



Rallying for Roy Adams, the discussion about God continues, conscientious cooperation or objection

In Support of Roy Adams

I AM A THIRD-generation Seventh-day Adventist. As I look around, many of my contemporaries have left the Church for a variety of valid reasons. I have elected to stay and take a stand for my faith and belief. Yet my faith in the Church, its structure, and its leadership suffers further erosion when a qualified individual like Roy Adams is blatantly set aside and denied a deserved promotion after years of dedicated service to the Church (Andy Nash, "Opportunity Lost," fall 2006). I am forced to ask myself if we are any different from the political and corporate entities with which I deal every day in the business world.

I guess I am still naïve enough to believe that Church might be different. I am naïve enough to believe that once you've paid your dues and done a good job within the church structure, you will get the promotion if you are the next person in line for it. I am naïve enough to believe that the seemingly logical dominator of color might not play a role in church leadership and its functions.

I am naïve enough to believe that when a leadership committee meets and makes a request/recommendation, the executive branch does not force its will on the committee. I am naïve enough to believe that a dying church

in North America would infuse itself with the brilliance of one of its luminaries. Alas, naiveté often leads to discouragement, bewilderment, and a sense of loss permeated by lack of faith in a system that shoots its wounded and give its young away for adoption.

I was at Andrews University when Roy Adams was there. I heard him speak at many functions and we greeted each other as we traversed the halls of learning. On more than one occasion, I watched him engage the minds of a Sabbath School class in a masterful way. He is gentle man, a scholar, and a great mind. He would have made a great editor-in-chief for our church paper. But that's just the opinion of a naïve mind.

WILNY AUDAIN

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Rejecting a "Designer Christ"

THANK YOU FOR the fall 2006 issue of *Spectrum* magazine. I believe you are performing a vital service for thinking Adventists by facilitating frank, open, in-house debate of key issues from various viewpoints. Including the *Spectrum Blog* background to Charles Scriven's editorial was a good move because it enables readers to weigh the points of evidence and decide for themselves. Beatrice Neall's short masterpiece is also very helpful.

Unlike Neall's essay, much of Charles

Scriven's editorial is off target. Here are some reasons for this assessment:

1. The editorial is titled "Biblical Authority: A Challenge to the Seminary." But Scriven is reacting to articles by only two seminary teachers (Richard Davidson and Roy Gane). Further investigation would reveal that, in fact, the biblical approach of Davidson and Gane to biblical authority is mainstream at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, which is committed to upholding all of the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs. The first of these is: "The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit...."

2. Scriven does not dispute that in the Bible there are "several stories that say God commanded Israel to carry out the total annihilation of an enemy." But he objects to the fact that "Gane takes it for granted that, as a 'true theocracy,' Israel was acting for God—responding to 'direct revelation from God'—when it engaged in genocidal violence." If Scriven is right, the Israelites made a serious mistake because they were not really responding to direct revelation

from God. If so, we cannot trust the way the Bible expresses God's will through his prophets.

3. Scriven cites my statement, "When God tells you to do something, you do it," even if it is unusual, unpleasant, and "evokes revulsion and instant condemnation." He reacts: "A theory of biblical authority that permits these conclusions is worse than dubious: it is dangerous." So this alleged ongoing danger is the reason for rejecting the divine inspiration of the biblical narratives regarding genocide, even though I made it clear in my article that there is no such thing as divinely mandated genocide after the end of the Israelite theocracy.

4. Scriven finds that while Gane "alludes to the 'truer religion' of Jesus with its ideal of 'sacrificial love,'" it is unfortunate that Gane "makes no explicit case for why Jesus should trump the theocrats." I make no explicit case for that because I do not find in the New Testament that Christ invalidated the theocracy that was centered around himself. Christ's self-sacrificing love and his justice are complementary rather than mutually exclusive because those who choose to spurn his mercy give up the only thing that is keeping them from destruction. God and Christ reveal and emphasize different aspects of their character in different parts of the Bible, but they are the same persons throughout.

After reading what I have written here, Richard Davidson applauds Scriven for acknowledging in hindsight that "in substantial part, Davidson's criticisms [of the historical-critical method] ring true, especially now that the self-assurance of modernity has begun to seem like arro-

gance." But he adds: "You [Gane] have well pointed out that Scriven's 'Christ-centered' approach actually presupposes a 'designer Christ' invented by Scriven that is not true to the full portrait of Christ in Scripture.... Scriven's approach leads to a 'canon within a canon' that muzzles those portions of Scripture not in accordance with his own reductionistic view of Christ."

ROY GANE

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CHARLES SCRIVEN RESPONDS:

High appreciation to Roy for participating in the conversation!

My title was meant to be arresting—many of us yearn, not just for papers from seminary professors, but also for more occasions of actual give-and-take. Perhaps the title was unfair. I apologize.

As for the rest, let me just say that Roy has not yet addressed the linchpin passages in my argument. These (and I here note the verses as well as the chapters) are Matthew 28:18; John 1:1, 14; Colossians 1:15–19; and Hebrews 1:1–4. In these and other places, Christian Scripture lifts Jesus to the position of final authority for insight into the will and way of God. No one else who walked on earth holds that position. Moses does not, nor anyone else—except Jesus.

The Old Testament remains, of course, critically important, for it is through the Old Testament that we come to understand Jesus. As an observant Jew, he was at home arguing a particular interpretation of the Bible he loved. God gave clear blessing to that interpretation on the day of the resurrection (Rom. 1:1–4).

Language and the Bible

I'M NOT ONE WHO writes letters to editors, but "The Discussion about the Nature of God" (fall 2006) aroused me from my lethargy and propelled me to my trusty Mac. Maybe it was just the sound and smell of screeching tires. Or perhaps it was another point that struck me between the eyes.

I do not know personally either Roy Gane or Richard Davidson, but I do know, casually, Chuck Scriven and Dave Larson. Both impress me as being reasonably intelligent and well-educated chaps with a better-than-average command of the English language. The same may be said of Gane and Davidson, if I may judge by their writing. But Gane says to Scriven, "Disagree if you like, but try to accurately represent what I say. You grossly distort my article...."

Beatrice Neall also dips her oar into this fluid discussion. She and I derived in less than three years time from the same maternal/paternal gene pool, but that has hardly made it easier for me to understand her—or her me. (I do admire her writing prowess whether or not I understand what she is saying.)

So here is the point: If several people with impressive letters after their names who all speak American English can't seem to communicate accurately with each other, why should I have confidence in their ability to understand what the Bible authors wrote millennia ago—centuries after the events they describe—in a foreign language for which we have no ancient and appropriate *Webster's Old World Dictionary* of the Hebrew language?

GORDON SHORT

Salt Lake City, Utah

Abraham and Isaac

I READ Ron Ritter's letter on the story of Abraham and Isaac (fall 2006) with interest:

Most people—Christians and non-Christians alike—find the traditional explanation of this story difficult to understand. Would God command something that contradicts his own law? Why would he keep Abraham in terrible distress for a long time before the command was counteracted?

Maybe we should think instead that the command came from the devil, since there are other passages in the Bible about such confusion (2 Sam. 24:1 vs. 1 Chron. 21:1). Although Abraham did not understand this, God took pity on him because he was willing to give up his dearest possession. Then he waited until the last moment to stop Abraham and give him another object to sacrifice.

As far as I know, nobody else has suggested this interpretation, since the Bible says the command came from God. I myself am reluctant to do so because I do not want to spread heresy, but I think this is the only way the story can be understood properly.

I believe that Ritter's observation is correct.

KRISTEN FALCH JAKOBSEN
Ringstad, Norway

Running God's Errands in the Military

I SHARE Ron Osborn's discomfort with the traditional Adventist stance on combatancy ("The Moral Ambiguity of Conscientious Cooperation," fall 2006), and have always had questions about our internal consistency on this troubling issue. But I come to a different conclusion from Osborn.

Yes, we should be unequivocal

advocates of peace, unfailingly promoting it in our public discourse. Yes, it is entirely appropriate, even necessary at times, to question our country's involvement in preventable conflicts—involvement that is sometimes calculated to advance political agendas.

But I wonder about Osborn's implication that allegiance to the United States or, in other words, fundamental patriotism, is inherently morally flawed. It is one thing to dissent from a country's occasional foreign policy misadventures (and yes, the United States has engaged in such), but quite another to suggest that "the military as an institution" is morally objectionable.

Were it not for a daunting military, the United States arguably would have never existed (the Revolutionary War). Or it would have been hopelessly sundered by the rebellion and secession of the 1860s, which would have essen-

tially gone unanswered, with slavery as an institution continuing indefinitely until much, much later when it probably would have died of natural causes (probably economic in nature). What of the obvious moral ambiguity of allowing that to happen?

If it is morally wrong for Seventh-day Adventists to participate in the military, then it is morally wrong for others as well, even in the defense of freedom and in resistance to tyranny and genocide. Should Hitler have been finessed? (I seem to remember that Chamberlain tried that.)

Both Osborn and I may find the work God has for us in the classroom. I am willing to allow that others may find the errands God has for them at the DMZ in Korea, or even in the heart of the Pentagon.

RAY MINNER
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