Seventh-day Adventist scholars eventually into three major groups: (1) Those who accept the method with its basic presupposition; (2) those who believe that a modified version of the method can be used apart from its basic presupposition; and (3) those who hold that the method is unacceptable because it cannot be isolated from its basic presupposition.

The existence of so-called “modified” versions of the classical historical-critical method would require a much more detailed study to identify particular understandings of the method by different Seventh-day Adventist scholars. However, no classification of such variant understandings is provided in the present article beyond the endeavor of pointing out a few Seventh-day Adventist studies that attempt to foster the use of the method and criticisms of those attempts.

Historical-critical studies of Ellen White’s writings were encouraged by the Autumn 1970 Spectrum article “Ellen White: A Subject for Adventist Scholarship,” written by Roy Branson, then assistant professor of Christian ethics at Andrews University, and Herold D. Weiss, then assistant professor of New Tes-
tament at the same university. In that article, Branson and Weiss challenged Seventh-day Adventists scholars to study Ellen White’s writings with a four-step historical-critical hermeneutics, intended (1) “to discover the nature of Mrs. White’s relationship to other authors,” (2) “to recover the social and intellectual milieu in which she lived and wrote,” (3) “to give close attention to the development of Ellen White’s writings within her own lifetime, and also to the development of the church,” and (4) “to apply in our day the words she spoke in her day.” 24

Such hermeneutics set the trend for several historical-critical studies that came out during this period (1970-1991) charging Ellen White with historical errors, plagiarism, psychological trances, and theological pitfalls.

In the fall of 1979, Benjamin McArthur, professor of American history at Southern Missionary College, pointed out in his Spectrum article, “Where Are Historians Taking the Church?” that Seventh-day Adventism was “witnessing the first great age of Adventist historical revisionism.” McArthur explained that the new generation of Seventh-day Adventist revisionists worked under the common presupposition that “the cultural milieu in which Ellen White lived and worked to a large degree shaped her writings on history, prophecy, health and, by implication, every other topic she discussed.” As a result, “the nature of her inspiration” and “her authority in the church” were at issue. 25

McArthur explained that since “orthodox belief and critical historical judgment are incompatible,” “the problem is not that the Adventist historian lacks faith in God’s providential leading, but that there is no way for him to include it in historical explanation.” 26 Thus, the use of the historical-critical method led Seventh-day Adventist revisionists not only to deal with Ellen White’s writings as “historically conditioned” 27 but also to a large extent to give up the Great Controversy theme as a philosophy of history.

In March 1980, Donald McAdams, president of Southwestern Adventist College, published an article in Spectrum under the explanatory title “Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s.” In that article, McAdams explained how critical studies of Ellen White during the 1970s tried to show that her works were “not entirely original” (because she “copied from other sources”) and were “not infallible” (because she “made statements that were not correct”). 28

The use of the historical-critical method was also encouraged in regard to the study of Scripture. Of special significance was the section entitled “Ways to Read the Bible” of the December 1982 issue of Spectrum magazine. There, John C. Brunt, professor of New Testament at Walla Walla College, argued that the use of the historical-critical method does not necessarily lead to “liberal conclusions.” Brunt further suggested that “virtually all Adventist exegetes [sic] of Scripture do use historical-critical methodology, even if they are not willing to use the term. The historical-critical method deserves a place in the armamentarium of Adventists who are serious about understanding their Bibles.” 29

Larry G. Herr, then professor of Old Testament in the seminary of the Far Eastern Division in the Philippines, argued in the same line that “the ‘historical-critical’ method of Bible study, used properly, can be a valid and powerful tool for Seventh-day Adventists.” 30

Meanwhile, some of the most significant Seventh-day Adventist criticisms of the historical-critical method were penned by E. Edward Zinke and Gerhard F. Hasel. During the 1970s, Zinke, then research assistant and chief editor of the Emmaus Press, and Hasel, president of Andrews University, came out with several articles on the subject. Of special significance was his supplement to Ministry magazine of October 1977, entitled “A Conservative Approach to Theology.” After surveying different approaches to theology from a historical perspective, Zinke stated that “method in theology must not be determined by an a priori consideration of the nature of man, of the universe, or of any aspect of these two. Rather, method must be determined totally by Scripture itself. The method by which Scripture is studied must not be the same as that applied to human literature.”

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Concerns about the use of the historical-critical method by Seventh-day Adventist scholars also led the 1986 Annual Council of the General Conference, which convened in Rio de Janeiro, to vote a document on “Methods of Bible Study.” In this official document, Adventist Bible students were urged “to avoid relying on the use of the presuppositions and the resultant deductions associated with the historical-critical method.”

the “method must always be subject to the judgment of Scripture.” Thus “the study of Scripture must follow a method that derives its philosophical conceptuality, its norms and procedures from Scripture itself.”

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The use of the historical-critical method was also criticized in several articles by Gerhard F. Hasel, Leon I. Mashchak, Richard M. Davidson, and Mario Veloso.

Further Developments. Since 1970, a significant variety of definitions of inspiration have been proposed in Seventh-day Adventist circles. Those definitions have oscillated between attempts to accommodate apparent “discrepancies” of inspired writings and concerns of uplifting the infallibility of those writings against the challenges imposed by revisionist studies.

In 1972, Rene Noorbergen’s Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny described the prophetic ministry in strong terms. According to Noorbergen, a “true prophet is not a psychic who performs with the aid of a mental or ‘spiritual’ crutch, but is someone who has no degree of freedom either in turning in or controlling the prophetic impulses or prophetic recall. These impulses are superimposed over the prophet’s conscious mind by a supernatural personal being, having absolute knowledge of both past and future, making no allowance for error or human miscalculation.”

Also in 1972, Hans Heinz’ Glaubenslehren der Heiligen Schrift came out with a special chapter on “The Holy Scripture.” After rejecting the theory of verbal inspiration, Heinz defined inspiration as “a positive divine impact on the mind, will, and imagination of the author, who uses his means in order to write as God desires, whereby the author is under the guidance of God, which prevents error.”

Of special significance was the 1974 Bible Conference, which was summoned “to focus on the Bible as the foundation of Adventist faith and doctrine, and to study sound principles of hermeneutics.” The doctrine of inspiration was addressed in Raoul Dederen’s two papers, “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics” and “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration.”

In the latter, Dederen defined inspiration as “the controlling influence that God exerts over the human instrument by whom His revelation is communicated. It has to do with the reception, by the prophet, of the divine revelation and the accuracy with which it is transmitted, whether in an oral or a written form. At the same time it gives the record of revelation its authority and validity for us.”

To this he added, “We can hardly believe that God, having performed the mighty acts and revealed their true meaning and import to the minds of prophets and apostles would leave the prophetic and apostolic ministry to take care of itself. The same Holy Spirit, we hold, who called them to share God’s knowledge and plans, also aided their ef-
Dederen also pointed out the existence of a tendency in certain circles “to caricature” as “some sort of a dictation theory” the position of those who believed that the Bible was “fully inspired” “in all its parts.” While recognizing that on “some occasions” God actually spoke and man just recorded the words (Gen. 22:15-18; Ex. 20:1-17), Dederen stated that “in the main” inspiration functioned in such a flexible way as to allow for “human personalities.”

After quoting Ellen White’s classic statement, “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired” from Selected Messages, Book 1, page 21, Dederen raised the crucial question, “Since the thoughts rather than the words are inspired, shall we conclude that we are at liberty to treat the text of Scripture as being of little importance?” Answering the question, he explained that “some, in fact, do maintain that God suggested the thoughts and the general trend of His revelation, leaving the prophet free to express them in his own language, as he liked. Quite apart from the fact that ideas are not most usually transferred by means other than words, this scheme ignores the fact that if the thought communicated to a prophet is of the essence of a revelation, the form in which it is expressed is of prime significance. The exegetical study of the Scriptures in their original language would lose much of its meaning if God has not guided the prophet in the writing of his message.”

In regard to Ellen White’s position on the matter, Dederen asserted that “Ellen White herself, who so clearly emphasizes that the thoughts rather than the words of a prophet are inspired, stipulates: ‘While I am writing out important matters, He is beside me helping me . . . and when I am puzzled for a fit word to express my thoughts, He brings it clearly and distinctly to my mind.’ ‘I tremble for fear,’ adds the servant of the Lord, ‘lest I shall belittle the great plan of salvation by cheap words . . . . Who is sufficient for these things?’ Everything points to the fact that God who imbued the prophets’ minds with thoughts and inspired them in the fulfillment of their task also watched over them in their attempts to express ‘infinite ideas’ and embody them in ‘finite vehicles’ of human language.”

Such a view of inspiration “does not nullify,” according to Dederen, “the significant human authorship of the biblical writings. It simply affirms that the prophetic message as we find it in Scripture is the testimony of God.”

In 1977, Dederen came out with an insert in Ministry, under the title “Ellen White’s Doctrine of Scripture.” While declaring that Ellen White did not support the views of verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the original autographs, Dederen explained that Ellen White’s concept of inspiration is that “the whole man is inspired, not just his words.”

Meanwhile, Arthur White prepared two series of articles for the Review, trying to counteract some of the tensions unleashed by revisionist studies of Ellen White. The first series came out in early 1978, under the general title “Toward an Adventist Concept of Inspiration.” In this series, Arthur White suggested again that Seventh-day Adventists were in a better position to understand the modus operandi of inspiration, because they still had the autographs of a modern prophet (Ellen White), while those of the Bible were no longer available.

White admitted that while “the revelation of God’s will is authoritative and infallible,” “the language used in imparting it to mankind is human and hence is imperfect.” He saw the prophet as under the influence of the Spirit of God not only in receiving “his message through the visions” but also in bearing testimony. Despite certain occasions in which “the very words to be used are impressed upon his mind by the Spirit of God,” the influence of the Spirit does not lead the prophet to “the point of being mechanically controlled, or of being forced into a mold.”

Arthur White began his second series, “The E. G. White Historical Writings” (summer of 1979), explaining in an euphemistic way that probably never before, since the death of Ellen White in 1915, had Seventh-day Adventists been so interested in the questions of “inspiration in general and the inspiration of Ellen White in particular,” as well as “Ellen White’s ‘sources’ for the Conflict of the Ages books in general, and The Great Controversy and The Desire of Ages in particular.” He promised that this series of articles would lead the readers “some distance from the narrow concepts held by some of a mechanical, verbal inspiration according to which
Ellen White wrote only what was revealed to her in vision or dictated to her by the Holy Spirit.”

In recommending this series, Kenneth Wood, editor of the Review, suggested that readers keep in mind “four facts”: (1) “Inspired writings do not come to us ‘untouched by human hands’”; (2) “in communicating with the human family, God inspired persons, not writings”; (3) “inspiration involves a variety of methods in communicating truth and God’s will”; and (4) “the message of an inspired writer does not depend for its authority on whether it is accompanied by the label, ‘This is God’s Word.’”

The second document (far more influential than the first one) was the new 1980 “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs,” officially accepted by the delegates of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church at the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas. The new statement on the Scriptures (statement 1) reads as follows: “All Scripture is inspired by God, and is God’s Word, which is living and active and powerful.”

Also published in 1980, Gerhard F. Hasel’s book Understanding the Living Word of God included a whole chapter on the inspiration of Scripture. In that chapter, Hasel argued that the witnesses of Peter (2 Peter 1:19-21) and Paul (2 Tim. 3:16) attest that “all Scripture is inspired by God.”

In 1981, William G. Johnsson, as-
sociate editor of the *Adventist Review*, stated in a *Ministry* article, “How Does God Speak?” that “defining inspiration is like catching a rainbow. When we have put forth our best efforts, there will remain an elusive factor, an element of mystery.”

Also in 1981, Roger W. Coon, associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, began a three-part series on “Inspiration/Revelation” in *The Journal of Adventist Education*. In this series Coon advocated “pleurisy (thought) inspiration,” in exclusion to both “verbal inspiration” and “encounter inspiration.”

In addressing the subject of infallibility, Coon mentioned two theories: (1) The “strait-jacket” theory, in which true prophetic writings are regarded as “prevented from making any type of error,” and (2) the “intervention” theory, which holds that “if in his humanity a prophet of God errs, and the nature of that error is sufficiently serious to materially affect (a) the direction of God’s church, (b) the eternal destiny of one person, or (c) the purity of a doctrine, then (and only then) the Holy Spirit immediately moves the prophet to correct the error, so that no permanent damage is done.”

Taking his stand on the side of fallibility, Coon stated that “in inspired writings, ancient [the Bible] and modern [the writings of Ellen White], there are inconsequential errors of minor, insignificant detail.” He then listed a few examples of “errors” in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen White. Among the “errors” in Scripture he mentions: (1) the allusion to Jeremiah (instead of Zechariah) as the author of the quotation found in Matthew 27:9 and 10 (cf. Zech. 11:12, 13); and (2) the different wordings of the inscription placed at the top of the cross (cf. Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19). The “errors” of Ellen White are seen as including (1) a reference to the Paradise Valley Sanitarium as having 40 rooms (instead of 38); and (2) a mentioning of the apostle Peter (instead of Paul) as the author of the saying, “the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

Rejecting the theory of “degrees of inspiration (or revelation)” and “degrees of authority,” Coon stated that “Ellen G. White is best understood in the role of the literary but noncanonical prophets of the Bible.” Thus, though the writings of Ellen White have the same level of inspiration and authority as the Bible, they are not “an addition to the sacred canon of Scripture.”

In response to the charges of plagiarism raised against Ellen White, George E. Rice, then associate professor of New Testament at Andrews University, in 1983 published his book *Luke, a Plagiarist?* In this book he suggested that the inspiration of Scripture can be fully understood only from the perspective of two distinctive models of inspiration.

The first of those models was termed “prophetic model,” by which Rice referred to “divine revelation coming to the prophet through dreams, visions, thought illumination as seen in the psalms and the wisdom literature, and the recording of these theophanies (divine manifestations) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

While recognizing that Seventh-day Adventists tended to see the prophetic model as “a big umbrella under which we gather all of the books of the Bible,” George E. Rice pointed out that this model “is inadequate to explain the variations in the gospel portrait.”

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Research—reading and oral interviews.” He explained that “the Bible writer who operated under this model was an author and a theologian in his own right. As an author he shaped and arranged the material he researched so that the end product expressed his interests. As a theologian he worked with the material so that the end product expressed his theological understanding. Yet the Spirit guided throughout the whole process.”

In 1985, Richard Rice, professor of theology at Loma Linda University, included a whole chapter on “The Doctrine of Revelation” in his book *The Reign of God*. Regarding inspiration as “one aspect” of “the larger dynamic of God’s communication to human beings,” the author pointed out that “the doctrine of revelation” should not be reduced “to the phenomenon of inspiration.”

Richard Rice saw the biblical doctrine of inspiration as containing two important ideas: (1) “the divine authority of Scripture,” and (2) “the divine-human character of Scrip-
In 1988, the Ministerial Association of the General Conference came out with a representative exposition of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, entitled Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . . About Inspiration of the Scriptures, this book emphasized (1) that “God inspired men—not words”; (2) that “the Bible is the written Word of God”; (3) that “the Bible does not teach partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration”; and (4) that the guidance of the Holy Spirit “guarantees the Bible’s trustworthiness.” While the Bible is regarded as “the supreme standard,” the writings of Ellen White are seen as (1) “a guide to apply Bible principles.”

The same author regarded the doctrine of inerrancy as “unbiblical” because: (1) “It seems to overlook the human dimension of Scripture”; (2) “it sometimes leads to distorted and unconvincing interpretations of the Bible”; and (3) “it miscasts the fundamental purpose of Scripture.” He then stated that “Seventh-day Adventists have never advocated biblical inerrancy, although they supported the divine authority and complete reliability of the Scriptures.”

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Noteworthy also are a few theses and dissertations defended at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Among them is “Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sanday and Warfield” (1987) by Peter van Bemmelen, which provided some insights on the relationship between the claims and the phenomena of Scripture: “Once Scripture is accepted as the only legitimate starting-point and source of reference in our quest, we must face up to the question whether the effort to establish the doctrine of inspiration by letting the Bible speak for itself should proceed primarily from the multifarious phenomena of the content and structure of Scripture or whether it should start from the explicit assertions of the Biblical writers or whether both should receive equal standing. It is evident that the decision we take at this junction is crucial. We suggest in view of considerations presented earlier that the inherent logic of the principle to let Scripture speak for itself requires that the teachings (or assertions, claims, or whatever other terms may be used) should be given priority over the phenomena. We use advisedly the word priority, for the phenomena cannot and should not be ignored. Whatever conclusions may be reached from a thorough study of the assertions must be examined and evaluated in the light of the phenomena, but just as surely, the phenomena must be examined and evaluated in the light of the conclusions derived from the assertions.”

But all those discussions previously mentioned have proved themselves unable to bring general agreement to the Seventh-day Adventist scholarly circles on the matter of inspiration. Those debates would actually continue through the 1990s.

This article is the second of three parts.

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Science and the Spirit

Barbara was meticulous—almost compulsive—about her health habits. She exercised and ate her greens and beans. But since the age of 43 she had been helplessly watching her bone density scores steadily decline until now, at age 50, she was suffering from severe osteoporosis.

“How can this be?” She wailed to a physician-friend. “It just isn’t fair. I’ve done everything I know to do—diet, weight-lifting, vitamin D. I have followed all the lifestyle advice, and nothing has worked!”

Osteoporosis is an endocrine disorder that can develop for various reasons and is not always preventable. But in Barbara’s case, one piece of lifestyle advice may have made a difference, but she had overlooked it. It’s found in the Bible: “A glad heart makes a healthy body, but a crushed spirit makes the bones dry” (Prov. 17:22).

Barbara had failed to detect the subtle but habitual worry, anxiety, and negativism that characterized much of her outlook on life. It didn’t show so much on her face, but her bones were now telling the story.

Science is also beginning to recognize the importance this often-overlooked link. Ellen White wrote: “True science and Inspiration are in perfect harmony.” Since God is the Author of both, combining their lessons provides powerful encouragement and instructions for building a better brain, better habits, and a better life.

Barbara had overlooked—or at least underestimated—the powerful effect of her state of mind on her physical health. The counsel of Ellen White affirms this mind-body relationship: “That which brings sickness of body and mind to nearly all, is dissatisfied feelings and discontented repinings.”

One of the scientific terms for “discontented repinings” is “ruminating,” or mentally rehearsing negatives over and over again, deepening the brain’s pathways dedicated to that memory while overshadowing more positive, balanced memories.

Roger Pitman, professor of psychiatry at Harvard University, describes it this way: “In the aftermath of a traumatic event, you tend to think more about it, and the more you think about it, the more likely you are to release further stress hormones, and the more likely they are to act to make the memory of that event even stronger.”

Ellen White summarized the brain-body link this way: “The relation that exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health to a far greater degree than many realize. Many of the diseases from which men suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust, all tend to break down the life forces and to invite decay and death.... Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is health to the body and strength to the soul.”

Always balanced, she also affirmed that the treatment of our body has a powerful effect on mental state: “If our physical habits are not right, our mental and moral powers cannot be strong; for great sympathy exists between the physical and the moral.”

What Ellen White penned so plainly long ago is now the talk of the town in scientific circles. Researchers are now learning that the brain and body have a profound effect on each other and that the condition of one to a large extent affects the health and function of the other.

Noted neuropsychiatrist John Ratey from Harvard University states it this way: “Exciting research has recently challenged several long-standing assumptions about emotion. For years psychologists have maintained that emotions are purely mental activities, some of which, such as fear, elicit a physical response by the body. But while a few unique emotions, such as altruism, are dominated by mental processes, the rest are equally due to the body.

“What the public, at the hands of some scientists, clinicians, and popular movements in psychology, has missed for so long is the fact that emotion wells up from the brain and the body acting together. The role of the body has been discounted. ... The other leading historical idea is that emotions are all localized in one system in the brain, commonly re-
ferred to as the limbic system. However, we are learning that emotions are the result of multiple brain and body systems that are distributed over the whole person. We cannot separate emotion from cognition or cognition from the body.

“It has always been our need as humans to divide and conquer, to separate out two kingdoms as heaven and hell, but separating the body and the brain is rapidly coming to be seen as ridiculous.”

Writers of Scripture support this connection. The psalmist talks of his grief and guilt as so all-consuming that it resulted in fever (Ps. 32:4, NASB) and inflammation (38:7, TLB). Conversely, joy is linked to increased strength of mind, body, and spirit (Neh. 8:10).

In a stunning testimony, Ellen White described this amazing relationship in incredible detail: “If your mind is impressed and fixed that a bath will injure you [as a treatment for illness], the mental impression is communicated to all the nerves of the body. The nerves control the circulation of the blood; therefore the blood is, through the impression of the mind, confined to the blood vessels, and the good effects of the bath are lost. All this is because the blood is prevented by the mind and will from flowing readily, and from coming to the surface to stimulate, arouse, and promote the circulation. For instance, you are impressed that if you bathe you will become chilly. The brain sends this intelligence to the nerves of the body, and the blood vessels, held in obedience to your will, cannot perform their office and cause a reaction after the bath.”

Fascinating scientific investigations have revealed the precise mechanism that Ellen White describes. Specific molecules of communication called neuropeptides are deeply rooted in our biology that are highly responsive to habits of mind and body. These neuropeptides are major players in the brain-body connection to disease and health. The Bible and Ellen White have described this link in simple language for years, and science is just now validating this profound truth.

Noted biophysicist Candace Pert, Ph.D., research professor in the Department of Physiology and Biophysics at Georgetown University Medical Center, has pioneered research that unraveled the mystery of how the chemicals in our bodies form a dynamic information network, linking mind and body systems in health and disease.

Pert’s description of this process is a scientific version of Ellen White’s, but reveals the same process: “Pockets of peptide juices are released from both glands and brain cells, after which they bind with specific receptors that enable them to act at sites far from where the juices originated. This is what endocrinologists call ‘action at a distance.’

“We made a radical discovery that every neuropeptide receptor we could find in the brain is on the surface of the human monocyte (immune cells). . . . Immune cells also make, store, and secrete the neuropeptides themselves. In other words, the immune cells are making the same chemicals that we conceive of as controlling mood in the brain. So, immune cells not only control the tissue integrity of the body, but they also manufacture information chemicals that can regulate mood or emotion.

“We know that the immune system, like the central nervous system, has memory and the capacity to learn. Emotions are at the nexus between matter and mind, going back and forth between the two, and influencing both.

“A major conceptual shift in neuroscience has been wrought by the realization that brain function is modulated by numerous chemicals in addition to classical neurotransmitters. Many of these informational substances are neuropeptides, originally studied in other contexts as hormones, gut peptides, or growth factors. Their number presently exceeds 50, and most, if not all, alter behavior and mood states.

“Neuropeptides and their receptors thus join the brain, glands, and immune system in a network of communication between brain and body probably representing the biochemical substrate of emotion.”

How true and inspiring, what depth of meaning the words of Ellen White hold when she exhorted: “The power of the will is not valued as it should be. Let the will be kept awake and rightly directed, and it will impart energy to the whole being, and will be a wonderful aid in the maintenance of health. It is a power also in dealing with disease. Exercised in the right direction, it would control the imagination, and be a potent means of resisting and overcoming disease of both mind and body.”

So today, if you feel there is something missing in your wellness journey, remember: A simple change in attitude can have a dramatic impact on your health—spiritually, physically, and emotionally.

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The Adventist Theological Society (ATS) has grown considerably over the past 25 years. From a small group of scholars from Berrien Springs and Collegedale to a worldwide membership involving many local chapters, dozens of institutions, and thousands of Bible students at every level, the Lord has opened the doors wide for the society’s expansion.

The society’s constitution calls for an executive board to run its interests led by the president, four vice-presidents (Communications, General, Global Outreach, and Publications), an executive secretary, a treasurer, and a president-elect. The board meets every November, in conjunction with the Evangelical Theological Society’s (ETS) annual conference to read and discuss papers that are heard by Adventist as well as interested evangelical scholars. This often leads to further interest by evangelical thought leaders in the areas of research that Adventists pursue, and in some cases, to collegial relationships that have led scholars to a better understanding, and even acceptance, of Adventist theological positions. A Bible symposium is also planned every year and conducted in an Adventist church in the area where ETS and ATS scholars meet. Symposium attendance consists of ATS members and is open for any Seventh-day Adventist pastor, leader, or lay person interested in the subjects.

In 2008, these meetings will take place in the Boston area. On November 20, the ATS section of the ETS yearly conference will meet in Providence, Rhode Island, dealing with the subject of “Text and Canon.” Presenters will come from the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and from Wheaton College’s Graduate School. The papers will address issues in the books of Genesis, Numbers, Daniel, Ezekiel, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation, as well as one on the role of the community in determining the canon.

The Bible symposium will take place on Sabbath, November 22, in the Stoneham Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church, just outside of Boston. The theme for the presentations will be “The Spirit of Prophecy in Scripture and Adventist History.” The schedule of speakers includes Gary Swanson, from the General Conference (GC), Isaac Olutunji, from Oakwood University, Gerhard Pfandl, from the GC’s Biblical Research Institute, Merlin Burt, from Center for Adventist Research at the Seminary, and Jon Paulien, from Loma Linda University.

Presenters will answer questions from the audience in a panel discussion at the end of the program.

The mission of ATS is to be a theological resource for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Perhaps one of the most significant services rendered by members of ATS, then, has to do with the many Bible conferences and ministerial councils organized and conducted all over the world. In 2008 alone, ATS led in no less than a dozen symposia in eight world divisions, including meetings in the Dutch Antilles, Bangladesh, Zambia, the Czech Republic, Russia, Angola, Madagascar, Kenya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico.

In most cases, local divisions and unions team up to bring as many pastors, theology professors, and theology students from a designated union as is feasible, to meet for three or four days of theological meetings. Many presentations are followed with a time for questions, and a longer Q & A period is held on the last day. Pastors and church administrators often express deep thanks for the work ATS does, in bringing clarity, depth, and conviction to biblical and theological issues relevant to the Adventist Church.

As an example, a recent Bible conference was held in Huambo, Angola. Angola is a large country in southwest Africa with a comparatively small population, in part, due to a 30-year civil war that raged until 2002. The church there, however, is healthy and growing, with some 400,000 current members.

Drs. Moskala, Mueller, and Pfandl and I made the ATS team that traveled from the United States, via South Africa, to Luanda, the capital. After spending one night at Dr. Benjamin Paiva’s home, third vice-president of the National Assembly and a committed Adventist lay leader, the
In an election year, religion in the U.S. becomes a very public matter. Every presidential candidate has professed faith in Christ, knowing that there is a sizable constituency of evangelical voters they cannot ignore. The theology that binds most of these evangelical believers together from many different denominations is called dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism teaches that the second coming of Christ takes place in two distinct phases. First, Jesus comes invisibly to remove His church (the secret rapture) prior to a seven-year period during which the rest of humanity must face the antichrist.

At the end of the seven years, which according to dispensational theology is the fulfillment of the last week of the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24, Jesus will again return, but this time visibly to deliver those who became Christians during these seven years. This means those who were not taken to heaven at the time of the secret rapture get a second chance during the seven-year period. At the second, visible coming, Jesus also destroys the enemies of Israel at the Battle of Armageddon.

Foundational to the rapture teaching is the concept that God has two separate plans—one for the Israelites or Jewish people and another for non-Jews, or Gentiles. The plan for Israel is revealed in the Old Testament. However, when the Jews rejected the Messiah, the prophetic clock for Israel stopped and the Church Age began. When the Christian saints are taken to heaven in the secret rapture, the prophetic clock begins ticking again and God’s plan for the Jews takes its course. This means that the prophecies in the Old Testament are meant only for the Jews, not for Christians.

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What makes this theology so appealing to conservative Christians is the fact that several events that dispensational theologians predicted
would take place before Jesus can return, have come to pass. Their endtime scenario rests on five pillars: (1) The Jews have to return to Israel [fulfilled during the first half of the 20th century when hundreds of thousands of Jews returned to Palestine]; (2) Israel must be restored as a nation [fulfilled in 1948 when the State of Israel was created, and millions of Jews from around the world moved to Israel]; (3) The city of Jerusalem must again be in Jewish hands [fulfilled in 1967 during the Six-Day War]; (4) The temple must be rebuilt and the temple service restored [what they are all waiting for now, but the The Dome of the Rock, one of the holiest places for Muslims, stands where the temple is supposed to be built]; and (5) The antichrist will rule over a united Europe, which will be the revived Roman empire [The European parliament and the events in Europe today are seen as a prelude to the rule of the antichrist].

It is remarkable how the first three of the predicted events have been fulfilled. It is if a supernatural power were guiding these events; and this may well be, but it is not God who is guiding them.

Undergirding dispensational theology is its understanding of the 70-week prophecy in Daniel 9:24-27. The first 69 weeks are seen as pointing to the Messiah, but the 70th week is believed to still be in the future. The “he” in verse 27, therefore, is not Christ but the antichrist of the future.

According to this theology, soon after the rapture of the church, the antichrist will be revealed. He will make a covenant with God’s people, the Jews, pledging to protect them from their hostile neighbors, but in the middle of the seven years, he will break that covenant, outlaw all religious practices of the Jews, who by then have rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem and have begun to sacrifice animals again. The antichrist will enter the temple in Jerusalem and demand to be worshiped as God. Thus Paul’s statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:4, “[The antichrist] sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (NIV) will be literally fulfilled. Therefore, the temple in Jerusalem has to be rebuilt so that the Antichrist can literally sit in the temple. He will begin a reign of terror against the Jews, who after the rapture have accepted Christ (the 144,000 are all Jews), but he will also persecute the Gentiles, who have accepted Christ since the rapture of the church.

The linchpin of this theology is the restoration and well-being of Israel today. This is the reason for America’s total commitment to Israel. The evangelical lobby in Washington is constantly pressuring the government to support Israel and its expansion at all costs—no matter what happens to the Palestinians.

In January 2006, Ariel Sharon, the prime minister of Israel, suffered a massive stroke. A few days later, Pat Robertson, one of the best-known evangelical leaders, stated that God had punished Sharon for withdrawing from Gaza and giving the land to the Palestinians. Robertson had to apologize a few days later, but his view reflects the teaching of dispensationalism that all the land of Palestine belongs to the Jews.

There are basically four reasons that Seventh-day Adventists cannot accept dispensational theology:

1. The Bible does not teach that the 70 weeks can be split into two time periods, the first 69 weeks reaching to the death of Christ and the 70th week still in the future. The 70th week begins with the baptism of Jesus and ends with the death of Stephen in A.D. 34. This was the teaching of conservative Christians until John Nelson Darby in the 19th century introduced this new theology.

2. The rapture of the saints will not be a secret rapture with people disappearing while life goes on here on Earth. The Rapture will happen when Jesus comes back visible for the entire world with the voice of the archangel according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (NKJV).

Before the real rapture occurs, the resurrection of the dead in Christ will take place. After the dead are raised, the living saints will be translated, and together the two groups will be raptured, that is, “they will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.” Nowhere does the Bible teach a secret rapture before the res-
uring the Christmas season in the West, our culture becomes enraptured in a mythical world of twinkling lights, snowmen, decorated trees, Santa Claus, reindeer, wrapped gifts, and sleigh bells. Among all these familiar icons, thankfully, a few Christian symbols have endured: the manger scene, a bright star, shepherds, the Magi.

Even in secular, materialistic society, the Wise Men are a part of the Christmas atmosphere. They are pictured as intrepid and inspired seekers of truth, traveling by night, bearing gifts.

But what was it about the Wise Men that in Scripture they should be called wise? Was it because they were learned? Was it because they were on the cutting edge of their time in the disciplines of mathematics and astronomy?

For that matter, what does Scripture mean by the word wisdom? We’re told that Solomon was the wisest person who ever lived. Does this mean that he was the world record holder for the highest intelligence quotient?

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, ‘Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him’” (Matt. 2:1, 2, NKJV).

It would surely be accurate to say that the wisdom of these men resulted at least in part from their knowledge of astronomy. Even in a time long before the technology of optics and telescopes and radio telescopes, they knew enough to recognize an unidentified flying object when they saw it. Clearly, it appeared to be moving in a way that was uncharacteristic of the other heavenly lights.

Further, their wisdom is evidenced by their recognition that this object was surely a fulfillment of prophecy. Scholars tell us that they probably came from Arabia or Per-
Lack of biblical support for dispensational theology

3. The Bible does not teach that the Jews as a nation will again be God’s people after the church is raptured. The special status of the Jewish nation as God’s people came to an end in A.D. 34 at the end of the 70 weeks (Matt. 21:43). Ellen White was very clear on this: “I saw that God had forsaken the Jews as a nation; but that individuals among them will yet be converted.” Similarly, in Spiritual Gifts she wrote, “Individuals among the Jews will be converted; but as a nation they are forever forsaken of God.”

4. Nowhere does the Bible teach that people who have not accepted Christ will get a second chance during the seven years between the secret rapture and the Second Coming. Why would only the last generation get a second chance, why not the rest of humanity from Adam on?

Dispensational theology is not scriptural. Nevertheless, most conservative Christians subscribe to it and support modern Israel in any way they can, including political pressure on the White House.

The Jews, of course, do not accept the dispensational theology, but they are happy for the support they receive from evangelical Christians. Nathan Perlmutter, director of the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith, is not concerned about the dispensationalist teaching that most Jews will be killed by the antichrist and that the rest will convert to Jesus. He said, “We need all the friends we have to support Israel… If the Messiah comes, on that day we’ll consider our options. Meanwhile, let’s praise the Lord and pass the ammunition.”

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“There is a downside to the dispensationalist/Israeli friendship.

In their commitment to keep Israel strong and moving in directions prophesied by the Bible, dispensationalists are currently supporting some of the most dangerous elements in Israeli society”

(Timothy P. Weber).

During the Christmas season in the West, our culture becomes enraptured in a mythical world of twinkling lights, snowmen, decorated trees, Santa Claus, reindeer, wrapped gifts, and sleigh bells. Among all these familiar icons, thankfully, a few Christian symbols have endured: the manger scene, a bright star, shepherds, the Magi.

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Further, their wisdom is evidenced by their recognition that this object was surely a fulfillment of prophecy. Scholars tell us that they probably came from Arabia or Per-
sia, an interesting irony for our time. The way the religious establishment in Jerusalem responded would be called profiling today.

But they had apparently studied the available Hebrew Scriptures closely enough to know that this star was significant. The prophecy of Balaam in the Book of Numbers speaks of the “star of Jacob” (24:15, KJV). “As these magi studied the starry heavens, and sought to fathom the mystery hidden in their bright paths, they beheld the glory of the Creator...” 1 Almost certainly the Wise Men drew on Balaam’s prophecy, and there were others as well.

The wisdom of the Magi must have surely derived from something more than knowledge of the celestial universe and scholarship on the subject of prophecy. Their wisdom was demonstrated in the fact that they saddled up their camels and headed west. They acted on what they had learned. They embraced and lived the truth as they discovered it in their study.

Throughout the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, the term “experimental knowledge” occurs a great many times. This expression may sound at first like a kind of knowledge in which you dabble with this and experiment with that, rather like an emphasis on trivia. But a careful reading of the context of this phrase shows that consistently Ellen White is writing about what is called today “experiential knowledge.” It is far more than information.

“There are very many who claim to serve God,” she says, “but who have no experimental knowledge of Him. Their desire to do His will is based upon their own inclination, not upon the deep conviction of the Holy Spirit.”

Have you ever wondered why Herod’s theological experts in prophecy could have known that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem—yet they hadn’t responded to the star? It’s probable that they hadn’t even seen it. They readily rejected the prophecy in their own Scriptures (Micah 5:2), that precisely pinpointed the location of the Messiah’s birth. And they looked upon the visiting Magi as heathen!

Truth doesn’t always come from the establishment. Sometimes it comes from unexpected sources. All truth is God’s truth.

But how do we respond to truth when it presents itself to us? In any study of Scripture, do we stop at mere knowledge—mere information? As we study and discuss the Sabbath school lesson, as we participate in any Bible study group, we read Scripture personally and devotionally, as we recount Bible stories to our children and grandchildren, are we merely exercising intellect?

“Modern knowledge is characteristically noncommittal. Much is known, but all is consequence-free. What we know and what we do about it are two different things... What matters for our thought-style is not simply doctrine but the Christian responsibility of knowledge exhibited in all our knowing... Knowledge for the Christian is never noncommittal nor consequence-free. Knowledge carries responsibility.”

Any encounter with Scripture should affect our hearts as well as our heads. Learning should lead to transformation, else it’s just an intellectual exercise. By their own account before King Herod, the wise men summed up their reason for being in Jerusalem: “We have seen His star in the East [information] and have come to worship Him [transformation]” (2:2, NKJV). The Magi didn’t say they had come to confirm a hypothesis or prove a doctrine.

“The best-informed man,” wrote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “is not necessarily the wisest. Indeed there is a danger that precisely in the multiplicity of his knowledge he will lose sight of what is essential... The wise man will seek to acquire the best possible knowledge about events, but always without becoming dependent upon this knowledge. To recognize the significant in the factual is wisdom.”

Let’s be reminded in the coming Christmas season that the knowledge of Jesus is more than mere information. Knowledge of God’s revelation through Scripture and the star is important—but more significant is our response to this information. It should make a difference in our lives. It should cause us to go beyond our library research, our panel discussions, and our publication of papers. It should cause us to get on our camels and hit the road. It should prompt us to worship.

REFERENCES

1 The Desire of Ages, pp. 59, 60.
2 Christ’s Object Lessons, p. 48.