



Reflections

A BRI Newsletter

Number 5

January 2004

Biblical Research Institute

PURPOSE

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

NEWS AND COMMENTS

CURRENT TRENDS IN ADVENTISM

Starting with this issue we will try to describe current trends in Adventism and focus on challenges that the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church faces. The subsequent article is a general introduction to this topic.

CURRENT TRENDS IN ADVENTISM: AN INTRODUCTION

Challenges to established church doctrines are to be expected. To a certain degree this may be beneficial, because people have to wrestle with biblical and theological issues and better explanations must be formulated. Oftentimes, challenges have led to further research and have confirmed and strengthened the position of the church. However, we also detect negative sides. If major doctrines of the church are attacked, church members may be led astray, pastors and theologians are occupied in an undue way, and the church may be distracted from its mission.

Adventists do not live in a vacuum. Society and its philosophies as well as other churches and religions exert their influence on us. Some of these trends affect us directly. Others are felt when we have to deal with theological challenges from within the church.

I. Theological and Quasi-Religious Influences Outside the Adventist Church

1. Influences in Western Societies

Before we move to theological influences, we need to turn to current trends and philosophies shaping societies, especially in the West. The problem is that these philosophies are seldom directly promoted or discussed. Yet, we are confronted by them and may accept them subconsciously. These current philosophies and trends of our society include the following:¹

- (1) *Individualism*. People are interested in their own world only, driven by the desire to be absolutely autonomous. Norms and regulations imposed on them by others are routinely despised or rejected. Radical individualism contributes to the lack of interest in biblical doctrines, biblical standards, and theological topics which we observe today.
- (2) *Pragmatism*. What is feasible, doable, and what benefits the individual counts no matter what. There is, for instance, the danger of applying non-Christian models and methods to the church because they seem to work, without studying whether or not Scripture allows for them.
- (3) *Materialism*. People want to fulfill all their wishes and are willing to sell "their souls" for money and material goods. In addition, whatever cannot be grasped with the human senses is considered irrelevant.

- (4) *Consumerism*. Our generation lives for the purpose of enjoying life to the fullest and being entertained. Christians go to church to get something from it rather than to serve God and others. Worship becomes a show.
- (5) *Tolerance*. Although tolerance has positive aspects, sometimes it becomes merely a cover for indifference, and at times it goes so far that all religions are declared equal and no value judgment can be passed on any lifestyle. When tolerance is turned into an absolute, those who claim that Christianity is unique are considered intolerant and must be opposed. Oftentimes, tolerance goes along with ecumenism and the notion of political correctness.
- (6) *Pluralism*. It claims that all religions lead more or less to the same god or a similar desired outcome. Everyone is correct. The church must accept all views.
- (7) *Relativism*. According to relativists there is no absolute truth. Nothing is certain. Nobody can claim to have found *the* truth.
- (8) *Ecumenism*. The combination of relativism, tolerance, and pluralism allows for full-fledged ecumenism, in which unity becomes more important than truth.
- (9) *Emotionalism*. What counts is personal experience. Emotionalism profoundly influences Christian worship and lifestyle. Decisions are made on the basis of what feels good, not on the basis of what may be right or true. Biblical positions are less important than personal feelings.
- (10) *Patriotism and nationalism*. Patriotism and nationalism coexist with individualism and strongly influence people and their world views. This has not only led to the creation of new and independent nations, but also reinforces the trend toward somewhat independent national churches within the larger body of an international church.

2. Theological Influences

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, liberal Protestantism succeeded in dominating theology. The biblical understanding of revelation and inspiration was virtually rejected, and Scripture became a purely human product. Miracles and resurrection were unacceptable. The History of Religion School proposed that the Bible consisted of Babylonian myths, ideas derived from Hellenistic mystery cults, or influences of the Roman emperor worship, which had been reworked. The question of the historical Jesus was raised, who supposedly differs widely from the biblical Jesus. Apocalyptic prophecy and end-time events were

regarded as irrelevant and strange. The social gospel was popularized.

Neo-Orthodoxy succeeded Liberalism and attempted to recover insights from the Reformation. Its most famous representatives were Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Rudolf Bultmann. But Neo-Orthodoxy also introduced the idea of revelation as encounter. Scripture is seen as the report of encounters that took place between God and humans. It was written down from the human perspective and is not really the Word of God. It may become the Word of God for an individual if this person individually has an encounter with God. For Brunner most of the OT was mythological. Therefore, he rejected a literal Paradise, Adam and Eve as historical persons, and opted for evolution. NT history has also undergone profound changes according to Brunner.² Thus, even neo-orthodoxy was not orthodox in the real sense of the word but followed certain presuppositions of liberalism. Bultmann was so radical as to suggest that we demythologize the NT. For him most texts attributed to Jesus were not authentic, but the product of the early church. He was also one of the founders of form criticism, one of the tools of the historical-critical method which is still the dominant method used today to interpret Scripture. In the document "Methods of Bible Study" the Adventist Church distanced itself even from a moderate use of this method.³

Today we find a plurality of theologies such as process theology, secular theology, radical theology, the theology of hope, the theology of history, the theology of evolution, situation ethics, liberation theology, feminist theology, and evangelical theology. Most of them follow the liberal tradition.

As an example we will take Heinz Zahrnt, a theologian whose books were published in the 1970s, who describes many of the basic elements that we find in certain Adventist circles today. He talks about the necessity of theology to be a contemporary theology of experience. Scripture is the original translation of the Christian feeling and must be reinterpreted. He supports the historical-critical method. For him the patriarchs did not exist. Most of the NT letters have an author other than the one claimed in them. The authority of the biblical canon is questioned, because the Bible supposedly contains serious flaws and contradictions. Not all of it is God's Word, and it cannot be taken literally. The Bible is not a book containing teachings but a book for life, a human book of remembrance. Even the NT does not rest on facts. It is a book of faith. Inspiration is reinterpreted, and the claim is that it happens today. Refusal to add or delete anything of the biblical message is compared to primitive religions and little children who insist that a story must be told always in the same

way. Zahrnt favors instead a present day “continuation” of the biblical message as present truth. That means that we may need to make statements that “in spirit” follow Scripture, although they may be quite different from Scripture. Scripture contains much straw and little wheat, he claims. Jesus was a man and a man only, who completely relied on God. He probably never called himself Son of God. The death of Christ is described with many different and contradictory images which today are no longer intellectually acceptable. Zahrnt also opts for a kind of pluralism.⁴ Because the historical-critical method has cast doubt on the biblical Jesus, the virgin birth, Jesus being the Son of God, his crucifixion, resurrection, the empty tomb, ascension, and second coming, the real question is whether God exists at all.

This is the social and theological milieu in which we live and by which we are influenced. So far, Adventists have chosen Scripture as the revealer of God’s will and of doctrines. Next time we will turn more specifically to theological influences within the Adventist Church.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

¹See, Peter Schmiechen, *Christ the Reconciler: A Theology for Opposites, Differences, and Enemies* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 14-15, 54-55.

²Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (Lexington: American Theological Library Association, 1965), 99.

³“Methods of Bible Study”, October 12, 1986, General Conference Committee, Annual Council.

⁴Heinz Zahrnt, *Warum ich glaube - meine Sache mit Gott* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1971), 65, 74, 83, 89-97, 105-112, 117-118, 133-139, 159.

THE FAITH AND SCIENCE DEBATE IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

During the last two years groups of scientists, theologians and church administrators in different parts of the world have been discussing the interrelationship between faith and science. Elder Jan Paulsen, President of the General Conference, took the initiative to call for such meetings. The first one was international and was held in the United States in 2002. During 2003 and the first half of 2004 different divisions have had or will have similar meetings in their territories. The formal discussions will come to an end in 2004, when the second international conference on the subject will take place in America.

Questions have been raised concerning the purpose and usefulness of such study, accompanied at times by

fear that church leaders may be planning to change the church’s doctrine of creation. However, there is 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. Recently, during the Autumn Council of 2003, he once more reaffirmed this fact. Then why the need to discuss the interrelationship between faith and science? The truth is that such discussion cannot be avoided.

First, evolution and the Adventist doctrine of creation represent two antagonistic and fundamentally diverse world views. It is an interesting phenomenon of history that both the rise of the Adventist movement and the formulation of the theory of evolution happened during the 1800s. It became only a matter of time for the two to confront each other, compelling Adventist theologians and scientists to take definite positions on the question of origins.

The root of evolutionary thinking predates by more than 2000 years the formulation of the theory of evolution. As proposed by Charles Darwin, his theory was based on the conviction that humans were the product of a process which began with the spontaneous formation of single living cells and primitive organisms which through struggle, adaptation, and survival of the fittest developed into higher beings and reached their present peak in humanity. In contrast, the Adventist doctrine is grounded in Scripture and describes humans as coming from the hands of God in a creative act of love. The two cannot both be right. This issue comes as part of the cosmic conflict and the church should be informed about the outcomes and problems.

Second, it is important for the church to be aware of the fact that neither we nor evolutionists have all the answers in the debate. Since there are areas of uncertainty in the interpretation of the scientific data, it is necessary for us to be well-informed concerning the challenges we confront as a result of our commitment to the biblical doctrine of creation. The conferences on faith and science provide a proper environment for us to explore and discuss these questions while at the same time holding to our faith commitment. We cannot pretend that there are no problems and conflicts between the biblical teaching of origins and modern scientific theories.

Third, we need to explore the interaction between faith and science because the debate already is taking place within some sectors of the church itself. During approximately the last thirty years a small number of Adventists in academic circles has been raising questions concerning the credibility of our position on creation based on the scientific evidence gathered by evolutionists. They believe that in order for the church to remain

relevant in the modern scientific world, it is necessary to introduce changes in some of our doctrinal positions or to at least allow for some diversity of views. Their concerns need to be heard and evaluated, although their number is, in the context of the world church, extremely small. The vast majority of Adventist theologians and scientists around the world are usually well-informed about the issues and uncertainties, but have chosen to hold on to the biblical doctrine of creation.

Those interested in change have little to offer to the church in place of the biblical doctrine of creation. Some of them argue that since Adventists believe that there is no contradiction between true science and faith, it may be necessary to bridge the apparent gap by giving priority to science over Scripture. Others, have concluded that the biblical text in Genesis 1-2 contains an ancient cosmogony that has been outdated by modern scientific discoveries, making it irrelevant for us in the 21st century. Hence the two main options offered to the church by these scholars and theologians are theistic evolution or agnosticism in regard to origins.

The small number of Adventists willing to argue for theistic evolution in place of the biblical doctrine of creation try to find a place for divine providence within the natural evolutionary process. But defining God's specific role in the evolution of humans remains an extremely difficult task for them.

Those who argue for an agnosticism in regard to origins suggest that the biblical evidence concerning the origin of humans is not intellectually and scientifically credible. Therefore, they will say, the Bible does not have the final answer. In other words, the Bible does not address the question of the origin of humans on this planet. They also feel uncomfortable with the main alternative, the theory of evolution, because of the damage it does to the biblical understanding of God and to the significance of the doctrine of atonement through Christ. On the topic of origins they simply find refuge in agnosticism, that is to say, they claim ignorance concerning the origin of the human race on this planet. They simply say, we do not know how we got here.

Once we set aside the biblical teaching on creation we are on our own, drifting in a great ocean of conflicting ideas and human speculations. The Adventist church is firmly grounded on the Word of God and without apology embraces its doctrine of creation in six literal days. We are not afraid to examine scientific evidence, neither do we fear to recognize that some of that evidence may appear to deny what the Bible says. But we are always willing to follow Scripture wherever it takes us.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

PRESERVATION OF BALEEN WHALES IN SOUTHERN PERU

From time to time there are news reports of a whale found stranded on a beach. Rescue workers and volunteers rush to the area and endeavor to return the whale back to the water so it might yet have a chance for survival. Each occurrence generates much interest and curiosity in whales and their behavior.

Over the past four years, I have focused my research on a phenomenon much more astonishing. A joint team of paleontologists and geologists from the Geoscience Research Institute in Loma Linda, Loma Linda University, Southwestern Adventist University in Texas, the Universidad Peruana Union, and the National History Museum in Peru, have documented over 1,500 specimens of well-preserved, fossilized baleen whales at four localities in western Peru. These are not isolated, beached whales. Whale bones in a single deposit known as the Pisco Formation have been found across several hundred square kilometers of a dry desert over 20 km from the Pacific Ocean.

Preservation

The preservation of the whales is remarkable since most of them are nearly complete (over 72% of the whales have connected vertebrae) while some have partially disconnected skeletons. They have not been markedly altered by mineralization. All of the bones are surprisingly light weight, porous and must be handled carefully to prevent breakage. Degree of preservation and coloration is uniform in all of the specimens. The bones bear no evidence of having been abraded, scraped, nicked or scratched during their deposition and invertebrate organisms have not bored or colonized the bones. This is curious because in the modern seas whale carcasses are bored, colonized, and destroyed by a variety of invertebrate animals that feed and dwell on them for many years after the skeletons reach the sea floor. Baleen whales are an excellent source of food for many marine animals--especially scavengers--not only because of the large amount of flesh available but also because of the high content of fat stored within the bones, which provides enough nutrients for an invertebrate community for many years. In addition, there is no evidence that the bones have partially dissolved during long exposure in the ocean. One very interesting aspect of the skeletons is the occurrence of shark teeth with many of the specimens. However no shark tooth marks have been found on the bones, which would be the normal case if sharks were attacking the whales. Moreover, delicate parts like flippers are in many cases entirely preserved and articulated, which suggests that sharks were not feeding on the

whales. The reason for the association of shark teeth with the carcasses remains undetermined. In some cases the baleen plates are preserved, even within the mouth, in life position. This is remarkable because baleen is made of protein keratin and tends to disarticulate and decay more quickly than bone, namely in a matter of hours. Several levels of fish fossils (scales and bones) indicate multiple mass mortalities of fish. The high quality of the bone preservation, the large number of articulated whales and the preservation of the baleen suggests that the whales were buried quickly after their death.

Sediments and Paleoenvironment

As mentioned, the whales occur in sediments called the Pisco Formation. These deposits are dominated by diatoms, volcanic ash, and clays. There does not appear to be any evidence of burrowing in the diatomaceous sediments. Burrowing is expected to occur in shallow waters, especially in sediments associated with decaying carcasses because of the abundance of invertebrates living in and around the bones.

Random orientation of the whale carcasses suggests their deposition was undisturbed by strong currents. A bay could provide a somewhat sheltered environment of deposition. Paleogeographic studies suggest that this area was sheltered by a number of islands a few kilometers offshore, creating an environment where diatoms would thrive and whales would find abundant food. The quality of preservation suggests a rapid burial over a period of a few weeks or perhaps months.

Time Implications

The Pisco Formation has been dated as Middle Miocene to Early Pliocene according to the standard geologic chronology, based on radiometric dating of several volcanic ash layers that occur throughout the basin. Accordingly, the whales would have lived and been deposited during a span of time of about 13 million years. During that time, slow deposition of sand, silt, diatoms, and volcanic ash would bury decaying whale carcasses at a rate of 10-75 cm/kyr. That means that a 40-cm thick whale skeleton might have taken one to two thousand years to be entirely covered and preserved. It is easy to imagine that before a few years had passed by the whole skeleton would have been disarticulated and destroyed by scavengers and physical agents. That's what happens in modern times with whale carcasses that are found on the sea floor. Therefore, in order to completely preserve a whale skeleton, with the bones in articulation and its baleen plates in life position, the carcass must have been buried very rapidly, in a matter of a few days to a few months, but not decades or hundreds of years.

This conclusion is in clear contradiction to the rates of deposition inferred from the radiometric dates obtained from the encasing layers of sediment. This issue is becoming common in many geologic and paleontologic studies, which yield long time and slow processes using radiometric techniques, but much shorter spans of time and faster processes based on the study of the fossils therein. More research needs to be done before elucidating the reasons for this apparent contradiction.

Raúl Esperante,
Geoscience Research Institute

THE BATTLE OVER THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments are hardly breaking news, but a quick glance through the US national media in recent months might indicate otherwise. Not only are the airwaves hot with talk about the Commandments, but the Ten Commandments have even come to the streets of the nation's capital. A gentleman, looking vaguely Mosesque, is at the wheel of a converted truck with a giant Ten Commandments on the back, driving the streets of Washington, DC to shout out the message loud and clear; America needs the Ten Commandments.

If that isn't enough to get your attention, maybe the October 2003 rally in front of the US Supreme Court is. The rally, which was the culmination of a road trip from Alabama to Washington, made up for the rather small size of the crowd by the colorful characters and language of the demonstrators. One gentleman in stilts and a top hat proclaimed that it is time to "end judicial tyranny," another dressed as Moses carried a copy of the Ten Commandments, "there is no separation of church and state in the constitution" proclaimed a number of protesters. Even George Washington was in attendance, in the form of a rather hot looking man dressed in resplendent colonial garb.

So what is all the fuss about? As one caller to a radio station recently observed "I thought Christians believed the law was nailed to the cross 2000 years ago and we are living under grace. So why are Christians protesting about the Ten Commandments today?" The answer may have less to do with a new brand of evangelical theology than it has to do with the politics of America's culture wars.

To understand the phenomenon, it is necessary to have a few background facts. The first is that the current furor over the Ten Commandments began with an obscure trial court judge from Alabama named Roy Moore. Judge Moore decided to post a wooden copy of the Ten Commandments in his courthouse. A group

called Americans United for Separation of Church & State (AU), sued Moore in federal court claiming that the display violated the constitutional ban in establishing religion. As it turns out, AU had the law on its side, but Moore had the people.

Alabamans are known as a deeply religious and proudly independent people. Outsiders asking a federal court to force Alabama judges to remove religious symbols from their state courthouses had the predictable result of whipping up a state-wide furor. Not one to miss an opportunity, Judge Moore decided to run for a seat on the elected Alabama Supreme Court. His campaign materials described him as the “Ten Commandments” judge. Predictably he won the seat and became the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama.

Soon after his election, Justice Moore fulfilled his central campaign promise. In the dead of night, without the consent of his fellow justices, Justice Moore installed a 5,300 pound granite Ten Commandments monument in the lobby of the Alabama Supreme Court. The entire event was filmed and copies distributed to delighted supporters. AU, however, was not delighted and resumed their legal battle with Justice Moore.

It was at this point that the nation started to take notice. One side stood firmly on the principle of keeping church and state separate, of protecting folks from the imposition of religious ideas by the state, on the high words of Jefferson and Madison. The other side stood tall for the right to recognize the Biblical basis of American civilization, the precedents set by Washington and Adams, and the state’s right to determine its practices. Both sides were wrong; if not in principle, then at least in practice.

AU deliberately stoked a fire that was better left alone. Judge Moore would still be an obscure judge in a small court in a corner of Alabama if AU had not decided to make him a cause célèbre. AU won on a minor issue, while providing the motivation necessary to continue the building of a movement that is destined to bury all those who oppose the union of church and state. A poll taken soon after AU’s “victory” and published by USA Today, found that 77% of Americans supported Justice Moore’s monument. On the other hand, no one watching these events closely can ignore the political opportunism at work by those supporting Roy Moore. Using the law of God, written with God’s own finger, as a political weapon is hardly laudable. That Moore’s version was edited down to remove any reference to the seventh day, only confirmed the danger inherent in government getting into the business of defining faith.

Cynicism comes easy to this generation, and maybe for good reason. The Ten Commandments controversy with its trade in insults, extreme views, symbiotic fund-

raising efforts, and political maneuvering is enough to make one ask if there is anything sacred left in this world. There must be, but it isn’t found in court houses, on talk shows, scrawled on placards or in fund-raising letters. It is found in a pure grace, freely given, with the law of love written large by the divine on the broken human heart. Hardly the stuff of headlines, but as earth shaking news now as it was on that awesome day when God gave man His immutable law.

James D. Standish,
Public Affairs and Religious Liberty

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

THOUGHTS ABOUT RUTH 2:1-13

The more things change, the more they remain the same. And so it was for Naomi and Ruth. Notwithstanding a change of address from Moab to Bethlehem, the same old problems and uncertainties continued to plague the lives of these two widows. Their plight was a desperate one. In a cruel irony, though they now lived in the “house of bread” (the meaning of the name Bethlehem), they were stalked by hunger, overwhelmed by loneliness, uncertain of their acceptance by the Israelite community, convinced that their situation was due to divine judgment (Ruth 1:20-21), facing the extinction of their family line, and perhaps on the verge of just giving up.

Such was the plight of widows in ancient Israel, and it parallels the predicament of many who are part of our congregations today: widows and widowers, the recently divorced, loyal employees who have been laid off, parents or spouses diagnosed with a serious, possibly fatal, disease. We are the Ruths and Naomis of today.

The very message that Ruth 2 proclaims, namely that God is actively working on behalf of his children, bring us courage and hope. The Almighty has not forgotten or abandoned us, but is already arranging events and circumstances so as to bring about a glorious renewal.

The first verse of Ruth 2 hints at the coming restoration by introducing the person through whom it will later be accomplished, Naomi’s wealthy relative, Boaz. Now at this point in the narrative, Naomi and Ruth are not thinking of Boaz as a candidate to extricate them from the pit into which they have fallen. However, he is already in place and possesses resources which will be used to bring about a reversal of their fortunes. There is a redeemer, as Boaz will later be designated, waiting in the wings (in Ruth 2:20; 3:9,12, the participle form of ga’al, denotes Boaz; the NIV translates this as “kinsman-redeemer”). Perhaps we need to add the phrase “prevenient providence” to our theological

lexicon. Some are already acquainted with the concept of prevenient grace. It refers to the divine grace that is already working on a person's heart prior to that person's turning to God. Though I have never heard of the term prevenient providence, the book of Ruth establishes the validity of the concept.

But what should Ruth and Naomi do in the meantime? In accordance with the stipulation permitting the poor to gather the grain left by the harvesters (see Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22), Ruth proposed finding a field in which she would be allowed to glean. So she headed out, and "as it happened" (2:3), she came to the field of Boaz. "As it happened" (*qarah*). What is the meaning of this phrase? Is the author suggesting that Ruth's encounter with Boaz, an event which takes on enormous significance as the plot of the book unfolds, is simply a coincidence? Not at all! Though it may appear to the reader that Ruth stumbled on the field of Boaz by accident, this "labeling of Ruth's meeting with Boaz as 'chance' is nothing more than the author's way of saying that no human intent was involved. For Ruth and Boaz it was an accident, but not for God" (Ronald M. Hals, *The Theology of the Book of Ruth* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969] 12). A study of the Hebrew verbal root used here (*qarah*) buttresses this point, for "Yahweh often lurks in contexts where *qrh* occurs" (Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988] 141, n. 7).

Herein the author is attempting to make a point about divine providence. Providence in the book of Ruth is not of the spectacular, miraculous, "fireworks in the sky," variety. To the contrary, much of God's activity "is very much that of one in the shadows, the one whose manifestation is not by intervention but by a lightly exercised providential control" (Edward R. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth*, AB [Garden City: Doubleday, 1975] 29). But the events that occur subsequent to Ruth's encounter with Boaz all have the feel of being part of the divine plan to redeem and restore Ruth and Naomi.

Dare we not also affirm God's providential leading of his children today and his involvement in our own lives? The Ruths and Naomis of today need desperately to hear the message that the same God who knows when a sparrow falls (Matt 10:29) cares deeply about them, that he is interested and involved in their lives. They need to be reminded of the gift of redemption, the ultimate restoration, and especially of the great redeemer *par excellence*, the one whom Boaz foreshadowed, Jesus Christ. Redemption and restoration are on the march and ultimately will be visible.

Something more should be said about Ruth. Her Moabite ancestry would seem to preclude her acceptance by the people of God. It is worth noting that throughout

the book, the author delights in calling attention to the fact that Ruth is a foreigner. Some of the references, such as the dual one in 2:6, are clearly superfluous. Every opportunity is taken to remind the reader of her Moabite heritage (1:4, 22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10). In light of this alien status, Ruth considers herself as undeserving of any kindness (2:10).

However, this emphasis on her foreignness serves only to highlight and dramatize the effect when Ruth's status as an outsider is reversed. This reversal comes to a climax in the last chapter of the book where Ruth is portrayed as blessed by the Lord and honored in Israel (4:11-22). This foreigner, whose Moabite ancestry would seem to place her outside the orbit of such blessings, is revealed as the great-grandmother of David, the Israelite *par excellence*, and the one through whose line Jesus Christ would later come (Matt 1:1-17).

"God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34, 35). This truth needs to be proclaimed loudly and often in our day when sadly, ugly terms such as "ethnic cleansing" have made a strong comeback and are alive and well. The fact that redemption and restoration are bestowed on this seeming outsider serves to highlight for us the equal status and value of all people in God's eyes. The riches of the divine kingdom are available to all who call upon the Lord's name (Rom 10:9).

Greg A. King,
Pacific Union College

SCRIPTURE APPLIED: A BIBLE STUDY

SIN—AN OUTDATED CONCEPT?

When did you hear the term "sin" the last time? We do not talk much about it any longer. If you make a mistake society would suggest not to admit it. You could possibly damage your feeling of self-worth or others could turn against you, some would argue. Therefore, mistakes should not be admitted. Yet we know that not everything is okay with us, and sometimes we may suffer because of it. So, let us face the problem rather than running from it. What do we know about sin?

I. The Bible and Sin

(1) What is sin?

- | | | |
|------------|---|---|
| John 16:9 | - | Sin is separation from God (see Gen 3). Sin is not to believe in Jesus. |
| 1 John 3:4 | - | Sin is lawless, transgressing God's commandments. |

- John 8:34 - Sin is slavery.
James 4:17 - It is not to do what is right, although we know what should be done.
- (2) Who is a sinner?
Rom 3:9-12, 23; - Everyone including myself.
1 John 1:8
Matt 5:21, 22, 27, 28 - There is nobody who has not transgressed the Law of God explained by Jesus.
Heb 4:15 - The only exception is Jesus.
- (3) What are the consequences of sin?
Gen 3:16-19; 4:8 - Pain, suffering, sickness, and whatever is negative
Rom 6:16, 23 - Death
Thus, all of us are affected.

II. *The Reality of Sin*

Although it is common to deny the reality of sin, it can be seen everywhere. It is manifested on a large scale in wars, "ethnic cleansing," terrorism, oppression of and crimes against other nations, cultures, or people, etc.

It is also a reality on the individual level. A telling description is found in 2 Tim 3:1-5. Sin not only influences all our relationships to God and other people but even our own mental and physical health.

Psychosomatic medicine has shown, that hatred, the desire to take revenge, anger, wrath, etc.--what people may call "little sins"--may cause physical problems as severe as--in some cases--death. Psychological problems and inner tensions may lead to problems with the nervous system, strokes, high blood pressure, heart attack, digestive disorders, colon ulcers, urogenital problems, allergic reactions, infections, eye and skin diseases, etc. On the other hand, faith in God, prayer, confession, and attendance of church services have a positive impact on health (Gary E. Fraser, *Diet, Life Expectancy and Chronic Disease*, Oxford University Press 2003, pp.153-159; Gary L. Hopkins and Joyce W. Hopp, *It Takes a Church*, Pacific Press 2003, pp. 78-85). As sin destroys the entire human being, so real conversion makes whole the entire human being.

III. *Solutions of the Sin Problem*

- (1) Situation:
Jer 13:23 - We are not able to solve the sin problem. (See Achan in Josh 6:18 and Josh 7, but David in 2 Sam 11 and 12:1-13.)

- (2) Solution:
2 Cor 5:21 - In Jesus God has provided a solution for the sin problem. Jesus took our place so that we may be free.
1 John 2:1 - Jesus is not only our Savior but also our advocate.
- (3) Conditions:
John 6:47, 51 - We must believe and commit ourselves completely to Jesus.
1 John 1:9 - We must confess our sins to God and accept his forgiveness.

This includes:

- Repentance (Acts 2:38; 17:30)
 - Admitting the wrong if necessary also (Luke 15:18-21)
 - Turning away from sin (Prov 28:13)
 - Restoration (Eze 33:14-16; Luke 19:8)
 - Willingness to forgive others (Matt 6:12,14, 15; Luke 23:34)
 - An active attempt to be reconciled Matt 5:24)
- (4) Results:
Inner peace, joy, restored relations, a good conscience, eternal life with God

IV. *Sin and Us*

God is willing to forgive and to grant us a new beginning. He only waits for us to turn to him--Isa 1:18. Jesus takes away our sin--John 1:29.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

BOOK NOTES

Herbert E Douglass, *Should We Ever Say, 'I Am Saved'?*, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003, 158 pp. \$12.99.

Herbert Douglass' contributions to Adventist thought are widely known through previous publications in book form (especially *Messenger of the Lord*, Pacific Press, 1998) and periodical articles, as well as numerous oral presentations.

Although initially this book deals with how to understand Ellen White's several expressions that on the surface seem to militate against Christian confidence, hence its title, in fact Dr. Douglass wrestles with several other issues troubling to many Christians. His discussions on grace and obedience affirm the balance of both within an ellipse that preserves the value of the two in what theologians term truth in tension. From there he leads us through a series of questions, including legal-

ism, perfectionism, and whether assurance can be lost. Throughout, his core theme rests on how true Christianity is identified with a surrendered walk with God, something beyond mere intellectual confession.

Herb Douglass has been criticized by some for his thinking with regard to perfection and the nature of the incarnate Christ. While he does not touch the second theme here, some will find his chapter on perfection surprisingly outside stereotypes. His treatment of the necessity of a pre-advent judgment is a defense of long-established Adventist beliefs and addresses the objections that some have directed to this doctrine.

Douglass' reader-friendly informality avoids heavy theological language while dealing with weighty questions. The result is freshly readable. Tucked into the heart of the book is a chapter [14] that seems almost a unit apart, where he turns momentarily from his biblical theme to explore scientifically the way in which habits are developed. His purpose is to relate this process to moral choices in seeking to live a surrendered life. Many readers will find this discussion enlightening and encouraging. On another matter, his use of a series of expressions that have become virtual code words in one of the independent ministries, the 1888 Message Study Committee, will no doubt raise questions in the minds of some readers. Overall, this book will be helpful for an array of Adventists who wrestle with the questions he is addressing.

George W. Reid, BRI

Ed Christian, *Joyful Noise: A Sensible Look at Christian Music*, Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2003, 173 pp. \$12.99.

Publication of *Joyful Noise* by Ed Christian has again raised the profile of the music debate. This is always valuable because there is still much to think through and learn about Christian discipleship in this complex arena of life. *Joyful Noise* is substantially a reworked collection of pre-published articles centred on criticism of Samuele Bacchiocchi's book, *The Christian and Rock Music*. It purports to be "a sensible look at Christian music" in order to bring healing on a sensitive subject and help alienated young people.

Christian's appeal that music should not become a stumbling block to unity and that all music must be put on the same evaluation table is commendable. His comments on MTV videos, entertainment, applause, the need for worship music to be more congregational than "special music;" why hymns have been rejected, and the need for good song leaders are timely. The final sixty or so pages of the book present as genuine reflections from the heart of someone with a pastoral concern for the church.

However, the central thrust and apparent purpose of the publication needs greater depth and exhibits a cutting tone and weak arguments. Those who believe that Christian decision-making in music is largely a matter of subjective taste--that "any style of music can be used to convey a Christian message" and that "God approves and blesses, no matter what the style of music" as long as the lyrics support faith and Christian unity is not threatened--will find this book a welcome confirmation of their viewpoint. However, readers who sense the subject's complexities and who recognize the need for something more objective will be disappointed with the lack of penetrating analysis on issues grappled with for centuries. Some key concerns are as follows:

By framing his discussion as a reaction to Bacchiocchi's book, the author ignores the debate's wider context that transcends Christian denominational boundaries, world religions, cultures, and centuries. If resolution to the music debate was as simple as Christian suggests, why wasn't it resolved generations ago? Christian gives the impression that the music argument is essentially a battle between elitist Western classical music lovers and those who are pro-CCM (Contemporary Christian Music). This issue, however, is much more complex.

Christian's assertion that biblical references to music are "less useful than we think" while at the same time ignoring Ellen White materials is both surprising and unwarranted. In contrast, his emphasis on the so-called biblical imperatives of enthusiasm, clapping, and dancing leave one wondering what was so wrong with the Holy Flesh Movement in Indiana in 1900 which was opposed by Ellen White.

A disappointing feature of *Joyful Noise* is its cutting criticism of scholars in different fields of expertise. For example, the author caricatures Calvin M. Johansson's position by painting an imaginary picture of his preferred church as "dead or dying." In reality, Johansson is a professor at an Assemblies of God college and is known for his writings about Charismatic worship music practices.

Throughout the book, Christian's constant mantra is that musical style is neutral. He simply asserts this, never offering evidence for it. Although he admits that, "there are some styles . . . that even without words are dark and menacing," he keeps affirming that "God can be praised in every style." Ultimately, what Christian is saying seems to boil down to doing whatever you feel is right for you. Such subjectivity is not really helpful when people sense the need for guidance. Undoubtedly, people come to know God through a variety of music styles, but God still holds his servants responsible for how they have represented him.

If we adopt Christian's view that all styles of music

are equally valid and that congregational offence is a significant arbiter of what ought to be done in a worship setting, we actually legitimize the pretext for people to worship with whatever music they find congenial and to form special interest worship groups based on similarity of musical taste. By this reasoning, rather than nurturing unity, music could become an even more divisive force within our church.

Although Christian speaks about his vision in terms of church relations and worship which is laudable, he fails to enunciate a musical vision—a vision of what “could be” musically in the church. His music philosophy is thoroughly pragmatic. It does not necessitate or call for Adventist musicians, as part of our wholistic message, to make a unique artistic contribution as a singular aesthetic witness to the world.

The fate of our young people is far too important to let our music drift randomly with no distinctive vision of what “ought to be” to guide it. Musically, as in all other arenas of life, P. T. Forsyth’s comment is pertinent: “Unless there is within us that which is above us we shall soon yield to that which is around us.” I believe that there are young people within our ranks who, with their youthful idealism, enthusiasm, and God-given talent, would rise to the challenge of a viable alternative musical vision. Sadly, *Joyful Noise* misses that opportunity.

Wolfgang Stefani,
South Australian Conference

BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA

Webpage: <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>; phone: 301-680-6790

fax: 301-680-6788; e-mail: biblicalresearch@gc.adventist.org

Editor: Ekkehardt Mueller, Th.D., D.Min.

Production Manager: Marlene Bacchus