

Important Decisions Reached in Atlanta

BY CLINTON WAHLEN

“This is not just an organization. This is not just another denomination. This is God’s Remnant Church.” So said the new General Conference president, Ted N. C. Wilson, on Friday, June 25, 2010 to those gathered at the 59th General Conference session in Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A. Together with emphasizing the role of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy in decision-making and the church’s

need of “revival and reformation,” Pastor Wilson set a spiritual direction for the session and for the work of the coming quinquennium. He will work closely with G. T. Ng, newly elected GC secretary, and Robert Lemon who was re-elected as GC treasurer. Other new appointments include Delbert Baker, Geoffrey G. Mbwana, Benjamin D. Schoun, and Artur Stele as GC General Vice Presidents, Jerry Page as Ministerial Secretary, and a number of new directors of departments: Williams Costa, Jr. (Communication), Lisa M. Beardsley (Education), Willie Oliver (Family Ministries) with wife Elaine as associate director, Thomas A. Kapusta (Trust Services), and Gilbert Cangy (Youth Ministries). The proposal to elect associate directors of GC departments at the Annual Council following a GC session was voted down and so these offices were also filled in Atlanta, though a special exception was voted by the session for the Ministerial Association associates for this quinquennium to be selected at the upcoming Annual Council.



Photo: Daniel Wahlen

Ordination of Deaconesses

In addition to changes in leadership, some significant items involving theological matters were considered. Dominating the business of the session was a major reorganization/revision of the *Church Manual*. In connection with this revision, a new provision for the ordination of deaconesses was discussed at length and passed:

... When these have been elected, the elders should be ordained, unless they have already been ordained as elders. A similar but shorter service should take place for ordination of deacons and deaconesses.¹

The change passed with more comprehensive language than the original proposal, which had provided for the ordination of deaconesses only in those regions that would have specifically allowed it.

Responding to the suggestion that the whole concept of ordination deserved more scrutiny, the question of what we mean by ordination was referred for further study during the coming quinquennium. This is an important step because ordination within the Adventist church (whether for elders, deacons, and now deaconesses) has always been worldwide rather than regional. Voting the modified proposal concerning deaconesses has preserved this understanding for the time being.

Another question that generated a little bit of discussion was the definition of marriage given in the *Church Manual*. In order to clarify the existing definition further, that “marriage, thus instituted by God, is a monogamous, heterosexual relationship,” it was voted that the phrase “between one male and one female” be added to the existing statement. This echoes language found in Gen 1:27, which is quoted by Jesus in Mark 10:6/

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EDITORIAL

Leadership and the Church



Many Adventists consider elections at a General Conference Session the most important agenda item. And we want to wish our leaders God's abundant blessings, the guidance of His Spirit, strength, wisdom, and a loving heart. But elections also trigger considerations about the nature of leadership and the people of God, including the concept of the priesthood of all believers.

In 1 Peter 2:9, the community itself is called a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.” . . . With the baptismal commitment of faith, all Christians become priests in the pattern of Christ—preaching, sacrificing their lives for their brothers and sisters, and becoming prayerful stewards of the universe.¹

The priesthood of all believers has important dimensions. All believers have direct access to the throne of grace (Rom 10:13; 1 John 1:9) because they are redeemed by Christ's blood (Heb 10:19-22) and saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). They can understand Scripture and therefore should have access to it (Acts 17:11). It also teaches the ontological equality of the believers and, consequently, their involvement in the mission, worship, and understanding of the theology of the church as well as the offering of spiritual sacrifices which include good conduct (1 Pet 1:15; 2:2; 3:16), service, and self-dedication (Rom 12:1).

Since the church as a whole is a priesthood, there is no room for unbalanced individualism or congregationalism. Unfortunately, in church history the priesthood of believers was divided into a twofold priesthood. Even today “the common priesthood of Christians is generally acknowledged but often muted in the interests of a special priesthood of the ordained.”²

On the other hand, church leadership is a biblical concept. Leaders develop plans, motivate church members to adopt and execute them, and encourage them to come up with their own. They stand up for truth, make tough decisions, and seek the best for the church, sometimes at great personal cost. Good leadership refrains from exercising kingly rule over the church (1 Pet 5:3). Following the example of Christ's servant leadership (Matt 20:25-28; 23:8, 11), leaders allow the members to participate in decision-making, regarding them as having high potential and wonderful spiritual gifts needed to further God's cause. The NT metaphor of the church as a body (1 Cor 12) points to a desirable diversity within a marvelous unity. Its members are called to respect elders, pastors, teachers, and administrators, who in turn are to exemplify humble service:

Men whom the Lord calls to important positions in His work are to cultivate a humble dependence upon Him. They are not to seek to embrace too much authority; for God has not called them to a work of ruling, but to plan and counsel with their fellow laborers” (9T 270).

The concept of the priesthood of all believers *put into practice* allows individuals to attain greater maturity and contributes to a climate of mutual love and to church growth. It also helps believers rejoice in their election and holiness and join in the effort “by all means [to] save some” (1 Cor 9:22).

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

¹ Stephen Happel, “Priesthood,” in *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, ed. by D. W. Musser and J. L. Price (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 380.

² D. F. Wright, “Priesthood of All Believers,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 532.



Reflections

Reflections 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.

Editor Clinton Wahlen

Production Manager Marlene Bacchus

Images Brenda Flemmer

Editorial Committee

Ángel M. Rodríguez • Kwabena Donkor
Ekkehardt Mueller • Gerhard Pfandl

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Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA

Phone: 301.680.6790 • Fax: 301.680.6788

www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org

Important Decisions Reached in Atlanta

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Matt 19:4 (cf. Gen 2:24; Mark 10:7/Matt 19:5).

The Doctrine of Creation

The General Conference session also considered the topic of Creation, which has undergone increased scrutiny in recent years. Following the Faith and Science conferences of 2002-2004, which brought together a widespread international representation of Adventist scientists, theologians, and administrators to examine issues

Pastor Wilson set a spiritual direction for the session and for the work of the coming quinquennium.

related to origins and the Flood, a report entitled “An Affirmation of Creation” was presented to the Executive Committee of the General Conference.² As a result of this report, a strongly-worded response was discussed and voted by the Annual Council in Silver Spring, Md., U.S.A. on October 13, 2004. (For details about these meetings, the report of the conferences, and this response, see the article by Gerhard Pfandl, “Creation Debate in the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” in this issue.)

This response was reaffirmed by the General Conference session on June 30, 2010. In addition to reaffirming “a literal, recent, six-day Creation” and a global Flood, it calls “on all boards and educators at Seventh-day Adventist institutions at all levels to continue upholding and advocating the church’s position on origins.” It also urges that students be “educated to understand and assess competing philosophies of origins that dominate scientific discussion in the contemporary world.”³ As part of the same discussion, the session voted to ask that study be given to clarifying Fundamental Belief #6 in accordance with the process it voted in 2005 for revising these statements.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI director, summarized this process for the delegates assembled in Atlanta. Requests for revision of or addition to the Fundamental Beliefs, he said, “should reach the office of the president of the General Conference at least two years before the

next General Conference session.” The GC president will then appoint an ad hoc committee to consider the request and, if necessary, prepare an initial draft of the revisions. The proposed revisions will be sent by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference to the Spring Meeting or Annual Council “for further discussions, contributions, and suggestions for changes or revisions.” After that, the document will be circulated among theologians and published in the *Adventist Review* and *Ministry* magazine to invite suggestions from the world church. The ad hoc committee will study these suggestions and incorporate those that are accepted into the document, which will be further discussed at the Annual Council preceding the General Conference session. “And from there it will be voted to take it to the General Conference session with any recommendation that the Annual Council might have.”⁴

All of these actions taken by the General Conference in Atlanta encourage the church individually and collectively to study and reflect on matters vital for our faith and practice. By drawing attention to them here, we hope to stimulate widespread study, discussion, and reflection on these topics at all levels in order to further theological unity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and thereby enhance understanding of what we believe and why.

What we mean by ordination was referred for further study.

Clinton Wahlen is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute

¹ *Adventist Review: General Conference Bulletin* 6, July 1, 2010, p. 3.

² The document is available online: <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat54.html>; accessed July 8, 2010.

³ The document is available online: <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat55.html>; accessed July 8, 2010.

⁴ *Adventist Review: General Conference Bulletin* 7, July 2, 2010, p. 29.

“... the promise of Christ’s presence in answer to prayer should comfort and encourage his church to-day as much as it comforted and encouraged the apostles whom Christ directly addressed” (3SP 247).

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Creation Debate in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

BY GERHARD PFANDL

At the Annual Council in 2001 the General Conference Executive Committee organized a series of conferences on faith and science during the years 2002-2004. The first conference in 2002 was an international conference in Ogden, Utah. More than 80 scientists, theologians and church administrators from different parts of the world began discussing the interrelationship between faith and science. Topics ranged from the hominid fossil record to Ellen White's view of science. The conference revealed the seriousness and breadth of differences concerning questions of origin that are present in the SDA community today.

During 2003 and the first half of 2004 seven divisions held similar faith and science conferences in their territories. The formal discussions culminated in August 2004 with the second international conference on the subject in Denver, Colorado. At this conference papers were read summarizing the findings of the discussions during the previous two years.

The new element in this conference was a discussion on the ethics of dissent dealing with the ethical responsibility of those who differ in significant ways from the biblical position of the church on the topic of creation. The discussion was open, candid, and highly professional. It was obvious that a small number of individuals – scientists and theologians – did not support or felt uncomfortable with the biblical doctrine of creation in six literal, consecutive days as clearly revealed in Genesis 1.¹

There was no attempt on the part of church leaders to modify or change our fundamental belief on creation. This was clearly stated by Elder Jan Paulsen before the discussions were initiated. However, such discussions cannot be avoided because the theory of evolution and the Adventist doctrine of creation represent two antagonistic and fundamentally diverse world views. Unfortunately, theistic evolution is one view that is being held and taught by some Seventh-day Adventists today.

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Secondly, it is important for the church to be aware of the fact that neither evolutionists nor creationists have all the answers in the debate. These conferences provided a proper environment to discuss these questions while at the same time holding to our faith commitment.

An Affirmation of Creation

A report entitled “An Affirmation of Creation” was presented on September 10, 2004 to the Executive Committee of the General Conference by the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee.² This report noted “a high level of concurrence on basic understandings” and “widespread affirmation of the church's understanding of life on earth.” However, the document also observed that “some among us interpret the biblical record in ways that lead to sharply different conclusions.” Specifically, “alternative interpretations of Genesis 1, including the idea of theistic evolution,” were rejected as lacking theological coherence and inconsistent with Adventist beliefs, including the biblical doctrine of creation. It also noted concern about the alleged ambiguity of the phrase “in six days” found in Fundamental Belief #6, resulting in “uncertainty about what the church actually believes.” In this same connection, the following observation is also significant:

We recognize that there are different theological interpretations among us regarding Genesis 1-11. In view of the various interpretations we sensed a high degree of concern that those involved in the Seventh-day Adventist teaching ministry conduct their work ethically and with integrity—by standards of their profession, the teachings of Scripture, and the basic understanding held by the body of believers.

The report also included the following statements of affirmations and recommendations:

Affirmations

1. We affirm the primacy of Scripture in the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of origins.
2. We affirm the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Genesis 1 that life on earth was created in six literal days and is of recent origin.
3. We affirm the biblical account of the Fall resulting in death and evil.
4. We affirm the biblical account of a catastrophic

Flood, an act of God's judgment that affected the whole planet, as an important key to understanding earth history.

5. We affirm that our limited understanding of origins calls for humility and that further exploration into these questions brings us closer to deep and wonderful mysteries.
6. We affirm the interlocking nature of the doctrine of creation with other Seventh-day Adventist doctrines.
7. We affirm that in spite of its fallenness nature is a witness to the Creator.
8. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist scientists in their endeavors to understand the Creator's handiwork through the methodologies of their disciplines.
9. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist theologians in their efforts to explore and articulate the content of revelation.
10. We affirm Seventh-day Adventist educators in their pivotal ministry to the children and youth of the church.
11. We affirm that the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church identified in Revelation 14:6, 7 includes a call to worship God as Creator of all.

Recommendations

The Organizing Committee for the International Faith and Science Conferences recommends that:

1. In order to address what some interpret as a lack of clarity in Fundamental Belief #6 the historic Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Genesis narrative be affirmed more explicitly.
2. Church leaders at all levels be encouraged to assess and monitor the effectiveness with which denominational systems and programs succeed in preparing young people, including those attending non-Adventist schools, with a biblical understanding of origins and an awareness of the challenges they may face in respect to this understanding.
3. Increased opportunity be provided for interdisciplinary dialog and research, in a safe environment, among Seventh-day Adventist scholars from around the world.³

The 2004 Annual Council, after careful discussion of this report, produced a response in which the members of the Council strongly endorsed the Church's historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day creation.

Response to "An Affirmation of Creation"

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 & 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.⁴

It is significant that this response of the 2004 Annual Council called on all school boards and teachers at our schools to uphold and advocate the Church's position on origins. Unfortunately, this recommendation

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has not been sufficiently followed up. Therefore, at the recent General Conference session in Atlanta, it was voted "to reaffirm and endorse" the 2004 Annual Council's response to the Affirmation of Creation statement. It also voted, in accordance

with the 2005 General Conference session protocol for amending a fundamental belief, to request that the General Conference administration initiate a process to integrate Fundamental Belief #6 with this response.⁵ It is hoped that this action of the world church will encourage the boards and teachers of our schools and universities to ensure that teaching on origins supports and affirms the church's Fundamental Belief #6.

Conclusion

The last few years have shown that theistic evo-

lution has gained entrance into our church. Should it become more and more accepted, we will be in danger of losing the biblical foundation for the Sabbath and our understanding of salvation. Without the creation week, the Sabbath becomes a Jewish institution; and if death existed long before the appearance of man, then there was no Fall in Eden and therefore really no need for salvation. And if there was no Fall, then Paul was in error when he wrote:

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. (Rom 5:12)



Gerhard Pfandl is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute

¹ Ángel M. Rodríguez, "Second International Faith and Science Conference: A Report," *Reflections* 9 (Jan. 2005): 2.

² "An Affirmation of Creation," Report of the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee; online: <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat54.html>; accessed July 8, 2010.

³ Ibid.

⁴ This response to "An Affirmation of Creation" was voted by the Annual Council in Silver Spring, Maryland, October 13, 2004; online: <http://adventist.org/beliefs/statements/main-stat55.html>; accessed July 8, 2010.

⁵ *Adventist Review*, July 2, 2010, p. 30.

Reflections on the GC Session: Items to Keep in Mind

By ÁNGEL MANUEL RODRÍGUEZ

Coming back from the Session in Atlanta I had time to think about a number of items related to the Session that appear to have some theological implications. I bring them to the attention of church leaders hoping that they may be taken into consideration in planning the next one. I have limited myself to three observations.

1. Selection of Delegates

The selection of delegates to the General Conference Session is exceptionally important. They speak and vote on matters related to policies, church governance, and Adventist lifestyle and doctrines. In order for them to be effective participants, they should be expected to have a basic knowledge of church governance and a deep and clear understanding of our faith. They should also be unquestionably devoted to the message and mission of the

church. In the absence of a full commitment we could easily witness during the session unnecessary debates and the promotion of personal agendas totally foreign to the world church.

It appears counterproductive to allow those on the extreme left and right fringes of the church to distribute or sell their materials during a General Conference Session.

It would appear to me that a General Conference Session is not the place for a delegate to voice a concern that goes against the Word of God, that opposes what the Church proclaims or that represents either a personal view or the view of an extremely small group

on the fringes of Adventism. Such individuals should not have the world church as their audience.

I would suggest that, among the criteria used for

the selection of delegates, the following elements be included. First, they should be individuals who have demonstrated through voice and action to have a solid understanding of the message proclaimed by the world church and who have appropriated it. Second, they should understand that their main concern as delegates is to work together in building up the Church and seeking what is best for it under the guidance of the Word and the illumination of the Spirit. Third, they should be instructed concerning church governance and proper parliamentary procedures. This applies in a particular way to delegates selected from local churches. I would suggest that this type of instruction be provided at the Union level.

2. Ethics and the Election of Leaders

Any session at which leaders are not reelected leaves a trail of emotional pain. Of course we should all be mature enough to deal with such an eventuality recognizing that we were appointed to serve in our positions for a specific period of time and that our reelection is not to be taken for granted. But human nature is not always rational; the unexpected happens and our emotions take over; we feel rejected or betrayed. The result is a strong sense of loss, and pain. How should we deal with those who leave the session hurting?

Let me be more direct. Should not those who, because of their particular role as leaders are able to influence the reelection process, tell in advance those who are serving that they may not be reelected? Should they not also be informed about the possible reasons for the decision? This will give them time to start thinking about another job before the session. Some may wonder whether it is wise to do this when no one can be absolutely certain concerning what will happen at the session. Obviously we should not give the impression to anyone that he or she will be reelected when deep in our hearts we know that this probably will not happen. But telling them in advance could potentially bring into the equation attitudes of defiance, unwillingness to cooperate, etc., that could aggravate the situation before and during the session.

So, what is the best thing to do? This is a question that leaders should ask themselves. I would suggest that the least we can do is care for the person who was not reelected. It is important to inform them that they were not reappointed before the name of the new person is brought to the floor. Those on the nominating committee especially must take their sacred responsibility seri-

ously to help ensure the confidentiality of nominations until this process can be completed. It is also important to do as much as possible to find a place for those not reelected to continue to serve the church, unless the inefficiency was of such a nature that the proper ethical decision would be to advise him or her to seek employment somewhere else. In any case, ministering to those who are hurting after a session is always spiritually and ethically appropriate and it would be good to think often about how to do this in a better and more effective way.

3. The Exhibits

I must say that, in general, the exhibits were very good and served well those who visited them. I have two comments to make, one is of a general nature and the other is an ecclesiological concern. The first one

is about noise pollution. Most of the

time, the level of noise was so great that it was difficult to talk to others on the floor. The main sources of noise were the large exhibits where groups were singing or where music was aired. From the health point of view noise pollution could be very damaging to those who are exposed to it for many hours. This was the experience of those who were in charge of the booths. My suggestion? Control the level of the music or have musical programs outside the exhibit area.

My second concern is about who should be allowed the privilege of promoting materials in the exhibit area. In order to answer that question it is important for those in charge of the area to define the purpose of the exhibits and establish clear criteria for the approval of requests for space. It appears to me to be counterproductive to allow those on the extreme left and right fringes of the church to distribute or sell their materials during a General Conference Session, because very often they undermine elements of the message of the world church and/or express some animosity against it.

Having shared these thoughts about the Session, I must conclude by saying that it was a wonderful experience. The Lord was among us in our fellowship through the Word, prayer, and the decisional processes. Unquestionably, the Lord has done, is doing and will continue

to do great things with this end-time movement. May we all continue to walk humbly before Him in the service of His church and the world.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez is director of the Biblical Research Institute



Photo: Daniel Wahlen



Marriage and Food in 1 Timothy 4:1-5

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

Paul's rejection of extreme positions regarding marriage and food in 1 Tim 4:1-5 have frequently been misunderstood. It seems that some people are quite easily deceived and may fall for various heresies, often-times choosing one extreme or the other. In NT times and subsequent centuries some followed quite a licentious lifestyle, while others embraced asceticism.¹ The latter problem is found in this passage:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, *men* who forbid marriage *and* advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim 4:1-5, NASB)

It will be helpful to understand the historical context of this passage before looking more closely at each of its constituent parts.

I. The Context of 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Paul's letter to Timothy was written to help the younger colleague pastoring the church in Ephesus (Eph 1:3) and to deal with the problems and challenges that

arose there. An issue with false teachers occurs already in chapter one.² False teachers are found again here. In chapter 6:20-21 they are mentioned once more in connection

with what was falsely being called knowledge (*gnōsis*).

Just before addressing this heresy head-on, Paul

makes wonderful statements about the church and about Jesus to conclude his discussion of church order and organization (1 Tim 3:15-16).³ But although the church is the house of God and the pillar of faith, heresy lurks around the corner and has to be addressed.

II. A Closer Look at the Passage

Verse 1. Clearly, the Spirit referred to in v. 1 is the Holy Spirit. R. F. Collins calls Him “the prophetic Spirit”⁴ and L. T. Johnson “the Spirit of prophecy.”⁵ In Revelation 2-3 the sayings of Jesus are at the same time also what the Spirit says. And indeed Jesus had spoken about false christs and false prophets (Mark 13:22).

Already in the time of Paul apostasy began. It would become more pronounced in the following centuries and reach its climax prior to Jesus' second coming.⁶

The deceitful teachings go back

to evil spirits, that is, demonic influences which are in opposition to the sound doctrine of the Pastoral Letters.⁷

Verse 2. Evil spirits use human instrumentalities—whom Paul charges with hypocrisy, calling them liars. Their cauterized conscience has become either completely insensitive and no longer reliable as an inner guide to distinguish right from wrong⁸ or it has been branded by an iron to become the property of Satan.⁹

Verse 3a. With v. 3 the nature of this false teaching is described: it forbids marriage and prohibits eating certain food items. We are dealing with a form of asceticism. In Gnosticism, which manifested itself more fully some decades later, a strong distinction between spirit and matter was made. All matter, including the body, was created by the God of the Old Testament, also called Demiurge, and considered evil. This “God” supposedly differed dramatically from the God of love of the New Testament. Gnostics argued that the body is our enemy and must be repressed by asceticism or conquered by fully indulging its desires.¹⁰ In a way not unlike the ascetic Gnostics, the false teachers of 1 Timothy 4 considered marriage with its sexual activity as well as eating certain foods sinful.

Paul had discussed singleness and marriage in 1 Corinthians 7. Although he favored singleness “in view of the present distress” (1 Cor 7:26) because “one could give more time and energy directly to serving the Lord (1 Cor 7:32, 35),”¹¹ Paul was by no means opposed to marriage and realized that many were gifted to marry. “But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own hus-



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band” (1 Cor 7:2, cf. vv. 9, 36-38). Paul also encouraged couples to have sexual relations (1 Cor 7:3-5). In the very same letter in which he discusses these ascetic tendencies, Paul supports marriage (1 Tim 2:15; 5:14). “The forbidding of marriage within Pauline Christianity would be to take the position of 1 Cor 7:1 literally, without any of the qualifications offered by the rest of the chapter.”¹² Why did the false teachers forbid marriage? Maybe they considered “marriage as inherently wrong,”¹³ thought that celibate singleness “was the means to a higher degree of holiness”¹⁴ or accepted an “over-realized eschatology” according to which the resurrection had already occurred.¹⁵

The word used for food (*brōma*) means “solid food.” At times it refers to meat or flesh (1 Cor 8:13; Ps 79:2). However it frequently describes grain (Gen 41:35-36; Isa 62:8). Some expositors suggest that Paul is talking about meat. Knight states: “It is likely that *brōma* is used in that specialized sense here. If so, the false teachers are urging abstention from meat as something intrinsically wrong. It is this evaluation of meat as intrinsically evil that distinguishes the false teachers from the ‘weak’ in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 and that elicits condemnation and refutation . . .”¹⁶ Others go a step further and suggest that Paul is abolishing the difference between clean and unclean food.¹⁷ Still others are more cautious and do not make a final decision because the term “food” is a general term and nothing in the text indicates that it refers to meat.¹⁸ Therefore, it is also impossible to make a case against biblical food laws. Interestingly enough, Clement of Alexandria states that some people ascribed abstention from sexual relations and the prohibition of eating beans to Pythagoreans (*Stromata* 3.24.1-2).¹⁹ If this is correct, the issue would not necessarily involve eating meat. S. H. Webb even suggests that the issue with the opponents is “strict periods of fasting”:

... the Greek word *brōma* is better translated as the generic for food. The group in question probably advocated strict periods of fasting. Even if they were vegetarians, they were being criticized not because of what they would not eat but because they connected their diet to a prohibition of marriage. They were thus motivated by a denial of the goodness of the material world and by a fear of all sexual things.²⁰

Verses 3b-5. Paul counters theologically-motivated asceticism by pointing back to creation. Creation and

thanksgiving are important in Paul’s response, and he uses both concepts at least twice. Against this incipient form of Gnosticism Paul’s God is the God of both Testaments, and this God has created everything, even food which is good for consumption and which should be received with gratitude. Johnson points out that verse 4 can be understood prescriptively, namely “nothing is to be rejected,” but also “more descriptively as ‘nothing is rejected’ (that is, by God).”²¹ In any case, God is the giver of good gifts that we are allowed to enjoy. While W. D. Mounce proposes that we are dealing with a cultic context,²² R. F. Collins insists that the writer “does not make use of the ritual language of ‘cleanness’ or ‘purity’ to speak about food.... Neither does he use the social language of good nor the medical language of health to speak of diet.... Food and sex are good because they have been created by God.”²³

Verse 4 could be understood in an absolute sense, i.e. that Christians can eat anything, but the context of v. 3 seems to militate against such an option. While God created certain things as food for animals and humans, other things were created for other purposes. “Foods that were created for consumption with accompanying thanksgiving are excellent.”²⁴ Although v. 4 may deal primarily with the food issue, it may also, at least indirectly, speak to the prohibition of getting married.²⁵

Since Paul refers back to Genesis 1 and 2, reminding his readers that what God had created was good (cf. Gen 1:31), one has to ask what it was that God created as food for humans. Fiore states: “the appeal to God’s creation and its goodness (v. 4) recalls Genesis 1-2, where food was created and marriage was instituted . . .”²⁶ What was created for consumption were various seed-bearing plants and fruits (Gen 1:29). After the Fall other vegetables were added to humanity’s diet (Gen 3:18). The eating of meat was permitted only after the Flood, but even then it was restricted to clean meat (Gen 9:3; 7:2; 8:20). God did not create animals to be consumed by humans. He created an excellent creation free from death and suffering.²⁷ It is not legitimate to read the situation and the consequences of a post-fall world back into the pre-fall paradise that God had created. But if people prohibit the consumption of what God has created to be used as food and refrain from receiving God’s good gifts with gratitude, they are going against the Creator’s order and plan.

If verse 4 were meant to be all-inclusive we should be able to eat even *poisonous* plants and animals as long as we receive them with thanksgiving. Would they then be miraculously transformed and sanctified and thereby

made edible through the Word of God and prayer? Such an understanding resembles magical thinking more than Pauline thought.²⁸ While we should eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31), we are not told to put God to the test by consuming poisonous things.

Verse 5 has been understood in various ways, especially the phrase “the word of God.”²⁹ It is generally agreed that Paul talks about table prayers.³⁰ W. Hendriksen suggests: “By means of God’s *blessing* upon it [the food] and by means of our *confident prayer*, it has been *consecrated* (cf. 2 Tim 2:21), that is, set apart for holy use, lifted into the spiritual realm. For the Christian, eating and drinking are no secular activities (1 Cor 10:31).”³¹ L. T. Johnson correctly points out that it is not “the prayer that makes marriage or food good; it is such, Paul says, by God’s creation rather than human action.”³²

III. Summary

1 Tim 4:1-5 is a somewhat difficult passage. Although it is quite obvious that Paul is dealing with asceticism, the precise nature of the food is not clear. It is quite likely that he is not talking about meat-based versus vegetarian diets. But even if that were the case, as Lea points out, Paul does not oppose singleness and vegetarianism. It is asceticism that he denounces.³³ The text cannot be used to show that the Old Testament distinction between clean and unclean meats is abolished.

Christians should accept the good gifts that God has



provided, namely marital relations and food appropriate for consumption. Eating and drinking are not secular activities. Rather they are to be enjoyed and received with prayers of thanksgiving.

Ekkehardt Mueller is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute

¹ Cf. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992), 187.

² Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (NAC; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 127-128 mention that Paul warned against “myths” and legalistic demands of the false teachers in Ephesus.”

³ Cf. Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (NTL; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 112.

⁴ Collins, 112.

⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (AB 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 238.

⁶ Cf. Benjamin Fiore, *The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Sec-*

ond Timothy, Titus (SP 12; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2007), 90.

⁷ Cf. Collins, 113.

⁸ Johnson, 240: “. . . they have no healthy inner guide.”

⁹ Cf. Knight, 189; Lea and Griffin, 129; Collins, 114.

¹⁰ Cf. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2004), 147; Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (rev. ed.; TNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994), 104. Collins, 114, states: “The two extremes, rigid asceticism and licentious antinomianism with regard to food and sex, were later associated with Gnosticism.” He continues: “The patristic texts and the *Acts of Paul* show that issues of sex and marriage were a matter of heated debate among second-century Christians. The church of the first century was, however, not innocent of debates about food and sex” (116).

¹¹ Knight, 190.

¹² Johnson, 240.

¹³ Knight, 190.

¹⁴ Lea and Griffin, 130.

¹⁵ Fiore, 90.

¹⁶ Knight, 190.

¹⁷ Lea and Griffin, 130, cf. 132, stating that “the believers in Ephesus had learned that there are no food laws.” William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville, Tenn.: Nelson, 2000), 233, 239, 240.

¹⁸ Cf. Fiore, 90-91; Hendriksen and Kistemaker, 147-148.

¹⁹ Cf. Collins, 116.

²⁰ Stephen H. Webb, *Good Eating* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 121.

²¹ Johnson, 241.

²² Mounce, 240.

²³ Collins, 117-118.

²⁴ Hendriksen and Kistemaker, 148.

²⁵ Collins, 119, suggests that the words about receiving food with a prayer of thanksgiving “can readily be extended to the use of sex within marriage.”

²⁶ Fiore, 91.

²⁷ This may not be taken into consideration by expositors such as Mounce, who seems to assume that at creation God already designed the animals to be eaten: “When God looked over creation and pronounced it very good, all foods were declared good. If Towner is correct that the opponents were trying to recreate the Garden of Eden with its lack of (formal) marriage and its vegetarianism, then Paul would be using one of their presumably key passages to argue against their teaching” (241).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 242, emphasizes: “Nothing in the PE [Pastoral Epistles] suggests that Paul sees prayers as having magical powers” (brackets mine).

²⁹ Guthrie, 105-106, Lea and Griffin, 131-132, and Mounce, 241 list several options.

³⁰ Cf. Fiore, 91; Guthrie, 105-106; Lea and Griffin, 132.

³¹ Hendriksen and Kistemaker, 148 (emphasis his). Knight, 192, understands the term “sanctified” in a more general sense as “declared fit, acceptable, or good for use or consumption.”

³² Johnson, 242.

³³ Cf. Lea and Griffin, 132.

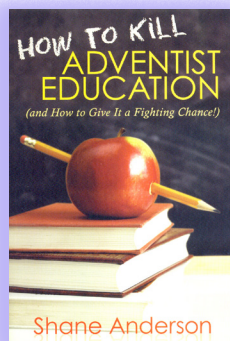
“Prayer is heaven’s ordained means of success in the conflict with sin and the development of Christian character” (AA 564).

BOOK NOTES

Shane Anderson. *How to Kill Adventist Education (and How to Give It a Fighting Chance!)*. Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald, 2009, 160 pp., US\$12.99.

Shane Anderson is a pastor well informed about Adventist education, its philosophy, practice, and present condition. In a sense he is an outsider to the Adventist educational system; he is not a professional educator or administrator. This is not his weakness but his strength. He objectively analyzes Adventist education and asks himself two questions: How did we get to where we are? What should be done to change the present situation? Although he is dealing with Adventist education in North America, educators from around the world will benefit from the book.

Anderson first describes the condition of our schools: Enrollment continues to decline, some have been closed, the rest are struggling to survive. Adventist schools are vanishing. These are the facts. Before addressing the primary causes for the decline, Anderson discusses some of the secondary causes (lack of commitment to Adventist institutions, high financial cost, and marketing). The root causes for the problems are located in a diversity of places. He begins with church members who do not seem to be interested in, much less committed to, conservative Adventist values and teachings. Besides, church members are not being trained to fulfill the mission of the church and practice true Christian disciplines (discipleship). Pastors are also responsible for the present crisis. A number of them do not provide the support to Adventist education that is needed. Adventist homes lack proper parental discipline and this is impacting our schools. Damage has been done through the inroads of postmodernism, secularism, and liberalism into our educational system. The situation in the schools themselves is problematic.



In most cases the philosophy of Adventist education is not promoted; there is a lack of passion among teachers for the distinctive Adventist message; the old type of leadership in our schools is no longer effective; the prophetic counsel of Ellen G. White is often ignored. We may not agree with Anderson in some of the details of his analysis of the root causes of the crisis, but the ones

he has identified are right on target. The answer he gives to the question, How to kill Adventist education, is very simple, “Keep on doing what we are doing.”

Fortunately, half of the book is about what can and should be done to address the crisis we face. This last part of the book is packed with practical suggestions and reveals the significant amount of research done by Anderson on the issue of Adventist education. Many of us who have been teachers in the system and administrators of it will find here a significant amount of useful advice. Together with that advice, the author emphasizes the need to find leaders who are willing to do what is necessary to save the schools, to find teachers committed to true Adventist education and the message of the church, and the importance of making the schools centers of prayer. There is also a call to the Division, the Union, and the Conference to be aggressively involved in the revitalization of our schools. Since the author is a pastor we would expect some pastoral advice at the end of the book. It is there. Here he speaks to all of us and calls us to spiritual revival: Become a person of prayer, live by the Word of God, and receive the filling of the Spirit daily. This should be the norm for the Christian life.

This book is indispensable for Adventist teachers, school administrators, members of school boards, pastors, church administrators at the different levels, and church members directly or indirectly involved in Adventist education.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI