

# Christ and the Conflict of Interpretations:

## *Hermeneutics Transfigured* | BY ZANE YI



"CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUE" BY GUSTAVE DORÉ, 1866.

### Introduction

In his telling of the history of Adventism, George Knight divides the phases of Adventism's development into three distinct stages, centering around three distinct questions. The pressing question for most of the pioneers of the denomination was "What is Adventist in Adventism?" The emphasis during the formative years of 1844–1885 was on the unique teachings that set Adventism apart from other denominations—the Sabbath, Sanctification, the Spirit of Prophecy, State of the Dead, and the Second Coming. This fifty-year focus on doctrinal distinctives,

however, led to sectarian tendencies, and the following phase of development served as a corrective, centering around the question of "What is Christian in Adventism?" Adventists during this time, 1886–1919, (re-)discovered the significance of the apostle Paul and the doctrine of justification by faith. This was followed by a third phase of development, 1919–1950, centered around a third question—"What is fundamental in Adventism?" Here Adventists grappled (and continue to grapple) with a host of contemporary issues, as do other denominations trying to find their way in the modern world: issues regarding discoveries in science, the role of women, and sexuality. Today, since 1950, Knight writes, all three of these questions are on the table for Adventists and there is confusion and disagreement about which of these questions is the most fundamental to Adventist identity—the beliefs that make them unique as a people, the beliefs they share with other Christians, or their beliefs about important issues being debated in society.<sup>1</sup>

Knight's analysis clarifies the central theological concerns that have shaped the way many Adventists study the Bible and illustrate the more fundamental hermeneutical insight that what an individual or community takes from the Bible to teach, what they derive from the Bible, is largely determined by the questions and concerns they bring to the text. In what follows, I will be suggesting an alternate path of inquiry, one I take to be a more fruitful and faithful one, guided by a different question.

### Why the Conflict of Interpretations?

Why do conflicts of interpretation happen between well-meaning people looking at the same text? Simply put, as Hans-Georg Gadamer points out, all textual interpretation is shaped by the pre-judgements and expectations readers bring to a given text. And, because the meaning of a text is co-determined by the text and reader,

a degree of plurality of legitimate meanings cannot be eliminated, even with careful attention and scholarship.

“Not just occasionally, but always,” Gadamer argues, “the meaning of a text goes beyond its author.”<sup>2</sup> Once it is “in the wild,” as they say, the meaning of a text is no longer under the control of the author, because readers are now involved. Because humans are finite and historical beings, living in various places and times, they will approach texts with different prejudices which can be modified, but never entirely eliminated.<sup>3</sup> Thus, while not every interpretation is a valid one, an irreducible plurality of possible meanings still remains; one can narrow, but never eliminate the hermeneutical circle.

But beyond the subjectivity of the reader, which forms both the condition and limit for any kind of intelligible experience, is the diverse nature of Christian Scripture itself. The Bible is actually a collection of many texts, written and compiled over many years. This results in, as Paul Ricoeur puts it, “a polyphonic language sustained by [a] circularity of...forms.”<sup>4</sup> The Bible speaks in many voices about God, addressing different people in different contexts, and what these voices claim is often in tension, if not conflict, with each other, regarding the nature of God’s will. And this tension exists, not just *between* the two major divisions of the Bible—the first and second testaments—but *within* them as well.

Take, for example, the shifting standards for membership into the community of God’s people. Walter Brueggemann draws our attention to two texts: Deuteronomy 23:1–8 and Isaiah 56:3–8.

### Deuteronomy 23:1–8

<sup>1</sup> No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.

<sup>2</sup> No one born of a forbidden marriage nor any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation.

<sup>3</sup> No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation.

<sup>6</sup> Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.

### Isaiah 56:3–8

<sup>3</sup> Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.”

And let no eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.”

<sup>4</sup> For this is what the LORD says:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—

<sup>5</sup> to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughter.

Deuteronomy, the earlier text, sets out the standard for membership into the Israelite community, and the liturgical acts central to the life of that community, along lines of reproductive capacity and proper bloodlines. Isaiah, however, according to Brueggemann “sets out to contradict and overthrow the ancient rules of Moses . . . by asserting a principle of inclusiveness against that of ancient exclusivism.”<sup>5</sup> In Isaiah, God goes on to promise foreigners “joy in my house of prayer” (Isaiah 6:7). Their sacrifices will be accepted in the temple. “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations,” God declares.

“This is an ancient text that corrects an even more ancient text,” Brueggemann observes.<sup>6</sup> The tension between these texts illustrate a wider, basic tension in the Old Testament, between the priestly and prophetic traditions. The priestly tradition conceives of holiness in terms of cultic purity. The prophetic tradition places the concern for justice, and more specifically protective justice for the most vulnerable of society, alongside that of purity.<sup>7</sup> Some of the later prophets argue that justice supersedes purity. Micah, for example, insists that God does not want sacri-

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fices at all, preferring acts of justice and mercy (Micah 6:6–8).

One could point out similar tensions in the New Testament. Again, one encounters a diversity of literary genres—parables, narratives, letters, visions, etc.—that seem to offer, at times, conflicting normative guidance. For example, Jesus, in the gospel of Luke, seems to recommend a renunciation of possession. “None of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions” (Luke 14:33). Compare this with what Paul says to the believers in Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:14), as he appeals for his collection for the church in Jerusalem. Here the recommendation is generosity, rather than renunciation.<sup>8</sup> Another example is the believer’s relationship to the state. Romans 13—“They are God’s servants . . . Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities” (vs. 4–5) and Revelation 13—“And I saw a beast coming out of the sea . . .” (vs. 1)—do not say the same thing. These are, as Richard Hayes points out, “radically different assessments of the relation of the

Christian community to the Roman Empire.”<sup>9</sup>

The diversity in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Old Testament with the New Testament is a major source for the diversity of interpretations about the Bible. Combined with the diversity of readers located in many times and places, conflicts of interpretations are inevitable. Diverse communities (and diverse individuals who comprise those communities) read diverse texts with a diversity of questions and expectations, facing diverse circumstances; hence, there is an inescapable diversity of interpretations about a single book.

## Transfiguring the Conflict of Interpretations

What should one do in the face of this inevitable conflict of interpretations? A story found in all three of the gospels and, arguably, alluded to in John—the Transfiguration—provides some suggestive hermeneutical insights.<sup>10</sup> The Markean version, most likely the earliest version of the story, provides the relevant details with its typical concision.

The message of the story, found in Mark 9:2–8, is enigmatic. Jesus takes His inner circle of students—Peter, James, and John—up onto a mountain top. There, Jesus’ appearance changes. “He was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them,” Mark recounts (vs. 2, 3). Two figures appear, identified as Elijah and Moses, and talk with Jesus. The disciples are terrified and one of them, Peter, proposes to build three shelters. Then a cloud appears and a voice speaks from the cloud identifying Jesus and issuing a command—“This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to him” (vs. 7). Suddenly, the disciples look around and they stand alone on the mountain with Jesus. “They no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus” (vs. 8).

The point of the passage emerges when read in light of the stories that immediately precede it and also the Old Testament passages it references and echoes. Two stories come before this



"JESUS PREACHING TO THE MULTITUDE" BY GUSTAVE DORÉ, 1866.

one. The first is one of Jesus questioning His disciples in light of His spreading popularity. “Who do you say I am,” he asks (Mark 8:29). To which, Peter responds, evidently correctly, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). This is followed by a story of Peter’s response to Jesus as he begins to speak of His coming suffering and death. This, understandably, causes some consternation with the disciples. Peter takes Jesus aside and rebukes him (Mark 8:32). Jesus in turn, rebukes Peter, calling him Satan and declaring that His followers must deny themselves and take up their crosses (Mark 9:34). The wider narrative context for the Transfiguration story, in other words, is one where the disciples, with Peter representing them, are confused about Jesus’ identity and mission.

The story also alludes to numerous figures, passages, and images from the Old Testament. Moses and Elijah, the figures who speak with Jesus, simply put, are two of the greatest figures in the Old Testament. Moses is the leader who led the nation of Israel out of slavery from Egypt. He is the giver of the Law and was regarded as the author of the Pentateuch. Moses’ burial place was unknown (Deuteronomy 34:5–8) leading to the idea that he had been taken up by God.<sup>11</sup> Elijah was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets. At the end of his life, Elijah is taken up into heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1–11).

Interestingly, both men had their own mountaintop encounters with God—Sinai and Carmel. Together, they represent the greatest leaders in the Old Testament. And this helps explain Peter’s confused suggestion (other than sheer fear, as Mark surmises). Peter wants to keep the conversation before him going as long as possible. He is amazed at the company Jesus keeps. As one commentator puts it, “The offer to build three tabernacles—one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah—would presumably encourage the stunning consultation to continue indefinitely.”<sup>12</sup>

Peter seems to either think that Jesus is *as great as* Moses and Elijah or that he derives His great-

ness from His relationship *with* Moses and Elijah. This confusion is addressed by the description of Jesus’ appearance and the voice from the cloud. When it comes to Jesus’ appearance, two passages from the Old Testament provide some relevant background. Exodus 34:30 describes Moses’ appearance after he had been with God on Mt. Sinai—“His face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.” In another passage, Daniel 7:9, Daniel describes a vision, writing, “As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool.” Jesus’ appearance, where His clothes become a “dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them,” echo these passages, indicating the presence of the divine. Somehow God is with and in Jesus.

The visual cues are accompanied by an auditory declaration and command. First, the text indicates that clouds appear. In the Old Testament, clouds are an indication of God’s presence and glory. For example, Exodus 19:16 tells us that a cloud covered the mountain where God gave the Ten Commandments—“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning cloud over the mountain . . . Everyone in the camp trembled.” When it comes to the voice at His baptism, recounted at the very beginning of Mark’s gospel (1:11), only Jesus (and the readers) hear the voice declaring Jesus to be “My son.” Now, the three disciples also hear the heavenly voice attesting to this relationship.

This voice gives very concise instructions. There is only one command: “Listen to Him” (Mark 9:7). The verb ἀκούετε is a present imperative, implying continuing action. “Keep on listening to Him” or “Continue to listen to Him,” the translation could go. (Interestingly, Mark’s ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ seems to echo Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses predicts the coming of another prophet like himself and instructs the Israelites to listen to Him—αὐτοῦ ἀκούσεσθε.<sup>13</sup>) What happens next makes the point clear. Moses and Elijah disappear. The sudden disappearance of the cloud and Elijah and Moses under-

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scores the point that the disciples are to look to Jesus to be their teacher. The heavenly voice implies that Peter's request to build the tabernacles was misguided, because he and his fellow disciples are to listen, ultimately, to God's Son. To drive home the point, Mark adds a redundant point of emphasis: "they no longer saw anyone, but only Jesus with them" (Mark 9:8).

"Listen to Jesus. Keep listening to Him." The same point communicated to Jesus' original students applies to the early Christians hearing this story—Mark's original audience. In a world of conflicting voices, and at times, when Jesus' teachings seem confusing, and at times when the way looks dark, they, too, are to continue looking to and listening to Jesus, over every other voice. This same point applies to professed followers of Jesus in every succeeding generation, in all times and places, including today. Taking the message of the Transfiguration seriously would transform the way Christians in the twenty-first-century deal with the polyphony of voices within Scripture and conflicts of interpretation about Scripture.

Like Peter, many of Jesus' students today face the temptation of a *flat hermeneutic*, where the voice of Jesus becomes one of the many voices of Scripture, rather than the authoritative voice of Scripture. Jesus' teachings are lined up with all the teachings of the Bible, systematized, and His voice competes amongst many other voices for attention.

His voice, at times, is muffled and interpreted through other voices; perhaps, if not by Moses and Elijah's voices, by voices that follow Him. The apostle Paul, for example, might become the ultimate theological authority. "Many Christians in our day treat the gospels as the optional chips and dip at the beginning of the meal..." N. T. Wright observes, "there's some nice stuff to crunch there, but then you go and sit at the table and have the red meat of Pauline theology. That's where we're all headed."<sup>14</sup> We could call this a *reversed hermeneutic*, where Jesus' teachings are interpreted through some other lens.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, with a *transfigured hermeneutic*,

Jesus is the ultimate authority—Jesus' voice, his teachings, take obvious and intentional priority over all other voices. Jesus receives hermeneutical priority over the rest of Scripture.

The same point is made in the opening lines of the epistle to the Hebrews:

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word (Hebrews 1:1–3).

The opening of the letter sets up a theme to be repeated throughout the rest of the letter—the superiority of Jesus to other revelations, powers, and ministrations. Addressing a community under severe persecution, the writer unleashes his rhetorical energies to persuade his audience to stay committed to their relatively new faith and not to return to former ways. This bold opening affirmation of who Jesus is, and His relation to other revelations, makes a clear point with profound hermeneutical implications—what Jesus reveals is superior and singular when compared to other previous revelations. All revelations may be inspired *by* God, but not all revelations are equal *before* God, including other revelations recorded in the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

## **Jesus and the Conflict of Interpretations**

So how, exactly, does looking to Jesus help us deal with the conflict of interpretations within and about the Bible? We should remember that Jesus was a teacher of Scripture, who, amongst other things, taught His students how to interpret Scripture. Christians, of course, affirm Jesus as being more than a teacher, but He was *at least* that and anyone calling themselves his students should treat Him accordingly, as their rabbi.





This would entail, as it did in second-century Palestine in Jesus' day, the serious attempt to learn their mentor's teachings.<sup>17</sup> Students would commit years to learning the teachings of their rabbi and committing them to memory. They endeavored to live out these teachings in their day-to-day lives. They would take notes as their rabbi debated other rabbis. By doing all this, they were learning a new skill—how to think like their rabbi and respond to new situations unaddressed by him in ways that were faithful to him. They would read sacred texts, new and old, like him.<sup>18</sup> Jesus' promise to His students, then and now, is that, once trained, they will be "like a householder who brings forth out of his storehouse treasure that is new and [treasure that is] old [the fresh as well as the familiar]" (Matthew 13:52).<sup>19</sup>

Glen Stassen and David Gushee, in their study of the Sermon on the Mount, provide an insightful summary of the interpretive principles that Jesus used to interpret Torah.<sup>20</sup> First,

they note, Jesus "understood the Law as an expression of God's grace, calling for a faithful response." Jesus loved His Bible and had the highest respect for it. (Jesus, I think, would respond as any teacher would today when students ask what part of a given reading assignment is really important—"All of it.") He clearly states that His teachings do not detract from anything the Torah teaches, but clarifies its true meaning (Matthew 5:17). Jesus, like the other rabbis of His day, viewed the Law as a gift from God. God had chosen to give it to them. This was abundant grace.

Secondly, with this said, certain teachings of the Bible were clearly more significant to Jesus than others. As Stassen and Gushee put it, Jesus "placed more emphasis on the moral than on the cultic aspects of the Law."<sup>21</sup> Take, for example, Jesus' teaching about neighbor love, which is drawn from Leviticus 19:18. If you look it up, it is actually a secondary clause to a larger teaching prohibiting revenge—"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but *love your neighbor as yourself*. I am the Lord."

What is even more striking are the instructions in the verse that immediately follows it: "Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material." The rationale or the significance for these latter teaching is unclear; perhaps they were self-evident to those living in an ancient agrarian society. Commentators note that Leviticus 19 has, as a whole, no clear organizing thread. Rather it is a loose association of ideas. In many ways, it is a microcosm of the Bible, as a whole, or the way it seems to many people trying to make sense of it. The phrase "love your neighbor as yourself," in other words, is one easy to overlook; it is surrounded by all kinds of other instruction. Yet Jesus homes in on this one phrase and makes it central to His teaching. All laws are not created equal, it turns out.

Thirdly, and this relates to the second principle, Jesus "had a prophetic rather than a legal-

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"THE APOSTLES PREACHING THE GOSPEL" BY GUSTAVE DORÉ. 1866.

istic understanding of righteousness; true righteousness consisted of deeds of love, mercy and justice, especially to the most vulnerable."<sup>22</sup> This returns us to the tension between the priestly and prophetic traditions in the Old Testament. It would be inaccurate to say that priests did not care about justice and that prophets did not care about ritual; but they seemed to focus on or emphasize one as being important to fulfilling God's will. How is one faithful to both these traditions when they come into conflict? Which should be prioritized over the other? Jesus clearly sides with the prophets. As Richard Bauckman points out, "Jesus does not reject the rules for priestly purity, but he downgrades them. Weightier considerations take precedence."<sup>23</sup> This is clear in Jesus' commentary on the punctilious payment of tithe by religious leaders. Jesus admonishes them for neglecting

"the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness" (Matthew 23:23). This is why Jesus stretched His reading of Scripture to include as many people as possible. One's neighbors weren't just faithful Jews; they included enemies, Samaritans, women, children, the demon-possessed, the imprisoned, tax-collectors, widows, and the poor.

Lastly, Jesus "placed emphasis on the root causes of behavior, i.e. the heart or character."<sup>24</sup> Take His teaching on the proper washing of hands and the eating of food: "Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them" (Mark 7:15). He goes on to explain to His students, who are just as mystified by His dismissive declaration as the religious leaders He is addressing, "Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside



can defile them? <sup>19</sup>For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.' (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)"<sup>25</sup> (How one interprets this parenthetical comment says a lot of about which of the three hermeneutics options that have been laid out—flat, reversed, or transfigured—they are opting for.)

Jesus continues, "What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup>For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup>adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup>All these evils come from inside and defile a person." In this, and other, engagements with the scholars of His day, Jesus had the ability to engage in sophisticated and legal moral casuistry. But that wasn't His focus like other teachers. Rather than more head knowledge, His teachings were crafted to identify, challenge, and transform matters of the heart.

## Adventism and the Conflict of Interpretations

Jesus *appreciated* all of Scripture, but *read* it prophetically, focusing on how people treat others, especially those on the margins of society, and seeking to transform the character of His listeners. Early on, at its inception, Christianity was clearly a movement based on the teachings of Jesus. The New Testament had not been canonized, so believers were reliant on the teaching of the apostles, who, as students of Jesus, interpreted the Scriptures they did have, the Old Testament, like Jesus—prophetically, ethically, and transformatively. But something shifted as the growing community of Jesus' students encountered competing philosophical and religious groups. Christianity became creedal, more and more about the beliefs one had *about* Jesus than living one's life inspired by the teachings of Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

The number of doctrines that defined what it meant to be a Christian grew like a patch of unruly weeds. In addition to beliefs about God

and Jesus, were eventually added affirmations (and denials) about the precise meaning of Jesus' death, the appropriate mode of baptism, what happens when one takes communion, the best way to organize a church, what happens at the end of the world, the true day of worship, etc. These are all, undoubtedly, important issues. Are they equally important? And how does this way of reading the Bible reflect or relate to the way Jesus read Scripture?

The time has come to rediscover Jesus as a teacher of Scripture and to restore His teaching authority in the church that bears His name. Like most Christians, Adventists believe that God inspired those who wrote the Bible and, through it, has something to say to them. We have approached the Bible with important and interesting questions—returning to George Knight's summary: "What is Adventist in Adventism? What is Christian in Adventism? What is Fundamental in Adventism?" Such questions have led to the discovery of many new insights. It has also generated, as we are aware, many new controversies and debates.

Is it possible, to quote the great theologian Bono, who in "11 o'clock Tick Tock," sings: "We thought that we had the answers, it was the questions we had wrong." Is it possible there are better questions we could have been and could be asking? What if we seriously started asking a different question as individuals and a community—How did, and would, Jesus interpret the Bible?<sup>27</sup> ■



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## Footnotes:

1. George Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000).

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2. Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 269.

3. Gadamer argues that “[r]eason exists only in concrete, historical terms—i.e., it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.” Ibid., 277.

4. Paul Ricoeur, ed. Mark I. Wallace, “Philosophy and Religious Language” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Fortress Press, 1995), 41. Through legislation, wisdom literature, narrative, epistle, hymns, etc., Ricoeur notes, “God appears differently each time: sometimes as the hero of the saving act, sometimes as wrathful and compassionate, sometimes as the one to whom one can speak in a relation of an I-Thou type, and sometimes as the one whom I meet only in a cosmic order that ignores me.”

5. Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 53.

6. Ibid., 55.

7. Ibid., 49. See also Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978).

8. Richard Hayes, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996). Text as quoted by Hayes.

9. Ibid., 190.

10. See John 1:14.

11. According to Origin (c.185–c.254), the dispute between the archangel Michael and the devil over Moses’ body in Jude 9 comes from a treatise entitled: “The Ascension of Moses.”

12. C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, Vol. 34B, (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 37.

13. Ibid., 38.

14. N.T. Wright, “Look at Jesus.” Interview for *The Work of the People*. <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/look-at-jesus>.

15. Paul, according to scholars, was technically the first interpreter of Jesus, as his letters form the earliest writings of the New Testament. Chronology in writing, I am arguing, does not supersede the weight of content, nor does it discount the weight of earlier circulating oral traditions that inform the Gospels.

16. See also, John 1:16, 17: “Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

17. This, of course, would be done with an awareness that we each approach the Gospel texts with our own expectations and interests. Our understandings of Jesus, mediated through the Gospel writers, are interpretations of interpretations. Acknowledging this, and the possible plurality of interpretations that inevitably arise, does not mean that all interpretations are equally legitimate; interpretations of Jesus can still be *evaluated* on the parameters set by the text and, furthermore, *compared* with other interpretations. For a fascinating survey of the way Jesus has been interpreted in

American history, see Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) for a wider historical survey.

18. See Brad H. Young, *Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 28–37. Jon Paulien and the late Hans LaRondelle write: “For a Christian believer, Christ is the true Interpreter of Scripture. His way of understanding the Old Testament, therefore, becomes the true standard for understanding Scripture. Followers of Jesus must be taught by Him, surprised by His personal knowledge of God, and ready to accept His interpretation of the Scriptures...” See Hans K. LaRondelle and Jon Paulien, *The Bible Jesus Interpreted* (Logos Bible Software: 2014), 29.

19. *The Amplified Bible*.

20. Glenn H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2003), 92–3. See also Richard Bauckham, *Jesus: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68–75 for a very helpful overview of Jesus’ interpretive approach to Torah. Richard Hayes also provides a summary in Chapter 7 of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 163–167.

21. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 92–3.

22. Ibid.

23. Bauckham, *Jesus*, 71. See 68–75 for another, similar overview of Jesus’ interpretive approach to Torah.

24. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 92–3.

25. Paul, in Romans 14:14, prior to Mark, also quotes Jesus: “I am convinced, being fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for that person it is unclean.” See also Romans 14:17.

26. Justo Gonzalez summarizes the outcome of the first six major church councils: “In this process, the historical, loving Jesus of the New Testament was left aside, and the Savior had become an object of speculation and controversy; he was now described in terms totally alien to the vocabulary of the New Testament—‘hypostasis,’ ‘nature,’ ‘energy,’ etc.; he had become a static object of discussion rather than the Lord of believers and of history...” See *A History of Christian Thought, Vol. 2*, revised edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 90.

27. An initial version of this essay was presented for the 2017 Adventist Forums Conference on *Celebrating the Word* and I am grateful to the organizers of the conference for the opportunity to share it and the lively conversation with attendees that ensued. Additionally, I am grateful to Dr. Norman Young, who read and offered constructive feedback on the manuscript of my presentation, helping me better understand the dating of and relationship between the Jesus and Pauline traditions of the New Testament (See notes 15 & 23).