

## *PURPOSE*

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*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.

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## *NEWS AND COMMENTS*

### **THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE GOES TO AFRICA**

In December 2004 the BRI staff met with an ad hoc committee at Valley View University, Accra, Ghana. This committee was organized by the African Divisions to deal with issues of a spiritualistic nature that affect the churches in Africa. The idea to begin a dialogue came about as a result of a rather unexpected interest in a paper on magic presented by Dr. Brempong Owusu-Antwi at the Faith and Science Conference in the Ivory Coast organized earlier in 2004. Drs. Andrews L. Ewo and B. Owusu-Antwi impressed upon Dr. Angel M. Rodríguez, Director of BRI, who happened to be in attendance at the conference, the need to hold a special meeting to examine the issues on spiritualistic manifestations and their impact on our churches in Africa. The result was the convening of a committee which brought together theologians, administrators, and departmental leaders from the three African Divisions, Will Eva, the editor of *Ministry* magazine, and the BRI staff. In a way, the conference at Valley View was historic, being the first of its kind on the African continent.

Following two days of intense brainstorming and reflections on the issues, the group came up with fourteen topics on the subject, to be dealt with in papers that will be presented mostly by African

theologians at a future meeting in Africa. The topics identified ranged from magic through witchcraft to ancestor worship. The papers on these topics will seek to discuss the biblical view on these matters and recommend appropriate practical, personal, and pastoral ways of responding to the problems the church faces. There was a general feeling among the participants that these discussions will be of great value not only to the church in Africa, but to the church worldwide.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

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### **POLITICIZATION OF RELIGION IN AMERICA**

The Public Relations and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference has consistently worked to prevent efforts designed to make churches the surrogates for political parties. These efforts take place around the world. One such effort is currently playing out in the United States. In this struggle we face serious odds as the White House is firmly in favor of passing a law that would allow political parties to recruit churches to join their party machines and use churches as political party cells to further their political agendas. The bill in question is not a bill with wide support among churches. Rather, it is a bill designed by politicians, for politicians, at the expense of the integrity of churches. So far we have prevailed against a very well coordinated, powerful effort in 2004. No doubt, we'll face it again this year.

We also have some major challenges coming up at the U.S. Supreme Court this year. Maybe one of the most serious is the challenge to the Religious Land Use & Institutionalized Persons Act. In 1990 the U.S. Supreme Court reinterpreted the freedom of religion provision in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. No longer, the Court stated, would the government be required to provide a “compelling interest” before placing a burden on religious freedom. Now, the Court declared, all the government must show when it inhibits the free exercise of religion is that the government did not directly intend to violate someone’s religious freedom and that the law or action in question applies to everyone. This ruling opened the door to significant governmental abuse of people of faith. The two areas initially impacted by the U.S. Supreme Court’s weakening of the protection for religious freedom, was zoning for churches and religious activities in prisons.

Zoning laws govern if a building can be built, whether it can be altered, and how a building may be used. After the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision, municipalities increasingly passed zoning laws that ensured that churches could not build in their communities. Of course the laws did not target churches specifically. Rather, following the Supreme Courts lead, the laws were written to apply to everyone equally – at least in theory – but the net effect was that more and more often congregations trying to build a church in their community were refused the right to do so. In other cases, churches were prohibited from renovating their buildings. Some communities even banned churches from providing charitable services from their church because they did not want the poor coming to their community for help. Because all of this was done with laws that did not appear on their face to be aimed at churches and that applied to everyone equally, they could be enforced under the U.S. Supreme Court’s new weak interpretation of what the state must do to ensure freedom of religion for its citizens.

A similar problem developed in some prisons. For example some prisons enforced rules that limited prisoners access to literature. This made it very difficult to get Bible studies, inspirational books, and other types of religious literature to prisoners. It is hard to believe this happened—after all, the point of prison is to reform prisoners, and there is no force capable of reforming the human heart equal to the power of the Holy Spirit—but it did.

In response to these problems, the U.S. Congress passed the Religious Land Use & Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA). RLUIPA mandated that before local governments could ban churches and other houses of worship from building a new structure, altering their

building for their needs, providing help to the poor, or using their building in any other way, the government must prove it has a “compelling” reason to impose the limitation. Similarly, it required that prisons show they have a “compelling” reason before banning the religious practices of prisoners. The Seventh-day Adventist Church played an important role in getting it passed and virtually all those interested in religious liberty were delighted by the passage of RLUIPA.

But not everyone was happy. Some local governments did not want the burden of showing a compelling reason before banning churches from locating in their districts. Further, some state prisons did not want to take reasonable steps to accommodate the religious needs of their inmates. In addition to these two groups, some expounded the theory that RLUIPA violates the separation of church and state because it protects religion but not non-religion. That is, RLUIPA ensures that houses of worship get preferential treatment over non-religious structures. The fact that the U.S. Constitution explicitly provides protection for religion in its text was not enough to convince them that, yes, protecting religious freedom not only is permissible under the U.S. Constitution, it is mandated.

Those unhappy with the religious liberty protections in RLUIPA brought a law suit, and this year that law suit will be heard at the U.S. Supreme Court. Once again, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is involved supporting the constitutionality of RLUIPA through an amicus brief that has been delivered to the U.S. Supreme Court. We are watching this case carefully, a negative decision could have a seriously negative impact on religious liberty across the board.

James Standish, Public Relations  
and Religions Liberty

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## **DOCUMENT ON CREATION VOTED BY THE ANNUAL COUNCIL 2004**

The document we are sharing with you, “Response to An Affirmation of Creation,” was voted by the Annual Council in 2004. After three years studying the interaction of faith and science the organizing committee of the two International Faith and Science Conferences, sponsored by the General Conference, presented its final report to the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council. The report indicated that there was an overwhelming support for the biblical doctrine of creation in six literal and consecutive days followed by the seventh-day Sabbath rest. It also indicated that there were some differences of opinions among some theologians and scientists. As a response to the report the Council voted the document that we are sharing with you.

What the response affirms is not new in Adventist doctrine and theology. It is simply a reaffirmation of the traditional, biblically based position of the church. This reaffirmation was considered necessary because a small number of individuals were misinterpreting the Fundamental Belief on Creation reading into it what the church never intended to say. Hence, the response reaffirms the historicity of Genesis 1-11, emphasizing in a particular way that “the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.”

The value of this document will be determined by the way it will be used by pastors, church leaders, professors and theologians in their respective work as they seek to nurture the church and contribute to the formation of new generations of Adventist church members. The Council did a significant service to the church, which it represents, by clearly stating what the Bible and the church proclaim to be biblical truth in the setting of the first angel’s message. This message calls the human race to “worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water” (Rev 14:7).

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

### *Response to An Affirmation of Creation*

VOTED, To approve the following statement in response to the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee’s report, An Affirmation of Creation, subject to the changes that were voted in the previous action, to read as follows:

Whereas belief in a literal, six-day creation is indissolubly linked with the authority of Scripture, and;

Whereas such belief interlocks with other doctrines of Scripture, including the Sabbath and the Atonement, and;

Whereas Seventh-day Adventists understand our mission, as specified in Revelation 14:6, 7, to include a call to the world to worship God as Creator,

We, the members of the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council, state the following as our response to the document, An Affirmation of Creation, submitted by the International Faith and Science Conferences:

1. We strongly endorse the document’s affirmation of our historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation.
2. We urge that the document, accompanied by this response, be disseminated widely throughout the world Seventh-day Adventist Church, using all available communication channels and in the major languages of world membership.

3. We reaffirm the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis 1-11: that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.
4. We call on all boards and educators at Seventh-day Adventist institutions at all levels to continue upholding and advocating the Church’s position on origins. We, along with Seventh-day Adventist parents, expect students to receive a thorough, balanced, and scientifically rigorous exposure to and affirmation of our historic belief in a literal, recent, six-day creation, even as they are educated to understand and assess competing philosophies of origins that dominate scientific discussion in the contemporary world.
5. We urge church leaders throughout the world to seek ways to educate members, especially young people attending non-Seventh-day Adventist schools, in the issues involved in the doctrine of creation.
6. We call on all members of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family to proclaim and teach the Church’s understanding of the biblical doctrine of Creation, living in its light, rejoicing in our status as sons and daughters of God, and praising our Lord Jesus Christ—our Creator and Redeemer.

Source: Adventist News Network

### **EXPOSITORY SERMON PREPARATION**

Renown expository homiletician, Haddon Robinson, describes sermon preparation as a “dynamic process” that involves “insight, imagination, and spiritual sensitivity—none of which comes from merely following directions.” Nevertheless, “an awareness of how others approach the task produces confidence and contributes to a more efficient use of time and energy.”<sup>1</sup> With this homiletical wisdom in mind, I propose the following seventeen-stage approach for preparing expository sermons. While seasoned expositors may merge and mix some of the stages, each one is a vital ingredient to the process. The first ten stages focus on exegetical analysis, the last seven focus on homiletical synthesis.<sup>2</sup> The entire process should take between 12 to 20 hours a week, depending on the expositor’s experience.

#### *I. Exegetical Analysis*

Three important questions should be asked during exegetical analysis from start to finish: (1) “What is the biblical author saying?” The answer to this question is the main idea of the text. This is a concise past tense

statement interpreting what the text meant in its original context. Homileticians call this sentence by various names such as the “central idea of the text” or the “exegetical idea.” This idea is often found at a single point in the text, sometimes sandwiched between two related ideas, or sometimes found in recurring ideas.<sup>3</sup> (2) “Why is the biblical author saying this?” The answer to this question reveals the biblical author’s purpose. Just as each passage in Scripture has a main idea, it also has a purpose. Thus, ask these questions throughout your study: Why did the author write this? What effect did he expect to have on his readers? The answer to these questions should be stated in another concise sentence indicating what the biblical author is trying to do.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of a text is often found in the larger literary context of the passage. (3) “How is the biblical author saying it? The answer to this question is the particular literary genre of the passage, that is, the literary structure the biblical author used to communicate his idea and purpose. Here the focus is on determining the rhetorical structure of the passage which issues in the exegetical outline.<sup>5</sup>

### Three Questions:

- *What is the biblical author saying?*
- *Why is the biblical author saying this?*
- *How is the biblical author saying it?*

With these three questions in mind, the expositor should begin the ten stages of exegetical analysis:

- Stage 1: *Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit.* It is important to emphasize at the outset of sermon preparation that the expositor seeks the presence and aid of God’s Spirit.
- Stage 2: *Determine the textual unit.* Define the textual parameters according to the literary context of the passage. If the text is part of a systematic expository series, then the parameters already set from a previous study can be used.
- Stage 3: *Get an overview of the passage.* Read it prayerfully and meditatively numerous times. Get a sense of its flow. Make tentative notes of ideas that come or issues that need to be explored.
- Stage 4: *Determine the genre or literature type of the passage.* The possible options are: narrative, poetry, wisdom, law, prophecy, gospel, parable, epistle, and apocalyptic. Apply the special rules of the particular genre to the passage during stage seven below.<sup>6</sup>
- Stage 5: *Analyze the literary context of the passage.* This stage involves reading and studying the larger book context, the section context (chapter or chapters), and the immediate context (surrounding paragraphs/verses) of the passage.
- Stage 6: *Analyze the historical/cultural context of the passage.* Use the following research tools:

Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, specialized studies on the historical/cultural context of the Bible, and commentaries.<sup>7</sup> Notes should be taken in the following areas appropriate to the text: author, recipients, date, situation, culture, politics, and geography.

- Stage 7: *Analyze the passage in detail.* The grammar and syntax of the passage, including its significant words and genre, should be analyzed with the following research tools appropriate to the expositor: Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic texts, lexicons, concordances, grammars, and word-study books. At this point, a diagram of the passage is very helpful. The end result of this stage is an articulation of the exegetical idea, exegetical purpose, and exegetical outline of the passage.
- Stage 8: *Analyze the theological context of the passage.* This stage involves studying the passage in its larger canonical context—the whole Bible. Is it applied in later passages of Scripture? What are its antecedent passages? At this point, it is important to see how the passage relates to Christ. What does it say about Him?<sup>8</sup>
- Stage 9: *Consult commentaries on the passage.* Make notes of any relevant insights that apply, or make any needed changes in your conclusions thus far. Generally, it is best to study the commentaries after completing your own exegetical work.
- Stage 10: *Summarize your findings.* Write out the exegetical idea, exegetical purpose, and exegetical outline or structural outline of the passage. These three elements of exegetical analysis will be very relevant as you move through the process of homiletical synthesis. The exegetical idea will become the homiletical idea; the exegetical purpose will become the homiletical purpose; and the exegetical outline or structural diagram of the text will become the homiletical outline which will connect the text with the congregation.

## II. Homiletical Synthesis

Homiletical synthesis translates exegetical analysis into the popular and contemporary language of the listeners. As such, it transforms exegetical data into an organized pattern with unity and focus, rhythm and symmetry, movement and climax. Just as the Spirit of God brooded over the earth at creation (Gen 1:2), so the expositor desires the same Spirit

*The minister of Christ is to preach the Word, not the opinions and traditions of men, not pleasing fables or sensational stories.*

to brood over the exegetical notes during the creative process of homiletical synthesis (John 14:26).

Having completed the foundational work of exegetical analysis in stages 1 through 10, stages 11 through 17 complete the process of expository sermon preparation.

Stage 11: *Translate the exegetical idea of the text into the homiletical idea of the sermon.* During this stage, the expositor transforms the wording of the exegetical idea into “the most exact, memorable sentence possible.”<sup>9</sup> This sentence is a statement of the timeless, universal truth of the passage in terms relevant to your particular audience. The entire sermon is built around this homiletical idea. It answers the question, “What am I saying in this sermon?”

Stage 12: *Translate the exegetical purpose into the homiletical purpose statement.* The issue here is to write the sermon’s purpose in the framework of your written exegetical purpose. Thus, simply answer the question: In light of this exegetical purpose, what does God desire to accomplish through this sermon in the hearers today? Your answer to this question is what you want the listeners to do as a result of hearing your sermon. This specific, moral, action statement influences the form of the sermon and provides guidance in the application and the conclusion. It answers the larger question, “Why am I preaching this sermon?”

Stage 13: *Decide what form the sermon will take based on the exegetical outline and generate a homiletical outline.* The form or shape of the sermon depends upon two factors: (1) the literary genre reflected in the exegetical outline and (2) the homiletical purpose statement. Based upon these two factors, the expositor decides which sermon form fits the text and the purpose best. The deductive form introduces the homiletical idea at the beginning of the sermon and divides it into two or more parts (movement from the whole to the parts). The inductive form begins with the specific parts and carefully works its way through them to the conclusion—the homiletical idea (movement from parts to the whole). The inductive-deductive form starts with the parts and works its way towards the homiletical idea in the middle and then divides it into specific parts for the rest of the sermon (movement from parts to whole and whole

to parts). Under the umbrella of inductive sermon forms is the popular narrative form, which essentially tells the biblical story in a relevant and meaningful way (often follows inductive or inductive-deductive movement). There are many types of sermon forms available to the expositor that will captivate the attention of audiences and accurately reflect the content of Scripture.<sup>10</sup> The sermon form answers the question, “How am I going to preach this sermon?”

Stage 14: *Expand the sermon outline with supporting material.* Homileticians have likened the sermon outline to a skeleton of thought. As a person’s bones are covered with skin and flesh, so a sermon’s bones should be covered with the skin and flesh of supporting material. Supporting material fleshes out each major division of the sermon (this applies to any form—deductive, inductive, narrative, etc.). It provides support by amplifying or expanding each thought in its relationship to the main idea. Without supporting material actively integrated into the expository sermon, it can become tedious, boring, and even lifeless. But when properly blended into the expository sermon, supporting material will add understanding, insight, interest, excitement, relevancy, and humor. While there are numerous types of supporting material for expository sermons, the basic four are explanation, illustration, application, and narration.<sup>11</sup>

Stage 15: *Prepare the introduction and conclusion.* Once the sermon body is complete, it is time to finalize on how to introduce and conclude the sermon. Both of these components are extremely important to the expository sermon and should receive great attention.

Stage 16: *Produce a sermon manuscript.* Most homileticians recommend that preachers, especially novices, type their sermons in full. The advantage of this is the clarity of thought it brings to the sermon. A manuscript allows the expositor to see the sermon as a whole and thus discover any disconnected thoughts or misplaced parts. At the very least, a detailed outline should be typed or written. It is better to find out in the study that the sermon is unclear or uninteresting than to make the discovery in the pulpit.

Stage 17: *Rehearse the sermon in order to internalize it.* Read through the sermon manuscript prayer-

fully and carefully; then preach through it out loud, staying alert to any potential problems, and make the necessary corrections. Then convert the manuscript into notes from which you will preach. These notes should contain only enough material to stimulate memory during delivery. Rehearse the sermon for familiarity so that it can be delivered with as much freedom as possible. Today's audiences do not tolerate very well a preacher tied to his or her notes. Connecting with the listeners is imperative.<sup>12</sup>

If there was ever a time for Seventh-day Adventist preachers to engage in expository preaching, it is now. Commenting on Paul's charge to "preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:1-2), Ellen White wrote: "In these direct and forcible words is made plain the duty of the minister of Christ. He is to 'preach the word,' not the opinions and traditions of men, not pleasing fables or sensational stories, to move the fancy and excite the emotions. He is not to exalt himself, but as in the presence of God he is to stand before a dying world and preach the word. There is to be no levity, no trifling, no fanciful interpretation; the minister must speak in sincerity and deep earnestness as a voice from God expounding the Sacred Scriptures."<sup>13</sup> May all of us who preach strive to follow this counsel!

Jud Lake,  
Southern Adventist University

<sup>1</sup>Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 53.

<sup>2</sup>See Jud Lake, "Expository Homiletics," *Ministry* (January 2005): 18-20; idem, "Preaching the Word of God for the People of God: A Proposed Definition of Seventh-day Adventist Preaching," in *The Word of God for the People of God: A Tribute to the Ministry of Jack J. Blanco*, Ron Du Preez, Philip G. Samaan, and Ron E.M. Clouzet, eds. (Collegedale, TN: School of Religion, Southern Adventist University, 2004), 467-494.

<sup>3</sup>See Robinson, 33-50, 66-70.

<sup>4</sup>See *ibid.*, 107-112; Fred Craddock, *Preaching*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 122-124.

<sup>5</sup>See Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward An Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); idem, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); and Walter L. Liefeld, *New Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>6</sup>See Grant R. Osborn, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 149-260.

<sup>7</sup>See Tim Crosby, "eTreasures: Seven ways to enhance your ministry through the Internet," *Ministry* (June 2004): 5-6, 27; Lee J. Gugliotto, *Handbook for Bible Study* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1995).

<sup>8</sup>See Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the*

*Expository Sermon*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

<sup>9</sup>Robinson, 103.

<sup>10</sup>See Harold T. Bryson, *Expository Preaching: The Art of Preaching Through a Book of the Bible* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 339-372; and Donald L. Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 32-116.

<sup>11</sup>See Mark Galli and Craig Brian Larson, *Preaching that Connects: Using the Techniques of Journalists to Add Impact to Your Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power* rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001); and the website, [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com), which provides fresh homiletical insights and a large database of contemporary illustrations.

<sup>12</sup>See Wilbur Ellsworth, *The Power of Speaking God's Word: How to Preach Memorable Sermons* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, IV20 1TW, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2000).

<sup>13</sup>Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, 147.

## FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

### DEALING WITH "DISCREPANCIES" IN THE BIBLE

What is a discrepancy in the Bible? For our purpose, a discrepancy in Scripture would be an idea, a thought, or a statement that appears discordant with or contradictory to other ideas or statements elsewhere in the Bible. Now the critical question is this, Are there discrepancies in the Bible? This question, in its essence, addresses the nature of the Bible. Does the Bible, in its nature, contain conflicting and inconsistent ideas and information? As with defining the nature of anything, we cannot and should not restrict our understanding of the nature of the Bible to these phenomena. In other words, what the Bible *is* is not fully defined simply by what it *appears* to us to be. An illustration might be helpful here. A rod plunged partially in a pool of water often appears to be bent. This is a phenomenon. However, there are causal reasons for the rod to appear to be bent, while it is not really bent.

It is quite evident that looking at the phenomena of the Bible, that is, looking at it as it appears to us, there are discrepancies. When critics of the Bible point to inconsistent dates, numbers, etc. they are dealing with the Bible formally as a phenomenon. However, the issue becomes a little bit more difficult when we begin to pay attention to other causal reasons regarding the nature of the Bible. Closer examination leads us to ask, for example, how the Bible came about and for what ends it was written. It is these latter kinds of questions that condition our answer as to whether in its nature the Bible contains contradictory and inconsistent facts and ideas. In other words, just as with the apparently bent rod there were causal reasons to show that the rod was not really bent, these questions force us to ask whether

there may be causal reasons for the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the Bible.

First, what do we know about how the Bible came into existence? The classic texts of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:19-21 show in a fundamental way human and divine agencies working together to produce the Scriptures. This fact cannot be ignored. Scripture is not just a human product. God was involved in its production. Furthermore, without even completely understanding the dynamics and logistics of the divine-human interaction, 2 Peter 1:19 makes it clear that the divine influence endowed the product with firmness, certitude, and stability. This is the essence of the use of the Greek word *bebaioteron* in the text. The foregoing points are causal factors that cannot be ignored in any quest to try to understand the nature of the Bible.

Second, what do we know about the ends for which the Bible was written? Here again 2 Peter 1:19 is helpful. However we interpret the “lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” the text is unequivocal about the end for which the Scriptures are given: We walk in a dark world, and God through His grace has given us a lamp, the Scriptures, for reproof, guidance, and correction. The intent of the text is that the course of our lives should be directed by the word of God.

How do these factors regarding how the Bible came into being and the ends for which it came into existence help us in dealing with alleged “discrepancies” in the Bible? First, without succumbing to the view of “inerrancy” which associates the perfection of the Bible with God’s timeless perfection, should not the fact of God’s involvement in the production of the Bible mean something when we talk about discrepancies in the Bible? Second, it would seem that the divine involvement in bringing about the Scriptures was necessary to give it the certitude, surety, and stability that would be needed for it to function as a light and guide for our walk. An unsure and uncertain guide would not be much of a guide. In this connection it is a bit difficult to see how the Bible in its nature could be inconsistent and contradictory and still function effectively as a light and guide for our walk.

The point I am making in bringing up these causal factors in connection with the phenomena of Scripture is to say that by its very nature, Scripture encourages us to approach the Bible as a harmonious, consistent, trustworthy document which may still show evidence of human imperfection due to the human agency involved in its origin. The tension between the divine and human contributions to the production of Scripture is a creative tension that should not be flippantly resolved either in the direction of total divine control as in verbal/mechanical

inspiration or in the direction of human ingenuity as in encounter revelation. Therefore, assuming the essential harmony of Scripture, we should seek to resolve apparent contradictions or discrepancies as far as possible by observing, among others, the following points: (1) Read texts in their contexts by paying attention to time and circumstances of writing; (2) be aware that biblical authors may legitimately use former writers and point out aspects that are not readily discerned in the original statements; (3) keep in perspective oriental metaphors and hyperboles; (4) take note of the practice of giving several names to one person, e.g. Edom/Esau and Gideon/Jerubbaal; (5) remember that different authors may be

*Scripture encourages us to approach the Bible as a harmonious, consistent, trustworthy document although it may show evidence of human imperfection.*

emphasizing different viewpoints; (6) consider the use of different modes of reckoning; and (7) study the different principles of arranging ideas and data.

Although we may be willing to acknowledge tensions and discrepancies in Scripture, it should not be the function of the interpreter to focus on them. Bible students look at the impressive unity and beauty of Scripture. Many scholars have adopted the foregoing approach to Scripture and in the process resolved what hitherto seemed unresolvable discrepancies. Perhaps it should not surprise us that we will sometimes have to search and dig hard and long to see the harmony and beauty of biblical truth. Some discrepancies may be solved in the future as some were resolved in the past. Some texts containing tensions may be harmonized, others may not. Let us study diligently. Jesus, in the parable of the hidden treasure (Matt 13:44) and the parable of the pearl of great price (Matt 13:45-46), seems to suggest that things of tremendous worth do exist that may not be apparent to the casual observer. Joy awaits those who find hidden treasures. If we cannot find a solution, let us not become obsessed with some details losing sight of the whole picture. Let us learn to suspend our judgment, because we are just humans dealing with the Word of God given to us in human language.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

## ***SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY***

### **IMMORTALITY?**

“Is death necessary?“, asked biologist G. R. Taylor and stated that in 1968 in the USA alone more than a thousand teams of scientists were working on the issue of growing old and the problem of death. Some people are frozen at their death. They want to be revived as soon as a cure for their disease or the aging process has

been found. Most of humanity seems to have the desire to live forever. Many people claim that although their body is mortal, their soul is not. Therefore the question must be asked: Is there a natural immortality of humans or their soul?

### *I. The Immortal Soul and Scripture*

#### *1. Scripture and Immortality*

There are only two biblical passages using the word “immortality”:

- (1) 1 Tim 6:14-16 - God alone possesses immortality.
- (2) 1 Cor 15:51-54 - Only at their resurrection, when Jesus comes again, will believers receive immortality.

Eternal life is always dependent on Jesus. Without Him there is no everlasting life, not on earth, nor in heaven, nor in hell - Rom 6:23; John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:11, 12.

#### *2. Scripture and Soul*

The Hebrew and Greek terms translated “soul” can be rendered in different ways. They stand for “life” (Gen 9:4; Matt 2:20), “heart” (Eph 6:6), “emotions” (Song 1:7; Mark 14:34), and frequently for “person”:

- (1) Humans do not have a “soul” but are a “soul” - 1 Cor 15:45; Gen 2:7.
- (2) Even animals are “souls” - Gen 1:20; 9:10; Rev 16:3.
- (3) The “soul” can weep - Jer 13:17.
- (4) “Souls” can be taken captive - Jer 52:28-30.
- (5) “Souls” can be baptized - Acts 2:41.
- (6) The “soul” can die - Eze 18:4; Jas 5:20; Rev 20:4; Ps 89:48; Job 36:14; Lev 19:8; 21:1, 11.

Result: Very often the term “soul” designates the entire human being. It is not used in connection with immortality. The concept of an immortal soul is not found in the Bible.

### *II. The Idea of Immortality in History*

#### *1. Support for the Natural Immortality of the Soul*

- (1) Satan - Gen 3:4 (in contrast to Gen 2:17)
- (2) Pagans - The doctrine of the immortal soul has been called a characteristic of paganism and has led to ancestor cult, human sacrifices, building of the pyramids, etc.
- (3) The Greeks - Plato called the body the prison of the soul and understood death as the liberation of the soul. Aristotle shared similar views.

- (4) Churches - Probably during the 3rd century AD the platonic doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul had already permeated the Christian church. Representatives were Athenagoras, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustin. It was fully developed by Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In December 1513 the dogma of the natural immortality of the soul was proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church. Most Protestant Churches have also accepted this doctrine.

#### *2. Opposition to the Natural Immortality of the Soul*

- (1) God - Eccl 9:5, 6, 10
- (2) Israel - Dan 12:13
- (3) Jesus Christ - John 6:40. Jesus did not experience his death as the liberation of his soul from the prison of his body which he, therefore, should have desired and accepted happily. He suffered.
- (4) Christians - Early church fathers such as Justin the Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp rejected this doctrine. Luther was ambivalent. A number of well-known modern Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Oscar Cullmann also believe that it has no foundation in Scripture.

### *III. Consequences*

#### *1. Teachings which Are Not Found in Scripture Are Grounded on the Idea of the Natural Immortality of the Soul*

These doctrines include (1) purgatory, (2) indulgences, (3) prayer, alms, and masses for the dead, (4) the constantly burning hell, (5) veneration of Mary and the saints (cf. 1 Tim 2:5 and Exod 20:4), (6) reincarnation, and (7) spiritualism - Deut 18:10-12; 2 Cor 11, 14.

#### *2. Biblical Teachings Are Darkened*

(1) *The Second Coming of Christ.* During church history the second coming of Jesus lost its importance in the Catholic Church and in many Protestant churches.



(2) *Resurrection of the Dead.* The resurrection is the divine antithesis to the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

(3) *Judgment at the End of the World.* Such a judgment would be superfluous if the souls were already in heaven, purgatory, or hell.

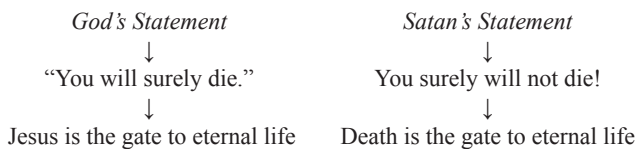
### 3. *God's Character Is Darkened*

(1) God would appear to be a liar who cannot be trusted (cf. Gen 2:17).

(2) God would be without compassion allowing people who supposedly had made it to heaven to watch the pain and suffering of their loved ones still living on earth without being able to intervene.

(3) God would be an unjust tyrant who punishes people in hell forever, although they have sinned for a limited time only.

The doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul creates a cruel picture of God and distorts Scripture. However, Scripture teaches that God is love and cares for us (1 John 4:8-9; Mal 1:2). We have to make the decision whom to trust.



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## BOOK NOTES

Jacques B. Doukhan. *The Mystery of Israel*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004. 143 pp. \$9.99.

J. Doukhan, the author of *The Mystery of Israel* teaches at Andrews University and has written a number of other works, especially on Daniel and Revelation. In this book he wrestles with the question whether or not Israel has been rejected by God and replaced by the church, the so-called Rejection or Supersession Theory traditionally espoused by many Adventists. He also addresses the interpretation of Dispensationalism. Both of these approaches he rejects. Instead he suggests a new model, called the Two-Witness Theory. According to this theory God has not rejected Israel. He uses two witnesses to point to the fullness of His revelation, the Jews and the Christian Church. Both are imperfect. Both are being called to service, which does not necessarily imply salvation. The Jews point to the law, neglected by Christianity, whereas Christians point to Jesus as the Messiah, neglected by many Jews. The messages of both witnesses are brought together in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In an appendix he deals with E. G. White's statements on Israel and the Jews.

Doukhan must be applauded for heightening the awareness of the Adventist church to the Jewish question, for pointing out the problem of anti-Semitism which may affect even the most devout Christians, and for pointing Adventists through the writings of E. G. White to the importance of the mission to the Jews as well as their role in the final days of earth's history.

The work contains many interesting insights, but it may also trigger mixed reactions. It seems that the author reads the New Testament through the lenses of the Holocaust. The danger of such an approach is to use the New Testament selectively and to avoid showing that at least in the first century—according to the witness of New Testament books--Jews created problems for Christians. There is no question that Christianity in the later centuries failed, often miserably, but a full picture of what happened, as far as it is accessible to us, would be helpful. The exposition of biblical texts as well as the interpretation of E. G. White material differs sometimes substantially from serious work done by other well-known Adventist scholars. This can be expected to some extent, but some tentativeness of one's own insights would be appreciated. In addition, some tentative suggestions early in the book become certitudes later on so that the work tends to sound dogmatic in a number of places. Some conclusions drawn by the author may be overstatements, e.g. to accept the Rejection Theory does not necessarily mean to exclude “the law from the plan of salvation” (p. 75). A definition of Israel is found rather late in the book (pp. 109-113). A definition of the law and a discussion of the issue of the law and its different aspects with which the first century church had to wrestle, is missing. While Jesus confirmed the law, he criticized the Jewish interpretation of the law. Paul showed that some elements of the law came to an end with Christ's death on the cross and that salvation is not accomplished by keeping the law. This understanding of the law caused problems not only with Judaizing elements of the early church but also with Judaism. It would have been good to explore these aspects. It seems that the Two-Witness Theory is not able to reconcile all historical data, nor is it supported by the New Testament. Obviously, a reconciliation of the law and the Messiah is not only found in the Adventist church. It was already present in New Testament times, when Paul stated that in Christ the barrier between those being circumcised and those being uncircumcised has been done away with and that Christ has created “one body,” the church (Eph 2-4).

The book raises many questions. It alerts us to fight any tendency of anti-Semitism and tactfully reach out with the full gospel, the Messiah and the law, to the Jewish community. This may be its contribution.

Whether or not its main thesis is helpful for the church is another issue.

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Richard Lehman. *La Foi de Moïse*. Dammarie-lès-Lys: Éditions Vie et Santé, 2003. 124 pp. €15.00.

Richard Lehmann is currently serving as president of Salève Adventist University. He is the author of a number of books especially on the Apocalypse. As a well-known NT scholar he has turned to the OT and written this volume dealing with the faith of Moses. Normally, when we talk about Moses, we associate him with the law as does also the NT. But it is intriguing to deal with the person of Moses from the perspective of faith (French *foi*) instead of the perspective of the law (French *loi*), although Lehmann does not omit this important topic. The book consists of an introduction, an epilogue, and six chapters all of them dealing with aspects of faith, such as the birth of faith, faith and power, faith and love, and faith and grace. It traces the story of Moses with a strong emphasis on the time up to

the Exodus as well as the events associated with Sinai. Lehmann not only describes faith but also deals with other crucial topics such as liberty, covenant, the Sabbath, all of the Ten Commandments, and the sanctuary. In the epilogue he touches on Moses' resurrection and his appearance on the Mount of transfiguration.

Lehmann furnishes interesting and helpful background information, points out connections to the NT, and applies the biblical message contained in these narratives and legal passages to the present reader. Although this book has devotional aspects and is easy and fascinating to read, it does not lack scholarly depth. It contains helpful and sometimes extensive footnotes. There are a few places where the reviewer had some questions, e.g., when the wrath of God is defined as the expression of cosmic disorder created by us through our carelessness from which God alone can keep us (p. 95). But overall this is a book worth reading. It is not only a volume on Moses and his faith but also, in a special way, a book on God and our response to Him.

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