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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NEWS AND COMMENTS

CHICKEN SOUP, SELF-ORGANIZATION AND THE ORIGIN OF LIFE: A TEST

Explaining the origin of life is one of the enduring problems for a naturalistic view of nature. Several conjectures have been offered to explain how life might have originated without an intelligent designer.

One of the most prominent conjectures of the origin of life has been the familiar "primordial soup" hypothesis, in which it is postulated that simple organic molecules might form in the atmosphere and accumulate in the ocean, where they would react to form living systems. This idea is currently out of favor, for a variety of reasons. First, the scenario requires incompatible chemical conditions for the various constituents necessary for life. Second, there is reason to believe that the Archaean atmosphere contained sufficient atmospheric oxygen to destroy most organic molecules in the atmosphere before they reached the ocean. Third, there is no evidence of such an organic-rich chemical soup in Archaean rocks. Fourth, the "primordial soup" hypothesis relies too heavily on random molecular collisions, which are highly improbable in an ocean.

The insufficiency of chance molecular collisions led theorists to propose that certain surfaces might act to concentrate organic molecules where chemical interaction would be more highly probable. Clay surfaces have been suggested, but pyrite is more commonly proposed as the type of surface needed. The conjecture of life arising from chemical reactions on a surface has been whimsically termed the "primordial pizza" hypothesis. A variety of scenarios can be included under this theme, including so called "hypercycles," "surface metabolism," and "RNA world." All these scenarios seem to assume some kind of self-organizational property of the materials that compose a living cell. Self-organization means that if the chemicals needed for life are all present in a small space, under the appropriate physical and chemical conditions, they will spontaneously assemble themselves into a living cell.

The notion of self-assembly of molecules into cellular components is currently a subject of scientific scrutiny. Do the chemical properties of molecules tend to drive chemical reactions in such a way that life results? One prominent origin-of-life theorist affirms that, under the proper conditions, the spontaneous formation of a living cell is "inevitable."[1] A similar claim is imposed in the notion of a "fully gifted creation."[2] According to this proposal, God "fully gifted" the creation in the beginning so that no further divine input is necessary. This implies that, under the appropriate conditions, without any activity by an intelligent agent, organic molecules will form and spontane-

ously self-assemble to produce life. Can such an idea be tested experimentally?

Chicken soup might provide such a test. Chicken soup is widely available in sealed containers, where undesirable oxygen and other chemical contaminants are excluded. Each tin of chicken soup contains a concentrated mixture of the organic molecules needed for life. Thus, the conditions postulated for the origin of life are present in each tin of chicken soup. If these molecules were actually "fully gifted" with chemical properties that drive their reactions toward producing life, or if the production of life is "inevitable" under such circumstances, one would surely expect to find some form of life in a least some tins of chicken soup. If a vertebrate source proves unsatisfactory, perhaps one could experiment with an invertebrate source such as clam chowder or some other material. Pyrite or other material could be included to provide a potential surface for facilitating chemical reactions. Perhaps different temperature regimes could be used. Regardless of the details, it seems possible to test the idea that molecules possess sufficient properties of self-assembly so that life can arise spontaneously.

A note of caution may be in order, however. If molecules actually possessed such properties, would we expect to observe death from "natural causes?" If molecules naturally tend to self-organize into living systems, what circumstances could cause them to lose this chemical property and permit death? What would happen if an organism were to die, say from physical trauma? At the very least, one would expect the constituents of the dead organism to spontaneously re-assemble themselves into some form of simple life. I am not suggesting that a dead elephant should re-assemble into a living elephant, but rather that at least some of the molecules of a dead elephant should re-assemble into some "simple" form of life such as a bacterium or protozoan. This might happen many times, or perhaps only in the anoxic environment of the deep tissues. The fact that we do not see such results strongly suggests that molecules do not possess the postulated properties required for self-assembly of a living cell.

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[1] C. DeDuve, "The Beginnings of Life on Earth," *American Scientist* 83 (1995):428-437.
[2] H. J. Van Till, "The Fully Gifted Creation," in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, edited by J. P. Moreland and J. M. Reynolds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 161-218.

THINKING BIBLICALLY AND THE PASTORAL MINISTRY

1. Doctrinal Illiteracy and a Weakened Sense of Identity

In 1988 Neal C. Wilson recognized that "too many of our people are doctrinally illiterate, and as a result they have no firm convictions or commitment to this prophetic movement."[1] In 2002 Jan Paulsen called attention to the risk that Adventists might lose their identity. Adventists are becoming more recognizable as "Christians" than as "Seventh-day Adventist Christians."[2] We lose our identity "to our own destruction."[3]

New generations of young adults are doctrinally and biblically illiterate and as a consequence they do not experience Adventism as a movement, much less as the end time remnant. For many, Adventism has become a place to worship. Yet some feel free to share the more lively "worship experience" of Charismatic and Evangelical meetings on Sunday mornings.

Doctrinal illiteracy leads to lack of identity. Yet, what leads to doctrinal illiteracy? Arguably, doctrinal illiteracy springs from various causes, among them pastors who do not feed the sheep in the deep things God reveals in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy. As the Word of God does not nurture the mind of the believer, the patterns of the world and other religious communities with which they interact begin to shape their thinking patterns and contents.

2. Destructive Dichotomy: Professing and Thinking

The displacement of biblical thinking by secular and evangelical thinking produces a destructive dichotomy in the life of the church. On one hand, the church continues to *profess* to believe in Scripture and to base all its doctrines and practices on it. For instance, the church does not change her clearly biblical fundamental beliefs. On the other hand, as these statements generally remain external to the process of personal thinking, members and leaders in the church continue to *think* according to the patterns of the surrounding culture they had espoused before becoming Adventists. They "download" various philosophies and cultural preferences from what they study, read, or watch on television. As a result, the church is biblical in its external form and doctrines, but secular and charismatic in her way of thinking and lived experience. We are and do what we think (Prov 27:3; 24:3-4), not what we externally profess. Therefore, what the church thinks is what determines its ultimate destiny.

3. The Changing Thinking in the Church

In some sectors of the church new generations of Adventists are no longer attracted to Scripture. They do not attend Sabbath School nor are they passionate about knowing the God of Scripture. Sometimes led by pastors and teachers, they are passionate about a mystical Christ they reach through music and generic spirituality disconnected from their every-day choices and life style. Books

written by popular evangelical writers replace the study of Scripture and the reading of Ellen White. I know Adventist pastors who are more passionate about the writings of C. S. Lewis than about Scripture. The mind of the church has become simultaneously secularized and charismatized. Increasingly, debated issues are no longer solved with a "thus says the Lord" but with the affirmation of cultural preferences.

Church members are becoming less committed to the doctrines and the mission of the church. They consider the claim that Adventism is the "remnant church" to be arrogant. As I interact with young people I discover that many do not understand what it means to be a Christian or a Seventh-day Adventist. The basic understanding of the Adventist faith was not explained to these individuals, neither before nor after baptism. Some of them want to change progressively the doctrines of the Church to make them fit with what they *think*. For instance, they would like to see the church recognizing the long ages of evolutionary theory. After all, doctrines are supposedly not important, what counts is our spiritual relation with Christ.

Thus, some sectors of Adventism have come to think according to patterns freely borrowed from contemporary culture and evangelical pastors. However, other sectors have continued to develop the Adventist revolution in theological thinking from Scripture. Parallel to the growth of doctrinal and biblical illiteracy, and the loss of identity as denomination, there has been a growth in biblical research.

4.   Changing the Thinking of the Church?

As the thinking of certain sectors of the church is changing from biblical to secular and ecumenical, can we change it back to biblical patterns? I think we can. How should we do it? Obviously, by going back to the Bible--not only to study it, meditate on it, sing from it, memorize it, but primarily to *understand it.*

We need to bear in mind that *thinking* is not the mere gathering of information but the understanding of real life and human beings as they interrelate with us. Moreover, *thinking* and *understanding* does not end in unproductive theories, but bears fruits in practice. We do what we understand.

What the church must make sure is that all *theological thinking* leading to reforms in worship rituals, life style, missionary work, and in our fundamental beliefs come from a process of *thinking biblically*, from a process of understanding reality based on Scripture only.

5.   Does Thinking Matter?

To change the thinking of the church one needs first to be convinced that such a change is necessary. Unfortunately, Adventists are convinced that thinking is not important. The need to have a church that thinks biblically may not have been the foremost priority for at least half

a century. We have become content with the traditionally received conviction that we have the truth.

If understanding precedes action, to change actions we need to change understandings. Why are we not growing in some sectors of the church? Is it because we do not have the right methods of evangelism, worship, or music? Could it be that what hinders the mission of the church and disrupts its unity is the way in which groups within the Church think?

6.   Thinking in the "Light of Scripture" and the Identity of Adventism

In the church to think is to do theology. In Adventism, "to do theology" is not to understand tradition and beliefs of the church or our own personal faith, but instead, to understand biblical revelation. This is the real basis for our identity as a people.

Yet, to "think biblically" does not mean just to read, study, or exegete the contents of Scripture, it also involves thinking "from" Scripture. Following the Roman Catholic tradition mainline Protestant and Evangelical churches read Scripture and built their doctrines working "from" the cultural thinking of the times. Adventism, by contrast, originated because our early pioneers interpreted Scripture from scriptural concepts and teachings. The fulfillment of prophecy led them to establish the doctrinal corpus of early Adventism. Ellen White explained that the subject of the sanctuary was the key that "opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious" (*GC* 423). Adventism springs, then, from a hermeneutical revolution through which the old Protestant principle of "sola scriptura" finally became operative. This unfinished revolution gives identity to Seventh-Day Adventism. However, by neglecting thinking in the light of Scripture today, Adventism finds itself facing widespread biblical and doctrinal illiteracy and experiences a weakened and self-destructive lack of identity.

7.   Renewing the Adventist Ministry by Helping the Church to "Think in the Light of Scripture"

How should a complex organization like Adventism overcome biblical illiteracy and recover its sense of identity? Local pastors are in the best position to revert these trends. Clearly, all depends on the way in which Seventh Adventist pastors think. In short, there should be a renewal of the Adventist ministry. Adventist ministry should redefine itself by centering on Scripture. Pastors should help the church to understand our contemporary world by thinking in the light of Scripture. This requires of pastors a deep understanding of Scripture.

Recent emphasis on the so-called "worship renewal" by itself may further intensify biblical and doctrinal illiteracy and the weakening of Adventist identity. Yet, when pastoral ministries renew churches in the light of Scripture, changes in liturgy will flow from a ministry

and a community that consider everything in the light of Scripture and not from the patterns of the surrounding culture (Rom 12:2).

8. Thinking Biblically and Salvation

The biblical renewal of Adventist ministry is necessary not primarily to lower the rate of biblical and doctrinal illiteracy in the church or to increase the sense of identity in the community of faith. The need for renewing the ministry of the Adventist church by centering it on the process of thinking in the light of Scripture and using it as a guide in our daily lives is the salvation of souls.

Although the ultimate cause of salvation is faith in Christ and his substitutionary death at Calvary, the task of the pastor is to preach the word at all times and in all situations (2 Tim 4:1-5). Through the contents of the words of Scripture the Holy Spirit convicts sinners, God forgive sins, and Christ transforms the minds and actions of sinners after his likeness (1 Cor 2:6). Through a Scripture centered ministry believers should grow in the knowledge of the deep things of God and his kingdom (Heb 5:12-14), and attract the world to the awesome God of Scripture. Biblically speaking, a Christian thinking in the light of the world and its traditions is an oxymoron.

9. The Power of God Is in the Word

Finally, Adventist ministry should redefine itself as God's instrument chosen to help the world and the church to understand God's thoughts and acts revealed in Scripture, because the power of God is in the content of the words of Scripture. Ellen White put it in these words: "The life of God, which gives life to the world, is in His word. . . The whole Bible is a manifestation of Christ. It is our only source of power (*GW* 251).

Scripture teaches the same. "The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12, NRSV). The contents of the words of God in Scripture have power, for instance, to save (John 6:63; Jas 1:21), to comfort and revive (Ps 119:50), to prevent sin (Ps 119:11), and to guide in the decision making process (Ps 119:105).

God unleashes the power of the Word through the life-long process of thinking biblically. The pastoral ministry is one of the most important agencies that can stall, destroy, neglect, or intensify biblical thinking.

10. Conclusion

Pressure comes to pastors from all sides. Complexities of pastoral life allow the trivial to hide what is essential. Culture is changing. A generic spirituality condones almost all life styles. Few listen to the message of the church. From inside and outside the church, many voices suggest ways pastors may use to navigate the pluralistic world of postmodern society. They concentrate mainly in technology of mass communication, entertainment, and contemporary music in a context of traditional and charismatic Christianity. These trivialities have helped Christians to forget that the power of God is in Scripture.

Adventists may be tempted to go the way of general evangelical Christianity, and some actually do. However, this trend will only increase biblical illiteracy and the lack of identity in contemporary Adventism. It may divide the thinking of the Adventist community beyond repair.

Instead, Adventist pastors may choose to face the complexities of ministry not from the dictates of contemporary culture or evangelical tradition but from the dictates of eternal truth as revealed in Scripture. By realizing that the central responsibility of ministry is to help people to "think in the light of Scripture," Adventist pastors will become truly ministers of the power of God. This trend will not only increase biblical literacy and develop a healthy sense of identity, but also unify the church in its message and mission.

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[1]Neal C. Wilson, "The President Calls for Renewal," *Adventist Review*, April 7, 1988, p. 12.
[2]Jan Paulsen, "The Theological Landscape," *Supplement to the Adventist Review*, June 13, 2002, pp. 3-8.
[3]Ibid.

EXPOSITORY SERMON PREPARATION

Renowned 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."[1] 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. 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. This central or exegetical idea is often found at a single point in the text, sometimes sandwiched between two related ideas, or sometimes found in recurring ideas. (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, so 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. 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.

> *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 engage 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.* Possible options are: narrative, poetry, wisdom, law, prophecy, gospels, parable, epistle, and apocalyptic. Apply the special rules of the particular genre to the passage during stage seven below.
>
> *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

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

dictionaries and encyclopedias, specialized studies on the historical/cultural context of the Bible, and commentaries.[2] 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 look at how the passage relates to Christ. What does it say about Him?
>
> *Stage 9: Consult the 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 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 ex-

egetical idea into "the most exact, memorable sentence possible."[3] 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 application and the conclusion. It answers the larger question, "Why am I preaching this sermon?"

Stage 13: Decide on 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.[4] 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.

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 prayerfully 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 you will preach from. These notes should contain only enough material to stimulate memory during delivery. Then 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.

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 plan 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" (*GW* 147). May all of us who preach strive to follow this counsel!

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[1] Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages,* 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 53.
[2] 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).
[3] Robinson, 103.
[4] 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.

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

THE FIRSTBORN (COL 1:15)

In Colossians 1:15 Paul states that Jesus is "the firstborn of all creation." This text has often been understood in the sense that Jesus was born before the creation of humankind and in one way or another emanated from God the Father in ages past, or that Jesus was created by the Father and then continued the creation process begun by His Father. How should the term "firstborn" be understood in the context of Colossians 1:15?

The Greek word *prōtotokos* ("firstborn") is found 127 times in the Septuagint and eight times in the NT. In the majority of the cases it refers to a literal firstborn (Gen 41:51) whether of humankind or of animals (Exod 34:19-29). The human firstborn enjoyed the birthright (Gen 43:37) and a double portion of the inheritance (Deut 21:16-17). According to 2 Chronicles 21:3 the firstborn son of the king received the kingdom while various gifts were given to the other sons. The chiefs of the tribes of Israel were the firstborn (1 Chron 5:12).

However, in a number of cases persons who originally did not belong to the category of the firstborn were made firstborn. Manasseh was the firstborn (Gen 41:51), but Ephraim, the second, took his place (Gen 48:20; Jer 31:9).

Although Shimri was not the firstborn, his father made him first (1 Chron 26:10). Very enlightening is Psalm 89. This Psalm describes God's lovingkindness and faithfulness. He had made a covenant with David promising that his throne would endure. David is mentioned in verse 3 and again in verses 20, 35, 49. In verse 27 an incomplete parallelism is found:

I also shall make	him [David]	firstborn,
-	-	the highest of the kings of the earth.

David who was the eighth child of his parents (1 Sam 16:10-11) would be made the firstborn. What this means is expressed in the second half of the verse: David as the firstborn would be the highest of the kings. The covenant with David was finally fulfilled in the Messiah, the antitypical firstborn and the King of kings. Ps 89:27 does not stress the issues of being born or being the first chronologically, but emphasizes the special honor, greatness, and authority of the firstborn.

In the NT the term *prōtotokos* is applied to Jesus six times: He was the firstborn of Mary (Luke 2:7), but He is also the firstborn among many brothers (Rom 8:29), the firstborn of all creation (Col 1:15), the firstborn from/of the dead (Col 1:18; Rev 1:5), and the firstborn whom the angels worship (Heb 1:6).

The term *prōtotokos* points to the special rank and dignity of the firstborn. However, being the first or being born is not always stressed and is, therefore, not necessarily important to the understanding of the term. This is the case in Colossians 1:15. The text and the immediate context (Col 1:15-20) show that Jesus is the image of God. He has created all things. Therefore, He Himself is not created. He is the Redeemer in whom all things have been reconciled to God. He is the One who holds all things together. Here is an outline of the passage:

A   **He is** { the image of the invisible God,
              the **firstborn** of all creation.

For in Him all things were created . . .
all things have been created *through Him* and for Him.

      B   And He is before all things,
        C   and in Him all things hold together.
      B'   And He is the head of the body, the church;

A'   **He is** { the beginning
              the **firstborn** from the dead . . .

For in Him it was His Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell, and *through Him* to reconcile *all things* to Himself . . .

In this passage the term "firstborn" is used twice. As Jesus is the firstborn of creation so he is the firstborn of the dead. The second phrase, which explains the first, makes it clear that the issue is not birth. Jesus was raised from the dead but not literally born from the dead. Second, he was not the first in a temporal sense. Others were raised before Him. He was first in the sense that all resurrections whether past or future were and are dependent on His resurrection. Without His resurrection no other resurrection is possible. Verse 18 shows what that means, namely "that He Himself will come to have first place in everything." As in Psalm 89 so here too, being the "firstborn" is associated with having supremacy.

When the term is applied to Jesus and does not refer to his birth by Mary, "firstborn" points to Christ's exalted position as the supreme king and ruler of the universe and does not suggest that he has been created or has emanated from God in ages past.

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SCRIPTURE APPLIED–A BIBLE STUDY

WATCH OUT FOR HELL

The eyes of a young man are burning like coals. Long flames come out of his ears. He hardly can breathe. When he opens his mouth blazing fire rolls out of it. The blood is boiling in his veins. The brain is boiling and bubbling in his head. The marrow is boiling in his bones, and yet he is conscious, and one can talk to him. He will be suffering torment and pain not only for hundred millions of years but throughout eternity. This description of hell is found in a tract for children published in 1855. Does the Bible know of such a place called hell?

I. There Is a Hell
(1) Jesus knows about hell - Matt 18:9; 23:33; Luke 12:5.
(2) There are only two options: (1) life eternal or (2) being lost/destruction/eternal fire - John 3:16; Matt 7:13-14; Matt 25:31, 32, 41. However, destruction/eternal fire is a future event connected to Christ's second coming. Therefore, "hell" still lies in the future.

II. What Does Hell Look Like?
Some Bible translators have rendered various words with "hell" which in reality have other meanings. Four words have been translated with the term "hell": (1) *sheol*, (2) *hades*, (3) *tartaros*, and (4) *gehenna*.
1. Sheol
Sheol is used 66 times in the Old Testament. It is the realm of the dead who are in the grave. Normally the Greek translation of the term is *hades*.
Gen 37:35   Jacob expects to go down to *sheol*/the grave, to his son Joseph.

1 Sam 2:6   God brings down to *sheol*/the grave and raises up.
Eccl 9:10   In *sheol*/the grave there is no activity, no planning, and no knowledge. *Sheol* is the place of the dead. There is no fire, neither is there torment. The righteous and the unrighteous are found there.
2. Hades
Hades is found ten times in the New Testament. It is also is the place of the dead, the grave. It corresponds with the Hebrew *sheol*.
Acts 2:27, 31   In *hades* there is decay. Jesus was the exception.
In Asia Minor the term *hades* is frequently found on tombstones. But relatives of the deceased did not want to say that their loved one was in hell. He or she rests in the grave. *Hades* is not hell which supposedly is already burning.
3. Tartaros
The Greek *tartaros* is not directly found in the New Testament, however, the verb "to cast in *tartaros*" is. It occurs in 2 Peter 2:4 only and is the abode of the fallen angels, who cannot return to the presence of God in heaven. It is not used to describe the place of the dead nor a hell in which people are cast after their death.
4. Gehenna
In the New Testament twelve times *gehenna* is mentioned. This is the hell about which Jesus spoke. It is the future place of punishment of the unrighteous. The term may be derived from *gê hinnom* pointing to the valley of Hinnom, a gorge near Jerusalem. According to Jer 7:32-33 it is a place of judgment. Rabbinical tradition understood it as a place outside Jerusalem for burning carcasses and rubbish.
Mark 9:43   Here *gehenna* is associated with fire. This fire begins only after Jesus' second coming (Matt 25:41), at the end of the age (Matt 13:49-50). Until then people "sleep" in their graves.
Luke 12:5   Because God alone possesses immortality (1Tim 6:16), *gehenna*/hell does not begin immediately after death for the person that has passed away.
Rev 20:9-10, 15   Does not mention the word *gehenna* but talks about the lake of fire in which after the millennium the unrighteous are burnt up. Since *gehenna* is associated with fire and is a future event after the Second Coming, having to do with judgment, it is best to understand hell in the context of Rev 20. This is the hell Jesus warned us about.
5. The Term "Forever"
Does the future hell last "forever and ever" (Rev 20:10)? The term "forever"/"eternal"/ "everlasting" as used in Scripture is broader than the English word. It

may describe (1) something or someone existing without beginning and without end (in connection with God); (2) something or someone with beginning but without end (the eternal life of the redeemed–John 5:24; Rev 21:3-4); and (3) something or someone with beginning and with end in the sense of "for some time" (Exod 21:5-6; 29:9; Jonah 1:17; 2:6).

6. The Second Death

The unrighteous suffer "hell" for a limited time only. However, the results are eternal.

Rev 20:9   Fire devoured them.
Rev 20:14-15   This is the second death.

The unquenchable fire (Matt 3:12) cannot be extinguished until its work is done and everything is burned up (Matt 13:40-42; Jer 17:27–Jerusalem does not burn any longer). Eternal life is available only for those who belong to Jesus. Satan is not the Lord of hell, but will also be destroyed (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:10).

7. Conclusion

Scripture knows about hell, but hell is still future. Greek philosophy is the mother of the doctrine of purgatory and eternal torment in hell. Socrates (born around 470 B.C.) supported such concepts, but acknowledged that they were fictitious stories.

III. Consequences

The doctrine of an already now and ever burning hell twists Scripture, misrepresents Christianity, and distorts the character of God, his love and his justice. It may even hurt people. Reports claim that after sermons on hell some people became mentally ill. The doctrine of eternal torment in hell is immoral. How can a merciful God of love torture people in all eternity for having sinned temporarily? We believe in a God of love and justice and in his kingdom in which sorrow, pain, crying, and death will be no more (Rev 21:3-4).

<div align="right">Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI</div>

BOOK NOTES

Leonard Brand and Don S. McMahon. *The Prophet and Her Critics*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005. 128 pp. $11.99.

This book by Leonard Brand, professor of biology and paleontology at Loma Linda University, and Don McMahon, throat surgeon and university lecturer in Australia, is a thoughtful and carefully researched response to many of the recent attacks on the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. While the book focuses particularly on Ellen White's health message, it also offers a new evaluation of several critical publications of her writings.

A chapter each is devoted to Walter Rea's book *The White Lie* (M. & R. Publications, 1982); Jonathan Butler's article "The World of E. G. White and the End of the World" in *Spectrum* 10.2 (1979); and Ronald Numbers

book *Prophetess of Health* (Harper and Row, 1976). Brand and McMahon evaluate these publications primarily in regard to the methods these authors used in their critiques of Ellen White.

Following their investigation the authors conclude that "Rea's research design and his logic contain errors that are fatal to his argument" (p. 21); Butler is faulted for "rejecting hypotheses that differ from his own not because of evidence, but simply because he prefers his interpretation" (p. 33); and Numbers' research design is declared to be "completely inadequate to support the conclusions he made," primarily because he "based his principal conclusion about Ellen White's inspiration on anecdotal evidence" (p. 43).

In chapter five McMahon outlines the research method he used to compare Ellen White's health principles with her supposed sources and with modern medical principles. He assigned each of Ellen White's health or medical statements to one of two categories: (1) lifestyle principles (the "whats"), or (2) the explanation or reason for a "what" principle (the "whys"). He then compared these categories with the writings of five other health reformers of her day (Sylvester Graham, William Alcott, Larkin Coles, James C. Jackson, and John Harvey Kellogg) and with the findings of modern science.

In his comparison of lifestyle principles (the "whats") with modern science he placed each principle in one of three categories: (1) unverified; (2) verified and minor; and (3) verified and significant.

Among the important results of his study are the following: (1) Ellen White's book *Spiritual Gifts*, volume 4 (published in 1864), contains forty-six "what" statements of which he considered forty-four (96%) verified, with seventy percent being significant principles and twenty-six percent minor principles. (2) In the book *Ministry of Healing* (published in (1905) Ellen White added forty more "whats." Of these extra forty principles, McMahon considers 31 (78%) verified, forty percent of them significant and thirty-eight percent of minor importance. (3) Of the three hundred lifestyle principles found in the writings of Graham, Alcott, Coles, and Jackson sixty-nine percent are unverified. Among them are such principles as "don't use salt; drink little water, don't' let children eat fruit, if you must eat meat, eat it raw, etc" (pp. 77-78).

McMahon concludes from this, "Since she was largely uneducated and certainly had no medical training at all, how did she know which health principles to choose and which to ignore? And where did she get the extra 'whats' that are not found in the writings of other reformers but that have been verified? True divine inspiration is one explanation. Does anyone have another realistic explanation?" (p. 64).

Something else that McMahon found is significant. The correctness level of the "whys" in Ellen White's books differs considerably from that of the "whats." Her "whys"

are no more correct than those of the other reformers. He explains this with a parallel in her writings on history. In the great controversy vision Ellen White was shown how God interacted with events in human history, but she was left to study history books to find the details (dates and places) of what she had seen. Similarly, McMahon suggests, God gave her the health principles but not always the reasons for them. These she may have found in the literature of other reformers. Furthermore, he says, "God could not have explained some of the whys correctly at that time without inventing medical vocabulary and revealing physiological concepts that were not known until decades after Ellen White wrote" (p. 73).

In chapter six, entitled "Ellen G. White and Principles of Sexual Relationships," Brand and McMahon counter the claim that her views on sex reveal how unbalanced her ideas on health were. While the authors acknowledge that not all her "whys" on this topic can be explained, perhaps she gleaned some of them also from other health reformers, they caution against a premature rejection of what she says.

"More medical research must be done before we will truly know how to interpret some of what she says" (p. 85).

The book has a concluding chapter and an appendix in which most of two chapters from *Prophets and Kings* are compared with the relevant section of Daniel March's *Night Scenes in the Bible.* This allows readers to gain a more accurate picture of how much similarity or dissimilarity there actually exists between these books.

The *Prophet and Her Critic* is a positive and valuable contribution to the ongoing debate concerning the role of Ellen White in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It provides new insight into the way God used Ellen White to bring the health message to the church. His differentiation between the "whats" and the "whys" is helpful and challenging at the same time. Critics and defenders of Ellen White will do well to take note of this book. As Jon Paulien wrote on the back cover of the book, "I challenge anyone tempted to reject the ministry of Ellen White to carefully consider the implications of this book."

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