

"THE ROLE OF BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS IN PRESERVING UNITY IN THE CHURCH"

By

Raymond F. Cottrell

March 12, 1996

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Raymond F. Cottrell

P A R T I

In His intercessory prayer just before entering the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed that those who follow Him "may all be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me."¹ Unity is essential to the credibility of our witness, as a community of faith, to the everlasting gospel. "Unity" was also the official motif of the recent General Conference Session in Utrecht.

The basis for unity is our faithfulness, under the aegis of the Holy Spirit, as individuals and corporately as a church, to what we call the Golden Rule: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you."² The golden Rule is particularly important for those in positions of power and authority in the church. The gospel requires them to be examples of this principle in all of their relationships to members of the household of faith, whether collectively or as individuals: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you," Jesus instructed His disciples, "but whosoever wishes to be great among you must be your slave."³

The Golden Rule and this servant-leadership principle require that those who are "great" among us--our elected leaders at all levels of leadership; members of church boards, conference, union, and division committees; and delegates to conference, union, and General Conference sessions--"serve" the church and not think of leadership in terms of authority and control, but of service.³ This is especially true of delegates to a General Conference session, who are entrusted with ultimate doctrinal and policy decisions for the world church.

Long ago we as Seventh-day Adventists set as our primary objective, proclamation of the everlasting gospel "to every nation and tribe and language and people."⁴ That objective envisioned a world church. In the beginning there were no Seventh-day Adventists outside of North America; today, the vast majority of our members live somewhere else. Of the 236 countries of the world, the church is currently operating in 208 with 98 percent of its population. Page 2: There are only 28 countries with only two percent of its population where the church is not represented--and Global Mission proposes to remedy that defect by the year 2000.⁵

Utrecht 1995 will go down in history as recognizing the fact that we are, now, the world church our forefathers envisioned. The structural administrative changes voted there recognized and implemented that fact by assigning the eleven world divisions of the church representation at future sessions of the General Conference in proportion to their membership.⁶

The administration of a world church confronts our leaders with unprecedented problems of which none of us have been more than dimly aware. The infinite diversity of cultures and levels of education; concepts of leadership roles, the exercise of authority, and the way in which the church should operate--and now the role of women in the church--all confront us with major challenges.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Can we continue to function as a united world church? What is unity in a world church, and how can it be maintained? Does unity require uniformity, or can there be unity in diversity? Is it reasonable to expect highly trained and experienced fourth, fifth, and sixth generation Adventists, and first generation members in the developing countries, to agree on church policy? As Utrecht demonstrated, these structural changes provide for recently baptized converts in the developing countries to outvote members with a lifetime of experience in the church. What does that vote bode for the future? Whose church, and what kind of church, is the future world church to be?

The so-called "third world" of developing countries is now in control of the General Conference. By their sheer weight of numbers they are the ones with power and authority. They demonstrated the way in which they propose to exercise that power by their overwhelming vote of 1,481 to 673 not to permit each world division of the church to decide a policy matter such as the ordination of women on the basis of what it considers best for the church in its part of the world. I am not concerned here with the question of ordination, however, important as that may or may not be, but with the far larger question of preserving and nurturing unity in the church. and especially with the fact that those who voted that resounding Nay cited their flawed biblical hermeneutic as their reason for doing so.⁷

In that vote, did the delegates from Latin America, East Africa, and other parts of the world abide by the Golden Rule, and exercise their power Page 3: and authority as servants of the world church? Immediately prior to the vote, and with the full backing of all of his union presidents, 8 the president of the North American Division, made an earnest plea to let each division decide matters of church policy and cultural awareness for itself, on the basis of what it considers best for the church and its mission in its part of the world. 9 That vote made obvious that they intend to control the church in North America (and elsewhere) according to their cultural mores and flawed understanding of the Bible. By no stretch of the imagination could it be said that they treated us like they would want us to treat them. That vote did not serve the best interests of the church in North America and some other parts of the world. It was not based on the Golden Rule.

Yes, the motif at Utrecht was unity, but the third world majority insisted on uniformity in order to protect its cultural concept of the role of women in society and the church. The Nay-sayers were doubtless very sincere, but they were evidently unaware that their insistence on uniformity severely fractured the unity of the world church, and unless that fracture can be repaired it will inevitably result in separation and divorce. In cultural and policy matters unity does not require uniformity. As a matter of fact, legislated uniformity fractures unity, whereas respect for diversity preserves true unity. To paraphrase my old friend Alfred, Lord Tennyson, The tie that binds too tightly snaps of its own accord. 10

That historic vote also escalated awareness of the crucial importance of biblical hermeneutics in the formation of doctrine and church policy, to the unity of the church, to an unprecedented level. Nineteen years differences on how to understand and interpret the Bible forced the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod into schism. 11 Over the past decade these ago similar differences have proved increasingly divisive in the Southern Baptist Convention (with fifteen million members the largest Protestant denomination in the United States), and portend eventual schism. Unless we as Seventh-day Adventists resolve this divisive difference in biblical hermeneutics, it has the potential of making two Adventist churches inevitable--one for open-minded people who base their conclusions on Bible principles, and one for closed-minded people who feel more secure with an immature, literalistic, authoritarian reading of the Bible.

For us as Seventh-day Adventists, this hermeneutical issue resolves itself into the ultimate question as to whether we, as a community of faith, Page 4: can be mature enough--open enough--to base our reading of the Bible on the weight of Bible evidence, or whether we permit preconceived opinions about the Bible to close our minds to the weight of evidence. We urgently need dialog. If wife and husband are

mature and open enough to listen to each other attentively, perceptively, and with mutual respect, in an endeavor to understand each other's point of view, they will probably find a solution to their differences of opinion in a way both will find acceptable. Without meaningful dialogue, separation and divorce may be inevitable. So it is with social and cultural differences in the church from one part of the world to another and the world divisions of the church in relation to biblical hermeneutics.

Why Is the Bible Understood in So Many Different Ways/

The Bible is the most remarkable literary document of all time. Its concept of life and the existence of all things has influenced the thinking and lives of more people over a longer period of time than any other. It continues to attract the careful study of a broad spectrum of readers, all the way from people who consider it a strictly human product to others who are profoundly committed to it as the inspired Word of God, and from people who are scarcely able to read, to scholars who devote their lives to understanding it.

No other literary document has attracted such universal attention or been understood in such a variety of ways--as the innumerable subdivisions of Christendom around the world make evident. Why is so important and influential a piece of literature understood in so many different ways? Is the Bible a sort of Delphic oracle that can mean anything a person wants it to mean? To the contrary, the Bible writers addressed explicit messages to particular people in the context of specific historical circumstances. The reason for the often contradictory ways in which the Bible is understood, consists of the presuppositions, principles, and procedures people follow as they read it. Obviously, reliable hermeneutical principles and procedures are of major importance.

We can read the Bible as literature. Books such as Ruth, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon are literary masterpieces. It may also be read for inspiration, and upon occasion, consolation.

Or, we can Page 5: just read it. It can be read for its lofty moral and ethical principles and as a guide to appropriate personal conduct and human relations. More than all of these, however, the Bible can be read as a guide to salvation in Jesus Christ--to a way of life in personal relationship to Him, in anticipation of life eternal.

For these modes of Bible reading no special training or expertise is necessary. But for Bible study with the objective of recovering the exact meaning the inspired writers intended their words to convey, a reliable hermeneutic is essential. And what is a "hermeneutic"? The word hermeneutic is derived from the Greek word *hermeneuo*, "to interpret," which in turn was based on the name Hermes, the legendary messenger, or interpreter, of the gods. A biblical hermeneutic is a method by which to interpret and understand God's messages to us on record in the Bible.

There are two basic ways, or methods, by which people read the Bible and try to understand it. These two methods look at the Bible from opposite directions and often come to opposite conclusions as to what it means. One reads it from the viewpoint of what its words (in translation) mean to us today, from our modern perspective of life, society, culture, salvation history, and the world about us--as if the writers had us in mind as they wrote. The other method reads the Bible looking for the meaning they intended their words to convey, from their perspective of life, society, culture, salvation history, and the world, and as their contemporaries would understand what they wrote). Then, having found the meaning they intended to convey, this method looks for the divine principles and instruction reflected in a Bible passage and how they applied to that particular situation, in order to know how those principles and instruction apply to us today.

The first of these two methods of reading and understanding the Bible usually goes by the name proof-text method, which often takes Bible statements and passages out of their original historical and literary

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

context and applies them directly to our time--often under very different circumstances to which they do not apply. The second usually goes by the name historical method because it first reads the Bible in its own literary and historical context, with the ultimate objective of understanding how to apply its principles and instruction to our time and circumstances.

The big advantage of the proof-text method, if there be any advantage, is that it requires no special training or experience. In fact, a person need not even be aware of following any method. For most people, the big disadvantage of the historical method is that it does require training and experience. Fortunately, however, those who have not had the privilege of that training and experience can still follow the historical method by making use of information those who do have that training have provided. More about that later.

Two factors are involved in obtaining an accurate understanding of the meaning the Holy Spirit and a Bible writer intended a statement or passage of Scripture to convey--the Bible itself and the person studying it. Let us briefly explore both of these essentials to an accurate understanding of the Bible.

Personal Qualities Essential to Accurate Exegesis

The Creator endowed us with the twin capacities of faith and reason. He did not intend faith as a substitute for reason, or reason as a substitute for faith. Each has its proper sphere of operation, and neither should invade the sphere in which He designed the other to operate. Faith and reason are two eyes of the mind that provide the intellectual perspective it needs in order to distinguish fact from fancy and truth from error. Faith needs reason to prevent it from deteriorating into credulity, superstition, and obscurantism. Conversely, reason needs faith in order to keep it from being blind to eternal realities and to enable it to rise above its finite limitations. The question is not one of choosing between faith and reason, but of coordinating faith and reason. Neither is truly viable without the other, and a mature mind will keep them in balance. Blind faith is no better than blind reason--or literal blindness.

Another essential quality of mind is objectivity--the realization that truth and reality exist outside of the human mind and are not affected in any way by what we may happen to think about them. What we may happen to think about truth and reality is, in a sense, irrelevant. We all have presuppositions about the Bible, but the Bible must always control our presuppositions; our presuppositions must never attempt to control the Bible. Our presuppositions about the Bible and our conclusions as to what it means must be based on the weight of Bible evidence. This requires that our study of the Bible be inductive--from the Bible evidence to our conclusions as to what it means, not deductive, with our presuppositions in control of the process.

Another essential of Bible study is humility in the presence of revealed truth. Humility forbids a dogmatic attitude which assumes that we are already in possession of absolute truth. We are servants of revealed truth, not its masters. It must control us; we must not attempt to manipulate it. Humility also requires openness and willingness to learn--a realization that truth is infinite and we are finite. Our finiteness in perceiving ultimate truth and reality also requires us to be open to other people as sincere as we are, and to respect their perception of reality and truth. It requires us to be willing to dialogue with them and to listen to their perspective of it when they express their point of view responsibly and with mutual respect. It requires us to listen as respectfully, attentively, and perceptively as we would like them to listen to us.

The Nature of the Bible

The sola Scriptura principle--the Bible and the Bible alone--requires that our ideas about the Bible--especially about the revelatory process and the balance between divine and human factors in that

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

process--be formed inductively from what the Bible says about itself. In large measure our concept of what the Bible is, determines what we think it says. The formation of an accurate concept of the nature of the Bible requires broad experience with the Bible. For more than fifty years it has been my privilege to engage in such a study of the Bible--college level Bible teaching, writing more than two thousand pages for, and editing, the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, numerous exhaustive study projects on a wide range of Bible subjects, more than a score of papers on biblical hermeneutics, and thousands of pages of papers and printed reports--all with the intention of being as objective and inductive as humanly possible. May I share with you some of the major conclusions about the Bible to which this half century of study has led?

The revelatory process consisted of divine and human factors similar to the divinity and humanity of Jesus, who was truly Son of God and Son of man. He was the Word of God incarnate; the Bible is the Word of God written. To discount either the divinity or the humanity of the Bible is as reprehensible as to discount either in the person of Jesus. The only objective way to recognize Page 8: and understand the balance between the divine and human factors in the revelatory process is to observe them in operation in the Bible itself.

The Bible was thought inspired, not verbally inspired. The Holy Spirit impressed the minds of the Bible writers with principles and instruction they addressed to people in covenant relationship to God, in specific historical circumstances. They applied these principles and this instruction to issues of the time in which they wrote, in language and thought forms appropriate to the understanding of their contemporaries--in much the same way as a pastor does in his Sabbath morning sermon. It is essential to an accurate understanding of the Bible to distinguish between its divine and its human aspects lest divine principles and instruction be construed as human, or their application to a local situation be construed as universally applicable at all times and under all circumstances. It is essential to read the Bible perceptively.

The divine principles and instruction have to do with our way of life in relation to God and to other people. Christ said that "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"--the customary Hebrew term for the Bible. That is what the Bible is all about.

The only truly and fully objective evidence that the Bible is, indeed, what it claims to be--the Word of God in the words of men--is that its perception of human existence and the evil of human nature tallies precisely with what we observe in the world, and that it provides a realistic and workable way by which to transform the evil into good. "The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse--who can understand it?" 12. But "thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" There is "no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." 13 The principle expressed in what we call the Golden Rule--"In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets," 14 and in the admonition to "love" even "your enemies" 15--would resolve all of the problems involving human relationships in the world today and transform it into a little heaven on earth.

The Human Aspect of the Bible. The human aspect of the Bible includes such matters as the languages in which it was written, the literary forms, idiomatic expressions, and discrepancies; its perspective of salvation history, the way in which the New Testament makes use of the Old Testament, the fact that it was all addressed to particular people in the context of particular Page 9: historical circumstances, and the nature and purpose of predictive prophecy. Let us take a closer look at some of these human features of the Bible, all of which which are inherent in the Bible itself.

Its perspective of salvation history. An exhaustive study of all that the Old Testament writers have to say about God's purpose for ancient Israel provides conclusive evidence that He originally intended them to remain the covenant people and chosen instrument for the salvation of the world throughout

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

history. The Old Testament knows nothing about Israel's eventual withdrawal from the covenant relationship, the transition to another covenant people, or anything beyond the close of Old Testament times.¹⁶

As for the New Testament perspective of salvation history, Jesus explicitly told His disciples that He would return within their generation, and nearly forty times the New Testament writers echo the expectation of the second coming of Christ by the close of New Testament times. There is no hint of time continuing for two thousand years. The Bible's own perspective of salvation history as reaching a climax at the close of Bible times is an important and valuable key to interpretation. ¹⁷

Typology. New Testament writers authenticate their witness to Jesus Christ and the gospel as the reality to which the Old Testament looked forward, by citing Old Testament passages and applying them within the New Testament perspective of salvation history. In their original literary context (in the Old Testament) every Old Testament passage they cite applied exclusively to its own historical context, without any indication or overtones of the application New Testament writers read into it. They read into the Old Testament passage a meaning that was neither explicit nor (as determined by its own context) even implicit.¹⁸

Seventeen times Matthew and John cite Old Testament passages as meeting their fulfillment in the life and ministry of Jesus: "thus was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet. . ." The Greek word for "fulfilled" is pleroo, which literally means to "fill full." These New Testament writers filled their witness to the life and mission of Jesus full of meaning for their Jewish reading audience by comparing specific incidents in His life and mission to similar situations in Old Testament times. There is no indication in the Old Testament that the passages they cite were intended as predictions, and there is no valid reason for considering them as such, or their New Testament use as implying prediction/fulfillment.¹⁸

Page 10:

The way in which the New Testament uses the Old Testament is properly described as typological. In context, the Old Testament statement applied specifically and exclusively to its own historical situation. It was not given as a type of anything in the future. The New Testament writer presents it as illustrative of a similar situation in New Testament times, as a means by which to enable his readers to understand what he has to say. He uses it as a parable. The Old Testament passage was not given as a type; it became a type when the New Testament writer cited it as such, and the authority for this typological use is that of the New, not the Old, Testament writer.¹⁹

In Galatians 3:16 Paul similarly cites the son promised to Abraham as a type of Christ, and in 1 Timothy 5:18 the command of Moses not to muzzle an ox threshing grain on an ancient threshing floor, as justification for a minister of the gospel to support by those to whom he ministers.

This typological use of the Old Testament to enable the covenant people of New Testament times to understand the will and purpose of God for them permeates the New Testament. A new covenant replaces the former covenant. Faith in Jesus Christ replaces the sacrificial system prescribed by Moses. A sanctuary in heaven replaces the ancient sanctuary and Temple. Christ as the lamb of God replaces the ancient sacrificial victims, and as our great High Priest, the high priesthood of Aaron and his successors. His ministry in heaven since the cross replaces the ministry of the high priest in the most holy apartment of the ancient sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. Divine principles formerly inscribed "On tablets of stone" are now inscribed on "tablets of human hearts." The new Jerusalem in heaven replaces ancient Jerusalem as the focus of believers' hopes.

"Whatever was written in former days," Paul assured believers in Rome, "Was written for our instruction." It was "written down to instruct us," he told the church in Corinth.²⁰

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

The typological use of the Old Testament by New Testament writers validates typology as a Bible principle.

Discrepancies. The outstanding discrepancy in the Bible is the irreconcilable chronology between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John with respect to whether the last supper was the paschal meal, or whether it was a ritual celebration preceding the paschal meal. There are several other minor discrepancies in the gospels such as the wording of the inscription on the Page 11: cross, whether there were two demoniacs or only one, whether there were two blind men or only one in Jericho, and whether Jesus encountered him (or them) upon entering or leaving Jericho. There are numerous numerical discrepancies in the genealogical accounts of Jesus' ancestry as given by Matthew and Luke. All of these testify to the human factor in the Bible record.

The nature and role of predictive prophecy. In the Bible the words "prophet," "prophecy," and "prophecy" refer to a person as a messenger with a message (from God), to his delivery of that message, and to the message itself. The modern concept of prophecy as prediction misrepresents the Bible use of the term.

The Bible writers explicitly declare that all predictions of the future are conditional, and that they are announcements of the divine purpose (not categorical predictions) designed to enable the covenant people to make wise choices in the present in view of the ultimate consequences of those choices. Predictions of the future are always contingent on the provision, "if you obey" or "if you disobey." The fulfillment of all predictions of events within probationary time is contingent on the cooperation of those to whom the predictions are made. Upon the default of one group of people, the divine purpose is entrusted to another, and predictions made to the first group will be fulfilled to others, at a later time and under different historical circumstances.

In conclusion, let us repeat the characteristics of a viable biblical hermeneutic designed to recover precisely what the inspired writers intended their words to convey.

Summary and Conclusions

1. A reliable biblical hermeneutic is essential to an accurate understanding of the Bible. Consensus regarding such a hermeneutic, and the way we relate to one another on issues in which hermeneutics is involved, is essential to the continuing unity of the world church.
2. Biblical hermeneutics has been at the root of every theological-doctrinal issue in the church, notably the debate on righteousness by faith in 1888, differences of opinion with respect to "the daily" of Daniel 8 in the first decade of the twentieth century, repeated challenges to the traditional interpretation of Daniel 8:14 over the past century, culminating at Page 12: Glacier View in 1980, and the current debate over the ordination of women to the gospel ministry.
3. Primary evidence that the Bible is, indeed, God's Word to humanity resides in its perspective of the origin, nature, and destiny of the universe and the human race, in its analysis of human perversity and its solution to the problem, and in its formula for harmonious human relationships. The application of these principles would result in a very real heaven on earth.
4. Differences in understanding the Bible are the result of differing hermeneutics.
5. For those who accept the Bible as God's Word, there are two fundamentally different ways of reading and understanding it. One method consists of understanding it from the modern reader's perspective of life, society, culture, history, salvation history, human destiny, and the universe. The other consists of ascertaining the meaning the Holy Spirit and the Bible writers intended it to convey, from the perspective of life, society, culture, history, salvation history, human destiny, and the universe of their

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

time. These two approaches to the Bible are as mutually incompatible as matter and antimatter. One reads the Bible out of its original literary and historical context; the other in its original literary and historical context. One consists of a rote understanding of words; the other, of identifying the meaning - the principles explicit and implicit in the Bible--in order to understand and apply them accurately and wisely in modern life.

6. The first method requires no prior training or experience; the second requires either (1) training and experience with biblical languages, history, and textual analysis, or (2) discriminating use of information provided by those who do have this training and experience.

7. Reliable study of the Bible requires a person to maintain an open mind, to modify presuppositions as coercive evidence may require, to evaluate evidence objectively, to maintain a balance between faith and reason, to base conclusions on the weight of evidence, and to relate to other equally sincere questors for truth in harmony with gospel principles.

8. Requisite to an accurate understanding of the Bible is a prior perception of its inherent nature as the Word of God in the words of men—the implicit nature of the revelatory process, a balance between the divine and human factors cooperating in that process, the salvation history perspective of the Old and New Testaments, the way in which the New Testament writers Page 13 make use of the Old Testament, the fact that the Bible writers all address their inspired messages to people of their own time and with respect to the needs of specific historical circumstances.

9. Reliable study of the Bible requires attention to the meaning of key words in the original language, grammar and syntax, context, the historical and cultural circumstances to which the writers addressed their messages, and the salvation history perspective of the time, all with the objective of ascertaining the meaning the Holy Spirit and the inspired writers intended their words to convey.

10. The ultimate purpose of an objective study of the Bible is to identify the divine principles and instruction in order to make an appropriate use of them as divine guidance for our time.

Procedures for Reliable Exegesis

The procedure for "drawing out" from a statement or passage of Scripture the meaning the writer intended it to convey is called exegesis, which is derived from the Greek word *exegeomai*, "to make known." For instance, in His mission to earth Jesus "made known" the Father" and was "made known" to two disciples as He broke bread in their home at Emmaus.²² First, let us ask how a Bible scholar goes about finding the meaning a Bible writer intended a statement or passage of Scripture to convey, and then what a person who is not a Bible scholar can do.

What a Bible Scholar Does

By training and experience a dedicated Bible scholar is mindful of how his mind operates. He has developed a balance between faith and reason, he is aware of his presuppositions, he thinks objectively, he goes about the task of exegesis inductively, he is aware of booby traps in the reasoning process, and he bases his conclusions on the weight of evidence. He has a broad experience in studying the Bible. He has learned what the Bible itself has to say, and demonstrates, with respect to the revelatory process, the balance between the divine and the human in Scripture, and the Bible's own perspective of salvation history. He is well informed with respect to biblical languages, ancient history, and the society and culture of Bible times.

Page 14:

His study of a passage of Scripture will proceed somewhat as follows. He will:

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

1. Base his study on the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, or the Greek text of the New Testament, as the case may be.
2. Look for variant readings in the ancient manuscripts and translations, which often prove helpful.
3. Review the document in which the passage he is studying occurs, as a whole, looking for the writer's purpose in writing.
4. Identify the author, the time and place of writing, and the particular historical circumstances that prompted his message, and to which he addressed what he wrote.
5. Study the scope of meaning of each important word in the passage throughout the Old (or the New) Testament, and look for the particular sense, or shade of meaning, the writer intended, as required by the context in which it occurs.
6. Give careful attention to syntax and grammar.
7. Examine the immediate context in which the passage occurs, as the principal means by which to determine the meaning the writer intended it to convey.
8. Correlate all of this data and base his conclusions on the weight of evidence.
9. Ascertain the degree of certainty (or uncertainty) of his conclusions, and retain all of the data even when some of it may seem to be contrary to what otherwise appears to be the weight of evidence.

The Person Who Is Not a Trained Bible Scholar

Do these qualifications and procedures for identifying the meaning a Bible writer intended to convey exclude the non-scholar from exacting study of the Bible? By no means! When I was editing the SDA Bible Commentary I came to the conclusion that if a person who is not a trained Bible scholar will follow certain well-defined procedures objectively and with an open mind, she or he can, with reasonable certainty, discover the meaning a Bible writer intended to convey, ninety or ninety-five percent of the time. The other five or ten percent of the time requires the expertise of the trained Page 15: Bible scholar, and in some instances even he cannot be 100 percent sure what a statement or passage really means. There are, for instance some 300 Hebrew words in the Old Testament of whose meaning no one, today, can be sure. And sometimes (as with Galatians 3:20) no one can be certain as to the exact meaning the writer intended.

Let me illustrate. At 84 I enjoy reasonably good health. I attribute this to five factors: the genes I inherited; parental training; considerable formal and informal study of physiology, health, diet, and hygiene; consistent, good sense application of these principles; and the good counsel of Ellen White. But now and then I encounter problems I cannot solve by myself, and then I rely on the expertise of a physician in whom I have confidence. The same is true of those who do not have the expertise of the trained biblical scholar. In their study of Scripture, with the objective of identifying the meaning a Bible writers intended a statement to convey, they will make use of the many helpful tools reliable Bible scholars provide. They will:

1. Purpose to be objective in their study and to invite the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which is as important in reading the Bible as it was in the writing.
2. Be aware of the presuppositions with which they come to the Bible, and be willing to modify these presuppositions as coercive Bible evidence may require.
3. Conduct their study inductively.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

4. Select a reliable modern translation such as the New International Version (NIV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), or Today's English Version (TEV). Many words in older translations such as the Authorized or King James Version (KJV) are now obsolete or convey a different meaning to the modern reader than the translators intended. Avoid paraphrases such as the Living Bible or the Clear Word Bible.
5. Identify the author of the passage being investigated; the time and historical circumstances in which he wrote, and his objective in writing. For this information read the introduction to the book of the Bible in which the passage occurs, in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary or another reliable Bible commentary. In the introductory outline, note the location of the passage being investigated and its relation to other parts of the book. If possible, read the entire book at one time, but especially the parts indicated Page 16: in the relevant outline section. The introductory articles in each volume of the Commentary provide in-depth helpful information--historical, archeological, chronological, and analytical. Articles about such things as people, places, customs, events in the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary will also shed light on the passage being studied.
6. Look for variant readings in the ancient manuscripts that may have a bearing on the passage. Many translations provide this information in either footnotes or the margin. In important instances the Commentary also notes this information and indicates its level of reliability.
7. Read the immediate context very carefully, noting everything that helps to explain the meaning of the passage under consideration.
8. If reference is made to the writings of Ellen White, note carefully whether she is commenting on the passage in its literary and historical context, or is using the passage to illustrate counsel to the church today. As God's messenger to the church today much of her use of the Bible is what we might call pastoral or homiletic--illustrative but not indicating the meaning the Bible writer intended the passage to convey. A careful reading of the Bible context and the context of her comment will usually indicate which of her two uses of the passage is indicated. Do not indiscriminately take her comment as indicating the meaning the Bible writer intended to convey.
9. In drawing a conclusion as to the meaning the Bible writer intended the passage to convey, take all of the accumulated evidence into consideration and base your conclusion on the weight of evidence.
10. When matters of Christian conduct and church policy are concerned, identify the principle(s) stated or implied in a passage and the nature of the situation to which the Bible writer applied them. Compare the ancient situation with the corresponding situation today to determine if, and/or how, the principles apply today.
11. When predictive prophecy is involved, identify the salvation history perspective of the time in which it was given and how it applied within that perspective. Remember that both the Old and New Testament perspectives of salvation history envisioned the complete fulfillment of the divine purpose at the close of Bible times.
12. If the evidence is not conclusive, recognize the fact, consider the results tentative, suspend final judgment, and remain open for further information or a clearer understanding of the available evidence.

Page 17:

Summary: The Two Methods

For the person who considers the Bible the Word of God in the words of men there are two, and only two, basic ways, or methods, by which to read and understand it:

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

1. From the modern reader's point of view of what the words of the Bible (in translation) mean, from her or his perspective of human existence, the world and the universe, historical and cultural environment, and salvation history.

2. From the Bible writer's point of view, of what its words, in the language in which he wrote and the meaning he intended them to convey, from his perspective of human existence, the world and the universe, historical and cultural environment, and salvation history.

These two methods are mutually exclusive and irreconcilable. The first method is highly subjective: the Bible means whatever a person wants it to mean or happens to think it means. It subjects the Bible to the presuppositions, opinions, and cultural biases of the modern reader, and inasmuch as people's presuppositions, opinions, and cultural biases differ, different opinions as to what it means are inevitable. The modern reader controls the Bible. Argument about what it means, and disunity, are inevitable.

The second method is highly objective: the Bible means what the inspired writer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, intended it to mean. The Bible--and the Holy Spirit--are in control of the reader, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is as essential in reading the Bible as it was in the writing.

There is a high level of probability that those who follow this method, conscientiously and consistently, will find themselves in substantial agreement as to what it means. Unity is not only possible, but highly probable.

All of our theological and doctrinal differences of opinion about the Bible, and the repeated traumatic episodes throughout our history as Seventh-day Adventists, have been due to the fact that, most of us and most of the time, we have been following the first method. If we continue to follow this method we will lock ourselves into this vicious circle and continue to go through one traumatic and divisive experience after another. It is high time that we, individually and corporately as a church, wise up to the facts and agree to follow the second method. This will unify the church, give our witness Page 18: to the everlasting gospel convincing power, and hasten the completion of our mission to the world.

This concludes Part 1 of "The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church." Part 2 of this study will trace, very briefly, the history of biblical hermeneutics since Bible times, and illustrate the difference between the two methods by applying them to a number of Bible passages. There will be opportunity for audience participation.

END NOTES

1. John 17:20-21.
2. Matthew 7:12.
3. Matthew, 20:25-27.
4. Revelation 14:6-7.
5. General Conference, "Statistical Report for 1994," p. 42.
6. For an index to constitutional changes voted at Utrecht, see General Conference Bulletin 10, p. 29 (Adventist Review, 172:35, July 20-27, 1995).
7. General Conference Bulletin 7, pp. 23-31 (Adventist Review, 172:32, July 7, 1995).
8. 11 NAD Union Presidents Support Women in Ministry, .. Adventist Review, 172:54, December 1995.
9. See Note 7, pp. 23-25.
10. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The last Tournament," in Idyls of the King, "The Poetical Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, London, McMillan and Co. , Ltd., 1911, 648 pp., p. 454.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

11. Raymond F. Cottrell, "A Church in Crisis," *Adventist Review*, 154:2 to 7, January 13 to February 17, 1977 (six articles).
12. Jeremiah 17:9.
13. Romans 7:25 to 8:1.
14. Matthew 22:40.
15. Matthew 5:43-48.
16. Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, pp. 25-38. The parenthetical sentence on p. 38, exempting the Book of Daniel from the principles set forth in the article, was added by Editor-in-chief Francis D. Nichol in order to protect the Commentary from criticism.
17. See the complete list in Chapter 18 of my book manuscript, *The Eschatology of Daniel*.
18. See the Introduction to my book manuscript (Note 17), pp. 9-11, and Chapter 23, 11 Integrity of the 1844 Experience."
19. See Note 18.
20. 1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4.
21. See Chapter 3 of my book manuscript (Note 17), "The Role of Predictive Prophecy in Salvation History."
22. John 1:18; Luke 24:35.

'RIGHTLY EXPLAINING THE WORD OF TRUTH'

2 Timothy 2:15 (NRSV)

Raymond F. Cottrell

The meaning the words of a Bible passage convey to a modern reader may not always be the same as the writer intended. For this reason a right understanding of the Bible requires careful attention to several fundamental principles and procedures. Let us examine a number of Bible passages that illustrate basic principles for "rightly explaining the word of truth":

1. The meaning of words in the original language determines the meaning they were intended to convey.
2. Some 250 English words in the King James Version of the Bible have a different meaning today than they did when it was translated nearly four centuries ago.
3. The context in which a statement occurs determine the meaning the writer intended it to convey.
4. Variant readings in ancient Bible manuscripts centuries closer to the original autographs sometimes provide a more accurate understanding of a passage.
5. Idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and symbols rooted in ancient customs, ways of thinking and expression, and historical situations are often confusing to a modern reader.
6. Old Testament predictions should first be understood in their local, historical and salvation history context, as a basis for later applications.
7. A modern reader may easily misconstrue the way in which New Testament writers quote and apply passages from the Old Testament.
8. The historical and cultural circumstances to which a passage was addressed are always essential to an accurate understanding of its import for our time.

1. Word Meanings in the Original language

Psalms 50:5: 11 Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."

MODERN READER: We enter into covenant relationship with God by sacrificial giving.

BIBLE WRITER: The Hebrew word translated "sacrifice" is zabach, which means "to slaughter" an animal sacrifice, the customary ancient ritual by which two parties entered into a formal covenant agreement.

Genesis 8:9: "The waters [of the Flood] were still on the face of the whole earth."

MODERN READER: The planet Earth.

BIBLE WRITER: The visible or known surface of the earth. In its 2,407 occurrences in the Old Testament the Hebrew word 'erets, "earth," never refers to the earth as a planet, but to its visible or known surface. According to Genesis 41:7, "All the world ['erets] came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain." Here "all the world" denotes lands of the Middle East in the vicinity of Egypt. Evidence for what we refer to as a world-wide Flood must come from the rocks.

Romans 10:4: "Christ is the end of the law."

MODERN READER: The Ten Commandments are not binding since Christ died on the cross.

BIBLE WRITER: The Greek word for "law" is nomos, the New Testament equivalent of the Hebrew word torah--the Hebrew title of the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy). For a Jew, the word torah (literally, "instruction") referred to all of the divine instruction on record in the writings of Moses, especially the ritual requirements of the Jewish religious system. The Greek word telos, translated "end," means "aim," "goal," "fulfillment". "end" in the sense of "Objective." The entire religious system of Old Testament times, Paul says, pointed forward to Christ.

Exodus 20:13: "Thou shalt not kill."

MODERN READER: Why, then, did God order the instances of genocide on record in the Old Testament, and why did Old Testament criminal law provide for death as a penalty?

BIBLE WRITER: The Hebrew word ratsach, translated "kill," means "commit murder." To "kill" is to take life; to "murder" is to take someone's life illegally, out of malice, hatred, or some other personal reason.

Matthew 6:13: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

MODERN READER: Why would God lead us into situations where we would be tempted?

BIBLE WRITER: The Greek word peirasmos, translated "temptation," means "testing," "trials," or circumstances in which a person experiences evil, not situations in which she or he is tempted to do evil.

2. English Words That Have Changed Meaning

Nehemiah 13:26: "Outlandish women cause[d Solomon] to sin."

MODERN READER: Of course.

BIBLE WRITER: When the KJV was translated, outlandish meant "foreign" women who were not Jewish.

1 Thessalonians 5:14: "Comfort the feebleminded."

MODERN READER: People who have lost their mental facilities.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

BIBLE WRITER: The Greek word *oligopsuchos*, translated "feeble-minded," means "fainthearted" or "discouraged."

Acts 21:15: "We took up our carriages and went to Jerusalem."

MODERN READER: How did they do that?

BIBLE WRITER: The Greek word *episkeuasamenoi*, translated "took up our carriages," means "we got ready" or "we made preparations."

Mark 6:25: "I will that you give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist."

MODERN READER: "By and by" means "after while." What is a charger?

BIBLE WRITER: The Greek word *exautes*, translated "by and by," means "at once." "Charger" is old English for "platter."

Page 3:

3. Context

1 Corinthians 2:9: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

MODERN READER: We cannot conceive of the wonderful things of heaven and the earth made new.

BIBLE WRITER: Paul here quotes Isaiah 64:4. In both instances a careful reading of the context indicates that reference is to wonderful things in the Bible, not heaven. "Open my eyes, so that I may behold wondrous things out of your law [the Scriptures]" (Psalm 119:18).

Galatians 3:24: "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ."

MODERN READER: The law here referred to is the Ten Commandments.

BIBLE WRITER: In context (3:15 to 4:4), the "law" was the ceremonial law system of Old Testament times. (On the Greek word for "law," see comment on Romans 10:4 in section 1 above).

Galatians 4:4: "When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son into the world."

MODERN READER: At the time Jesus was born Rome had united the entire Mediterranean world and universal peace (the *pax Romana*) prevailed. Koine Greek was the *lingua franca* or universal language of the Mediterranean world. Jesus came at the right time in history for the spread of the gospel.

BIBLE WRITER: In context (3:15 to 4:3), "the time" to which Paul here refers is the time when the "heir" of verses 1 to 3 reaches maturity and receives the promised inheritance. In context, this heir/inheritance metaphor illustrates comment in 3:6-29, where God's covenant promise to Abraham and the religious system based on that covenant relationship (the "law" of 3:24 as "schoolmaster" or "disciplinarian" (NRSV) was in force until Christ came and set the covenant people free from the "law" (verse 25).

Daniel 12:4: "Shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased."

MODERN READER: This is a prophecy of modern transportation and the great explosion of knowledge and technology of our time.

BIBLE WRITER: In context, reference is to the study and understanding of the prophecy of Daniel at 11 the time of the end," until which it was "shut up" and "sealed."

Matthew 24:34: "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled."

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

MODERN READER: The generation to which Jesus here refers is the generation that witnesses the fulfillment of the promised signs in the heavens of verses 29 to 33.

BIBLE WRITER: In context, the generation to which Jesus here refers is that of the Jewish leaders (23:36) and the disciples (24:33).

Ezekiel 9: A man with a "writer's inkhorn" or "writing case" (NRSV) is told to place a "mark" on the foreheads of God's loyal people in Jerusalem, and six "executioners" with "destroying weapons" are told to follow him and slay all who do not have the mark.

Page 4:

MODERN READER (in this instance David Koresh and the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas): The "mark" indicates acceptance of the Shepherd's Rod / Branch Davidian message by Seventh-day Adventists (the inhabitants of Jerusalem). The "executioners" are God's agents in disposing of those who do not accept that message.

BIBLE WRITER: In context (chapters 8 to 11), this message by the prophet Ezekiel was given about five years before the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Idolatry was rampant in Jerusalem, even in the sacred precincts of the Temple. Those who participated in this idolatrous worship were to be slain, while those protected by the "mark" were to be spared.

4. Readings in the Ancient Manuscripts

John 5:39: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life" (KJV). "You search the Scriptures because that in them you think you have eternal life" (NRSV),

MODERN READER: Which is correct, the KJV or the NRSV?

BIBLE WRITER: The imperative (KJV) and the indicative (NRSV) forms of the Greek word *ereunate* are identical, and as for the form of the verb here, both are correct. The context, however, favors the indicative mode.

John 5:4: "An angel of the lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had."

MODERN READER: Does God, indeed, reward those least in need of healing who can out maneuver those in greater need? How different from Jesus healing all who needed it (Mark 1:32).

BIBLE WRITER: Manuscript evidence is conclusive that John did not write these words. It does not occur in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts, including the oldest complete manuscript of the Gospel of John known as Bodmer II (about 200 A.D.).

Matthew 5:22: "Whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. ."

MODERN READER: Does this imply that Jesus approved of anger a person thinks justified?

BIBLE WRITER: The phrase "without a cause" is lacking in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts, including Bodmer II.

5. Idiomatic Expressions, Metaphors, and Symbols

Mark 8:31: "The Son of man must . . . be killed, and after three days rise again."

MODERN READER: In order for the resurrection to have occurred on the first day of the week, Jesus must have been crucified the preceding Thursday, or perhaps even Wednesday (depending on how we understand the word "after").

BIBLE WRITER: In Bible times (and in many parts of the world today) the lapse of time was expressed by what is known as inclusive reckoning, with the first and last time units both included (in this instance, Friday, Sabbath, and Sunday).

Page 5:

Revelation 16:12-19: "The sixth angel poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up in order to prepare the way for the kings of the east," and they assembled 11at the place that in Hebrew is called Harmagedon •••• God remembered great Babylon and gave her the winecup of the fury of his wrath."

MODERN READER: A literal battle in the valley of Megiddo.

BIBLE WRITER: The Book of Revelation is a book of symbols, many of which including the battle of Armageddon are expressed in terms of Old Testament terminology. Suffering under imperial Rome, Jews and Christians referred to Rome by the cryptic term "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13; Babylon was in ruins and Peter was actually in Rome). Babylon, Israel's archenemy of Old Testament times, was an appropriate symbol for Rome in New Testament times. The term Euphrates here alludes to the drying up of the Euphrates River by the invading Persian army, a strategy that resulted in the fall of Babylon. Several crucial battles between ancient Israel and her foes took place in the valley of Megiddo. No Jew or Christian of New Testament times could miss the import of this metaphoric reference to Rome as "Babylon."

6. Old Testament Predictions in Their Historical Context

Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 13-15, 63-64: "If you will only obey the Lord your God, . . . all these blessings shall come upon you . . . The Lord will make you the head, and not the tail . . . But if you will not obey . . . all these curses shall come upon you . . . The Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other."

MODERN READER: A logical set of alternatives.

BIBLE WRITER: The entire Old Testament was addressed to ancient Israel as the covenant people and chosen instrument of the divine purpose for the human race throughout Old Testament Reflecting this "if / but if" principle, all Old Testament predictive prophecy is a conditional declaration of the divine purpose for Israel (Jeremiah 18:1-11; 12:16-17).

Isaiah 7:14: "The lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

MODERN READER: A specific prophecy whose fulfillment is recorded in Matthew 1:22-23.

BIBLE WRITER: As the context (chapters 7 and 8) makes evident this prediction had a local fulfillment. Judah was facing imminent invasion, and if King Ahaz would trust the Lord God promised to be with, and protect, His people ("Immanuel" = "God is with us"). The "young woman" (the literal meaning of the Hebrew word 'almah) to whom Isaiah referred was his own wife, as the continuing narrative in 8:1-4 makes evident. But Ahaz refused, and as a result the Assyrian army invaded Judah (verses 5-10). Accordingly, the Lord instructed Isaiah to name the child (who could have been called Immanuel, God with us) Mahershalalhashbaz, which means: "speed to the spoil, haste to the prey." By inspiration

Matthew used the Greek word parthenos, "Virgin" (instead of "young woman"), to impress his Jewish readers with the fact of the virgin birth of Jesus and that He was, literally, "God with us."

Page 6:

7. New Testament Writers' Use of the Old Testament

Matthew 2:15: "This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

MODERN READER: Hosea 11:1 was an inspired prediction of Jesus' return from Egypt as a child.

BIBLE WRITER: Seventeen times Matthew and John refer to Old Testament passages in their accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus. However, the Old Testament passages they cite give no indication of being intended as predictions. The Greek word pleroo, translated "fulfill," means "to fill full." These Old Testament passages, with which their intended Jewish readers were presumably familiar, would fill their accounts of Jesus' life and ministry full of meaning. In the Bible the words for "prophet," "prophecy," and "prophesy" denote a person who delivers an authentic message from God, the message he bears, and his delivery of the message. They do not imply prediction (the sense in which modern readers usually understand the terms), but attest the messenger and his message as having divine authority. Matthew and John's use of the Old Testament is typological, not a prediction and fulfillment. The New Testament writer cites the Old Testament to illustrate what he has to say.

Galatians 3:16: Here the Apostle Paul identifies Christ as the son God promised to Abraham.

MODERN READER: God's promise to Abraham specifically referred to Christ.

BIBLE WRITER: Here Paul uses the Old Testament typologically, not as the fulfillment of a prediction. Nothing in the Old Testament implies that the promise, as given, was intended to apply to Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:9-10: "It is written in the law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was indeed written for our sake." (Cf. Deuteronomy 25:4.)

MODERN READER: Why does Paul here say that Moses' regulation regarding oxen threshing grain on ancient threshing floors really had nothing to do with oxen, but that what Moses wrote applied exclusively to ministers of the gospel?

BIBLE WRITER: As in Galatians 3:16, Paul here cites the Old Testament typologically, to illustrate the point he wishes to make.

8. Historical and Cultural Circumstances

Some questions as to the meaning a Bible writer intended to convey and its import for our time cannot be resolved by any of the foregoing procedures or all of them together. Special procedures fully in harmony with Bible principles, however, can and do clarify that meaning. The two following examples illustrate how that can be done. The first example has to do with Bible principles regarding the ordination of women to the gospel ministry. The second resolves the question as to whether tongue-speaking in the church at Corinth consisted of speaking in foreign languages, or was charismatic. In both instances the Apostle Paul is the writer.

Page 7:

The Role of Women in the New Testament Church

1 Corinthians 11:3-11: "The husband is the head of his wife."

1 Timothy 2:11-14: "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve."

1 Corinthians 14:33-36: "As in all the churches of the saints, women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says. If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

For the modern reader a literal reading of these passages precludes the eligibility of women for leadership roles in the church. The question is, Was Paul stating a universal gospel principle, or was he applying gospel principles to a particular historical-cultural situation? Elsewhere he provides an unambiguous answer to this question by defining the way in which he related to two such situations. Both of these involved the relationship of Gentile Christians to Jewish ritual regulations and his own example and counsel with respect to this issue, which plagued the church throughout New Testament times.

Paul Versus the Ritual Uncleaness of Food "offered" to Idols: "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself everything is indeed clean" (Romans 14:14, 20). For Paul, gospel principles made the question irrelevant; it was strictly a matter of Jewish ritual requirements and not one of conscience (1 Corinthians 10:27-29; Romans 14:16).

However, such food "is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean" (verse 14), and thus a matter of conscience (1 Corinthians 10:29). To eat of it when dining with such a person would "put a stumbling block" in his way, injure him, and possibly cause his ruin (Romans 14:13-15, 20). The gospel principle was "never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another" but to "pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding . . . not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble" (verses 13, 19, 21), but to "give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or the church of God" (1 Corinthians 10:32). Accordingly, Paul wrote, "I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved" (verse 32).

Paul's Example and Counsel With Respect to Jewish Ritual Regulations clarifies his instruction regarding the subordination of women, their role in the church, and the import of this instruction for our time.

The story begins in the church at Antioch, in Syria, where Paul and Barnabas were leaders. The church members were Gentiles. Peter was a visitor, and ate with them contrary to the requirements of Jewish custom. Many years before, the Holy Spirit had directed him to the home of Cornelius, "a devout man who feared God with all his household" but who had not yet formally become a practicing Jew (Acts 10). Peter explained to Cornelius that "it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean."

Back to Antioch again. Some Jewish Christians from Jerusalem arrived in Antioch, evidently to check up on Paul and the Gentile Christians. Their message was, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved" (Acts 15:1). Peter had been living "like a Gentile and not like a Jew," but he, Barnabas, and the other Jews who had also been fellowshiping with the Gentile believers all "drew back" and kept themselves "separate for fear of the circumcision faction" (Galatians 2:12). When Paul "saw that they were not acting consistently with the gospel he "opposed" Peter "to his face" for his "hypocrisy." Reprimanding him publicly, Paul asked, "How can you" (by your example) "compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (verses 12-14).

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Many years later Paul returned to Jerusalem for the last time with a substantial love gift from his Gentile converts to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Accompanying him were a number of Gentile fellow believers.

The day following their arrival they met with James, leader of the Jewish branch of the church, and all the elders (Acts 21:17-26). "They said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs.'" They then told Paul to join four Jewish Christians in a ritual ceremony at the Temple. "Thus all will know," they said to him, "that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law." Paul went with the four men, ritually purified himself, and offered a sacrifice for himself and for them.

In the Gentile church at Antioch Paul severely reprimanded Peter for reverting to Jewish ritual regulations. In Jerusalem he voluntarily participated in them. When with Gentile Christians he lived like a Gentile; when with Jewish Christians he complied with Jewish ritual regulations. Was this as inconsistent as it appeared to be? How did Paul justify this ambivalent seemingly conduct? In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 he explains why he acted differently under differing religio-cultural situations:

"Though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the [Jewish ritual] law I became as one under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak [in their understanding of the gospel] I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings."

Paul considered himself "under Christ's law"--the gospel--which required him "not to . . . do anything that makes your brother stumble" (Romans 14:21), but to "give no offence to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God. . . just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:32-33).

"The kingdom of God." Paul wrote, "is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:16). "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). For him, the formal act of participating in the ritual customs was irrelevant and meaningless.

Page 9:

But he warned anyone doing so with the intention of being "justified by the law": You "have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (verse 4).

Was Paul ethically justified in giving the Christian Jews in Jerusalem the false impression that he, too, participated in the ritual regulations as they did (with the intention of earning merit before God)? For him the key issue was preservation of unity in the Jewish-Gentile church of New Testament times. His refusal to accede to the request of the elders would have defeated the very purpose of this visit to Jerusalem, accompanied by a retinue of Gentile believers he had baptized and bearing generous gifts from the Gentile churches he had established, as a token of good will and Christian fellowship, and fractured that unity forever. Thus it was that to comply loomed in his mind as the lesser of two evils. It must have been a difficult decision indeed!

What does the gospel have to say about male-female relationships "under Christ's law," the gospel?

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

The basic gospel principle that applies to all human relationships is, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (Matthew 7:12). We are to love others as we love ourselves (22:34-40).

"In lowliness of mind" we are to "esteem" others as better than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4). In bearing the burdens, or concerns, of others we "fulfil the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). Selfless concern for the well being and happiness of others is more important than the prophetic gift, or even faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13: 2, 8, 13). We are to "be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5), to "love one another with mutual love," to "outdo one another in showing love" (Romans 12:10). Under the gospel "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female." "All" are "one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28).

Note that in all of these affirmations of absolute equality no distinction is made between male and female.

Everyone acknowledges these gospel principles, but some make a distinction between equality in relationships and roles in life, based on what they refer to as Adam's "headship" over Eve by virtue of the fact that he was created prior to Eve and that she was created as his "helpmeet." Is this a valid deduction from the Genesis narrative?

Then God said, "let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness and let them have dominion over . . . the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over . . . every living thing that moves upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26-28).

Adam and Eve were both created in God's image. Both were like God. God gave both of them "dominion over . . . the earth." In their pre-sin [prelapsarian) state Adam and Eve were not only equal in every respect in their relation to God and to each other, but in their rulership role over the earth as well. The prelapsarian relationship of Adam and Eve to each other, and individually to their Creator, was His ideal. The entrance of sin changed Page 10: their relationship to God and to each other. The words God addressed to Eve, "Your husband . . . shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16), were a premonition of the result of that changed relationship, not a divine fiat. The gospel was designed to restore the original relationship of both men and women to their Creator and to each other, and as a result "there is no longer" the distinction between "male and female" that came in as a result of sin (Galatians 3:28).

As for Eve being Adam's "help meet," the Hebrew word 'ezer is often used of God as man's helper (for instance, Exodus 18:4; Psalm 33:20). If being Adam's helper implies subordination to him, a parity of logic would subordinate God to man! Reducto ad absurdum.

Anything that would perpetuate the postlapsarian relationship of inequality and subordination, to that extent thwarts the divine purpose in the gospel. And if men and women, under the gospel, enjoy equality before God, what valid excuse can be offered for perpetuating the sin relationship of inequality and the subordination of one to the other?

This, together with Paul's personal practice of adapting his own conduct and inspired admonition to varying socio-religio-cultural situations is incontrovertible evidence that his directions with respect to the role of women in the church were adaptations to the religious and cultural mores of the time, not universal mandates. Furthermore, the leaders of New Testament congregations were lay persons of each congregation appointed to leadership roles, and for that matter there was no conference organization to do the appointing. Nor is there any indication in the New Testament that these lay

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

leaders were "ordained" with the laying on of hands. The Greek word *kathistemi* means, literally, "appoint," not "ordain" in the modern sense of the term.

Our modern procedure for ordaining and credentialing persons to serve as pastors is appropriate recognition by the church of their divine call and qualification for service in that capacity. It is without either precedent or divine mandate in the Bible. Consequently, the Bible leaves the ordination of women to serve as ministers of the gospel a moot question for the church to resolve on the basis of appropriate church policy, in harmony with gospel principles.

Tongue-speaking in the Church at Corinth

Tongue-speaking in the church at Corinth presents a different type of problem than any of the foregoing examples. The question is, Was that tongue-speaking in a foreign language, as in Acts 2, or was it charismatic? The resolution of this problem requires two considerations: (1) a detailed examination of every detail in the context of both 1 Corinthians 14 and Acts 2, and (2) a comparison of the two sets of data to determine whether the analogy with Acts 2 is valid. In both chapters the Greek words for "Speak" and "tongues" are identical. The contextual details of the two accounts are as follows:

Page 11:

	Acts 2 {Pentecost}	1 Corinthians 14 (Corinth)
1. The speakers:	Apostles	Lay persons
2. The hearers:	Unbelievers	Church members
3. Form:	Preaching	Prayer, song, praise
4. Function:	Evangelistic	Devotional
5. Addressed to:	Men and women	God
6. Audibility:	Audible	Audible/inaudible
7. As languages:	Specifically said to be	Not referred to as such
8. Interpretation:	Not required, to edify	Required, to edify
9. When occurred:	In the hearing	In the speaking
10. Comprehension:	Hearers understood	Hearers did not understand
11. Content:	Prophetic	Devotional (see item 4)
12. As prophecy:	Equivalent to	Distinct from
13. Objective:	To convert unbelievers	To express gratitude to God
14. Result:	Unbelievers converted	Unbelievers alienated

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

15. Edification:	The hearers	The speakers
16. Value as a sign:	Effective	Ineffective
17. Importance:	Major	Minor, if any

SUMMARY: Tongue-speaking at Corinth was "in the Spirit" (charismatic, or ecstatic, verse 2). It consisted of prayer and thanksgiving (14, 17). It edified the speaker (4). Paul spoke in tongues and encouraged others to do so (5, 18). It was not to be forbidden, but done in order (26-33, 39-40). It was not intelligible; no one understood it (2, 9, 16). It did not upbuild, encourage, console, edify, or instruct anyone (3, 4, 6, 12, 17, 19, 26). It would lead unbelievers present to conclude that the Corinthian Christians were mad (23). It was not decent and in order, but led to confusion (33, 40).

If the tongue-speaking at Corinth was in a foreign language inspired by the Holy Spirit (as at Pentecost), how shall we account for Him condoning and participating in its use under circumstances in which no one benefitted and only evil resulted? If He inspired some to speak in a foreign tongue, why did He not inspire either the speakers or others to interpret what was said? (5, 13, 27-18). Surely the speakers would not have access to the power of the Spirit without the Spirit's approval.

If, on the other hand, the tongue-speaking at Corinth was a foreign language spoken solely on the initiative of the speakers, without the Holy Spirit, they must have known what they said and could have interpreted it, yet Paul says that no one present could do so. Furthermore, without the Spirit they could not speak a foreign language they did not understand. The analogy between 1 Corinthians 14 and Acts 2 is not valid. The tongue-speaking at Corinth was not in a foreign language.

ADVENTIST BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Raymond F. Cottrell

The focus of this paper is Seventh-day Adventist biblical interpretation in the twentieth century. Two aspects will be considered: (1) a brief history of interpretation, and (2) church policy with respect to Bible study on the research level. For perspective, let us begin with a brief summary of biblical hermeneutics during and since New Testament times.

How New Testament Writers Used the Old Testament

The New Testament is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The Apostle Paul, for instance, testified that he believed "everything laid down according to the law or "written in the prophets" and that he said "nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place."¹ But the Book of Acts records thirteen occasions on which the Jews plotted to take his life because, they said, he "is teaching everyone everywhere against our people, our law, and this place" (the Temple). ² "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."³

This crucial difference between Paul and his unbelieving fellow countrymen consisted in his method of interpreting the Old Testament. In its own literary and historical context and perspective of salvation history, every part of the Old Testament had been addressed to the writer's contemporaries and consisted of instruction that applied to them within their own historical circumstances and needs. Paul's critics complained that he was reinterpreting the Old Testament, out of its own literary and historical context, and giving it a new meaning, different from the one the writer intended.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

This charge was true. For instance, when Moses wrote "You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain"⁴ he referred to literal oxen threshing grain on ancient threshing-floors. But Paul quotes Moses out of context and asks, "Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Or does he not speak entirely for our sake?" and then answers his own question: "It was indeed written for our sake . . ." ⁵ In Galatians 3:16 he interprets God's promise to Abraham, of a son--which in context referred to Isaac--as really

Page 2: referring to Christ. Seventeen times Matthew and John similarly apply Old Testament passages, out of their original literary and historical context, to events in the life of Christ. For instance, Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called my son"--Israel, as the context explicitly states--as if Hosea referred to Christ's return from Egypt as a child. ⁶

The New Testament is replete with reinterpretation of the Old Testament in terms of the new perspective of salvation history Jesus inaugurated: A new covenant replaces the former covenant. Faith in Jesus Christ replaces the sacrificial system prescribed by Moses. A sanctuary in heaven replaces the ancient sanctuary and Temple. Christ as the lamb of God replaces the ancient sacrificial victims, and as our great High Priest, the high priesthood of Aaron and his successors. His ministry in heaven since the cross replaces the ministry of the high priest in the most holy apartment of the ancient sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. Divine principles formerly inscribed "On tablets of stone" are now inscribed on "tablets of human hearts."⁷ The new Jerusalem in heaven replaces ancient Jerusalem as the focus of believers' hopes. These are all homiletical reinterpretations of the Old Testament.

The point is that the New Testament writers consistently use the Old Testament, the Bible of their time, typologically, out of its original context, and give it a new meaning neither explicit nor implicit in the Old Testament. They do so homiletically, to illustrate present truth in New Testament times. They use the Old Testament passages they cite as parables, illustrative of the truth they set forth. Their use of the Old Testament establishes typology as a valid, authentic principle of biblical interpretation, or rather reinterpretation. Authority for this typological use of the Old Testament resides with the New Testament writers, not the those of the Old Testament.

Interpretation Since Bible Times 8

By whatever name a person may refer to her or his method of reading and understanding the Bible, there are two--and only two--fundamentally different ways of doing so, and it is essential to have a clear distinction between them in mind as we proceed. The two are mutually exclusive, incompatible, and irreconcilable. They come to the Bible from opposite directions and often arrive at opposite conclusions.

Page 3:

The first of these two methods, in general use down through the centuries since Bible times, interprets the Bible from the reader's perspective of life, contemporary circumstances, and salvation history. In doing so, she or he often construes the words of Scripture out of their original literary and historical context, misses the meaning the inspired writer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, intended them to convey, and reads into them her or his personal opinions.

The second method comes to the Bible looking for the meaning the inspired writers intended their words to convey, from their perspective of life, historical circumstances, and salvation history. Its objective is a clear understanding of the divine principles set forth, with a view to applying them accurately and wisely to the reader's time and circumstances.

Let me illustrate. In his classic four-volume *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Le Roy Edwin Froom identifies more than 350 Bible scholars down through the twelve centuries prior to 1844 who set dates for the

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

fulfillment of Daniel's time prophecies. In doing so they were following the first method, in an endeavor to make Daniel's prophecies relevant to their time. Obviously they were all mistaken.

In the ninth century a Jewish Bible scholar by the name of Nahawendi devised the day-for-a-year principle in an endeavor to make the prophecies of Daniel relevant to his time, more than a thousand years after they were written. Three hundred years later Roman Catholic scholars adopted the principle. Eventually, some of them applied the antichrist of Revelation, by which John referred to imperial Rome, to papal Rome. When the Protestants of Reformation times began identifying the pope as antichrist, on the basis of this principle, the Catholic Church denounced the day-for-a-year principle and, logically, ceased to use it.

In the sixteenth century it had long been customary to think of planet Earth as the immovable center of the universe. Along came Copernicus with the idea that the sun, and not the earth, is really the center of the solar system. In the early seventeenth century Galileo confirmed Copernicus' model of the solar system. Catholic theologians, following the first method of Bible interpretation then in general use, branded both Copernicus and Galileo as heretics. An erroneous interpretation of the Bible thus initiated the great rift between science and religion that has persisted to this day.⁹

Page 4:

In the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin originally studied theology. Following the first method of interpretation, still in general use, he understood the expression "after its kind" in Genesis 1 to mean that each successive generation of animals would reproduce identically with its parents. When he observed the variations in the finches and turtles of the Galapagos Islands he discovered that this observable data proved the Bible (as he understood it) in error. It was not the Bible, however, but his mistaken way of understanding it, that gave rise to the theory of evolution.⁹

Recovery of the Ancient Past

Thus it was that, to approximately the middle of the nineteenth century, everyone, or at least nearly everyone, read the Bible more or less as if it were a modern book. Little attention was given to the historical circumstances to which the writers addressed their messages, and the meaning they intended their words to convey to people of their time, for the simple reason that relatively little was known about the ancient past.¹⁰

Events of the nineteenth century began to remedy that defect. Modern archeology was born with the discovery and deciphering of the Rosetta Stone in 1799 and 1832, respectively. The discovery of ancient Bible manuscripts centuries closer to the original autographs, such as the Sinaiticus in 1844, the Chester Beatty papyri in the early decades of the twentieth century, and the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947, made a much more accurate text available for study. The recovery of thousands of documents from ancient libraries made the ancient past to which the Bible writers addressed their messages come alive as never before. Most important of all, these discoveries made possible a far more accurate way to study and understand the Bible.

First to respond to these discoveries were the modernist-oriented Bible scholars of Germany, such as Julius Wellhausen and Ernest Troeltsch, who developed the historical-critical method. During the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, Fundamentalism mounted a vigorous attack against the historical-critical method. The essential characteristic of Fundamentalism was the fact that it retained the conservative presuppositions of the proof-text method and used them as a means by which to process and evaluate the new evidence about the ancient past, and thus to control the conclusions to which their study of the Bible led.

Page 5:

The contest between Fundamentalism and modernism became critical during the 1920's. It rocked Princeton University, and led several mainline Protestant churches into schism. A similar struggle between conservatives and "moderates" over biblical hermeneutics split the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in 1976. Today it is increasingly traumatizing the Southern Baptist Convention, and forebodes schism there as well.

Historical Adventist Hermeneutical Methodology

Like most if not all of his predecessors and contemporaries, William Miller followed the proof-text method of prophetic interpretation. An informed person today reading what he wrote is aghast at his misuse of Scripture. As pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist faith struggled to understand the Bible in the turbulent wake of the great disappointment of October 22, 1844, they too followed the proof-text method and sometimes came to wrong conclusions which they, or others in later years, found it necessary to revise. For instance, Dr. Desmond Ford has identified twenty-two modifications the church has made in its understanding of the sanctuary doctrine since pioneer days. 11 In his exposition of the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation Uriah Smith likewise followed proof-text principles and procedures, and for nearly half a century the church has considered his classic Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation out of date. At a number of points the pioneers would feel quite uncomfortable with our present 27 Fundamental Beliefs.

All of this reflects the fact that, over the years, continuing study has led to an ever clearer and more accurate understanding of the divine Word. We would be more than a little naïve to think that we have nothing more to learn. Let us not soon forget Ellen White's inspired counsel:

"New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with the sun of righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God.

"In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation.

"In investigating every jot and tittle which we think is established truth, in comparing scripture with scripture, we may discover errors in our interpretations of Scripture. Christ would have the searcher of His

Page 6:

word sink the shaft deeper into the mines of truth. If the search is properly conducted, jewels of inestimable value will be found." 14

"We cannot hold that a position once taken, an idea once advocated, is not, under any circumstances, to be relinquished." 15

"When the mind is kept open and is constantly searching the field of revelation, we shall find rich deposits of truth. Old truths will be revealed in new aspects, and truths will appear which have been overlooked in the search." 16

"As real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word and discourage any further investigation. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion." 17

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Prior to about the mid-1930's Adventist exposition of the Bible was basically by the proof-text method, which may often be in context and correct, but often is not. The problem with it is two-fold: (1) It is highly subjective and relies on presuppositions, principles, and procedures which may—or may not—be valid, and which vary from one person to another, and (2) it has no built-in safeguards such as those inherent in the historical method.

Adventist Bible Scholars Adopt the Historical Method

Prior to about 1935 Adventist expositors of the Bible were at least generally following the proof-text method of Bible study. Two seemingly unrelated events of that decade led to a gradual transition to the historical method over the next twenty-five years, with the result that by the 1960's most of the Bible scholars of the church had adopted that method.

In 1932 the General Conference concluded that it was necessary to upgrade the training and qualifications of persons who entered the ministry of the church, and voted to establish a school of theology. This led to the establishment in 1934, at Pacific Union College, of what was at first called the Advanced Bible School, and in 1937 moved to Washington, D.C. where it took the name Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary: The second event was a requirement imposed on the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University) that students accepted for the medical course be graduates of accredited colleges.

These two events logically made it necessary for the colleges to upgrade their faculties including, of course, their religion teachers. As the colleges sent members of their religion faculties for advanced training in such

Page 7:

subjects as biblical languages, ancient history and chronology, archeology, and ancient Bible manuscripts, they gradually came to realize the importance of the principles and procedures of the historical method in forming an accurate understanding of the Bible.

Among the first to participate in this program were such persons as Edwin R. Thiele, Siegfried Horn, Richard Hammill, Lynn Wood, E. E. Heppenstall, and I. I. Caviness—all but one of whom are now awaiting the coming of the lifegiver. It was my privilege to become familiar with the historical method in the early 1940's, while teaching religion at Pacific Union College.

As chairman of the Bible Research Fellowship (BRF)¹⁸—professional organization of college Bible teachers from 1942 to 1952—Dr. Caviness fostered use of the historical method. As secretary of that organization during those years, it was my privilege to participate with him in encouraging its use. By 1952 BRF membership had risen to more than 250 and included practically every religion teacher in every Adventist college around the world. Seventeen were members of the General Conference headquarters staff.

As we might have expected but did not anticipate, tension arose between the historical method followed by a majority of the Bible teachers and the proof-text method followed by church administrators. As a matter of fact that tension originated in Australia when Louis F. Were, a former minister who was under censure for his views on Daniel 11 and Armageddon, returned from the 1950 session of the General Conference in San Francisco and proclaimed that the college Bible teachers were all in agreement with him. My article on BRF in the Summer 1978 magazine Adventist Heritage narrates the details of this episode, which do not need repeating here. 18

In an endeavor to resolve this tension between administrators and the Bible scholars of the church, I drafted a detailed proposal that the General Conference (GC) itself establish a permanent office of Bible

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

research and a permanent Biblical Research Committee. With Dr. Caviness' approval I sent copies of this document to several personal friends in the GC, and as a result the Autumn (now Annual) Council of 1952 set up the office and the Biblical Research Committee (BRC), which metamorphosed into the Biblical Research Institute in 1975.¹⁹ I arranged with Elder C. L. Bauer, then president of the Pacific Union Conference, for Dr. Caviness to be appointed as a delegate to the Autumn Council, at one session of which he officially transferred the Biblical Research Fellowship to the new Biblical Research Committee. The

Page 8:

original guidelines the GC set up for BRC stipulated that it was to serve the Bible scholars of the church in the same way that the Bible Research Fellowship had been serving them.

As providence would have it, that very summer Elder F. O. Nichol (an Australian, by the way) invited me to the Review and Herald Publishing Association to edit the Bible Commentary, and our move from Angwin to Takoma Park coincided with the 1952 Autumn Council. Having served as secretary of the Bible Research Fellowship for its lifetime of ten years, it now became my happy privilege to participate, as a charter member, in every meeting of the Bible Research Committee for the next twenty-four years.

Soon after Robert H. Pierson became president of the General Conference in 1966 I presented him with a thirty-page document recounting the history of Bible research in the church over the preceding twenty-five years, and recommending that the Biblical Research Committee become the Biblical Research Institute. My purpose in this proposal was to give it a higher level of permanence and continuity, which experience had demonstrated it needed.

The privilege of writing more than two thousand pages for the Seventh day Adventist Bible Commentary and editing it from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:20 was perhaps the major event of my forty-seven years of service to the church prior to retirement in 1977. Last night I recounted for you the story of the Commentary and need not repeat it here. The important point I do wish to make is that, to the best of our ability, we built the principles and procedures of the historical method into it, making it the first Adventist publication to reflect that method of reading and understanding the Bible.²⁰ My article in volume 4, "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," was intended to foster use of the historical method in the interpretation of Old Testament prophecy, the perennial happy hunting ground of weird would-be expositors. ²¹

A further comment on the phrase "to the best of our ability" in the preceding paragraph calls for a word of explanation. We followed three fundamental guiding principles in editing the Commentary: (1) to be absolutely faithful to the meaning the inspired writers, guided by the Holy Spirit, intended their words to convey, (2) to make it a faithful witness to the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Bible, and (3) to be in harmony with the writings of Ellen G. White. At a few major points we found it impossible

Page 9:

to reconcile the first two of these principles. We did the best we could, but none of us were happy with the compromise between them to which we found it necessary to come. in these instances. ²² The major instance in which we found it impossible to reconcile our comment with the first and second of these three principles was the eighth and ninth chapters of Daniel. In a number of relatively minor instances we dodged the issue with phraseology such as "Adventists believe that . . ." indicating that the editors did not find a particular interpretation compatible with sound exegesis.

During the time the Theological Seminary was located in a building adjacent to the General Conference in Takoma Park (1937-1960) there was a low-key feud between administrators immersed in the proof-text method, and Seminary teachers following the historical method. Students indoctrinated in the

prooftext method would complain to an administrator regarding what they considered heretical views expressed by a Seminary teacher--which resulted in relatively minor ongoing tension between administrators and the Seminary. Fortunately, this never erupted into open warfare.

Doctrinal Discussions With Martin and Barnhouse 23

At the very time we were struggling with the eighth and ninth chapters of Daniel for the Commentary the General Conference entered into a protracted series of eighteen doctrinal discussions with Walter F. Martin and Donald Grey Barnhouse, the first of which took place on March 8 and 9, 1955 and the last in August 1956. Participants representing the GC were LeRoy Edwin Froom, Walter E. Reed, and Roy Allen Anderson, to whom we editors referred collectively by the acronym Freada.

The three GC participants were administrators and not Bible scholars, and basically prooftext in their orientation. This left them at a disadvantage in the discussions, but as a result of the on-going town-versus-gown tension between the Seminary and the GC there was a minimum-of contact between them and the Seminary. Instead, they kept coming to Don Neufeld and me for help in Greek and Hebrew, and exegesis. Elder Nichol required Don and me to be at work by 4:30 every morning every day of the week except Sabbath, and took a dim view of them preempting our time during those hours. But out of hours Freada was in continual touch with us, and we were thus indirectly involved in the discussions.

Page 10:

When a decision was made to publish Freada's dozens of responses to the questions Martin and Barnhouse were asking, we became more directly involved. Nichol, Neufeld, and I were mildly horrified at the idea of publishing their more or less inadequate responses as a book which would inevitably be considered at least a quasi-official statement of Adventist doctrine. I proposed setting up an editorial committee. The GC appointed A. V. Olson, a vice president, to chair such a committee, W. E. Read, a participant in the discussions, and M. R. Thurber, Review and Herald book editor, to do the editing.

Neufeld and I were asked to critique the documents in detail in order to bring them into more acceptable form. Inasmuch as Martin wanted to quote from our book, Questions on Doctrine, in his forthcoming book to be published by Zondervan, The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists, the editorial committee asked me to evaluate what he might say. I surveyed the Martin-Barnhouse articles in the evangelical press and prepared a 16-page, single-spaced, summary for the committee. My concluding paragraph warned that "a storm of opposition" was almost certain, and that "we should not close our eyes to the possibility of a serious division in our own ranks as a result of the certain refusal" of some to "go along with the interpretation of Adventism set forth in the documents now being prepared for publication, and in Martin's new book." Soon after publication M. L. Andreasen, for fifteen years considered the dean of Adventist theologians but long since retired, mounted very vocal opposition to Questions on Doctrine and charged the GC with apostasy. As a result of his refusal to remain silent the GC revoked his credentials and cut off his sustentation--which the Federal government required the church to restore. His credentials were restored posthumously.

Generally speaking, Nichol, Neufeld, and I found the positions set forth in their final form reasonably acceptable, but we knew that many Adventists would not. Fifteen years later, with the stock of QOD nearly exhausted, it became my unhappy task as Review and Herald book editor to recommend that it be discontinued and out of print--which the R&H Board voted. My hope was that this would abate the continuing storm of criticism (but it has not).

Again, the fundamental problem was differences of opinion arising from differing biblical hermeneutics--whether the modern reader is to understand the Bible from his modern perspective of what the words

mean, or from the meaning the inspired writer intended his words to convey, from his perspective of salvation history.

Page 11:

The Revision of Bible Readings, and the "Daniel Committee" 24

Soon after the last volume of the Bible Commentary was off the press in the late autumn of 1957, and printing plates for the old classic Bible Readings were worn out, the Review assigned Don Neufeld and me the task of revising it, as necessary, to be in agreement with the Commentary. Quite by accident my half of the book included the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation.

With our recent experience in editing the Book of Daniel vividly in mind I set out resolutely to find a way to reconcile our sanctuary doctrine with sound biblical hermeneutics--and failed miserably. Upon the recommendation of senior editor Nichol, I sent a brief questionnaire to the head of each college Bible department in North America and to every teacher versed in Hebrew. All 27 of them were personal friends of mine. All replied, and without exception they took the position that there is no linguistic or contextual basis for our sanctuary-in-heaven-investigative-judgment interpretation of Daniel 8:14.25

When the results of this poll (sans names) came to the attention of GC president R. R. Figuhr, he and his officers appointed a committee they named Committee on Problems in the Book of Daniel, which deliberated inconclusively for five years and issued no formal report. The committee finally voted an informal report that reaffirmed the traditional interpretation but was silent as to any "problems." Again the problem was one of biblical hermeneutics. It was impossible to reconcile the traditional interpretation with sound principles of biblical interpretation. Few, even in the General Conference, ever heard about this committee, and at the Glacier View conference of the Sanctuary Review Committee in August 1980 Neal Wilson commented that he knew nothing about it prior to that time.

Inasmuch as I have been asked to speak on the Glacier View conference in Sydney next Sabbath afternoon, I will refrain from commenting further regarding it today. Suffice it to say that the fundamental issue there was also one of how to understand the Bible.

Page 12:

Official Adventist Hermeneutical Policy, 1969-1979 27

The years 1969 to 1979 witnessed a major reorientation of the corporate, official hermeneutical processes of the church, both as to policy and procedure, unique in the history of the church. The changes that took place during those years earned for them the title, Decade of Obscurantism. A review of those changes is essential to an accurate understanding of the biblical-theological-doctrinal climate in the church from 1979 to the present.

In conducting such a review it is important to bear in mind a clear distinction between the two basic methods of reading and understanding the Bible: (1) the proof-text method, with what its words mean to the modern reader from his perspective in time, as normative for interpretation, and (2) the historical method, with the meaning the inspired writer, guided by the Holy Spirit, intended his words to convey, as normative.

A review of events during the decade of obscurantism would not be possible or intelligible without mentioning the names of the persons involved. Would it be possible to give a meaningful account of World War II without mentioning such names as Adolph Hitler, Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Stalin? Would it be possible to present a clear picture of the age-long conflict between good and evil in the universe without ever mentioning Jesus Christ or Lucifer?

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

As we proceed with this review let us remember that those who played key roles in the decade of obscurantism were dedicated Seventh-day Adventists who loved the Lord as much as we do and whose sincere convictions led them to act as they did. Three of the four are now awaiting the return of the Lifegiver, and it will be our privilege, if faithful, to meet them in that better land.

God loves sinners but hates the sin. However dim a view we may take of our fellow Christians' opinions and the way they may implement them, let us respect their integrity and consider them friends. At least two of the four who played key roles were esteemed personal friends of mine. The following very brief review of the decade of obscurantism proceeds with charity for all and malice toward none.

The decade of obscurantism began three years after Robert H. Pierson became president of the General Conference. The administration of his predecessor Reuben R. Figuhr, from 1954 to 1966, was a model of wise, balanced

Page 13:

leadership, of openness, and of mutual respect and confidence between administrators and the Bible scholars of the church. Like a falling barometer, however, that decade introduced a climate of mutual suspicion, alienation, and witch-hunting.

Robert H. Pierson was a gracious person, a dedicated Christian, a gentleman in every respect. Despite the conviction then and now that his policy with respect to the biblical-theological-doctrinal processes of the church at the General Conference level was seriously flawed, our conversations and correspondence on the subject were always on the high level of mutual respect, and constructive in tone. In his August 29, 1982 letter to me, upon reading my white paper "Architects of Crisis: a Decade of Obscurantism" (which I had invited him to critique), he wrote: "Through the years that we served together in Washington I always considered you a friend. Although there may have been areas of differing opinions I had a warm feeling for you personally." My reply reciprocated: "I have the highest personal regard for you as a kind, gracious, Christian gentleman. I esteem you as a friend." His next letter expressed appreciation for my frankness and characterized my letter as "a beautiful example of true Christian courtesy and grace, in dealing with a matter on which you and I seem to have varying views." Our relationship was a prime example of two people who disagreed radically on a subject of major importance to both of us and to the church, yet with Christian respect and full confidence in each other's integrity.

Elder Pierson graduated from Southern Junior College in 1933 and entered the ministry in the Georgia-Cumberland Conference. In 1936 he responded to a call to service overseas and served with distinction in India, the Caribbean, and South Africa. At the time of his election to the presidency of the General Conference thirty years later, in 1966, he had more than fulfilled the unwritten requirement of significant overseas service. But his lifetime of service overseas proved to be a severe handicap when he returned to General Conference headquarters. For most of his life out of touch with the church in North America, he experienced considerable difficulty in understanding and relating to, changes that had taken place during his absence, in several important areas of the life and work of the church. This was especially true with respect to the corporate biblical-theological-doctrinal processes of the church at the General Conference level, which he considered it his duty to restore to the way they were when he went overseas in 1936. What changes?

Page 14:

Prior to 1936 the church was following the prooftext method of Bible study, and administrators were the "brethren of experience" in those processes. But during Elder Pierson's absence church administrators had come to rely on a new generation of trained and experienced Bible scholars as their

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

brethren of experience in such matters, and he very sincerely believed that the Bible scholars, with their historical method of Bible study, were leading the church astray! Repeatedly he expressed it to be his conviction and policy that administrators, and not Bible scholars, should conduct the corporate biblical-theological process at the General Conference level. It was his implementation of that policy that, to this day, has made it difficult for church administrators and Bible scholars to work together in a spirit of mutual understanding and confidence, as they had been doing prior to his administration.

Aware of the direction affairs were taking, three months after Pierson became president in 1966 I presented him with a carefully crafted thirty-page document reviewing the recent course of our corporate biblical process on the General Conference level and proposing that the Biblical Research Committee be reconstituted as the Biblical Research Institute. Repeatedly over the twelve years of his presidency, sometimes at my initiative and sometimes his, we discussed these matters together at some length. The last time was a long discussion aboard our charter return flight from the 1975 General Conference in Vienna. Our conversations were always positive and constructive in tone, but he never seemed to understand.

Implementing his policy, Elder Pierson appointed two administrators without training or experience in Bible study on the research level to be in charge of the GC office of biblical research and the Biblical Research Committee--GC vice president Willis J. Hackett, and Gordon Hyde. Both shared his convictions in such matters and conscientiously proceeded to implement them. On April 3, 1969 the Spring Meeting of the General Conference removed the Bible scholars en masse from the Biblical Research Committee and staffed it with administrators. A vigorous protest by the Seminary faculty forestalled implementation of the plan, but a similar effect was achieved a few months later by adding a large number of administrators and other non-scholars to the existing committee.

In no sense a Bible scholar himself, Gordon Hyde selected Gerhard F. Hasel as his mentor and authority on biblical-theological-doctrinal matters,

Page 15:

and consistently presented Hasel's views as his own. Hasel had recently come to the Seminary from Southern Adventist College, and was completing a degree in Old Testament studies at Vanderbilt University. While there he had formulated a hybrid proof-text/historical method of interpreting the Bible that consisted of historical method procedures under the control of proof-text method principles. This hybrid hermeneutic appears--to the uninitiated--to provide scholarly proof for traditional proof-text conclusions. His phenomenal ability to assemble masses of scholarly data was impressive, especially to persons unfamiliar with hermeneutical principles. He repeatedly stated that a person must not attempt to be objective in his study of the Bible. As a result, his subjective presuppositions controlled his evaluation of evidence and his conclusions, which often made his conclusions non-sequitur to the evidence he surveyed. He prescinded from verbal inspiration in the revelatory process, but treated the Bible as if it were verbally inspired.

With the full support of Elder Pierson during the 1970s Gordon Hyde, as director of the General Conference office of biblical research and chair of the Biblical Research Committee (since 1975, Institute), promoted Hasel as the dean of Adventist Bible scholars, and made his hermeneutic normative in the biblical-theological-doctrinal processes of the church. This was particularly noticeable in the series of North American Bible Conferences in 1974 and the attempt to make him dean of the Theological Seminary earlier that year.

Hyde and Hasel both targeted anyone who did not subscribe to Hasel's hybrid hermeneutic as a dangerous liberal, and warned administrators to beware of them. Several friends in the General Conference, including Elder Pierson, told me this. Later, as dean of the Seminary during the 1980's,

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Hasel froze a number of dedicated, competent teachers out of the Seminary—such as Larry Geraty (now president of Loma Linda University), Fritz Guy (a professor there), Ivan Blazen (now teaching at Loma Linda University), Sakae Kubo (later president of Newbold College, now retired), and others. As head of the religion department at Southern College in the early 1980's, Hyde and others purged the department of three able and dedicated teachers whose only fault was that they did not subscribe to Hasel's hermeneutic. Neither Hyde nor Hasel ever went to the persons they targeted for ostracism before warning administrators to beware of them. These are not pleasant facts, but they are facts, and demonstrate the tactics that made the years 1969 to 1979 a decade

Page 16:

of obscurantism and set the stage for the two doctrinal firestorms that tormented the church in 1979 and 1980.²⁶

During the decade of obscurantism Drs. Hyde and Hasel aborted several opportunities to resolve the issue of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment, and to clarify Ellen White's use of sources and the relationship of her writings to the Bible. It was this climate of obscurantism, and their persistent unwillingness to resolve issues by consensus in open dialogue, that resulted in Desmond Ford going public on the investigative judgment at Pacific Union College before an audience not prepared to understand or relate to what he said, on October 27, 1979, and Walter Rea's crusade against Ellen White a year later.²⁷ But that is the subject for next Sabbath afternoon in Sydney. I hope you can be there.

Today, well over ninety percent of Adventist Bible scholars follow the historical method of interpretation, in search of the meaning and the divine principles the inspired writers, guided by the Holy Spirit, intended their words to convey, and how those principles apply to our time. They meet together annually in the Adventist Society for Religious Studies, commonly referred to as ASRS. This year John Brunt of Walla Walla College is president of ASRS.

Less than ten percent of Adventist Bible scholars are members of the Adventist Theological Society (ATS), which subscribes to what it calls the historical-grammatical method formulated by Dr. Gerhard Hasel. This method makes use of historical method procedures under the control of a proof-text concept of the revelatory process equivalent to verbal inspiration, which usually leads it to popular proof-text conclusions. Led by Bible scholars, more than ninety-eight percent of its fifteen hundred or so members are interested lay persons. Practically all of its Bible scholars are located at Southern Adventist College and the Theological Seminary. Edward Zinke, an Adventist business man and former protégé of Dr. Gordon Hyde, is currently ATS president.²⁷

Page 17:

END NOTES

1. Acts 24:14; 26:22.
2. Acts 21:28.
3. Acts 22:22.
4. Deuteronomy 25:4.
5. 1 Corinthians 9:9.
6. Matthew 2:15.
7. 2 Corinthians 3:3.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

8. See Chapter 14, "Interpretation of Daniel, A.D. 100 to 1844, 11 in my unpublished book manuscript, The Eschatology of Daniel.
9. This is covered at length in my unpublished paper, "Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World," pp. 31-34.
10. See Note 8.
11. Desmond Ford, Daniel 8:14 the Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment, pp. 115-136. (Original Glacier View document.)
12. Ellen G. White, Counsels on Sabbath School Work, p. 34.
13. White, Christ's Object lessons, p. 127.
14. White, Review and Herald, July 12, 1898.
15. White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 105.
16. White, MS 75, 1897.
17. White, Counsels to Writers and Editors, p. 38 = Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 706.
18. Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Bible Research Fellowship," Adventist Heritage, 5:1, Summer 1978, pp. 39-52.
19. See Note 18.
20. Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Untold Story of the Bible Commentary," Spectrum, 16:3, August 1985, pp. 35-51.
21. Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 4, pp. 25-38. The parenthetical sentence on p. 38 was added by Elder Nichol to protect the Commentary from unnecessary criticism: "(This rule does not apply to those portions of the book of Daniel that the prophet was bidden to "shut up" and "seal," or to other passages whose application Inspiration may have limited exclusively to our own time.)"
22. See Note 21.
23. My twin papers, "Questions on Doctrine: A Historical-Critical Evaluation" and "Questions on Doctrine: Footnotes to History" provide an in-depth study of the Martin-Barnhouse discussions and the process of preparing the book Questions on Doctrine.
24. See Chapter 1, "Encounter," in my unpublished book Manuscript, The Eschatology of Daniel.
25. The questions and Responses to my 1958 poll of Bible scholars on Daniel 8:14 are given on pp. 13-14 of my "Report of a Poll of Adventist Bible Scholars Concerning Daniel 8:14 and Hebrews 9." This "Report," an official Glacier View document, reported a 127-question poll I conducted four months prior to Glacier View.
26. My unpublished paper, "Architects of Crisis: A Decade of Obscurantism" records more than thirty specific incidents between 1969 and 1979 and provides a much more detailed account of the decade.
27. My unpublished paper, "The Adventist Theological Society and Its Biblical Hermeneutic," (49 pp.) provides an in-depth analysis of ATS, its history, nature, policies, and hermeneutic.

THE CHURCH OF TOMORROW:

ADVENTISM FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

RAYMOND F. COTTRELL

WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FOR THE FUTURE, EXCEPT AS WE SHALL FORGET THE WAY THE LORD HAS LED US, AND HIS TEACHING IN OUR PAST HISTORY. ¹

IF WE COULD FIRST KNOW WHERE WE ARE, AND WHITHER WE ARE TENDING, WE COULD BETTER JUDGE WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT. ²

The present is the fulcrum between time past and time future. What we learn from the past, and what we do about it in the present, will determine the shape of the church in days to come.

Nineteen hundred sixty-five years ago Jesus told His disciples, "I will come again" and assured them that their generation would not pass ere they would see "the sign of the Son of Man" coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ³ Nearly forty times throughout the New Testament those who heard and believed that promise reflect their anticipation that Jesus would return in their lifetime. ⁴ For example:

PETER: "The end of all things is near." ⁵

JOHN: "We know that it is the last hour," and Jesus assures him that everything on record in the Book of Revelation "must soon take place" for "the time is near." Four Times Jesus reiterates, "I am coming soon . . . surely I am coming soon." ⁶

JAMES: "The coming of the Lord is at hand. The judge is standing at the doors." ⁷

PAUL: "The appointed time has grown very short." "We who are alive, who are left" await "our blessed hope, the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." ⁸

THE WRITER OF HEBREWS: "Yet a little while, and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry." ⁹

How near is "near"? How soon is "soon"? How short is "very short"?

How little is "a little while"? Do twenty centuries qualify as a "little while" and a "very short" interval of time? What would Peter, John, James, Paul, and the other inspired writers of the New Testament have thought and written if they knew that "a little while" would be two millennia, or maybe even longer?

Page 2:

In his classic four-volume Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers Le Roy Edwin Froom identifies more than 350 ardent "adventists" over the twelve centuries prior to 1844 who assigned dates for what they thought of as the soon return of Jesus. ¹⁰ In his book The Imminent Appearing of Christ J. Barton Payne observes that:

There has yet to arise a generation in church history in which at least some believers were not convinced that theirs were the closing days of the era. All, however, except those of the present generation, have proved to be mistaken, and it is not too much to suggest that those of the present could be too. ¹¹

One hundred forty-six years ago (in 1850) Ellen White wrote:

"Some are looking too far off for the coming of the lord. Time has continued a few years longer than they expected, therefore they think it may continue a few years more, and in this way their minds are

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

being led from present truth, out after the world, . . . Time is almost finished, . . . Get ready, get ready, get ready.”¹²

When Ellen White wrote these words six years ("a few years longer") had passed since the great disappointment of October 22, 1844. Was she implying that she (and the pioneers) expected Jesus to return within the next six years? In context, "a few more years" would end in 1856.

Ninety-six years ago (1900) she wrote again that "Only a moment of time, as it were, yet remains.”¹³

Is almost a century properly described as "a moment of time"? What would Ellen White and the pioneers have thought if they knew we would still be here at the dawn of the twenty-first century? What would the disciples have thought? The pioneers were disappointed when Jesus did not return on October 22, 1844, or at least very soon thereafter. How about our great disappointment that He still has not come, a century and a half later? We still talk glibly about the soon coming of Jesus. How soon will "soon" prove to be?

Let us not soon forget that His soon coming is the very essence of Adventism--as it was for those who wrote the New Testament and later for our pioneers. How much longer can we continue to proclaim His soon coming and remain credible in the eyes of an incredulous world? Do we have an imminent advent indefinitely delayed? As we look to the future one of our greatest needs is a credible theology of the delayed advent--for our own sakes as well

Page 3:

as for the integrity of our witness to Jesus' soon coming! Where are we in the long intermission between eternity past and eternity future? Has the Lord been leading us in the past, and what does this "leading" bode for the future? What does our past history teach us? Where are we, and whither are we tending as we soon cross the threshold of the twenty-first century?

As we ponder these questions let us remember that it is the wicked servant in the parable who says to himself, "My master is delayed." ¹⁴ May the good Lord give us wisdom as we look to the future and plan for it! "Do business . . . until I come back," Jesus told His disciples in the long ago, and we may assume that that admonition is still valid and appropriate today. ¹⁵

Planning for the future

How, then, shall we "do business," as individuals and corporately as a community of faith, now and in the twenty-first century? How can we make our witness to the everlasting gospel more credible and more effective?

As a dedicated, lifelong, fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist it has been my happy privilege to serve the church for forty-seven years prior to retirement, and another nineteen years since then. The seventh-day Sabbath has been a precious treasure in our family for twelve generations, first as Seventh Day Baptists, and since 1851 as Seventh-day Adventists. The goal of my life is, and ever has been, "that blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." ¹⁶ My sixty-six years of service to the church span half of the time since it was organized 133 years ago. Over these years I have had an opportunity to participate in its life and mission and to observe how effectively it is doing the Lord's business. Perhaps a few observations may be appropriate as we look to the future.

I have a dream for the church, of what it can and should be in order to be the church Christ wants it to be "in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind . . . holy and without blemish." ¹⁷ May I share that dream with you? There are nine successive scenes in this panorama of the future:

1. What is the church?

2. Church Members in the Church of Tomorrow.
3. Church Leaders in the Church of Tomorrow.
4. Communication in the Church of Tomorrow.

Page 4:

5. Adaptability in the Church of Tomorrow.
6. Church Structure in the Church of Tomorrow.
7. Doctrine in the Church of Tomorrow.
8. Witness to the Gospel in the Church of Tomorrow.
9. Unity in the Church of Tomorrow.

1. What Is "the Church"?

The question, What is the church? may at first seem inane, disingenuous, and simplistic, and the answer so obvious as to make the question superfluous. But as a matter of fact how we answer this question determines our concept of what it means to be a church member, how church leaders should lead, how the church should be structured and governed, and the kind of unity it should have. We need to give this question the thoughtful consideration it deserves and find answers consistent with the requirements of the gospel.

The New Testament word for "church" is *ekklesia*, literally, the "called out [ones]"--called out from the world into a special relationship with Jesus Christ and with one another. The first believers referred to their community of faith as "the way,"¹⁸ inasmuch as Christ had said of Himself, "I am the way . . . to the Father," and that the gospel is "the way . . . that leads to life" eternal.¹⁹

The church is built on the rock of recognition that Christ is "the Son of the living God."²⁰ A person who comes to Christ in faith, accepting His gracious gift of salvation and life eternal,²¹ enters into a personal relationship with Him as Lord and becomes a member of the community of faith composed of all who enter into that relationship. Their individual relationship to Him unites them with one another,²² and as the diverse members of the human body are one by virtue of their subjection to the mind, so those who accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and who commit their lives and service to Him, are "one" in Him in the same way that the body is "One" in relation to the mind.²³

Paul also illustrates the relationship of the church to Christ by that of a wife to her husband.²⁴ In an ideal marriage each partner finds supreme happiness in making the other supremely happy. In a home where this is the fixed purpose of both husband and wife there will, at times, be differences of opinion on some matters. But can you imagine harsh words, unfaithfulness, or divorce? Two partners in marriage become "One" by virtue of the

Page 5:

Creator's purpose, their love for one another, and their community of interest in, and need for, each other.²⁵ Each is important to the other; neither is complete without the other. So it is with Christ and the church.

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."²⁶ Because we are supremely important to Him, and in anticipation of "the joy that was waiting for him," he thought "nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross."²⁷ "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends,"²⁸ and we love the Lord Jesus--we care supremely about Him and for Him--because He loved us first.²⁹ He lived and died for us in order that we might live for Him in this life, and with Him in the life to come. As members of the body of Christ we will have the same love for one another.

According to the New Testament the church is people, not an organization, and like the Sabbath (to paraphrase Mark 2:27) the organization was made for the people, not the people for the organization. It is the role of the church--the ekklesia or people thus "assembled" together--to provide an environment and a fellowship within which its members can cooperate together for their mutual edification and encouragement, and for their individual and collective mission to proclaim the good news of God's saving grace to the world--by word and deed to be sure, but most importantly and effectively of all by being the kind of people the gospel was designed to make of them.

2. Church Members in the Church of Tomorrow

The great apostle uses the human body to illustrate our relationship to one another in the church: "You are the body of Christ and individually members of it . . . there are many parts yet one body." ³⁰ Each part of the body is important to all of the others and is, in turn, dependent on them, and "we are members one of another." ³¹ An even more appropriate illustration of our relationship to one another in the church refers to it as the family of God. ³² An ideal family consists of people closely related to one another, who are important to one another and who care about--and for--one another.

According to the New Testament the same agape love--selfless care and concern for the well-being and happiness of others ³³--that motivates our

Page 6:

individual and corporate relationship as a church to Christ, also motivates our relationship to one another within the church. It takes precedence, Paul says, over everything else including philanthropy, knowledge, prophecy, inspired preaching, and even faith and hope; it is "patient and kind" and "does not insist on its own way." ³⁴ It invites us to esteem others as better people than we are, and to be as solicitous for their interests as we are for our own. ³⁵ If our love for one another is genuine it will make us an openhearted, caring church in fact as well as in theory.

In the Sermon on the Mount Christ counsels us not to be judgmental of others—"Judge not, that you be not judged"--but to be concerned with our own shortcomings. ³⁶ We are not to measure fellow church members by criteria of our own devising or by our private understanding of Scripture. ³⁷ The agape principle applies to people who see things from a different perspective than we do as well as to those who agree with us. No two of us look exactly alike or think exactly alike; each is a unique person. We are not gingerbread men and women all cut out of the same mould, but we can live and work together in harmony if each respects the right of others to think differently and to be different, with full confidence in their integrity as fellow Christians. We are to consider sincere differences of opinion from their point of view as well as our own, and to respect differences responsibly expressed. ³⁸ Inasmuch as we are all finite, erring human beings, differences of opinion are inevitable, but even so they need not be divisive. We can still fellowship together with full confidence in one another's integrity as fellow members of the family of God. The devil's weapons and tactics have no place in fighting what some may think of as the battles of the Lord.

The way we relate to one another comes into sharp focus in our degree of openness toward one another. Some minds tend to be open and objective in forming opinions and in relating to people, while others tend to be closed and subjective. In contrast with judgmental exclusiveness the New Testament Commends a climate of openness consistent with the golden rule: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." ³⁹ Respect for the principle of openness would resolve most issues and differences of opinion without hurt or injury to anyone, and lead us to live at peace with differences the Bible itself does not resolve or that we are not otherwise able to resolve.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

The open mind recognizes its own finite and personal limitations and is therefore patient with the limitations of other people. It also recognizes

Page 7:

the possibility that their point of view may be based on more accurate or complete information and may therefore be more nearly correct. Accordingly, the open mind respects differing opinions and the intellectual integrity of those who hold them, and listens attentively and perceptively to differing opinions responsibly expressed. It is ready to revise, or to abandon, opinions objective evidence proves untenable. It also recognizes changed and changing circumstances and adjusts to them in a reasonable and responsible way. It is patient and at peace with diversity on a live-and-let-live basis, and is disposed to accept everyone, including people with closed minds, as fellow members in good and regular standing. The open mind operates in harmony with the agape principle: like God, it "shows no partiality."⁴⁰ The person who knows more must always be patient with the person who knows less, inasmuch as the less a person knows he or she often finds it more difficult to be patient with diversity.

The closed mind tends to think its own opinions and point of view sacrosanct and infallible, and differing opinions as unworthy of consideration or respect. It prefers traditional ways of thinking and doing with which it is familiar, and tends to be inflexible, uncompromising, and intolerant. It feels threatened by change and the prospect of having to make unfamiliar adjustments. Unable or unwilling to live at peace with diversity, it denies the inherent right of other people to hold differing opinions or to be open-minded; it aspires to impose its own particular norm of uniformity on everyone and to purge the church of open-minded people who do not conform. It draws a tight little circle of respectability designed to exclude those whose understanding of faith and duty differs from its own, and as a result it leads to discord. ill will, alienation, confrontation, conflict and disunity, are the result, whereas an open mind would preserve the spirit of unity in the bond of peace by respecting the right of each person to be responsible to God for her or his beliefs and conduct. The closed mind professes allegiance to the agape principle but in practice applies it only to those who meet its approval.

Not a few of our problems in the church result from the closed-minded notion that unity requires uniformity, that one person's opinions or those of a small group should be normative for the entire church, and that others who do not conform are not to be considered members in good and regular standing. But why should I be so eager to ferret what looks to me like a speck out of

Page 8:

your eye when I may have a log in my own? ⁴¹ I have a God-given right to my convictions and I am responsible to Him for them, even as you are for yours, but He never gave me the right or the responsibility to impose my personal convictions on you. In your relationship to Christ the important thing is your conscience and not mine. That is the way it will be at the pearly gates. It is my Christian duty to be true to my conscience and to respect your right to be true to your conscience--without presuming to be judgmental of you even in my thoughts. Yet with great piety and zeal some evidently sincere people aspire to be mind and conscience for everyone else, even on matters of private opinion.

Upon one occasion Peter asked Jesus, "What about this man [John]?" and Jesus replied, "What is that to you; follow me."⁴² What John might or might not do was none of Peter's business. Many years later Peter and Paul disagreed sharply on an issue of far more fundamental importance to the gospel than some more recent issues in the church--the propriety of Jewish Christians dining with Gentile Christians⁴³ but in spite of their own deep convictions they extended the right hand of fellowship to each other. Neither sought to have the other disfellowshipped or to have his apostolic credentials revoked, as I fear some in the church today would have done. If Christian love is more important than any other facet of

the gospel,⁴⁴ what could be worse heresy than refusing to fellowship with other Christians who love the Lord as much as we do, because we do not consider them “good” enough—whatever that is.

In no small measure the future unity and success of the church will depend on whether the open mind or the closed mind eventually prevails. The alternative to being an open minded church will be continuing polarization, trauma, and eventually schism that could lead to two Seventh-day Adventist churches, one for people with open minds and another for people with closed minds. That is the last thing people with open minds would like to see, though closed minds would no doubt furtively welcome it and explain their attitude on the basis that “many a star that we have admired for its brilliancy will then go out in darkness.”⁴⁵ This possibility--by no means as remote as it may seem now--places a burden of responsibility on open minds in the church to be patient and tolerant, in order, if possible, to preserve unity and peace. The closed mind seems to be neither able nor willing to be

Page 9:

patient and tolerant. Schism can happen here as surely as it did in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod some nineteen years ago.⁴⁶

Who then will qualify as a credible Seventh-day Adventist in good and regular standing in the church of tomorrow?--everyone who has a living personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is evident in her or his life, who purposes to live in harmony with the plain teachings of Scripture, who sincerely believes in the fundamental integrity of the Advent Message as a credible witness to the everlasting gospel in our time despite possible differences of opinion on some details of exegesis that may need further study, who participates actively in the life and mission of the church, who maintains a positive, constructive attitude toward the church and remains loyal to it in spite of its mistakes and shortcomings, and finally, one who wants to be an Adventist and who accepts fellow Adventists in good faith, practices the golden rule in relating to them, and is willing to work in harmony with them even if their perspective of truth and duty may differ in some respects from her or his own.

3. Church leaders in the Church of Tomorrow

Instructing His disciples on the basic principle of leadership in the church Jesus said: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”⁴⁷

Jesus personally selected the twelve apostles as charter members of His church and commissioned them as its first leaders. As the church grew it needed additional leaders--deacons and later elders--who were selected and commissioned jointly by the Holy Spirit and the church.⁴⁸ Their service as leaders thus had a divine dimension and a human dimension: in serving the church they were also serving God. On one hand they must be faithful to the principles of the gospel, on the other they must merit the respect and confidence of their fellow church members. They were responsible both to God and to the church for the way in which they conducted themselves and performed their duties. Acceptance by the church did not diminish their responsibility

Page 10:

to God or release them from it, nor did acceptance by the Holy Spirit diminish their responsibility to the church or release them from it. A good soldier must “Satisfy the one who enlisted him.”⁴⁹ So it must be with church leaders today: they are servants of God and the church and must therefore please both God and the church. An awesome responsibility indeed!

If openness is important for church members it is ten-fold more important for church leaders.⁵⁰ In order to serve the church and fulfill their responsibility to it leaders must listen to the church as well as speak to it. Especially will they listen to the consensus judgment of persons with training, experience, and competence in particular areas, and be guided by it in their decision making. Authority must be exercised wisely if it is to be accepted and respected, and wise leaders will earn the respect, confidence, and cooperation of the church by listening attentively to it and respecting its point of view.

In many areas of church life and mission numerous Adventist professional organizations already enable members with specialized training and experience to confer together and form a valid, objective consensus. Such organizations could readily provide church leaders with informed consensus counsel in their respective areas of expertise. In other areas related in one way or another to the church and its mission such organizations do not exist. The leaders of the church would do well to encourage their formation, benefit by their counsel, and make better informed decisions.

4. Communication in the Church of Tomorrow

In order to work together and coordinate their activities people must have access to relevant information and be able to communicate. Members of a marching band could not keep step and rank, or time on their instruments, out of continuous audio-visual communication with their leader and with one another. The success of any group activity requires effective communication.

The subjects of a dictator are expected to function as robots by responding to his requirements automatically, unquestioningly. Communication is one-way; he does the speaking and they do the listening; there is no provision or need for two-way communication on matters of policy because he has no need--or desire--to hear what they may have to say. The same is basically true in a hierarchical form of church government such as that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,

Page 11:

in which there is no grass roots representation above the local conference level. But the gospel thinks of church members as "priests,"⁵¹ not as robots. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ does not mean the surrender of free will and acceptance of the role of a robot.

One of the things the church urgently needs is a higher level of lay responsibility and participation in the decision-making processes of the church at all levels of church administration. Important steps were taken in this direction at the recent General Conference Session in Utrecht. A higher level of well-informed lay participation in the decision-making process will result in a higher level of participation in implementing the decisions made. And in order to participate effectively, these lay persons must have access to all relevant information--on all sides of an issue.

Today, communication within a local conference between the membership and the conference leadership tends to be quite effective. But the present hierarchical structure of the church prevents adequate communication between members and congregations on one hand, and leaders above the local conference level on the other. Instead, communication tends to be monologue rather than dialogue, with upper echelon leaders doing all of the speaking and expecting the members to do all of the listening. Some suggestions in section 7 below, on church structure, would remedy this defect.

Church leaders at all levels, from the local congregation to the General Conference do well to listen attentively, perceptively, and with respect to informed and responsible suggestions by lay persons competent in their respective areas of expertise. All too often, in recent years, upper echelon leaders, instead of listening to informed, responsible suggestions and points of view, turn a deaf ear and silence

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

suggestions and points of view that differ from their own. There is urgent need today for open, two way communication between leaders and members.

The master key to effective communication in the church is openness on the part of church leaders and awareness of their role as servants of the church and of their need to listen to it, especially to the consensus judgment of members with training, experience, and competence in particular areas, as surely as it is their prerogative to speak to the church. Willingness to listen is fully as important for church leaders as it is for church members if they are to cooperate effectively together, and for this reason greater provision must be made for effective two-way communication.

Page 12:

At present little or no provision is made for the responsible, constructive expression of alternative points of view and options, and responsible publications such as Adventist Professional in Australia and Adventist Today and Spectrum in North America, are trying to fill that need. Instead of resenting publications such as these, leaders would do well to listen to the points of view and concern they express as they endeavor, however imperfectly, to fill this important need in the church today. Open, responsible, and informed discussion of all issues is essential to a flourishing church.

More than fifty years ago distinguished Adventist author Le Roy Edwin Froom editorialized in Ministry magazine, which he founded:

“It is through candid discussion, the untrammelled expression of conviction, and the summoning of every available argument and pertinent fact, that the truest and soundest conclusions are reached. A sound position has nothing to fear from investigation. Especially does it court the questions of friends. It is through freedom of discussion that all the facts are brought out. In this way weak points come to light and can be remedied. Repression is the method of the weakling, the refuge of the intolerant. Let freedom of discussion ever prevail in our committees, councils, and conferences.”⁵²

Such discussion is essential to wise decisions, to glad-hearted cooperation with them, to effective participation in the mission of the church, and to the unity of spirit and purpose of the church.

5. Adaptability in the Church of Tomorrow

Adaptability to changing circumstances and needs is essential on a personal level, in a business enterprise--and in the church. Fundamental principles do not change, but rigid adherence to fixed policies and procedures in changing circumstances is at best counterproductive and at worst fatal to an enterprise. Remember the famous Maginot Line the French built after World War I to protect themselves against a future German invasion? Hitler's panzer divisions readily swept around its northern end as if it did not exist! The Maginot Line was a perfect answer to the trench warfare of World War I, but an anomaly and a disaster in the mobile warfare of World War II.

With God “there is no variation due to change.”⁵³ An infinite being with infinite knowledge and wisdom does not need to change, but for us finite

Page 13:

beings with our limited experience and information, change is inevitable. Whether as individuals or collectively as a church, such factors as our inherent limitations coupled with the capacity to learn from experience, together with social and historical change, scientific and archeological discovery, and technological development in the world about us, unavoidably affect not only our customary ways of thinking and doing things but our understanding of the Bible, our formulation of doctrine, and church structure, polity, and policy as well.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Change is inexorable, and failure to recognize the need for it and attempts to resist it usually prove counterproductive. Depending on our individual perspective of life and reality and our degree of openness, change can be either a stimulating or a threatening experience. Permanence gives us a sense of security (we know what we can count on as a basis for thought and action), whereas the prospect of change poses a potential threat to security by confronting us with uncertainty and the need to make adjustments in our thought processes, in relating to the world about us and to one another, and in our concept of reality, duty, and destiny. If gravity, for instance, were to operate intermittently or erratically, at times anchoring us to the floor and at other times bouncing us around on the ceiling like a balloon, we would feel terribly insecure.

With respect for the past and a desire for historical continuity we tend to rely on yesterday's traditional ways of thinking and doing as normative for dealing with today's problems and challenges. But we are now approaching the close of the twentieth century, and some things that were appropriate in the 1890's are out of touch with reality in the 1990's. Fundamental principles do not change, but the way in which they apply in one generation may not be appropriate in the next. "Present truth" in our time may not be exactly what it was a century and a half ago. Much in the world about us and within the church has changed since then, yet we tend to keep on pretending to ourselves that everything can continue as it always has been.⁵⁴

Even after the great disappointment of October 22, 1844 the pioneers, heeding the explicit counsel of Ellen White, expected Christ to come in their time. But they were mistaken again. And if they were mistaken about so vital a matter of faith as the imminence of our Lord's return, how do we know but what they were mistaken about some other things as well? Do we have the courage to face up to the question realistically, or will we opt to bury such

Page 14:

questions as the delayed advent and to rely, instead, on an ever more resolutely reaffirmed tradition? A dedicated Adventist feels a sense of guilt even in recognizing the existence of troublesome questions his or her intellectual honesty raises. Do we have the courage to place such questions on our agenda of unfinished business, or shall we move them to the back burner and pass them on for the church of tomorrow to wrestle with?

Ellen White wrote that "time and place must be considered"⁵⁵ in applying her counsel (on such things as riding bicycles and young women learning to harness horses,⁵⁶ and what passed as psychology and life insurance a century ago) is not relevant today when the circumstances that prompted those counsels no longer exist.⁵⁷

Continuity with the past is important, but it should not blind us to today's realities and needs. Perhaps our neglect to adapt to the facts of life in the contemporary world is an important factor in the slow growth of the church in North America, Australia, Europe, and elsewhere in the Western world. Rapid growth in some parts of the world such as New Guinea reflects the fact that the Advent Message is being perceived there as relevant, whereas slow growth in the Western world reflects the fact that it is not being so perceived here except by minority and underprivileged groups. It may be that in our witness to the world we should place more emphasis on the importance and value of the Adventist way of life in the modern world and less, proportionately at least, on doctrine.

In our adjustment as individuals and as a church, to the present and the future, we need continuity with the past for a sense of identity and security, inasmuch as we are children of our spiritual forefathers. But we also need sanctified wisdom to distinguish between changeless principles and the way in which principles apply in changed circumstances, conditions, and ways of thinking and doing. With a broader perspective of reality, and recognizing that change is inevitable, open-minded people see change as a

prudent way to relate to reality and find it relatively easy to adjust. With their more limited perspective of reality, closed-minded people often find change a threat to their sense of identity and security, and thus traumatic. Whether it be polity, policy, or doctrine (which after all is a human endeavor to restate fundamental Bible truth), the church must be adaptable in order to survive and to fulfill its mission. It must remain open to new vistas of truth, for inflexibility is the precursor of senility and rigor mortis.

Page 15:

The church of tomorrow should encourage leaders and members alike to be open minded and adaptable with respect to all aspects of its life and work. In order to avoid repeating painful experiences of the past and to be true to itself and the legacy of the pioneers, it should conduct its affairs not only in continuity with the past but also with a view to reality in the closing decade of the twentieth century, and needs of the present and future.

6. Church Structure in the Church of Tomorrow

The recent General Conference Session at Utrecht voted and witnessed major changes in the structure of the world church, the full effect of which is yet to be demonstrated.

Long ago we as Seventh-day Adventists set as our primary objective, proclamation of the everlasting gospel "to every nation and tribe and language and people."⁵⁸ That objective envisioned a world church. In the beginning there were no Seventh-day Adventists outside of North America; today, the vast majority of our members live somewhere else. Of the 236 countries of the world, the church is currently operating in 208 with 98 percent of its population. There are only 28 countries, with only two percent of its population where the church is not represented--and Global Mission proposes to remedy that defect by the year 2000.⁵⁹

Utrecht 1995 will go down in history as recognizing the fact that we are, now, the world church our forefathers envisioned. The structural administrative changes voted there recognized and implemented that fact by assigning the eleven world divisions of the church representation at future sessions of the General Conference in proportion to their membership.⁶⁰

The administration of a world church confronts our leaders with unprecedented problems of which none of us have been more than dimly aware. The infinite diversity of cultures and levels of education, concepts of leadership roles, the exercise of authority, and the way in which the church should operate--and now the role of women in the church--all confront us with major challenges.

Can we continue to function as a united world church? What is unity in a world church, and how can it be maintained? Does unity require uniformity, or can there be unity in diversity? Is it reasonable to expect highly trained and experienced fourth, fifth, and sixth generation Adventists, and

Page 16:

first generation members in the developing countries, to agree on church policy? As Utrecht demonstrated, these structural changes provide for recently baptized converts in the developing countries to outvote members with a lifetime of experience in the church. What does that vote bode for the future? Whose church, and what kind of church, is the future world church to be?

The so-called "third world" of developing countries is now in control of the General Conference. By their sheer weight of numbers they are the ones with power and authority. They demonstrated the way in which they propose to exercise that power by their overwhelming vote of 1,481 to 673 not to permit each world division of the church to decide a policy matter such as the ordination of women on the basis of what it considers best for the church in its part of the world. I am not concerned here with the

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

question of ordination, however, important as that may or may not be, but with the far larger question of preserving and nurturing unity in the church, and especially with the fact that those who voted that resounding Nay cited their flawed biblical hermeneutic as their reason for doing so.⁶¹

In Bible times there were two basic forms of civil government: (1) the city-state, in which a city with its nearby villages and countryside constituted an independent political entity that administered its own affairs and was not subject to external control, and (2) the imperial system, in which a king with a good army could control many erstwhile city states. The city state was, in a sense, "Congregational," and the imperial form of government hierarchical.

Scattered throughout the known world, the church of New Testament times had no formal administrative structure above the level of the local congregation with its deacons and elders, yet under the bond of the Holy Spirit and the charismatic leadership of the apostles it was one in spirit and purpose, united by its faith in Jesus Christ and loyalty to Him. The apostolic church consisted of people associated together in local congregations, not an organization and certainly not a hierarchy consisting of deacons, elders, and apostles. Modeled after the Jewish synagogue and resembling the city state, each congregation conducted its own affairs, and inter-church relations and cooperation were voluntary on the part of the congregations involved. In structure and polity the New Testament church was strictly congregational. But look how it grew!

Page 17:

This apostolic arrangement prevailed for approximately three centuries. Younger churches looked to those already established and their leaders for counsel but not for administrative supervision. Hierarchical church government with its centralized control developed as the structural aspect of the great apostasy, a process that began with Emperor Constantine the Great (A.D. 311-337), and was essentially complete by the pontificate of Pope Gregory the Great (A.D. 590-604).⁶²

Constantine made Christianity the official Roman religion and an instrument for maintaining the unity of the Roman Empire. The hierarchical structure of the empire became the model for restructuring the church: as cities and districts within a province were under the administrative control of the provincial governor and the governors were subject to the emperor in Rome, so the Christian congregations of the province came under the administrative control of the bishop or metropolitan of the church in its capital city, and the metropolitan bishops eventually became subject to the bishop of Rome. Historically and structurally the hierarchical form of church government is imperial, not apostolic.

Today there are three basic forms of church polity: congregational, representative, and hierarchical.⁶⁴

In a congregational form of church government (such as the congregations of the Southern Baptist Convention), as in New Testament times, each local congregation is a little administrative island with full authority over, and responsibility for, itself. Cooperation with the Convention and with other Baptist congregations is voluntary.

In a representative form of government many congregations cooperate together through representatives to whom, collectively, they delegate authority to devise ways and means by which to work together for their mutual good as units of a larger whole. Authority flows upward from the local congregations through their representatives to the higher levels of organization, and the leaders serve the church, as in New Testament times and according to the gospel. Most mainline Protestant churches such as Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran bodies follow this basic organizational pattern, usually with congregations electing delegates to each of the higher governing bodies.⁶³

Fully developed representative church government, providing for representatives chosen by local congregations to participate in decision making

Page 18:

and the election of officers at all levels of organization, is a relatively recent development in church polity made possible by modern means of communication and transportation. By this system any number of congregations, at whatever distance from one another, work together to accomplish their mutual goals, as the members of each congregation do in administering local affairs. In the congregational system of the New Testament church members participated in the selection of leaders and governance of the congregation. The representative system extends that same opportunity to the members of many congregations acting corporately.

In a hierarchical form of government there is a supreme authority to which local congregations and their members belong and are subject but in which they have no voice. That supreme authority is "the church"; in and of themselves the people are not "the church" but belong to it as subjects to an absolute monarch who rules by divine right. Authority flows down from the supreme authority to the local congregations and individual members, and the leaders rule the church. The Roman Catholic Church is the preeminent example of this form of government. The pope and the Roman curia are the supreme authority. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church the General Conference is that supreme authority. The hierarchical form of government is incompatible with the servant-leader concept of the gospel and with the priesthood-of-all-believers principle of the Protestant reformation.

The principal reason that led the Eastern Orthodox churches to separate from Rome in A.D. 1054 was their rejection of centralized authority in the papacy. That is also the major reason why they have rejected overtures to reunite with the church of Rome since Vatican Council II.

By etymology, a hierarchy is a form of government conducted by priests as intermediaries between the members and God, vested with His plenary authority and responsible to Him for the people under their jurisdiction. As commonly used the word implies centralized authority and stratified administrative levels, each of which is responsible to the next higher level and all levels to a supreme authority at the apex of the hierarchical pyramid. Whether these administrative levels consist of priests, bishops, cardinals, a curia, and a pope, or pastors, committees, and presidents, is irrelevant. The essential characteristic of a hierarchy is centralized control from which authority flows--downward.

Page 19:

Only the Roman Catholic and Seventh-day Adventist churches qualify as hierarchies.

Adventist Church Polity

In recent years it has been General Conference policy to ever more centralize basic decision-making, authority, and control at that level—the very process that culminated in the papacy fifteen centuries ago. For instance, the model union and local conference constitutions crafted by the General Conference and voted at the 1987 Annual Council give formal expression to this trend,⁶⁴ as do changes voted at the 1995 Spring Meeting (and some proposals that did not come to a vote). Neal Wilson's jocular reference to his vice presidents as "cardinals," at the 1985 session of the General Conference in New Orleans, and references to him as "pope" at the 1987 Spring Meeting of the General Conference, reflect official awareness of this trend. Informed, thinking people who care about the church and are loyal to it are increasingly disenchanted with the present trend toward progressively centralized authority.

On the level of local congregations and conferences the Seventh-day Adventist church is representative, but above that level it operates as a bona fide hierarchy. Above that level there is no provision for participation by representatives chosen by the constituent membership. At union and General

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Conference sessions there are lay representatives from lower echelons of the hierarchy, to be sure, but they are chosen by, and so represent, the hierarchy at those lower levels, not the congregations or their members.

If present Adventist church polity were to become a model for the political structure of the United States, voters would elect their city or county officials, who would elect the governor and other state officials, and who in turn would elect the president and members of Congress. Even Adventist Americans would think it time for another revolution. Such a system would provide a fertile breeding ground for all sorts of political corruption. Little wonder that many thinking Adventists are increasingly disenchanted with the state of affairs in the church today! The Adventist hierarchy is a closed, self-operating, self-perpetuating system in which the church (the people) has no more voice than if it were Roman Catholic rather than Adventist.

Page 20:

Furthermore, the Seventh-day Adventist hierarchy functions as a bureaucracy, which Webster's Third International Dictionary defines as a system of administration characterized by specialization of function that operates according to fixed rules, that has a tendency toward proliferation of administrative units and increased functions, that lacks flexibility, that is indifferent to public opinion, that has a hierarchy of authority, and that refers policy decisions to a superior authority. The Seventh-day Adventist Church qualifies as a bureaucratic hierarchy on each of these counts.

Is the present tendency to strengthen the Adventist hierarchy the direction the church of the future should take?

The structural and administrative changes voted at the 1995 session of the General Conference in Utrecht constituted it a bona fide international organization. In view of the vast social, cultural, economic, literacy, and political diversity in the world church, the time has come for its mature world divisions to become autonomous administrative entities. A mature world division would be defined as one in which all aspects of its mission are in full operation, in which indigenous leadership is fully developed, and which is able to maintain and support itself.

These autonomous world divisions would continue to meet together as the General Conference, to coordinate their continuing relationship with one another, to recommend plans and policies, and to share responsibility for completing their collective mission of establishing the church in parts of the world where it is not yet mature. Instead of administering the work of the church, the General Conference would take on the role of a coordinating body in which the mature world divisions could work together for their mutual well being and for completing their mission to the world. Each mature division would be free to adopt or modify recommendations of this coordinating body, or to decide that they are not best for the church in its part of the world.

7. Doctrine in the Church of Tomorrow

What a church believes and teaches is fundamental to its self-identity, character, and unity. The Seventh-day Adventist Church came into being because its pioneers had clearly defined convictions about what they understood to be "present truth," and the church today is what it is because of what it

Page 21:

believes. A belief system is like the force of gravity, which among other things keeps our feet firmly anchored to planet Earth and enables us to maintain a stable relationship to our environment. If gravity and gravitation suddenly ceased to operate chaos would instantly take over throughout the universe.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Something similar seems imminent when the belief system on which a person--or a church--relies is threatened.

We need to be protective of our fundamental beliefs because of the intellectual and emotional equilibrium and the sense of security and well being our belief system provides. Composed as it is of people, the church likewise tends to feel secure in its belief system. This instinctive protectiveness resembles the protection the autoimmune system of the body provides against intruding foreign organisms and substances, and its tendency to reject organ implants. Autoimmunity is essential to the preservation of life, as AIDS so mortally demonstrates. But in its attempt to protect the body against harm it may also, at times, thwart attempts to preserve life.

So with a personal belief system or that of the church: that which is designed to protect us from believing error may inadvertently prevent us from recognizing and accepting what is true because it is new and strange to us. No belief system is infallible for the simple reason that it reflects a finite, and therefore fallible, understanding of infinite truth. Accordingly, every belief system should remain open to further study, refinement, and revision when more accurate or complete information becomes coercive. To affirm otherwise is to claim the gift of inspiration and to forfeit credibility unless that claim can be substantiated. As individuals and as a church we need objective criteria and a sanctified sense of discrimination by which to evaluate our belief systems and to protect ourselves against the fallacies of preconceived opinion.

Many otherwise logical minds tend to react negatively to unfamiliar concepts, including suggestions that a presumably established belief may be susceptible to more accurate definition or explication, without evaluating them objectively. As a result, differences in understanding the Bible on important points of doctrine easily give rise to differences between church members that may lead to confrontation and alienation. Throughout the history of the Christian church doctrinal differences have resulted in ostracism, persecution, schism, civil strife, and war between nations.

Page 22:

There is a vast difference between studying the Bible exegetically—in an endeavor to learn what the inspired writers, guided by the Holy Spirit, intended their words to mean--and studying it apologetically in search of proof for what we already believe, whether right or wrong. There is all the difference in the world between listening attentively and receptively for the voice of the Lord as we read His Word, and inadvertently mistaking the echo of our own finite opinions as His voice.

"Present truth" in the wake of the great disappointment of 1844 when our illustrious forefathers were expecting Christ's return momentarily, within weeks or months at most, is not necessarily truth in its fulness for us today, a century and a half later than they expected that awesome event. Had Jesus returned when they expected Him their perspective of present truth would have been adequate. But He did not come then, and the world, the church, and our perspective of history and the Bible are much different from theirs. May it be that we, like the religious leaders of Christ's day, have become so bound by tradition--by what our forefathers understood Him to be saying to them--that we cannot hear what He wants to say to us in our time?

Our finite perception of infinite truth summons us as individuals and collectively as a church to an ongoing quest for an ever more accurate and complete understanding of it. We are unfaithful to the Author of truth unless we enter upon a continuing quest for an ever more accurate and complete understanding of revealed truth. One of our major doctrinal needs is to distinguish between that which is explicit in Scripture, and that which is not. Church doctrine should be limited to that which is explicit in the Bible. Beyond that, the church may set forth other points of belief. But we should affirm as the teaching of the Bible only that which the Bible plainly teaches. That which is explicit is central; that

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

which is not explicit is peripheral. The church is right to insist on acceptance of that which is explicit, but it should permit diversity with respect to that which is not.

Probably most Adventists consider the writings of Ellen White an infallible interpretation of Scripture. As a matter of fact much of her use of the Bible is homiletical--applying Bible principles, out of context, to our time. To construe her homiletical comment as exegesis of what the inspired writers intended their words to mean does a gross injustice to both the Bible and Ellen White. She repeatedly refused- to let her writings decide differences of opinion as to the meaning of a passage of Scripture.⁶⁵ The church

Page 23:

of tomorrow will recognize and appreciate Ellen White as God's appointed messenger to the church in our time and respect her disclaimer to being an infallible interpreter of the Bible. There is no valid reason why we should claim for her more that she claimed for herself. One thing is certain: in order to remain credible to informed people of other faiths (and our own), the church of tomorrow must affirm as the teaching of the Bible only that which the Bible itself plainly teaches, as determined by sound principles of exegesis--or frankly admit that it places Ellen White above the Bible. Recognition of her true role will increase the respect of informed Adventists for her and remove a major barrier to informed non-Adventists accepting the Advent Message.

As individuals, church members have an individual responsibility to study the Bible for themselves. The church has a corporate responsibility to provide its members with a normative understanding of the Bible based on the consensus judgment of those best qualified by training and experience to provide that information, those who have devoted their lives to an accurate understanding and explication of Scripture. The church should ask them to form a professional organization similar to more than a score of other Adventist professional organizations, in which they can work together in resolving questions of Bible interpretation and doctrine on the basis of sound hermeneutical principles.⁶⁶ The church should have confidence in their consensus judgment as the most reliable biblical, theological, and doctrinal information available. "In an abundance of counsellors there is safety."⁶⁷

The church of tomorrow will recognize the need for continual growth in its understanding of the Bible and will provide for that growth. It will resist the temptation to think itself rich and increased in its understanding, as if it already knew everything worth knowing. "There are mines of truth yet to be discovered."⁶⁸ On a number of subjects the church has not yet explored all of the information the Bible provides. The church of tomorrow should seek consensus on a number of questions that continue to absorb time and attention, divert it from its primary mission to its own members and to the world, and have resulted in intermittent debate and trauma.

If the church of tomorrow finds a more mature and responsible way to relate to biblical, theological, and doctrinal questions, tension on such

Page 24:

matters will be reduced to a minimum. At the same time it will realize that so long as we are human we will probably never come to the place that we see everything exactly alike, and will learn to live at peace with differences of opinion and to respect the integrity of those whose perspective of truth and reality may differ in some respects from our own. We will learn to be patient with one another, willing to listen attentively and with respect to one another, in honor preferring one another.⁶⁹ United in spirit despite these differences we will go forward a united church to complete the mission to which God has called us. We will find that perfect unity for which Christ prayed.

8. Witness by the Church of Tomorrow

Jesus' gospel witness to the people of His time is the perfect model for the church to follow today. A perceptive analysis of the content of what He said, the form in which He presented it, the character of His listening audience, and the attendant circumstances reveals the underlying principles of His method of witness to the kingdom of heaven.⁷⁰ A similar analysis of what He did (His miracles) makes evident that it was an integral part of His witness, fully as much as its verbal aspect.

The theme of Jesus' public ministry was "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."⁷⁰

The "kingdom" of which Jesus spoke was "not from this world."⁷¹ It consisted of two aspects: divine principles motivating the hearts and lives of human beings here and now⁷² and a future kingdom they will "inherit" in which He reigns as King.⁷³ Entrance into the kingdom consists of changing one's mind (Greek *metanoieite*, "repent") and accepting the "good news" as a present reality in one's life. This acceptance consists of loving God with one's entire being, and relating to other people with selfless care and concern for their well being and happiness.⁷⁴

Jesus' public witness to the kingdom of heaven consisted of an exposition of how its principles operate in the lives of those who "believe," as set forth at length in the Sermon on the Mount⁷⁵ and the Sermon by the Sea.⁷⁶ He made the abstract principles concrete by short narratives involving familiar episodes, or parables; in fact, says Matthew, "Without a parable he told them nothing."⁷⁷ The subject matter of His public

Page 25:

preaching and teaching was practical, not theoretical. It was designed to help people understand and relate to their Father in heaven, to other people, and to the problems of life. It did not consist of what we refer to as doctrines, or of an exposition of Bible prophecy. And people listened to Him "with delight,"⁷⁸ for "never has anyone spoken like this" and "he taught them as one having authority"⁷⁹

A major aspect of Jesus' ministry was what He did for people, by taking a personal interest in them and their daily problems. He entered into their personal lives and made their lives better. He cared. These "works" or miracles were an important factor in leading people to believe in Him and His message. "No one can do these signs that you do," Nicodemus acknowledged, "apart from the presence of God."⁸⁰ In what Jesus did for people He demonstrated what He wants us to do. A personal interest in people, in making life better for them in this present world, is a powerful witness in leading them to "believe in the good news" of divine principles operating in their lives, now and in the hereafter.

May it be that the present format of our public evangelism and our "Revelation Seminars" does not reflect the way in which Jesus bore witness to the good news? What would happen if we, today, witnessed to the good news like He did? Jesus reserved what we refer to as the doctrines, and an exposition of the prophecies, for people who were already following Him. When the disciples asked Jesus why He taught as He did, in parables, He replied, "To you it has been given to know the secrets [or "mysteries"] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them [people who were not yet following Him] it has not been given."⁸¹ For instance, Jesus' exposition of the prophecies of Daniel was made to the disciples. It was not part of a public address.

Why is it that our message meets with such acceptance in third world developing countries, and primarily among the underprivileged people in Western, developed countries? In short, it is because we introduce them to a better way of life in this present world. We offer them hope for improving their lives here and now, like Jesus did in the long ago. I would like to suggest that the Adventist way of life has much to offer everyone, in our countries and at all levels of society as well as in the less privileged

areas of the world. Maybe we should deemphasize doctrine and prophecy in our public evangelism, emphasize the things Jesus said and did in His public ministry, and reserve the doctrines and prophecy (again as He did) for

Page 26:

people after they have accepted Jesus into their lives. In the church of tomorrow this format for our proclamation of the everlasting gospel and the soon return of our Lord could make a real difference in the success of our witness to the world. It would include all that Jesus said and did in His public ministry, about a better life here and now, and a future life in the hereafter.

9. Unity in the Church of Tomorrow

Interceding with the Father on behalf of the Twelve and “those who will believe in me through their word,” Jesus prayed “that they may all be one.” Unity in the church is a vital aspect of its witness, “So that the world may believe.”⁸²

The General Conference is the unifying factor in our world church today. On the other hand, such things as the great diversity of cultures, religious concepts, ideas about church governance, educational levels, economic status, racial bias, and political concepts all tend to be divisive factors. The restructuring of the General Conference and its world divisions proposed in section 6, “Church Structure in the Church of Tomorrow,” suggests a way to resolve these tensions in a way that would preserve true unity. That proposal is based on the concept that unity does not require uniformity, but that the best way to preserve true unity is to provide for unity in diversity.

Unity construed as uniformity is reminiscent of the ancient Greek tyrant Procrustes, who operated the first motel on the road between Athens and Corinth. He provided his wayfaring guests with an iron bed that fitted him perfectly, and required that each of his guests fit it perfectly also. In order to help them comply with this requirement he equipped the bed with a winch to stretch the anatomy of those shorter than he was, and a guillotine to amputate whatever part of a person’s anatomy did not fit the bed.

As a matter of fact, one of the most effective ways to fracture unity is to impose uniformity! Such requirements are counterproductive. To paraphrase my old friend Alfred. Lord Tennyson, The tie that binds too tightly snaps of its own accord.⁸³ It is a mark of Christian maturity to be willing for other people to see and do things differently from the way we see and do them—including their lifestyle and their way of understanding the Bible—yet to respect their integrity as just as dedicated followers of Jesus

Page 27:

Christ as we are. True unity under the bond of the Holy Spirit transcends sincere differences of opinion in regard to the interpretation of Scripture, as well as all racial, cultural, social, economic, and other differences. The important thing is not whether I think you are eligible to be a church member or to enter the kingdom of heaven, but whether you want to be, and consider yourself, one.

The church of tomorrow will recognize that true unity does not consist of imposed, mindless, robot-like uniformity of thought and action, but of voluntary unity in diversity under the aegis of the Spirit. God respects our individual differences; why should we not respect them? St. Augustine's apt formula for Christian unity is as true today as it was when he wrote fifteen centuries ago: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity; in all things, charity"—with only that which the Word of God explicitly enjoins considered essential. On this basis we can attain to the unity for which Christ prayed and for which He bestowed the Holy Spirit—“until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.”⁸⁴

Epilogue

The key question for the church of today as it anticipates tomorrow is whether it will choose to be open or closed. How it answers this question may very well determine whether we can continue as one church, or whether it will be necessary to have two Seventh-day Adventist churches, one for people with open minds and another for people with closed minds. Will members have the opportunity to participate actively in its life and mission as volitional, creative, responsible moral beings, or will they be expected to function more or less as robots? The gospel, the Golden Rule, and the two great principles of the law of Christ require openness toward God and one's fellow church members, openness between leaders and members, open communication, openness to change when change is needed, openness in the governance of the church, openness in the interpretation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine. All may still be "one" despite differences of opinion and practice if we respect the other person's God-given right to think differently and to be different.

The alternative to an open mind is a closed mind--legalistic, judgmental regimentation of other people, aspiring to be mind and conscience for them

Page 28:

and to control their thinking and conduct. If the closed mind ultimately prevails the church will continue in the direction it has been taking over the past twenty-five years or so, and will become ever more centralized, paternalistic, authoritarian, and hierarchical. Communication between leaders and members will continue to be monologue. Tradition rather than Scripture will continue to determine church policy and doctrine, and there will be periodic lapses into doctrinal crisis. Leaders will rule the church instead of serving it, and church members will follow their bidding like robots. Open discussion of policy alternatives and an objective study of the Bible will continue to be considered subversive. Administrators will not seek the consensus of persons trained and experienced in particular areas or the preferences of the church at large, and administrative decisions will be considered sacrosanct.

If, on the other hand, the open mind eventually prevails the church of tomorrow will be people-centered, a truly caring church in practice as well as in theory. It will be representative at all administrative levels. Leaders will listen to the church as attentively as they expect it to listen to them. Communication will be informed, constructive, responsible dialogue. Polity in such areas as business management, education, and theology will reflect the consensus judgment of persons with training and experience in their respective areas of expertise, expressed through their respective professional organizations. Doctrine will consist of that which the Bible explicitly teaches; that which is not explicit will be considered peripheral and open to diversity of opinion and further study. Ellen White will be considered God's special messenger to the church, and her writings primarily a homiletical application of Bible principles to our time, but not exegesis determining what the Bible writers intended their words to convey, to people of their time.

Of one thing we can be sure: our heavenly Father- will welcome home many prodigal children whom we, like the elder brother in the parable, are reluctant to accept as brethren and sisters in good and regular standing. But if we must look forward to spending eternity with them in heaven, why should we be reluctant or unwilling to fellowship with them here for a few short years? As a matter of fact, our holier-than-thou attitude here might very well prove to be the proverbial last straw to frighten some of them from

Page 29:

wanting to share eternity with people like us. Solemn thought! On that fateful day "When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him," and "Separates the sheep from the goats," do

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

we want to hear Him say to us, "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. . . Truly, I say to you, if you did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it not to me." ⁸⁵

Many years ago a plaque on the wall a few inches above the head of the justice of the peace in St. Helena, California, read:

When you get to heaven you will surely find some people whose presence there surprises you. But do not stare and do not ask how they happened to get in. Some people may be surprised to see you there.

At the close of our little church school in Shanghai, China, one day many years ago our teacher, Miss Lucy Andrus of esteemed memory, asked children who had been tormenting schoolmates on the way home to remain a few minutes longer than the others. The day before, it so happened, a boy somewhat older, heavier, and stronger than I had taken me down and sat on me in the middle of unpaved Ningkuo Road, right in front of the China Division headquarters. I probably deserved it. The following afternoon as I rose to leave Miss Andrus reminded me that I, too, had been annoying some of the other children after school. Mea culpa!

Like the Pharisee in the parable of the two men at prayer in the temple we may be tempted to thank the Lord that we are not sinners--like that proud Pharisee! How much more appropriate to unite in prayer with the tax collector, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" and then to sing the words of that old spiritual, "It's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

Let us open wide the windows of the church heavenward and let the lifegiving, invigorating atmosphere of our Father's love and openness toward us motivate all of our relations with one another, and let us open wide our minds, our hearts, our lives, and our church to receive and reflect it.

Page 30:

END NOTES

1. Ellen G. White, Life Sketches of Ellen G. White, p. 196 = Testimonies for the Church, p. 10.
- 2 . Abraham Lincoln, "A House Divided." A speech at Springfield, IL, June 16, 1858, in A. H. Thorndike, ed., Modern Eloquence, vol XI, p. 227, New York, Modern Eloquence Corporation, 1932.
3. John 14:3; Matthew 24.
4. In the context of Matthew 23:31-39 "this generation" refers specifically to the generation of people then living (verse 36). The fact that the New Testament writers all so understood Jesus' remark in Matthew 24:34 (as cited in Notes 5 through 9) confirms this conclusion.
5. 1 Peter 4:7.
6. 1 John 2:18; Revelation 1:1, 3; 3:11; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20.
7. James 5:7-9.
8. 1 Corinthians 7:29; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Titus 2:11.
9. Hebrews 10:37.
10. Le Roy Edwin Froom, Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers.
11. J. Barton Payne, The Imminent Appearing of Christ, Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing eo. I 1962, 191 pp. I p. 106.
12. White, Early Writings, pp. 58, 64.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

13. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, p. 14.
14. Matthew 24:48.
15. Luke 19:13.
16. Titus 2:13.
17. Ephesians 5:27.
18. Acts 24:14; 19:9, 23; cf. 16:17; 18:26.
19. John 4:6; Matthew 7:14.
20. Matthew 16:16-18.
21. John 1:12; 3:16.
22. John 17:11, 21, 23; Galatians 3:26-28.
23. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.
24. Ephesians 5:23-30; 1 Corinthians 12:12-21.
25. Genesis 2:24.
26. Ephesians 5:25.
27. John 3:16; Hebrews 12:2, TEV.
28. John 15: 13.
29. 1 John 4:19.
30. 1 Corinthians 12:27, 20; cf. Romans 12:4.
31. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:25.
32. Ephesians 2:19, TEV; 3:15.
33. Cf. Matthew 22:38-40.
34. 1 Corinthians 13:1-4.
35. Philippians 2:3-4.
36. Matthew 7:1-5.
37. Cf. 2 Corinthians 10:12.
38. Cf. Matthew 5:43-48.
39. Matthew 7:12.
40. Acts 10:34; cf. Matthew 5:43-48.
41. Matthew 7:3.
42. John 21:21-22.
43. Galatians 2:11-14, 9.
44. 1 Corinthians 13:13.

Page 31:

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

45. White, Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 81.
46. Raymond F. Cottrell, "A Church in Crisis" (the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Adventist Review, 154:4-5, January 13, 1977 and the four following issues. The editorial note to the series on p. 3 notes that events in the Synod are "of more than ordinary interest and concern to Seventh-day Adventists, because similar issues and pseudo-issues are developing in our own church." See Cottrell, "Architects of Crisis: A Decade of Obscurantism," for a detailed summary of such developments in our own church (an unpublished paper).
47. Matthew 20:25-28.
48. See Acts 5:3-6; 13:2-4; 1 Timothy 3:2-10; Titus 1:5-9.
49. 2 Timothy 2:4.
50. 1 Thessalonians 4:12.
51. 1 Peter 2:19.
52. Froom, "Editorial Postscript," Ministry, 18:45, October 1945.
53. Malachi 3:6.
54. 2 Peter 3:4.
55. White, Selected Messages, Book 1, p. 57.
56. White, Testimonies, vol. 8, pp. 51-52, 66; Education, pp. 216-217.
57. White, Testimonies, vol. 1, pp. 290ff, 549-551.
58. Revelation 14:6-7.
59. General Conference, "Statistical Report for 1994," p. 42.
60. For an index to constitutional changes voted at Utrecht, see General Conference Bulletin 10, p. 29 (Adventist Review, 172:35, July 20-27, 1995).
61. General Conference Bulletin 7, pp. 23-31 (Adventist Review, 172:54, December 1995).
62. V. Norskov Olsen, Papal Supremacy and American Democracy, (Loma Linda, Loma Linda university Press, 1987) 190 pp., pp. 4-13, 19-31, 67-76.
63. Cottrell, "Varieties of Church Structure," Spectrum 14:40-43. Olsen, pp. 110-120.
64. 1987 Annual Council, 87:501-509, October 12, 1987.
65. White, Evangelism, p. 256; Selected Messages, Book 3, p. 33; Book 1, p. 164.
66. Cottrell, The Eschatology of Daniel, Chapter 22, "Group Dynamics at Glacier View."
67. Proverbs 10: 14.
68. White, Testimonies, vol. 5, p. 704.
69. Romans 12:10.
70. Mark 1:15.
71. John 8:36.
72. Matthew 5:19; 19:7, 24.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

73. Matthew 25:31, 34.

74. Matthew 22:37-39; 25:34-40.

75. Matthew 5 to 7.

76. Matthew 13.

77. Matthew 13:34.

78. Mark 12:37.

79. John 7:46; Matthew 7:29.

80. John 3:2.

81. Matthew 13:10-11.

82. John 17:11, 20-21.

83. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Last Tournament," in "Idylls of the King," The Poetical Works of Alfred, Lord, Tennyson, London/ Macmillan and co., 1911, 647 pp., p. 454.

84. Ephesians 4:13.

85. Matthew 25:34-46.

OPENNESS IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Raymond F. Cottrell

Ideally the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a community of people who have, individually, entered into a faith relationship with Jesus Christ, for whom it is a credible, convincing witness to the everlasting Gospel, and who participate in its life and mission. As "members" of "the body of Christ" they constitute "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." Their role in salvation history is to "proclaim the mighty acts" of Him who called them "out of darkness into his marvellous light." They are "the flock of God."¹

Jesus Christ is the "great" or "chief shepherd of the sheep," "head over all things for the church"; the Holy Spirit is His surrogate; and the human leaders He appointed "to tend the flock." and gave "oversight" over it are His undershepherds.²

Called and commissioned by Christ Himself, The Twelve and later the Apostle Paul were in a unique position as leaders of the apostolic church. Their assistants and successors were chosen by the church and confirmed by the Holy Spirit. Those, and others later appointed to serve individual congregations, were thus accountable to God and to the church. Leaders in the church today are similarly accountable to both God and the church, and this dual accountability, with its divine and human dimensions, requires them to be open to both. In a sense, they serve two masters--which may, on occasion, make their service difficult.³

Christ Himself enunciated the cardinal principle of leadership in the church when He said to the disciples: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."⁴

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

According to the gospel, the essential role of a church leader is therefore service, not control, and "one who serves" both God and the church in a way acceptable to both must be open to both and listen as attentively and

Page 2:

perceptively--to both--as he or she wishes to be listened to. As in all things, leaders must set an example of openness and willingness to listen if they wish "the flock" to be open and listen to them. Two-way openness and willingness to listen are essential to the unity of the church and the success of its mission. For this, Christ prayed "that they may all be one so that the world may believe that you have sent me." 5

This fundamental leadership principle applies to every church leader at every level of church administration. It is increasingly important at successively higher echelons of leadership, as more and more members are affected by the decisions they make, and of supreme importance at the highest level. Accordingly, it is appropriate to consider the way in which presidents of the General Conference have, or have not, demonstrated openness over the past half century or so. They are, presumably, examples for all of the rest of us to follow. The following six case studies provide both positive and negative illustrations of openness.

Case Studies of Open and Closed Minds

The following six case studies of open- and closed-minded leadership at the General Conference (GC) level are matters of personal observation and experience. Hopefully, my evaluation is objective. The focus of my own service to the church has been an accurate understanding and exposition of the Bible in the sense the inspired writers intended; I have never aspired to administrative duties. It has been my privilege to serve the church for forty-seven years prior to retirement and eighteen years since, from 1930 to the present, and during these sixty-five years to observe the administrative style of six GC presidents, often in an intimate working relationship with them. Four of the six were personal friends of mine, and one of them ordained me to the gospel ministry.

James L. McElhaney (1936-1950). Five weeks or so before the Enola Gay dropped the first atom bomb on Hiroshima I was sitting with a GC committee chaired by Elder McElhaney, at which Carlyle B. Haynes in his usual vigorous style presented a proposal of importance to the Medical Cadet Corps, of which he was director. With equal vigor others on the committee took exception to the proposal, and a heated debate continued for more than an hour. Without participating in the debate, Elder McElhaney listened intently. When all had

Page 3:

been said that everyone wanted to say, he quietly summarized the points on both sides of the issue and suggested what he considered to be the best solution to the problem. Someone moved his proposed solution, which the committee voted unanimously without further debate.

That resolution of a knotty problem with impressive evidence on both sides testified eloquently to the respect all had for Elder McElhaney as a fair, open-minded, impartial administrator whose custom it was to listen attentively and perceptively to all of the evidence.

William H. Branson (1950-1954). Immediately following the 1950 session of the General Conference in San Francisco, the college Bible teachers of North America met at nearby Pacific Union College for their quadrennial "Section Meeting," at which they discussed matters of mutual interest relating to their teaching role. One of the papers presented and discussed was how to deal with controversial subjects in the classroom. I suggested to Dr. Vernon Hendershot, dean of the Theological Seminary and chair of the meeting, a questionnaire indicating their present understanding of a number of topics on which there

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

had been noteworthy differences of opinion. Tallying the responses, it became evident that, in so far as the Bible teachers were concerned, those differences had all evaporated! Someone proposed that we sing the doxology, which we did with gusto, and a prayer of thanksgiving.

Learning of this questionnaire, and that the Bible teachers unanimously espoused a position on the battle of Armageddon contrary to the one he held, Elder Branson issued a four-page letter warning Adventist VIPs around the world against the Bible Research Fellowship (BRF), professional organization of college Bible teachers, which was in no way involved, without conferring with its officers or sending them a copy. Letters of protest from officers of the Fellowship might as well not have been written. Elder Branson's mind was completely closed and impervious to further input.⁶

Fifteen years before that Branson had denounced W. W. Prescott--a highly respected church editor, Bible scholar, and administrator for half a century--to colleagues at the GC because Prescott had confided in him an interpretation of Daniel 8:14 different from the one he himself held. In 1953 Branson blacklisted a Bible Research Committee article on biblical hermeneutics the editor of Ministry had scheduled for the February issue--because, he said, it would disqualify him from studying the Bible in the way Bible scholars do!

Page 4:

Reuben R. Figuhr (1954-1966). As GC president. R. R. Figuhr was a paragon of openness and sound judgment. This openness became notably evident during the Martin-Barnhouse discussions (1955-1957) and the process of preparing the book Questions on Doctrine for publication. Mediating between those for and those against publication, he demonstrated qualities of leadership that earned the confidence and respect of even those who dissented from his decision to proceed with publication. His re-election for two additional terms was a tribute to his openness. With nostalgia those who participated in that episode of church history look back to his administration as a model of openness.

Robert H. Pierson (1966-1979). Elder Pierson was a deeply committed Christian and Seventh-day Adventist. In personal relations he was always gracious and kind. As an administrator, however, he invariably implemented his personal convictions with messianic fervor, irrespective of counsel.

Graduating from Southern Junior College in 1932, Pierson entered the ministry and served cum laude in three overseas divisions from 1936 to his election as GC president in 1966. With a limited education, and being absent from North America for practically all of that time, he was almost completely out of touch with progress the church in North America had made during those years. He made it a major objective of his administration to restore the status quo as it had been when he began his successful tour of duty overseas.

Deeply and sincerely suspicious that the Bible scholars of the church were leading it astray, he repeatedly stated that church administrators and not its Bible scholars should be responsible for the corporate biblical and theological processes of the church. Implementing this policy, the 1969 Spring Meeting of the GC removed Bible scholars en masse from the Biblical Research Committee (now Biblical Research Institute) and staffed it with administrators! Emphatic protest from the Theological Seminary prevented actual implementation of this policy, but similar results were soon achieved by adding a large number of administrators and other non-Scholars to the committee, and appointing persons without either training or experience in biblical studies to direct it. He applied a similar policy in several other areas of church life and endeavor.

With a mind hermetically sealed and immune to experienced counsel, he surrounded himself with assistants and advisors who thought as he did. The closed-mind climate in the church over the past twenty-nine years is a direct

Page 5:

result of Elder Pierson's well intentioned but mistaken policy, and legion are those who have suffered as a result. This climate has been an important factor, also, in not a few dedicated church members channelling their tithe and other contributions to the church, to projects of their own choosing.⁸

Neal C. Wilson (1979-1990). The Desmond Ford affair and the Glacier View conference of the Sanctuary Review Committee, coincident with Elder Pierson's early retirement in the autumn of 1979, was a direct product of the closed-mind policy of the preceding decade--which Elder Wilson inherited and perpetuated.

As planned and conducted, the Glacier View conference was a prime example of closed minds in operation. The issue being biblical and doctrinal, administration invited Bible scholars to participate, apparently in the belief that they would support administration in finding Ford in error. The fact that a majority of the Bible scholars did not do so was evident in several ways:

On Monday morning, for instance, in Study Group 2 to which I was assigned, 12 of the 16 speeches by Bible scholars supported Ford's position, but the GC chairperson announced that the consensus of the group was against his position. In the plenary session that afternoon 11 of the 15 speeches by Bible scholars supported Ford. The Consensus Statement voted at the close of conference agreed with Ford on five major points of interpretation and noted that two other major points required further study. The two questionnaires conducted at the beginning and end of the conference found 34 percent of all of the delegates disagreeing at least to some extent with Article 23 of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the church, "Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary," and some of them almost completely.⁹

The years following Glacier View were marked by severe witch hunting on the campuses of Andrews University and Southern College--and elsewhere--as a direct result of the closed-minded policy that prevailed during those years.

Robert S. Folkenberg (1990-). On Sabbath afternoon, April 4, 1994 Adventist Today conducted a panel discussion on Adventist Creationism in Loma Linda. Five of the six panelists are, or had been, associated with the Geoscience Research Institute, and one is an anthropologist at the University of California, Riverside. A more competent, responsible, and prestigious panel could not have been assembled anywhere to address the topic under consideration. All are Seventh-day Adventists in good and regular standing, and all

Page 6:

can properly be described as creationists. The panel proceeded with dignity and mutual respect on the part of both panelists and the audience.

The first three panelists were asked to summarize problems in the observed phenomena of the natural world that appear to conflict with the Bible account of creation, and the reasons that led the GC to establish the Geoscience Research Institute in 1957. The second three were asked to relate what Geoscience has done and is doing to correlate these phenomena with the Bible account of creation.

Forty-eight or so hours later Elder Folkenberg's weekly newsletter distributed to Adventist VIPs around the world reported that the "Historicity of Scripture and the Genesis account of creation carne under attack last Sabbath afternoon, not by secular forces but by two retired church workers, Raymond Cottrell [sic] . . . and Richard Hammill . . . during a panel debate in California." This report was altogether fictitious. In no sense was the panel "a debate." None of the panelists "attack[ed]" "the Genesis account of creation." Cottrell functioned exclusively as moderator and at no point commented on the subject under discussion, much less participated in the reported "attack."

Upon receiving copies of this fictitious report Hammill and Cottrell each wrote two letters of protest to Elder Folkenberg, and a fifth letter jointly. To this day he has not responded to our five letters or even acknowledged receiving them, much less taken any measures to rectify the error. Instead, his newsletter two weeks later reiterated his criticism!¹⁰

What grade will future open minded Adventist historians assign such closed-minded conduct? Recent incidents continue to reflect the symptoms of a closed mind in operation.

An Analysis of Closed-minded Leadership

The preceding section of this article has illustrated the problem of closed-mindedness in top echelon church leadership, but by no means is the problem limited to that leadership level. A specific and accurate diagnosis of the problem, and a careful analysis of the factors that contribute to it, are prerequisite to prescribing an effective remedy. A syndrome with at least seven major components is responsible for the closed mind set of some leaders of the world church at every level of church administration:

Page 7:

1. Less well informed minds tend to feel insecure and are often pre-disposed to being closed, especially when confronted by facts and situations with which they are not familiar and to which they are unsure how to relate.
2. Advancement to greater responsibility does not automatically equip a person with the knowledge and experience necessary to deal effectively and promptly with problems unique to that office. The so-called "Peter principle" tends to take control when a person is projected into a position that requires information, expertise, and good judgement beyond that which he or she already possesses. The only escape from that leadership black hole is by way of an open mind, the capacity to learn, and willingness to adapt to the requirements of that particular task.
3. The phenomenal growth of the church around the world in recent years inevitably confronts world leaders with increasing social, cultural, educational, economic, doctrinal, and political diversity that challenges the wisest minds in the endeavor to preserve unity in the church. A closed mind usually resorts to legislated uniformity and ever more rigid control as a panacea for preserving unity. In contrast, true unity is unity of spirit and purpose, under the aegis of the Holy Spirit. Attempts to impose and enforce uniformity tend to foment disunity, and prove counterproductive.
4. The hierarchical structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—unique among Protestant churches-- contributes in a major way to closed-minded leadership. Aspirations for acceptance and upper mobility within the hierarchy tend to lock its members into a mood of responsibility to the hierarchy rather than of providing the church at large with genuine servant leadership. Preservation of the hierarchy becomes an end in itself. Inasmuch as, in a hierarchy, authority automatically flows down from the top, leaders at lower levels of administration tend to feel primarily responsible to the hierarchy rather than to their respective constituencies, and to close their minds to the concerns and suggestions of those constituencies.
5. Most Protestant churches have only one intermediate administrative level between individual congregations and their highest governing bodies, or in a few instances at most two. Through their local congregations, members have the opportunity to participate in the election of officers at all levels and in the formulation of church policy. The five-tiered hierarchical structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, from the local congregation to the General Conference, tends to isolate upper echelon leaders (who make the

Page 8:

major policy decisions) farther and farther from the concerns and collective wisdom of the members, and thereby thwarts the priesthood-of-all-believers principle.

6. Whereas secular society has found a separation of legislative, executive, and judicial powers essential to responsible government, the hierarchical system combines these powers in one group of persons at each level of the hierarchy. Those who formulate policy are the ones who administer it and who sit in judgment over their conduct when questions regarding it arise.

7. Some leaders suffer from a messianic complex. Thinking they have a divine mandate to lead the church in a particular direction, they turn a deaf ear to any counsel that would divert them from their predetermined course. These, and doubtless other, factors contribute to closed-minded leadership and a closed-minded church, foster disunity, alienate the confidence and participation of thoughtful members, and hinder the accomplishment of its mission.

A Governance Model for the Twenty-first Century Church

By 1901 the church model Seventh-day Adventists adopted in 1863 had become obsolete as the result of changes that took place over the intervening thirty-eight years. The major restructuring of 1901 has served the church well throughout the twentieth century. However, vast changes that have taken place, both in the church and in the world, since 1901 suggest the need for another major restructuring to prepare it for century twenty-one of the Christian era: ¹¹

The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways, |
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world. ¹²

Or, we might add, the church. The following tentative model of an open world church adequate to cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century is designed to enable it to fulfill its mission as effectively as possible. In order to do so the church must, among other things, restore the climate of openness that prevailed prior to 1966. Such a climate is essential to wholehearted cooperation between members and leaders. It is essential to unity.

Page 9:

This model is designed to bring members and leaders closer together in the planning and conduct of its mission.

1. The roles, structure, and function of the General Conference and its world divisions will change. A distinction will be made between mature and immature divisions, with maturity defined as a church fully developed and operating in all aspects of its ministry and mission, an experienced indigenous leadership, and full self-support. Mature divisions would be completely self-governing. For them, the General Conference would serve as a coordinator, and its voted policies would be recommendations subject to acceptance, modification, or non-implementation, as each mature division considered appropriate in its part of the world. For immature world divisions the present relationship between them and the General Conference would remain substantially as it is at present, and all world divisions would cooperate together in developing a mature church in immature divisions. Only in funding the maturation of the church in such divisions--as voted by all divisions in counsel together--would the mature divisions bind themselves to comply with General Conference recommendations.

2. As stated above, each mature world division would be completely self-governing and responsible for its internal structure and operation. Within a mature division there would be only one administrative

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

level between its local congregations and the division leadership--the local conference—for both of which the local congregations would be the constituency. Through their elected representatives they would participate in the election of both local conference and division officers and in the formulation of division policy and objectives. There would be a division of powers, with a clear distinction between legislative, administrative, and adjudicatory functions.

3. To assure the church of open-minded, competent leadership, and with the constituency and incumbent leaders working together, there would be an official, voted job description of the requirements for, and responsibilities of, each elected and appointed conference and division officer. It would remain open for needed revision. Minimum qualifications for each office would be clearly stated and would be normative for nominating or appointing a person to office. Each division and each of its conferences would elect a knowledgeable and experienced "Senior statesman" known and respected for openness, fairness, and sound judgment to conduct an orientation class for

Page 10:

all elected or appointed personnel, following each election. The curriculum would consist of Christian principles of leadership, leadership qualities and relationships, and church polity.

This streamlining of the church for the twenty-first century would result in a high level of openness and unity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This openness and unity would bring members and leaders closer together in the fulfillment of its mission. It would eliminate tensions to which present church polity contributes. It would result in a church to which talented, responsible people would want to belong, in whose fellowship and service they would be happy to participate, and in a higher and more effective level of participation. It would make the church more relevant within the social-cultural milieu of every part of the world, and thus hasten the fulfillment of the mission Jesus Christ entrusted to it.¹¹

With fervid messianic zeal over the past twenty-nine years a vocal minority advocating a sectarian version of orthodox Adventism has created a closed, fortress-minded climate in the church reminiscent of the John Birch society several decades ago and Torquemada's Spanish inquisition several centuries ago. Its goal is a monolithic, authoritarian church based on an ersatz fundamentalist ideology. It refuses to dialogue in an endeavor to develop a consensus that can preserve unity. Instead, it has polarized the church and fractured its unity. Unless there is a decided change in the present course of events the result will be increasing polarization, disunity, eventual schism, and two Adventist churches--one for people with closed minds and another for those with open minds.¹³

Openmindedness is essential to the unity for which Christ prayed, and for accomplishing the mission He entrusted to the church—"that they all may be one . . . so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

END NOTES

1. 1 Corinthians 12:27; 1 Peter 2:9; 5:2.
2. Ephesians 1:22; Hebrews 13:20; John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7-15; 1 Peter 5:1-4.
3. Matthew 12:11-4; Acts 26:12-18; 22:6-21; 1 Corinthians 15:8; Acts 1:21-26; 6:2-6; 13:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; Matthew 6:24.
4. Matthew 20:24-28.
5. 1 Timothy 4:12; John 17:20-21.

Page 11:

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

6. For details, see Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Bible Research Fellowship: A Pioneering Seventh-day Adventist Organization in Retrospect," Adventist Heritage, 5:1, Summer 1978, pp. 39-52.

7. For details, see Raymond F. Cottrell, "Questions on Doctrine: A Historical Evaluation," unpublished paper, 28 pp.

8. For details, see Raymond F. Cottrell, "Architects of Crisis: A Decade of Obscurantism," unpublished paper, 39 pp. This paper records 31 specific incidents from 1969 to 1979 that document the origin and development of closed-minded, authoritarian policies. It evaluates those who participated in that process, and the principles and policies that mark those years as a decade of obscurantism.

9. For details, see a series of papers I have written on various aspects of the Glacier View conference of the Sanctuary Review Committee:

"Dr. Desmond Ford's Position on the Sanctuary," an unpublished 18-page synopsis of his 991-page Glacier View document, "Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment."

"Glacier View and the Church," a 49-page document prepared at the request of Roy Branson, editor of Spectrum, and based on my shorthand notes of the entire conference. It appeared in Spectrum, 11:2, November 1980, pp. 2-26, with the title, "The Sanctuary Review Committee and Its New Consensus."

"Group Dynamics at Glacier View," an unpublished 20-page document evaluating the way in which the conference was planned and conducted, how the participants related to one another, and its conclusions.

"A Hermeneutic for Daniel 8:14," a 38-page paper prepared at the request of the General Conference as one of the official Glacier View documents. It evaluates the issues considered at Glacier View, with emphasis on principles of interpretation.

"A Poll of Adventist Bible Scholars Concerning Daniel 8:14 and Hebrews 9," officially distributed at the Glacier View conference. I conducted this poll of Adventist college Bible scholars four months prior to Glacier View. This 14-page unpublished document tabulates the scholars' replies to 125 questions. As an appendix it also tallies the responses of twenty-seven college Hebrew Bible scholars and heads of college Bible departments to a similar poll I conducted in 1958 during our revision of Bible Readings. This poll led the General Conference to appoint the original "Committee on Problems in the Book of Daniel."

10. For details, see Raymond F. Cottrell, "Setting the Story Straight—The Loma Linda Creationism Panel," Adventist Today, 2:4, July-August 1994. For the six panel papers, see Adventist Today, 2:5, September-October 1994, pp. 4-10; and 2:6, November-December 1994, pp. 17-22. For responses to a subsequent poll of Adventist college science teachers regarding their views on creation, see Adventist Today, 2:6, p. 19. For comment on a Christian view of the balance between Faith and Reason, see Raymond F. Cottrell, "Faith and Reason: Two Eyes," Adventist Today, 2:5, pp. 12-13. This is a condensation of a commencement address I gave at Andrews University. in 1972.

11. For extended comment, see Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Future of Adventism," an unpublished 56-page paper.

12. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "The Passing of Arthur," in "Idylls of the King," The Poetical Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, London, Ward Lock & Co., Ltd., 1911, 647 pp., p. 473.

13. See Raymond F. Cottrell, "The Adventist Theological Society and Its Biblical Hermeneutic," an unpublished 56-page paper. This paper traces the pre-history of ATS, evaluates ATS, and analyzes its biblical hermeneutic.

The Untold Story of the Bible Commentary

by Raymond F. Cottrell

Spectrum

Seventh-day Adventist study of the Bible came of age with publication of the seven-volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* in 1953 to 1957. The proof-text method of interpretation used for doctrinal apologetics began to give way to an objective investigation of Scripture using the historical-contextual-linguistic method.

Prior to the *Commentary*, Adventist books about the Bible usually assumed the dogmatic role of a teacher; the *Commentary* chose the more humble role of a student listening intently in order to hear what the Bible has to say. It eschewed a closed mind, naively content with the illusion of already being in possession of all truth, for an open mind in quest of an ever more complete and accurate understanding of Scripture. It recognized and respected alternative interpretations of moot passages of Scripture and, upon occasion, acknowledged the fact that we do not have all of the answers. Its objective was not to get in the last word on every point of interpretation but to encourage and assist readers in reaching their own conclusions. For the *Commentary*, Bible study became a continuing pilgrimage into truth.

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary became the first publication of the church to deal with the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation in a systematic, expository way. It was the first to base its comment consistently on the text of the Bible in the original languages instead of an English translation, and first to make consistent use of state-of-the-art archaeological information in an endeavor to recreate the historical circumstances within which each passage was written and to which it was addressed. It was first to make consistent use of variant readings in the ancient manuscripts wherever these clarify a statement or resolve a problem in the text.

Raymond Cottrell, former associate editor of the *Adventist Review* and *SDA Bible Commentary*, is a consulting editor and frequent contributor to *Spectrum*.

Most of the 37 contributors were adequately trained, experienced, dedicated Bible scholars who had been serving the church as college Bible teachers over the preceding 20 years.

The index to Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words considered in the *Commentary* (see Vol. 7, pp. 996-1017) reflects the endeavor of the contributors and the editors to provide as accurate an understanding as possible of the meaning the inspired writers of the Bible intended their words to convey. The exhaustive subject index on pages 1022 to 1167 enables *Commentary* readers to readily locate information on every Bible topic considered in its 7,949 pages. The 34 introductory articles in the seven volumes, together with an introduction to each book of the Bible, were designed to provide a wealth of information on such subjects as historical, chronological and cultural background, and on the writing and interpretation of Scripture—all of vital importance in understanding the Bible. Finally, the *Commentary* gave every church member instant access to the best information Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars could provide.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

The story begins with two remarkable men, J. D. Snider, who initiated the project, and F. D. Nichol, who carried it through to a successful conclusion. The story of the *Commentary* is basically the story of these two men, and the kind of people they were in large measure explains its success over the past 30 years.

J. D. Snider, Dreamer Extraordinary

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible *Commentary* germinated in the fecund mind of J.D. Snider (1889-1976), Review and Herald book department manager from 1936 to 1967. "J.D.," as his friends affectionately knew him, was endowed with the rare gift of anticipating books designed to respond to a particular need, of finding the right people to write them, and of inspiring still other creative people to help him translate his dreams into reality. His success was legendary; if J.D. was for a project, it was certain to succeed.

J.D.'s consuming passion during his tenure as book department manager found ingenuous expression in the title of his classic *I Love Books* (1942), which sold a quarter of a million copies and was translated into several languages. His personal library of 25,000 volumes likewise mutely witnessed to the ardor of his lifelong love affair with books, and over his office door the theme of his life was embossed in wood: "Without a love for books, the richest man is poor."

The idea of a Seventh-day Adventist commentary on the Bible took root in J.D.'s thinking as the result of a persistent demand for classical commentaries such as those of Jamieson, Fausett and Brown: Adam Clarke; and Albert Barnes—all of 19th century vintage and not always in harmony with the Adventist understanding of the Bible. He foresaw the value of an up-to-date Adventist commentary to the church and believed it feasible to produce a major work of such dimensions within a reasonable time and at a viable cost.

Spectrum

Enter Francis D. Nichol

As commander-in-chief of the; *Commentary* project, Snider and the Review and Herald board selected Francis D. Nichol, who had served for the preceding 23 years as associate editor and then editor-in-chief of the Review and Herald (now the Adventist Review). With Nichol's 30 years of editorial experience and authorship of a score of books, several of them requiring painstaking research and accuracy, Snider and the board had good reason to believe that Nichol was the right man for the job and the person most likely to make the project a success. Nichol knew the Bible, was sensitive to the mood and needs of the church, had the sound judgment to make the product both useful and acceptable to a church sensitive on doctrinal matters, and he enjoyed the confidence of all whose participation would be necessary in order to transform the idea into reality.

Nichol accepted the challenge of the *Bible Commentary* in addition to his full-time job as editor of the Review, and gave both of them his formidable thought and drive at the rate of 12 to 15 hours a day, six days a week, for six years. He had the dubious reputation of running a marathon race at the pace of a hundred-yard dash. He was at his desk by four-thirty every morning and expected the same of his editorial associates on the *Commentary*. He usually worked evenings as well, and often Saturday nights.

With his consummate editorial skill Nichol was ever aware of the limits of his knowledge and relied heavily on the expertise of others in their respective fields of competence. He often referred to his editorial role as that of "a broker of other men's brains."

As editor of the Review—a post of responsibility and influence usually considered to be second only to the General Conference president—Nichol had a high sense of editorial prerogative and responsibility, which he often reverently remarked he had learned from his illustrious predecessor, F.M. Wilcox.

Volume 16, Number 3 37

He listened intently to everyone, and when he recognized a valid point he incorporated it into his decision making. But on more than one occasion he said to me: "No one, not even the president of the General Conference, can tell me what goes into the Review or what does not. Of course, they can have me fired if I make an irresponsible decision."

The Commentary Team

In consultation with teachers at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and a few trusted friends, Elder Nichol assembled members of the *Commentary* team. The full-time team consisted of Don F. Neufeld and Raymond F. Cottrell, associate editors, and Julia Neuffer, assistant editor. There were, as well, six part-time editors—making a total of ten. The major prerequisite was expertise in Hebrew and Greek; as for editorial skills, Nichol would provide on-the-job training.

Julia Neuffer was already established as the Review's research specialist. She had majored in archaeology and Near Eastern antiquity at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and since the late 1940s had worked in close association with Lynn H. Wood and later Siegfried H. Horn on an ad hoc committee of the General Conference, on the chronology of Ezra 7. Upon the recommendation of Dr. Horn she was chosen by Elder Nichol to write the chronology articles for Volumes 1 to 3 and 5 of the *Commentary*.

Her chief concern was matters of factual detail, for which she was often sent to the Library of Congress. Her penchant for accuracy was notorious.

At the time Nichol called me to join him at the Review and Herald, I was teaching biblical exegesis at Pacific Union College, where my wife, Elizabeth, and I had been for 11 years. We arrived in Takoma Park late in September 1952, and began work on the *Commentary* the first day of October. During those five years I invested more than 15,000 hours in concentrated study of every verse of the Bible. At the conclusion of work on the *Commentary* and the retirement of Frederick Lee in 1957, Elder Nichol invited me to join the Review staff as an associate editor.

Early in 1953 Elder Nichol invited Don F. Neufeld, head of the Bible department at Canadian Union College, to join our team. He arrived with his wife Maxine and their family in June, at the close of the school year. Don was an expert in Hebrew and Greek, and over the years he made his own translation of several books of both the Old and New Testaments. He was painstakingly careful and accurate in his explication of the Bible, eminently logical in his reasoning processes, and meticulous in his use of language.

The *Commentary* chose the humble role of a student listening intently in order to hear what the Bible has to say. Its objective was not to get in the last word on every point of interpretation but to encourage and assist readers in reaching their own conclusions.

Never having met each other before the *Commentary* brought us together. Don and I had independently formulated identical principles of exegesis, and from time to time each of us felt constrained to express

happy surprise at finding the other following the same principles. This not only made our work together congenial, but resulted in a much more uniform product than would otherwise have been possible.

38

Of course we both followed the linguistic-contextual-historical method, but even more to our mutual surprise, identical principles in the interpretation of Bible prophecy.

Our auxiliary editorial team consisted of Leona Running, Earle Hilgert, Alger Johns, Herbert Douglass, Bernard Seton and James Cox, who participated variously from a few months to as much as two years. The first two were teachers at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary; the others were graduate students recommended by the Seminary faculty. Leona Running and Alger Johns were simultaneously studying with William Foxwell Albright at Johns Hopkins University in nearby Baltimore.

In any exposition of the Old Testament, an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of archaeology and ancient history is vital. Though not formally a member of the *Commentary* team, Dr. Siegfried H. Horn, recognized by his fellow archaeologists as unexcelled in his field, provided that expertise—both in the planning stage and throughout the editorial process. In addition, he wrote 929 pages of the *Commentary*—more than any other contributor.

The Writers and the Writing

For writers, Elder Nichol logically turned to the Bible teachers in our North American colleges and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. He visited each campus, interviewing candidates and exploring their areas of expertise, interest and willingness to participate. Later he made specific assignments, stipulated the number of pages for each and set up mutually agreeable target dates. Each writer received a formal contract that promised the munificent sum of one dollar per manuscript page—scarcely enough to pay for typing the manuscript! The privilege of participating in the project was, presumably, to be a writer's principal reward.

Elder Nichol's aspirations for the *Commentary* are reflected in the ten pages of his "Instructions to *Commentary* Writers." "First and most importantly," he wrote, it is to be "exegetical"; where appropriate it could also be "homiletical." It was to provide Seventh-day Adventists with "a work

Each writer received a formal contract that promised the munificent sum of one dollar per manuscript page—scarcely enough to pay for typing the manuscript! The privilege of participating in the project was, presumably, to be a writer's principal reward.

free of. . . doctrinal errors" and with "emphasis and elaboration" in "those areas of Scripture that are the basis of distinctive Adventist belief." It was not "to crystallize once and for all a dogmatic interpretation" of the Bible, nor to "give sanctuary or support to the pet theories of any individual" or to be "speculative." By avoiding technical theological jargon it was to be "at once learned and simple": "It isn't necessary to use ten dollar words in order to express ten dollar thoughts." It was to take full advantage of the insight into the meaning Hebrew and Greek words provide, but without making a fetish of them. It was to be written for ministers, Bible instructors, Sabbath school teachers, local elders, missionary-minded lay persons and those who "have a special love for the Bible and who wish to study it with greater thoroughness."

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

The most often expressed criticism of the *Commentary* has been Nichol's listing of all authors "Without specifying what each wrote. The instructions contained an extended section on the "Anonymity of Writers" in which Nichol explained the reasons for this intentional omission. He felt that since the

39 Spectrum Volume 16, Number 3

manuscripts required fairly extensive revision to achieve the uniform style necessary for a Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary, they could not be used as vehicles for personal opinions. To protect individual writers from criticism, even on points where the writers and editors might agree, the editors assumed full responsibility for content, although names of the 37 contributors of all seven volumes appear in each volume. Thirty years later these fears no longer seem justified. The accompanying list of authors should be read with the reservation in mind that opinions expressed in the *Commentary* reflect the consensus of the editors and not necessarily always the opinions of the original writers.

The Editorial Process

The manuscripts varied considerably in quality, and thus in the time required to process them for typesetting. Some, such as those by Siegfried Horn and Graham Maxwell, required little or no editing. Others had to be revised or completely rewritten. In some instances the

To protect individual writers from criticism, the editors assumed full responsibility for content of the *Commentary*, although names of the 37 contributors of all seven volumes appear in each volume.

manuscript consisted essentially of the teacher's classroom notes—excellent for use in lectures but impossible as commentary material. In several instances the manuscripts consisted primarily of generalities and homily, with little or no exegesis. In some instances excellent scholars simply proved to be poor writers. It was the task of the associate editors to remedy these and numerous other defects and to unify the style. Elder Nichol then evaluated the work and made the final decision regarding what the *Commentary* would say, verse by verse.

What should the editors do when they discover that one of the contributors had had his secretary type Albert Barnes' commentary for an entire book of the Bible, word for word from beginning to end, and submitted this as his contribution to the *Seventh day Adventist Bible Commentary*? Nichol's solution was to say nothing, pay the stipulated fee, file the document in his circular file, and secure a pinch-hit writer. Understandably, the name of the former writer does not appear among the contributors.

What should the editors do when comment on a major book of the the Bible is completely unusable? In this case the writer was suffering the later stages of a terminal disease, yet his high sense of loyalty and responsibility led him to do his best to fulfill his contract. He was paid, of course, but the three editors who wrote what appears in the *Commentary* were unable to use any of his material. In this instance there was not time to secure another writer.

What should the editors do when a major manuscript is three years late and the time is fast approaching when it must be processed in order to keep the project on schedule?

Nichol asked his associates to suggest a substitute writer who might be persuaded to fulfill the assignment—almost overnight. The long-delayed document came in the mail a day or two later and proved to be one of the best-written contributions to the *Commentary*.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Inasmuch as this was to be a Seventh-day Adventist Bible commentary, we considered it appropriate, always, to take note of historic Adventist interpretations of a passage.

Where two or more interpretations have been held by a significant number of responsible persons within the church, it was our purpose to represent all of them fairly, but to favor an interpretation on

40 Spectrum

which an informed consensus had crystallized. As editors we did not consider it appropriate to use the *Commentary* as a vehicle in which to promote our personal opinions or those of anyone else. In instances where our collective judgment could not conscientiously support a particular traditionally held interpretation, we sought in an inoffensive way to present the evidence and give the reader an opportunity to make up his or her own mind. At times the expression "Seventh-day Adventists have taught that ... " or its equivalent was our ironic way of expressing collective editorial judgment that the interpretation so characterized is not exegetically valid. Accurate exegesis was our primary concern.

A little more than halfway through, Nichol figured that the editorial process alone required 11 ,025 work-hours for each volume, or a total of 77,175 for all seven. For one person to do all of the writing and the editing, nearly 100 years would have been necessary. By enlisting the help of 37 writers, an editorial team consisting of three full-time and six part-time editors, copy editors, and more than 100 non-editorial readers, Nichol was able to compress the work of a century into five or six years-with a high level of accuracy. In a letter to contributors in August 1955 he wrote:

It is becoming increasingly evident to us that the very nature of this work, which must make a cohesive whole of all that is written ... demands a tremendous amount of work upon the original manuscripts. This is in no way a disparagement of the authors This heavy total of editorial hours explains, in part, why it is possible to bring out ponderous volumes at a rather rapid rate and still produce works of prime value.

But, for Elder Nichol, quality was even more important than time: The *Commentary* must be as nearly perfect in every respect as possible-biblically, theologically, factually, typographically and stylistically. Accuracy and speed are not usually altogether compatible, but operate in inverse proportion to each other. Nichol demanded both. In order to provide the *Commentary* with both, he set up an elaborate system designed to ferret out every possible type of

Volume 16, Number 3 Page 41

error or shortcoming before the presses began to turn. By the time manuscript copy was made into plates for printing, 22 pairs of eyes had read every word of every line in the endeavor to make the resulting product as perfect as humanly possible.

Theological Booby Traps and Roadblocks

From beginning to end the editorial process seemed to be loaded with booby traps of various kinds which, if carelessly handled, could have been the source of real problems for the editors.

The very first words of the Bible—"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—held us up at an editorial roadblock for three weeks. and Elder Nichol began to wonder out loud when, if ever, we would reach our destination of Revelation 22:20. Comment was written and rewritten, edited and re-edited, typeset and reset.

An entirely different exegetical ambush awaited us at Genesis 30:37 to 31:12, where Jacob informs Laban that God devised the procedure by which he had been able to acquire most of Laban's flocks and herds. As described, however, the strategy was based on two genetic impossibilities—prenatal influence

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

of the kind here described and the transmission of acquired characteristics. The former qualifies as superstition, the latter as science fiction (see Genesis 30:37; cf. 31:4-121. Did God overrule the laws of genetics and let Jacob believe that the procedure produced the result he claimed for it, or was it a ploy Jacob invented to awe Laban into believing that God had directed him to perform? The result was clear, but it is obvious to us today that the conception of spotted and speckled cattle was not the result of the procedure to which Jacob attributed it. In addition to the genetic problems involved is the ethical question: Would God deceive Jacob into thinking that the procedure produced the result, and would He connive with Jacob to the disadvantage of Laban as the Bible implies?

Spectrum Volume 16, Number 3 42

Another type of problem lurked in Leviticus 11. The identity of a third of the Hebrew names of animals listed as unclean is unknown today, and any attempt at identifying them with known animals is guesswork.

How could we comment intelligently (see Leviticus 11:2)? Again, how was the *Commentary* to reconcile the instruction of Deuteronomy 14:22-26—about spending one's tithe for wine, strong drink and whatever a person might lust for—with the Bible admonition that the tithe is sacred and that intoxicating substances are evil?

The so-called "wisdom literature" presented a number of perplexing problems. The book of Ecclesiastes confronted us with the need to determine whether some statements should be considered as inspired or as a reflection of the cynical, perverted reasoning of the writer's wayward, apostate years (see Vol. 3, p. 1060). Also, how did the amorous, erotic Song of Solomon get into the sacred canon? Is it historical or allegorical? Made into a motion picture it would earn an "X" rating, and if offered for sale on 42nd Street in New York City we would consider it pornographic (see Vol. 3, pp. 1110, 1111).

The Old Testament prophets are loaded with booby traps for the inexperienced and unwary. While we were editing Volume 4, I suggested to Elder Nichol that a discussion of principles for interpreting Old Testament predictive prophecy would be desirable. With his blessing, I wrote the article, "The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy" (Vol. 4, pp. 25-381, which affirms that the predictive prophecies of the Old Testament were originally addressed to literal Israel under the covenant and were to have been fulfilled to them had they remained faithful to their covenant obligations and accepted the Messiah when he came.

Prior to editing the comment on Daniel, both Don and I thought of the book of Daniel as an exception to this otherwise universal rule, but editing the comment on Daniel convinced both of us—contrary to our previous opinion—that this principle applies to the book of Daniel as well. Elder Nichol's overriding pastoral concern, however, led him to insert the parenthetical caveat on page 38 exempting "the book of Daniel that the prophet was bidden to 'shut up' and 'seal,' or to other passages whose application Inspiration may have limited exclusively to our time." This was one of only two or three occasions when Elder Nichol exercised his prerogative as editor-in-chief to override our editorial judgment.

Aware of the problems associated with the traditional interpretation of passages in Daniel and the Revelation, and of the experience of the church in attempting to deal with them, Don and I repeatedly spoke to each other of being, like Daniel, "astonied by the space of half an hour" and like Paul of spending "a day and a night in the deep."

If modern literary documents made use of each other as the synoptic Gospels do we would consider it a clear case of gross plagiarism and a valid basis for indicting two of them as infringements of copyright.

But we did not think the *Commentary* was the right place to make an issue of matters not essential to salvation, and our own pastoral concern led us to do the best we could with the traditional interpretation. Upon one occasion when certain questions were addressed to Elder Nichol in a public meeting, he replied that the *Commentary* would not deal with these matters, and he did not expect to be around when the church was ready to tackle them.

The synoptic problem—the literary relationship of Matthew, Mark and Luke—has

Volume 16, Number 3 43

never been resolved to everyone's complete satisfaction. If modern literary documents made use of each other as the synoptic Gospels do we would consider it a clear case of gross plagiarism and a valid basis for indicting two of them as infringements of copyright. Ninety percent of Mark is reproduced in Matthew and Luke, often word for word, and both Matthew and Luke make extensive use of still another, unknown source. A more practical aspect of the problem was whether to comment at length on the same incident wherever it occurs in all three, or in only one of them, and if so which one (see Vol. 5, p. 1941)

It is not possible to determine the precise sequence of events in the ministry of Jesus. What principles should we follow in constructing a harmony of the Gospels, which inevitably involves arranging the events of Christ's life on earth in particular sequence?

Furthermore, there is no clear evidence in the Gospels to indicate the length of Christ's ministry; commentators vary all the way from three and a half years to one year (see Vol. 5, pp. 190-2011). Despite all statements to the contrary, there is no unambiguous evidence for the date of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, nor has anyone been able to harmonize the information the four Gospels provide as to when the Last Supper took place. Lurking in the background of this dilemma is the fact that the date of the crucifixion is the anchor point that led to selection of 457 B. C. as the beginning date for 2300 days of Daniel 8:14, yet any suggested date for the crucifixion is arbitrary guesswork. (see Vol. 5, pp. 247-266).

Often Don and I would spend an hour or two, or sometimes—on an important point—a day or more, exploring the problem together in order to arrive at a considered decision as to what the *Commentary* should say on a particular passage of Scripture. Upon one occasion we proposed to Elder Nichol that a weekend retreat for the *Commentary* editors should be devoted to the subject of prophetic fulfillment, the relation of Old Testament prophecy to the New Testament, the "little apocalypse" of Matthew 24 (including "this generation"), and the imminence of the parousia ("presence" or "coming") of Christ clearly expressed throughout the New Testament. Meeting at the large Milesbum cabin beside the Appalachian Trail in Micheaux Forest about 30 miles west of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, we devoted several hours to a discussion of the various issues and found our way through to the position to be taken on these matters.

Aware of the periodic theological hurricanes that brew in Australia and eventually reach North America, I suggested to Elder Nichol that we might do well to give our Australian brethren an opportunity to read galley proofs of the book of Hebrews. I suspected that some of them would take vigorous exception to some of the comments we as editors had already agreed on, and that it would be preferable to obtain their responses before publication rather than after. He agreed, and a few days later we met with some of the Australian leaders who were in Washington for meetings.

Members of the editorial team were familiar with the principles of textual criticism, as it is called, and in writing and editing the New Testament commentaries we examined several thousand variant readings

and selected those we considered deserving of attention. Periodically we would confer in the capacity of a textual criticism seminar and reach a consensus on the weight to be given each variant to be mentioned in the *Commentary*. (See Vol. 5, pp. 146, 147, for an explanation of the system we devised for expressing the weight of evidence for a particular reading. Interestingly, the system later adopted by the editors of the Bible Society Greek New Testament was very similar to ours. See their introduction, pp. x and xi.)

What should an editor do with "proof texts" that inherently do not prove what is traditionally attributed to them—as, for example, Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6; Revelation 12:17 and 19:10; Daniel 12:4;

Volume 16, Number 3 44

Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:1, 2; and most of the texts usually cited with respect to "the law"? In most of these and a number of other passages, pastoral concern led us to conclude that the *Commentary* was not the place to make an issue of the Bible versus the traditional interpretation, much as this disappointed us as Bible scholars and would be a disappointment to our scholarly friends who know better.

Ellen G. White and the Bible

One of Elder Nichol's basic requirements was that the *Commentary* should at no point express any concept that could be construed as a contradiction of the writings of Ellen White. We were, of course, familiar with her published works, but nevertheless kept one editorial eye fixed on the Conflict of the Ages series, which parallels the Bible account. In addition, we asked the various readers of galleys and foundry proofs to call our attention to any items we as editors might have missed.

It was not long before we discovered that Ellen White sometimes construes a passage to mean something different from what the original context requires; we also discovered why she does so.

First and foremost we were to be faithful to the Bible, but in so doing we could avoid comment that might appear to contradict comment by Ellen White. Generally speaking, references to her writings in the body of the comment are inserted, not as authority for the statements made, but in confirmation or for comparison.

It was not long before we discovered that Ellen White sometimes construes a passage to mean something different from what the original context requires; we also discovered why she does so. When dealing with a passage in its historical context—as throughout the Conflict series—she consistently deals with it contextually and her comment comports with the Bible. But when her primary objective is homiletical application of a passage to our time she often quotes the Bible out of context, applying the principle involved but in a way that seems to contradict the Bible. In such instances she uses the Bible to illustrate her point, not to exegete the Bible. New Testament writers often quote the Old Testament in the same way. Exegetical and homiletical uses of Scripture are both legitimate. but it is a gross misuse of Scripture to construe their—or her—homily as exegesis.

A prime illustration of Ellen White's homiletical use of Scripture is her comment on "the law" in the book of Galatians. In *Acts of the Apostles*, where she deals with the historical situation in Galatia, she consistently identifies; "the law" as the ceremonial system-accurate exegesis. But when, as in *Selected Messages* (pp. 233, 234), she applies the principle of legalism to our day she identifies "the law" as the Decalogue—homily. In effect she is saying that we can no more be saved today by keeping the law than

the Galatian believers could be saved by observing the ceremonial law: now, as then, salvation is by faith alone.

Something the same is true of Ellen White's application of Old Testament predictions that originally applied to Israel of old, and to the closing events of earth's history. According to Nahum 1:9 for instance, affliction would not arise again from Assyria. Ellen White applies the statement to the ultimate end of all evil in a universal sense (as in *The Great Controversy*, pp. 485, 612; and Exodus 12:37 cf. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 3341. Sometimes she bases her comment on a wrong meaning of an English word (as in 2 Thessalonians 2:9 cf. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 686).

Volume 16, Number 3 45

An Exhaustive Climax to an Exhaustive Project

The exhaustive index to the seven volumes of the *Bible Commentary* (Vol. 7, pp. 1022-1167) was the last of our 12 herculean labors. None of us had any formal training or experience in compiling an index of these proportions, but realizing the need for a good index and the fact that the compilation of one requires special expertise, Nichol sent Julia Neuffer, assistant editor of the *Commentary* and research specialist, for a course in indexing at nearby Catholic University of America.

She thus became our authority for index content, style and clarity, as she had been our authority on so many other things essential to the project. Her favorite illustration of poor indexing was a series of "see" references which sent the hapless reader on a wild goose chase that eventually led him back to the original entry without locating the information he sought, (1) Wild goose chase. See Chase, wild goose. (2) Chase, wild goose. See Goose chase, wild. (3) Goose chase, wild. See Wild goose chase.

As I read page proofs for the seven volumes, I had been blue-penciling items to be indexed. Each entry was typed on a separate three-by-five card, and all of the cards were classified and alphabetized. Eventually our *Commentary* office was cluttered with boxes containing thousands upon thousands of cards. Inasmuch as the index had to include Volume 7 itself, in which it was to appear, final preparation of the index could not begin until we had read the last proof and filed the last entry card.

Climaxing his courtship with the *Commentary* for more than seven years, J.D. Snider insisted that Volume 7, and thus the complete *Commentary* set, be ready for the 1957 Christmas trade, and when page proofs for Volume 7 were finally in hand, read and indexed, the seven furies took control of the *Commentary* office and pandemonium prevailed. Fourteen of us (editors, copy editors and proofreaders) literally worked around the clock shift by shift, day after day, for ten days to complete the process of transforming the thousands of card entries into the index as it appears in Volume 7. Work halted about ten minutes before sundown Friday night and began again ten minutes after sundown Saturday night. By the close of those ten days we had produced an exhaustive index, and we ourselves were exhausted.

Why Did It Succeed?

The ultimate measure of the *Commentary's* success is the extent to which it illumines the Bible for those who aspire to a better understanding of Scripture. This cannot be measured directly, of course, but there are a number of indirect means including, chiefly, the response of the church in purchasing it and how often it is quoted in other church publications such as the Sabbath school *Lesson Quarterly*.

During the 1950s and 1960s the open theological climate in the church was favorable to the honest way in which the *Commentary* editors, in their dedication first to the Bible and then to the church, sought to deal with the Bible and with the teachings of the church in relation to the Bible.

From the publisher's point of view the best estimate of success is the sales report. It was originally hoped that 5,000 sets could be sold within three years of the time the last volume was off the press, and with that in view the original printing order for Volume

Spectrum Volume 16, Number 3 46

1 was 5,160. But even before Volume 7 was ready 23,000 sets had been purchased at the prepublication price of \$55.65 for the seven volumes. By the close of 1984 more than 83,000 complete sets had been sold, the current price being \$174.50. Were J.D. Snider alive he would have good reason to be jubilant.

Although the *Commentary* was not intended for reading like an ordinary book, a surprising number of people have told me of reading every word of it from beginning to end!

One of Elder Nichol's important goals was to make the *Commentary* acceptable to the church. Thirty years without complaint about its consensus understanding of the Bible is strong evidence that the church feels comfortable with the *Commentary*. This is not to suggest that everyone agrees with it at every point or that the *Commentary* is without flaw; even the editors did not personally approve of every concept it expresses. It does mean, however, that the church accepts it and identifies with it. The fact that the *Commentary* respects differences of opinion is doubtless an important factor in its acceptance. That Adventist Bible scholars, who realize that the traditional Adventist understanding of the Bible has not always been strictly biblical, also feel reasonably comfortable with the *Commentary* and find it useful, is another measure of its success. Six key factors were responsible for this success:

1. J. D. Snider's vision—his awareness of the need for an Adventist Bible commentary, together with his belief that the church was ready for it, that Adventist Bible scholars could and would write it, and that the Review and Herald could publish and market it at a price sufficient to cover the cost of production. "J. D." was the only person at the time who had that vision and was in a position to implement it, and his vision proved to be correct at every point.
2. F. D. Nichol's editorial expertise. He was probably one of a very few persons in the church at the time who combined all of the qualities essential to planning and executing the project: editorial experience, a concept of what the *Commentary* should be, sensitive awareness of the thinking and the mood of the church and its leaders, open-mindedness and willingness to respect points of view with which he differed, appreciation of scholarship and a penetrating analysis of other people's reasoning, the high esteem in which he was held by the entire church, including its leaders and the contributors, an almost fanatical penchant for accuracy, and a passionate drive to carry the project through to completion within a relatively brief period of time.
3. The willingness of the publisher to venture a quarter of a million dollars, which eventually became half a million "initial expense" (the cost before the presses begin to turn), and the dedication of Review and Herald personnel to the project.
4. The content—the labors of the contributors and the editors to make the *Commentary* faithful to the Bible and to the Adventist understanding of Scripture.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

5. The dedication of the church at large to the Bible and the value its members place on a better understanding of it.

6. The openness of the church at the time the *Commentary* was written and published. During the 1950s and 1960s the theological climate in the church was favorable to the honest way in which the *Commentary* editors, in their dedication first to the Bible and then to the church, sought to deal with the Bible and with the teachings of the church in relation to the Bible.

The *Commentary* was strictly a publishing-house project with the blessing of the General Conference. The Review and Herald Publishing Association accepted both financial and theological responsibility. In other words, the project was unofficial, with credit for success or blame for failure going to the publisher and not to the General Conference.

This arrangement protected the General Conference from criticism in case the *Commentary* posed either a financial or theological problem. Had the project been sponsored and controlled by the General Conference, the *Commentary* would inevitably have taken a dogmatic, apologetic position on points of exegesis and interpretation where differences of opinion existed; this would have alienated the respect of many and limited the *Commentary's* value and usefulness. Without training and expertise in biblical and theological matters, administrators would have found themselves in the embarrassing position of having to make decisions they were not competent to make.

The fact that the publisher, with its Bible scholar editors, made these decisions and accepted

Spectrum Volume 16, Number 3 47

responsibility for them protected the General Conference in case errors of judgment were made, errors for which it could then disavow responsibility.

Long-term Influence

Though not by design on the part of those who convened it, the 1952 Bible Conference opened the door to a 15-year climate of openness and freedom to study the Bible objectively rather than apologetically, during which the church made rapid progress in its understanding of the Scripture. Elder Nichol often commented that except for the 1952 Bible Conference it would not have been possible to produce the *Commentary* because the editors could not have operated with sufficient freedom to make it objective and therefore worthwhile. In turn, the *Commentary* consolidated the openness and freedom that began in 1952 and continued for several years.

As a result of this climate of openness and freedom it was possible to build into the *Commentary* advanced principles of Bible study that set the *Commentary* free from the outmoded proof-text method of study. These advanced principles make the Scriptures in the original languages, the ancient manuscripts, the context in which a statement occurs, and the historical setting normative for its meaning. The purpose of this method of study is to ascertain what the inspired writers, guided by the Holy Spirit, intended their words to mean, and thus to give the Bible an opportunity to interpret itself. It avoids the common proof-text method of reading into the Bible whatever the would-be interpreter may imagine it means.

Inevitably, the editors found that certain passages of Scripture, taken in context, do not support the traditional proof-text concepts usually attributed to them. As editors we would have been unfaithful to the Bible if we had not set forth what we conscientiously believed to be the true meaning of a passage. At the same time, with appropriate pastoral concern, we included the traditional interpretation, and were thus able in most instances to be faithful to the Bible and at the same time recognize a historic Adventist position. By offering more than one interpretation of a passage we made clear to *Commentary*

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

readers that we were not freezing Adventist theology into a creed, despite fears in some quarters that we would attempt to do so. We realized also that some church members, used to the dogmatic, proof-text approach, would feel uncomfortable and threatened by the openness of the *Commentary*, but we believed that in time the church would come to appreciate the virtues of openness and that our endeavor to be faithful to the text of Scripture would have a corrective effect.

Publication of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* was an epochal event in the history of the church, one whose full import is yet to be perceived. With the clearer and more complete understanding of the Bible reflected in the *Commentary* as a basis, together with continuing study of the Bible by sound principles, competent Adventist Bible scholars of a future generation will be able to improve on what we were able to do.

Editors' note: Significant revisions of a few general articles in the first edition of the *SDA Bible Commentary* were completed in 1976. Begun by Ray Cottrell, the revisions were completed under Ray Woolsey's supervision. Geoscience Institute staff, primarily Ariel Roth—revised the articles in Volume 1 on Creation and the flood. (See W. W. Hughes' "Shifts in Adventist Creationism," in *Spectrum*. Vol. 16. No. 2, pp. 47-50.) The section on lower criticism or editing of biblical manuscripts was rewritten for the article on "Lower and Higher Criticism," in Volume 5. Historical maps in Volume 7 were revised when Rand McNally acknowledged errors unnoticed for decades in their depiction of places in Egypt and the Niger Desert. Rand McNally thanked Julia Neuffer, assistant editor of the first edition, for bringing the needed corrections to their attention. Throughout the seven volumes. Metric measurements were added to English measurements, and where necessary, values of coins were compared to wages of their day instead of to the fluctuating value of the dollar.

Appendix

Index to the Commentary

In the indexes that follow, contributors to *Commentary* are listed with their works. Employing institutions, where noted, are shown in parentheses (See key). Number of pages shown in parentheses represent total number of pages contributed. This figure includes maps and charts not provided by the respective authors and the text of the Bible (KJV) for each chapter.

It is important to remember that all manuscripts were edited and that the editors accepted full responsibility for all contributions in their final form. The point of view set forth may or may not reflect the opinion of the author whose name is listed for a particular article or book of the Bible.

Key: AUC = Atlantic Union College; CME = College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University); CUC = Canadian Union College; EMC = Emmanuel Missionary College (now Andrews University); FC = Florida Conference; GC = General Conference; HC = Helderberg College; LSC = La Sierra College; (now Loma Linda University); PUC = Pacific Union College; R = Retired; R&H = Review and Herald Publishing Association; SMC = Southern Missionary College (now Southern College); TS = Theological Seminary (now Andrews University); WMC = Washington Missionary College (now Columbia Union College).

Author Index

Andreasen, M.L. ¹ (TS) Leviticus, Hebrews (221 pages!)

Caviness, L. L. (PUC) Esther, Song of Solomon

Christensen, O.H. (EMC) Joshua (130 pages)

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Cottrell, R.F. ² {PUC} Synoptic Gospels, John 1-4

4: The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy

5: The Fourfold Gospel Narrative; Major English Translations 171:1 pages)

Froom, L. E. ³ (TS) 4: Interpretation of Daniel 7: Interpretation of the Apocalypse (69 pages)

Hammill, R. (SMC) Judges (120 pages)

Hardinge, L. (WMC) Colossians (37 pages)

Hartin, L. H. (PUC) Galatians (60 pages)

Hartwell, R. H. ⁴ (FC) 7: John and the Isle of Patmos (6 pages)

Heppenstall, E. E. (LSC) 2 Corinthians (107 pages)

Hilgert, E. (TS) Jeremiah 46-52, Lamentations, Daniel 10-12, John 5-6, Revelation 1-11 5: "Lower" and "Higher" Biblical Criticism, Chronology of the Pauline Epistles (230 pages)

Horn, S. H. (TS) Genesis, Exodus 1-18, Ezra., Nehemiah, Daniel 1. 3-6

1: Languages, Manuscripts, and Canon of the Old Testament; Archeology and the Recovery of Ancient History; Historical Background of the Patriarchal Period; Daily Life in the Patriarchal Age; Weights, Measures, and Money Values in the Old Testament

2: Ancient World From c. 1400 to 586 B.C.

3: Musical Instruments of the Ancient Hebrews; Ancient World From 586 to 400 B.C.; Tables of Elephantine and Jewish Papyri

4: Chronology of the Old Testament Prophets

5: Ancient Jewish Literature; "Lower" and "Higher" Biblical Criticism

6: Chronology of the Acts

7: The Seven Churches of Revelation (929 pages)

Hyde, W. T. (PUC) Proverbs, 1-3 John, Jude (133 pages)

Jemison, T. H. (WMC) Philippians (44 pages)

Johns, A.F. ⁵ (LSC) James (47 pages)

Loasby, R.E. (TS) Numbers, Deuteronomy, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, 1-2 Peter, Revelation 17-22

1: Names of God in the Old Testament (451 pages)

Ludgate, T.K. (HC) 1 Corinthians (164 pages)

Marsh, F.L. (EMC) 1: Science and Creation (24 pages)

Maxwell, A.G. (PUC) Romans (186 pages)

McMurphy, E.J. (SMC) Titus, Philemon (28 pages)

Minchin, G.H. (AUC) Ephesians (55 pages)

Murdoch, W.G.C. (TS) Psalms 107-150, Daniel 2, 7-9 (121 pages)

Neufeld, D.F. ⁶ (CUC) Ezekiel, John 7-21 (272 pages)

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Neuffer, J. (R&H)

1: Chronology of Early Bible History

2: Hebrew Calendar in Old Testament Times; Chronology from the Exodus to the Exile (a compilation)

3: Chronology of Exile and Restoration

5: A Basis for New Testament Chronology (212 pages)

Pease, N.F. (CME) Job (120 pages)

Price, G.M. ⁷ (R) Evidences of a Worldwide Flood (28 pages)

Read, W.E. ⁸ (GC) Revelation 12-16 (42 pages)

Smith, C.O. (AUC) 1-2 Thessalonians (58 pages)

Specht, W.F. (LSC) Jeremiah 1-10 (61 pages)

Thiele, E.R. (EMC) 2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Isaiah (845 pages)

Thurber, M.R. ⁹ (R&H) 1: Outline of Sanctuary Service (13 pages)

Walther, D. ¹⁰ (TS) 7: Reformation and Onward (39 pages)

Wearner, A.J. ¹¹ (UC) John (see note)

Weniger, C.E. (TS) Psalms 1-106

3: Poetry of the Bible (269 pages)

Wirth, W.G. (CME)

Exodus 19-40, Jeremiah 11-45, Minor Prophets, 1-2 Timothy (470 pages)

Wood, L.H. ¹² (TS) 1 Samuel

1-7: All art maps

5: Between the Testaments (278 pages)

Yost, F.H. ¹³ (TS) Acts

5: Jews of the First Christian Century

6: Early Christian Church

7: Medieval Church (495 pages)

49

NOTES ON AUTHORS

1. Andreasen, a veteran teacher at the Seminary, had recently retired.

2. Cottrell was teaching biblical exegesis at Pacific Union College at the time assignments were made. and moved to Washington, D.C., to edit the *Commentary* in September 1952.

3. Froom was retired and on special assignment for the General Conference, writing *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, on which subject he lectured at the Seminary.

4. Hartwell was a pastor in the Florida Conference, selected because of his personal acquaintance with the Isle of Patmos.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

5. Johns was teaching at La Sierra College at the time assignments were made but transferred to Washington, D. C. in 1955 to attend the Seminary. While in Washington he completed his doctoral degree under William F. Albright at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.
6. Neufeld was head of the Bible department at Canadian Union College at the time assignments were made, and moved to Washington, D.C., in June 1953 to join the editorial team. In addition to his Commentary assignments. he edited the *SDA Bible Dictionary* and the *SDA Encyclopedia*, and, with Julia Neuffer, the *SDA Bible Students' Source, Book* {which became volumes 8, 10, and 9, respectively, of the Commentary Reference Series subsequently added to the seven volumes of the *Commentary* as a ten-volume set).
7. Price had been a teacher for many years in various colleges but had long since been retired at the time assignments were made.
8. Read was chairman of the General Conference Biblical Research Committee, and was selected for this assignment because of his major presentation on Armageddon at the 1952 Bible Conference.
9. Thurber was book editor for the Review and Herald Publishing Association. He was selected for this assignment because of special research he had done.
10. Walther's name is unaccountably missing from the list of contributors.
11. Werner, veteran Bible teacher, was head of the Bible department at Union College but suffered a terminal illness before his assignment was completed. The editors greatly appreciated his heroic effort under the most difficult circumstances.
12. Wood drew all of the art maps for all seven volumes.
13. Yost's primary assignment at the time was as secretary of the Religious Liberty department. He had been teaching for many years at the Seminary and still taught an occasional class there.

50

General Articles Index

Volume I

Languages, Manuscripts and Canon of the Old Testament: S.H. Horn.

Science and Creation: F.L. Marsh (The article in the revised edition of the Commentary. "The Creationist Model of Origins." was prepared by the staff of the Geoscience Research Institute.)

Evidences of a Worldwide Flood: G.M. Price (The article in this revised edition of the Commentary, "Genesis and Geology," was prepared by the staff of the Geoscience Research Institute.

Archeology and the Recovery of Ancient History: S.H. Horn.

Historical Background of the Patriarchal Period: S.H. Horn.

Daily Life in the Patriarchal Age: S.H. Horn.

Weights, Measures, and Money Values in the Old Testament: S.H. Horn.

Names of God in the Old Testament: R.E. Loasby.

Chronology of Early Bible History: J. Neuffer.

Outline of the Sanctuary Service: M.R. Thurber.

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

Maps and line drawings (all volumes): L.H. Wood.

Ellen G. White Comments (all volumes): Ellen G White Estate.

Volume 2

Ancient World from c. 1400 to 586 B.C.: S.H. Horn.

Hebrew Calendar in Old Testament Times: J. Neuffer

Chronology from Exodus to Exile: J. Neuffer (compiler)

Volume 3

Poetry of the Bible: C.E. Weniger.

Musical Instruments of the Ancient Hebrews: S.H. Horn.

The Ancient World from 586 to 400 B.C.: S.H. Horn.

Chronology of Exile and Restoration: J. Neuffer. Spectrum

Volume 4

Chronology of the Old Testament Prophets: S.H. Horn.

Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy: R.F. Cottrell.

Interpretation of Daniel L.E. Froom.

Volume 5

The Period Between the Testaments: L.H. Wood.

Jews of the First Christian Century: F.H. Yost.

Ancient Jewish Literature: S.H. Horn.

Language, Manuscripts and Canon of the New Testament: S.H. Horn.

"Lower" and "Higher" Biblical Criticism: S.H. Horn and E. Hilgert.

The Fourfold Gospel Narrative: R.F. Cottrell.

Maps and Diagrams on the Life of Christ: L.H. Wood.

A Basis for New Testament Chronology: J. Neuffer.

Major English Translations of the Bible: R.F. Cottrell.

Volume 6

The Early Christian Church: F.H. Yost.

Roman History in New Testament Times: F. H. Yost.

Chronology of the Acts of the Apostles: S.H. Horn.

Chronology of the Pauline Epistles: E. Hilgert.

Volume 7

The Role of Biblical Hermeneutics in Preserving Unity in the Church

The Medieval Church: F.H. Yost.

The Reformation and Onward: D. Walther.

John and the Isle of Patmos: L.H. Hartwell

The Seven Churches of Revelation: S.H. Horn.

Interpretation of the Apocalypse: L.E. Froom.