



Reflections

A BRI Newsletter

Number 10

April 2005

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

BIBLE CONFERENCE IN HONG KONG

During the week of prayer, from November 9-13, 2004, the Biblical Research Institute staff, joined by Dr. Jim Gibson from the Geoscience Research Institute, held a Bible Conference in Hong Kong for the ministerial workforce of the Hong Kong-Macao Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Among the topics covered were "Current Trends in Adventist Theology," "Issues in Creation and Evolution," "Revelation-Inspiration," "Hermeneutics," and "New Testament Eschatology." Two lectures each morning and afternoon, translated into Chinese and with ample time for questions, informed the approximately sixty attendees about important developments in Adventist theology. Each evening one of the lecturers led out in the week of prayer meetings, and on Sabbath each one preached in a different church in Hong Kong. The Chinese pastors appreciated the biblically based lectures and in the words of one participant "were inspired by these studies," and the presenters enjoyed the Chinese cuisine and hospitality.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

GRAND OPENING OF THE LYNN H. WOOD ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

November 11-13 marked the greatly anticipated grand opening of the Lynn

H. Wood Archaeological Museum. The museum exhibits for the first time to the public one of the largest teaching collections of ancient Near Eastern artifacts in North America. Dr. William G. Dever, America's foremost Near Eastern archaeologist, placed the collection at Southern Adventist University in January 2000. Since that time careful plans have been laid for a state-of-the-art museum available to both the university and the public. The completion of Hackman Hall in October 2003, which required a great deal of collaboration, was the first phase of realizing that dream.

The strength of the collection are the complete sequences of pottery forms from the Early Bronze Age, the time of the patriarchs, all the way through the Byzantine period. "That means that for 3,500 years of history we are able to trace the development and changes in lamps, dipper, juglets, bowls, and other forms," said Chris Chadwick, a senior archaeology major. There are also unique artifacts, such as letters written in cuneiform from Ur in Mesopotamia, a clay brick from Babylon inscribed with Nebuchadnezzar's name, weapons of copper and iron, and even a clay chariot that is over 4,200 years old. Together they connect the visitor tangibly to a world that many have only read about in the Bible.

Over two hundred artifacts and objects are exhibited to the background of a stunning display of over 220 photographs,

illustrations, maps, and original artwork that set the objects in the original context and show how they were used. “Museums today are highly interactive and we wanted people of all ages to have a captivating and educational visual experience as they journey into the biblical world,” said Giselle S. Hasel, Designer and Art Director for the Museum.

The grand opening festivities included a formal banquet with Middle Eastern cuisine followed by a ribbon cutting ceremony and open house. Professor Dever stated in his public address at the banquet, “Over the course of my career I have had the opportunity to visit and consult for many museums around the world. This museum is exceptional because it combines the latest in museum design with a truly educational experience. The visitor will come many times and still learn more with each visit.”

During its first two days of operation, the museum experienced over one thousand visitors, many from the community. “It is nothing short of miraculous to stand in this place and see what God has made possible,” commented Dr. Jack J. Blanco, whose vision as Dean of the School of Religion gave birth to the project years ago.

The goal is to make the museum available not only to students on campus and use it as a foundation for the B.A. program in archaeology, but also to open it to the wider community and to educate and communicate the rich cultural history of the ancient Near East which serves as the foundation for Western civilization. Through scheduled lectures and changing exhibits it is hoped that as many as possible will visit the campus and be introduced to this vital discipline.” The dream has become a reality as visitors are invited with the theme of the exhibit to experience: “Vessels in Time: A Journey into the Biblical World.” For directions and hours call: 423-236-2030 in the United States of America.

Michael G. Hasel,
Southern Adventist University and
Lynn H. Wood Museum

SABBATH AS A STRESSOR FOR CHURCH LEADERS

An article in the June 2004 issue of *BRI Reflections* introducing May-Ellen Colón’s world survey on Adventist Sabbath observance stated: “Since the data indicate that the Sabbath brings stress to many in church leadership, a way needs to be found to reduce it for church leaders on Sabbath. The intense Sabbath routine of many church leaders clearly compromises their Sabbath rest and joy.” This article will further focus on this finding.

The difference between church leaders and laity for the Sabbath as a “Burden” factor was not statistically significant. Items in “Sabbath as a Burden” are: a judgmental attitude, a feeling of restriction, comparison with others when I go to church, boredom, and unhappiness. However, the difference between church leaders and laity for the Sabbath as a “Stressor” factor was statistically significant and higher for church leaders. The magnitude of this difference is the strongest in this study. The items within the Sabbath as a “Stressor” factor are: fatigue because of too many Sabbath activities, lack of time for family, and pressure and stress.

Because church leaders have higher stress on Sabbath than does laity, their ability to really rest on the Sabbath is limited. The Sabbath appears to be somewhat less personally meaningful to church leaders and health-care professionals. The fact that these two groups need to be on duty on Sabbath might contribute to this. Sample answers reflected some church leaders’ personal/family concerns regarding unrestful Sabbaths:

“Sabbath is a wonderful time for spiritual communication with God, but a pastor almost never has time for this.” (Moldova)

“As a pastor, it is a day that I cannot completely appreciate in all of the fullness of my relationship with my Creator.” (Venezuela)

“I look forward to this special time with Him, but I have to admit that as a Levite I feel under pressure with Friday vespers, Sabbath a.m. sermon, meetings Sabbath afternoon, and appointments Saturday night.” (United States)

Often Sabbath is the pastors’ busiest day—and, yes, working in the service of God is in harmony with the object of the Sabbath (Matt 12:5; John 7:21-23; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 285). But even though spiritually beneficial, training events, preaching, etc., can be tiring, many preachers and teachers are more tired because of the way they spent Sabbath, instead of being physically, emotionally, and spiritually refreshed.

Church leadership as well as individuals need to look at these data and seek ways to ameliorate this trend. A way needs to be found that will allow church leaders including pastors and others to have some kind of Sabbath rest and to experience Sabbath as a day of fellowship, joy, and refreshment. How can they teach it and not experience rest themselves? In a General Conference Leadership Council church leaders were reminded that they need to be less casual about the Sabbath and intentionally provide time for keeping it. It is more than regrettable if pastors do not enjoy God’s wonderful gift of the Sabbath. What can be done? Here are some suggestions:

- (1) We should prepare well for the Sabbath and keep certain activities out of the Sabbath that may be acceptable per se but do not enhance our experience of keeping the Sabbath. As much as possible we prepare sermons, devotionals, Sabbath School lessons, seminars, and evangelistic campaigns during the week. The Sabbath must be a special day for pastors too.
- (2) We should ask God to give us a positive attitude and help us to joyfully anticipate the Sabbath day. We perceive Sabbath as a wonderful privilege not only to meet God but also to meet our church(es) and to minister to our brothers and sisters, youth and children, and other people. Our own attitude will to a large extent determine how we experience the Sabbath with its workload.
- (3) It is true that pastors and other church leaders may not be able to change some situations in their ministry on Sabbath. Therefore, there must be a way to reframe scenarios that are not going to change. As church leaders, we need to ask ourselves, “Who is the force behind my ministry? In whose name do I minister?” Ministry wears us down if it is done in our own strength. It may not be wrong to be physically tired at the end of the Sabbath, but if we are constantly physically exhausted, we could become spiritually exhausted. If we are physically exhausted we will be too tired to pray, read the Word, etc., and replenish our spiritual supply. The physical and the spiritual are related.
- (4) Whereas some pastors may enjoy an easy life, others tend to become workaholics—even on Sabbath. Both extremes must be avoided. We do not withdraw from our responsibilities, neither do we put too much into the Sabbath hours. Searching for God is the most important reason for keeping the Sabbath. We should not consider the Sabbath to be the major day for ministry and outreach. Our whole life should be built around ministry—not just on Sabbath. Ministry is compatible with the Sabbath, but it is not to be the only day to minister.
- (5) We must take one day off per week. If on a particular Sabbath we are unavoidably physically exhausted, we need to be sure the rhythm of our week is such that the overdraft on our physical energy account is replenished before long.
- (6) We should intentionally plan personal spiritual retreats of quiet study, prayer, and meditation, preferably in a special place.
- (7) We should intentionally plan time with our spouse and our family each week.

Whatever works best in each situation will need to be decided, but the watchword is “intentionality.”

The Sabbath can transform us. Even though church leaders may not always be able to change some ministry situations during Sabbath, we can, by His grace, choose to receive our strength for ministry from Jesus. We can intentionally choose to come to Jesus during the Sabbath hours to bask in His special Sabbath rest. We need to be as intentional about our Sabbath rest as we are about working for God in church duties. The Lord of the Sabbath is saying to us, “Come unto me on the Sabbath, all you pastors/church leaders who serve Me on my Holy Day, who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28, author’s paraphrase).

May-Ellen Colón,
Sabbath School/Personal Ministries

ISSUES ON REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

The topic of revelation and the inspiration of the Bible has become a central theological issue among Adventist theologians and many interested church members. The significance of the topic cannot be exaggerated since it places on the table for analysis that from which we derive our message and life style. Consequently, the way we understand revelation and inspiration, that is to say the very nature of the Bible, will have a direct effect on our faith and practice, and on the role of the interpreter.

Studies made on the history of revelation/inspiration in the Adventist church have indicated that our pioneers simply took for granted the traditional Protestant view of verbal inspiration and that the topic began to be seriously addressed only after 1882.¹ Subsequent discussions of the subject indicate that the church was feeling uncomfortable with verbal inspiration and that other options were being explored, such as

Verbal Inspiration

The focus is on the words of the Bible. God uses the vocabulary from the author’s background and education to communicate the message.

the theory of degrees of inspiration proposed by George I. Butler. This theory was soon rejected. An indication of the direction the church would be heading is found in a General Conference statement made in conjunction with the revision of the book Testimonies to the Church, by E. G. White, in which it was stated: “We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thought, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed.”² This view came to be known as “thought inspiration.”

In spite of that statement, most Adventists continued to adhere to verbal inspiration and in some cases to mechanical inspiration. The topic of revelation/inspiration

Thought Inspiration

The focus is on the writer not on the words of the Bible. Inspiration reaches the mind of the author and the Holy Spirit ensures that the message is correctly expressed. Although the words are not inspired, Scripture as a whole is.

became particularly sensitive during the revision of the book *Great Controversy*. Since E. G. White was considered to be a

prophetess, and since the prevailing view was that of verbal inspiration, it was unimaginable to many that her writings would undergo revisions. They should be free from errors. However, she made it clear that she never believed in verbal inspiration, and in the introduction to the *Great Controversy* she established what she believed was the proper understanding of revelation/inspiration. She simply indicated that revelation operates on the whole person infusing the human mind with divine thoughts.

However, the socio-theological context of the Adventist church in

Mechanical Inspiration

The Holy Spirit dictated the very words to the biblical writers without regard to the background and education of the prophet.

North America directly contributed to the promotion of verbal inspiration. In their struggles against modernism Evangelicals promoted verbal inspiration, and many Adventists who faced the same challenges continued to support verbal inspiration. The 1919 Bible Conference held in Washington DC, July 1-21, 1919, indicated that Adventists were divided on the topic, some still maintaining verbal inspiration and others denying it. During the first half of the 20th century the prevailing theory was that of verbal inspiration. But by the 1950s thought inspiration was beginning to become the main position of the church. The first edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1966) stated that “we do not believe in verbal inspiration, according to the usual meaning of the term, but in what may be properly called thought inspiration.”³

At the moment when a consensus was being reached by the church on the topic of revelation/inspiration another challenge appeared on the theological horizon: The Encounter Theory of Revelation. Encounter theory argued that revelation consisted of an existential encounter between the prophet and God in which God did not communicate any information to the human instrument. The content of the Bible is the prophets’ feeble and fallible interpretation of that personal encounter.

The Bible is a witness to that encounter but it does not contain any revelation from God to us; it is a book like any other book. The impact of this theory, coming from non-Adventist liberal theologians, was not significant mainly because a number of Adventist theologians were able to disarm it.⁴

The last quarter of the twentieth century was characterized among Adventists not only by issues related to revelation/inspiration but also by biblical hermeneutics and the inroads of the historical-critical method. Since then much has been written by Adventist theologians on that topic. Concerning hermeneutics, the world church officially rejected the critical methodology because it placed human beings as judges over the Bible. On the topic of revelation-inspiration, Fundamental Belief number one voted at the General Conference Session in 1980 states:

The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.⁵

This statement establishes, through the use of biblical language, that the Bible is of divine origin and that God was involved in the process of transmitting and recording the divine revelation. It avoids the phrase “thought inspiration” as well as the idea that the very words of the Bible were dictated by the Spirit to the prophet. In spite of the fact that thought inspiration is not explicitly mentioned in Fundamental Belief number one it has become the predominant view among Adventists. Unfortunately, this view has more recently been misused by placing it at the service of the historical-critical methodology.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century thought inspiration has been radically separated from the words of the Bible. It is now argued by some Adventist theologians that the theological task is to uncover the thoughts God revealed to the prophets and not the means they used to embody that thought—e.g. the culturally conditioned story they told or the culturally determined legal materials found in the Bible. This dichotomy between thought and words allows them to argue, for instance, that we should consider the story recorded in Gen 1 to be an ancient Near Eastern cultural expression used by the biblical writer to communicate the divine thought revealed to him, namely that God is the Creator of everything. That is what was revealed and not that God

created in six days and rested on the seventh (the how of creation). Behind this view lurks Greek dualism. Accordingly the “thought” would be the equivalent of the “soul” and the “word” would be the “body.” The task of the interpreter would be to release the thought from the words in order to be able to apprehend the divine.

Such dichotomy is not only foreign to the Bible but it is also absent from the writings of E. G. White. The classical biblical passages on revelation/inspiration (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21) indicate that they used the term inspiration to refer to the origin of the revelation as well as to the end-result of it, the Scripture. They make clear that God was involved in the revelation/inspiration process from beginning to end and that the way the prophets expressed the divine thought was under the guidance of the Spirit. God appropriated the words of the prophets (Ezek 2:7; Jer 1:7) and made sure that they were able to deliver the message in a trustworthy way. The Lord asked Jeremiah, “What do you see?”, and after he described the vision the Lord said, “You have seen correctly” (Jer 1:11-12). Such guidance did not grant the prophets divine perfection in their work. The human element is always present and becomes particularly visible in some biblical discrepancies.

Any attempt to interpret the concept of thought inspiration in E. G. White along the lines of the radical dichotomy that we mentioned is a distortion of what she has to say on the subject. Here is her classical statement:

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.⁶

According to her, God addresses the totality of the person and not only one aspect of the personality of the prophets, e.g. the verbal skills of the prophets. Second, what she is describing is the mysterious process through which the divine message or word is “incarnated” into the human condition. The divine mind, she says, is diffused. And by that she means that the divine mind and will are combined with the human mind and will in such a way that what is expressed by the human instrument—“the utterances of the man”—are “the word of God.”

E. G. White does not separate in a drastic way the reception of the message from its delivery. She emphasizes that the words used were not given to the prophet from the divine language or vocabulary, but she insists that in

recording the message the Spirit was directly involved: “Although I am as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in writing my views as I am in receiving them, yet the words I employ in describing what I have seen are my own, unless they be those spoken to me by an angel, which I always enclose in marks of quotation.”⁷

The process of revelation/inspiration reaches the words even though the words themselves are not inspired, that is to say they do not represent the divine language per se and neither were they dictated by the Spirit. However the Spirit guided the prophets in the writing process in the sense that the Spirit made sure that the prophets used to the best of their abilities their own vocabulary to express the message they received in a trustworthy and reliable form. E. G. White suggests that possibility when she comments that there were times when she was not certain of how to express herself and then “the appropriate words” came to her mind.⁸

Obviously the debate among us on the topic of revelation/inspiration will continue. However, any view that undermines or tends to undermine the authority of the Scripture or that places human beings as judges over it must be rejected as incompatible with the very nature of the Word of God.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

¹See Alberto Ronald Timm, “A History of Seventh-day Adventist Church Views on Biblical and Prophetic Inspiration (1844-2000),” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10.1, 2 (Spring-Autumn 1999): 486-542.

²“General Conference Proceedings,” *Review and Herald*, Nov 27, 1883, 741-742.

³Don F. Neufeld, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1966), 585.

⁴See among others, Edward Heppenstall, “Revelation and Inspiration,” *Ministry*, August 1970; Raoul Dederen, “Revelation, Inspiration, and Hermeneutics,” in *Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*, edited by Gordon M. Hyde (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, 1974), 1-15; and idem., “Toward a Seventh-day Adventist Theology of Revelation-Inspiration,” in *North American Bible Conference 1974* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, 1974).

⁵*Yearbook: Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference, 2004), p. 5.

⁶1 *SM*, p. 21 (Manuscript 24, 1886; written in Europe in 1886).

⁷1 *SM*, p. 37. In another place she writes, “I am just as dependent upon the Spirit of the Lord in relating or writing the vision as in having the vision” (3 *SM*, p. 48).

⁸1 *MCP*, p. 318.

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

THE PROBLEM OF UNCLEANNES--MARK 7:15-19

Mark 7:15-19 belongs to those passages that are easily misunderstood. People argue that Jesus did away

with the food laws and “declared all foods clean.” Mark 7:1-23 reports that Jesus’ disciples were eating bread without having washed their hands. Such behavior was against Jewish traditions as described in verses 3-4. Therefore, the Pharisees and scribes addressed and indirectly rebuked Jesus (v. 5) for supposedly not keeping the law. In responding Jesus did not directly deal with the question his adversaries had asked (v. 6-13), but went to the heart of the matter. He revealed their hypocrisy by applying an Old Testament quotation (Isa 29:13) to them and by relating one of their customs. By way of illustration Jesus focused on the fifth commandment of the Decalogue and its circumvention by the traditions. He showed that the Jews were transgressing God’s law and invalidating the Word of God for the sake of their own traditions, and he repudiated them for such an attitude (v. 7, 8, 9, 13).

Next Jesus addressed the crowds and moved from the transgression of God’s law to the issue of uncleanness and defilement (v. 14-15). This concept was further developed in a private conversation with His disciples (v. 18-23). Jesus stressed that evil thoughts make humans unclean. Whereas in the first part of this longer passage Jesus focused on the law of God, in the second part he wrestled with the issue of uncleanness. When talking to the disciples he combined both. The list of twelve vices reminds us of the Decalogue and other Old Testament commandments, e.g. Lev 18. So in the last part of Mark 7:1-23 Jesus merged the issues of keeping the law and avoiding defilement. Here is an outline of the passage:

Introduction (1-4): Uncleanness

Narrative Frame

- (1) Pharisees and scribes versus Jesus’ disciples (1-2)
- (2) Background information on Jewish traditions (3-4)

First Scene (5-13): The Law

- (1) *The Pharisees and scribes* ask (5)
Direct speech: Question about the violation of the traditions of the elders
- (2) Jesus answers (6-8)
Direct speech: Old Testament quotation (Isa 29:13) and emphasis on the law of God
- (3) Jesus says (9-13)
Direct speech: The law of God and an example from everyday life, Old Testament quotations (the 5th commandment in Ex 20:12 and Ex 21:17), and conclusion

Second Scene (14-15): Uncleanness

- (4) Jesus addresses *the crowd* (14-15)

Direct speech: Uncleanness

Third Scene (17-23): Uncleanness and the Law

- (5) *The disciples* ask (17)
Direct speech: Nothing from without can defile the heart.
- (6) Jesus answers (18-19)
Direct speech: Real defilement comes from within, that is from the heart and is against the law.
- (7) Jesus says (20-23)
Direct speech: Real defilement comes from within, that is from the heart and is against the law.

The issue in this passage is not clean versus unclean food. It is eating with unwashed, that is, unclean hands. Jesus is not discussing the *kind* of food that can be eaten, but only the way it is eaten. Jesus is not addressing a biblical issue but a tradition of the elders. The parallel text in Matt 15:1-20 is even clearer. It starts out with the problem of eating food with unclean hands and refers to it again at the end of the passage (Matt 15:20).

Furthermore, the text does not talk about meat, but about food (*bromata*). To restrict it to meat only is to ignore the Greek meaning of the word. The context talks about the bread that the disciples ate (verses 2, 5). “Purifying all food” (verse 19) is a comment by Mark which refers to Jesus. It is not the digestive process which purifies the food, but Jesus declares food clean even if consumed without the washing of hands. Jesus did not do away with the distinction between clean and unclean meat. If this had been the case Jesus would indeed have been a lawbreaker. On the contrary, Jesus wholeheartedly supported the law which includes the Decalogue as well as other Old Testament precepts. They were still valid in his time and are valid even today. Had Jesus abolished the food laws, why would Peter in his vision in Acts 10 have refused to eat unclean meat? An interesting comment on Mark 7 is made by Robert A. J. Gagnon, a non-Adventist scholar:

“The saying in Mark 7:15-19 about what defiles a person is often cited as proof that Jesus abolished the food laws. It is more likely that Jesus intended a hyperbolic contrast: what counts most is not what goes into a person but what comes out . . . If Jesus did not abrogate even such things as food laws and meticulous tithing, then it is impossible that he would have overturned a proscription of sexual immorality as serious as that of male-male intercourse.”¹

Gagnon claims that Jesus was opposed to homosexuality, because in Mark 7:22 he mentions *porneia* as something that comes out of humans and defiles them. *Porneia* refers to different kinds of sexual sins including homosexuality, sins such as those listed in Lev 18. Since

Lev 18 is still valid in the New Testament, as Paul shows (1Cor 5), the law of clean and unclean meat as found in Lev 11 is also not abolished by Jesus.

The main message of our passage is: God's will is important and must not be circumvented, and the real problem of our uncleanness is our sinful heart which affects our thought processes and actions. Therefore, in Mark 7:15 Jesus moves from ritual defilement to the more important issue of moral defilement and our human nature. This reminds us of Matt 23:23, where Jesus is not opposed to meticulous tithing but shows that it is not enough to pay tithe. There are more important matters in the Christian life which cannot be neglected without suffering harm. The real problem is not with external matters (7:15,18-19) or even external challenges. The issue is our internal dilemma (7:15,21-23).

The phrase "the things that defile a man" (7:15) is repeated almost identically in 7:19 and 23. And what comes out of a man (7:15) is that which comes out of his heart, namely the evil thoughts (7:21). Verses 18-23 are a commentary on verse 15, which is called a parable by the disciples (7:17). This commentary lists twelve things which defile. They are "adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness" (7:21-22) and are referred to as "evil thoughts." All sins start in our thoughts, and frequently thoughts become acts. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus has shown that evil thoughts are already sinful when cherished and not rejected (Matt 5:28). The real problem is our mind which produces thoughts that defile us.

The list of vices in verses 21 and 22 includes three terms that refer to sexual sins and that remind us of the seventh commandment. It also covers the third, sixth, eighth, probably the ninth, and the tenth of the Ten Commandments. In our days, we are confronted with sexual temptations, with violence, deceit, pride, arrogance, and many other sins. It is easy and convenient to adapt to a lifestyle which has become our common culture. It is also easy to make excuses when we have failed to follow Christ's example. But it is still we who make the decision to respond to these challenges and imitate behavior common today or to reject it. As someone has said, we cannot hinder the birds to fly over our heads, but we can hinder them to build nests on them. The problem is our hearts.

What we therefore need is a renewal of our mind. How this can be achieved is not discussed in Mark 7:1-23 but in the following passage (Mark 7:24-30) in which Jesus is presented as the solution to our problems. He is able to drive out our "demons." He is willing to honor

our faith and respond to our prayer. Our passage invites us not to look at peripheral problems but to face the real issues, namely our sinful hearts.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

¹Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 69.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

THE LAST ENEMY

Although some obituaries claim that God has taken a loved one into a better world, others do not reflect any hope. Nevertheless, all of them remind us that one day it will be our turn.

A kind of obituary is found in 1Cor 15:3-8. It contains four statements: (1) Christ has died; (2) Christ was buried; (3) Christ arose from the dead; and (4) Christ appeared to different persons. Jesus Christ, our Creator and Savior knows exactly what is going on when humans die. In addition he has experienced death himself, and through the Bible he can give us important information about this topic.

I. *The Cause of Death*

- Gen 2:17 - God's statement: The possibility that death may become a reality is introduced.
- Gen 3:4 - Satan's statement: Immortality is part of humanity.

After the fall the possibility of death became a bitter reality affecting all human beings--Rom 6:23.

II. *The State of Death*

1. *Death in the Old Testament*

- Gen 2:7 - God gave life to the body that he shaped from the dust of the ground and that up to that time was without life (dust + life= a living being). If God withdraws life, the former state—earth, dust—is found again (cf. Eccl 3:19,20).
- Eccl 9:5,6,10 - In death there is no activity. The deceased have no consciousness.
- Dan 12:2,13 - Death is compared to sleep which seems to imply: (1) It is a state

of unconsciousness. The dead are “sleeping” in the earth. (2) There will be an awakening.

2. *Death and Jesus*

- 1Cor 15:3,4,20 - Jesus is called the first fruit or the first of those who are asleep. As such, Jesus also “slept” when He was dead. After His crucifixion He did not go directly to the Father but rested in the tomb until His resurrection (John 20:17).

3. *Death in the New Testament*

- John 5:28,29 - The dead are in the grave.
 Acts 2:29,34 - David, a man after God’s heart (Act 13:22), rests in the tomb and is not with God.
 John 7:33,34; 13:33 - Where Jesus is, His disciples cannot come immediately.
 The OT, the NT, as well as Jesus’ own experience suggest that death is an unconscious state called sleep (see also John 11).

III. *And After Death*

- 1Cor 15:42-44 - There is a resurrection. Believers will receive a new body. However, we have no detailed information what this body will be like. Someone has compared the old body to coal and the new body to a marvelous diamond. Both consist of carbon, and yet they are so different from each other.
 1Cor 15:22-23 - A child of God expects the resurrection.
 John 14:1-3 - Jesus has prepared dwelling places for his people that they will inhabit after His Second Coming.
 Rev 21:4 - Finally, death will be done away with. Death will be the end only if my life does not belong to God.

IV. *Preparation*

- Ps 90:12 - We are preparing. We get our priorities straight. Important things must remain important.

In ancient Thessalonica two inscriptions were found which obviously come from the same period. One says: “No hope.” The other one reads: “Christ is my life.” Two inscriptions and two different philosophies of life, resignation and assurance. What about your life?

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

BOOK NOTES

Graeme Bradford. *Prophets are Human*. Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing Company, 2004. 91pp.

This book is by nature and design an apologetic work. Graeme Bradford is attempting to demonstrate that the charges raised against the prophetic ministry of E. G. White are based on a misunderstanding of the manifestation of the biblical gift of prophecy. Bradford lists the main charges raised against her prophetic claim and attempts to solve them through the formulation and use of at least five fundamental hermeneutical principles that according to him are based on what the Bible says about prophets. I will list those principles and then evaluate their implications.

1. *Divine revelation is incomplete*: He argues that God always leaves room for doubt but provides enough evidence to support belief. His revelation is always incomplete. This principle explains why prophets made mistakes. Their fallibility is part of the divine plan. Since God respects our freedom He limits His revelation and does not overwhelm us with indisputably clear evidence.

2. *Revelation is culturally conditioned*: Bradford implies that the way the prophets received and communicated their messages was to a large extent culturally determined. In that process God used cultural practices that were less than ideal. According to him, that is what E. G. White meant when stating that the Bible contains the human mode of thought and expression. In her writings she used information that today is considered to be incorrect, but these concepts were “considered to be true in her day and culture” (p. 50). In using those materials she was not settling once and for all the correctness of the historical or scientific information she was using. Bradford concludes that information not central to what she was trying to communicate could contain errors. That explains her willingness to correct historical information found in her writings.

3. *Inspiration is thought inspiration*: God did not dictate the Bible but gave the prophets ideas and thoughts through different means. Among them we find visions, dreams, and sometimes dictation. But the prophets also used personal experiences and research to communicate their message (e.g., Luke 1:1-4). This prin-

ciple establishes, Bradford suggests, that when studying the Bible or the writings of E. G. White we should look for the message God was trying to communicate and not worry about the correctness of the information used by the prophets to express the divine thought.

4. *The central purpose of the prophetic gift:* The prophetic gift has one primary purpose, namely to bring Jesus to the reader. Hence the book *Desire of Ages* is an evangelistic tool. She copied from others not in order to produce a historical document free from errors, but to present in a winsome way the person of Jesus. According to Bradford, if we keep in mind that primary purpose we should not have any problem with discrepancies or errors that could be found in the Bible or in E. G. White.

5. *Prophets are humans:* Prophets received revelations which they had to interpret and apply. In these revelations God used cultural concepts that were familiar to them and their audiences. Bradford argues that it is in the interpretation of the revelation that the prophets are likely to make mistakes (Acts 10:34-35; 1 Pet 1:10-11). For example, E. G. White misunderstood the vision of the shut door. Since prophets are humans, they sometimes fall short of God's ideal for them. The book emphasizes the human side of inspiration. Bradford says very little with respect to God's role in the process of revelation and inspiration.

Evaluation:

Some may find in this volume a good response to the critics of E. G. White. In fact the principles upon which the arguments are based are difficult to refute. Who will argue against the fact that prophets are humans and are not infallible? Who will deny that culture has an important role to play in the process of revelation and inspiration, or that prophecy has a central purpose, or that God inspired thoughts?

The shortcomings of this book are located in the rather superficial way in which it deals with very complex issues and the lack of any attempt to set proper parameters for the way the principles identified operate. Besides, the book does not explore the divine dimension of inspiration except to say that God inspired the thoughts, guided the prophets, and gave us an incomplete revelation in order to preserve our freedom of choice. In other words, it presupposes a doctrine of revelation and inspiration that is never clearly articulated. Neither does the book take into consideration explanations given by other scholars to the criticisms raised against E. G. White. If we consistently apply the hermeneutics found in this book to the Bible, its authority would be seriously affected.

The drastic dichotomy between thought and word offered by Bradford and others is damaging to the

biblical concept of inspiration. The combination of thought inspiration and the central role of culture in the prophetic phenomenon described and promoted by Bradford could also be damaging. For instance, the book of Exodus describes the giving of the Decalogue to the Israelites as a glorious historical event that took place on Mount Sinai. God descended and they heard Him speaking to them. Critical scholars placed this event within the culture of the author and concluded that it never happened. What we have here, they say, is a literary device whose purpose is to invest the law with divine authority. In the ancient Near East a legal code was authoritative if it originated among the gods. The gods gave the law to the king and consequently it was authoritative. The Israelites did not have a king, therefore the biblical writer created a story in which God directly gave the law to the Israelites. The story has one central purpose and it is there where the revelation is found. One should remove the culturally conditioned element—the story of God speaking to the people from a mountain—, and retain the thought that was inspired—God is the law giver.

Culture did play a role in the process of revelation and inspiration. But God took cultural practices and at times rejected them, modified them to make them compatible with His self-revelation, or accepted some of them as expressing His will or intention. Each case should be carefully evaluated. One should not give the impression that the theological point was the only important thing and the rest of the message is to be credited to the culture in which the prophets lived. Concerning E. G. White one should ask, how do we identify that which is culturally conditioned in her writings? What about her end-time scenario? Is that also culturally conditioned? The best approach is to examine each case on its own merits. Making open-ended remarks that will function as a kind of overarching hermeneutical principle that will solve all real or imaginary problems, creates more problems than it solves.

It is correct to believe that the primary purpose or goal of God's revelation is to exalt and point to Christ. But in achieving that goal the Bible becomes a vehicle for the revelation of God's manifold wisdom in salvation, creation, and the historical development of His plan of salvation. The Bible provides a Christ-centered worldview, a philosophy of life and history. In fact history belongs to the essence of divine revelation. If the Bible contains historical inaccuracies or inconsistencies we should examine each one to establish as clearly as possible the reason for them. In some cases we may have to acknowledge that the prophet may not have been well informed. But we should not solve the difficulty by arguing that the scientific or historical information found

in the Bible can be simply ignored because the purpose of the Bible is not to deal with history or science but to nurture our spiritual well-being. This is clearly a very narrow view of the nature of inspiration not found in the Bible nor in the writings of E. G. White.

The book by Bradford will not do much damage among church members who are not aware of the issues I am raising. However, it makes a contribution to the development of an Adventist concept of revelation and inspiration that is not representative of what Adventists have considered to be the biblical understanding of the inspiration and authority of the Bible and of the role of E. G. White.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

A more detailed evaluation of this book written by Gerhard Pfandl can be obtained from the Biblical Research Institute.

David Marshall. *The Battle for the Bible*. Stanborough Press, 2004. 192 pp. \$ 10.99.

The status of the Bible in Western culture, and in contemporary theology appears to be on the decline. The present state of affairs is the result, in part, of century old battles over the accuracy and historicity of the Bible. In *The Battle for the Bible* David Marshall, editor of the Adventist publishing house in England, traces briefly the history of some of the significant battles over the integrity and dependability of the Bible.

Before identifying the battle lines, Marshall devotes the first section of three brief chapters to discussing the composition of the Bible with regard to its languages, authors, and the manner in which the books from different periods were brought together.

In section 2, Marshall begins to outline the battle lines. The eighteenth century saw the rise of skepticism among scholars and charges of mistakes and inaccuracies in the extant texts of both the Old and New Testaments. Marshall's discussion of the Masoretes, Essenes, Dead Sea scrolls, Codex Sinaiticus, the Chester-Beatty Papyri, and the Washington Codex is presented as a vindication of the Bible's integrity.

In section 3, Marshall includes the story of the English Bible. From the persistent and heroic efforts of characters such as Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne, Caedmon of Whitby, Aldhelm, Bede, Wyclif and Tyndale, to the story of the Coverdale, Matthew, Great, Geneva, Bishop, and King James' Bibles, Marshall discerns the divine hand at work in preserving the Bible and making it accessible to God's people. He sees the production of new versions adapted to the times as a necessary ongoing task.

In section 4, Marshall brings archaeology to the battle arena showing how archaeological finds have settled erstwhile embarrassing questions regarding particular personalities and cities mentioned in the Bible, but supposedly not referred to anywhere else. His discussion includes the significance of the Rosetta Stone and the Behistun Rock, as well as various tells. He refers to archeological excavations that have unveiled Babylon, Nineveh, the Hittite Empire, Ur of the Chaldees, Jericho, the Philistine cities, and various places in Israel. With regards to the New Testament, Marshall employs archaeological finds to confirm the building activities of King Herod, and Jesus' ministry in the vicinity of Capernaum in Galilee.

Finally, in section 5, Marshall concludes by pointing out that in spite of the merits of archaeology and the discovery of ancient manuscripts, the truth of the Bible does not depend on these. Thus the invitation is extended to taste and see, and to discover and encounter the Man of the Book--Jesus Christ.

Marshall's book is concise, readable, insightful and illuminating. It is clear throughout where he stands in the *Battle for the Bible*: the Bible is a supernaturally inspired and preserved book. However, it would have been interesting to see the discussion extended to contemporary ideas that are at odds with the biblical world view and which are as potent in displacing trust in the Bible as are doubts and skepticism over the text of the Bible.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

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