



Reflections

The BRI Newsletter
Number 41
January 2013

The Bible and the Church: Revisiting the Obvious

BY ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA

Since its inception, the Seventh-day Adventist church has been committed to the Bible and the Bible only to establish its system of beliefs and form its mission. The Bible has also played a major role in Ellen White's prophetic ministry and in guiding the Adventist movement through some challenging times of theological turmoil. The current cultural, intellectual, and social circumstances indicate that as the church moves toward the future, its stance on Biblical authority will face increasing challenges from every corner. Theological controversies, ethical dilemmas, and cultural demands will increasingly force the church—amidst turmoils of criticism, doubt, and social pressures—to take a clear stand on crucial issues. Given the realism of this scenario, one might ask: How can the church survive? How can the church preserve its identity through the social changes and the challenges posed by the unstable moral foundation of contemporary society?

Sources of Theological Authority

In dealing with the challenges mentioned above, some people may appeal to tradition; others, to reason and experience. Well-intentioned believers may appeal to the community as the locus of ultimate authority. Unfortunately all of these supra-mentioned authorities, as helpful and convenient as they may be, are not solid enough to function as the bedrock foundation the church needs to face the challenges that lie ahead. Tradition as the ultimate source of theological authority was examined by the Reformers and found wanting on the basis of biblical revelation. As good as it may be, and of course there is good tradition (see 1 Cor 11:2), tradition in itself can never work as the ultimate foundation for the church's beliefs and procedures. Because of its very nature, tradi-

tion is ever changing and easily degenerates into traditionalism. As J. Pelikan, puts it: "Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living."¹ Although not wrong in itself, tradition is deficient as a superior source of authority to judge its claims and correct its course. But what about reason?

Reason might be a viable option, but that it is not reliable has been sufficiently demonstrated by the two world wars that engulfed humanity in killing without precedent in our short human history, the culmination of which was the Holocaust. Such atrocities, perpetrated by enlightened nations, reveals that the enlightened intellect does not stand the test of absolute reliability in matters related to the ultimate good. In regard to human values and the search for the supreme good, the Cartesian ideal followed by the Enlightenment's obsession with making reason the ultimate locus of authority has proved beyond any shadow of doubt to be a total failure. Reason, as part and parcel of God's image in humanity, has an obvious and indispensable role in the apprehension of information and in the processing of knowledge. Reason, however, is also deeply affected by sin and therefore needs a source of authority above itself to judge and correct its ways.

More recently, the community has been advanced as a viable option to hold the seat of ultimate authority. According to this view the community of believers is to determine truth and decide what is right and what is wrong. However, the community is not reliable as a foundation for ultimate authority. Although the community lies at the core of what it means to be a church, and as much as one may value the authority of the community, it has also been affected by sin and as such is obviously not exempt from failure. Communities—religious and otherwise—have perpetrated horrible things against fellow human beings. In the late twentieth century, entire communities came close to the brink of being annihilated by other communities for either religious, racial, or other reasons. So, as much as one may respect the authority of the community, it becomes evident that the community is not a reliable locus for ultimate authority. The community must be subordinated to a higher authority in order to decide what is wrong and what is right.

In the attempt to circumvent the

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Bible and the Church: Revisiting Obvious	1
Contemporary Responses to <i>Sola Scriptura</i> : Implications for Adventist Theology	5
Scripture Applied	
Stewardship of Money	8
Book Notes	
<i>Dios defiende a su pueblo: Comentario exegético de Daniel 10 al 12</i>	10
Worldwide Highlights	
Ordination Study	10
SID Elaborates a Statement on Adventists and Politics	11
BRI Launched New Website	11

problems attached to reason, tradition, and community, one might point out that the Holy Spirit, by bringing enlightenment to the believers, stands as the supreme foundation of authority. Although such a suggestion appears to be absolutely right at first glance, it should be kept in mind that seldom do appeals to the Spirit become a subtle way of legitimizing one's own subjective experience. Even in appealing to the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme seat of authority in theological matters, the believer risks arguing on the basis of a Jesus reconstructed according to his or her own personal or cultural preferences.

The power of the Spirit and the lordship of Jesus certainly play a foundational role in solving theological disagreements. Nevertheless, the question may be asked as to how one can be sure that a given course of action is being moved by the Spirit and, therefore, represents the lordship of Jesus. Again, in indiscriminate appeals to the Holy Spirit or to Jesus the risk persists of replacing Jesus and/or the Spirit with reason/experience, tradition, or community, and therefore of identifying one's own desires and preferences with the will of Jesus and/or guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Among such important, though limited and restricted sources of theological authority, the Bible emerges as the unique and absolute standard to judge all other authorities. Such postulate emerges naturally from the example of Jesus and the self-authenticating claims of the Scriptures themselves.

It does not require too much effort to notice that according to the gospels, Jesus regarded the Scriptures as the ultimate court of appeal and repeatedly pointed to them to clarify an issue or settle a debate. In his appeal to a biblical passage, He asserted with absolute conviction: "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:34, 35).

The Scriptures claim over and over again that what is being said comes from God. Writing to Timothy, Paul stated "that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:15–17). This classical text affirms the divine origin of the Bible with its consequent implications for its inspiration and authority. It evaluates the Scripture as being profitable and clarifies its purpose: "to make wise for salvation."

On the basis of the Scriptures' own claim in regard to their origin and purpose, we are justified to take the Bible as the ultimate seat of authority. The Epistle to the Hebrews declares: "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds" (Heb 1:1–2). This short passage illustrates and encapsulates the canon in its entirety. In the Old Testament God speaks to us "in various ways through the prophets." In the New Testament God speaks to us "through the Son."

Therefore, only the Scriptures are capable of leading us out of the maze of so many ethical options and theological points of view vying for acceptance in a culture of relativism and consumerism. Only by accepting the self-authenticating claims of the Bible and by taking into consideration its absolute authority will the church be able to solve

her theological and practical quandaries and still remain united under the lordship of Jesus Christ.² In order to know what path we have to tread as a corporate church and as individual church members, there is no option but to turn to the Scriptures. After all, the Bible clearly voices its self-authenticating claims of being the ultimate court of appeal in all matters of theology and practice for the church. As the well-known passage from Isaiah posits: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa 8:20; cf. 2 Tim 3:16–17).

Relevance of the Scriptures

The revelation of God in the Scriptures



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.

Editor Elias Brasil de Souza
Production Manager Marlene Bacchus
Images Brenda Flemmer
Editorial Committee
 Artur Stele • Ekkehardt Mueller
 Kwabena Donkor • Clinton Wahlen
 Gerhard Pfandl • Ángel M. Rodríguez

Manuscript Policy Articles important for Adventist theology are written at the invitation of BRI and should be sent by email attachment to the editor at brnewsletter@gc.adventist.org.

Permissions Material may be used for preaching and public presentations and may be reprinted by official entities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church if the Biblical Research Institute is indicated as the source. Translated articles should be reviewed by the appropriate Biblical Research Committee prior to publication.

Copyright © 2013

Biblical Research Institute
 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®
 12501 Old Columbia Pike
 Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA
 Phone: 301.680.6790 • Fax: 301.680.6788

www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org

is the most objective and foundational means God employs to communicate his will to the church. Although modern developments in the social sciences, semiotics, and linguistic theory have stressed the importance of various means and processes of communication—including nonverbal communication—the word remains the primary and foundational instrument for interpersonal interaction and relationships.³ Endowed with the image of God, humans received from the Creator the ability for objective and verbal communication like none of the other created beings that populate this planet. As if this were not enough, God revealed His will to human beings by means of words. And through the Bible He establishes relationships and gives guidance to His people. The effective power of God's Word in creation and regeneration, ubiquitous from Genesis to Revelation, is concisely expressed in Isaiah 40:8: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever."

The Word of God claims authority over all areas and dimensions of individual and church life. The seven points elaborated below just exemplify some areas in need of attention if we want to be faithful to the comprehensive and gracious demands of the Scriptures.

1. Theologians and Bible teachers have the solemn responsibility of putting scholarship into the service of God and His Word. More than thirty years ago, James D. Smart wrote a book titled: *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics*.⁴ This work argues that although the Bible has been mass produced and its academic knowledge has increased, this knowledge has not reached the people. Nonetheless, the crucial challenge that the church faces today is not ignorance of the Bible's message but the silencing of its authoritative voice. A perusal of some recent biblical and theological works produced by so-called conservative scholars seems to indicate the muting of some central claims of the Bible. To exemplify, one could mention the growing skepticism of some evangelical scholars about the literality and historicity of the Genesis' creation account coupled with an increasing disposition to accept evolution.⁵

This situation places a major responsibility on the shoulders of Adventist scholars. With the bewildering variety of theoretical frameworks and methodological options available in the academic community, Adventist scholars must use critical skills to adopt right presuppositions and methods in the interpretation of the Bible. Besides, the combination of academic integrity with humility remains the standard before every Bible scholar and theologian. The authority of the biblical interpreter must be subordinated to that of the Bible, and particular opinions should be humbly submitted to the evalua-

tion of peers and, ultimately, of the church at large. By integrating competent work with prayerful trust in the Spirit, theologians and Bible teachers will continue to be a blessing to the church, inasmuch as they help her to better understand and apply the Word of God. The words of Malachi voiced to Israelite priests, fittingly apply to Adventist theologians and Bible teachers: "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, and people should seek the law from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal 2:7).

2. Church leaders must allow the Bible to determine their leadership style. It has been acknowledged that the Bible is "the greatest collection of leadership case studies ever written, with tremendously useful insights for today's leaders and managers."⁶ But in matters of church leadership and administration the Bible is essential not only because of its "case studies" but because of the leadership principles contained therein. Business management techniques and marketing initiatives may have a place in the overall running of the church, but without the Bible these otherwise useful tools may become nothing more than secular models of efficiency and professionalism. Church leaders are called not only to promote the preaching of Jesus, but also to follow Jesus' style of leadership and administration. Church leaders are not called to act or behave like CEOs, but to be leaders like Jesus: "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Pet 5:2-4).

3. Prayer, an obvious spiritual discipline usually taken for granted, must have a biblical orientation. According to the Bible, prayer should be offered with a recognition of God's holiness and human sinfulness. Biblical prayer does not function as a mantra to manipulate God, but as a means of communication and communion between penitent sinners and a merciful Creator and Redeemer. The following passage, captures an important dimension of Biblical prayer: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the Lord" (Isa 55:6-8).

4. Evangelism must remain biblically oriented. Although there are many legitimate ways of motivat-

ing people to come to Jesus, the preaching of the Word must remain central in the missional undertakings of the church. Along and above the different methods employed to attract people to Jesus, strong efforts should be made to lead people to trust God's Word and follow the Jesus revealed therein. Thus evangelism in its manifold expressions should not only proclaim the person of Jesus, but should also invite people to obey Jesus and be faithful to his message as revealed in the Scriptures. True evangelism honors the Scriptures. When summoned before King Agrippa, Paul clarified that his preaching intended to say "no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come." (Acts 26:22) And, in continuation, the apostle asked the monarch the decisive question: "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?" (Acts 26:27).

5. Christian education must also be conditioned by the Scriptural revelation of God. That education in its ultimate sense must take into consideration the word of God is clearly expressed by the admonitions of God's wisdom in the many biblical passages that emphasize the instructions/law/testimonies of the Lord as the source of wisdom. The largest chapter of the Bible, Psalm 119, is entirely devoted to extolling the benefits of the Torah, the revelation of God, for the spiritual and intellectual growth of God's children. In the same vein, the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible does not spare words to advise and admonish those in search of wisdom to cherish God's word. With a keen perception of what the Bible means by education, Martin Luther penned this much quoted statement: "I am much afraid that schools will prove to be the great gates of Hell unless they diligently labor in explaining the Holy Scriptures, engraving them in the hearts of youth. I advise no one to place his child where the Scriptures do not reign paramount. Every institution in which men are not increasingly occupied with the Word of God must become corrupt."⁷ Hence the relevance of God's appeal to His children: "Get wisdom! Get understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth" (Prov 5:5).

6. The ministry of music is an important area of church life that needs to be founded on the Bible. Music may excel in many communication forms as a means of conveying the truth. There may be many Christians who do not know the Bible well, but there is hardly a person who do not know several hymns or gospel songs. Conflicts involving music styles and music instruments have engulfed some congregations, but as important as music style and music instruments may be in conveying the right atmosphere for adoration, one should not be oblivious to the importance of song and hymn lyrics. The message of hymns and songs should be in harmony with the teaching of Scripture. Church composers and musicians have the sacred duty to make and perform church music

in such a way as to communicate a message consistent with God's character revealed in the Scriptures: "Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding" (Psa 47:6-7).

7. Church worship must give an important place to the reading and preaching of the Scriptures. The worship service should not become a venue for so many announcements and advertisements of church activities and programs that hardly any time is left for the exposition of God's Word. When God's people gather together to worship, they need to receive the Word of God to help them face the trials, discouragement and challenges of daily living. Nothing should impair or replace the proclamation of the Word. Preachers who use the pulpit to tell personal stories without responsible biblical exposition or who use the pulpit for the mere entertainment of their audiences are betraying their calling and profaning the pulpit. What Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:2 should become the orientation point of every preacher: "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

Our preaching and exposition must be informed by appropriate study and investigation of the Scriptures. The Bible does not function merely as a recipe book or a reference book. The Bible does not always yield easy and ready answers for some of life's challenging circumstances. One may not find a specific passage or verse for each spiritual malady or personal problem.⁸ But the Bible, if rightly interpreted, certainly provides the ultimate answers for life's most crucial questions—and even for matters related to church procedures—because the relevance of the Bible transcends the sum of its individual parts. As the written record of the overarching plan of God to redeem the world from sin, the Bible provides God's people with a worldview, a meta-narrative that spans from creation to the new creation. Although individual passages and texts may bring comfort in situations of sorrow and suffering, and even provide guidance for specific circumstances, one should never lose sight of the organic interconnections among the various passages and themes of the Bible in the grand panorama of the plan of salvation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every preacher to make the unity, truth, and authority of the Bible clear and accessible to the audience. Preachers should pay attention to Paul's advice to Timothy: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

Conclusion

As argued above, the Bible stands as the absolute foundation upon which the church should base her theol-

ogy and practices. As Paul emphasized in Ephesians 5:25–27: “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the **washing of water by the word**, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (emphasis supplied). Therefore, in order to remain faithful to the Lord, the church must continue to uphold the Word of God as the supreme authority to prescribe her beliefs and adjudicate her experience and practice.



Elias Brasil de Souza is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute

¹Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition*, The 1983 Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

²See the study by Kwabena Donkor, “Contemporary Responses to *Sola Scriptura*: Implications for Adventist Theology” in this issue

of *Reflections*.

³See Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning was the Word: Language: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 11–38.

⁴James D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church: A Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 142.

⁵See, e.g., Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2012); John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011); Waltke, Bruce K. and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 153.

⁶Lorin Woolfe, *The Bible on Leadership: From Moses to Matthew: Management Lessons for Contemporary Leaders* (New York: MJF Books, 2003), ix.

⁷Quoted in Mark Water, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Alresford, Hampshire: John Hunt Publishers, 2000), 129. Also in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, Pacific Press, 1911), 140.

⁸See Ekkehardt Mueller, “Hermeneutical Guidelines for Dealing with Theological Questions,” *Reflections* 40, October 2012.

Contemporary Responses to *Sola Scriptura*: Implications for Adventist Theology

BY KWABENA DONKOR

Responses to *sola scriptura* (by scripture alone) today are divided into positive and negative camps as briefly outlined below. Within the positive camp there are differences which reflect one's view of Scripture. After all, if the *sola* is predicated on Scripture, then one's *sola scriptura* principle will be conditioned by one's view of Scripture to which the *sola* is attached. We should not be naïve to think that today *sola scriptura* has a univocal meaning. In this study, we shall examine some positive and negative responses to *sola scriptura* with attention to its implications for Adventist theology.

Positive Perspectives

Positive responses to the Reformers' *sola scriptura* principle have been categorized into micro, macro, and mega perspectives.¹ Carl Braaten is representative of the micro view, which takes its cue from Luther's material principle.² Braaten maintains a kerygmatic idea of *sola scriptura* and criticizes Protestant orthodoxy for shifting the grounding of biblical authority “from Luther's gospel-communicating Bible to orthodoxy's inerrant Holy Manuscript.”³ For Braaten, *sola scriptura* means that the kerygmatic “canon within the canon” must be applied to

Scripture itself. This perspective of biblical authority has a history among luminaries who stressed the Bible's authority from different material viewpoints: Barth (God's self-revelation), Cullmann (record of salvation history), Bultmann (kerygmatic announcement of Christ-event, generating new self-understanding of faith).⁴

James Packer goes beyond Braaten and has a macro perspective on *sola scriptura*. He is critical of Braaten's view which he sees as limiting Scriptural normativity. Packer understands the Reformers' view to be that Scripture, “as the *only* Word of God in this world, is the *only* guide for conscience and the church, the *only* source of true knowledge of God and grace, and the *only* qualified judge of the church's testimony and teaching, past and present.”⁵ Parker's position is by and large representative of the evangelical position.

The mega perspective on Scriptural authority is a foundationalist position which argues for biblical foundations in order to provide “a secure truth base for confidence in the epistemological enterprise itself.”⁶ Gordon Clarke is representative of this view. Mary Crumpacker notes that “While Clark concurs that science cannot be the standard for the Church, his solution of course would be to reject modern scientism altogether and adopt as the test for all truth the orthodox Protestant criterion—namely, the Bible.”⁷ The three positive contemporary views on *sola scriptura* outlined above differ only in the range of the Bible's authority either as the only source of the gospel; or gospel and doctrine; or gospel, doctrine and metaphysics respectively. In our post-critical age,

however, there is much negativity regarding the *sola scriptura* principle.

Negative Perspectives

It should be clear by now that the fortune of the *sola scriptura* principle was, from the beginning, inextricably tied to the general Protestant Scripture principle. The Scripture principle was the necessary presupposition of the *sola scriptura* principle. Although critical of it, Carl Braaten summarizes the Scripture principle well. “The Scriptures are the written deposit of revelation which God communicated to the prophets and apostles by means of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God was the real author of the Scriptures; the human writers were the instruments which God used to produce the Bible.”⁸ Already before the last quarter of the previous century Wolfhart Pannenberg was writing about the crisis of the Scripture principle in Protestant theology.⁹ The crisis of the Scripture principle also meant a crisis in the *sola scriptura* principle. At the heart of this crisis, in Pannenberg’s view, is the universal validity of theology as a science for, he notes, “if theology and secular sciences make different and opposite statements about the world, man, and history, then the question which of these statements are true cannot be rejected.”¹⁰ In the light of the European Enlightenment, adaptations of theology to modern scientific thought took a liberal turn which could not preserve central elements of the Christian faith. The result is that Protestantism today is represented by a conservative tradition which holds onto the Scripture principle, and looks at theology as a positive science of revelation. But Pannenberg thinks that this approach is not sustainable in contemporary times.

On his part, Carl Braaten writes about the shattering of *sola scriptura*, and also traces it to the blows of Enlightenment criticism.¹¹ Since Protestant orthodoxy based biblical authority on its divine origin and inspiration, the defense of the Bible in the face of criticism took an evidentiary form: miracles, fulfilled prophecies, etc. Meanwhile, methods of historical criticism which were generally applied to all ancient writings were now applied without hesitation to the biblical documents. Among others, the result of this application tried to show that the deeds and words ascribed to Jesus were a mixture of fact and interpretation; and a multiplicity of theologies were said to be present in the New Testament. The chief result of all this, in Braaten’s view, is that biblical authority can no longer function as it did before the rise of historical critical consciousness. “The Bible has lost its privilege of holding an *a priori* position of authoritativeness.”¹² In his view, the need now arises for theologians to shift the case for biblical authority from *a priori* to *a posteriori* grounds.

It is easy to see how the so-called shattering of the

Scripture principle touches the perfections of Scripture¹³ which undergird the *sola scriptura* principle. When reason is applied to the **authority** of the Scripture as one of its perfections, the Bible can only count as one of many competing sources. John Macquarrie¹⁴ takes this route and in more recent times the Wesleyan quadrilateral¹⁵ has been read by some in this way. A common strategy of this approach is to make revelation an over-arching concept which is then predicated of all the other sources such as reason, tradition, and experience. Thomas Oden, for example, in responding to the question regarding how the worshipping community knows what it seems to know notes that

The study of God relies constantly upon an interdependent quadrilateral of sources on the basis of which the confessing community can articulate, make consistent and integrate the witness to revelation. These four are scripture, tradition, experience, and reason, all of which depend upon and exist as a response to their necessary premise: revelation.¹⁶

The **necessity** of Scripture is also affected by the crisis in the Scripture principle. It is argued that in the postmodern, pluralistic, relativistic context, singling out the Christian Scriptures and giving it pre-eminence is not possible. Ted Peters thinks that to do so is to revert to a first naïveté concept of the *sola scriptura* which is impossible due to the rise of historical consciousness.¹⁷

Ted Peters takes issue with the **clarity** of Scripture and argues that what may have been possible in Luther’s time is not possible today. According to him, “it requires incredible intellectual naïveté to accept” the three assumptions that supported the clarity of Scripture (the identity of the literal sense of the Bible with its historical and natural content, the possible identification of the Reformers’ doctrine with the content of scriptural writings, trust in the Holy Spirit to work directly through the text).¹⁸ While Luther may not have needed to make intellectual detours through concepts of myth before making assertions, critical consciousness has estranged the contemporary world from the world of meaning found in Scripture.

The challenge to the **sufficiency** of Scripture today comes in the form of developments in some of the charismatic renewal movements where it is argued that divine prophecy is heard today, and is in some ways at par with the word of an Isaiah or a Jeremiah.

These are the burdens under which the *sola scriptura* principle operates today. And to conclude our discussion we need to make some observations and reflections on how Adventists ought to relate to these findings and developments.

Implications for Adventist Theology

1. A key observation to anchor about the Reformers' use of the *sola scriptura* principle is that it was, first and foremost, a hermeneutical principle of authority. Popular understanding of the principle tends to be "statistical," but that was not the Reformers' position. The critical issue was that while the Roman Catholic Church wanted Fathers, Council, Popes, and ecclesiastical traditions to be *regula fidei* of the Church's faith, the Reformers deemed Scriptures alone sufficient to serve that function. The facts of the situation were that the Roman Catholic Church believed in the formal authority of the Bible. However, by giving tradition *regula fidei* status, it inevitably became an additional source of authoritative truth.

Noting subsequently that the Reformation viewpoint will not be appreciated if it functions only in a polemic with Rome, Berkouwer notes: "We never deal with a blank sheet of paper. Certain traditions—not as additions but interpretations—may even become attached to the life of the church in the course of time to the extent that practically they have the features of additions and are therefore out of reach of the critical and sovereign Word of God."¹⁹

2. Luther's emphasis on the gospel as a "canon within the canon" leads to the conclusion that, at least from that perspective, Adventists do not go completely along with the Reformers *sola scriptura* principle. For Luther, this instrument was a powerful and critical authoritative principle, even for making distinctions in the canon. While as Adventists we rightly criticize Luther's canon within the canon, it seems that a mere formal acceptance of the principle is not enough. The different contemporary positive responses to *sola scriptura* is a reflection of this problem. The issue becomes even more critical upon contemplating the fact that interpretation was at the core of the Reformers' dispute with Rome. In our context, hermeneutics has come to occupy an even more central place in theological discourse. The question remains for reflection whether *sola scriptura*, as a *formal* principle,²⁰ requires a *material* principle/s to be a complete principle of authority.²¹

3. A major concern from the perspective of maintaining *sola scriptura* in the contemporary context relates to the supernatural nature of the Bible. Parker agrees with James Barr in distinguishing between "hard" and "soft" concepts of authority, and observes that while most Protestants espouse a "soft" view of biblical authority, that of the Reformers was as "hard" as could be.²² The Reformers could maintain a "hard" idea of authority because "they were concerned to ascribe to the Scriptures an absolute divine authority springing from the fact that God then and now says to us what they say."²³

It is imperative to stress that *sola scriptura* stands or falls with the *a priori* acceptance or rejection of biblical authority. Ted Peters represent the post-critical situation well when he emphasizes that in the pluralistic context we as human choose, "but in choosing we must see ourselves as the chooser. In effect we confer authority, not simply accepting it. Existentially, we cannot help but put ourselves in a position of authority higher than that to which we decide to submit, even if it is listening to the message of the Bible. The buck stops at home."²⁴ This approach cannot be compatible with *sola scriptura* even if the basis of our decision to submit to Scripture is based on a biblical concept such as, say, love. The call for an *a priori* acceptance of biblical authority, however, requires an even more careful development of our doctrines of revelation and inspiration.

4. Maintaining *sola scriptura* today requires that we accept the unity of Scripture, not only in theory, but in practice. The fashion is common in contemporary biblical studies to focus on contrasts in style and vocabulary and, in some cases, thereby deny what Parker calls any such thing as "the biblical theology."²⁵ It seems that much of contemporary biblical studies in academic settings are set up in this way. The challenge for us is to be able to speak and write about the unique viewpoints of different biblical writers without unwittingly giving the impression, for example, that the writings of Luke-Acts or Paul should be separated out and kept distinct.²⁶ Cole expresses the significance of this point quite eloquently.

Some judgment as to the gravamen of the divine purpose is essential if the formal and material aspects of Scripture are to be held together. Authority to what end? Clarity in what areas? These questions are related to the more basic one of the purpose of Scripture conceived as a whole. Such a line of thinking is unpopular at present, in an academic environment in which the diversity of Scripture is seen rather than its unity. However, to abandon the notion of the unity of Scripture makes theological exegesis of its contents Sisyphean to say the least.²⁷

5. The *sola scriptura* principle reveals a complex understanding of Scripture that is not usually appreciated. It seems to me that Adventists do not espouse *sola scriptura* in the *exact* sense in which Luther did it. Because of Luther's strong emphasis on the material principle of Scriptural authority, Adventists are quick to add *tota scriptura* (all of Scripture) to the *sola scriptura* formulation. The idea is to try to forestall Luther's canon within the canon approach. Finally, I

wish to suggest that emphasizing the hermeneutical nature of the *sola scriptura* principle may help to clarify the issue of the Spirit of Prophecy's relationship to the Bible. A statistical understanding of *sola scriptura* is what appears to perplex folk regarding the place of Spirit of Prophecy writings in Adventist theology.

Kwabena Donkor is an Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute



¹Graham Cole, "Sola Scriptura: Some Historical and Contemporary Perspectives," *Churchman* 104/1 (1990), 30.

²"Material principle" refers to the gospel as understood by the Reformation. The "formal principle" refers to the Bible, which was considered the source and norm of the "material principle."

³Carl E. Braaten, "Can We Still Hold The Principle of Sola Scriptura?" *Dialog* 20 (1981), 190.

⁴*Ibid.*, 03.

⁵J. 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: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1973), 48-49.

⁶Cole, 26.

⁷Mary M. Crumpacker, "Clarke's Axiom: Something New"? *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 32/3 (1989), 357.

⁸Braaten (190) adds these further details. "The process of inspiration pertained to both the subject matter and the verbal forms of Scripture. God provided the correct ideas in the minds of the authors (*suggestion res*), the exact words to use (*dictatio verborum*), as well as the stimulus to write them down (*impulsus scriben*).

⁹Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Crisis of the Scripture-Principle in Protestant Theology," *Dialog* 2/4 (1963), 307-313.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 308.

¹¹Braaten, 191.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³"Perfections of Scripture" is a theological expression to refer to the principal characteristics of Scripture, such as, e.g., authority, necessity, clarity, sufficiency.

¹⁴See chapter I of John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966).

¹⁵The four sources used by John Wesley to reach theological conclusions: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience.

¹⁶Thomas C. Oden, *The living God* (San Francisco, CA: Harper-San Francisco, 1992).

¹⁷Ted Peters, "Sola Scriptura and the Second Naivete," *Dialog* 16 (1977), p. 270. The first naivete is the state of development in human consciousness where things are accepted unreflectively, or what Bernard Lonergan referred to as undifferentiated consciousness.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 271.

¹⁹G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 305.

²⁰See n. 2 above.

²¹For example, with reference to Adventists, is the General Conference in Session for us a sufficient material principle? And, how may we ensure that it does not end up overcoming the formal principle?

²²See Packer, 50-51, "A 'hard' idea would mean that the authority of the Bible was (i) antecedent to its interpretation and (ii) general in its application. The reader or user of the bible would be expected to *expect* that biblical passages would be authoritative and therefore illuminating... and this expectation would be firm before the interpretation was carried out, and not therefore be a decision based afterwards upon the results of the interpretation. A 'soft' idea of authority would suggest that authority was (i) posterior to interpretation and (ii) limited according to the passages where an authoritative effect had in fact been found."

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴Peters, 271.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 52.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 53.

²⁷Cole, 29.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Stewardship and Money

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

Giving is a heavenly principle (Acts 20:35). It is God's will that we give: time, talents, and money/material possessions (Matt 22:15-22). Satan replaced the Sabbath with another day of worship in order to eliminate our understanding of God as creator. He destroyed the principle of giving the tithe in order to extinguish the knowledge of God as the owner of all things.

I. Tithe

1. In the Old Testament

Genesis 14:18-20

Abraham gave the tenth of his income, the tithe. He

Genesis 28:20-22

Leviticus 27:30, 32

is the father of all believers (Rom 4:10-12; Gal 3:28-29).

Jacob knew and practiced this principle.

Israel was asked to give the tithe. The tithe was designated to provide a livelihood for the priests and Levites. Nevertheless, the tithe was given to God who in turn took care of his servants (Num 18:20-32). Under Nehemiah the people promised to tithe again (Neh 10:28-29, 37-38). On the other hand, God promised rich blessings for those who would be obe-

dient to this command (Mal 3:7–12).

2. In the New Testament

Matthew 23:23 Jesus affirmed the tithing.
1 Corinthians 9:11–14 Paul knew the principle of tithing (see also Heb 7:1–10) and supported it.

The tithing principle already existed before Israel came into being as a people. It is not just a Jewish institution. Those who gave the tithe dedicated their entire property to God.

II. Offerings

In addition to tithing, believers at all times gave voluntary offerings. We are also called to do that. In this case, the amount is not prescribed. The individual believer can decide under prayer how much to give, allowing himself or herself to be influenced by the Lord (Exod 36:3; Deut 16:16–17; 1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 9:5–7).

III. Questions

1. How Much Should We Give?

Sometimes questions arise whether to give from the salary without deductions or the salary minus deductions. We give tithe and offerings from our full salary or, if we are self-employed, from our income.

2. Why Do We Give?

- Jesus gave himself for us (Gal 1:4).
- God gives us inner peace, a fulfilled life on earth, and whatever we need (Matt 6:31–33; John 10:10).
- Even more than that, he gives us eternal life (1 John 5:11–12).
- It is God's will that we give. Our giving testifies to our faithfulness as stewards of God's gifts.

God does not need "our" money but he allows us to be fellow workers with him. This has advantages for us. We are being freed from our egotism and our worries. Giving brings blessings (Mal 3:10–11).

3. How Should We Give?

We give happily and not grudgingly or under compulsion, rather we give because Jesus gave Himself for us (2 Cor 9:7). In giving we respond gratefully to God's love (Mark 12:41–44; 2 Cor 8:3–5). It is possible to give without loving, but it is impossible to love without giving. We do not give with a rebellious heart like Cain (Gen 4:3–6), and like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–4).

4. When Should We Give?

God comes first (Matt 6:33). Therefore we set aside the tithe and offerings before we use the remaining money for our own needs, even if the budget is very tight. By giving to God first, we exercise faith and trust in the Lord. A person who gives only after his/her own needs have been met may indicate a lack of trust. Also nothing should be retained since this would not only rob God of his property, but would also prevent the giver from having wonderful experiences with the Lord.

5. For what Purposes Do We Give?

The tithe is used for the gospel ministry. It should not be used for other purposes. Freewill offerings, however, can be given for the local church budget, mission programs, building funds, ADRA, and many other purposes.

6. Is It Really Possible to Give when You Cannot Make Ends Meet?

- God keeps his promises, even if His command appear to be illogical (Mal 3:10).
- This is supported by biblical examples. Remember that through God Gideon's three hundred men conquered an entire army (Judg 7:7–25). Consider the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:8–16) and Jesus' feeding of the five thousand (Matt 14:13–21) when God multiplied the little they had.
- This is supported by experiences of believers throughout the centuries, including our own. The Protestant pastor E. Modersohn writes about giving tithe during the difficult times right after World War II: "The miracle happened. The income reached farther than before. I do not know how it came about. Did the shoe soles last longer? Did we need less new clothes? I do not know. . . . But I can testify: We never experienced shortage."
- Tithe payers do not necessarily give because they have; they have because they give. It is possible to give because "with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

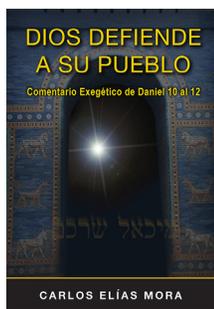
Conclusion

When we return tithe and offerings to God, we recognize him as the true owner and as our Lord. We express that we are determined to be faithful stewards. We document that we will use the money remaining in our hands according to His will. It is His; we are His (Matt 6:19–21, 24).

[Christ] accepted the offerings of children, and blessed the givers, inscribing their names in the book of life.

E. G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 564.

BOOK NOTES



Carlos Elías Mora. *Dios defiende a su pueblo: Comentario exegético de Daniel 10 al 12*. Mexico: Adventus (Editorial Universitaria Iberoamericana), 2012, 252 + xvi pp. US\$15.00

The author, a professor of Old Testament at the Advanced International Institute for Advanced Studies in the Philippines,

offers a detailed commentary of Daniel 10–12 according to the historicist approach. The first chapter of the book lays down the methodology employed in the exegetical chapters with emphasis on the principles of prophetic interpretation. Attention is given to the literary structure and the Hebrew vocabulary relevant to the interpretation of each pericope. In the second chapter the author discusses the place Daniel 10–12 in the book of Daniel. With the help of several tables, he attempts to uncover the main literary structures of the passages under investigation.

In the last ten chapters of the book, Mora offers a section-by-section commentary on Daniel 10–12. The author draws from a vast assortment of Adventist scholarship and succeeds in providing an overarching synthesis of the last section of the book of Daniel. He also pays careful attention to the literary structure of the passages and emphasizes the key words and motifs that convey the main points of each section. In spite of the exegetical challenges of these chapters and the difficulties in establishing a precise interpretation for some debated

issues, Mora does not refrain from expressing his views at several junctures of the prophetic panorama depicted in Daniel 10–12. Following the historicist approach, he understands the events depicted in Daniel 10–11 as extending from the Persian period to the eschatological consummation. According to Mora, Daniel 11:21 marks a major transition in the sequence of prophetic events portrayed in Daniel 11. The “vile person” (v. 21) points to a new entity, a corrupt religious power; and “the prince of the covenant” (v. 22) refers to the Roman Empire and its alliance with the Christian church. On the sometimes controversial time prophecies of Daniel 12:10, 11, Mora skews futurist interpretations. Consistent with his historicist approach, he contends that these time periods should be understood within the framework of the time prophecies of Daniel 7 and 8.

Mora has contributed a detailed and balanced commentary on Daniel 10–12. Although he does not offer a great amount of new and original information, he makes judicious use of the exegetical evidence available and interacts extensively with Adventist scholars. His attention to the literary structure of the biblical text anchors the exegetical process on a solid foundation. In addition, this book provides a useful combination of exegetical insights with homiletical applications, since the author concludes each section of the commentary with some reflections on contemporary application. As such, it is a helpful volume to be added to the library of those interested in a deeper understanding of Daniel 10–12. Unfortunately, only those able to read the beautiful language of Cervantes will accrue the benefits of this book.

Elias Brasil de Souza, BRI

WORLDWIDE HIGHLIGHTS

Ordination Study

The worldwide Adventist Church is currently engaged in a biblical-theological study of ordination. Each Division through its respective Bible Research Committee (BRC) is in a process of discussing the theological foundations and practical implications of ordination. BRI is actively assisting with this BRC process. Good discussions have taken place in various BRCs and excellent papers have been submitted to these committees. Such a study is crucial to the formulation of an Adventist understanding of this topic as well as to the resolution of the issue of women’s ordination. Suggestions, questions, and conclusions produced by the BRCs will be sent to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (TOSC).

The TOSC is a large committee formed by repre-

sentatives of each of the thirteen world divisions and chaired by Artur Stele (GC Vice President and Director of BRI). About a quarter of the committee are women; lay representation is also included.¹ The assignments of this committee can be summarized in the following way: (1) Review the history of the study of ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (2) develop a Seventh-day Adventist theology of ordination; (3) study the subject of ordination of women to the gospel ministry; and (4) in areas of disagreement, focus on potential solutions that support the message, mission, and unity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The TOSC will prayerfully study these issues, trying to reach a consensus on each assignment. In the areas where consensus will not be reached, the TOSC will present several reports and will also work on potential solutions. These steps will insure that the process will be open, fair, and transparent. The

TOSC will complete its work in the Summer of 2014.

¹For a list of the committee members, see: http://www.adventistreview.org/site/1/docs/ordination_committee_members.pdf

SID Elaborates a Statement on Adventists and Politics¹

The Biblical Research Committee of the Southern Africa Indian Ocean Division met last October in connection with the Division's year-end meetings and finalized a statement entitled: "Guidelines on Adventists' Involvement in Politics in Africa." After a careful examination of the biblical and theological foundations for political involvement and the challenges of political engagement for Adventists in Africa, the document adopted by the division's year-end meeting issued the following guidelines:

The Adventist in Active Politics

Spiritual Life

- Members who desire to seek public office should ensure by the grace of God that spiritually they stay in tune with God.
- The politician should endeavor to maintain such regular spiritual disciplines as prayer, Bible study, and especially maintain fellowship with fellow believers by attending services on Sabbath.

Parties and Political Campaigns

- The political campaigns of the Adventist politician must be marked by dignity, civility, and Adventist Christian values.
- The Adventist's Christian experience should be a positive influence on others.
- Adventists should not engage in actions or processes that may impinge on the observance of God's law including Sabbath observance.
- Churches should not be used for the promotion of political agendas.
- Politicians who are involved in political associations should not enter into alliances that will require them to sacrifice biblical values and principles.

Agenda and Actions

- Adventists should give recognition to the promotion and/or defense of human rights as long as these do not interfere with biblical principles and the teachings of the church.
- Adventists involved in politics should seek to exemplify and demonstrate the values and principles of God's government. (3MR 37–38).
- Adventists who are involved in politics

should not use their clout unduly in church affairs.

The Church and Politics

- Political leaders should not be permitted to use their power or privilege to influence the church or its leaders in ways that are illegal and immoral or create some form of dependence.
- The Adventist Church should eschew all forms and appearances of corruption.
- Church leaders should be extremely careful to receive any benefits from political leaders, even if it can be legally or morally justified.
- Church workers should abstain from active participation in politics and political activity.
- Our churches should not be used as platforms for the furtherance of political agendas both by our members and non-members.

Church Members and Politics

- Adventists shall not use their political connections to advance personal interests at the expense of their faith and the name of the church.
- Members shall not engage in political activism in the church or the use of party political attire, symbols, and language in the church. Nothing that may engender division and schisms in the church should be permitted.
- Certain political terms, party attire and insignia shall not be displayed within the precincts of the church.
- Members of the church should avoid strife and divisions in the church by not bringing political questions into the church.

¹This document is to our knowledge the first statement by a division addressing the issue of Adventist involvement in politics officially. It may also be helpful for other divisions. The full text can be obtained from the ministerial secretary of SID, Jongimpu Papu, email: papuj@sid.adventist.org

New BRI Website Launched

The BRI website has a new look. Feel free to browse it and enjoy easy access to hundreds of articles dealing with biblical topics relevant to SDA theology and practice. Subjects range from Bible study, to theology, ethics, apologetics, Christian living, and church history.



<http://adventistbiblicalresearch.org>