



# Reflections

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## **PURPOSE**

*Reflections* is the official newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. It seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors, and teachers.

## **NEWS AND COMMENTS**

### **THE CENTER FOR ADVENTIST RESEARCH**

On Sabbath, April 17, 2004, at 3:00 pm the dedication of the new Center for Adventist Research took place on the first floor of the James White Library at Andrews University.

The Center for Adventist Research combines the resources of the Adventist Heritage Center and the Ellen G. White Estate Branch Office at Andrews University and seeks to promote an understanding and appreciation of the heritage and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its holdings date from before the Millerite period of the 1840s to the present, and encompass items from around the world, among them well over 30,000 books and theses, about 30,000 other text materials, and 12,600 microforms.

Periodical resources include more than 20,000 volumes of English and non-English SDA titles. With nearly 2400 different periodical titles, which include 800 current titles from around the world, it is the finest and most complete collection of its kind in existence. In addition there are large numbers of official church publications and records, personal papers collections, e.g., from William Miller, sound and motion recordings, photographic materials and images, artifacts and memorabilia, and rare materials and

other collections. One of these collections is the Suhrie Bible collection, that includes a William Tyndale New Testament, several Torah scrolls, reproductions of the Gutenberg Bible and the Codex Vaticanus, and a copy of Bishop James Ussher's Chronology, to name but a few of the titles.

As a Branch Office of the White Estate, the Center contains extensive resources for Ellen G. White studies. The collection of unpublished letters and manuscripts of Ellen White consists of extensive original copies (many with Ellen White's handwritten interlineations and signatures) as well as photocopies of over 50,000 typewritten pages covering the period from 1845 to 1915. The White Estate Document File consists of more than eighty-five drawers filled with thousands of topically arranged folders, containing articles, correspondence, term papers, etc. on Ellen White and Adventist history. In addition, researchers have available Ellen White's office and family correspondence, as well as various research aids, such as the Ellen G. White Biographical Index and the Question and Answer File which contains answers to many questions asked over the years.

The dedication service included a brief history of the Center by Larry Onsager, dean of the Andrews University Libraries, remarks by Niels-Erik Andreasen, president of Andrews University, on the value of the Center for the university, and a brief survey on the value of the Center for the world church by James R. Nix, director of the

Ellen G. White Estate. Patricia Mutch, vice president for academic administration led out in the dedication reading and George R. Knight, professor of church history at the Theological Seminary, offered the dedication prayer. Following the dedication service, participants were invited to view the exhibits and tour the Center.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

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## STATEMENTS ON FAITH AND SCIENCE FROM THE DIVISIONS

During 2003 and the first part of 2004 several Divisions have held Faith and Science Conferences in their territories. The participants have been church administrators, religion teachers, and scientists. A number of these Conferences produced consensus statements describing the understanding of the participants of some of the fundamental issues and where they collectively stand with respect to them and the biblical doctrine of creation. We share those statements with you not only to keep you informed concerning developments in the field of science and faith within the church, but particularly to motivate you to study them and join in the reaffirmation of our commitment to the biblical doctrine of creation.

In general, the statements share a number of common features. I am referring to two of them in this article. First, they all recognize the importance of exploring the tensions and challenges that the church confronts in the field of faith and science. They imply that since we exist in a scientific era we have no choice but to interact with the data and its scientific interpretation. Second, they acknowledge that at the present time the scientific interpretation of the data and some aspects of the data itself are difficult to reconcile with the biblical description of the origin of life on the planet. There is a conflict between scientific theories of origins along the lines of natural evolution and the doctrine of creation. Third, the statements also establish that the participants are willing to live with that tension while at the same time giving priority to the biblical understanding of origins. We hope that access to this information may be of help to you in your respective fields. The following are statements drafted by the representatives of the South Africa-Indian Ocean Division and the Euro-Africa Division.

### *I. Faith and Science Conference: Affirmations and Recommendations--South Africa-Indian Ocean Division, 2003*

The church, in the fulfillment of its mission, confronts a world in which science plays a significant role in defining the understanding of the natural world in

terms of natural evolution. In that setting it is impossible for the church to ignore the issues raised by science in the area of origins and the challenges they pose to the Adventist biblical doctrine of creation. The fact that the theory of evolution in the form of theistic evolution is already impacting a small number of Adventist theologians and scientists makes it absolutely necessary for the church to reaffirm its doctrine of creation. This reaffirmation should include the following elements:

1. *God the Creator:* We believe that the transcendent God of love through His Son, our Lord, brought into existence the universe and everything in it as an expression of love. Everything He created was very good in nature and function. Although He chose to dwell among His creatures, He is not part of the created universe but sustains and preserves it through the power of His word. He is the personal God who after the fall of humans into sin sent His Son to restore us to fellowship with Him.
2. *Creation in Seven Literal Days:* We uphold the literal, historical, and theological interpretation of Gen 1-2. Such a reading provides a solid and unique foundation for the Sabbath commandment and for humans the duty to submit in humble obedience to it. During the week of creation, on the sixth day, God created the human race in His own image. When humans came out of the hand of the Lord they existed in perfect harmony with God, with each other, and with the natural world. Death and suffering were not part of their existence. We also maintain that when science is properly interpreted it will be in perfect harmony with the biblical account of creation.
3. *Sin Damaged God's Creation:* We uphold the literal and historical interpretation of Genesis 2-3. The fall of humans into sin transferred the cosmic controversy to our planet and distorted nature and the human ability to correctly understand it. Unaided reason cannot apprehend the power and wisdom of God revealed in the natural world. Left to ourselves and to our rationality we will never be able to uncover our origin and destiny. God's revelation in the written word must take precedence over scientific conclusions and theories. Confronted with a real or imaginary conflict between faith and science we must uphold the biblical teaching on the subject.
4. *Universal Flood:* We uphold the literal and historical interpretation of Gen 1-11. The universal extent of the flood is clearly taught in Scripture and helps us to understand the history of life on our planet. The evidence of catastrophism found throughout the world is to be interpreted in terms of the universal flood.
5. *The Role of Ellen G White in the Adventist Understanding of Origins:* While we affirm Scripture as our rule of faith and practice, we also recognize that God

has spoken to His remnant people through the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. Her reaffirmation of the biblical doctrine of creation in six literal days, of God's rest on the seventh day, and of the universal flood confirms the correctness of our commitment to the biblical teaching in those extremely important areas. Her reaffirmation of a short chronology as taught in the Bible excludes the long periods of times required by natural evolution for the development of life on our planet.

We recognize that Adventist theologians and scientists are not able to answer all the questions raised by the scientific evidence used to support natural evolution and that at the present time they experience some tension between science and the biblical doctrine of creation. But we also know that the evolutionary theory is not able to satisfactorily explain all the scientific evidence, e.g., the origin of human consciousness. We therefore expect Adventist theologians and scientists to uphold the Adventist doctrine of creation in the midst of scientific uncertainty and not to allow science to determine or modify the biblical doctrine of creation.

## II. *Final Statement of the International Faith and Science Conference--Euro-Africa Division, 2004*

At the initiative of the Euro-Africa Division a group of forty-six Seventh-day Adventist scientists, theologians and church leaders and two non-Adventist scholars met at Friedensau Adventist University in Germany from March 26-30, 2004, for a dialogue on faith and science issues. This International Faith and Science Conference (IFSC-EUD2004), the first of its kind in Europe, is one of several such meetings in various divisions. The conference provided a starting point for a dialogue on questions, both in theology and science, that challenge the European Seventh-day Adventist Church's understanding and exegesis of the biblical narratives regarding the origin of the earth and its varied life forms. Reconsideration or revision of the Adventist's teaching regarding creation was not the focus or purpose of this conference.

The Seventh-day Adventist view of origins (life and the universe) as the result of creation by God is in tension with the modern world view that explains existence on the basis of wholly natural and random events over long ages. The participants at this conference affirm the following:

- Faith in God, the Creator, and belief in the Bible record is fundamental to Christianity and to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Creation serves as an anchor point in Seventh-day Adventist theology, ethics, lifestyle, and understanding of reality.
- The message of creation is not only restricted to Gen 1 to 11, it is a message throughout the whole Bible.

Old and New Testament texts dealing with creation must be studied more closely in order to better understand them. Based on the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, employed by the Seventh-day Adventist church, presentations delivered at this conference provided a creative approach for understanding biblical texts in an enlarged faith-affirming perspective.

- A creation/flood model should inspire us to look at scientific data in new ways.
- Alternatives to the evolutionary model are being developed, based on creation and the great flood. Aspects from different sciences, such as geology, paleontology, biology, archaeology, and anthropology offer the perspective of new hypotheses that are non-evolutionistic.
- Creation is not only descriptive but also prescriptive, e.g., marriage and the Sabbath.
- Effective dialog on the tensions between world views (faith in creation and evolutionism) needs to proceed on a broader basis than simply apologetics and anti-evolution rhetoric.
- The scientific process of finding knowledge is the same for all who do scientific research, both those who adopt evolution and those who adopt creation.
- In its methodology, science is irreplaceable, but not without errors.
- A great need is felt for an improved and more efficient communication and cooperation between institutions, associations, and organizations supporting creation, inside and outside the Seventh-day Adventist church.
- The argument of "intelligent design" is accepted. However, it is an anti-evolutionistic argument which does not require a Christian creator.
- This IFSC-EUD2004 was a good starting point; it is necessary that discussion and further studies continue.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

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## **ECOLOGICAL ZONATION: THEORY, PROBLEMS, AND PERSPECTIVES**

Harold Willard Clark was an Adventist pioneer in the study of the fossil record who was decades ahead of his time within the creationist community and as we shall see, with respect to the geologic community as well. Clark lived from 1891-1986. He was a professor of biology and geology at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California. Author of *The New Diluvialism* in 1946, Clark began formulating his theory of Ecological Zonation (EZ) after a trip to the oil fields of Texas and

Oklahoma where he observed fossil sequences in well cores recovered from oil and gas wells. His intense study of Phanerozoic organisms (the fossil record) ensued.

The result of Clark's trip to the oil fields is well known within the Adventist community. A rift developed between Dr. Clark and George McCready Price who did not accept order in the fossil record for many years. Clark maintains that Price, in later publication, "did not propose to do away with the orderly classification of the rocks that had been and was being developed" (Clark p.62). In his development of the EZ Theory, Clark postulated a direct creation by an omniscient Creator and believed the following assumptions to be unavoidable: 1) The earth's surface was diversified by mountains, plains, lakes, seas and streams. 2) These environments would have many different types of plants and animals. 3) Flora and fauna would be grouped into communities that in a broader aspect would constitute the major life zones. 4) Based on his understanding that the Creator pronounced the creation "very good," Clark assumed that structural features and life zones would be closely correlated. Lastly, he believed a more complete series of organisms existed pre-Flood than today (Clark p.71). Based on these assumptions the EZ Theory suggests that the order of fossils in sedimentary basins reflects landscapes sequentially eroded by rising Flood waters.

The most stunning aspect of Clark's position is his appeal to modern analogues in support of his theory. In Clark's discussion of various organisms he appealed to catastrophic, modern analogues, "Here again is a plain example of ecological zonation, if one interprets the past in terms of the present rather than in terms of an *a priori* theory" (Clark p.73). The geologic community would not begin to accept catastrophic modern analogues for another 30 years! Today geologists, as actualists, use catastrophic modern analogues to interpret the past. Indeed, geologists have been compelled to redefine uniformitarianism ("the present is the key to the past") as actualism ("what you see is what you get").

There has been much discussion in the Adventist church about sequences of small land mammals and the inadequacy of the EZ Theory to explain such order in the record. Clark used modern examples to explain these phenomena. He discusses the rabbits of the western United States as well as the weasel family, arguing, "Anyone finding these [referring to the living organisms] as fossils would be able to prepare as convincing evidence of their evolution as has been done for the Tertiary mammals. And yet there is absolutely no proof that one has evolved from another or all from common stock" (Clark p.78). In this discussion, Clark seems to be addressing the variation of species without evaluating

the stratigraphic sequence. However, he does address the difficulty of correlation, citing H. F. Osborn's *The Age of Mammals*, "Tertiary fossils are found largely in scattered basins, surrounded by mountains and volcanic peaks. The deposits are largely of volcanic ash, although the manner of deposition is not well understood" (Clark p.74). Later in the book he acknowledges the Gulf Coast Tertiary deposits which are laid down "in long narrow lines along a shallow sea" (Clark p.131). The point being that Clark was aware of that sequence and saw it as evidence of materials sequentially washed down from the highlands. In defense of his theory, Clark refers to the repeated references in the literature to incomplete ecological relationships in a variety of systems. Indeed, post-flood Pleistocene deposits with extinct animals, we know little about, occur in deposits that are difficult to interpret. With such a poor understanding of the more recent material, how can we expect to more fully understand the more complex deposition and destruction found in the lower units?

At present, we need to recognize that the scenario is even more complex than it was presented by Clark. There are difficulties in taxonomy of extinct plants because different parts of the same plant have been given different names. For example, *Lepidodendron* is the name for the trunk of a tree fern; *Lepidophylloides* is the name for the leaves; *Lepidostrobus* is the name for the cones; but the term *Stigmaria* is the name for the roots of the same plant because originally the connection between the roots and the stem was not known. In some cases, such as *Lepidodendron*, some very fortunate finds were made fairly early and the plant, for the most part, was better understood. This is not the case with all of the plants which are often drawn without roots or canopy in the case of some of the fern trees or with much of the extinct invertebrate fauna. Adults, juveniles, males, females, life stage morphologies are all difficult to ascertain, and these problems complicate the taxonomy of fossil sequences. Gigantism and dwarfism also contribute to the complications within the fossil record. Adding to the complexity, are the plant extinctions that are not synchronous with the extinction events of the animal kingdom. Despite all the complexity to be found in the geologic record, Clark asks his readers, "When will geologists go all the way and accept the natural conclusion, that the whole geological series simply represents the ecological arrangement of a world which was complete as a unit, and not strung out throughout age after age of time?" (Clark p.80).

In a letter to *Science*, Dr. David M. Raup at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago stated: "One of the ironies of the evolution-creation debate is that the creationists have accepted the mistaken notion that the

fossil record shows a detailed and orderly progression and they have gone to great lengths to accommodate this ‘fact’ in their flood geology” (Raup, 1981). Note that this is not an Adventist response but rather, this comment comes from one of America’s better known paleontologists. He is not referring simply to the order in the record but rather to the order of fossil links that evolutionary biologists hope to find. In the view of some, things have improved somewhat for evolutionists since this statement was made. Nevertheless, his point is well taken, i.e., in the fossil sequences most scientists see a hierarchy of primitive to modern characters in the organisms but this hierarchy may not represent reality at the time of deposition. In Clark’s view, the sequences in the fossil record may not represent long age sequences but rather sequential burial of organisms during the Genesis flood that we have not as yet, adequately explained.

Recognizing the differences in the pre-Flood ecologies relative to modern ecologies, the theory works well in general with marine organisms suddenly appearing and dominating the lower part of the record, followed by a wide variety of terrestrial organisms that suddenly appear together higher in the record and may represent lowland life forms. It is important to remember that the fossil sequences actually do not record the sudden appearance of life forms but rather, the sequence represents a record of death. Most researchers believe the first occurrence of a fossil in the rock record marks the beginning of that organism’s existence in the long chronology proposed for this earth’s history. Many creationists believe that the first appearance of a species represents that point in time during the Genesis flood that a particular group of organisms began dying. Thus, interpretation of this record of death is highly complex. Complicating factors for Flood geology in the sequence include escape motility of organisms, transport and sorting, bloat and float properties, etc. Perhaps this is the primary reason the ecological zones are not complete in the fossil record.

The order in the fossil record seems problematic for creationists and although the theory of ecological zonation was proposed in response to this issue, the sequences remain problematic. Recognition that pre-Flood ecologies were very different from the ecologies we have today, and acceptance of the fact that our visions of global Flood activity may not reflect the reality, should encourage researchers to study the theory of ecological zonation more carefully as well as to encourage exploration of alternative theories within the context of a literal understanding of the creation account and a short chronological history for life on this planet.

#### References:

Clark, H. W. 1946. *The New Diluvialism*: Science Publication, Angwin, CA, 222p.

Raup, D. M. 1981. Evolution and the Fossil Record: Letter to Science, *Science* 213:289.

Roth, A. A. 1998. *Origins-Linking Science and Scripture*: Review & Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, MD, 384p.

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### THE GREAT CONTROVERSY EXPERIENCE: FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANITY CD-ROM

The Great Controversy Experience: First Century Christianity by P. Gerard Damsteegt (Berrien Springs, MI: Christian Heritage Media, 2004) is a cross platform interactive multimedia CD-ROM for Windows and Macintosh. The price is \$59.99, and it is available from the Adventist Book Center or [www.christianheritagemedia.com](http://www.christianheritagemedia.com).

This interactive CD-ROM deals with the history of the Christian church and portrays the experience of God’s people during the first century of Christianity in the light of a historicist view of Bible prophecy. It focuses on the conflict between Jesus Christ and His followers with the Jewish Nation and the Roman Empire.

The opening scene introduces you to a virtual museum of the history of the Christian Church. The CD-ROM depicts the experience of the New Testament Christians through 3D scenes, original music, 360-degree virtual panoramas, maps, timelines, and artistic displays. In the museum lobby you have several choices: The galleries, library, maps, and helpdesk.

Selecting the galleries leads you to four major displays: The Jesus Display, the Church of the Apostles Display, the Destruction of Jerusalem Display, and the Early Persecutions Display. These four scenes were chosen because they give you the best insight into the most significant events of first century Christianity.

The Jesus Display introduces you to the prophecies of His birth, ministry, death, and resurrection, revealing the extraordinary nature of the Founder of the Christian church and His claims to be the Savior of the world. The Apostles Display gives you insights into the ministry of the apostles from the time Jesus taught them until the end of the first century AD. The Destruction of Jerusalem Display gives a detailed explanation of the fulfillment of the prophecies about the fall of the Jewish capital in AD 70. The Persecutions Display portrays the earliest persecutions Christians experienced from the Jews, Herodian kings, and Roman Emperors Nero and Domitian.

Going from the lobby to the library brings you to a desk with several books: *The Wars of the Jews* by Josephus, *The Great Controversy* by E. G. White, and *The Encyclopedia of Persons, Places, Events, and Sources*. *The Wars of the Jews* is a vivid eyewitness account of the Roman Jewish War of AD 66-70 and lets you experience the details of the dramatic fulfillment of Bible prophecies about the fall of Jerusalem. The Great Controversy chapter on the destruction of Jerusalem is narrated and beautifully illustrated.

The Encyclopedia of Persons, Places, Events, and Sources provides information on the major personalities, places, and events that have played a significant role in prophecies dealing with the world empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, the nation of Israel, and the early Christians. Special efforts have been made to incorporate primary sources from ancient historians to give as accurate a picture as possible of this period.

Bibliographical sources are generally listed at the end of the encyclopedia articles. Extensive work has been done to incorporate some of the best available works on prophecy. The criteria for the works cited are historical accuracy and spirituality. Our purpose, therefore, is to provide not only historical facts but also to reveal their spiritual significance and relevance for today. The sources in the library provide full bibliographic information on all materials and places used in the CD-ROM, which include books, graphics, coins, sculptures, paintings, images, photos, as well as museums, churches, and archaeological sites.

From the lobby and library you can access a collection of maps covering the empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Maps of Palestine display its geography and political borders from the time the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity until the end of the first century AD. Maps of Paul's missionary journeys, his visit to Rome, the Roman Forum, and his final trip to prison and place of execution conclude this section.

There are six timelines with artistic icons that picture the place of God's people among the nations of the world: From 650 BC until 63 BC, from 63 BC until AD 100, the life of Jesus Christ from c. 5 BC until AD 31, the final week of Jesus' ministry, the church of the Apostles from AD 27 – 100, and events related to the fall of Jerusalem from AD 66 until 71. The timelines provide valuable historical background for the study of the prophecies of Daniel 2, 7, 8, 9 and 11. Clicking on an icon takes you to the related article in the encyclopedia.

The CD-ROM is a very useful tool for anyone with an interest in the study of the Great Controversy theme

and prophecies about Jesus as the Messiah and the Savior of the world, the conflicts in the New Testament church, the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and the persecutions of Jesus and His followers. It also provides the basic framework and foundation of the historicist interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy that was used by early Christians and the Protestant Reformers.

The production of the CD-ROM involved close teamwork between author, artist, musician, multimedia programmer, photographers, editors, and researchers and took about eight years to develop. As time and finances permit, more CD-ROMs will be produced.

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## IRONY IN SCRIPTURE

Irony is not only encountered in every-day life, we also find it in Scripture. "In common parlance, irony is the statement of one thing with the intention of suggesting something else. . . . Ironic incongruity underlines both the teachings of Jesus . . . and his fate . . . . As literature the scriptures are also filled with dramatic irony, in which the reader knows what the characters do not . . . ."<sup>1</sup>

After the flood God promised not to send a worldwide flood again. But humans built a tower, maybe as a refuge for a future flood, to reach up to heaven and to make themselves a name. In spite of the gigantic building it was so little that God had to come down from heaven in order to be able to see it (Gen 11:5). The situation is described in ironic terms. When Nathan encountered David after his sins of adultery and murder and told him a story, unknowingly David condemned himself. Jonah could not escape God, and at the end he was fulfilling the commission which he hated and from which he was running. Peter claimed that he would defend Jesus with his own life. Yet he denied the Lord and fled (Mark 14:30). Paul appealed to Caesar in order not to be handed over to the Jews and be killed (Acts 25:11). However, at the end he was killed by Caesar. The Bible is full of irony.

### *Irony in the Life of Jesus*

Unintentionally, the Jewish leadership of Jesus' time made statements that were meant to be derogatory, and yet these very statements contain deep insights in the plan of salvation and Jesus' life and ministry. According to Luke 15:2 the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." But this negative statement contains very good news. Because of what Jesus has done sinners like us have a chance.

In John 11:50 Caiaphas, the high priest, exclaimed at a council of the leadership in Jerusalem: “It is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.” John goes on to explain the irony of the situation in the next two verses.

There are strange sayings of Jesus. In the parable of the workers in the vineyard, those who have started working last receive their wages first. And those who have worked for one hour receive the same amount as do those who have worked twelve hours. “The last will be first and the first last” (Matt 20:16). “Blessed are you poor . . .” (Luke 6:20). “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.” (Mark 8:35). Jesus’ life and fate is ironic. As the Messiah, the king of peace, who lived to serve and save others he is crucified. The crucifixion of the Savior is an irony.

### *Irony in Mark 15:31*

The Gospel of Mark also has its share of irony. “In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes, were mocking Him among themselves and saying, ‘He saved others; He cannot save Himself’” (Mark 15:31).

The word translated “to save” can also be rendered “to deliver” or “to heal.” Before Jesus was born the angel declared that “He will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). In desperation during a storm the disciples exclaimed: “Save us, Lord; we are perishing!” (Matt 8:25), and Jesus stilled the storm. Jesus met people or they came to Him to be healed (Mark 3:4; 5:23, 28, 34; 6:56). Demoniacs were healed and delivered (Luke 8:36). Jesus raised a dead girl, but before doing that He promised her father that He would make her well again (Luke 8:50). Yet Jesus was not just concerned with physical healing, He brought about salvation for the individuals He met. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus’ enemies acknowledged that He had helped and healed others. But they claimed that He could not save himself.

Could Jesus have left the cross and saved himself? Sure, He could have called to His help myriads of angels (Matt 26:53). He who had the power to lay down His life and who had the authority to take it up again (John 10:18), would not have had any problem to pull out the nails from the cross and ascend to heaven. So, the priests and scribes were wrong. Jesus had the power to save himself.

But again we ask: Could Jesus have left the cross and saved himself? And this time we have to answer: No. Because He was determined to save others, He could not save Himself. For Jesus it was an either-or situation

not a both-and choice. Either He saved humanity or He saved Himself. Either Jesus died for us so that we might be free, or He saved Himself, and we have to face eternal death. Because Jesus is in the business of saving humans, because He loves humanity too much, He could not save Himself. So, after all, the priests and scribes were right, unknowingly. They made a statement about Jesus’ nature and character which they themselves did not understand and comprehend. Their pejorative remark was correct. This is irony. Our salvation is ironic. “He saved others; He cannot save Himself.”

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1. R.N. Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, third edition (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 2001), 88-89.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

## ***FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE***

### **MATTHEW 9:35-38**

Matthew 9:37-38 presents a great motivational text for getting church members involved in evangelism. It deserves some attention during this year of evangelism.

Matthew 9:35 depicts a period of restless activity of teaching, preaching, and healing by Jesus in the cities of Galilee. One key result of this extended period of exposure to the people was Jesus’ “gut reaction” which Matthew describes with the use of the vivid word “compassion” in verse 36 (NASB). Jesus is moved to this reaction by a sense of need that he perceived among the people, and Matthew captures this need with the metaphor of *sheep without a shepherd*. By elaborating on the metaphor, the text states that the people were distressed and downcast.

The absence of Moses (Num 27:17) or a king (1 Kings 22:17) would constitute Israel as *sheep without a shepherd*, although when Israel had unfaithful shepherds (i.e., religious leaders) God himself became Israel’s shepherd to gather them together, feed them, and give them rest (Eze 34:11-16). *Sheep without a shepherd* may bring to view a lack of political leadership, but in the context of our text it is the lack of spiritual care and guidance that is in focus. The lives of the people whom Jesus met in His ministry throughout the cities and villages of Galilee were aimless, “centerless,” and futile.

A distressed, downcast people, with no spiritual guidance, gave rise to one great spur to urgency (9:37-38). Jesus describes the spiritually destitute, aimless, and “centerless” crowd as a “plentiful *harvest*,” and by implication, ripe. Obviously, the Old Testament picture of *harvest* as the coming judgment (Isa 27:12; Hos 6:11;

Joel 3:13) has given way, in this context, to the thought of people's readiness to accept the gospel. The readiness of the Galileans to respond to the good news of the kingdom created a strategic evangelistic opportunity that required urgent action. Indeed, this opportunity may provide a partial answer to Jesus' rather startling restriction of the disciples' missionary activity, in this instance, to Israel (Matt 10:5-6).

In the face of what clearly presented itself as a great potential evangelistic opportunity, Jesus makes a grim assessment of the prospect of an actual harvest; and the reason is simply a paucity of laborers (verse 38). The "laborers" are men sent out to rescue others from judgment. The method proposed by Jesus to have this deficiency rectified speaks to the nature of the scarcity of "laborers": Prayer should be made to the Lord of the harvest to *thrust forth* laborers into His harvest, because laboring in the harvest does not seem to be a natural human disposition. Laborers for the harvest come about as a result of divine prompting and urging.

The significance of this passage for a year of evangelism is quite illuminating: a strategic evangelistic opportunity requires a divinely qualified and energized "labor force." First, it is not unusual during times of evangelistic emphasis to fall back on standard, formerly tried methods and strategies. The net is usually cast into familiar waters with more or less standard results, which is all well and good. But the insight from our passage that the spiritually destitute and centerless constitute a *harvest* should spur us on to creative strategic evangelistic planning at a time of immense spiritual and theological upheaval. It is crucial to identify "harvest ripe" populations whether among postmodernists or the spiritually deprived segments of contemporary culture. Second, our passage draws attention to the kind of preparatory work needed in order to meet the challenge of effectively reaping the harvest. The need for reapers requires the involvement of real people. Money and prayers will be needed, but they cannot take the place of men and women engaged in harvesting. More importantly, these men and women "laborers" may not undertake the work at hand simply on the basis of experience, training, or proven methods, important as they may be. Success will come about as "laborers" petition the Lord, whose harvest it is, to qualify, motivate, and inspire and thereby *thrust them forth* into the harvest.

Kwabena Donkor,  
Ontario Conference

## SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

### FIVE PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

The most important decision in life is the decision to accept Jesus as personal Savior and Lord. With this

decision of faith a completely new life begins. For our physical life we need air, food, rest, and exercise in order to develop our capacities, grow, and maintain a healthy life. Principles for growth are also found in the spiritual realm. If we follow them, we will become mature Christians and enjoy our fellowship with Christ.

#### I. *First Principle: Reading the Bible*

There are very few persons who would not want to eat for a week or a day. Food is necessary to stay alive. Being without food for some time makes us feeble and sick. Lack of spiritual food has the same effects on our spiritual life. Therefore, we read God Word's on a daily basis.

1 Pet 1:23; 2:2

Matt 4:4

Psalm 1:1-3

Jos 1:8

#### II. *Second Principle: Praying*

Prayer is a dialogue with our loving heavenly Father. Oftentimes weakness of character can be attributed to a lack of prayer. When it feels most difficult to pray, we should pray most. Therefore, we daily approach God in prayer.

Matt 26:40-75 - Prayer and its results.

1Thess 5:17 - To pray without ceasing means that during the day our thoughts turn to God again and again and we just talk to him freely and openly.

Psalm 50:15 - This text has been called God's phone number.

#### III. *Third Principle: Seeking Fellowship with Other Christians*

Fellowship means to spend time with others who also love Christ. A pile of logs normally allows for a good fire. If, however, one log is separated from the others the fire on that log goes out soon. Likewise, Christians must support each other and stand together, otherwise the fire of their enthusiasm will soon be extinguished. Fellowship is essential for Christian growth. Therefore, we belong to a church and are actively involved in it.

Heb 10:23-25

Acts 2:42, 46

#### IV. *Fourth Principle: Bearing Witness*

A witness is a person who testifies what he or she has seen and heard. A witness shares his or her own personal experience. Whoever has a living and personal relationship with Christ can be a witness for Him. A genuine Christian life is contagious. Therefore, we cannot abstain from talking about Jesus.



Rom 1:14-16

1 Pet 3:15

Acts 1:8

It is a privilege and the responsibility of each Christian to reach their neighbors and all humanity with Christ's wonderful message.

#### V. *Fifth Principle: Being Obedient*

The key to rapid spiritual growth is immediate obedience as soon as we recognize what God's will is. It would be unwise to disobey the one who really loves us and who alone knows what is best for us. God desires that we live a meaningful and successful life. Therefore, we obey God always.

Matt 6:24; 22:37

John 14:21; 15:10

1John 2:6

Phil 2:13

Luke 6:46-49

#### *Summary*

These five principles help us to stay in contact with Jesus Christ and grow spiritually. The first two refer to our relationship with the Lord. Through Scripture God communicates with us. Through prayer we talk to God. The next two principles bear on our relationship with humans. In fellowship we enjoy interchange and unity with Christian brothers and sisters. In witnessing we pass on the good news about Jesus to others. Obedience is directed toward God but oftentimes it also affects our fellow human beings. If we follow these principles, joy, peace, love, and fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ will increase.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

## **BOOK NOTES**

Knight, George R. *Exploring Mark: A Devotional Commentary*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004. 302 pp. \$16.99.

This is the second volume of the Devotional Commentary Series and it is also written by George Knight. The first volume was on Hebrews. This new work surpasses the other in length by almost fifty pages. *Exploring Mark* is a concise treatment of Mark's Gospel and provides good background information. The author has managed to give insights into the issues as to how passages relate to each other and are structured. Boxes throughout the book catch the attention of the audience and entice users to read at least certain segments.

Again no verse references are provided for the 61 sections of the book aside from the verse indications for

the paragraphs found in the headings. Some passages are not treated sufficiently and details are missing which might have been of great interest to the reader. Furthermore, it seems that more space is devoted to verses or small passages in the beginning of the book than towards the end. But this has to be expected because this commentary is not an exegetical but a homiletical work, which also explains the use of illustrations.

Against the witness of the early church fathers Knight accepts Markan priority claiming that Mark was the first of the canonical Gospels that was written. He wrestles with the different endings of the book. Here and there he also points out differences between the synoptic Gospels (synoptic problem) but conclusions are normally not drawn, and we do not know where the author stands with regard to these critical questions. But again that may not be necessary, especially not in a devotional commentary. There are a few cases in which this reviewer would have some questions or would have wished to find balancing statements, for example when the issue of science and Scripture is mentioned (110) or when the human needs come in conflict with divine law (79-80). On page 116 A. McLaren is quoted who speaks about "the awful picture of the demoniac" calling it "painted from life" or "one of the most wonderful feats of the poetic imagination." A sentence clarifying this statement would have been helpful.

But overall this is a wonderful work, easy to read and yet not superficial, which allows readers to gain a deeper understanding of the shortest of the canonical gospels.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

Jon Paulien. *The Deep Things of God*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004. 176 pp. \$14.99.

We are accustomed to getting from Jon Paulien useful materials on the interpretation of the book of Revelation and this volume is no exception. It is basically a guide to the study of the book and the principles of biblical interpretation that will help the investigator obtain a proper understanding of it. In fact, Paulien has provided for us an introduction to biblical interpretation in general with particular application to the book of Revelation. There is a brief introduction to Revelation and its first century setting. A long chapter addresses the question of biblical prophecy and examines materials from Genesis and the prophetic literature—not from Genesis to Revelation as was intended by the author—to obtain from them biblical principles of interpretation. That section deserves a careful evaluation that we cannot provide in this short review. Distinctions are made between biblical exegesis, biblical theology and systematic

theology and the importance of those distinctions in the hermeneutical process. The material dealing with the interpretation of the writings of E. G. White and their use in the interpretation of Revelation is very valuable. Furthermore, Paulien has provided useful discussions on the literary structure of Revelation, its use of the OT materials, its relation to the rest of the NT, and the role of the sanctuary scenes.

At a very fundamental level, Paulien's book is challenging. He is in fact suggesting a methodological way of reading Revelation that appears to be significantly different from the one Adventists are using. That may explain why he did not interact with other Adventist scholars who have written on the interpretation of biblical apocalyptic literature. At the present time it is difficult to determine the full impact of his approach on the traditional Adventist interpretation of Revelation. In the interpretation of that book Adventists thus far have employed the historicist method. This method acknowledges that some of the prophecies of Revelation have already been fulfilled, others are being fulfilled and the rest will be fulfilled in the future. Paulien is suggesting that in the interpretation of Revelation we need an eclectic approach that will incorporate methods as diverse and sometimes as contradictory as preterism, futurism, historicism, and idealism. He wants to approach the text of Revelation anew, through an objective exegetical analysis that will allow it to speak for itself. He gives

the impression that in the exegetical task one can set aside all pre-understandings and be totally objective. But the truth is that he himself begins with a very powerful presupposition, namely that in the interpretation of Revelation we have to use different methodologies and that the exegetical task will help determine which method is applicable to specific sections of the book. Those distinctions are difficult to maintain in the interpretation of any piece of literature.

We must ask on what grounds did he conclude that the use of different methods is indispensable for a correct interpretation of Revelation, and that the methods to be used are the ones he has identified? He did not raise that question and yet it deals with an issue of fundamental importance for the way he is going to read and interpret Revelation. Adventists have correctly claimed that the use of the historicist approach in the interpretation of Revelation is justifiable because that is the method the interpreting angel provided for Daniel, and it has shown itself to be extremely useful in decoding Revelation. A significant change in the Adventist approach to Revelation faces in the long run the risk of replacing a biblical methodology with human ones. Whatever Paulien is trying to tell us, the least we can say is that his approach raises serious concerns. Time will tell whether they are justified or not.

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