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THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Ellen G. White's Role in Biblical Interpretation: A Survey of Early Seventh-day Adventist Perceptions

By Denis Kaiser

Introduction

The acceptance of Ellen G. White's modern-day prophetic gift naturally raises questions about the relationship between her writings and the biblical writings. If the same divine source generated both sets of writings, one may legitimately ask for the authority and finality of Ellen White's comments on biblical passages. In their history, Seventh-day Adventists have answered that question variously and those answers are paradigmatic for the divide that continues to exist in the Church to this day. Some ascribe to her comments a normative and final authority in biblical interpretation, whereas others deny them any privilege in that regard. Still others try to find some middle ground. The crucial issue is which approach is more loyal and truthful to Ellen White and her divine inspiration.

This article surveys the history of Adventist views on the role of Ellen White's writings in biblical interpretation from 1845 to 1930. While she evidentially played a major role in the development of the publishing work, the organization of the church, health institutions, educational institutions, mission work,

lifestyle principles, spirituality, and more, this article focuses specifically on the role and authority Adventists ascribed to her in the interpretation of the Bible.¹

Spiritual, Non-Normative Role (1845–1885)

Early Sabbatarian Adventists believed in the divine origin and authority of Ellen White's visions and writings, yet they felt their function and scope differed from those of the Bible. They believed that Scripture as the "only rule of faith and practice" was authoritative for all Christians throughout the Christian dispensation. Ellen White's revelations, however, were subject to the scrutiny of the Bible (1 Thess 5:19–20) and therefore derived their authority from Scripture. As a genuine manifestation of the modern-day gift of prophecy, her visions and writings addressed only a particular group of people at the time of the end (Rev 12:17; 19:10).²

In the late 1840s, Sabbatarian Adventists gained new insights through the study of the Bible on such matters as the heavenly sanctuary, the seventh-day Sabbath, the third angel's message, the sealing, etc. During that period, Ellen White was usually unable to comprehend the arguments on the subject under

discussion,³ yet her visions helped in that process in two distinct ways. First, they confirmed those insights of Bible study, strengthening the faith of the believers in God's leading. Second, when those involved in the study discussed conflicting views reaching a deadlock because both sides had apparently exhausted their arguments from Scripture, the visions pointed to relevant biblical passages not yet considered and thus brought about unity.⁴

To maintain appreciation for that divine guidance and the belief in the foundational role of Scripture was not always easy, however. The belief in Ellen White's divine revelations attracted criticism, incurring the charge of making them, rather than Scripture, the rule of faith. To avoid criticism and prejudice, James White and other leaders chose to refrain from publishing her visions in the columns of the *Review and Herald* in the early 1850s. Sensing that they had nevertheless inhibited the prophetic gift, they affirmed their belief in her visions at a conference in November 1855. They stated that it would be inconsistent to argue that these messages were irrelevant and not binding to those who believe in their divine origin.⁵ While they subsequently printed articles about the prophetic gift and material from Ellen White in the *Review*,⁶ they did not employ her writings to bolster points of biblical interpretation or theological belief.

Adventists were further aware that Ellen White's revelations offered partial rather than comprehensive insights into the truth. The discovery of the time to commence the Sabbath is a profound example. When, in 1847, several people debated about the proper starting time of the Sabbath, Ellen White received a vision that stressed that the Sabbath runs "from even unto even" (Lev 23:32). Instead of accepting this clue as a starting point to study the biblical meaning of "even," Joseph Bates mistakenly interpreted "even" to confirm his 6 p.m. position, and everyone else accepted his interpretation. Seven years later, James White recommended a biblical study of that particular aspect as it had been settled by "experience" rather than Bible study. At the above-mentioned conference in November 1855, J. N. Andrews demonstrated that "even" refers to sunset. Everyone accepted his conclusions except Bates and Ellen White, who struggled with that experience. A few days later, she had a vision. Using the opportunity, she asked the angel when the Sabbath begins, to which the angel replied, "Take the word of God, read it, understand, and ye cannot err. Read carefully, and ye shall there find *what* even is, and *when* it is." As Andrews' study was sufficiently clear, this problem was solved. Another question arose however. Ellen White wondered if God's "frown" was upon them as their Sabbath practice was not completely correct for almost nine years. The angel explained that God is only displeased when people consciously reject revealed light. They had accepted the message as they had understood it. God waited for a more opportune time to give them a better understanding through the Bible.⁷ Thus, He did not use Ellen White's visions to

supersede Scripture but He used them to point Adventists to the Bible.

From the late 1850s to the 1880s, Ellen White wrote several sets of books and multiple articles that commented on biblical and Christian history.⁸ When, in the early 1880s, the Sabbath School quarterly dealt with Christ's life and the Book of Acts, church members were recommended to consult, among others, her books *Spirit of Prophecy*, volumes 2 and 3, and *Sketches from the Life of Paul*.⁹ Thus far, her publications primarily addressed members of the denomination. Nevertheless, Adventist writers consistently based their biblical interpretations and doctrinal views on pertinent Bible texts. They occasionally utilized other sources such as newspaper reports, historians, and other theologians in case they confirmed their interpretations. They refrained from using her writings to support their views, a custom that was not so much a sign of lacking trust in her prophetic ministry—quite the opposite was true—but of deep commitment to the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice.

Final, Normative Arbiter (1885–1903)

Several early leaders of the church, such as James White and J. N. Andrews who had participated in discovering the Adventist doctrines, passed away in the early 1880s. Afterwards a new generation of ministers and church leaders felt that Ellen White's writings could, or in some cases should, be utilized to determine the correctness of a given interpretation. Such a use of her writings became more prevalent in North America by the second half of the 1890s.

In 1886, readers of the *Review and Herald* could observe a unique change in the articles of one author. Unlike other Adventist writers, D. M. Canright began to frequently quote Ellen White's writings in support of matters of practice, implying that her writings were equal to Scripture.¹⁰ Shortly afterwards, he separated from the church and accused Adventists of employing her writings exactly in that manner, a claim that Uriah Smith vehemently denied.¹¹ Both Smith and George I. Butler continued to uphold that Ellen White's visions were not on par with or above Scripture.¹² She herself wrote in the preface to the *Great Controversy* that the gifts of the Spirit do not supersede the Bible but were subject to the Bible, the standard and test for all teaching and experience.¹³ The discussion between Butler and E. J. Waggoner on the nature of the law in Galatians 3 (the ceremonial law vs. the moral law) tempted Butler, however, to look for a statement from Ellen White in support of his position—a request she denied him.¹⁴ Years later, she would suggest a complementary view that combined the apparent contradictory positions, showing the depth of thought in that passage.¹⁵ Meanwhile, when she lent her support to Waggoner and A. T. Jones in the wake of the Minneapolis Conference in 1888, both Smith and Butler questioned her and singled out allegedly unreliable statements from her writings as they seemed to conflict with their perception of the controversy.¹⁶ They fell somewhat

into disgrace when they opposed the reform efforts of those younger ministers who, in turn, came to be viewed as loyal to Ellen White.

During her stay in Australia (1891–1900) and Waggoner's missionary work in England (1892–1903), Jones became perhaps "Adventism's most influential preacher," and spokesperson for Ellen White in North America.¹⁷ At the General Conference Session in 1893, he stressed the verbal inspiration and absolute clarity of inspired writings, suggesting that Scripture's meaning is clear and beyond the need of interpretation. Attempting to interpret or explain a given biblical text is a usurpation of Christ's place because He is the author of Scripture and He alone through His Spirit can explain its meaning. Jones argued that "the Spirit of Prophecy," the testimony of Jesus, is "the means through which Christ himself gives the true understanding and right interpretation of his word." As Christ possesses infallibility, His interpretation is "infallible" and "absolutely sure." Thus, Ellen White's writings are the final infallible interpreter of Scripture. Subjecting Scripture to her writings, Jones wrote, "the right use of the Testimonies . . . [is] to study the Bible *through them*, so that the things brought forth in them [the Testimonies] we shall see and know for ourselves *are in the Bible*."¹⁸ Similarly, W. W. Prescott stated that Jesus through the Spirit of Prophecy gave an infallible interpretation of Scripture.¹⁹ By 1896, the Sabbath School quarterly began to contain statements from Ellen White's writings as comments on particular biblical passages. Interestingly, it was Prescott who had written that quarterly.²⁰ As influential Adventist writers led by example, others adopted the practice of using Ellen White's writings in interpreting the Bible.

Divided Positions (1903–1920s)

Ellen White's return to the United States in 1900 brought American church leaders once again in direct contact with her and with the dynamics of her inspiration. Those dynamics conflicted with the assumptions that A. T. Jones and John Harvey Kellogg had concerning her inspiration and, as a result, they rejected her inspiration and ministry altogether. Subsequently, some turned the acceptance of Ellen White's role as a final arbiter in matters of biblical interpretation into a test of orthodoxy, much to the chagrin of those who had worked closely with her during her Australian years, such as her son W. C. White and A. G. Daniells.

Relations between Kellogg and church leaders became increasingly strained by 1903, a circumstance that drove Jones closer to Kellogg and further away from Ellen White, Daniells, and others. Jones maintained his belief in verbal inspiration but he eventually questioned Ellen White's divine inspiration and claimed that he had "never . . . put them [her writings] in the place of the Bible,"²¹ although evidence from the 1890s suggests otherwise. Jones' open rejection of Ellen White and his separation from the church naturally generated fears whenever someone would express similar ideas. Meanwhile, W. W. Prescott, who had

previously shared Jones' conviction that Ellen White's writings were an infallible commentary of Scripture, had come to the conclusion that her writings were not to be used to settle exegetical discussions.²² Later, he explained that it was through particular experiences with her writings—his editorial work with her articles for the *Review*, and his assistance on historical matters for the *Great Controversy* (1911) and *Prophets and Kings* (1917)—that he came to the conclusion that they could serve as a guide or pointer in study but that it was necessary to "develop directly from Scripture the full meaning" of a passage. Scripture itself was to be the central study.²³ He was impressed by Ellen White's guidance in the early history of the church and her masterful advice during the Kellogg crisis, circumstances that strengthened his trust in "the reliability of the Spirit of Prophecy."²⁴ However, Prescott's refusal to grant Ellen White the role of a final interpretative arbiter seemed to resemble the position that Jones had adopted. Anyone who refused her that authority was subsequently in danger of being associated with Jones's apostasy.

The dispute, starting around 1908, over the interpretation of *hatāmīd* (the daily, continual, regular) in Dan 8:11–13 laid bare the divergent preferences and presuppositions concerning the use of Ellen White's writings in biblical interpretation. S. N. Haskell, J. N. Loughborough, J. S. Washburn, and others, who held the traditional view of *hatāmīd* (pagan Rome), felt her remarks in *Early Writings*²⁵ strongly endorsed their particular definition of the term. Prescott, Daniells, and others who advocated a new view (the heavenly ministration of Christ) nevertheless preferred to factor in the Old Testament use of the term and refused to employ her writings as the final word.²⁶ Those who held the traditional view interpreted that refusal to utilize Ellen White's writings as the final, infallible arbiter as a clear rejection of the divine inspiration and authority of her writings.²⁷ Ellen White herself repeatedly urged individuals involved in the dispute to stop using her writings because she had not seen anything on the particular point under discussion.²⁸ W. C. White concluded that God desired to have this matter settled through "a thorough study . . . of the Bible and history" rather than "by a revelation."²⁹ Public discussions on the *tāmīd* eventually ceased, yet the differences, prejudices, and recriminations continued in private.

In the next two decades, those who had been involved in the conflict continued to express their convictions on the role of Ellen White's role in biblical interpretation. Haskell stated, "A living prophet is an inspired commentary upon what God has previously spoken. He develops and applies the words inspired before."³⁰ "The living prophet, therefore, becomes an infallible guide to the correct conclusion of what the dead prophet has said."³¹ As Ellen White was a "living prophet," this interpretative authority applied particularly to her.³² Haskell thought that her refusal to place her writings on par with Scripture resulted from her

fear to be lumped together with false prophetic claimants. For Seventh-day Adventists, her writings had the same authority as the biblical writings, he argued, yet when sharing their beliefs with non-Adventists, they were to prove everything from Scripture.³³ Similarly, J. S. Washburn viewed her writings as a final, infallible interpreter of Scripture; interpretations that seemingly contradicted statements from Ellen White were to be disregarded and rejected. To say that her writings were not on par with Scripture because they had to be tested by Scripture was, in his view, “simple Higher Criticism.”³⁴

At the 1919 Bible Conference, Daniells had made several significant remarks on that subject. He felt that Ellen White’s explanations of biblical passages were “dependable,” although in a few cases “there may be some difficulties.”³⁵ Scripture was to be interpreted “primarily” through Scripture.³⁶ To argue, however, that her writings were “the only safe interpreter of the Bible” was “a false doctrine, a false view.”³⁷ He rejected the assumption that her writings were to Adventists “the only infallible oracle” as Joseph Smith had been to the Mormons.³⁸ Prescott stressed that her writings were not to substitute serious Bible study.³⁹ He appreciated the spiritual and practical value of her writings and although he felt that she had been mistaken on some matters of biblical interpretation, he disliked the practice of some to contrast her writings with Scripture in public.⁴⁰

In the 1920s, F. M. Wilcox, W. C. White, and a few others sought to bridge the gap by outlining the purpose and scope of Ellen White’s writings. In W. C. White’s view, the quoting of his mother’s writings in sermons was not necessarily a problem. Yet when some people felt it was easier to make particular matters clear by use of the *Testimonies* rather than the Bible, he felt that they were putting her writings before the Bible. He said, “These things have grieved mother, and she has often advised our ministers to use the Bible first in presenting truths that were of a character to call for decided reforms, then to read the Testimonies as another witness to the same truths.”⁴¹ Wilcox stressed the role of Scripture as “the rule of faith and practice”⁴² and “the great test book, or standard, of every claim in doctrine and in revelation.”⁴³ Thus, Ellen White’s writings had to be tested by Scripture, and as they were in harmony with the Bible and exalted it “as the one rule of faith,” they were to be accepted as coming from God.⁴⁴ Referring to Ellen White’s own view on the role and function of her writings, Wilcox emphasized that they were “in no sense . . . to take the place of the Bible”⁴⁵ and were not “an addition to the canon of the Bible”⁴⁶ or on “a parity with the Bible.”⁴⁷ Instead of viewing her writings as the final authority in matters of interpretation, he portrayed them as “a spiritual commentary” on the Bible and the plan of redemption because they helped to comprehend the “great principles” of the Bible. They provided practical spiritual guidance in a believer’s life.⁴⁸ Some scholars perceive Wilcox as “the personification of Adventism”

and the “great mediator” in the 1920s because he tried to formulate positions that all parties in the church could accept.⁴⁹ His long-running editorial work for the *Review* (1909–1944) had a huge impact on the church, yet he was apparently unable to bridge the gap between the different positions on the role of Ellen White’s writings in the interpretation of the Bible as tensions continued to exist along these lines.

Summary

From the beginning, Seventh-day Adventists generally adhered to the position that Scripture interprets itself, while maintaining that Ellen White’s writings contained beneficial spiritual advice and inspired insights. By the 1890s, some leading ministers introduced the idea that Jesus had given the visions and writings of Ellen White to function as a final, infallible interpreter of Scripture. Both assumptions continued to coexist and compete with one another. Some considered the exalting of Ellen White’s writings to the position of an infallible commentary as a functional abandonment of the principle of *sola scriptura* while others felt a refusal to ascribe to her writings that role was a practical denial of her divine inspiration and authority. Inner-denominational theological controversies gave rise to hypersensitivity, keeping watch for giving Ellen White either too much or too little authority. The result was a rift in matters of biblical interpretation that continues within Adventism to this day.

Toward a Holistic View

The different perceptions of the role of Ellen White’s writings in biblical interpretation uncover varying assumptions concerning the relationship between and the functions of canonical and post-canonical revelation. However, a prevalent underlying assumption seems to be the unwitting idea that the final meaning of a text can be deduced either from a surface reading or from the commentary of an inspired writer. That assumption does not seem to factor in the following realities. The biblical text contains (divine) thoughts of eternal depth and their meaning is probably deeper than a surface reading might suggest. The text may contain different nuances and aspects that only come into view through deep study. Ellen White used different biblical passages in various ways. Scholars have detected in her writings exegetical, theological, typological, parenthetical, and other uses of Scripture.⁵⁰ In her effort to instruct, admonish, and encourage individuals, Ellen White occasionally applied biblical principles to particular circumstances without intending to establish a universal rule for all and every situation. Sometimes she used one particular passage in different ways at different points in her life. In other cases, she saw the complementarity of seemingly contradictory interpretations (e.g., on the law in Galatians). There are further many biblical passages she never used, leaving them unexplained. We believe that divine revelation presents us with truth, yet revelation is evidently also progressive and partial

because it never presents all there is to know. Thus, Ellen White may have commented on a particular aspect in a given passage without exhausting the depth of its meaning. We may value the beneficial insights and spiritual truths brought out in her comments on Scripture without limiting the meaning of Scripture and the discovery of biblical truth by making her the final word and thus functionally a part of the canon. We should consider how we use her writings in our sermons and research without giving the impression that we read Scripture only through the lens of her writings or that we think little of them and can virtually ignore them. Resolving the dilemma of the proper use of Ellen White's writings in that way allows Bible students to appreciate her comments, to discover for themselves the richness of Scripture, and to yearn continually for growth in understanding the deep things of God.

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¹ This article is based on relevant information concerning this subject from Denis Kaiser, "Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History (1880–1930)," PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016.

² See, e.g., Roy E. Graham, *Ellen G. White: Co-Founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, American University Series, Series 7, Theology and Religion, vol. 12 (New York: Lang, 1985), 45–46; Zoltán Szalos-Farkas, *The Rise and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality: The Impact of the Charismatic Guidance of Ellen G. White*, Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 1 (Cernica: Editura Institutului Teologic Adventist, 2005), 64–68, 71–83.

³ Ellen G. White, "The Work for This Time," *Review and Herald*, May 18, 1905, 17.

⁴ Alberto R. Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines*, Adventist Theological Society Doctoral Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1995), 166–169, 390, 393–396.

⁵ Joseph Bates, J. H. Waggoner, and M. E. Cornell, "Address of the Conference Assembled at Battle Creek, Mich., Nov. 16th, 1855," *Review and Herald*, December 4, 1855, 79.

⁶ James White, "A Test," *Review and Herald*, 16 October 1855, 61, 62; James White, "The Testimony of Jesus," *Review and Herald*, December 18, 1855, 92–93; Ellen G. White, "Communication from Sister White," *Review and Herald*, January 10, 1856, 118.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 1:116; James White, "Time to Commence the Sabbath," *Review and Herald*, February 25, 1868, 168.

⁸ See, e.g., *Spiritual Gifts*, vols. 1 and 3; and *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols.

⁹ Kaiser, "Trust and Doubt," 461 fn. 486.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 171 fn. 255.

¹¹ Uriah Smith, "A Miracle Called for," *Review and Herald*,

October 18, 1887, 649.

¹² George I. Butler, "The Visions: How They Are Held Among S. D. Adventists," *Review and Herald*, August 14, 1883, 12; Uriah Smith, "Mrs. White and Her Work," *Review and Herald*, Extra, November 22, 1887, 10–11.

¹³ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1888), e.

¹⁴ Denis Fortin, "Galatians, Law in," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 830.

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, "The Law in Galatians," [1900], Ms 87, 1900, EGWE; Ellen G. White to Uriah Smith, June 6, 1896, Lt 96, 1896, EGWE.

¹⁶ Gary Land, *Uriah Smith: Apologist and Biblical Commentator*, Adventist Pioneer Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 178–182; Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal, eds., *The Ellen G. White Letters & Manuscripts with Annotations: 1845–1859*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 801–802.

¹⁷ George R. Knight, "Jones, Alonzo Trevier (1850–1923)," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, eds. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 429.

¹⁸ A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message—No. 1," *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, January 27, 1893, 9–11; A. T. Jones, "The Third Angel's Message—No. 15," *General Conference Daily Bulletin*, February 23, 1893, 361; A. T. Jones, "The Gifts: Their Presence and Object," *Home Missionary*, Extra, December 1894, 12; A. T. Jones, "The Sure Interpreter," *Bible Echo*, February 11, 1895, 44.

¹⁹ W. W. Prescott, "The Word of God—No. 4 [cont.]," *General Conference Bulletin*, February 25, 1895, 326–327.

²⁰ See [W. W. Prescott], *International Sabbath School Quarterly* 1, no. 5, quart. 3 (1896): passim. I thank Melissa Cooke for pointing out this detail.

²¹ A. T. Jones to A. G. Daniells, January 26, 1906, EGWCF, EGWE.

²² W. W. Prescott to R. A. Underwood, August 2, 1908, PIC box 3090, GCA.

²³ W. W. Prescott to I. H. Evans, February 15, 1933, Richard Hammill Collection, bx 22, fld 8, CAR.

²⁴ W. W. Prescott to S. N. Haskell and E. W. Farnsworth, September 4, 1904, Richard Hammill Collection, box 22, fld 9, CAR.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1882 [1945]), 74–75.

²⁶ Denis Kaiser, "The Word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and Mutual Love: Lessons from the 'Daily' Controversy for Conflict Resolution," *Ministry*, December 2014, 16–19.

²⁷ J. S. Washburn to Claude E. Holmes, April 18, 1920, WCWCF, EGWE.

²⁸ Kaiser, "The Word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and Mutual Love," 16.

²⁹ W. C. White to P. T. Magan, July 31, 1910, WCWCF, EGWE.

³⁰ S. N. Haskell, "A Living Prophet," *Bible Training School*, August 1912, 42.

³¹ S. N. Haskell, "Resurrection Taught by Writings of Moses," *Bible Training School*, July 1911, 13.

³² S. N. Haskell to John N. Loughborough, October 19, 1912, EGWCF, EGWE; S. N. Haskell to W. W. Prescott, November 15, 1907, William Warren Prescott Papers, Col. 143, bx 1, fld 1, CAR.

³³ S. N. Haskell to W. C. White, November 21, 1912, EGWCF, EGWE.

³⁴ J. S. Washburn to A. G. Daniells, May 1, 1922, WCWCF, EGWE.

³⁵ "Report of Bible Conference Held in Takoma Park, D.C., July 1–19, 1919," unpublished manuscript, GCA, 1194.

³⁶ Ibid., 1194–1195.

³⁷ Ibid., 1195–98.

³⁸ A. G. Daniells to F. E. Dufty, [1920], WCWCF, EGWE.

³⁹ *Report of Bible Conference*, GCA, 1919, 1252, 1254.

⁴⁰ W. W. Prescott to W. W. Fletcher, June 28, 1929, WCWCF, EGWE; *Report of Bible Conference*, 1198, 1252, 1254.

⁴¹ W. C. White to D. D. Voth, September 22, 1921, WCWCF, EGWE.

⁴² F. M. Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church [No. 7]: Relation of Mrs. E. G. White’s Writings to the Bible,” *Review and Herald*, September 27, 1928, 17.

⁴³ F. M. Wilcox, “The Holy Scriptures: Their Divine Origin,” *Review and Herald*, August 9, 1928, 3.

⁴⁴ F. M. Wilcox to L. E. Froom, August 5, 1928, L. E. Froom Reference Files box 3874, fld “Tests of Fellowship,” GCA; F. M. Wilcox, “The Editor’s Mail Bag,” *Review and Herald*, January 19, 1922, 5; F. M. Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church [No. 2]: The Work and Writings of Mrs. E. G. White,” *Review and Herald*, August 23, 1928, 9.

⁴⁵ F. M. Wilcox, “The Study of the Bible: Aided by the Writings of the Spirit of Prophecy,” *Review and Herald*, February 3, 1921, 2.

⁴⁶ Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church [No. 7],” 17; F. M. Wilcox, “The Testimony of Jesus [No. 9]:

Not an Addition to the Bible,” *Review and Herald*, September 7, 1933, 5–6.

⁴⁷ Wilcox to Froom, August 5, 1928.

⁴⁸ Wilcox, “The Study of the Bible,” 2, 6.

⁴⁹ LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 417–418; Jeffrey A. Gang, “F. M. Wilcox and the Spirit of Prophecy: A Study of His Teaching Concerning the Authority and Role of Ellen White and the Spirit of Prophecy from 1915 to 1930,” Research paper, Andrews University, 1994, 20.

⁵⁰ Jon Paulien, “The Interpreter’s Use of the Writings of Ellen G. White,” in *Daniel and Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 7, *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies*, Vol. 2, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 163–174. See also Gerhard Pfandl, “Ellen G. White and Hermeneutics,” in *Biblical Research Institute Studies*, vol. 1, *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 309–328; Frank M. Hasel, “Ellen G. White’s Use of Scripture,” in *The Gift of Prophecy in Scripture and History*, eds. Alberto R. Timm and Dwain N. Esmond (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2015), 297–315.

Worship: The Center of the Three Angels’ Messages

Part 1

By Kwabena Donkor

Introduction

Why is it that in the Bible creation and worship themes often appear together? (See Exod 20:1–17; Job 38:7; Ps 33:6–9; 95; 104; 115; 139:1–9; Isa 40:12–31; Amos 5:8; Acts 17:22–30; Rom 1:18–25; Rev 4:11.) And why are the two themes often set in conflict? It is not only the commandment to have no other God before Yahweh in Exodus 20:3 that is set in the context of the risk of idolatry (Exod 20:4–5). Psalm 95’s impassioned plea to Israel to worship (Psalm 95:1–5) shifts to a rather somber mood in the subsequent verses. Obviously, the shift in mood reflects the psalmist’s sense of the danger of the community turning to worship competing gods (Psalm 95:3). It has been said that “the battle for worship lies at the heart of the very meaning of the biblical narrative itself.”¹ At an existential level, worship decisions have consequences, and why should that be the case? We wish to explore these questions by examining Revelation 14:6–12 in the context of worship, noting that an objective reading of the passage raises the fundamental questions about worship mentioned above. Our thesis is that only creation

theology satisfactorily answers these questions. Thus, our focus will be on the theological relationships among creation, worship, and judgment—not on controverted interpretational details. Our approach will simply assume the broad contours of interpreting the passage as generally understood among Seventh-day Adventists.

The Message of the Three Angels of Revelation 14:6–12

The message of the three angels is found within the larger context of Revelation 12–14. Although much of the Book of Revelation involves controversy, chapters 12–14 in particular are so conflict-centered that this larger context must be explored in order to obtain a proper understanding of the message of the three angels.

The Context of Revelation 12–14

Chapter 12 opens with a dramatic vision involving characters who clearly point to a struggle between the forces of good and evil. John depicts a pregnant woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and in labor ready to give birth to a male

child destined to “rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev 12:5). Meanwhile, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns stands before the woman, poised to devour the child to be born. The allusion of Revelation 12:5 to Psalm 2:9 has been generally recognized, pointing interpreters to see the child to be born as the Messiah. Thus is depicted a conflict between the dragon and the Messiah. The child who is born, however, escapes the capture of the dragon (Satan) and is caught up to heaven, whereupon the dragon pursues the woman who escapes into the wilderness, where she is nourished for 1,260 days (Rev 12:6; cf. Rev 12:14; 13:5; Dan 7:25). The failure of the dragon to capture the woman leads it now to attack the woman’s offspring, who are identified as keeping the commandments of God and having the faith of Jesus (Rev 12:13–17).

Chapter 13 continues the dragon’s attacks on the offspring of the woman mentioned in Revelation 12:17. Using the agency of a sea beast and a land beast (thus constituting a satanic trinity), the dragon heightens the element of conflict. First, the dragon is pictured as awaiting the arrival of a beast from the sea, which, like the dragon, has ten horns and seven heads (Rev 13:1). This sea beast, which seems to be a composite of the beasts of Daniel 7, has a blasphemous name on its heads (Rev 13:1). Before his appearance here, the beast had received a mortal blow “by the sword,” from which wound he had recovered (Rev 13:3). From the awaiting dragon, this beast receives power, throne, and authority (Rev 13:2). And the whole earth *worshipped* the beast as well as the dragon because the dragon gave his authority to the beast (Rev 13:3–4). The sea beast speaks “great things,” blasphemes God’s name, His sanctuary, and those who dwell in heaven, and he fights against the saints for forty-two months (Rev 13:5–8).

The land beast is the second agent the dragon employs in his attack on the people of God. This beast is different in appearance, having two horns like a lamb, but speaking as a dragon (Rev 13:11). In his actions, the land beast exercises all the authority of the sea beast and compels the “earth dwellers” to *worship* the sea beast. He resorts to some specific strategies to achieve this goal. First, he does “great miracles” to deceive the “earth dwellers,” and second, he causes an image to be made to the sea beast and enforces worship of the image on pain of death (Rev 13:13–15). Then he enforces a mark equivalent to the name of the sea beast through the boycott of those who refuse to accept the mark, either on the forehead or the right hand (Rev 13:16–18).

Chapters 13 and 14 have been seen as counterparts, where the latter presents God’s counter move to the actions of the dragon and the two beasts. Chapter 14 has three sections and opens with the first where the Lamb is seen on Mount Zion in the company of the 144,000, representing those who have withstood the onslaughts of the satanic trinity of the dragon, sea beast, and land beast.² The singing of the 144,000 is

a clear reflection of the conflict through which they have passed and their victory over the satanic trinity (Rev 14:2–3). The second section of the chapter, the message of the three angels (Rev 14:6–12), is the focus of our study on worship, which will be explored shortly. The final section is the second coming of Christ, symbolically portrayed as the harvest of the earth, with distinct destinies for the two groups involved—the saved and the lost (Rev 14:14–20).

Worship in the Message of the Three Angels

The larger context of Revelation 14:6–12 clearly shows that the passage is centered in conflict over worship. Chapter 12—which provided the introduction, setting, and summary of chapters 13 and 14—clearly depicts a conflict between Christ and Satan. As the details of the conflict unfold in chapter 13, it becomes clear that while the sea beast receives near worldwide worship, he is set on speaking great things and blaspheming against God, His sanctuary, and those who dwell in heaven (Rev 13:3–6). Furthermore, Revelation 14:8 depicts a polarity where all who dwell on the earth worship the sea beast, except those whose names have been written in the Lamb’s book of life. On his part, the land beast’s focus on worship is patently evident.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the message of the three angels, which is God’s counter move to the actions of the satanic trinity, should focus on worship.

The First Angel

Whether the “everlasting gospel” of the first angel is the same as the gospel proclaimed in the rest of the New Testament should not detain us.³ Adventists identify the two gospels as one and the same on the basis of the prologue in Revelation 1:5–7, which provides the background for the gospel the first angel proclaims.⁴ The message the angel proclaims with a loud voice is, “Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters” (Rev 14:7).

Theologically, the message of the first angel embodies in principle everything that may be said formally about true worship as far as humans are concerned. Notably, worship is presented as essentially a fundamental human responsibility; hence the angel’s message is given as a “command” with some key action words used in tandem: “fear,” “glory,” and “worship.” The suggestion seems to be that the responsibility humans have to worship (falling before God) *consists* in the fear of God (holding Him in reverence), which leads to giving Him glory (honoring Him). “Giving God glory is the aftereffect of fearing God,”⁵ remarks one scholar, who also summarizes the dynamics of these constituent aspects of worship:

According to Solomon, fearing God and keeping his commandments is the first duty

of a human being (Eccl. 12:13). It is in the sense of obeying God and his commandments that the giving of glory to God in Revelation 14:7 must be understood. God's end-time people in Revelation are referred to as those who fear God (Rev. 11:18; 15:4; 19:5) and keep his commandments (cf. Rev. 12:17; 14:12).⁶

But the internal motivation for worship indicated in the text should not be missed. So another writer remarks, "In the case of the command, *fear God and give him glory* is a fairly exact equivalent to "repent" (see 16:9), except that John's vision spells out further implications of this repentance: *Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water* (v. 7)."⁷ True worship of God, then, is precipitated by repentance which issues in the "fear of God," meaning "reverence" and "respect" for God's authority, that enables people to obey His commands (Gen 22:12; Jer 32:40; Ps 111:10).⁸ Such repentance also involves giving "glory" to God. While giving glory to God entails giving Him honor, praise, and homage, it should also be kept in mind that

the order to *give him glory* is a Hebraic saying appearing in both Old and New Testaments: Joshua told Achan to give glory to the LORD (Josh. 7:19; see Jer. 13:16), and the Pharisees commanded the man born blind to give glory to God (John 9:24). The phrase signifies telling the truth by sinners who appear before God's judgment seat.⁹

The idea of "telling the truth" by sinners, as an aspect of giving glory to God, fits well with the rationale given by the angel for worship. As in the case with Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Acts 14:15), God, as the creator of all things, is the motivation given for people "to worship" Him instead of the creation. In the context of the first angel, part of telling the truth as an aspect of giving glory to God is the truthful declaration about the rightful recipient of worship: "Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters" (cf. Exod 20:4–6, 11; Deut 10:12–15). Evidently, "giving glory to God" by observing the fourth commandment, rooted as it is in the biblical creation story, is ultimately an act of worshipping "Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

The Second Angel

Whereas the first angel provides a sketch of true worship, the second angel gives a depiction of false worship, especially in its eschatological manifestation. We are presented with a picture of end-time idolatry and its constituent elements, particularly those factors that lead people into idolatry. The message of the angel is, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."

The echo of Babylon's fall and destruction in Isaiah 21:9 has been noted by scholars, such as one¹⁰ who takes the view that all wicked world systems take on the symbolic name "Babylon the Great."¹¹ He may be correct in his general assessment of the universal manifestation of symbolic Babylon in wicked world systems. However, a careful examination of eschatological Babylon in the book of Revelation strongly suggests more definitively that it is "identical to the satanic trinity, consisting of the dragon, the sea beast, and the beast out of the earth—that is, paganism and spiritualism, the ecclesiastical Rome, and America with apostate Protestantism."¹²

But it is important to observe carefully what Babylon represents in the system of false worship. Babylon is the "instrumental cause" of false worship; the reason for the judgment soon to fall on Babylon is because she "made all the nations drink of the wine that leads to passion for her immorality."¹³ In other words, Babylon is herself immersed in immorality, but what she does is to incentivize the world with a passion for her immorality. She does this by means of the seduction of intoxicating wine. Thus, the world is misled, led astray, and deceived. In the eschatological context, however, how is the deception achieved? Comparing Revelation 14:8 to 17:2 and 18:3,

the nations' cooperation with Babylon ensures their material security (cf. 2:9, 13; 13:16–17). Without this cooperation, security would be removed. Such security is a temptation too great to resist. Therefore, the causative idea of the verb *πεπότικεν* ("she made to drink") means that, at least in the final, global manifestation of Babylon's activity, the nations were forced to "drink," to comply . . . if they wanted to maintain economic security.¹⁴

The conjunction of cooperation with Babylon (to be taken in its tripartite manifestation as mentioned above) and the promise of economic well-being seems remarkable, but cannot be fully explored here.

Comparing the first and second angels' messages from the point of view of worship, the contrast is quite clear. First, whereas true worship consists in giving glory to and worshipping (falling before) "Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters," false worship consists in trusting one's security to creaturely, worldly systems. Second, whereas true worship is motivated by repentance that results in the fear (reverence) of God thus enabling obedience to His commandments, false worship is induced by the deception of material security that leads one to "fear" worldly, creaturely systems and render obedience to their demands.

The Third Angel

With the third angel we encounter the particularization of both the "subjects" and "objects" of false

worship in the end time context. The angel declares,

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name (Rev 14:9–11).

In the message of the second angel, Babylon falls not because she was directly the object of worship but because of her bad influence and her falling away from truth. With the third angel, the message is concerned about entities that have become objects of worship: the beast and his image. The angel also marks the subjects of false worship with particularity—those who receive a mark on the forehead or right hand. Hence, we are presented with the beast and his image as an alternative teleological principle—namely, an object of worship, in contrast to the Creator God. And the angel announces the judgment of those who embrace this alternative principle—torment with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. The message is as stark as it is clear: focusing on the wrong goal in worship leads to a dead end.

Receiving marks on foreheads and right hands may signify identification with the satanic trinity (Babylon) whom they worship. If true worship ends up with obedience, it may be correct that

in the final analysis, the mark of the beast on the right hand or the forehead serves as identification for the worshippers of the satanic trinity, as the counterpart to the seal of God. Worship of the beast and the reception of his mark stands as the antithesis to obedience to God's commandments, the substitution of the obedience to the satanic trinity for the obedience of God.¹⁵

This assessment seems all the more appropriate in view of the conclusion to the message of the three angels: “here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

Summary of Worship in the Message of the Three Angels

The three angels of Revelation 14:6–11 depict a conflict of worship situation in the end time. Together, they paint a composite picture of the structure and contours of both true and false worship.

First, the fact that in the end time the whole of

humanity is constituted into two opposing worshipping camps underscores the point that worship is fundamentally an essential aspect of human life. True worship places a responsibility—an imperative—on humans to worship the Creator God. In the conflict situation of the end time, however, forces opposed to the Creator God set up a counterfeit, creaturely system that demands an alternative worship.

Second, true worship is motivated by a response of repentance to the gospel that creates reverence, respect, and awe towards the Creator God and results in giving Him glory, including obedience to His commandments. On the other hand, false worship is encouraged by deception. In the end time context, the seduction is one of material security that leads a segment of humanity to “fear” a worldly, creaturely system put in place by a satanic trinity that demands obedience on the pain of death.

Third, the rightful recipient of true worship is the Creator God, who alone is worthy of worship.

The foregoing brief discussion on the theology of worship in the message of the three angels raises a significant issue that needs explication—namely, God and the rightfulness of His demand for worship and the fairness of His judgment on those who engage in false worship. This issue will be taken up in the second article of this series.



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¹ Noel Due, *Created for Worship* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications Ltd., 2005), 34.

² There is evidence to suggest that the 144,000 does not represent a literal figure. See William G. Johnsson, “The Saints’ End-Time Victory Over the Forces of Evil,” in Frank B. Holbrook, ed., *Symposium on Revelation*, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 32.

³ For example, See Grant R. Osborne, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 534, writes concerning this gospel that “it is a very different gospel from the one found elsewhere in the NT, for it does not mention Jesus and his sacrifice for sin, nor is there the call for repentance as in 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11.”

⁴ See Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Last Message for this World,” <https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/materials/nt-texts/last-message-world> (accessed: 10-04-2017).

⁵ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 451.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ J. R. Michaels, *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Revelation*, vol. 20, rev., 14:6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997).

⁸ David E. Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B (Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), 827.

⁹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, vol. 20, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 408.

¹⁰ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 754.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 755.

¹² Ekkehardt Mueller, “Babylon Identified,” in Artur A. Stele, ed., *The Word: Searching, Living, Teaching* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2015), 169.

¹³ Osborne, 538. See also Beale, 755: “Both τοῦ θυμοῦ (“of passion”) and τῆς πορνείας (“of fornication” or “intercourse”) are to be taken as genitives of cause, purpose, or result: “the wine *that causes* [or “leads to” or “results in”] *passion for intercourse with her*” (cf. NIV: “made all the nations drink from the *maddening wine* of her adulteries.”

¹⁴ Beale, 756, expands on the economic interpretation: “This economic interpretation of the nations’ intoxicating passion for Babylon is clear from ch. 18, especially 18:3, where ‘(they committed) intercourse with her’ is equivalent to ‘they became rich from the power resulting from her *luxury*.’ In addition, 18:9 places in conjunction ‘they committed intercourse’ and ‘they lived *luxuriously* [sensuously] with her.’ In line with this, it is interesting that στερῆνός and the cognate verb, occurring respectively in 18:3 and 18:9, can be translated with the sense of ‘luxury’ or ‘sensuality.’ Clearly ungodly humanity’s love for Babylon lay in her ability to provide economic prosperity (so 18:11–19). The nations ‘weep and lament’ over Babylon’s fall because they ‘fear’ that it means their own imminent demise (18:9–10, 15, 19).”

¹⁵ Stefanovic, 461.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Does the Bible ask Us to Return Tithe From the Gifts We Receive?

By Elias Brasil de Souza

This important question is often asked. Therefore we will offer some brief observations from a biblical perspective. At the outset, we should bear in mind that, for the ancient Israelites, there was no question about this. In an agricultural economy, anything a person received was by default considered as “income.” However, in modern society we make a distinction between our paycheck and the gifts we receive. Indeed, the Bible does not address this point directly, but offers some hints. When Abraham met Melchizedek, “he gave him a tithe *of all*.”¹ Later, Jacob recommit himself to the Lord by vowing that “*of all* that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You” (Gen 28:22). Significantly, the classic passage on tithe says: “Bring *all the tithes* into the storehouse” (Mal 3:10). Turning to the New Testament, the apostle Paul instructs the Corinthian church: “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up *as he may prosper*, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Cor 16:2). In another passage, the apostle says,

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And *God is able to make all*

grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work (2 Cor 9:6–8).

While these latter New Testament texts do not discuss the subject of tithe, they contain important principles that also apply to tithe paying.

From the above, a few observations can be derived. First, we should return the tithe *of all* that the Lord gives to us. Certainly, the gifts we receive are part and parcel of God’s blessings to us. Gifts that increase our property or income are to be counted as part of the prosperity God graciously brings to us. Thus, they should be factored in as we return our tithes and give offerings to the Lord. Second, the qualifying word “all” in connection to tithes seems to imply that we may neglect to return the tithe “of all” or forget that “all” the tithe must be brought to God—hence the emphasis on absolute fidelity in returning all the tithe to the Lord. Third, whatever the circumstances, our tithes and offerings are to be brought to the Lord with a cheerful heart. After all, He is the source of our blessings. By returning tithes and giving offerings, we acknowledge that everything we have ultimately belongs to Him.

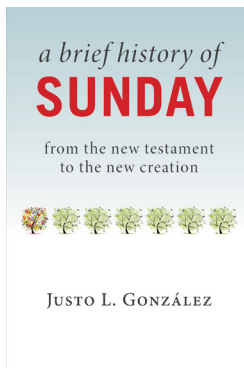
¹ Italicized portions throughout this article indicate emphasis supplied.

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor 9:7 NIV)

BOOK NOTES

Justo González A Brief History of Sunday from the New Testament to the New Creation

(Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans, 2017), 156 pp.
US\$16.00



Many Seventh-day Adventists tell the story of the change of the Sabbath to Sunday by simply citing the famous decree of Constantine in AD 321. This book makes it clear that one needs to pay careful attention to this early history of the transition from Sabbath sacredness to Sunday sacredness because it is more complex. González, a Methodist and famous for having written numerous books on religious history (most notably his respected three-volume *History of Christian Thought*), has given us an important addition to his vast corpus of publications.

Right at the outset González delimits his topic by noting that he has several Adventist friends. But Adventist readers should not be surprised that he reads both Revelation 1:10 and the *Didache* (a very early Christian document first published in 1883, dated to the late first century by some scholars and to the first half of the second century by others) in their reference to “the Lord’s day” as an implicit reference to Sunday. However, it should be noted that the language used in the *Didache* (14:1) may not refer to a day at all. Furthermore, he asserts that

at least as late as the fourth century, some or perhaps even most Christians observed the Sabbath, and then the Lord’s day [that is, Sunday] on the following day. In other words, the Lord’s day, celebrated on the first day of the week, was not a substitution for the Sabbath, but a separate celebration of the resurrection of Jesus (p. 23).

Nevertheless, as he admits, “it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine most of the details of Christian worship in the early centuries” (p. 36).

There is rich material that Adventist scholars and pastors will be able to glean from this book. For example, he succinctly summarizes the major shift with Constantine, who became a patron of Christianity (scholars vigorously debate how sincere he was through this process). Yet it is clear that the Christian church changed afterward. The liturgy became more elaborate, vestments and artifacts were worn by the priest, music was sung by choirs, and the congregation was meant to sit and admire. Thus a mystical power was supposed to

possess the participant as an act of devotion. Also, new and often elaborate houses of worship were erected, as the church wrestled with what to do with explosive growth. Such growth necessitated a drastic reduction in the period of preparation for baptism (pp. 48–51). Despite Constantine’s command to rest, González argues that it was only later that the notion of Sabbath rest became associated with Sunday (p. 60).

The medieval era brought a “new mood” for worship. While it is clearly recognized that prayers for the dead appear in Jewish literature during the intertestamental period (2 Macc 12:38–46), González observes that the Christian doctrine of purgatory did not become firmly established until Gregory the Great (who was pope from 590 to 604), when the practice of saying masses for the dead became commonplace (p. 72). By this time also, rest was now required as part of Sunday worship. The list of forbidden activities grew and became specifically defined, paralleling earlier rabbinic discussions (p. 86). Finally, at the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church established Sunday worship as deriving from the authority of the Church (p. 99). This was in response to the Protestant Reformers, who rejected the apocrypha as an authority along with any practices (e.g., prayers for the dead) that could not be proven from the Old and New Testaments. González argues for a rather innocuous transition from Sabbath to Sunday that somehow started early but whose full acceptance took many centuries, and that such full acceptance was not really complete until at least the time of the Reformation. Trentine Catholics used this as a point of criticism against Protestants, who by worshipping on Sunday thereby affirmed the authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

Adventist pastors and scholars will appreciate the sections on seventh-day Sabbatarianism—both as related to revivals of seventh-day observance in conjunction with the Anabaptists and, still later, among the Puritans. One area of weakness is that the author does not adequately explain why there were still other groups, such as the Waldenses of northern Italy and along the French border, who refused to accept the control of the Romish Church, including Sunday worship, for many centuries (up until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries). A similar argument can be made that there were other groups

outside of Western influence, such as Sabbatarians in Goa, India and among the Ethiopian Christians of Africa who similarly preserved worship of the seventh-day Sabbath (at least up until Roman Catholic missionaries “converted” them in the seventeenth century). Also of note is the author’s observation that the translation of the word “Sabbath” was in fact connected to the seventh day for many languages. In English, however, the word for “Saturday” does not have this same connotation, thus making it easier to equate Sunday with “Sabbath.” González argues that this made the transition of Sunday as a replacement for Sabbath fully complete with the early American Puritans (p. 118) who made Sunday into “Saint Sabbath” (p. 121). Seventh-day Adventist scholars¹ have already noted the importance of Puritanism for Adventist theology so this cursory section will not be much of a surprise, and in fact I wish it could have been developed a little more fully.

Altogether this book is a quick yet thorough overview of Sunday worship, which, as indicated above, often overlaps with the seventh-day Sabbath during the past two millennia. The chapters are short and easy to read. Seventh-day Adventists can learn much from this interpretation of the history of Sunday sacredness, including the complexity and diverse shades of meaning that this day has had throughout Christian history. It also means that in the telling of the change from Sabbath to Sunday, one must be cautious since so few documents remain from this early period—some historians estimate that less than one percent of known documents have survived. What is clear is that some Christians were beginning to worship on Sunday

by the mid second century, but only later did Sunday take on the character of a day of rest. For centuries, both days were honored by Christians in various places and sometimes they worshipped on both Saturday and Sunday. González’s book makes a contribution by suggesting just how complex this change was across the centuries and in various places.

As someone who teaches a class on the history and doctrine of the Sabbath it is very difficult to find resources. I have personally updated and used a compendium of sources originally compiled during the 1980s, and unfortunately another significant volume² is out of print. This should be a reminder of the need for an up-to-date, well-researched monograph on the seventh-day Sabbath, which the BRI is currently working on. Until then, this book may be a helpful resource for those who teach in this area. Despite its flaws, it can still offer some helpful insights about the interpretation of Sunday since it provides a helpful summary of some of the latest Sunday research. The wealth of recent publications cited in this book indicates that it is high time for Seventh-day Adventist scholars to publish more on this vital topic.

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¹ I.e., Bryan Ball, *The English Connection* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1981); idem., *The Seventh-day Men* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

² Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1982).

NEWS

Second International Conference on Adventist Theology and Mission in Africa Held at the Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

From August 30 to September 2, 2017, members of BRI participated in the 2nd International Conference on Adventist Theology and Mission in Africa, held at the Adventist University of Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. Frank Hasel and Clinton Wahlen, together with Michael Campbell of Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS) and other

presenters from across Africa examined the topic of “Biblical Hermeneutics: Implications and Applications in the Context of Africa.” Topics for the plenary sessions included issues in biblical interpretation, biblical hermeneutics and the Adventist pioneers, and the impact of culture on biblical hermeneutics. More than two hundred participants from all three African Divisions gathered for this well organized and thoughtfully arranged bible conference.



Index to *Reflections*

The first issue of *Reflections* was published in January 2003. Since then, we've published many articles.

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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.

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