The Church and Scripture

The role of the church in the interpretation of the Holy Word is a matter of delicate balance.

Richard M. Davidson

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Many scholarly studies of biblical hermeneutics are available that deal primarily with individual interpretation of Scripture. However, aside from the Roman Catholic perspective (where the magisterium plays a dominant role), little has been published dealing specifically with the role of the church as a corporate body in biblical interpretation.

What is the relationship between the church and Scripture?

The Church and the Principle of Sola Scriptura

A fundamental principle set forth by Scripture concerning itself is that the Bible alone is the final norm of truth, the foundational and absolute source of authority, the ultimate court of appeal, in all areas of doctrine and practice. The classical text that expresses this basic premise is Isaiah 8:20: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.” The two Hebrew words for “law” and “testimony” point to the two loci of authority in Isaiah’s day that now constitute Holy Scripture: the Pentateuch (the Torah or Law of Moses) and the testimony of the prophets to the previously revealed will of God in the Torah. Jesus summarized the two divisions of Old Testament Scripture similarly when He referred to the “Law or the Prophets” (Matt. 5:17). The New Testament adds the authoritative revelation given by Jesus and His apostolic witnesses (Eph. 2:20).

Isaiah warned apostate Israel against turning from the authority of the law and the prophets to seek counsel from spiritist mediums (Isa. 8:19). In biblical times other sources of authority were threatening to usurp the final authority of the biblical revelation: human philosophy and science/knowledge (Col. 2:8), nature (Rom. 1:20–23), reason (Prov. 14:12), and experience (Gen. 3:1–6). But none of these addresses the authority of ecclesiastical tradition.

Jesus and Paul clearly indicate that Scripture is the norming authority over tradition, including the tradition of the religious authorities (Matt. 15:3, 6; Col. 2:8). This does not deny the usefulness of Judeo-Christian tradition, as some wrongly interpret sola scriptura, but rather upholds the finality of Scripture over all tradition as the final norm of truth. Tradition—even ecclesiastical tradition—must be judged by Scripture unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). It is the standard by which all doctrine and experience must be tested (vss. 16, 17; Heb. 4:12). Scripture thus provides the framework, the divine perspective, the foundational principles, for every branch of knowledge and experience. All additional knowledge and experience, or revelation, must build upon and remain faithful to, the
all-sufficient foundation of Scripture.

Seventh-day Adventists maintain the rallying cry of the Reformation—*sola scriptura*, “By Scripture alone,” the Bible and the Bible only as the final norm for truth. All other sources of knowledge and experience, all other authorities, including ecclesiastical authority, must be tested by this unerring standard. The appropriate human response must be one of total surrender to the ultimate authority of the word of God.

Ellen G. White states this principle succinctly: “God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men, the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain ‘Thus saith the Lord’ in its support.”

The Church as the Repository of the Oracles of God

In New Testament times Paul speaks of the Jewish people of his day as those to whom God “committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2), i.e., the Old Testament. For the apostolic church the “Scriptures” or “oracles of God” included the Old Testament and also the writings which became known as the New Testament. Paul’s use of the word *scripture* in his first Epistle to Timothy (5:18) points in this direction. He introduces two quotations with the words “Scripture says,” one from Deuteronomy 25:4 in the Old Testament, and one from the words of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:7. The word *scripture* thus is used synonymously for both the Old Testament and the Gospel accounts in the technical sense of inspired, sacred, authoritative writings.

Numerous passages in the Gospels assert their truthfulness and authority on the same level as the Old Testament Scriptures (John 1:1–3 paralleling Genesis 1:1; Matthew 1 paralleling Genesis 5). Peter used the term *scriptures* for Paul’s writings: “Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15, 16). By equating Paul’s letters to the “other Scriptures,” Peter implies that Paul’s correspondence is part of Scripture.

The New Testament is the apostolic witness to Jesus and to His fulfillment of the Old Testament types and prophecies. Jesus promised the 12 disciples to send the Holy Spirit to bring to their remembrance the things He had said (John 14:26). Paul stated that “the mystery of Christ” was “revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:4, 5). The disciples held a unique, unrepeatable position in history as bearing witness of direct contact with the humanity of Christ. This certainly validates the apostolic writings of Peter, John, and Matthew. Paul also was called to be an apostle (Rom. 1:1), and he indicates authority (1 Cor. 7:40; 12:13). Thus the New Testament embodies the witness of the apostles—directly or indirectly—through their close associates Mark,

The church as it was manifested in the Old Testament and New Testament served as the repository of the “oracles of God.” Beyond New Testament times, the church’s responsibility as the repository of the oracles of God continues in its responsibility to preserve the Word of God. As L. Berkhof states it: “By giving His Word to the Church, God constituted the Church the keeper of the precious deposit of the truth. While hostile forces are pitted against it and the power of error is everywhere apparent, the Church must see to it that the truth does not perish from the earth, that the inspired volume in which it is embodied be kept pure and handed on faithfully from generation to generation.”

The responsibility to preserve the Word involves not only fostering a proper interpretation of Scripture, but also ensuring that the Bible is made available for study by all people of the world in faithful and clear modern translations, and that the copies of Scripture are plentiful and affordable. Hence the valuable work of Bible societies in translating into all languages and disseminating the Bible worldwide.

But the questions naturally arise: What constitutes the Bible? What forces/sources “authorized” the various biblical writings to become canonical?

The Church and the Formation of the Biblical Canon

Adventists join other Protestants in affirming that the canonization of both Old Testament and New Testament is not a product of the church or other human agencies, but of the Holy Spirit, and that the canonical books contain internal self-authenticating and self-validating qualities that were recognized as such by the community of faith.

Regarding the Old Testament, Adventists, along with other Protestants, accept only 39 canonical books and not the so-called deuto-canonical books of the Apocrypha. The latter books, while containing some helpful historical information, were not written by inspired prophets, but came after the close of the Old Testament prophetic period (ca. 400 B.C.). Adventists accept a sixth-century B.C. date for the writing of the Book of Daniel (in harmony with the internal claims of the book), and place the canonization of the Old Testament in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (ca. 400 B.C.), both of whom as prophets played a role in popularizing and affirming the canonized books among the Jewish people. Jesus Himself recognized the three-part Hebrew canon (Luke 24:44), which was later reaffirmed at the Council of Jamnia (ca. 90 A.D.).

Regarding the New Testament, we have already noted above the apostolic witness inherent in all of these writings—all written by an inspired apostle or an apostle’s direct disciple who was an inspired eyewitness—and thus the canon of the New Testament was closed by the end of the first century when the last inspired apostolic document had been written. Such inspired apostolicity/canonicity was eventually recognized by the New Testament covenant community. The Christian Church “came to recognize, accept, and confirm the self-authenticating quality of certain documents that imposed themselves as such upon the Church.” In sum, the church did not
determine the canon, but discovered it—did not regulate the canon, but recognized it. The church is not the mother of the canon, but the child of the canon, not its magistrate, but its minister, not its judge, but its witness, not its master, but its servant.\(^5\)

**The New Testament Church’s Interpretation of the Old Testament**

The New Testament provides numerous examples in which Jesus and the apostles interpreted Old Testament Scripture. Elsewhere I have examined the claim that Jesus and the New Testament writers often took Old Testament passages out of context, reinterpreted, and reapplied them in light of the Christ-event, and thus imposed a New Testament meaning upon the Old Testament that was foreign to the original meaning. After examining the major examples of New Testament citations of Old Testament passages in which it has been claimed that the New Testament has not remained faithful to the Old Testament meaning in its original context, I have joined other biblical scholars who have concluded that the New Testament writers did not take Old Testament Scriptures out of context in their citations, did not read back into the Old Testament what was not originally there, but rather consistently remained faithful to the Old Testament intention, and consistently engaged in solid exegesis of the Old Testament passages using sound hermeneutical principles.

But the focus of this presentation is not upon the individual New Testament interpreters, but rather upon the church as a whole in its interpretation of Scripture. A crucial case study is found with regard to the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. Here is an apostolic model of the exercise of ecclesiastical authority within the church at large: representatives of the various local churches met in a general assembly under the direction of church leaders ("the apostles and elders"; vss. 2, 6) to consider a matter of vital significance for the world church. Here is a model that gives biblical justification for Ellen White’s statement regarding the authority of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in general session: “God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority.”\(^6\)

It has sometimes been claimed that Acts 15 provides a model of ecclesiastical authority in which the church, empowered in the freedom of the Spirit, is able to reach back into the Old Testament witness, and select those portions of the Old Testament that are still relevant to the current situation, and with that same authority of the Spirit also move beyond other portions of the Old Testament that are no longer applicable, and even add new stipulations not contained in the Old Testament. In other words, it is suggested that the New Testament church—and by implication, the church today—has authority to determine the best path to unity by rejecting some Old Testament instructions and adding new ones as it sees fit under the sanctified guidance of the Spirit.

Such a position, however, does not square with the data of Acts 15. It is true that the Jerusalem Council did allow for vigorous debate on the issues that were faced. The basic issues were: Should Gentiles become Jews to become Christians, and what Jewish practices beyond the moral law of the Ten Commandments were to be required for these Gentiles who became Christians? Spirited testimonies were given by the parties involved (vss. 7–12). But the basic deciding factor, in the end,
was the authoritative testimony of Old Testament Scripture. James’s concluding statement was in essence based upon an exegesis of crucial Old Testament passages. In Amos 9:11, 12, he found the answer to the issue of whether Gentiles had to become Jews to become Christians: they did not.

And in Leviticus 17 and 18 he found the biblical basis for deciding which laws of the Jewish ceremonial law applied to Gentiles. Acts 15 lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians given by the Jerusalem Council: “that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled [i.e., with the blood coagulated and not drained away], and from sexual immorality” (vs. 29).

In this clear case of the interrelationship among texts, the Jerusalem Council undoubtedly concluded that the practices forbidden to the alien in Leviticus 17 and 18 were what should be prohibited to Gentile Christians in the church. The parallel of the fourth prohibition in each passage is unambiguous: what Acts 15 labels *porneia* are those illicit sexual activities included in Leviticus 18. These activities may be summarized in general as illicit sexual intercourse—including incest, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality. Various scholars have recognized this intertextual connection.

The correlation between Acts 15 and Leviticus 17 and 18 seems to provide a solid foundation for determining what the early church understood should be required of the Gentiles who became Christians. What was required of the Gentile “strangers” in the Old Testament was still required of them in the New Testament. Scripture ultimately provided the basis for the church’s decision regarding appropriate practice.

Some claim that this decision on the part of the Jerusalem Council was only advisory, not binding, inasmuch as Paul is seen to consider its ruling as a nonissue in his dealings with food offered to idols (1 Cor. 10:19–33). But again, such readings overlook both the wider New Testament data and the Old Testament basis for the Jerusalem Council’s ruling. According to Acts 16:4, in Paul’s journeys after the Jerusalem Council, he and Silas upheld the rulings of the council and considered them binding upon the churches: “As they went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.”

Paul did not change his basic position in his counsel to the Corinthians. Rather, he recognized that the Old Testament basis for not eating food offered to idols was found in Leviticus 17:7–9, which prohibits the sacrificing of food to demons/idols. Paul understood the intent of this Old Testament passage that formed the basis of the Jerusalem Council prohibition, and thus correctly upheld the prohibition against offering food to idols/demons (1 Cor. 10:20, 21). At the same time he recognized that if the Gentile Christian himself was not offering food to idols, he would not be going against the Old Testament prohibition, and hence, the Jerusalem Council ruling based upon that Old Testament prohibition, if he ate food that, unknown to him, someone else had offered to an idol (vss. 25–29).

Acts 15 reveals that the church, in its assembly of representative members, may indeed speak not merely in an advisory capacity, but with binding authority upon the whole church, as that authority is based upon the authority of the written Word.

**Church Statements of Fundamental Beliefs in Relation to the Authority of Scripture**
The basic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the relationship between its Statement of Fundamental Beliefs and Scripture is set forth in the Preamble to the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists”: “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.  

Seventh-day Adventists recognize that church creeds even among Protestant churches often function in effect like tradition in the Roman Catholic Church to place the authority of the church over that of the Bible. Ellen White warned of this: “Though the Reformation gave the Scriptures to all, yet the selfsame principle which was maintained by Rome prevents multitudes in Protestant churches from searching the Bible for themselves. They are taught to accept its teachings as interpreted by the church; and there are thousands who dare receive nothing, however plainly revealed in Scripture, that is contrary to their creed or the established teaching of their church.”

The Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs represents the church’s current consensus on biblical truth, the “corporate faith-consciousness” based solely upon Scripture. This statement reflects an ongoing relationship of the church with Scripture, in which the Scripture is given final authority in any future expression of the church’s fundamental beliefs. As Kwabena Donkor puts it, “Not only does the church see its statement of fundamental beliefs as grounded in the Bible, but it explicitly and purposefully subordinates the statement of beliefs to the Bible by giving the Bible magisterial oversight on its future expressions.”

The statement of beliefs expresses the Seventh-day Adventist community’s concern for hermeneutics. Donkor points out that “By putting out a statement of beliefs, the community is declaring that ‘this is the way we read Scripture’; ‘we are not indifferent to any reading of Scripture.’ Furthermore,” Donkor argues, “the statement of beliefs, as a system of beliefs, becomes collectively the principle or framework of interpretation for the community in organizing the disparate data of Scripture. . . . In this way, the statement not only declares the interpretational stance of the community of the past, but provides a guide for present interpretational efforts.”

At first glance it may seem contradictory to maintain the Bible as the only creed and at the same time maintain a statement of fundamental beliefs. But as Donkor puts it, “the Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not in any way take away from the authority or supremacy of the Bible. Rather, the fact that the church has taken a definite stand on certain biblical fundamental beliefs reflects its responsible commitment to the sola scriptura principle and its continuing trust in the Bible as the inspired Word of God.”

The statement of fundamental beliefs is authoritative to the extent that the statement accurately presents the message of Scripture. The statement is regarded as authoritative because the community of faith sees it as representing a Spirit-directed consensus, in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise.
that the Spirit would guide into all truth (John 16:13). At the same time the statement constitutes a derived authority, a *norma normata*, a “rule that is ruled,” and a rule that is open to further modification as the Spirit leads into deeper understanding of truth.

The statement of fundamental beliefs differs from a creed in this last important principle: the possibility (even probability) of change over time. Donkor gives this apt definition of a statement of beliefs: “a faith community’s Spirit-directed consensus on the truth at any one time, based on its interpretation of inspired Scripture, which then defines the community’s identity and mission.”

The Seventh-day Adventist statement of beliefs, though always provisional, and derivative in authority, under the Word of God, nonetheless is to be accepted as authoritative for God’s people. It was voted by the General Conference in session, which follows the model of Acts 15 in setting forth the interpretation of Scripture under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Following the pattern established in Acts 15, the Seventh-day Adventist Church assigns its highest authority, under the Word of God, to the General Conference in session. In 1877 the General Conference session took the following action: “Resolved, that the highest authority under God among Seventh-day Adventists is found in the will of the body of that people, as expressed in the decisions of the General Conference when acting within its proper jurisdiction; and that such decisions should be submitted to by all without exception, unless they can be shown to conflict with the word of God and the rights of individual conscience.”

Ellen White discusses the authority of the General Conference in session, in the following counsel written in 1909: “I have often been instructed by the Lord that no man’s judgment should be surrendered to the judgment of any other one man. Never should the mind of one man or the minds of a few men be regarded as sufficient in wisdom and power to control the work and to say what plans shall be followed. But when, in a General Conference, the judgment of the brethren assembled from all parts of the field is exercised, private independence and private judgment must not be stubbornly maintained, but surrendered. Never should a laborer regard as a virtue the persistent maintenance of his position of independence, contrary to the decision of the general body.

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

“When this power, which God has placed in the church, is accredited wholly to one man, and he is invested with the authority to be judgment for other minds, then the true Bible order is changed.
Satan’s efforts upon such a man’s mind would be most subtle and sometimes well-nigh overpowering, for the enemy would hope that through his mind he could affect many others. Let us give to the highest organized authority in the church that which we are prone to give to one man or to a small group of men.”

The Church Manual summarizes the nature and extent of the authority of the General Conference in session: “The General Conference in session, and the Executive Committee between sessions, is the highest organization in the administration of the church’s worldwide work, and is authorized by its constitution to create subordinate organizations to promote specific interests in various sections of the world; it is therefore understood that all subordinate organizations and institutions throughout the world will recognize the General Conference as the highest authority, under God, among Seventh-day Adventists. When differences arise in or between organizations and institutions, appeal to the next higher organization is proper until it reaches the General Conference in session, or the Executive Committee at the Annual Council. During the interim between these sessions the Executive Committee shall constitute the body of final authority on all questions where a difference of viewpoint may develop. The committee’s decision may be reviewed at a session of the General Conference or at an Annual Council of the Executive Committee.”

As already noted, the authority of the church, exercised by the assembled General Conference in session, in voting a statement of fundamental beliefs, as in other decisions, is a derived authority, always under the authority of Jesus Christ expressed in the truths of Scripture.

**Individual vs. Corporate Interpretation and Application of Scripture**

In contrast to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, in which Christ and the Spirit mystically indwell in the church, and therefore the church has the authority to state what is the true meaning of Scripture, the biblical principle is that the Bible is plain and does not require any human ecclesiastical magisterium to pronounce its meaning. The biblical testimony encourages the readers to study the Bible for themselves to understand God’s message to them (Deut. 30:11–14; Luke 1:3, 4; John 20:30, 31).

Likewise, Ellen White continually encourages personal searching of the Scriptures. “The one book that is essential for all to study is the Bible. Studied with reverence and godly fear, it is the greatest of all educators. Its pages are filled with truth. Would you gain a knowledge of God and of Christ, whom the Father sent into the world to live and die for sinners? An earnest, diligent study of the Bible is necessary in order to gain this knowledge.”

Again, she urged: “Let every one who has been blessed with reasoning faculties take up the Bible and search its pages, that he may understand the will of God concerning him. In this Book divine instruction is given to all. The Bible is addressed to every one—to every class of society, to those of every clime and age. Every one should read the Bible for himself. Do not depend on the minister to read it for you. The Bible is God’s Word to you. And Christ has made this Word so plain that in reading it, no one need misunderstand.”
Ellen White warned individuals not to allow any other source of authority to take precedence over a plain “thus saith the Lord.” We have already noted her counsel regarding the finality of the Bible over all other sources of authority.18

While the Bible and Ellen White’s counsel underscore the importance of individual study of Scripture, there is also the need to recognize the validity of corporate unity and harmony in the interpretation of Scripture. The Bible calls the community of faith to come into “the unity of the faith” (Eph. 4:13). Ellen White wrote: “God is leading a people out from the world upon the exalted platform of eternal truth, the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. He will discipline and fit up His people. They will not be at variance, one believing one thing and another having faith and views entirely opposite, each moving independently of the body. Through the diversity of the gifts and governments that He has placed in the church, they will all come to the unity of the faith. If one man takes his views of Bible truth without regard to the opinion of his brethren, and justifies his course, alleging that he has a right to his own peculiar views, and then presses them upon others, how can he be fulfilling the prayer of Christ? And if another and still another arises, each asserting his right to believe and talk what he pleases without reference to the faith of the body, where will be that harmony which existed between Christ and His Father, and which Christ prayed might exist among His brethren?

“Though we have an individual work and an individual responsibility before God, we are not to follow our own independent judgment, regardless of the opinions and feelings of our brethren; for this course would lead to disorder in the church. It is the duty of ministers to respect the judgment of their brethren; but their relations to one another, as well as the doctrines they teach, should be brought to the test of the law and the testimony; then, if hearts are teachable, there will be no divisions among us. Some are inclined to be disorderly, and are drifting away from the great landmarks of the faith; but God is moving upon His ministers to be one in doctrine and in spirit.”19

In the interface between the church and Scripture, the biblically based tension must be maintained between an individual Christian’s right and responsibility to stand alone before the Word (if necessary even in the face of established doctrine, as did Martin Luther and William Miller), and his or her loyal and submissive stance with regard to church authority.

There are some areas of Christian doctrine that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is still vigorously discussing and has not yet taken an official stand (such as the precise makeup of the human nature of Christ, or whether the inorganic “raw materials” of this Earth were created by God before or during the six-day creation week). Ongoing study and dialogue in these areas is enriching to the church. In all areas of doctrine there is ongoing need for deepening our understanding of the Word, ever sinking the shaft deeper in the mine of Truth.

At the same time, there is also need for a “corporate faith-consciousness,” as described above in the section on statements of fundamental beliefs, a corporate consensus on the truth that defines the community’s identity and mission. The body of Christ must take a definite and unified stand in interpreting the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The Bible and the Bible alone must always be the
basis of church unity. The importance of corporate unity in interpreting Scripture is especially evident when faced with those who claim to have discovered “new light.”

**Church Authority and Procedure for Dealing With “New Light” and With Heresies**

Both the Bible and Ellen White encourage the ongoing searching of the Scriptures, which will ever bring forth fresh and new insights. Ellen White wrote: “The earth itself is not so interlaced with golden veins and filled with precious things as is the word of God.”20 “We have seen only the glimmering of divine glory and of the infinitude of knowledge and wisdom; we have, as it were, been working on the surface of the mine, when rich golden ore is beneath the surface, to reward the one who will dig for it. The shaft must be sunk deeper and yet deeper in the mine, and the result will be glorious treasure. Through a correct faith, divine knowledge will become human knowledge.”21

Again, Mrs. White emphasized that “New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God. Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God.”22

However, at times, individuals who study Scripture discover what they consider “new light” that is contrary to the established positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In such situations, no individual has the right to utilize the pulpit as a public forum for advocating disputed points of doctrine or procedure. The *Church Manual*, building upon biblical principles, urges that those who think they have discovered new light contrary to established doctrinal or procedural Seventh-day Adventist positions, seek counsel from responsible leaders.

Three times in Proverbs the principle stated a variation of the truth that in a multitude of counselors there is safety (Prov. 11:14; 15:22; 24:6). Ellen White elaborated: “There are a thousand temptations in disguise prepared for those who have the light of truth; and the only safety for any of us is in receiving no new doctrine, no new interpretation of the Scriptures, without first submitting it to brethren of experience. Lay it before them in a humble, teachable spirit, with earnest prayer; and if they see no light in it, yield to their judgment; for ‘in the multitude of counselors there is safety.’”23

In the early church, when a difference of opinion arose over an important issue, the believers sent representatives to Jerusalem, and the question was submitted to those assembled, under the leadership of the apostles and elders, for consideration. The decision of this council was accepted by the believers in Antioch, and thus unity was preserved in the church.

This counsel and paradigm from inspired sources must not be seen as deterring one from diligent study of the Scriptures, but instead as a protection against the introduction of false theories and doctrines into the church. God desires that individuals search the Word for gems of truth, but does not wish any to be led astray by erroneous teachings.

That which is truly new light from God’s Word does not make void the old. Instead it harmonizes with the old, causing it to shine brighter with greater luster. As the inspired wise man puts it, “The
path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18).

Though the individual interpreter of Scripture must be ready to accept the progressive understanding of the Word, such understanding will not contradict previous light. This position is supported by the fundamental biblical principle of testing claims to new light: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).

While this principle speaks primarily to testing claims of competing sources of authority, it also implies that later light will not contradict previous light. The special light that God has given the Seventh-day Adventist Church in its formative years of hammering out the system of truth with its distinctive foundational doctrines (the “old landmarks”) will not be overthrown by further explorations of the Word. Ellen White gives the following warning: “We are not to receive the words of those who come with a message that contradicts the special points of our faith. They gather together a mass of Scripture, and pile it as proof around their asserted theories. This has been done over and over again during the past fifty years. And while the Scriptures are God’s word, and are to be respected, the application of them, if such application moves one pillar from the foundation that God has sustained these fifty years, is a great mistake. He who makes such an application knows not the wonderful demonstration of the Holy Spirit that gave power and force to the past messages that have come to the people of God.”

The church has various appropriate venues in which those who have discovered potentially new insights into Scripture may tentatively test these ideas in a spirit of loyalty and honest inquiry to receive biblically based feedback. These venues include, among others, private interviews with a pastor or teacher or colleague, informal discussion groups involving academic peers or papers presented to theological societies, correspondence with scholars in such church entities as the Biblical Research Institute or other academic institutions.

The policies of the church allow for a process for those to follow who claim to have new light to have their ideas examined by those of experience, beginning on the local (conference/institution) level, and then allowing for appeal to committees on the union and division levels. During this process of investigation by the “multitude of counselors,” it is urged that the one claiming new light refrain from presenting publicly any questions that are not in full harmony with the views of the established body, in order to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). The church pulpit or class lecture room is not the place for a pastor or teacher to work through his or her questions regarding the teachings of the Bible, or to promote new ideas that contradict the fundamental beliefs of the church.

Against those who seek to bring false doctrine into the church, and who will not accept the counsel of the “multitude of counselors,” the church has a corporate responsibility to protect the doctrinal purity of the church. The Bible gives high priority to maintaining sound teaching and avoiding heresy (1 Cor. 11:2; 1 Tim. 1:3; 6:3). The church was charged by the apostles to “test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1) or, in Paul’s terms, to “test all things; hold fast what is
good” (1 Thess. 5:21). The same is true in regard to the exercise of church discipline, ranging all the way from private admonition (Matt. 18:16) to removal from church membership (1 Cor. 5:11, 13). The church as a corporate body has established specific biblically based policies and procedures for dealing with church discipline, although in practice there is considerable variation in their application since situations dealing with individual church discipline and/or membership status are ultimately handled by local congregations.

The church is given authority to deal with church discipline, based upon Bible principles. “The world’s Redeemer has invested great power with His church. He states the rules to be applied in cases of trial with its members. After He has given explicit directions as to the course to be pursued, He says: ‘Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever in church discipline ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’ Thus even the heavenly authority ratifies the discipline of the church in regard to its members when the Bible rule has been followed.

“The word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body.”

The Relation of Church Policies to Scripture

The Bible gives basic direction that the church is to formulate plans so that “all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40). In the formative years of the Advent movement, Ellen White consistently urged the application of this biblical principle. In 1875 she wrote: “The church of Christ is in constant peril. Satan is seeking to destroy the people of God, and one man’s mind, one man’s judgment, is not sufficient to be trusted. Christ would have His followers brought together in church capacity, observing order, having rules and discipline, and all subject one to another, esteeming others better than themselves.”

As indicated above, the General Conference in session, in its role as the “highest authority” on earth, under the Word of God, following the model of Acts 15, has authority to settle the conditions of membership and the rules governing the church. It has voted well-defined rules requisite to good order, derived from principles set forth in Scripture. The content of the various voted policies set forth in the Church Manual is “the expression of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s understanding of Christian life and church governance and discipline based on biblical principles. It expresses the authority of a duly assembled General Conference session. ‘God has ordained that the representatives of His church from all parts of the earth, when assembled in a General Conference, shall have authority.’ Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 260.” These church policies, while representing the best thinking of the church, are not set in concrete. The 1946 General Conference Session voted that all “changes or revisions of policy” in the Church Manual shall be “authorized by the General Conference session,” and in practice numerous such changes are made at each succeeding General
Conference session.

**Church Responsibility to Foster a Proper Interpretation and Proclamation of Scripture**

In the Old Testament church the institution of the priesthood was given the responsibility of teaching God’s Word to the people (Lev. 10:11; Mal. 2:7), instructing the people how to distinguish between the holy and the common and the unclean and the clean, and interpreting the law of God for individual case situations (Deut. 17:8–11). In the days of Samuel, special schools of the prophets were established, which “proved a great blessing to Israel, promoting that righteousness which exalteth a nation, and furnishing it with men qualified to act, in the fear of God, as leaders and counselors. . . . The chief subjects of study were the law of God with the instructions given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry. . . . Sanctified intellects brought forth from the treasure house of God things new and old.”

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Levites “read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading” (Neh. 8:8). This involved both translation from Hebrew to the more familiar language of Aramaic and explanation of the meaning to the Jewish people recently returned from Babylonian exile.

Jesus Himself indicated the need for biblical interpretation, in light of the misapprehension of truth in His day. After He had risen from the dead, Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and “expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). Later that night He met with the rest of the disciples and “opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (vs. 45). Jesus taught the first hermeneutics course to the early church! And the record of the sermons in the Book of Acts give evidence of Jesus’ hermeneutical teaching being passed on by the apostles to the wider community of faith in Israel and beyond.

The New Testament witness is clear that the interpretation and application of Scripture is the task of the entire church, and not restricted to an elite cadre of biblical specialists (Acts 17:11; Eph. 3:18, 19). The New Testament provides the example of Philip interpreting the meaning of Isaiah 53 to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30, 31). The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to be sure he is “rightly dividing,” “accurately handling” (NASB), or “rightly handling” (ESV) the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15).

Today, in our denominational schools, which should resemble to some degree the ancient schools of the prophets, a central focus must be “deeper investigation which involves the searching of the Scriptures.” In all branches and disciplines of the educational process, the foundational perspective and basic principles must derive from, and build upon, Scripture. There is a need for continuing symposia dealing with the Bible and Adventist scholarship, and other such venues, to seek to recapture the vision of the biblical model, in a thoroughgoing and radical return to *sola scriptura* in our educational endeavor as a denomination.

The church has a responsibility, not only in the area of general formal education, to promote the proper interpretation of Scripture and the *sola scriptura* principle in all of the academic disciplines. The church must take the lead in clarifying the proper methods of biblical interpretation, in contrast...
to unbiblical methodology. A landmark Bible conference in 1974, and publication of a basic book on hermeneutics in the same year, both sponsored by the Biblical Research Institute, began this process in earnest. In 1986, the “Methods of Bible Study” document voted by the Annual Council in 1986 gave impetus to this project. The Biblical Research Institute is currently taking additional steps in the publication of two volumes on hermeneutics.

But much more is needed in providing abundant resources, as well as diverse venues (such as symposia and workshops), for the training of church members in the proper interpretation and application of Scripture.

There is special need for pastors to be thoroughly trained in the proper principles of biblical interpretation and application. Ellen White issues numerous clarion calls for pastors to be trained to be powerful students and preachers of the Word. She wrote: “Of all men upon the face of the earth, those who are handling solemn truths for these perilous times should understand their Bibles and become acquainted with the evidences of our faith. Unless they possess a knowledge of the word of life they have no right to undertake to instruct others in the way to life. . . . Those who are ambassadors for Christ, who stand in His stead, beseeching souls to be reconciled to God, should be qualified to present our faith intelligently and be able to give the reasons of their hope with meekness and fear. Said Christ: ‘Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me.’”

In many and varied ways, the organized church must make a more concerted effort to educate its leaders and entire membership in the proper methods of interpreting and applying Scripture.

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Guiding the Church Into Unity in Biblical Interpretation

In modern hermeneutical approaches toward the Bible, both among conservative/evangelical and liberal/critical scholars, it is often assumed that the original intent of the Bible writer can be ascertained by the rigorous application of hermeneutical principles and exegetical tools, quite apart from any supernatural spiritual assistance. Thus non-Christians can determine the meaning of Scripture as well as Christians, if they use the tools and apply the principles correctly. This assumption is maintained in the laudable interest of upholding a degree of objectivity in interpreting the biblical text.

Scriptural data, however, leads to a different conclusion. Note particularly, 1 Corinthians 2:11, 14: “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. . . . The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (NIV).

“Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.” Since the Bible is ultimately not the product of the human writer’s mind but of the mind of God revealed through the Spirit (vss. 12, 13), it is not possible to separate “what it meant” to the human writer—to be studied without the aid of the Holy Spirit, from “what it means”—to be applied by the help of the Spirit. Both the original meaning and its
present application involve the thoughts of God, which according to Paul can be adequately comprehended only if we have the aid of the Spirit of God (John 6:45; 1 Cor. 2:1–14).

Some have resisted letting the Spirit have a place in the hermeneutical spiral because it seems to them to allow the subjective element to overcome solid exegetical/hermeneutical research. It is true that “spiritual exegesis” alone—that is, an attempt to rely totally on the Spirit without conscientiously applying principles of exegesis and hermeneutics arising from Scripture—can lead to subjectivism.

But the proper combination of dependence upon the Spirit with rigorous exegesis based upon sound hermeneutical procedures, far from leading to subjectivity, constitutes the only way of escaping subjectivity. Modern scholars are increasingly more willing to recognize that all come to the Scripture with their own preconceptions, presuppositions, biases. This cannot be remedied by approaching the text “scientifically” without a “faith bias.” In fact, since the Scriptures call for a response of faith, an attempted “neutral” stance is already at cross-currents with the intent of Scripture (Matt. 13:11–17; John 6:69; Acts 2:38).

Believing and Spirit-led interpreters also come with their own biases and preconceptions and are not impervious to error (Acts 11:15). But for Christians who believe the promises of Scripture, it is possible to ask God to transform their minds so that they increasingly adopt and incorporate the presuppositions of Scripture and not their own. The Spirit of truth was promised to the disciples, and to us: “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). It must be noted that the you here is plural; the Spirit directs interpreters together in the fellowship of the church body (Ps. 119:63; Acts 2:42), where they may be benefitted by exchange with and correction of other believers. The experience of Acts 15, and of the early Sabbath conferences in the Advent movement, where believers gathered together to wrestle with the weighty truths of Scripture, is needed again in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today.

Interpreters within the church must make a collective decision that their pre-understandings will derive from and be under control of the Bible itself, and constantly be open for modification and enlargement on the basis of Scripture. They must consciously reject any external keys or systems to impose on Scripture from without, whether it be naturalistic (closed system of cause and effect without any room for the supernatural), evolutionary (the developmental axiom), humanistic (humankind the final norm), or relativistic (rejection of absolutes). They must ask the Spirit who inspired the Word to illuminate, shape, and modify their pre-understandings according to the Word, and to guard their understandings to remain faithful to the Word.

“Spiritual things . . . spiritually discerned” implies not only the need of the Spirit to aid in understanding, but also the spirituality of the interpreter. The Spirit not only illuminates the mind, but also must have transformed the interpreter’s heart. The approach of the interpreter must be that called for by Scripture, an attitude of consent or willingness to follow what Scripture says, if he or she is to understand Scripture’s meaning: “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:17).
There must be diligent, earnest prayer for understanding, after the example of David: “Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end” (Ps. 119:33). There must be an acceptance by faith of what the prophets say (2 Chron. 20:20; John 5:46, 47).

The Bible cannot be studied as any other book, coming merely “from below” with sharpened tools of exegesis and honed principles of interpretation. At every stage of the interpretive process, both by the individual interpreter and the corporate interpretation of the church body, the Book inspired by the Spirit can be correctly understood only “from above” by the illumination and transformation of the Spirit. God’s Word must be approached with reverence. Perhaps the best encapsulation of the interpreter’s appropriate stance, and of the collective attitude of the church, before Scripture, is recorded by Isaiah: “This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word” (Isa. 66:2, NRSV).

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12. Ibid., p. 104.
15. Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, p. 27.
17. Ibid. (July 11, 1906).
18. See endnote 2.


21. Ibid., p. 113.

22. *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 34.


24. *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 32.


30. Ibid., p. 98.


Early in the 21st century, Adventism faces deep and entrenched doctrinal divisions. Gradually, scholars, theologians, religious leaders, and believers have come to experience Adventism as a cultural/religious rather than a theological phenomenon. Imperceptibly, church leaders accommodate Adventist life and mission to the evolving theologies, liturgies, and ministerial paradigms of American evangelical culture. Consequently, evangelical theologies and practices are increasingly shaping Adventist thinking.

Is the apparent “Protestantization” of Adventism real? If so, how did it come to exist? Should Adventists be concerned about it? Do church leaders recognize its existence? Should we affirm and promote this long-held Adventist tradition, or should we deconstruct and overcome it? What is the role of theologians, pastors, and professors preparing new generations of leaders in Adventist seminaries and universities around the world?

Adventist leadership is experiencing a conflict of self-understanding. Officially, Adventist leaders continue to affirm biblical doctrines with their brains, while evangelical theologies and practices progressively shape their hearts and actions. This growing ambiguity represents a stark turnabout from the experience of early Adventist pioneers who, dissatisfied with traditional Protestant theologies, decided to follow their own understanding of scriptural truth and abandoned their evangelical denominations to become the remnant church.

A Working Definition of Protestantism

In this article, the word Protestantism is used to describe the theological system and ministerial paradigm of the segment of Christianity that in the 16th century broke away for the Roman Catholic Church on the doctrine of justification by faith based on the sola scriptura, sola gratia, and sola fide principles. Protestantism centers on the doctrine of justification by faith, the article on which the church stands or falls.

The way in which Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jacobus Arminius understood these principles and theological center produced a worldview that differs slightly from that of Roman Catholicism. Yet, as Catholic leadership predicted, the Protestant system of theology spun a multiplicity of incompatible theological projects (Denominationalism). Within this general context, I use the word Evangelicalism to refer to the coalition of American denominations that in spite of their doctrinal differences agree on the principles and center of the Magisterial Reformation, and with the Roman Catholic interpretation
Protestantization of Adventism and Theological Method

The Protestantization of Adventism is a phenomenon that springs from the theological methodology used by Adventist leaders. Theology seeks the "understanding of God." Theological method is the process through which one seeks to understand God. Method requires a material to work with, a pattern to process the material, and an end to provide it with direction and purpose. In theological parlance, the material condition of method corresponds with the issue of revelation-inspiration. The formal condition of method corresponds with hermeneutics. And the final condition of method corresponds with the subject matter of theology.

The material condition refers to the revealed sources of theology. The material principle of Protestant and American evangelical theological methodology (classical, modernist, and postmodern) is not the sola, tota, and prima scriptura principle, but the principle of multiple revealed sources that they received uncritically from the Roman Catholic theological system.

Emerging from the profound dissatisfaction of American believers with the conflicting doctrines of traditional Protestant denominations, Seventh-day Adventist pioneers adopted the sola, tota, and prima scriptura principle as the material principle of their theological methodology. Consequently, they were critical of tradition (deconstruction) and thought doctrine from scriptural foundations. We should notice that they inherited this belief (Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief 1) not from the Magisterial Reformers but from the English Connection.

In theological methodology, the formal condition stands next to and depends upon the material condition. The formal condition consists of the macro-hermeneutical principles necessary to interpret Scripture and to construct the system of Christian theology (ontology, cosmology, and metaphysics). Evangelicals have never used Scripture to define their macro-hermeneutical principles. Instead, they have implicitly assumed the philosophical principles of Plato and Aristotle as retrieved by Augustine and Aquinas. Unbeknown to most Protestant and evangelical believers, these ontological principles condition and permeate the Protestant-evangelical system of theology. They determine the evangelical understanding of the doctrines of justification, grace, and faith.

Radically departing from evangelicals, early Adventist pioneers used Scripture to interpret the macro-hermeneutical principles necessary to understand Scripture and construct the system of Christian theology. Ellen White identified as foundational to Adventist doctrine the sanctuary, the Law of God, the Sabbath, the non-immortality of the soul, and the three angels’ messages.

In various levels and ways, the biblical pillars of the Adventist faith work as the hermeneutical conditions of its theological methodology. Ellen White reveals the hermeneutical role of the sanctuary doctrine when she explained, "The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God’s hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people." More specifically, “The correct
understanding of the ministration in the heavenly sanctuary is the foundation of our faith.”

These simple observations on evangelical and Adventist theological methodologies may help Adventists to understand two pivotal points involved in their relations with evangelicals. First, Luther’s revolutionary insights on justification, Calvin’s systematic construction, Arminius’ slight modifications to Calvin’s system (divine foreknowledge and human free will), and Wesley’s inclusion of sanctification still stand on the basis of Roman Catholic interpretation of the material and hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology. Second, Protestant theologians have never applied the *sola scriptura* principle to the hermeneutical principles of their theological method. Consequently, Protestantism has never produced a *sola scriptura* systematic theology.

The Evanescence of Adventist Theology: *Questions on Doctrine (QOD).*

There are traces of the ongoing Protestantization of the Adventist mind in the answer to *QOD*’s first question: What doctrines do Adventists share with other Christians? The authors of *QOD* answered that, with the exception of few doctrinal points (the existence of the heavenly sanctuary, the investigative judgment, the Spirit of Prophecy, the three angels’ messages, and the seal of God and mark of the beast), Adventists believe evangelical doctrines on God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

Later, Froom identified these doctrines as the “eternal verities” essential to the Christian gospel. This answer reveals that the initial step in the Protestantization of Adventist thinking had already taken place in the minds of Adventist leaders. From it, the more advanced and explicit Protestantization of Adventism at the beginning of the 21st century grew.

This answer superficially enumerates similarities in doctrinal issues, but it does not address divergent theological positions, systems, and theological methods embraced by Adventists and Protestant denominations. Thus contemporary readers may arrive at incorrect conclusions. They may infer that Adventists and evangelicals share the same theological understanding in all doctrinal points with the exception of a few minor eschatological issues. Moreover, they may also deduce that these minor divergences do not affect the understanding of the “eternal verities,” that is, most of the content of evangelical systematic theology. From this simple answer to a complex question, an increasing number of Adventists today assume their beliefs are evangelical, notably, the central doctrines of Christianity. One can see why they feel free to use evangelical books to learn their theology and ministerial paradigm.

In *Movement of Destiny (MOD),* his sequel to *QOD* for Adventist readership, Froom explained that the “separative” doctrines were a “distinct handicap” of early Adventists. These doctrines made Adventists different and distanced them from evangelicals.

The New Role of the Sanctuary Doctrine

In *Movement of Destiny,* Froom singles out the sanctuary as the most separative Adventist doctrine. According to him, neither the early church nor the Reformation taught this doctrine. Nonetheless, he did not suggest that Adventists should abandon their understanding of the sanctuary...
but sought to soften its divisiveness by ignoring its hermeneutical role.

He affirmed the doctrine but redefined its function, asserting that "any weakening or denial or submerging of the sanctuary truth is not only a serious but a crucial matter. Any deviation or dereliction therefrom strikes at the heart of Adventism, and changes its very integrity." Thus, he believed in the doctrine of the sanctuary but no longer as the macro-hermeneutical principle that leads to the discovery of the biblical system of truth. Instead, he argued that the sanctuary was the light that illumined the precarious position after the Great Disappointment, and is "the all-encompassing essence of Adventism," the doctrine that "embraces" or contains the complete system of Adventist beliefs, and, the broad outline of the great eschatological consummation.

In its new redefined role, according to Froom, the doctrine of the sanctuary continues to have a "central place in our distinctive identifying emphasis for this time," and it continues to define our uniqueness by being the reason that justifies our existence as Christian denomination.

Consequently, we should proclaim the Investigative Judgment as "Present Truth."

Following QOD’s lead, Froom’s subtle redefinition of the sanctuary doctrine’s role from "hermeneutical key" to "distinctive doctrine" had far-reaching consequences in theological method, system, teachings, and ministerial praxis. From it, the progressive Protestantization of Adventism builds and nourishes.

Theological Tradition as New Hermeneutical Key

Froom was convinced that the sanctuary doctrine fit perfectly with Christian doctrinal tradition. The sanctuary doctrine, he explained, "is not a departure from the historic Christian faith. It is, instead, the logical completion and inevitable consummation of that faith." It seems that Froom was convinced that the Adventist system of theology embraced in the sanctuary is the logical and inevitable consummation of the historical Protestant evangelical faith.

Since Adventists historically understood the eternal verities of the gospel in various ways, Froom called on them to accept evangelical tradition and teachings on God, Christ, and the gospel. In his own words: "We were not at first united on certain of the saving provisions and Divine Persons of the Everlasting Gospel, in relation to the Third Angel’s Message in its final phase and culminating witness. There were variant views of the Godhead, the Deity of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and on aspects of the Atonement, as well. Yet allegiance to these saving truths—the Eternal Verities—has been the heart of the true Church’s faith in all periods of its greatest purity. This was true of the early church, the Reformation times and the Wesleyan period. And it must be for us today."

Thus, in many ways, Froom articulated the gospel as the new hermeneutical principle in Adventism. As we have seen above, the sanctuary doctrine continued to be an important distinctive eschatological emphasis, but leaders no longer conceived or used it as the hermeneutical key to understand all Christian doctrines, including the gospel. At least after QOD the gospel as understood by the evangelical theological tradition became the hermeneutical key to interpret all doctrines, including eschatology and the sanctuary.
This change in the understanding of the hermeneutical conditions of theological methodology requires a change in the material condition. Since evangelical theology does not build on Scripture alone, progressively Adventists no longer developed their theological understanding from Scripture alone but also from the multiplicity of theological sources used by evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians.

**Facing Evangelical Theology**

When, during the 1960s, more Adventists ventured into the halls of secular universities and evangelical seminaries, their Adventist experience and self-understanding became strongly influenced by the emerging Protestantization of Adventism nurtured by *QOD*. As they faced millennia of unfamiliar theological thinking, a sense of bewilderment overcame many young Adventists. Many found the historical-critical method convincing and employed it to find the meaning and truth of biblical texts. In response to this trend, Adventism declared officially that Bible teachers could not use the historical-critical method because of its naturalistic presuppositions. However, because Adventist scholars have not been able to replace the naturalistic assumptions they are supposed to avoid, the debate on the scholarly method of biblical exegesis stills goes on unabated, and many Adventist Bible teachers continue to use it as their tool of choice.

In some sectors of the church, the combination of the *QOD/ MOD* switch from the sanctuary to the evangelical gospel with the progressive utilization of historical-critical methodology led to the intensification of the Protestantization of the Adventist mind and lifestyle.

Desmond Ford revealed the consequences of this methodological combination. According to him, justification by faith and historical-critical methodology leave the sanctuary doctrine groundless. Moreover, the traditional Adventist interpretation of the sanctuary doctrine contradicts the view of a complete atonement in Christ. On this basis, Ford and many after him believe Adventists should recognize their error and reject the sanctuary doctrine and the historical interpretation of apocalyptic prophecies in Daniel and Revelation.

As many Adventists become convinced that the gospel and the historical-critical method show the doctrinal distinctives of their church to be erroneous, they can no longer accept Adventism as the true remnant church. Such a claim is perceived as groundless and a sign of institutional arrogance. Adventists are considered as only one of many evangelical denominations that make up the visible body of Christ, the church.

The full Protestantization of Adventism takes place by embracing modernity and its postmodern cultural relativism in self-designated “progressive Adventist circles.” They experience the full Protestantization of Adventism as the way back from Scripture to evangelical and scientific traditions. From there, the way back to Rome is only a matter of time.

**Facing Evangelical Ministry**

These methodological changes away from the sanctuary and Scripture are changing the
ministerial paradigm of Adventism around the world. Changes in the conditions of theological methodology necessarily bring changes in the thinking, lifestyle, administration, and mission of the church. In other words, if Adventism agrees with almost all evangelical doctrines, as QOD and MOD affirm, it is understandable why some administrators, teachers, and pastors feel free to borrow from evangelical books on theology, doctrine, and ministerial methodologies.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the supernatural power/praise paradigm of ministry of evangelicalism is replacing the Bible study/theological understanding paradigm of ministry of earlier Adventists. As a result of this mostly unrecognized phenomenon, the Protestantization of Adventism is reaching the pews around the world. According to the Protestant ministerial paradigm, God grants salvation by His supernatural decision and power. Consequently, the ministerial method becomes the proclamation of the Cross as complete atonement, justification, and the assurance of salvation. As a result, those Adventist ministers who follow the Protestant paradigm no longer see the need for Bible studies as a condition for baptism, spirituality, or salvation.

Because the evangelical understanding of the gospel continues to play the macro-hermeneutical role in theological method, Adventists feel free to drink from evangelical theological reflection and ministerial practices. In this way, evangelical theologies and ministerial practices will shape Adventist thinking and lifestyle for years to come.

The limited and partial phenomenological analysis of selected evidence leads only to initial conclusions calling for further research and verification. The Protestantization of the Adventist mind and lifestyle is real, ongoing, broad-reaching, and intensifying. Disconnected from the doctrinal formulations of the church, the Protestantization phenomenon takes place at the existential level of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Conclusion

The Protestantization of Adventism came into existence by way of a progressive forgetfulness of the biblical system of theology from which it came. Like the Reformers, Adventists have become distracted with church business and neglected their emerging theological thought. With the passing of time, they have forgotten the hermeneutical role of the doctrine of the sanctuary in its theological methodology and replaced it with the evangelical hermeneutical principle of justification by faith. Moreover, like the Reformers, Adventists have overlooked the sola, tota, prima scriptura principle, and embraced the plurality of theological sources on which the Roman Catholic theological system stands. QOD’s superficial affirmation that Adventism shares most Protestant doctrines opened the gates to the global dissemination and progressive intensification of the Protestantization of Adventism.

Adventists should be concerned about this because it is transforming the very essence and identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission. Adventists could reverse this process by becoming the perpetuators of the Protestant Reformation of the church that ended too soon. In other words, the way out of the Protestantization of the church is to complete the theological revolution
initiated by the Protestant Reformation (sola scriptura) and articulated by the Adventist reformation when early Adventist pioneers implicitly discovered in the sanctuary doctrine the biblical interpretation of the hermeneutical principles of theological methodology.

Adventists need to understand that the sanctuary doctrine is not the invention of Ellen White, nor does it result from superficial exegetical or theological thought. All to the contrary, the hermeneutical role of the sanctuary doctrine is central to Christian theology, as Old Testament scholar Roberto Ouro argues: “Christ in the Sanctuary is the theological center both of the [Old Testament] and [New Testament].”

Yet the further theological discovery of the Adventist pioneers is not complete. To overcome the Protestantization of Adventism, contemporary Adventists must complete the restoration of truth left incomplete by the Protestant Reformers and early Adventist pioneers. Adventists must develop the sola scriptura systematic theology project at the scholarly level. This requires a shared understanding of the conditions of theological methodology and a solid commitment to scholarly research that challenges the strong houses of Christian theology to establish Christianity upon an eternal basis. This project should include the development of Adventist theology in neglected scholarly disciplines, such as fundamental, biblical, systematic, and ministerial theologies.

In a time when Protestant leaders are going back to Rome, Adventist leaders, administrators, pastors, and scholars should be going back to Scripture and using the sanctuary doctrine as the hermeneutical key to understand the complete and harmonious system of biblical truth. When the inner logic of God’s Word, through the educational ministry of the Holy Spirit, penetrates our hearts and we treasure it in the inner recesses of our spirits, we will no longer experience doctrine as “brain” knowledge but as the transforming and saving power of God through the Holy Spirit. Then the church will be of one mind, and Adventism will fulfill its God-given final mission.

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Ever since it was written, the Book of Daniel has fascinated historians, linguists, archaeologists, and clergy, as well as lay people. The book has attracted interest primarily because of its content, which outlines human history through the use of many apocalyptic prophecies. As such, it has fascinated many generations.

In addition to a panorama of political events related to the events in connection to Daniel’s world, all prophecies seemed to be geared toward the needs and concerns of God’s people, whether in connection to their judgment or their liberation. It is as true for God’s people in the Old Testament who were represented by an ethnic entity, as it is for people in His church, who claim to be His children.

In spite of the fact that God’s chosen people, the Judeans, were sent into exile because of their atrocities and transgressions, God did not intend for them to perish, but to learn a valuable lesson: the final victory will be granted to those who remain faithful to God. Demonstrating His loving care for groups and individuals who remained true to Him, God never excludes those who are of Gentile descent from His care. He even revealed Himself to heathen kings who needed to know that God is in control of the entire history of this world.

Purpose of the Book

It appears that all prophecies were given and directed to satisfy the concerns and needs of God’s people throughout time. Basically, there are four visions in the Book of Daniel. The first vision is recorded in chapter 2 and answers the question, “What will happen to the kingdom of Judah?” Without this kingdom they will eventually lose their identity, be dispersed among other nations, and disappear from the face of the earth. The first vision answers this concern when God demonstrates to the king of Babylon that He is in control of all kingdoms and that His universal kingdom will at last be established and will last forever (2:44).

The exiles’ second concern was connected to the kingship of Judah. The last king of Judah was captured, brought before King Nebuchadnezzar, blinded, and exiled to Babylon in chains (Jer. 39:4-7), where he remained a prisoner for the rest of his life. King Zedekiah was incapacitated to such an extent that there was no hope that he would ever be able to reclaim the throne in Jerusalem. It seemed that God’s promise to David, that his descendants would sit on his throne forever, was
broken (2 Sam. 7:14–16, 29). Nevertheless, Daniel’s second vision, in chapter 7, indicated that the royal power would be bestowed upon the Son of Man and that His cosmic rule would be eternal (7:14).

The exiles’ third concern related to their place of worship. In addition to Jerusalem, which represented their political and national identity, the people of Judah depended on their temple, which symbolized their spiritual identity and was most certainly the pride of the entire nation. It was the house of their God, and as long as the temple stood, they were certain that God’s presence was with them. Without their capital and temple they would be lost and forgotten as a nation. The answer to this concern comes in the third vision, recorded in chapter 8. The sanctuary would be restored to its rightful place (8:14). The fact that the text here does not address the earthly sanctuary did not make any difference to them. They were satisfied to hear that the most holy structure would be restored again.

Their fourth major concern related to their fate as God’s people. Thus far they were His ambassadors to the neighboring nations. Their task and mission was to reveal God’s character—His goodness, love, and passion for those who love Him. Who will now fulfill this noble mission? What will happen to the promises God made to Abraham about his descendants—that they will never perish from this earth?

This final concern was answered by the last vision recorded in Daniel, chapters 10–12. No matter how merciless the enemy, God’s universal people will be triumphant at the end of time. Even if death comes first, there will be a glorious morning of resurrection when those who are asleep will rise again (12:2) and be part of His eternal kingdom.

**Further Evidence of God’s Care**

Additionally, God’s care for His people was evident through several details given in the third vision recorded in chapter 8. For some reason, at this time Babylon was excluded from any symbolism, while the previous chapter included Babylon with other kingdoms. The popular assumption that, at the time this vision was given (in chapter 8), Babylon was almost gone, is not entirely accurate. Only three years had elapsed between these two visions. The vision in chapter 7 came to Daniel during Belshazzar’s first year of reign (553 B.C.), while the vision in chapter 8 came during the third year of the same ruler (550 B.C.). Both visions, therefore, were given in close proximity, and both occurred more than a decade before Babylon’s destruction in 539 B.C. Something must have happened during those three years that caused God’s decision to exclude Babylon from the symbolism and its representation. Whatever happened indicates how much God was involved in the affairs and well-being of His people in Babylon.

A few years earlier, Medo-Persia had changed rulers. Cambyses I, who ruled very briefly (560-559 B.C.) was replaced by Cyrus II, also known as Cyrus the Great (559-530 B.C.). The exiles were familiar with this name because they knew about him from a prophecy of Isaiah two centuries earlier (Isa. 44:28): Cyrus was the promised one who would restore the temple in Jerusalem and
return God’s people from captivity. When the news reached the exiles in Babylon that Cyrus had become king in Medo-Persia, excitement, joy, and hope filled their hearts, especially those who longed to return to Judea and continue to fulfill their role as God’s remnant people.

News of the growing power of Medo-Persia also reached the palace of King Belshazzar. Soon after, the Babylonians formed an alliance with Lydia and Egypt to secure their borders and to make sure that Cyrus would not proceed with plans to invade Babylon. The news of this alliance induced deep concern in the exiled Judeans. The fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy suddenly became uncertain. To show the exiles that the prophecy was true and that there should be no concern, God excluded Babylon totally from the vision in chapter 8, showing that Cyrus would be successful regardless of Babylon’s new allies. Despite Babylon’s apparent strength, in God’s mind it was already finished. This showed God’s care and mercy, sending a strong message to Judeans, indicating that He was still in control and that the prophecy of Isaiah would certainly be fulfilled.

God’s mercies provided not only for His exiled people in Babylon, but were also extended also to a heathen king. King Nebuchadnezzar was brought to a humiliating level of mental illness (chapter 4). God wanted to show this king who was really in control of all kingdoms and who rules over the entire universe. Finally, the king realized how insignificant he was and at the same time how precious in God’s eyes he was as a person. Ultimately, he was able to testify: “Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise, exalt, and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride” (4:37, NASB).

God’s interest in the affairs of the history of this world extends above and beyond the time and place in which Daniel and his contemporaries lived. Daniel was given a unique opportunity to understand that his people did not receive an indefinite time to fulfill their mission. In chapter 9, verse 24, Daniel received a revelation that his people would have only 70 weeks/years (490 years) to complete their mission as God’s people. At the completion of 490 years, God would abandon the idea of giving one ethnic group the task of introducing and revealing His true nature and character to other nations (Deut. 4:5-8). When the period of 490 years ended (A.D. 34), God selected a group beyond geographical and ethnic boundaries, His church. From then on, the Christian Church, its well-being, suffering, prosperity, growth, and downfall became God’s primary focus and attention. This concern about the prospects of His church is not as evident in the first vision as in the second and third visions.

The second vision is recorded in Daniel 7, in which the political history of the ancient world is outlined. It starts with the appearance of four winds that stirred up the surface of the Great Sea (vs. 2). Soon after, four beasts (lion, bear, leopard, and an unnamed one) moved from the sea one after the other. It was explained to Daniel that these four beasts represent four kingdoms (vs. 17). He seemed to be satisfied with this explanation except that he requested additional information regarding the fourth beast (vs. 19), which he could not recognize at all. He was assured that even though this beast was different from the previous two, it represented the fourth kingdom. If the first three beasts represented Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece, then the fourth one symbolized the
ancient Roman Empire. Furthermore, the beast’s 10 horns represented the partition of the Roman Empire into 10 kingdoms at the time when it crumbled.

In spite of the fact that this fourth beast with its 10 horns was the most terrifying, it seems that the appearance of the 11th horn, also known as the Little Horn (vs. 8), was the major concern of this vision. Its description, activities, and fate occupy a greater part of this chapter, and therefore it was the main focus of the vision.

**Description, Activities and Fate of the Little Horn**

The Little Horn is not depicted as a positive power. It played a very negative role and certainly did not enjoy favor in God’s eyes. It was described as one that would blaspheme against the Most High God, try to change God’s Law, and persecute the saints of God (vs. 24). Because of its acts, this power existed for a limited time (vs. 25). Its atrocities provoked God’s judgment (vss. 9, 10, 26) and ultimately, it would be destroyed (vs. 26).

The text explains that this Little Horn represents another king or kingdom (vs. 24). Obviously, all the previous kingdoms represented by different beasts and/or horns existed from much earlier times. At various points in time, they became dominant powers of the ancient world. This must be assumed for the Little Horn as well. It does not represent an entity that came into existence soon after the Roman Empire crumbled, but it existed much earlier, only without dominance.

Chapter 8 evidently mentions the Little Horn again. The repeated appearance of the same power is not unusual in the book. Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome are represented by different symbols in previous chapters. It is unique that the symbolism for this new power does not change. The reason for this may be that Daniel and his readers should understand that both chapters (7 and 8) speak about the same power. In spite of the fact that most modern scholars do not recognize that the Little Horn in both chapters stands for the same entity, its appearance and activity are exactly the same. Apart from the same name, their place of origin is the same. Both chapters clearly indicate that it came as a continuation of the previous political powers: In chapter 7, it is the fourth beast, Rome; in chapter 8 it is from one of the winds of heaven. Scholars seem to be confused regarding its origin, believing that in chapter 8 it is one of the four horns. Its only possible origin, however, could be traced to the phrase “winds of heaven.”

The presence of winds is already established in chapter 7. Four winds stir up the Great Sea, from which four beasts emerge. The appearance of four winds can be seen as a parallelism to four beasts/kingdoms. In this case for every wind there was one beast/kingdom. The fact that the Little Horn in chapter 8 came out of one of the winds indicates that it came from an already existing kingdom. Babylon is not even included in this chapter, while the ram (Medo-Persia) and he-goat (Greece) are already gone, so the only kingdom not mentioned yet that might have been represented by this one wind is the Roman Empire.

In addition to its origin, the Little Horn in both chapters has the same appearance. Chapter 7 describes it as one with eyes and mouth (vs. 8); chapter 8 explains that it “understands riddles” (vs.
23, ESV) and “by his cunning he shall make deceit” (vs. 25, ESV). In both cases “eyes” and “understanding” indicate that the Little Horn would be intelligent, and “mouth” together with “cunning to make deceit” refer to great influence.

**Little Horn’s Transgressions**

Furthermore, the Little Horn in both chapters behaves in the same way. There are three major levels of its transgression: first, it will “speak . . . against the Most High” (7:25, NKJV); second, it will “persecute the saints of the Most High,” (vs. 25, NKJV); third, it will “intend to change times and law” (vs. 25, NKJV). All three transgressions are present in chapter 8 as well. First, this power will “even rise against the Prince of princes” (8:25, NKJV), second, it will seek to “destroy the mighty, and also the holy people” (vs. 24, NKJV), and third, it will “cast down truth to the ground” (vs. 12, NKJV).

The first transgression in both chapters is directed against the Most High (chapter 7) and the Prince of princes (chapter 8). Both cases reflect the Little Horn’s attitude toward the Supreme Being. In most instances the phrase “Most High” refers to God, who is described in chapter 7 as one that was “Ancient of Days” (vs. 23, NKJV), while “Prince of princes” from chapter 8 refers to the Son of God. The word that is translated as “against” in chapter 7 is a compound word in the Aramaic language made of the preposition for “to,” “toward,” and the masculine noun for “side.” This combination is found only here, and it does not necessarily indicate actions in opposition to God, but rather it refers to taking the side or place that belongs to the Most High. In the same way, chapter 8 indicates a similar kind of attitude. This power will rise up against the Prince of princes or the Son of God Himself. Here the Hebrew language uses the preposition for “over,” “on,” “upon,” “against,” “in front of,” or “down from,” which indicates the position of the subject toward its object. In most cases, the subject is raised to the same position or above its object. Obviously, this power would seek to position itself on the same level or above the Prince of princes.

The second transgression is directed toward the saints of the Most High or His followers. The words “wear out” (7:25, NRSV) and “destroy” (8:24, 25, NRSV) refer to continual harassment. The action directed against the saints of the Most High would not be an occasional activity but rather a constant one. The original word could be understood as “to spoil” or “to ruin.” The same form was used on numerous occasions, and it may refer to a physical destruction or spoiling and ruining. Obviously, this power will seek to destroy or harass God’s people physically, and it would also try to corrupt them continually.

Though chapter 7 simply mentions that the Little Horn would direct its anger against the saints of the Most High, chapter 8 adds the term for “mighty” or “numerous.” This term was never applied to individuals who were great, famous, or who did some heroic deeds, but rather to indicate strength of a multitude (Isa. 8:7). Among other things, it may refer to people in general (Gen. 18:18; Isa. 60:2), or to locusts (Joel 1:4, 6; 2:25), waters (Isa. 8:7), and transgressions (Amos 5:12), as well. Therefore, the Little Horn’s harassment, destruction, and corruption would not be directed only toward certain individuals, ethnic groups, or races, but toward the multitude of those who were
considered to be the saints of the Most High.

The third transgression is directed against God’s law (Dan. 7:25). The text uses an Aramaic word used several times in Daniel and Ezra that may refer to a serious decree in which death was the result of failure, such as the interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2:13, 15), and to the unchangeable laws of the Medo-Persians (6:9, 13, 15). The same word is also used to indicate God’s law (Dan. 6:6; Ezra 7:12, 14). Furthermore, it is also applied to the king’s law when it is in agreement with God’s law (Ezra 7:26).

In addition to God’s law, this power will also try to change the time. Daniel uses an Aramaic word in its plural form (“times”). Apart from this occasion (7:25) the same form (plural) is used two more times in the Nook of Daniel (6:11, 14) and it always refers to repetition or short cycles of times. The words for “time” and “law” are in the same context, and therefore both should be understood in their relationship with each other. There is only one commandment in God’s law that deals with time: the fourth. It is the commandment that regulates the relationship between God and His people in respect to the day of worship.

This transgression is also evident in chapter 8. The same power will throw the truth to the ground (vs. 12). In this context the word for “truth” is synonymous with God’s law (Ps. 43:3; 119:43). Casting the truth, or God’s law, to the ground indicates the ability, willingness, and arrogance of the Little Horn in its desire to show its ultimate power on earth and even in heaven.

**Time and Its Identity**

This power would not have an indefinite time to operate. Though chapter 8 is silent with respect to the time limit of the Little Horn, chapter 7 specifies that the horn will have “a time, two times, and half a time” (vs. 25, NASB). Earlier, Daniel used the word for “time” in the context of the Little Horn’s activities, but here he used a different Aramaic word that refers to a cycle of definite time covering four seasons. The same word was used in connection with the prophecy given to king Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 when he was given seven warnings to understand that the Sovereign God of Daniel is in command of all the universe. In both cases, “time” referred to a length of one calendar year. It seems that the Little Horn would have dominion and power to act for three and a half years, which translates into 1,260 days. Consequently, as one prophetic day is equal to one year (Dan. 9:24; Eze. 4:6), the Little Horn was given a time of 1,260 years to accomplish its activities, and after this time it would lose its power and dominion.

The description of the Little Horn in both chapters indicates that the entity it represents is different from any previous powers. Other horns, whether coming as a continuation of the fourth beast (Roman Empire) in chapter 7, or the five horns appearing on the head of he-goat (Greece) in chapter 8, clearly represented political entities.

This Little Horn is different in both chapters. None of the previous horns had a mouth and eyes or a deceitful influence like the Little Horn. It thus must portray a different kind of entity than the previous horns or beasts that represent mere political powers. The only recognizable entity that could
be represented by the Little Horn must be a system that came after the fall of the Roman Empire. According to Daniel, it would be a combination of political as well as religious powers. Furthermore, the mixture of political and religious powers is also evident in the first vision in chapter 2. Here all the kingdoms are represented by metal; the feet, as a continuation of the fourth kingdom (Rome), were composed of metal and clay.

During the first few centuries of its existence, the Christian Church followed its mission given as by Jesus Christ. It did not, however, have a clear structure under one unified authority. After the conversion of Constantine during the first part of the fourth century, the Christian Church became a state church. At that time the entire Roman Empire was subdivided into more than 100 provinces governed by provincial governors. On the same basis, the bishop of the capital in each province became a metropolitan bishop whose major responsibility was "to resolve disputes between bishops, or between a bishop and his clergy, or his congregation."

During the following few centuries, several metropolitan bishops, based on their location, became dominant. Cyril, the bishop of Alexandria, took charge of the entirety of Egypt and tried to maintain his control through the distribution of over a thousand pounds of gold to members of the court at Constantinople at the time of the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. The bishop of Antioch extended his authority over all of Syria-Palestine, and the bishop of Constantinople became dominant in Greece and Asia Minor. At the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth century, however, the bishop of Constantinople reduced the authority of the bishops of Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch.

Similarly, the metropolitan bishops of Rome were without rivals in western Europe but claimed supremacy even over the bishops of Constantinople. This was based upon the tradition that Peter and Paul established the church in Rome. The supremacy of Rome’s bishops is not based upon regional and political importance of the city itself but rather on the assumption that they were the full heirs of St. Peter. As such, Rome’s bishops claimed supreme authority over the entire western European Christian Church but not without opposition even as late as the fifth century.

After Constantine, the church enjoyed a freedom guaranteed by the state. As such, it influenced secular administration to some degree. Its influence, however, was very limited while the state interfered in the church’s affairs regularly. Emperor Justinian decided on and appointed the number of priests, clerics, deacons, and sub-deacons at Constantinople. Occasionally, state officials were bribed by bishops to act on their behalf. Furthermore, secular administrators were even expected to approve the distribution of the priesthood under their jurisdiction.

**Uprooting of the Three Horns**

By the fall of the Roman Empire in A.D. 476, a vacuum in political power and authority was created in Rome. This was the perfect time for its metropolitan bishop to step in and to assume a political role as well. Soon afterward, he used his political influence to settle religious matters with heretic tribes that accepted Arianism. Clovis, the king of the Franks, was used by the bishop of Rome to eradicate Arian Visigoths in 508. Later, in 533, the last king of the Vandals, Gelimer, suffered the
same fate by general Belisarius, and finally Ostrogoths were defeated in 538 by the same general. Through such methods, the church leadership, with the metropolitan bishop of Rome at its head, fulfilled the first part of the description associated with the Little Horn in chapter 7, uprooting the three existing horns.

**Transgressions of a Religious Nature**

The second part of the Little Horn’s activity was more or less related to its religious actions (assuming titles that belong only to God, persecuting the saints of God, and changing God’s law). These acts are also recognizable in the conduct of the leadership in the Church of Rome from the sixth century onward.

The leadership of the Christian Church in Rome blasphemed against the Most High in two ways. First, the assumption of God’s prerogatives could be summarized: The Bishop of Rome “is [of] so great [a] dignity and excellence, that he is not merely man, but God, and vicar of God . . . is called the most holy . . . divine monarch, and supreme emperor, and king of kings . . . is of so great dignity and power that he constitutes one and the same tribunal with Christ.”

Second, the church leadership in Rome accepted and promoted the Alexandrian school of thought. According to this school the Scripture is purely allegorical in character, and individuals and events described in the Bible are not real but used in symbolic ways to provide deeper spiritual lessons and meaning. Thus, the interpretation of Scripture is hidden to ordinary persons and could be provided only by clergy. By accepting this theology, the church in Rome placed itself on the same level with God by taking away the Bible from the people and replacing it with tradition. In this way, the Holy Spirit—who inspired Scripture to be written in such a way that it changes the lives of people upon reading it—was excluded and replaced by the church.

In addition to the assumption of titles, the second activity of the Little Horn is related to the persecution of the saints of the Most High. Religious intolerance against fellow human beings and especially those who followed their conscience in serving God was fully exercised when the leadership of the church in Rome accepted and/or was able to influence political powers to act on their behalf. Not only did the church leadership use their influence to remove several Arian tribes (as seen earlier), but it continued to use the same power in centuries to come to get rid of all who disagreed with its doctrines.

“After the signal of open martyrdom had been given in the Canons of Orleans, there followed the extirpation of the Albigenses under the form of a crusade, the establishment of the Inquisition, the cruel attempts to extinguish the Waldenses, the martyrdoms of the Lollards, the cruel wars to exterminate the Bohemians, the burning of Huss and Jerome, and multitudes of other confessors, before the Reformation; and afterwards, the ferocious cruelties practiced in the Netherlands, the martyrdoms of Queen Mary’s reign, the extinction by the fire and sword of the Reformation in Spain and Italy, by fraud and opened persecution in Poland, the St. Bartholomew’s Massacre, the persecution of the Huguenots by the League, the extirpation of the Vaudois, and all the cruelties and
prejudices connected with the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. These are the more open and conspicuous facts which explain the prophecy, besides the slow and secret murders of the holy tribunal of the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{5}

The third act of the church leadership in Rome that identified them with the Little Horn was an attempt to change God’s law and the day of worship. The seventh-day Sabbath as the day of worship was celebrated by Jews and Christians alike during the early years of the church. Due to the fact that Jews were persecuted and despised for their circumcision and Sabbath-keeping, anti-Semitic feeling was evident among Roman writers as early as Seneca in the first century A.D. The same attitude was evident among the Christian writers as early as the middle of the second century, when Justin Martyr presented “a most devastating and systematic condemnation of the Sabbath, as well as giving the earliest explicit account of Christian Sunday worship services.”\textsuperscript{6}

That the change from Sabbath to Sunday was not based on any scriptural evidence is attested and summarized by John O’Brien, a prominent Catholic professor at Notre Dame University: “You believe that the Bible alone is a safe guide in religious matters. You also believe that one of the fundamental duties enjoyed upon you by your Christian faith is that of Sunday observance. But where does the Bible speak of such obligation? I have read the Bible from the first verse in Genesis to the last verse of Revelation, and have found no reference to the duty of sanctifying the Sunday. The day mentioned in the Bible is not the Sunday, the first day of the week but the Saturday, the last day of the week. It was the... Church which... changed the observance to the Sunday... The word ‘Sabbath’ means rest and is Saturday the seventh day of the week.”\textsuperscript{7}

Because of the atrocities against God and His people, the Little Horn represents fallen Christianity with its leadership, which was given a definite time to function. A specific time of 1,260 years was designated for the fallen Christian church to operate. This period began in 538, when it eliminated the competition of the Arian tribes and became the only power to conduct its activities in the Western Hemisphere. And it ended in 1798, when it lost its political influence.

The Book of Daniel represents the struggles of God’s people as an ethnic group (Jews) who were rejected because they failed their mission, and their replacement by God’s church of the New Testament without ethnic boundaries. The church started well during the first few centuries of its existence when it followed Christ’s mandate. But through the centuries, its leadership used political influence and power to accomplish its goals, which were not in accordance with the mandate by Jesus Christ. Thus it became the Little Horn. By placing themselves on the same level or above God, disrespecting God’s unchangeable moral law, and disregarding human lives for which Jesus gave His life, they became fallen Christianity. The church leadership forgot the grim warning of Paul when he wrote his letter to the church in Rome: “If God did not spare the natural branches [Jews], neither will He spare you” (Rom. 11:21, NASB).

Thus, the Book of Daniel tells a story of God’s people—their tragedies and triumphs, struggles, pitfalls, and vindications. It speaks about those who stood tall when persecution, either from pagan powers or from their fellow Christians, was inflicted upon them. Many were crucified, cast before wild
beasts, burnt at the stake, died from torture in medieval dungeons, only because they wanted to
remain faithful to God. The book of Daniel further testifies that even if they felt abandoned they shall
be reunited with God again and “will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and
those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” (Dan. 12:3, NASB). It
was promised to Daniel that they will stand one day in their allotted places before the living God
throughout eternity.

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