



Reflections

The BRI Newsletter
Number 40
October 2012

Hermeneutical Guidelines for Dealing with Theological Questions

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

When people ask questions of a biblical or theological nature, it happens that they request as an answer one clear Bible text, a “Thus says the Lord” in order to have the respective issue explained or settled. While it is highly commendable and while it is the Adventist approach to rely on Scripture for deciding theological issues, one cannot always provide a clear-cut Bible text that solves the issue. Therefore, it may be helpful to discuss briefly how to handle theological questions. We do this with a high view of Scripture in mind. That is, we assume the Scripture to be God’s propositional revelation to human beings.

Categories of Questions

When thinking about and working on biblical and/or theological questions one soon realizes that there are different kinds or categories of questions.

Questions on Biblical Texts

First, there are questions that relate to the interpretation of biblical texts or larger biblical passages. Someone wants to understand, for instance, Luke 23:43, a text containing Jesus’ words to the thief on the cross, or the prophecy of Daniel 11.

In such cases, we meticulously study the text and employ exegetical steps that are derived from Scripture.¹ The starting point is clearly a biblical text. The question is not which biblical text(s) to choose but how a biblical text should be interpreted based on a hermeneutical method that accepts the self-testimony of Scripture.

Questions on Biblical Topics

Second, there are thematic questions that deal with how biblical topics should be under-

stood. If, for instance, we would study biblical themes such as the Sabbath or the resurrection of the dead in Scripture, we would search Scripture for the respective terms and related vocabulary, e.g., “Sabbath,” “rest,” “complete rest,” and “to rest.” We would investigate the texts that we have found in their contexts, applying briefly the above mentioned exegetical steps to these texts, and would try to formulate a theology of the respective topic.

Questions on Biblical Concepts

Apart from biblical topics that are based on biblical terms there are topics such as the Trinity, anthropology or eschatology that deal with biblical-theological concepts which cannot directly or at least not exclusively be based on biblical vocabulary.

Dealing with these and similar topics one has to go beyond word searches and explanations and has to investigate and subsequently synthesize various biblical themes and concepts. When we study, for instance, the Trinity, we could take a look at how different terms applied to God are used, investigate Jesus’ and the apostles’ claims that Jesus was divine, ask ourselves how Jesus and the Holy Spirit relate to God the Father in Scripture, consider the notion that God is one, etc. There is no biblical text that says: “There is one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” But we believe that this concept is clearly found in the Old and New Testaments.

Questions Not Mentioned in Scripture

Finally, Christians in the centuries following the closing of the canon were and still are confronted with questions of a theological and/or ethical nature that are not directly addressed in Scripture. Some would refer to these questions as the silence of the Word of God. However, this is not an absolute silence. And Adventist fundamental beliefs, which are derived from Scripture are not envisioned here.

Here are some examples of issues not explicitly spelled out in Scripture: Can God die? What happened to Jesus’ divine nature when He died on the cross? Did Jesus die the first or the second death? How should we relate to abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and human cloning? Can Christians

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today still be involved in one or another form of slavery because the Bible does not clearly prohibit slavery? What about ecology and the care for planet earth? Should we be free to drink alcohol, smoke tobacco, or abuse drugs? There is no biblical prohibition: “You shall not smoke.”

These and similar questions cannot be answered by referring to one or more Bible texts only. There may be no Bible text at all that deals directly with these issues. Nevertheless these questions are important and a number of them directly influence our daily lives. They cannot be ignored.

In other words, some biblical/theological questions are directly related to biblical texts or biblical material and can be answered by straightforward Bible texts, while others cannot.

Different Approaches to Questions that Cannot Be Answered with One or More Biblical Texts

This raises the question of how we should proceed and what we should do in cases where we cannot simply refer to clear-cut Bible texts. What are our options, if we accept Scripture as the Word of God, avoiding critical approaches such as suggestions that Scripture is culturally conditioned, reflects an evolutionary development of religious thought, or is relative in its statements and in its authority? Excluding these approaches, it seems that we still have about four options.

What Scripture Does Not Prohibit Is Allowed

One approach would be: What Scripture does not prohibit is allowed. Such an approach would mean that if Scripture does not address a specific issue directly, Christians are free to proceed in whichever direction they want to go. Some would limit this freedom somewhat and would claim that under prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit the church rather than the individual should make decisions on issues not directly addressed in Scripture.

Let us take, for instance, church structure. The Bible does not tell us precisely how a worldwide church should be structured. We have no texts that spell out that we should have Conferences, Unions, Divisions, and the General Conference or how much authority should rest with leaders on various levels of church administration. Would an Episcopal, Presbyterian or a Congregational type of church governance be more profitable? On the other hand, if the principle “What is not prohibited is allowed” is true, would we be free to take narcotic drugs and get involved in gambling and pornography?

This and the following approach were already discussed early in church history. J. P.

Lewis writes:

Tertullian was concerned about whether a Christian could wear a laurel wreath. While the opposition argued “whatever is not forbidden is certainly permitted,” Tertullian contended “whatever is not clearly permitted is forbidden.” It would be overplaying the evidence, however, to assume that Tertullian applied his contention consistently to all mat-

ters of faith and practice of the church.²

He continued to say:

... Luther considered that “What Scripture has neither commended nor prohibited had to be considered ‘free’ and dealt with accordingly.” Luther had not attempted to eliminate the elevation of the Host or the use of eucharistic vestments. When Karlstadt asked, “Where has Christ commanded us to elevate the Host and exhibit it to the people?” Luther’s reply



Reflections

Reflections seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors and teachers.

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was, “Where has he forbidden it?” Luther stated, “As for the Mass, where has Christ forbidden elevation? The Pope transgresses when he commands it, and the sectaries when they forbid it.”³

Luther talked about the “adiaphora,” things about which Scripture—and, by extension, God—is indifferent.⁴ This approach is also called the “normative principle,” adopted, for instance, by the Anglicans.⁵

What Scripture Does Not Allow Is Prohibited

A second approach would be: What Scripture does not explicitly allow, is forbidden. This approach could mean that, for instance, we may have to live like the Amish people and avoid electricity and all modern means of transportation and communication because they are not mentioned in Scripture. Scripture does not address advances in science and medicine that influence our daily life. Can we have a CAT scan or an MRI, an organ transplant or reading glasses? Again, what about the structure of the Adventist Church and its different departments? Should we eliminate Conferences, Unions, Divisions, and the General Conference because none of these entities are listed and therefore not directly allowed in Scripture? What do we do as a church with schools and hospitals, publishing houses, and health food industries? Should we ban organs in the churches—as Calvinists did at first—or PA systems?⁶ All of these are not explicitly referred to in Scripture, and there are many more examples that could be enumerated. One could argue that Scripture regulates religious life and not secular life. However, such a distinction is not directly made in the Bible.

As already stated, the issue was-discussed in the first centuries and came up again with Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin. For Zwingli “all was to be simple. Scripture ought explicitly to sanction whatever was done in the service, though there was an area of ‘things indifferent’ such as the wording of the prayers. What was not authorized was to be rejected.”⁷ And according to Calvin: “Nothing is safer than to banish all the boldness of human sense, and adhere solely to what Scripture teaches.”⁸

Thomas Campbell of the Restoration Movement stated “Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent.”⁹ This sounds very good and is certainly sincere. However, W. Woodrow shows that Campbell was not able to stick to his own principle:

Unfortunately, Campbell often used the same logic to exclude one practice and include another. . . . Campbell justified many items

for which there was neither command nor example under the ‘law of expediency’: meetinghouses; baptistries, the translation, publication, and distribution of Scripture, times of convocation; and specific arrangements for the Lord’s day, etc. . . . Campbell spoke favorably of capital punishment, concluding there is not a “word in Old Testament or New inhibiting” its usage. The institution of slavery is not of itself immoral since there “is not one verse in the Bible inhibiting it.” Elsewhere Campbell conceded, “God having prescribed no one form of political government has equally sanctioned every form which society chooses to assume.” Since the apostles gave no specific directions regarding the manner of church cooperation, this is “left to the wisdom and discretion of the whole community.” It should be noted that the context in which Biblical silence was prohibitive for Campbell generally involved some aspect of the church—its form of government, worship, or terms of communion. . . . Since the New Testament presented all essential features of the church, extra-Scriptural elements lacked Biblical authorization, violated the divinely given pattern, and impeded the cause of Christian unity. Silence in this context was prohibitory. However, since Scripture specified no exact procedure for carrying out the essentials, silence in these areas implied freedom.¹⁰

Restorationists may have failed to see that not all church situations in the NT were alike and therefore in some cases various options existed. For example, Jewish Christians still worshiped in the temple and the synagogue, while Gentile Christians met in house churches modeled after the synagogue but did not meet in the temple. Restorationists may have also failed to distinguish between biblical narratives and biblical prescriptions. In other words: they may not have been able to make a distinction between what the Bible reports and what the Bible prescribes. In any case, Woodrow notes:

. . . this does not mean that any word or act which does not specifically appear in Scripture is inharmonious with or antithetical to Scripture . . . While the mention of one practice in the New Testament contradicts (in the sense of being different from) another, it does not on that basis make the latter practice wrong or sinful . . . For Christians to commemorate the Lord’s Supper by fasting would be ludicrous;

however, the institution of the Supper does not preclude fasting as a valid expression of worship simply because they contradict or differ.¹¹

This second approach is also called the “regulative” approach and was followed by the Puritans.¹²

Choosing the Two Aforementioned Approaches Simultaneously

A third approach would be to pick and choose between the two approaches just introduced or to find a mediating position. A church member may argue that it is not a problem to watch TV because what the Bible does not prohibit is allowed; and the very same person may argue that Scripture does not allow for candles or flowers in the sanctuary because what the Bible does not allow is prohibited.

Although this may sound strange, such an approach can be encountered with Adventist church members, pastors, and administrators. However, it is also found throughout church history, because typically persons espousing the latter approach were not able to apply it consistently. This is true for reformers as well as Restorationists.¹³

Karlstadt, Luther’s colleague but later his opponent at Wittenberg, expressed the principle of adding nothing to Scripture. . . . Anyone who adds to or subtracts from God’s word is automatically excommunicated. Nevertheless, one has the right of freedom where Scripture is not explicit, but individual right is subsumed to the needs of the community. . . . Karlstadt could expand what Scripture states. His case for the care of widows includes care of widowers.¹⁴

Biblical Principles to Decide Theological Issues

A fourth approach would suggest that in the absence of clear biblical texts dealing directly with the topic under investigation we should look for biblical principles that may shed light on the respective issue, evaluate them prayerfully, and determine how these principles are to be applied to theological and ethical issues. Biblical principles are found in biblical texts. In order not to misuse these texts they should be exegeted first, followed by a theological analysis that looks for the texts’ topic and theological themes. From these theological themes biblical principles can be derived. This approach would insist that biblical commandments and prohibitions must be taken seriously. The same is true for biblical principles. The will of God can never safely be ignored.¹⁵

Let us return to the health issue. This approach

would look at what Scripture has to say about health and would, for instance, find that God has entrusted our bodies to us and expects us to be good stewards of them. It would listen to Scripture calling our bodies temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19) and challenging us to glorify God in our bodies (1 Cor 6:20). In light of this biblical principles, the tremendous health risks associated with smoking make it difficult for a Christian to justify this practice.

The Bible does not contain a clear prohibition of slavery; yet, by looking at biblical principles that stress human dignity, freedom, and basic equality as well as by studying Paul’s treatment of slavery in letters such as Philemon many Christians, including Adventists, came to realize that slavery had to be abolished.

Evaluating the Approaches

The four approaches are basic approaches to deal with theological and ethical issues that are not directly addressed in Scripture. There may be more than the four—and there are more, if one opts for critical approaches to Scripture—but we will concentrate on these and will briefly evaluate them, pointing to their strengths and weaknesses.

First Approach: What Scripture Does Not Prohibit Is Allowed

This approach allows for quite a bit of freedom and responsibility. However, it can also be dangerous and freedom can be abused. It seems to be too simplistic and may not take into consideration biblical principles that may exist while direct biblical texts are lacking. The Bible has more to say about lifestyle issues, ethics, and other questions than what appears on its surface level. Therefore, this approach seems to be problematic.

Second Approach: What Scripture Does Not Allow Is Prohibited

The second approach seems to have clear controls and may not as easily be abused as the first approach, but it can be very restrictive and make life today very difficult. The question would also be, if such an approach is really the intention of Scripture and favored by Scripture itself. Undoubtedly, the second approach lacks the freedom that the first approach guarantees. It may hardly look for biblical principles and may also be satisfied with a superficial reading of Scripture. In addition, following such an approach would complicate or even hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the proclamation of the Three Angels’ Messages, if, e.g., modern means of transportation and communication were excluded.

Scripture tells us not to add to or subtract from it

(Deut 4:1-2; Rev 22:18-19; etc.). And one could argue that this means we are not allowed to do anything that is not mentioned in Scripture. However, the question is whether or not these texts have to be interpreted this way. G. R. Osborne correctly argues that they should be understood in the context of heresy. “As in Deuteronomy, Christ is warning against false teachers who distort the meaning of the prophecies by adding their own teaching to it or removing the meaning that God intended.”¹⁶ This is supported by G. K. Beale: “Such false teaching amounts to ‘adding to’ God’s law. It is also tantamount to ‘taking away from’ God’s law . . .”¹⁷ These biblical texts do not address the issue “What Scripture does not explicitly allow is forbidden,” e.g., driving a car is prohibited because it is not specifically allowed in Scripture. Ironically, while teaching additional regulations—things not explicitly mentioned in Scripture but enforced in order not to go beyond what Scripture allows for—recording them in Mishnah, Talmud, and other documents, and most likely not regarding them as additions to Scripture, Jewish leaders actually added their traditions to Scripture and were criticized by Jesus for this practice. As the first approach, so also this second approach is quite problematic.

Third Approach: Choosing the Two Aforementioned Approaches Simultaneously

To pick and choose between the two approaches above sounds bizarre. It is hardly conceivable that the first and second approaches can be combined in a meaningful way and be compatible. It defies all logic to alternate between these approaches that are diametrically opposed to each other.

Unfortunately, people are inconsistent and often-times make decisions that are not based on clear principles. Because of sloppy thinking they may combine what is irreconcilable. They may also divide life into different compartments with some being governed by one approach while others are governed by the opposite approach. It seems to us that the third approach is worse than the previous two. Knowingly or unknowingly the individual becomes the norm to interpret Scripture. With this approach there is the danger that the first or second position are chosen subjectively, either to come to personally desired outcomes and conclusions or to maintain some kind of tradition.

Fourth Approach: Biblical Principles to Decide Theological Issues

As pointed out, the fourth approach to issues not mentioned in Scripture is governed by biblical principles. It may be more challenging than the previous approaches and forces those applying it to study Scripture

seriously, pray, and seek the will of God. However, this is not disadvantageous but actually beneficial. It fosters a mature and growing relationship with God. This approach seems also to allow for some latitude, especially when dealing with the concept of Christian stewardship. By default, this seems to be the best possible approach among the four.

W. C. Kaiser and M. Silva maintain: “Only what is directly taught in Scripture is binding on the conscience. . . . To bind the consciences of believers to that which is not *directly* taught in Scripture is to come perilously close to raising up a new form of tradition . . .”¹⁸ This sounds like the first approach. But they continue: “Thus, what is directly condemned in Scripture, we must condemn. And what is condemned by immediate application of a principle we must also condemn.”¹⁹

Selecting an Approach

This brings us to the point where we have to make a decision on the various approaches dealing with issues not directly mentioned in Scripture. Such a decision is at the same time a decision on how to do theology. Obviously, a simplistic approach will not do. The Lord wants us to grapple with issues, think them through, and—under the guidance of His Spirit—come up with responses to questions not directly addressed in Scripture that are biblically-based, sound, and consistent.

What does the Bible suggest? How did Jesus and the apostles go about dealing with questions that were not discussed (or not sufficiently discussed) in Scripture?

In Matthew 19 Jesus was confronted with the question of divorce. The Old Testament contained a permission of divorce in the case of indecency (Deut 24:1-3). But Jesus knew that this was a concession made to Israel due to the people’s hardness of heart (Matt 19:8). So he did not choose the approach “what the Bible does not explicitly prohibit is allowed.” Rather he went to the biblical principle that he found in the creation account, declaring that God made one man and one woman, joined the two together in marriage, and they became one flesh (Gen 1:27: 2:24). From this fact Jesus deduced: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate” (Matt 19:6).

In Romans 1 Paul discussed the sinfulness of the Gentiles, mentioning various vices including homosexual activity. Clear prohibitions of a homosexual lifestyle are found in Leviticus 18 and 20. But Paul did not only allude to these texts but provided the creation (Rom 1)/fall (Rom 5) context as a reason for the rejection of homosexuality activity. Even though Paul had biblical texts opposed to a homosexual lifestyle, he still used biblical principles to point out the problem.

When His disciples were accused of breaking

the Sabbath because they were picking some heads of grain—supposedly harvesting, threshing, and winnowing—Jesus opposed the absurdity of the claim by referring to 1 Samuel 21, the story of David receiving the consecrated bread, and concluded: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

Evidently, the fourth approach should be favored. Again this is an approach dealing with issues not mentioned at all, or only marginally mentioned in Scripture. It does not do away with a literal understanding of biblical texts, (unless we encounter parables, metaphors, symbols, etc.),²⁰ but involves sound exegesis derived from Scripture itself and the discovery of biblical themes. But some questions remain: First, how do we find biblical principles and apply them to the issues we face? Answer: We read Scripture widely and on a regular basis. We ask the Holy Spirit to guide us to the right principles. Also the community of believers is important because generally the church as a whole is able to point us to biblical principles that are applicable to specific situations.

Second, which additional criteria should be utilized?

- (a) When looking for biblical principles, those principles have priority that share the same or similar concerns with the question under investigation. For instance, when abortion is being discussed, principles related to the value of life, killing, and death need to be considered.
- (b) The solution to a specific case must be in harmony with other biblical teachings on the same subject as well as with the entire biblical message.²¹ While we acknowledge different theological emphases in various biblical books, nevertheless there is an overarching unity. Consequently, there should not be loose ends and conflicting statements when we do theology to determine how difficult questions not directly addressed in Scripture should be solved. Biblical truth is an integrated and united system which should not be destroyed.
- (c) Some issues/principles should be traced throughout the Bible in order to see whether or not changes in practice have taken place. If changes can be observed, the direction of change may be further pursued, as was done, for example, by Christians in the case of the abolition of slavery.
- (d) Christians are not islands. Dealing with these questions may require us to consult with other church members and people of experience and to listen their suggestions and advice.

Conclusion

People with a high view of Scripture have several options when it comes to responding to questions that

are not addressed or only marginally addressed in Scripture. An approach that uses biblical principles to deal with these issues seems to be most fruitful and demanded by Scripture itself. Adventists are keen to maintain their faithfulness to Scripture.

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¹Cf. Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series vol. 12, edited by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 58-104; Gerhard Pfandl, *The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture* (Wahroonga, Australia: South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists, n.d.); Ekkehardt Mueller, “Guidelines for the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, edited by G. W. Reid, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2006), 111-134.

²Jack Pearl Lewis, “Silence of Scripture in Reformation Thought,” *Restoration Quarterly* 48/2 (2006): 73.

³Lewis, 82.

⁴Cf. Lewis, 83-84. Darrell Hamilton, “Silence of the Scriptures,” <http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVArticles/SilenceOfTheScriptures.htm>, accessed 5/15/2012, seems cautiously to allow for this approach, but does not seem to be completely clear, because he may to some extent sympathize with the second approach.

⁵I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 40. “The Anglicans . . . ‘upheld the authority of Scripture inasmuch as no practice directly condemned by the Bible should be countenanced in public worship . . .’”

⁶John Barber, “Luther and Calvin on Music and Worship,” *Reformed Perspective Magazine*, 8/26 (2006), 8, n. 23.

⁷Lewis, 75. However, Zwingli was not consistent: “Zwingli’s concept of a state church demanded infant membership, and he defended infant baptism though he had earlier agreed that it had no scriptural command or example. . . . When the Anabaptists demanded a text for infant baptism, Zwingli replied that neither was there a plain text for admission of women to the Lord’s Table, but he thought no wrong was being done in the practice” (75).

⁸John Calvin, *Institutes* 4.18.12.

⁹Quoted in W.E. Garrison and A.T. DeGroot, *The Disciples of Christ: A History* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958), 140. Similar ideas are expressed by popular writers such as Stan Cox, “The Silence of Scripture,” <http://www.watchmanmag.com/0612/061210.htm>; accessed 5/15/2012, who is opposed to musical instruments in the worship service, missionary societies, fellowship halls, socials, women preachers, and many other things, Mark Dunagan, “Silence of the Scriptures,” http://www.ch-of-christ.beaverton.or.us/Silence_of_the_Scriptures.htm; accessed 5/15/2012, and Wayne Jackson, “The ‘Silence’ of the Scriptures: Permissive or Prohibitive?” <http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/128-the-silence-of-the-scriptures-permissive-or-prohibitive>, accessed 5/15/2012.

¹⁰Woody Woodrow, “The Silence of Scripture and the Restoration Movement,” *Restoration Quarterly* 28/1 (1985-1986): 31-32.

¹¹Woodrow, 38.

¹²Marshall, 40.

¹³Woodrow, 33, shows that the same pattern appeared with other Restorationists, e.g., G. C. Brewer (1884-1956). He “also main-

tained the force of silence to be proscriptive and permissive. On the one hand, silence meant prohibition to act: ‘To remain silent means that we will stop practicing where the Bible stops teaching; that our practice in matters of religion is limited by the word of the Lord, restricted by divine revelation.’ However, Brewer also believed many current organizations about which Scripture said nothing were allowable: ‘We may have a Bible school (Sunday school), a singing school, a Christian college, a religious paper, an orphans’ home, an old people’s home, etc.’” See Lewis, 78, on John Oecolampadius.

¹⁴Lewis, 79. In a similar way Calvin “approved ‘of those human constitutions only which are founded on the authority of God and derived from Scripture, and are therefore altogether divine.’ But Calvin made a distinction between ‘all the parts of divine worship, and everything necessary to salvation’ and ‘external discipline and ceremonies’” (85).

¹⁵Some people have used the story of Noah and God’s command to build the ark with gopher wood and have concluded that Noah was not allowed to use other wood for the ark. I would agree. But Noah was not told not to make tools and was not told to make them from gopher wood. If he made tools from pinewood, this was not a violation of the divine will, many people would most likely say.

¹⁶G. R. Osborne. *Revelation*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 795.

¹⁷G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 1151. See also D. L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-21*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 56A (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 80.

¹⁸Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 204. Marshall, 9, believes “it is right to seek a principled way of moving from Scripture to its contemporary understanding and application, and that the way to do this is to explore how the principles can be established from Scripture itself . . .” However, he seems to go way beyond what is suggested here.

¹⁹Walter and Silva, 205.

²⁰Non-literal or figurative language requires additional procedures for a careful and accurate interpretation.

²¹Kevin J. Vanhoozer, in Marshall, 93, writes: “They must learn to read particular texts in the context of the whole Scripture, and in relation to the center of Scripture, the gospel of Jesus Christ. They must learn not simply to parse the verbs or to process the information, but to render the same kind of judgments as those embedded in the canon in new contexts and with different concepts. ‘Canon is key . . .’”

***Sola Scriptura* Principle and the Reformation**

BY KWABENA DONKOR

Sola Scriptura is a principle of religious authority which gained great visibility during the Protestant Reformation. It was employed to point to the Bible as the only normative authority for Christian belief and practice. Although the phrase gained prominence during

the Reformation, it was not a creation of the Reformers; it was already in currency during the Middle Ages.¹ The contexts in which the phrase has been used, however, create nuances of meaning which should not be confused. For our purposes in this article, we shall focus on the meaning of the phrase as used in the context of the Reformation. Within this context, we hope to explore the intent of the phrase and its motivations.

***Sola Scriptura* in the Reformation: Its Intent**

The name of Martin Luther (1483-1546) is so inextricably linked with the Protestant *sola Scriptura* concept that it is impossible to discuss the concept without reference to him. The idea was at the heart of Luther’s struggles with the Roman Catholic Church, but the struggle was not for the *formal* recognition of the Bible’s authority. As a standard for revealed truth, the Bible had been acknowledged through the centuries, including the Medieval Catholic church. Thus Luther shared the common theological assumption of the formal, normative authority of the Bible with his opponents.² Luther’s break from medieval theology on the Bible was his denial of the assumed compatibility between the Bible and the church’s hermeneutical tradition. At the heart of the Reformation *sola Scriptura* principle, then, was the issue of biblical interpretation, the right understanding of the Bible. The Reformation opposed “the arbitrariness,” which, “despite the recognition of Scripture as God’s Word, neglects its concrete authority.”³ *Sola Scriptura*, in the context of the Reformation, served to focus attention on the Bible as a principle of interpretation against competing principles.⁴

In Luther’s day, the main competing principle of interpretation was tradition. It is important to emphasize that Luther’s critique of tradition was, first and foremost, not as a source of religious authority. His complaint fell heavily on the use of tradition as a principle of interpretation. He confronted the position that Scripture can be properly understood only by a few and that it was not a sufficient principle to say that it must be interpreted in accordance with its own spirit.⁵ John M. Headley captures the essence of the principle of tradition that Luther was combating, noting that “such a principle leads to the burial of Scripture and theology’s immersion in the commentaries of men, where the sophists seek not the substance of Scripture but what they may notice in it.”⁶ To see the *sola Scriptura* principle as a critique of the hegemony of tradition (regarding interpretation) over the Bible clarifies the importance of the term *sola*.

The term *sola* addresses the Reformers’ critical *intent* regarding the role of the Bible in the Church. It is generally agreed that for Luther and the Reformers, “*sola Scriptura* refers to Scripture as both the source and norm of the Christian gospel . . . and the source and

norm of the church's doctrine."⁷⁷ *Sola Scriptura*, thus, construes the Bible as *norma normans* (the ultimate norm that rules over other norms), not *norma normata*, that is, a rule that is ruled by other norms, such as tradition, reason, or religious experience. In order to fully appreciate the *sola Scriptura*'s construal of the role of the Bible in the Church, however, it should be pointed out that the principle implies a certain "logical geography" that needs to be outlined briefly. In the words of Graham Cole, "*sola Scriptura*, in systematic perspective, is an implicate of the perfections of Scripture. The appeal to Scripture alone makes little sense if Scripture is without authority, or is unnecessary for human welfare, or is unclear as to its meaning, or is insufficient in terms of its divine intent."⁷⁸ The authority of the Bible, its necessity, its clarity (perspicuity), and its sufficiency, these constitute what is traditionally known as the perfections of Scripture. To talk about *sola Scriptura* without these perfections of Scripture is to fail to capture the profundity of the issues that the concept was designed to counteract.

Authority of Scripture

Luther's words at Worms, on April 18, 1521, represented the Reformers' view on the authority of the Bible that was bound with their concept of *sola Scriptura*. "Unless I am convinced," he said, "by the testimonies of Scripture or evident reason (*rationes evidente*)—for I believe neither the Pope nor Councils alone, since it is established that they have often erred and contradicted themselves—I am the prisoner of the Scriptures cited by me, and my conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God; I neither can nor will recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me. Amen."⁷⁹ J. I. Packer marks the intent of these words by Luther: "What Luther thus voiced at Worms shows the essential motivation and concern, theological and religious, of the entire Reformation movement: namely, that the Word of God alone must rule, and no Christian man dare do other than allow it to enthrone itself in his conscience and heart."⁸⁰

We have pointed out already that both Luther and his opponents affirmed the formal authority of the Bible. It was noted as well that Luther's break with his opponents consisted in his denial of the *a priori* assumption of the Church that its traditional teachings were in agreement with the Bible. We can now state more succinctly that with his *sola Scriptura* principle, Luther's novel point was to insist that Scripture is its own interpreter, *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres*. The historical context is worth repeating. A fictional apostolic tradition had developed which was not only regarded in the Church as a source of theological knowledge, but treated as "the necessary warrant for the authority of the Bible, and as

the indispensable guide for the interpretation of Scripture."⁸¹ The point needed to be made that the authority of the Bible needed no warrant. The doctrine of the perfections of Scripture, in general, was developed to counteract this tendency. More specifically, the authority of Scripture, as one of its perfections, emphasizes the *autopistia* nature of the Bible's authority, namely, "that the truths of the Bible authenticate themselves as divine by their own light."⁸²

Necessity of Scripture

Another of the perfections of Scripture, the necessity of Scripture, was designed to combat two separate tendencies. On the one hand, there was the self-sufficient, Bible-warranting Roman Catholic Church which, though needing tradition, did not really need Scripture in spite of professing it to be a norm. For, "according to Rome it is far more correct to say that the Bible needs the Church than that the Church has need of the Bible."⁸³ On the other hand, there were groups such as the Cathari for whom the Bible was really superfluous. By exalting the inner word against the external, and regarding the Bible not as the Word of God but as a testimony, these groups considered the real Word of God as that which was spoken by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of God's people. Against both tendencies, the Reformers insisted on the necessity of the written Word of God. In doing so, however, the Reformers were not advancing a theory of *absolute* necessity which would preclude the Church. Their point was to emphasize the necessity of the written word as a witness to divine revelation. It is Scripture's nature as witness to divine revelation that makes it necessary. Because it is beyond humans to work out any true knowledge of God for themselves, divine revelation is needed and that is what Scripture provides.

Perspicuity (Clarity) of Scripture

In the context of the Reformers' struggle with the Roman Catholic Church, the notion of Scripture's clarity went to the heart of the contest. To ascribe sole authority or necessity to a Bible which is unclear would make no sense. Leading up to the time of the Reformers, a climate had built up regarding the obscurity of Scripture for which reason the laity were not encouraged to read it. "In 1199, Innocent III declared that the desire to read the Bible is to be commended, but that the reading in "conventicles" (without the supervision of the duly appointed priest) is not to be tolerated, because the profundity of Scriptures is such that not only the unlearned, but also the *docti et prudentes* (taught and prudent/wise ones) cannot grasp its meaning."⁸⁴ Also, the Synod of Toulouse (1229) had forbidden the laity from reading the New and Old Testaments for devotional purposes, except the Psalter.⁸⁵ The supposed obscurity of Scripture

also was the reason why Fathers and Councils and Popes had been elevated to the position of ultimate interpreters.¹⁶ In *The Bondage of the Will* Luther argues that Erasmus confuses the *Deus Absconditus* and profundity of the things of God with obscurity. Furthermore, clarity of Scripture did not mean simplicity. The critical issue has to do with the difference between propositions and statements. For Luther Scripture expresses absolutely clear propositions on its subject matter, although some statements may not be clear to us because of our ignorance of their vocabulary and grammar.¹⁷

Sufficiency of Scripture

It is worth noting that the issue of the *sufficiency of Scripture* was the immediate background for *sola Scriptura*. Indeed, the *sola* in the formulation *sola Scriptura* was intended to highlight the sufficiency of Scripture. The various doctrines, institutions, and traditions which the church had put in place, with no basis in Scripture, were an indication to the Reformers that Rome deemed the Bible to be insufficient.¹⁸ In the polemical situation of the Reformation, sufficiency had been traditionally described as a clash of the *sola Scriptura*-principle versus Scripture *and* tradition-principle. This clash has been formalized in recent times by Heiko Oberman as a conflict between Tradition I and Tradition II perspectives.¹⁹ Oberman defines Tradition I by noting:

In the first case the sole authority of Holy Scripture is upheld as the canon, or standard, of revealed truth in such a way that Scripture is not contrasted with Tradition. Scripture, it is argued, can be understood only within the Church and has been understood within the Church by the great doctors specifically committed to the task of interpretation of Scripture and especially endowed with the gift of understanding this unique source of truth. The history of obedient interpretation is the Tradition of the Church²⁰

He defines Tradition II as follows:

In the second case Tradition is a wider concept. It is argued that the Apostles did not commit everything to writing, usually on the grounds that the scriptural authors reported what Christ said and did during His lifetime but not what Christ taught His disciples in the period between the resurrection and the ascension. During these forty days an oral tradition originated which is to be regarded as a complement to Holy Scripture, handed down to the Church of later times as a second source of revelation.²¹

Oberman contrasts the two conceptions of traditions this way:

In the first case Tradition was seen as the instrumental vehicle of Scripture which brings the contents of Holy Scripture to life in a constant dialogue between the doctors of Scripture and the Church; in the second case Tradition was seen as the authoritative vehicle of divine truth, embedded in Scripture but overflowing in extra-scriptural apostolic tradition handed down through Episcopal succession.²²

The position taken by the Reformers was clearly against Tradition II. However, could their position on the sufficiency of Scripture be squared with Tradition I? Keith Mathison thinks “the case can be made that the Reformers adhered to Tradition I.”²³ On this point, Mathison disagrees with A. N. S. Lane whose taxonomy has four components: the Coincidence view (tradition coincides with Scripture; c/f Tradition I), the Supplementary view (tradition is a second source of revelation; c/f Tradition II), the Ancillary view (tradition is an aid for interpreting Scripture), and the Unfolding view (tradition is the process by which the meaning of apostolic doctrine is gradually unfolded).²⁴ Lane identifies the Reformers’ position with the ancillary view. In trying to evaluate the Reformers’ position in relation to Tradition I, two points critical to Tradition I’s position ought to be stated. Although the Bible is maintained as the sole source of revelation and the final authority for doctrine and practice, it is to be interpreted in and by the church, and it is to be interpreted according to the *regula fidei* (rule of faith).

Luther’s words on Popes and Councils noted in his speech at Worms would seem to deny the validity of Tradition I. It seems that while Luther was not willing to go the way of subjective interpretation of Scripture, and even acknowledge some valid traditions, he was equally unwilling to *formally* yield biblical authority to Church tradition, or councils and popes. Greg Krehbiel criticizes Mathison’s equation of the Reformers’ position with Tradition I, noting:

But Luther goes too far. He says “I do not accept the authority of popes and councils.” Whatever else Luther may have said, *this* is the message of Lutheranism – councils have no authority whatsoever. So Luther has demolished any foundation for that ancient doctrine of the church that Keith summarized in chapter one – that the Bible is supposed to be interpreted in and by the church. How can it do that when people say “I do not accept the authority of popes and councils”?²⁵

Luther's concept of *sola Scriptura*, from the point of view of Scripture's sufficiency seems to defy the neat categorizations of Oberman. He denied both extremes of the radical Reformers who would have nothing to do with tradition or Church (Tradition I) and the Roman Catholic Church's position which subsumed Scripture under tradition (Tradition II). And as is being pointed out here, Luther's stance did not agree with Tradition I either.

In all of this, what remains clear, however, is the discriminating intent of the Reformation *sola Scriptura* concept. Graham Cole notes: "the logic of 'sola' has to do with the exclusion of rivals. Its use indicates the presence of a limiting principle."²⁶

Sola Scriptura in the Reformation: Its Motivation

In seeking to explore the motivation for the Reformers' *sola Scriptura* principle, we wish to address their rationale for holding so strongly onto the normative, necessary and sufficient authority of the Bible. Why was the Bible authoritative for them? Again our focus will be on Luther. As mentioned before, the issue between Luther and his opponents went beyond the normative authority of Scripture which we have said was held by both camps. Luther's break with patristic and Medieval theology centered on his rejection of the assumed congruity between Scripture and the church's tradition of interpretation. At the center of the conflict was the right understanding of the Bible, which has to do with the *content* of the Bible. It follows that, for Luther, the key issue, and perhaps his primary motivation for defending the *sola Scriptura*, did not have to do with the *formal* authority of Scripture. By the formal authority of Scripture is meant the authority that pertains to the Bible by virtue of its divine attributes.²⁷ It appears that Luther's motivation was based on the material authority of the Bible. This distinction between the formal and material aspects of the Bible relates to Luther's understanding of the phrase "Word of God." Luther is noted to have used the terms *Word*, *Scripture(s)*, and *gospel* in the same contexts without clearly distinguishing them.²⁸ For him, the Word of God was an overarching term that assumed three forms: the personal Word (Christ), the spoken Word (gospel), and the written Word (Scripture). These forms are distinguished and ranked in that order, although they were not to be separated. Yet, it was clear in this schematization that Scripture, the written Word, had a servant status to Christ, the personal Word. Thus, Luther's argument against his adversaries could take the following form, "Therefore, if the adversaries press the Scriptures against Christ, we urge Christ against the Scriptures. We have the Lord, they the servants, we have the Head, they the feet or members, over which the Head necessarily dominates and takes precedence."²⁹

With the servant form of Scriptures we hit the core of Luther's understanding of the Bible and its authority. It seems to explain Luther's emphasis on the material principle of biblical authority. It has been suggested that Luther did not develop a systematic locus "On Holy Scripture" for this very reason.³⁰ It was impossible for him to write formally about the Bible without its content, Jesus Christ and the gospel which speaks about Him. The potency of Luther's material principle of biblical authority becomes evident in his popular assessment of biblical books. This material principle of authority translated into the critical principle of *was Christum treibet* (whatever promotes Christ). On this basis, the epistle of James is marked as "an epistle of straw" because it "does not once mention the passion, the resurrection, or the Spirit of Christ."³¹ Similarly, the canonical status of the book of Revelation is questioned. In this particular case, it seemed initially that inspiration would be a decisive factor, for in doubting Revelation's apostolicity Luther noted, "I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it." Yet, it becomes all too clear that inspiration is not the critical factor when he observes that "for me this is reason enough not to think highly of it [Revelation]: Christ is neither taught nor known in it. But to teach Christ, this is the thing which an apostle is bound to do."³²

So, what is the rationale or motivation for Luther's *sola Scriptura*? The answer depends on what one means by Scripture. For Luther, Scripture is the written form of the personal Word to whom it is subservient. In this written Word is the proclamation of the personal Word, the gospel, which is the heart of the Bible. The gospel, as revealed in Scripture is the authority. It is an *interpretive* authority. It is a *material* principle of authority. It is the gospel which Luther used to test the decrees of Popes and Councils and found them wanting. This idea is the "canon within the canon" concept which is attributed to Luther. Luther's "Scripture alone" was at its core *solus Christus* (Christ alone), and his motivation for defending it was his inestimable value of the gospel which Scripture proclaims. Lotz captures Luther's motivation for upholding *sola Scriptura*:

When Christians stand before and under Holy Scripture so as to acknowledge its binding authority for faith and life, they do so *because* they thereby stand before and under the personal Word of God, Jesus Christ, their Savior and Lord; and *because*, at the same time, they stand before and under the living Word of the gospel, the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, through which Christ and his Spirit continually create and sustain faith. I contend, therefore, that, in urging "Scripture alone" Luther was urging "Christ alone."³³

The foregoing exposition on Luther's Christological emphasis in the *sola Scriptura* concept is not intended to deny Luther's belief in the inspiration of Scripture.³⁴ Even Lotz will say that one may not invoke Luther's authority to support the view that Scripture as such is not God's true Word and authentic revelation. Neither may one, in Luther's name drive a wedge between the written Word on the one hand and the personal and the spoken Word on the other.³⁵ The Reformers' concern for careful exegesis and an educated clergy points to their high regard for the words of Scripture as such. Nevertheless, it appears that given the critical issue of the interpretive hegemony of Fathers and Councils and Popes by people who also subscribed to the formal authority of the Bible, Luther found himself perhaps over-emphasizing the material authority of the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Although Luther may have overstressed some aspects of the *sola Scriptura* principle, he correctly set the Bible against those who recognized it as God's Word, but neglected its concrete authority. Ultimately, *sola Scriptura* implies that the Bible stands alone and above other authorities. That is, as *norma normans* (norm not ruled by other authority) the Scriptures function as the ultimate norm to evaluate and judge tradition, reason, experience, etc. As Seventh-day Adventists, it is our privilege to carry on this reformation principle and uphold the authority, accept the necessity, and recognize the perspicuity of the Scriptures.

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¹Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 390.

²David W. Lotz, "Sola Scriptura: Luther on Biblical Authority," *Interpretation* 35/3 (1981), 266.

³G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 107.

⁴*Ibid.*, 306. Luther's clarion call, therefore, was not for a return to the Bible as an original source (humanism and the Renaissance advocated that). It was not even a call to renounce every bit of tradition (both Luther and Calvin had great respect for church tradition). Luther's call was to recover the true tradition of biblical truth through correct interpretation of the Bible, unhampered by an assumed, necessary congruity between the Bible and traditional church teaching.

⁵Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2001), 99.

⁶It should be remembered, as Headley reminds us, that during the late Middle Ages the text of Scripture was generally "published with the text of the Gloss [comments on the margin] and comments upon that Gloss by other interpreters" (John M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 82, quoted in Mathison, 99).

⁷Graham Cole, "Sola Scriptura: Some Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," *Churchman* 104/1 (1990)

⁸*Ibid.*, 24.

⁹Quoted in, Clyde L. Manschreck (ed.), *A History of Christianity: Readings in the History of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 31.

¹⁰J. I. Packer, "Sola Scriptura" in History and Today" in John W. Montgomery (ed.), *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1973), 44.

¹¹Loius Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 163.

¹²*Ibid.*, 164

¹³*Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁴F. E. Mayer, "The Principium Cognoscendi of Roman Catholic Theology," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 22/5 (1951), 326.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶See Erling T. Teigen, "The Clarity of Scripture and Hermeneutical Principles in the Lutheran Confessions," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (1982), 148.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁸Berkouwer, 302.

¹⁹See Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 361-390; Mathison, 72-81.

²⁰Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, trans. Paul L. Nyhus (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), 60, quoted in Mathison, 73.

²¹Quoted in Mathison, 73-74.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Mathison, 85.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 86. See also A. N. S. Lane, "Scripture, Tradition, and Church: An Historical Survey," *Vox Evangelica* 9 (1975), 37-55.

²⁵Greg Krehbiel thinks that the "problem with Luther and Calvin's doctrine is that—practically speaking—it does not allow the church to do this. Keith is right that they did not intend to throw the church, or individual Christians, back onto their own subjective judgment, as if their own opinion was a law unto itself. But by tearing down the authority of popes and councils without recognizing any other practical way for the church to interpret Scripture, that is precisely what they did" ("The Shape of Sola by Keith Mathison, Reviewed Chapter by Chapter, with Discussion," available at <http://www.crowhill.net/Mathison.html>, Accessed, April 30, 2012).

²⁶Cole, 24-25.

²⁷For this reason David Lotz has argued that Luther was not a biblicist. Lotz observes, "I take 'biblicism' to denote a view of Scripture and its authority which is based on the divine attributes ('perfections') of the Bible as a 'supernatural book.' The Bible's authority is thereby located in its 'form' as an inspired book, rather than its 'matter' or content. The Bible's divine inspiration and factual inerrancy guarantee the truth of its message, with the result that fiat, though directed ultimately to Christ, is first directed to the Bible as written Word of God. For Luther, by contrast, the Bible's authority is self-authenticating owing to its content (Christ and his gospel), and the object of faith is, from first to last, Christ himself," see Lotz, 268, n. 30.

²⁸Luther wrote, "When the light of the Gospel first began to appear after the great darkness of human traditions, many listened eagerly to sermons. But now that the teaching of religion has been successfully reformed by the great growth of the Word of God, many are joining the sects, to their destruction. Many despise not only Scared Scripture but almost all learning." See LW 26, 47/WA 40-1, 105 ("Galatian Lectures," 1535), quoted in Lotz, 260.

²⁹Luther's Works (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1960), 34:112.

³⁰Lotz, p. 268.

³¹Luther's Works, 35:396.

³²Ibid., 398-399.

³³Lotz, 266.

³⁴Packer cautions appropriately that "It would be wrong to view

Reformation theology as the projection into words of an experience, but equally it would be wrong to forget that it was born out of a tremendous renewal of Christian experience...But the presupposition of the experience was that what Scripture says has divine authority" (Packer, 45-46).

³⁵Ibid., 263

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Christian Lifestyle and Appearance

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

While millions of humans suffer, hunger, and die, others live extravagant lives. They own the hottest gadgets, have the newest and largest houses, seek constantly new forms of entertainment, and dedicate their lives to ever-changing fashion by wearing the latest and most expensive clothes.

"The Emperor's New Clothes" is a story by Hans Christian Andersen, dealing with a king who always needs the newest things, especially clothes. Two people offer to weave and tailor for him an incredible suit, made from extraordinary fabric that is invisible to ignorant people. When the emperor parades in his new clothes, the people pretend to admire what they do not see, while a child asks, why the emperor has no clothes on. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon comes at last to the conclusion that all pursuit of luxury, ease, and pleasure is in the end nothing else than vanity. This raises the question of the priorities in life and a Christian lifestyle.

I. Principles of a Christian's Life According to 1 Peter

1 Peter 2:21	Redeemed persons follow Christ's example.
1 Peter 1:15; 2:12; 3:16	They live holy lives, exhibiting excellent behavior.
1 Peter 3:13,17, 4:19	In spite of suffering they seek what is right and good and do it.
1 Peter 1:2; 4:2	They obey God's will.
1 Peter 2:12; 4:11	Their lives glorify God and help others to glorify the Lord too.
1 Peter 1:22; 2:13, 17; 4:8,10	They love and serve.
1 Peter 4:7; 5:8	Their lives are shaped by prayer, vigilance, and sobriety.
1 Peter 2:9; 3:1, 15	They proclaim the gospel by word of mouth and by

their lifestyle, aiming at winning others to become children of God.

Peter stresses that in this world Christians are strangers (1 Pet 1:23; 2:11) and may irritate others indirectly because they do not participate in the majority's wild life, debauchery, and licentiousness. They have committed their life to Jesus, are extremely grateful for the gift of salvation, and follow Jesus' example. John uses the term "world" to point to that which is hostile to God (1 John 2:15-17). While Christians cannot and do not join the world's opposition to God and its perversity (see 2 Cor 6:14-18; Jas 4:4), they are not called to turn away from the world completely. God loves the world (John 3:16), and Christians carry responsibility for it (Matt 28:19-20). Therefore, they live exemplary lives.

II. The Outward Appearance of Christians

1. Peter

While discussing foundational principles of the Christian life Peter also addresses the outward appearance of Christians.

1 Peter 3:1-5

Obviously, Peter approves of adornment; only inward, and not outward adornment. While he rejects outward adornment, inner adornment is to be manifested through reverence, purity, gentleness, submissiveness, and humility. Such adornment is winsome and may reach non-Christians.

2. Paul

In 1 Timothy 2:9-10: Paul supports inward adornment too. Outward adornment is mentioned by listing some items of jewelry. It is inward adornment such as modesty that counts.

3. In the Old Testament

Pride was one reason for the fall in heaven. Satan wanted to be like God (Isa 14:12-14; Eze 28:14-17).
Isaiah 3:16-24 Wearing of decorative jewelry is associated with

Exodus 33:5-6

pride. God’s judgment on the haughty daughters of Jerusalem brings about a reversal of circumstances, “branding instead of beauty.”

Although jewelry was worn during OT times, God told Israel to take it off, before He would bring them to the Promised Land, probably as a sign of repentance and returning to Him. Functional jewelry such as the one worn by high priests and kings was not forbidden. Obviously Scripture makes a difference between functional and purely decorative jewelry, allowing for the first and rejecting the second.

4. The Example of Jesus

Jesus’ appearance was marked by simplicity and modesty. However, His garment was of good quality, because the soldiers decided not to divide it (John 19:23-24). Inward values were more important to Jesus than

was outward appearance (Matt 15:18-20); yet he did not neglect the outward (Luke 7:44). Christians follow Christ’s example.

III. Practical Principles

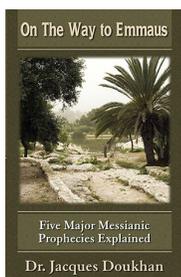
When discussing clothing and outward appearance, one should consider the following issues and principles:

- The principle of simplicity
- The concept that clothing must meet the highest moral standards
- The question of practicality
- The economical perspective (stewardship)
- The consideration of furthering vs. damaging one’s health
- The principle of natural beauty

Conclusion

Christians will strive to clothe themselves in a simple, modest, and tasteful way. They will not go out in rags (if possible) nor will they show off in an extreme way. They will make a difference between what is good and what the Bible calls “worldly” in a negative way. Sometimes it is difficult to make right decisions, but believers can turn to the Lord in prayer and ask Him for wisdom to make such decisions that honor God and allow them to be effective witnesses. Then they will live their lives happily.

BOOK NOTES



Jacques Doukhan. *On the Way to Emmaus: Five Major Messianic Prophecies Explained*. Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers, 2012, 236pp. US\$11.60; on Kindle US\$7.99.

In this book, Jacques Doukhan approaches the hermeneutically challenging subject of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament.

Each chapter deals with a specific messianic text, titled by a key word: Genesis 3:15, “The Seed”; Numbers 24:15-19, “The Star”; Isaiah 7:14, “The Sign”; Isaiah 53, “The Servant”; and Daniel 9:24-27, “The Sevens.” The biblical passages are investigated with keen sensitivity to intertextual connections and echoes in other parts of the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament. Doukhan also pays attention to the interpretation of his selected messianic texts in Jewish tradition and successfully

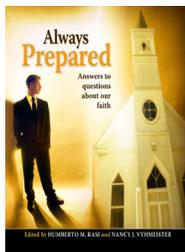
demonstrates that Jewish texts also interpreted those passages within a messianic framework.

Going against the grain of the historical-critical method, the author makes a strong defense of the original messianic intention of the biblical passages analyzed. In this regard, this book also represents an important contribution to this topic and brings a breath of fresh air into passages that are usually restricted to a critical interpretation with no room for a predictive announcement of a Saviour to come. Doukhan’s work also makes an important contribution to our understanding of the hermeneutical relationship between the Testaments. An important implication of the entire work is that the New Testament authors did not read messianic meaning into the Old Testament, but read out of the Old Testament a messianic intention that was already there since its inception.

One may not agree with every single detail of Doukhan’s exegesis, but one is certainly challenged to view the text of the Hebrew Bible from different angles of perception. His sensitivity to the Hebrew language

and his way of dealing with the biblical text also provide interesting methodological venues for those interested in a better understanding of the Scriptures. And his high view of the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures cannot be commended enough. Therefore, this book can be useful to scholars, pastors, and all church members interested in a deeper understanding, application, and preaching of the Messianic prophecies of the Bible.

Elias Brasil de Souza, BRI



H. M. Rasi, and Nancy J. Vyhmeister, eds. *Always Prepared: Answers to Questions About Our Faith*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2012, 219pp. US\$19.99.

A select team of Adventist scholars has been selected to produce this important work dealing with a variety of topics related to the Adventist

Christian faith. Its twenty chapters cover topics such as the reliability and inspiration of the Bible, the contribution of archaeology to understanding the Scriptures, God, the Trinity, the uniqueness of Jesus, miracles, the problem of evil, Sabbath, salvation, the prophetic ministry of Ellen White, etc. Although some of the topics are philosophically and theologically complex, the authors succeeded in offering the reader a clear, concise, and easy presentation of difficult subjects.

Each chapter is titled as a question—“How Reliable is the Bible?”; “Why do I Believe in God?” “Are There Moral Absolutes?” “If God is Good and All-

powerful, How Can He Allow Suffering?” etc.—which is answered from within a framework of Biblical truth and explained from an Adventist perspective. Through this work the Bible is taken seriously and its authority emerges as relevant for tackling some crucial intellectual challenges to the Christian faith. A few considerations give the reader an idea of the value of this work. The chapter “How reliable is the Bible?” by Richard Davidson lays the foundation for the entire work. Davidson tackles important issues such as the textual, historical, prophetic, and scientific reliability of the Bible. In the chapter “To What Extent Do Archaeology Discoveries Confirm the Bible?” Randall Younker clarifies that although archaeology does not function to “prove the Bible” archaeology does make a very positive a contribution inasmuch as it can help us understand better the historical, linguistic and cultural context of the Bible. Furthermore, Younker also argues that archaeology may be very helpful in refuting criticisms against the Bible’s historicity.

This book will be useful to college/university students, pastors concerned on addressing important issues pertaining to the Bible and our self-understanding as Seventh-day Adventists. Furthermore, it can be used in study groups, given as a gift to non-cristian/non-Adventist friends, and mined for topics and ideas to be addressed in preaching and personal/interpersonal Bible study. The editors are to be commended for organizing such a timely collection of articles with serious and accessible answers to some of the most important questions currently being asked.

Elias Brasil de Souza, BRI