

# Inerrancy, Adventism, and Church Unity

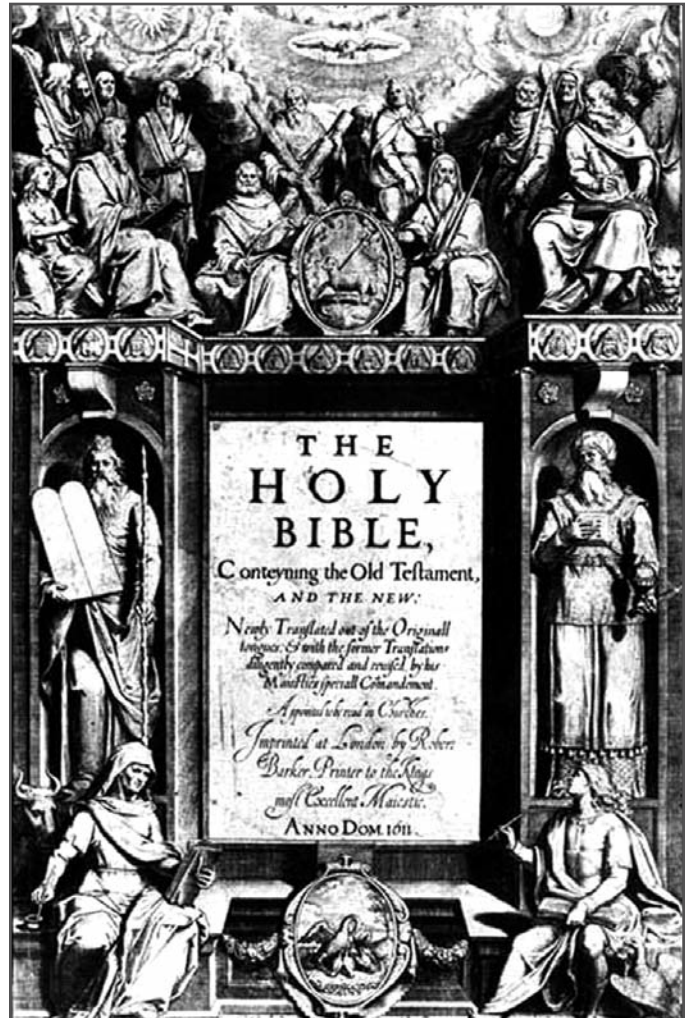
BY RICHARD RICE

Nothing is more important to a Christian community than its view of the Bible. And nothing is more perplexing than the presence of conflicting views of the Bible. In fact, there may be no issue within the range of Christian doctrine where lines are drawn more sharply and sides are taken with more determination than here. But the issue is with us to stay, and for Adventists today it is inextricably connected to the current debate over women's ordination. The purpose of this discussion is to note one source of tension among Adventist scholars and express the hope that we can learn to live with it whether or not we find a way to resolve it.

Although Adventists have hardly ever applied the word "inerrancy" to their views of the Bible,<sup>1</sup> a number of Adventist scholars seem to endorse certain aspects of the inerrantist position. I fear this implicit acceptance of inerrancy may have a fragmenting effect on our community, as it has on others. In what follows, I will briefly outline the features of inerrancy as conservative evangelicals describe it, note the appearance of inerrantist ideas within Adventism, and suggest ways to avoid its divisive effects.

## Evangelicals and inerrancy

References to biblical inerrancy appear frequently in the publications and organizations of conservative evangelical Christianity. The preface to the New King James Version informs readers that "all participating scholars" "signed a statement affirming their belief in the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture, and in the inerrancy of the original autographs."<sup>2</sup> And inerrancy occupies a prominent position in the doctrinal statements of a number of conservative institutions and organizations, including the Evangelical Theological Society. ETS members are required to subscribe annually to this statement: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is



therefore inerrant in the autographs." The organization's website directs members to the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy"<sup>3</sup> for more information.

Since it is inspired by God, the Statement asserts, the Bible is "of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms," including its statements about God's acts in creation, the events of world history, and its own literary origins. Indeed, to limit in any way this

“total divine inerrancy” inescapably impairs the authority of Scripture. Divine inspiration extends to the whole of Scripture, right “down to the very words of the original.”<sup>4</sup> “Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching.”<sup>5</sup>

The Statement also identifies “grammatico-historical exegesis” as the appropriate method of biblical interpretation and denies “the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.”<sup>6</sup> While the only reference to historical criticism per se appears in Article XVI,<sup>7</sup> it is clear that the document sets forth an alternative to both the method and the results of critical approaches to the Bible.

An extensive argument for biblical inerrancy appeared in Carl F. H. Henry’s six-volume magnum opus, *God, Revelation, and Authority*.<sup>8</sup> According to Henry, revelation is supernatural in origin and propositional in character. And because propositions are nothing if not verbal expressions, the divine authorship of Scripture must extend not only to the concepts expressed in the Bible, but to the very words employed by its writers. Propositional revelation necessarily implies verbal inspiration.

For all his emphasis on inerrancy, Henry believes that too much can be made of the idea, and he is unwilling to make it a test of evangelical orthodoxy. However, the same cannot be said of other advocates of inerrancy.

Church historian Martin Marty once observed that the 1980s were a time when the world was moving away from toleration, not toward it.<sup>9</sup> That was certainly true of one of America’s largest denominations. During that decade, “the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was torn apart by the most serious controversy in the history of the denomination.”<sup>10</sup> As described by one participant, “Two factions, Fundamentalists and Moderates, polarized the SBC from 1979–1990.”<sup>11</sup> Although a number of issues were at stake, the popular ral-

lying cry of the Fundamentalists was “the inerrancy of the Bible.” And, perhaps significantly, those on different sides of this issue placed themselves on opposite sides of the question of women’s ordination. Fundamentalists argued for biblical inerrancy. Moderates “contended for the authority of Scripture ‘for faith and practice’ but not as an inerrant scientific and historical book.” Fundamentalists insisted on a hierarchical model of male-female relationships and denied a woman’s right for ordination. . . . Moderates advocated equality between women and men and affirmed ordination for women.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Contrasting Adventist hermeneutics**

Just what the Bible represents and just how the Bible is appropriately interpreted form the backstory of current Adventist discussions over women’s ordination. Which biblical statements present us with the timeless principles and which statements reflect the customs and cultures of bygone ages has always been a source of perplexity, and it has emerged with new urgency in the current debates. Behind this familiar principle-application distinction lies the issue of just what the Bible represents, and how its contents are appropriately construed. While we have avoided the turmoil afflicting other denominations, the sharp lines that have been drawn among Adventist scholars between those who reject any use of historical-critical methods of Bible study and those who find them helpful in modified form is reminiscent of divisions that have emerged in other conservative Christian communities.<sup>13</sup>

### **Historical criticism rejected**

While Adventists typically avoid the expression “inerrancy,” a good deal of the language and logic employed by those who advocate inerrancy appears in Adventist discussions of biblical interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Notable examples include the document “Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods”<sup>15</sup> voted by the 1986 Annual Council, and Richard M. David-

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son's essay on "Biblical Interpretation," which appears in the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*.<sup>16</sup> Both documents affirm God's direct influence on the authors of the biblical writings and insist that human reason must stand under the authority of the Bible. Most importantly, they reject historical criticism and insist that any reliance on its methods is inappropriate for Adventist Bible scholarship.<sup>17</sup>

According to the "Methods" Statement, "even a modified use of the [historical-critical] method that retains the principle of criticism which subordinates the Bible to human reason is unacceptable to Adventists." Such an approach "deemphasizes the divine elements in the Bible as an inspired book (including its resultant unity)."

Davidson rejects the "historical-critical" in favor of the "historical-biblical" method.<sup>18</sup> Whereas the former makes human reason the ultimate criterion for truth, he maintains, the latter uses "methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone."<sup>19</sup> Because the disciplines of literary (source) criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, and canon criticism all treat the biblical documents as products of human ingenuity rather than divine inspiration, all their results are suspect, including the familiar theory that the authors of Matthew and Luke relied on a written version of Mark.<sup>20</sup>

No Adventist scholar rejected the use of historical-critical approaches to the Bible more emphatically than Gerhard F. Hasel. Over the course of a highly productive and tragically truncated career, Hasel repeatedly insisted that historical-critical method cannot do justice to the divine dimension of the Bible as the Word of God and therefore does not provide a hermeneutic adequate for both the divine and human dimensions of the Bible.<sup>21</sup> One of the reasons he most frequently gives is that method and presuppositions are inseparable. In other words, one cannot make use of any historical-critical approaches to the Bible without committing oneself to the idea that the Bible is to be viewed as nothing more than a

collection of human documents. Citing Ernst Troeltsch, Hasel insists, "The theologian or exegete must not get the impression that he can safely utilize certain parts of the historical-critical method in an eclectic manner, because there is no stopping point."<sup>22</sup>

### **Historical criticism affirmed**

The exclusion of historical criticism from Adventist biblical scholarship on the grounds that it is incompatible with confidence in divine authority of Scripture is reminiscent of the concept that the Bible is without error in any of its affirmations.<sup>23</sup> Does this mean that Adventists are, at least implicitly, committed to inerrancy?

Not if one notes that this rejection is not typical of Adventism. In fact, it may represent an exception to the way Adventists have generally thought about the Bible. Note, for example, the striking contrast between the 1986 "Methods of Bible Study" declaration, and this statement from the "Bible Commentary" in 1956: "there is a legitimate, as well as a destructive, higher criticism."<sup>24</sup> The call to reject all historical-critical study of the Bible thus represents a notable departure from the views that respected Adventist biblical scholars held a number of years ago.

It also varies from what seems to be the qualified approval of historical-critical methods we find in *The Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*,<sup>25</sup> which followed the 1974 Bible Conference. In his contribution to the book, Raoul Dederen described the Enlightenment approach to history as a "perfectly legitimate undertaking," which yielded many positive results when applied to the Bible. The methods of literary and historical criticism, says Dederen, provided us "with a flood of light on our 'background' knowledge of the Bible." Since we need divine illumination in order to understand "what God really expressed in the Bible," the knowledge achieved by historical inquiry is "inadequate." But this does not render it unacceptable. Instead, says Dederen,

“These two levels of reading the Bible are not contradictory” and may be assembled into a unity.<sup>26</sup>

In a similar vein, Edward Zinke notes a number of the benefits to be gained from “certain aspects of modern biblical studies,” although he wonders if it is possible to separate the method that produced these benefits from the presuppositions of those with whom they originated.<sup>27</sup>

These qualified affirmations of historical inquiry leave us with an important question. Granted that something more is needed to appreciate the Bible as God’s Word, are the results of historical investigation acceptable as far as they go? Do all uses of historical-critical inquiry inevitably involve a depreciation of the Bible as the inspired means of divine revelation? Zinke’s essay raises the question, but the answer he and Dederen give is not entirely clear. In some ways they seem to issue a caveat rather than a call to reject such methods out of hand, although the church’s official position hardened noticeably in subsequent years.

### Historical criticism incognito

There is another similarity between Adventist biblical scholars who reject historical criticism and those who endorse inerrancy: in practice each group departs from the view of the Bible it embraces in theory. To quote a chapter title from Thom Stark’s book, *The Human Faces of God*, “inerrantists do not exist.” His point is that proponents of inerrancy never consistently adhere to the method of “historical-grammatical exegesis.” In actual practice, they embrace a “hermeneutics of convenience,” bringing biblical statements into harmony with their theological presuppositions whenever the two conflict.<sup>28</sup> We could say something similar about Adventist biblical scholars who reject historical criticism. Whatever our position on the question of its acceptability, in practice all Adventist biblical scholars find the selective use of historical-critical methods not only helpful, but in certain cases indispensable.

For example, even though the “Methods of

Bible Study” Statement formally rejects “even a modified use of historical criticism,” other parts of the Statement clearly endorse such a use. While “the *usual techniques* of historical research” are inadequate, the Statement concedes that “there may be *parallel procedures* employed by Bible students to determine historical data.”<sup>29</sup> In certain cases, apparently, historical-critical methods, or something very much like them, are permissible.<sup>30</sup>

For example, the Statement acknowledges that a background knowledge of Near Eastern culture is “indispensable” for understanding certain biblical expressions. Indeed, “in order not to misconstrue certain kinds of statements, it is important to recognize that they were addressed to peoples of Eastern cultures and expressed in their thought patterns,” rather than ours. For example, “Hebrew culture attributed responsibility to an individual for acts he did not commit but that he allowed to happen. Therefore the inspired writers of the Scriptures commonly credit God with doing actively that which in Western thought we would say He permits or does not prevent from happening, e.g., the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart.” Given the difference between our perspective and theirs, the assertion, “The Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex 9:12) is not to be taken at face value. A knowledge of ancient culture permits a different interpretation.

It appears that appeals to the insights of historical criticism have been summarily dismissed by the “Methods” Statement only to be employed when they are needed in order to avoid unwelcome exegetical conclusions. What the text says, and what it evidently meant to the people who originally wrote it, is not what the text means for us.<sup>31</sup>

A well-known passage where Adventists employ historical and literary considerations in order to discount a literal reading is Luke 16:19–31. *The Andrews Study Bible* describes Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus as “an imaginary story, built on popular folk tales.”<sup>32</sup> It represents a “popular yet mythical story” that

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Jesus used in order to illustrate the point. So, instead of taking all biblical statements literally, we must attribute many of them to the cultural perspective of the time, and occasionally to sources other than divine inspiration.

The same is true of certain descriptions of the natural world. In a response to a reader's question about Psalm 121:6, George W. Reid attributes the notion of being smitten by the moon to the author's prescientific worldview. So, "While God was revealing Himself and His truth to the ancients, He did not at the same time correct every misunderstanding they had accepted as part of their culture. The Bible describes the ancients as believing certain things about the operation of nature that we now know to be inaccurate. Even inspired Bible writers were not . . . purged of all incidental misbeliefs."<sup>33</sup> To summarize, biblical statements are not automatically to be taken at face value and regarded as divinely authoritative. In numerous cases, they give expression to ancient religious, ethical, and cosmological beliefs that are no longer credible.

### **Historical criticism and Ellen White's writings**

There is another reason to question the rejection of all historical-critical methods. Adventist scholars have found them immensely helpful in responding to questions about Ellen White's inspiration. Several decades ago, various studies revealed that Ellen White made extensive use of other writings and relied heavily on literary assistants. Though Adventist leaders were well aware of this long before,<sup>34</sup> the issue was not addressed openly until the early 1980s. When it finally was, church leaders argued that these practices should not undermine our confidence in her inspiration because the writers of the Bible themselves followed such practices.

In a 1980 article, "This I Believe about Ellen G. White," Neal C. Wilson declared, "Originality is not a test of inspiration," and to support this conviction he appealed to the

evidence of literary dependence in the Bible itself. "A prophet's use of sources other than visions does not invalidate or diminish the prophet's teaching authority." And the example he cites is Luke, author of the third Gospel. "Luke was not an eyewitness," Wilson observes. "He used the materials available. One of his source materials though he did not mention his indebtedness to it, was Mark's Gospel, much of which was directly copied, often word for word."<sup>35</sup>

In a later article, Wilson once again mentioned the similarity between Ellen White's writings and the Gospel of Luke. "Our knowledge of how the Lord worked in the life and experience of Ellen White," he wrote, "helps us understand how the Bible writers functioned under the Spirit's influence."<sup>36</sup> So, knowing how Ellen White's writings were produced helps us understand how the Bible writers functioned, and vice versa.<sup>37</sup> What we find in both cases is literary dependence, or to put it another way, a lack of total originality.

The qualification "total" is important, because a writer may use material derived from others in a highly original way. And this brings us to another way in which Adventists have made use of historical-critical methods. In *Luke, A Plagiarist?*,<sup>38</sup> George Rice demonstrates that the third Gospel provides a distinctive portrayal of Jesus' life and work, in spite of the fact that the author's account has a great deal in common with the first two Gospels. Rice presents what he calls the "lucan model of inspiration"<sup>39</sup> as a distinct alternative to the prophetic model. And although he never characterizes his approach as an exercise in "redaction criticism," it clearly exemplifies that particular historical-critical method.<sup>40</sup>

Given Wilson's endorsement of the scholarly consensus regarding the similarities between Luke and Mark, it is puzzling to find Adventist scholars suggesting years later that none of the Gospel writers drew material from the others. It is also puzzling to find a later General Conference President flatly condemning historical-

critical method as “one of the most sinister attacks against the Bible” and “a deadly enemy of our theology and mission.”<sup>41</sup>

Looking at the way Adventists go about interpreting the Bible, we have to wonder about the emphatic exclusion of all historical-critical methods, even in modified form. The principle seems out of harmony with our actual practice.

### **Historical criticism and inerrancy: ironic similarity**

When lines are so sharply drawn on issues of such importance, it may be impossible to stake out a middle ground or imagine anything in the way of compromise that would transcend the divergent perspectives. But there are a couple of factors that may reduce the force of the challenge that historical criticism seems to pose for those who accept the authority of the Bible. One is the fact that historical criticism and biblical inerrancy have something in common. The roots of both lie in the Enlightenment, the historical phenomenon that transformed the shape of human knowledge.

The Enlightenment background of historical criticism is well known. What is not so well known is that inerrancy trades on the same view of rationality. When inerrantists insist that the Bible is absolutely trustworthy in all its assertions—not only in the “spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes” found in the Bible, but also in the fields of history and science—they are actually embracing an Enlightenment standard of truth, a standard that derives not from the Bible itself, but from outside the Bible. From the Enlightenment perspective, the reliability of the Bible stands or falls with the precision of its historical accounts and its descriptions of the natural world. If the Bible is inspired, all its claims must be accurate by scientific standards.<sup>42</sup>

An inerrantist view of the Bible thus imposes an immense apologetic burden on those for whom the Bible has religious significance. They must defend its authenticity at all costs. They must demonstrate that the Bible meas-

ures up to modern standards of historical and scientific inquiry. Regrettably, in the thinking of some, this view of things makes the Bible hostage to a scientific perspective. According to Robert E. Webber, for example, “Both conservatives and liberals have approached the Bible through empirical methodology in search of truth. Liberals used reason to demythologize the Bible... [C]onservatives argued for the exact correctness of everything in the Bible... In this vicious circle the liberals tore the Bible to shreds with biblical criticism while the conservatives continually followed ... trying to put the pieces back together with rational arguments.” And with this, Webber concludes, something essential was lost. “[T]he foundation of the Christian faith shifted from the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ to the centrality of the Bible.”<sup>43</sup> If Webber has a point, those who are determined to defend the Bible’s inspiration from all the perceived threats of historical criticism may be forcing the Bible into a container where it doesn’t really fit, or, to change the metaphor, playing the game by their opponents’ rules.

### **Criticizing historical criticism**

This is not to say that there is nothing objectionable about historical-critical approaches to the text. To the contrary, there is a great deal to object to. The point is that we are not forced to choose between a preoccupation with the Bible’s complete accuracy and an uncritical embrace of historical criticism. We can appreciate a good deal of what historical-critical approaches to the biblical documents have to tell us. And we can do this without accepting all their conclusions, nor embracing their presuppositions. Most importantly, we can maintain that the most important aspects of the Bible involve things that historical criticism doesn’t really touch. As it turns out, the shortcomings—or shortsightedness—of historical criticism are well known to those for whom the Bible has great value.

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rather “blunt instrument” for examining certain features of the Bible. What is interesting about a text, she says, is hardly exhausted by a historical examination of it or the circumstances in which it arose. We may have other concerns as we study the Bible, and it is perfectly acceptable to approach the biblical texts in different ways. We can view a biblical narrative as a unity, even if it was composed of “simpler bits assembled by editors with varying concerns and interests.” And we may be interested in the meaning a passage has when taken in the context of the Bible as a whole.<sup>44</sup>

### Putting historical criticism in its place

If Stump is right, there must be a way between the horns of this dilemma: either affirm the humanity of the biblical documents, accept the negative conclusions of historical criticism, and abandon confidence in the Bible as divine revelation; or affirm the divinity of the Bible and deny any applicability of historical-critical method. In other words, there must be a way to avoid both biblical inerrancy on the one hand and historical reductionism on the other.

Our reflections suggest two steps toward this goal. One is to apply historical criticism to historical criticism. Recognizing the cultural assumptions from which historical criticism springs gives us a way to discriminate among its claims. We can accept some of the insights that historical criticism gives us into the biblical texts, but we are under no obligation to accept all of its conclusions. In other words, as the “Bible Commentary” of 1956 indicates, we can make legitimate use of historical-critical methods while avoiding its destructive consequences.

A second step is to recognize that historical criticism typically overlooks the essential nature of the biblical texts. The Bible is first and foremost a religious text. Whatever its more particular features, its specific aim is to put human beings in touch with God, and to ignore this intention is to fail to take the text seriously. A view of the Bible that takes seriously what the Bible is ostensibly and obvious-

ly about must consider the claims that the Bible makes on the reader, a claim that God reaches into history and offers us salvation.<sup>45</sup>

The fact that the biblical documents are thoroughly human does not mean they are merely human, that they exhibit no transcendent dimension whatsoever. If we ask, “What occasioned their production, their collection, their preservation, their enduring power to attract and transform lives?” the answer takes us beyond the sphere of human invention. These documents were nothing less than the response of faith to God’s actions in history—in the history of the people of the covenant and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Accordingly, the Bible is instrumental to its purpose, but neither identical nor incidental to it. The essential purpose of the Bible is to communicate God to human beings and to awaken a response within us. Its central concerns are clear and its essential claims are reliable, whether or not all its descriptions of historical events and natural phenomena are factually precise.

### A concluding hope

People looking at Adventism from the outside would probably be most impressed with the things we hold in common, the beliefs and practices we all embrace, the forms of service we all endorse, and the worldwide mission we are all committed to. It is ironic to find that within our community we are deeply concerned about our differences. Yet, as a church historian once observed, “nothing divides so bitterly as common convictions held with a difference.”<sup>46</sup>

Divergent perspectives regarding women’s ordination have become enormously important to us. Many among us believe they pose a real threat to unity within our church. I hope it never comes to that. I also hope that divergent views regarding the Bible will not threaten unity among Adventist scholars. All Adventists agree that the Bible is the Word of God, the product of divine inspiration, and as such the

ultimate authority in matters of faith. They also agree that divine revelation takes expression through human words and thoughts. For some, the human dimension invites us to explore the historical aspects of the Bible, including the composition and collection of its documents. For others, the divine authority of the Bible forecloses such inquiries. Is our common conviction in the dual nature of the Bible strong enough to enable us to transcend the differences in our emphases? The future unity of the church may depend to no small degree on our ability to answer this question affirmatively.

I began by saying, "Nothing is more important to a Christian community than its view of the Bible." I would like to rephrase that. "Nothing is more important to Christian *community* than its view of the Bible." A common reverence for the Bible as the Word of God, a reverence which respects its divine authorship, but does not insist that there is only one view of inspiration that upholds that authorship, can provide us with a uniting, unifying basis for developing our doctrines, nurturing our spirits, and inspiring us to finish the work to which we are all committed. ■

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his wife Gail, who also teaches at LLU, have two grown children and four grandchildren. His latest book, *Suffering and the Search for Meaning: Contemporary Responses to the Problem of Pain*, will be available from Intervarsity Press next July.

## References

1. An exception was House, Benjamin L., *Analytical Studies in Bible Doctrines for Seventh-day Adventist Colleges: A Course in Biblical Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: College Press, 1926).
2. *New King James Version*, ed. Thomas Nelson (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1997).
3. ICBI, "Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy." Statement formulated at the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy conference, Chicago, IL, October 1978.
4. *Ibid.*, Article VI.
5. *Ibid.*, Article XIX.
6. *Ibid.*, Article XVIII. According to the Statement, biblical inerrancy and infallibility, though not identical, are inextricably connected. And while divine inspiration and inerrancy apply directly to the original biblical autographs, the Bible as we have it is nonetheless the infallible word of God (see Article XI).
7. "We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by Scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism."
8. Henry, Carl F. H., *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Word Books, 1976–1983). For a more extensive discussion of Henry's account of inerrancy, see my review of *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vols. 1–4, and Bloesch, Donald G., "Essentials of Evangelical Theology," vols. 1–2, in *Religious Studies Review*, 7, no. 2 (April 1981), 107–114.
9. Cited in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 282.
10. *Ibid.*, xix.
11. *Ibid.*, xix.
12. *Ibid.*, xx.
13. For example, see Thompson, Alden, *Inspiration: Hard Questions, Honest Answers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), and the reactions to it by a various Adventist scholars in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992).
14. I'll set aside certain coincidences, such as the fact that a number of Adventist scholars hold membership in the ETS, and the fact that the *Andrews Study Bible* uses the NKJV.
15. The statement originated as a report to the 1986 Annual Council by the "Methods of Bible Study" Committee.
16. *The Handbook of Adventist Theology*, eds. George W. Reid, Raoul Dederen, et al (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000).
17. For informative studies of varying Adventist attitudes toward historical-critical methods see McIver, Robert K. "The historical critical method: the Adventist debate," *Ministry* (March 1996); and Bruinsma, Reinder "Adventist and Protestant Fundamentalism," *Spectrum*, Winter (2002), 24–36.
18. Cf. the thesis of Gerhard Maier's book, *The End of Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leveranz and Rudolf F. Norden (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1977): "the historical-critical method is to be replaced by a historical-Biblical one" (52, [quoted in Stuhlmacher, Peter, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1977), 68]).
19. *The Handbook of Adventist Theology*, ed. George W. Reid, Raoul Dederen, et al. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 94–95.
20. Davidson approvingly cites Etta Linnemann's conviction that none of the Gospels is dependent on another, so there is no "Synoptic problem" (*Handbook*, 92). For more from Adventist scholars about Etta Linnemann and her rejection of historical-critical approaches to the Bible, see Hasel, Frank M., "'The Word of God should be the measure': An interview with Etta Linnemann," *Ministry* (July 8, 2008), 13–15; Gulley, Norman R., "An Evaluation of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' method



in the Light of His View of Scripture and Use of Ellen White," *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, eds. Frank Holbrook and Leo VanDolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2005), 81–83; and Gerhard F. Hasel, who describes her book on historical criticism as "a must for understanding the historical-critical method of today" (Hasel, Gerhard F., "Reflections on Alden Thompson's 'Law Pyramid' within a Casebook/Codebook Dichotomy," *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2005), 169, f.n.15. One wonders if Linnemann's view of the Synoptic Gospels may have contributed to a change in the curriculum at the Adventist Theological Seminary. While attending the Seminary in the late sixties, I took a graduate seminar on "the Synoptic Problem." Some years later, however, an acquaintance of mine earned an MA in Bible Studies at Andrews University, but never even heard of the Synoptic problem until they pursued further study at another university.

21. "Principles of Bible Interpretation," *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1974), 167.

22. Hasel, Gerhard F., *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1980), 26. As the quotation from Troeltsch indicates, some of the best known proponents of historical criticism share Hasel's all or nothing approach to the discipline(s). According to Rudolf Bultmann, for example, "The mythical view of the world must be accepted or rejected in its entirety" (Bultmann, Rudolf, "New Testament and Mythology," *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch [New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1961], 9). And the historical method presupposes that it is possible to understand the whole historical process as a closed unity, which cannot be rent by the interference of the supernatural powers (Bultmann, Rudolf, "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?," *Existence and Faith: Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann*, ed. Schubert M. Ogden [Meridian Books, 1960], 291–292).

23. As the "Chicago Statement" asserts: "Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms..." and "Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives."

24. "Legitimate criticism," the article continues, "seeks to take all that linguistic, literary, historical, and archeological study has proved in regard to the Bible, and to use this in determining the approximate dates of writing, the probable authors, where the authors' names are not stated, the conditions under which they wrote, and the materials they used in their writing" ("'Lower' and 'Higher' Biblical Criticism," *Seventh-day*

*Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5 [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1956], 188). For an engaging account of the production of the Adventist Bible Commentary, see Cottrell, Raymond F., "The Untold Story of the Bible Commentary," *Spectrum*, 16, no. 3 (August 1985), 35–51.

25. Dederen, Raoul, "Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics," *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: RHPA, 1974), 9–10.

26. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

27. Zinke, Edward, "Postreformation Critical Biblical Studies," *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, D.C.: RHPA, 1974), 85.

28. Stark, Thom, *Human Faces of God: What Scripture Reveals When It Gets God Wrong (and Why Inerrancy Tries to Hide It)* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 15, 37. James Barr makes a similar observation. "In order to avoid imputing error to the Bible," he argues, "fundamentalists twist and turn back and forward between literal and non-literal interpretation" (Barr, James, *Fundamentalism* [Norwich, UK: SCM Press, 1981], 40).

30. According to Davidson, both historical-critical and historical-biblical methods "analyze historical context, literary features, genre or literary type, theology of the writer, the development of themes, and the process of canonization." The difference is that the latter "analyzes but refuses to critique the Bible" (*Handbook*, 96). However, the extensive similarities between the two methods, and the selective use of historical-critical methods that historical-biblical methods involve, blur the distinction between the two approaches to the Bible (cf. Stuhlmacher's description of Maier's proposal as a "half-hearted dependence on historical criticism" [Stuhlmacher, 70]).

31. Other aspects of the Bible also require us to acknowledge the vast difference between ancient and modern perspectives, including divinely commanded genocide and the tacit acceptance of practices that many Christians today find morally objectionable, such as polygamy, divorce, and slavery. "Although condemnation of such deeply ingrained social customs is not explicit, God did not necessarily endorse or approve all that He permitted," asserts the Statement.

32. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2010; q.v.

33. Reid, George W., "'Windows on the Word': 'Smitten by the moon?,'" *Adventist Review* (April 28, 1983).

34. Adventist leaders knew of this decades ago and wondered how they could address the topic without undermining the faith of church members in Ellen White's ministry. For an extensive analysis of W. W. Prescott's deep perplexity over widespread misconceptions of Ellen White's writings, see Valentine, Gilbert M., "The Church 'drifting toward a crisis': Prescott's 1915 Letter to William White," *Catalyst*, 2, no. 1 (November 2007), 32–94. Although the issue was seriously considered by church leaders at the 1919 Bible Conference, their discussion was not publicly available, nor even generally known, until the minutes of the

conference were finally published—sixty years after the conference took place (*Spectrum* [Winter 1979]).

35. Wilson, Neal C., "This I Believe about Ellen G. White," *Adventist Review*, 157, no. 12 (March 20, 1980), 8–10.

36. Wilson, Neal C., "The Ellen G. White writings and the church," *Adventist Review*, (July 9, 1981), 4.

37. This is not to say, of course, that Wilson endorsed all uses of historical-critical methods. A subsequent article urges readers to avoid the extremes of both liberalism and conservatism. Though we must reject the idea of biblical inerrancy, it says, we dare not treat the Scriptures as just another human document. Accordingly, "we cannot, without extensive modification and a different set of presuppositions, employ the critical method used by secular scholars in the study of the Bible." Wilson, Neal C., "Together for a Finished Work," *Adventist Review* (December 17, 1981), 5.

38. Rice, George, *Luke, A Plagiarist?* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1983).

39. Rice, George, "How to Write a Bible," *Ministry* (June 1986), 9.

40. Redaction criticism "is concerned with studying the theological motivation of an author as this is revealed in the collection, arrangement, editing, and modification of traditional material, and in the composition of new material or the creation of new forms within the traditions of early Christianity." Perrin, Norman, *What Is Redaction Criticism?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1969), 1.

41. These remarks come from President Ted N. C. Wilson's July 3, 2010 sermon, his first as the newly elected President of the General Conference.

42. See Taylor, Charles, *A Secular Age* (Harvard University Press, 2007), 330.

43. Webber, Robert E., *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 45.

44. Stump, Eleonore, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34, 32.

45. Harrisville, Roy A., and Walter Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture: Baruch Spinoza to Brevard Childs*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 336.

46. Cragg, Gerald R., *Freedom and Authority* (Santa Ana, CA: Westminster Press, 1975), 222; quoted in *The Struggle for the Soul of the SBC: Moderate Responses to the Fundamentalist Movement*, ed. Walter B. Shurden (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 282. This phenomenon is not peculiar to Christianity, of course. In a recent lecture, Rabbi Hillel Cohn noted the sad irony that just as the walls that have for so long separated Jews and non-Jews are coming down, intrafaith relations (relations between Jews and Jews) have become more strained ("Interfaith and Intrafaith: Where We Have Been and Where We are Going," presented at the 18th Annual Rabbi Norman F. Feldheim Lecture, Congregation Emanu El, Redlands, California, February 6, 2013).

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**Jun 14** Jeannine Bookhardt-Murray

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