

PURPOSE

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

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NEWS AND COMMENTS

SECOND INTERNATIONAL BIBLE CONFERENCE, IZMIR TURKEY, JULY 7-17, 2006

In July, 2006, almost 250 biblical scholars and theologians, including a good number of church administrators, gathered in Izmir/Turkey for the Second International Bible Conference. This was a historic meeting, because it was only the second time in the history of the Adventist Church that such a group met. The First International Bible Conference had taken place in 1998 in Jerusalem. This time the positive response to the invitation to come, share, listen, and lecture was even more overwhelming. Scholars and theologians from all around the world were present. On the first Sabbath, the president of the General Conference, Jan Paulsen, addressed the group. Also attending the conference were the majority of the GC vice presidents, the GC undersecretary, GC

departmental staff, the entire Geoscience Research Institute staff, division presidents and secretaries, as well as other leaders of the church. They were able to engage in dialogue with Adventists theologians and biblical scholars.

The conference was organized by the Biblical Research Institute and sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, The Adventist Theological Society, and The Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried H. Horn Museum. Long before the conference took place, and while plans were being laid to have such a meeting, it was felt that ecclesiology is one of the most important and pressing topics for the Adventist Church. Therefore, it was decided to choose as the general topic for this conference, to which all lectures, plenary sessions, and sermons would contribute the theme “The Adventist Theologian and the Nature, Mission, and Unity of the Church.”

From July 7 through July 17, the group listened to inspiring devotionals and sermons by M. Finley, C. Steger, L. Cooper, R. Clouzet, D. Schneider, J. Paulsen, and T. Wilson, challenging the audience to undivided commitment to Jesus, His remnant people, and the mission of the church. About seventy-five seminars were presented from which participants could choose to attend fifteen. The ten plenary sessions were dealing with the following topics:

- “An Adventist Ecclesiology in the Making” (Á. Rodríguez)
- “The Message and Mission of God’s People in the Old Testament” (J. Moskala)
- “The Message and Mission of God’s People in the New Testament” (R. Badenas)



- “The End Time Remnant and the Christian World” (E. Mueller)
- “The End Time Remnant and the Non-Christian World” (G. Christo)
- “The Role of Fundamental Beliefs in the Theology and Life of the Church” (K. Donkor)
- “The Role of the Church in the Interpretation of Scripture” (R. Davidson)
- “Ellen White and the Role of the Bible in the Remnant Church” (E. Zinke)
- “Unity and Diversity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (G. Pfandl)
- “The Duties and Responsibilities of the Adventist Theologian” (L. Lichtenwalter)

Apart from the opportunity to interact with each other and share research results, concerns, and successes the group had the opportunity to visit the seven churches of Asia Minor mentioned in the Book of Revelation, the island of Patmos, as well as some other places. Each participant received a copy of the latest BRI Publication



“Understanding Scripture” and other material. A pleasant atmosphere and a spirit of companionship were present. Some colleagues were very much engaged in helping to prepare the

conference, while a great number of participants helped with various tasks such as coordinating the buses, the seminars, the worship services, the devotionals, and the music, welcoming the delegates at the airport, registering them in the hotel, caring for their health needs, and serving in the steering committee.

Thanks to all presenters and all those involved in one way or the other! The conference was a great success, and this spirit of the Advent movement attracted also the attention of hotel guests and employees in very positive ways.



The Second International Bible Conference was not only an opportunity to exchange ideas and share biblical and theological insights, but it was also intended to contribute to the theological unity among Adventist theologians and scholars. Therefore, toward the end of the meeting a statement was drafted which was discussed in three committees before it was brought to the floor, where it was again discussed for about two hours. Finally, a vote showed that this statement, which is printed in the next column, was almost unanimously accepted by the participants of this conference.

Consensus Statement

Preamble

The Second International Bible Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Theologians brought together Bible scholars and administrators from around the world to Izmir, Turkey. The purpose of this gathering was to explore the biblical doctrine of the church, to inspire commitment to its mission and unity, and to foster fellowship. The program included visits to archeological sites related to the seven churches of the book of Revelation. Theologians and administrators prayed and studied together, seeking a deeper understanding of the truth about the church that we hold dear.

Affirmations

At the conclusion of the Conference we, the attendees, make the following affirmations:

1. We affirm, first and foremost, our commitment to Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to the final authority of God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures, and to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

2. We affirm the unique contribution of the writings of Ellen G. White to the study of the nature and mission of the church.

3. We affirm our commitment to the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God’s end-time people recognizing that it is the responsibility of the world church to establish biblically based doctrines and standards.

4. We affirm, in continuity with our understanding of Bible prophecy and our theological heritage, the unique identity and role of our church as God’s end-time remnant, entrusted by Him with the message that prepares the world for the soon return of our Lord.

5. We affirm that the fulfillment of our mission as a church depends on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. To a large extent it also depends on a clear understanding of the nature and function of the remnant church and the degree of theological unity in the church.

6. We affirm the vital role of theologians in the fulfillment of the mission of the church—a task to which all theological activity should aim, and without which our endeavors are incomplete.

A Call

In view of the above affirmations, we extend:

1. A call to all theologians, teachers, pastors, administrators, and local elders around the world to join us in our commitment to take positive steps that will bring these affirmations to fruition.

2. A call to all institutions and organizations worldwide to support and promote the affirmations set forth in this document.

3. A call to all local churches and church members to study the Scriptures and, together with us, affirm

the unique role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as God's end-time remnant.

Thanksgiving

We praise God, for in His abundant grace He has called us to the pastoral, teaching, and administrative ministry of His church. We thank Him for this Conference, and for the care and protection He has extended to us during our travels and meetings. In a response of love and gratitude for His goodness we re-consecrate ourselves to that divine call and ask God to grant us wisdom and power to effectively continue to serve Him and His church.

A recommendation followed which reads the following way:

Since international Bible conferences contribute to theological unity and to a better understanding among Bible scholars and administrators, we recommend that the leadership of the church allocate the financial and human resources needed to convene these conferences at least once every quinquennium. We also encourage church leaders to make provision for division-wide Bible conferences that will include the participation of a limited number of theologians from other divisions and from the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. Such conferences will contribute to further research on issues of theological significance, enhance trust and collegiality among theologians, Bible teachers, and administrators, and strengthen the unity of the church.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

TIKTAALIK: ANOTHER "MISSING LINK?"

It was Charles Darwin who noted that "Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain [of intermediate varieties between different groups of organisms]; and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against my theory."¹ Most likely the term "missing link" is derived from this observation. From a Darwinian perspective there should be many links in the "organic chain" connecting all living things, but their absence in the fossil record renders them "missing links." This absence of intermediate varieties Darwin attributed to imperfection in the fossil record.

After almost 150 years of diligent exploration, the pattern evident during Darwin's day continues. The more distantly related organisms are, the more links there should be between them and yet the fewer putative links have been found in the fossil record. Thus the excitement about the discovery of a creature that might be a link between fish and vertebrates that walk on land--the tetrapods--is reason for rejoicing among promoters of Darwinism. Recently, just such a "missing link," named *Tiktaalik roseae*, was

published in the scientific literature² accompanied by an apparently well orchestrated blizzard of excited media reports.

The impressive intermediate features of *Tiktaalik* include a relatively flexible neck, some parts of the ear, a pectoral girdle and fins with bones that resemble in some ways those found in the forelimbs of tetrapods ranging from frogs to elephants. In addition, *Tiktaalik* has a skull that superficially resembles that of some amphibia and reptiles.

So should creationists give up on the Biblical record of the creation and flood on the basis of such evidence? First, a word of caution about reflexive responses to new discoveries like *Tiktaalik*; the two essential ingredients in evaluating claims of this sort are: 1) expertise in the particular area within which the claim is being made

It is worth noting that the history of missing links is spotty at best.

and 2) examination of the actual material in question--in this case the fossil. Anything short of this is probably fairly characterized as speculation. So far no creationist expert has had access to this particular fossil and thus caution is warranted before placing too much confidence in criticisms of the fossil or its interpretation.

With that caveat in mind, it is worth noting that the history of missing links is spotty at best. Currently there is much debate about relationships between the various Sarcopterygian fish, and because of this, it is probable that the claims made for this particular fossil will become more controversial in the future. This seems to be a common trend when it comes to putative missing links; frequently telling challenges are put forward by both creationists and others.

Assuming this specimen is everything that it is said to be, it does present an interesting proof of the trend that is as clear today, if not clearer, than it was during Darwin's time: Intermediate varieties remain rare when they should be abundant. This is what makes these uncommon finds so newsworthy. If the fossil record really is imperfect, it seems to be imperfect in a remarkable way that strongly militates against fossilization of missing links. In the case of fish, it is incredible that just one kind of fish would evolve onto land and only in the Upper Devonian. Why are there not fish to land-animal missing-links in Mesozoic or Cenozoic rocks? Since the formation of the Devonian rocks in which *Tiktaalik* was found, hundreds of millions of years are supposed to have past with no fish evolution onto land. Evolution from fish to tetrapods appears quite capricious rather than law-like. Interestingly, little seems to be made of those fish living today that exhibit traits similar to those found in land-dwelling vertebrates. For example the Sargassum fish has hand-like fins and mudskippers are well adapted to life both in and out of water.

Ultimately, while Darwinists cling to extremely atypical fossils which appear to be exceptions that prove the rule when it comes to rarity of intermediate varieties, creationists may embrace the huge variety of creatures that show little or no change from the ancient past to the present. Ironically this would include the coelacanth fish which is thought to belong to the same group as *Tiktaalik*. These remarkable lobe-finned fish are found in ancient rocks then go missing in strata above the Cretaceous, and yet are found at present swimming happily around the Comoros Islands and Sulawesi. To date none have been discovered developing walking skills on the sea bottom or crawling out onto beaches.

Timothy G. Standish,
Geoscience Research Institute

¹C. R. Darwin. 1859. "On the Imperfection of the Geological Record." Chapter IX in *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*, first edition from <http://www.gutenberg.org/>.

²E. B. Daeschler, N. H. Shubin, and F.A. Jenkins Jr. 2006. "A Devonian Tetrapod-like Fish and the Evolution of the Tetrapod Body Plan." *Nature* 440:757-763, and N. H. Shubin, E. B. Daeschler, F. A. Jenkins Jr. 2006. "The Pectoral Fin of *Tiktaalik* Roseae and the Origin of the Tetrapod Limb." *Nature* 440:764-771.

OPEN THEISM—A REVIEW OF THE ISSUES

One of the controversies that have created a bit of a stir in evangelical theological circles in recent times is the debate over what has come to be called, among others, "open theism."¹ The term "open theism" is noted to have been introduced in 1980 with the publication of Seventh-day Adventist theologian Richard Rice's *Openness of God*. The issue was not broadly discussed, however, until 1994 when five essays were published by five Evangelical scholars, including Rice, under the title *The Openness of God*.²

The complexity of the subject compels us to limit our presentation in a manner that can be concise and still helpful. Only an overview may be attempted here, and even then this discussion intends to touch mainly on the key issues at stake in the controversy.

I. What Is It?

What is open theism? As the label implies open theism is a view of God and His relationship to reality that is characterized by openness. What does it mean for God to be open to reality? The critical issue is what is entailed in the caption "open" or "openness." Gregory Boyd, a key advocate of this view describes the openness in this way: "Open view theists believe that the future exists partly as actualities (future events that God sovereignly determines to bring about) and partly as possibilities (aspects of the future which God sovereignly allows his creatures to bring

about)."³ David Basinger, however, more specifically characterizes the openness in the following terms: "(1) God not only created this world *ex nihilo* but can (and at times does) intervene unilaterally in earthly affairs; (2) God chose to create us with incompatibilistic (libertarian) freedom—freedom over which he cannot exercise total control; (3) God so values freedom—the moral integrity of free creatures and a world in which such integrity is possible—that he does not normally override such freedom, even if he sees that it is producing undesirable results; (4) God always desires our highest good, both individually and corporately, and thus is affected by what happens in our lives; (5) God does not possess exhaustive knowledge of exactly how we will utilize our freedom, although he may well at times be able to predict with great accuracy the choices we will freely make."⁴

Open theism then represents a new way of framing God's relation to reality in an open way that is 'supposed' to be different from the two main existing paradigms: classical and process.⁵

II. Why Pave a New Way?

Looking at the way open theists frame the notion of openness, one detects an effort, on the one hand, to somewhat restrict God's sovereign rule and, on the other hand, a desire to enhance human freedom. But what motivates this

The central issue in the controversy is the interface between divine sovereignty and human freedom.

move on the part of open theists? Keeping in mind that the central issue in the controversy is the interface between divine sovereignty and human freedom, open theism has come to the conclusion that traditional theism does not make room for true human freedom. In other words, traditional theism is regarded as unable to integrate real, open, historical free human choices. Human freedom is at the center of this controversy. For open theists true freedom is *libertarian* freedom which is the power "to choose to perform action A or choose not to perform action A. Both A and not A could occur; which will actually occur *has not yet been determined*" (emphasis supplied).⁶ Libertarian freedom is a powerful concept because it means that when a deed is carried out "agents themselves are the *ultimate explanations* of their own free activity . . . We thus need not assume that there is also a divine reason explaining its occurrence."⁷ For open theists, then, "libertarian freedom is *incompatible* with the claim that God's will is the ultimate explanation for someone's choosing as he did."⁸

In sum, open theists are paving a new way because they feel that *compatibilistic* freedom (the classic view) is not genuine freedom. Compatibilistic freedom says that one can harmonize the view that God is the final explanation of everything that happens while at the same time holding people responsible for their *free* actions. But on what is the critique by open theists based?

III. *Why the Classical View of Freedom is Critiqued*

The classical view of human freedom is challenged as being *unreal* because of the understanding of the nature of God that is held by classical theists. The God of classical theism, according to open theists, is static, insensitive, and unresponsive. Since such a view of God can only permit an “I-IT relation,” it would mean that God has not given humans the “room to be genuine.”⁹ The classical view of God, open theists allege, has its source in Greek philosophy rather than in the Bible.¹⁰ Richard Rice provides a summary of the essence of classical theism and contends that it “does not reflect faithfully the spirit of the biblical message, in spite of the fact that it appeals to numerous biblical statements.”¹¹

To summarize, the open view places a high premium on freedom which is premised on a give-and-take relationship between divinity and reality. The God of classical theism cannot truly facilitate a dynamic relationship and hence needs to be criticized. This is not only so because classical theism simply does not meet the requirements of open theism, but also primarily because according to open theists classical theism is Hellenistic and unbiblical.

IV. *Why Classical Theists Are Concerned*

Classical theists are concerned about what they perceive as open theists’ revisionism for several reasons. First, they raise the counter charge that it is rather open the-

The biblical God does not have to be in process to be dynamic, sensitive, and responsive.

ism that is unfaithful to Scripture and dependent on an *unhelpful* philosophy, specifically the

process thought of Alfred North Whitehead.¹² In particular the following redefinitions of classical theism by open theism are noted as problematic: God is vulnerable and open to the failure of some of His intentions; God is sometimes mistaken in His beliefs about what will happen; God is not omnipotent in the traditional sense, and His efforts are sometimes defeated.¹³ Second, classical theists are concerned about the immense theological ramifications that the above revisions of God will have:¹⁴ (1) on the doctrine of God—since Christ as God incarnate is the fullest revelation of God, and the attributes of Christ on earth reflect the *ultimate* character of God himself; (2) on soteriology—since God did not foresee the fall of mankind, God had not planned for Christ to die for the sins of mankind; furthermore, the cross is not a penal offering; (3) on pneumatology—since God’s work is often thwarted by free agents, and the Holy Spirit’s ability to work is affected etc. In short a finite God, as classical theists see it, is a risky proposition for evangelical theology.

V. *Are There Difficulties with Both Positions?*

The truly remarkable phenomenon is how both classical theism and open theism are able to amass biblical data to

buttress their respective views of God.¹⁵ This phenomenon points us to the underlying philosophy in both positions. Geisler is correct in noting that both views are based on different philosophies, although open theists deny their dependence on process philosophy. Be that as it may, the problem with both positions seems to be that there appears to be some incoherence between the respective views of God and doctrines that are developed. It is difficult to reconcile a Platonic view of God with such biblical doctrines as Christ’s atonement, human freedom, and revelation-inspiration (classical view). On the other hand, it is not easy to define a biblical doctrine of human freedom and the other issues that are of interest to open theists without a clearly defined *ontology* on which their doctrine of God rests.¹⁶ This is why the charge of dependence on process philosophy seems plausible against open theists. So where do we go from here?

VI. *Where Should Seventh-day Adventists Stand?*

We have seen that the issue of freedom is central to the controversy reviewed above. It has become quite clear that the question of free-

On the issues between classical theism and open theism, just as on all other issues, we should stand on the biblical foundation without any philosophical footings.

dom quickly leads to the one about the nature of God. So the main question being asked here is where Adventists should stand on the

nature of human freedom. Are humans genuinely free? And what does that mean for the nature of God? Seventh-day Adventists can only build on biblical evidence; and there is substantial evidence that clearly points to a God who knows the past and the future; one who indeed knows how the future is going to unfold (Dan. 2, 7, 8; Rev. 12-14 etc.). The Adventist Great Controversy motif falls flat without presupposing this kind of God. At the same time, the Bible substantively points to human responsibility and accountability for action taken, implying that those actions were taken in freedom (Acts 5:4). Of course there are pieces of evidence that seem to point in the direction of God’s overweening control of events; but it is important to take into consideration the whole picture presented in Scripture. Otherwise the biblical text is subjected to predisposing philosophical factors.

Adventists can believe in both divine, sovereign providence and genuine human freedom (as we see in the Bible, e.g., Gen. 45:5-8) without contradiction. We can do this because we are not obliged to refract the biblical God through the lens of a Greek timeless concept by virtue of which thought and action would be inseparable. Divine foreknowledge does not have to rule out human freedom; not if we preclude divine timelessness. This is the dilemma of classical theism. At the same time, we can endorse genuine, free human actions without succumbing

to the seeming finite god of process thought. The biblical God does not have to be in *process* to be dynamic, sensitive, and responsive. He comes across in the Bible as both transcendent and immanent.

So where should Adventists stand? On the issues between classical theism and open theism, just as on all other issues, we should stand on the biblical foundation without any philosophical footings.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

¹During the November 2002 annual convention of the Evangelical Theological Society (Toronto, Canada), a founding member of the society challenged the membership status of Drs. Clark Pinnock and John Sanders based on their open theistic views. Other labels that have been affixed to this theological proposal include the following: 'open view of God,' 'openness of God,' 'neotheism,' 'free will theism,' 'creative love theism,' 'relational theism,' and 'consistent Arminianism.'

²See "Open Theism" *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia* at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_theism.

³Quoted from Boyd's website in Glenn R. Wittig, "Open Theism: A Selective and Annotated Bibliography," *Criswell Theological Review* 1/2 (2004):215. Other noted key proponents of open theism include David Basinger, William Hasker, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, and John Sanders; see *ibid.* 216.

⁴David Basinger, "Practical Implications," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, edited by Clark Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 156.

⁵Open theists deny that the view of God they present is shaped by the principles of process philosophy. However, to the extent that process theology, which is derived from process philosophy, is used broadly to describe any theology that emphasizes an active, ongoing, and dynamic relationship between 'God' and creation, yet limits God in one way or another, the difference between process theology and open theism seems to be blurred. Technically, however, process philosophy as pioneered by Alfred North Whitehead, employs an empirical, that is, naturalistic methodology. From this perspective, process theology may be distinguished from open theism. Open theism claims to discover God's relatedness to all reality from the Bible instead of from philosophy.

⁶David Basinger, "Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), 416.

⁷Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 19.

⁸Mark R. Talbot, "True Freedom: The Liberty that Scripture Portrays as Worth Having," in *Beyond Bounds*, edited by John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul K. Helseth, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 80.

⁹*Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰For a concise reflection on open theism's critique see Chad O. Brand, "Genetic Defects or Accidental Similarities? Orthodoxy and Open Theism and Their Connections to Western Philosophical Traditions," in *Beyond Bounds*, edited by John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul K. Helseth, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 43-73.

¹¹Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, edited by Clark Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 15. The essence of classical theism outlined by Rice includes the following: God's will is the final explanation for all that happens; His sovereign will is irresistible; nothing can

thwart or hinder the accomplishment of His purposes; His relation to the world is one of mastery and control; immutability is one of His central characteristics; He is timeless, and utterly changeless in His nature, plans, and intentions; and the past, present and future appear alike before Him. *Ibid.* 12-15.

¹²Norman L. Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 21-22, observes that "Aquinas can provide a philosophical answer to the growing influence of the finite god of process theology. There is no better philosophical system capable of answering the threat raised by process theology and defending the traditional theistic and biblical view of God as eternal, unchanging and absolutely perfect Being."

¹³Robert E. Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to John Sanders' *The God Who Risks*," *JETS* 44 (2000):483.

¹⁴See A. Boyd Luter and Emily H. McGowin, "From Bad to Worse," *Criswell Theological Review* 1/2 (2004):150-166.

¹⁵For texts in support of Open Theism see Rice, 12-15; for texts in favor of Classical theism see Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The new "Open" View of God—Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1997), 75-91.

¹⁶See Fernando Canale, "Evangelical Theology and Open Theism," *Journal of Adventist Theological Society* 12/2 (2001):27-30.

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

IS JESUS BREAKING THE SABBATH?—JOHN 5:18

John 5:18 contains a statement not found in this form in any of the Gospels or other parts of the New Testament: "For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God." This statement is puzzling to some and seems to contradict other texts in the Gospels. Was Jesus breaking the law or not?

I. The Context

Jesus' healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) triggered a negative response by the Jews (John 5:16-18). They were not only hostile toward Him, but also attempted to kill Him. For them the immediate problem was the healing of a man on the Sabbath day, who had been sick for thirty-eight years, and Jesus' command to this individual to pick up his bed or mat and walk. In the subsequent discussion with the Jews and as His defense Jesus pointed out that God was working on the Sabbath, at least to the extent that He was maintaining the universe. This was acknowledged by the rabbis. However, their problem was that Jesus claimed God to be His Father, not in the sense that Israel had a Father in heaven--which was acceptable--but in the sense that He had an intimate relationship with God surpassing all human relationships with the deity and that He was allowed to do what the heavenly Father did, which included to perform certain types of work on the Sabbath that were not allowed to humans.¹

Thereby the issue shifted from a perceived breaking of the law in reference to the Sabbath to an even more serious

crime in Jewish eyes, namely blasphemy, and this is what verse 18 is concentrating on. Still the question remains to be answered, how should the statement that Jesus was breaking the Sabbath be understood?

II. The Greek Term

The Greek term translated “breaking” is *luō*. It can be rendered as “to loose,” “to untie,” “to release,” “to set free,” “to break,” “to set aside,” “to destroy,” or “to allow.” How should it be understood in this verse? Is Jesus setting the Sabbath free, breaking the Sabbath, or destroying the Sabbath?

The term is used six times in the Gospel of John. In John 1:27 and 11:44 it refers to untying sandals and wrappings. However, in John 2:19; 7:23; 10:35 it should be translated with the English terms “to destroy” and “to break.” The temple will be “destroyed,” but Scripture cannot be “broken.”

John 7:23 is quite important, because the text contains parallels to John 5:18: “If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the Law of Moses will not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made an entire man well on the Sabbath?” In both verses the Sabbath, the verb *luō*, and behind them the concept of the law and healing on the Sabbath occur. In this case the verb *luō* must be translated by the term “to break.” Therefore, John’s usage of this term seems to suggest that also in John 5:18 *luō* should be translated “to break.” Consequently, this text claims that Jesus broke the law.

III. Jesus and the Law

Yet this understanding seems to create a problem, because in other places Jesus cannot be charged with antinomianism. According to John 10:35 Jesus held that Scripture cannot be broken which would also include its law. In chapter 8:46 John reported that Jesus challenged His audience to convict Him of sin. Obviously they were not able to do that. He called his disciples to keep His commandments as He had kept His Father’s commandments (John 15:10). Thus, the Gospel of John makes it very clear that Jesus did not abolish the law.

A brief look at the Synoptic Gospels confirms that Jesus regarded the Ten Commandments as binding. In the Sermon on the Mount He stated that He had not come “to

The evidence is overwhelming that Jesus supported the law including the Sabbath.

abolish the Law or the Prophets, “but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). The passage following this statement and dealing with the law shows that for Jesus the Ten Commandments were binding. He wanted the commandment to honor father and mother to be kept and not replaced by their traditions (Matt. 15:3-6; Mark 7:7-13). The Pharisees were told that divorce and polygamy are against God’s will (Matt. 19:2-9; Mark 10:7-9). The rich young ruler was challenged to keep the commandments

(Matt. 19:16-19; Mark 10:19). Tithe should be given (Matt. 23:23). According to Matt. 24:20 He called His disciples to pray that their flight from Jerusalem would not have to take place on a Sabbath. Finally, Jesus’ prosecutors had a hard time to find any evidence against Him that would allow them to condemn Him (Matt. 26:59-60). The evidence is overwhelming that Jesus supported the law including the Sabbath.

IV. The Accusations Against Jesus

Therefore, it seems that the phrase “He was . . . breaking the Sabbath” is not a comment by the Gospel writer but an accusation of the Jews against Jesus. Two accusations were leveled against him: (1) Jesus broke the Sabbath, and (2) Jesus made himself equal with God. The first was wrong in any case. Jesus may have broken the Sabbath as some Jewish circles understood and interpreted it, but actually He did not break the Sabbath. Rather in His ministry He elevated the law to a new level and summarized it in the commandments of love toward God and the neighbor (Mark 12:28-34).

The second was most probably wrong too. Although Jesus claimed to be one with the father, He did not strive for equality with God in the way Satan did. Borchert notes: “Jesus did not claim to take the place of God or be an alternative to God, which is what the Jews meant by ‘making

“Jesus is not abolishing the Sabbath; he is reinterpreting it in terms of his relationship to the Father.” F. J. Moloney

himself equal with God’. . . What Jesus, as the One and Only Son of God (1:14, 18) claimed was to be sent by God, in

mission for God, doing the works of God, obedient to God, and bringing glory to God. That is not the role of one who displaces God but one who is a representative or emissary of God.”²² Although Jesus was God, as John points out in many places, He remained subordinate to His heavenly Father. In verse 19 Jesus stated that “the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.” This includes the ability to resurrect the dead and judge humanity (John 5:21-30).

Beasley-Murray seems also to understand the second part of John 5:18 as “Jewish objection to Jesus,”²³ while Keener states: “The claim that Jesus annulled the law is not his but that of his opponents.”²⁴ The Catholic scholar Moloney summarizes the issues well by saying: “The Greek verb translated by ‘was breaking’ (*elyen*) has a primary meaning of ‘loosened’ or ‘broke.’ However, it could also mean ‘did away with’ . . . If this were the meaning, ‘the Jews’ would be wrong. They are correct in suggesting that he broke their understanding of the Law. Jesus is not abolishing the Sabbath; he is reinterpreting it in terms of his relationship to the Father.”²⁵

¹Cf. Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2002), 235-236; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary 36, second edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 74; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 127.

²Borchert, 236; cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 310.

³Beasley-Murray, 74.

⁴Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, two volumes (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1:646.

⁵Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina, Vol. 4 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 174.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

THE FINAL JUDGMENT (REV 20)

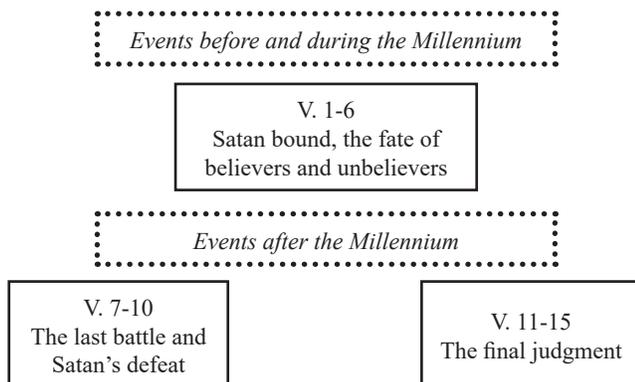
Most people do not want to appear in court. Although some criminals manage to go unpunished by earthly tribunals, they will not escape God's judgment (2 Tim. 4:1). The final "reward" is inevitable.

I. The Context

In Revelation 19 Christ's second coming is described in symbolic terms (v. 6-11). Those who do not belong to Jesus will perish (v. 12-21), while Christ's followers will be resurrected and/or transformed and will be with Jesus (1 Thess. 4:15-17). After the Second Coming a period of one thousand years (the Millennium) follows, which in turn will be superseded by a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21).

II. An Outline of Revelation 20

Revelation 20 can be divided into two parts. The sec-



ond part has two subsections which are parallel, portray the situation from different perspectives, and complement each other.

III. Events before and during the Millennium

- At the end of Revelation 19 the death of the unbelievers is described.
- In the beginning of Revelation 20 John deals with the question: What will happen to Satan?

Revelation 20:1-3: An angel will bind Satan with a chain for one thousand years. Satan will not be able to deceive anybody during this period. The chain has to be understood symbolically: Satan is restricted in his activities, because the earth is depopulated (see Rev. 19 and 1 Thess. 4:15-17).

- John's attention now turns to the believers. Revelation 20:4, 6: Christ's followers will reign with Him for a thousand years and will participate in the judgment (1 Cor. 6:2-3). An important aspect of the final judgment is the vindication of God's character and the revelation of His love and justice.
- In the middle of his depiction of the righteous John performs a mental leap asking himself what would happen to those that are lost and reports that they will remain dead during the Millennium. Starting with v. 7 the focus is on the lost and on Satan.

IV. Events after the Millennium

- After the Millennium the lost will be resurrected. Therefore, Satan will be able to lead them astray (Rev. 20:5a, 7, 13a).
- Being deceived again they will attack the New Jerusalem which has come from heaven in the meantime (Rev. 21:2). The greatest war of all times is supposed to be fought.
- However, suddenly the unbelievers and Satan will find themselves in front of God's throne and will be judged (Rev. 20:11-13).
- Finally, the verdict will be executed (Rev. 20:9b, 10, 14, 15).

V. Questions

- Who will be judged during and after the Millennium? True followers of Christ are participants of the judgment activity, not defendants (see John 5:24). The final judgment will be dealing with the unrighteous and the satanic agencies.
- What are the criteria used during the judgment? Salvation is by grace, but judgment includes the issue of works (Rev. 20:12, 13). Obviously, the sentences and the degrees of penalty will differ depending on what people and angelic beings have done and how they lived, although all enemies of God will die.
- "They will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Does this statement point to an ever burning hell? The term "forever" or "everlasting" has different shades of meaning in Scripture depending on the nature of that to which it is applied:
 - (1) without beginning and end (in connection with God)
 - (2) with beginning but without end (the eternal life of the believers)

(3) with beginning and end (e.g., Jon. 2:6; Exod. 21:6)

The context of Revelation 20 suggests that the torment will not be forever, because fire will devour God's enemies (v. 9). Their annihilation is called "the second death" (v. 14). It is not the punishment which will continue forever, the results of rejecting Jesus will. God does not enjoy people to be tormented forever.

- What about the time after the final judgment?

Jesus promises a wonderful new earth without sin, suffering, and death. The redeemed will live there in close fellowship with God.

The Millennium is not a period of peace on earth in which people still can make a decision for God. Such an idea is not only foreign to Scripture but also dangerous, because it indirectly encourages people to put off their decision for God to a time, when it will be too late. The Millennium is the time of God's final judgment. However, God's children do not need to be afraid, because God intervenes for them. The choice is ours.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

BOOK NOTES

Ben Clausen and Gerald Wheeler. *The Book of Beginnings: Creation and the Promise of Redemption*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2006. 160 pp. US\$10.99.

This book is not only written by two authors, but also consists of two parts. The first six chapters deal with Genesis 1 through 11:26, while the remaining seven chapters cover Genesis from 11:27 onward. Ben Clausen works as a scientist at the Geoscience Research Institute in Loma Linda, while Gerald Wheeler is the head book editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association. In style these two parts are completely different.

The second part takes the readers through the biblical text. Although many biblical chapters are dealt with only briefly because of space limitations, the authors manage not only to retell the biblical story, but also to provide helpful exegetical insights and background information. They point to the structure and parallels of biblical passages and here and there apply the text to our present situation. Over all, this part is well done and profitable to read.

The first part does not directly lead the readers through the biblical text but discusses various topics from a scientific and sometimes philosophical perspective. It uses the biblical text as a springboard to deal with God, humanity, creation, theodicy, the flood, and the issue of certainty. It covers among other items ancient creation and flood stories, the question of how biblical texts about creation should be interpreted--especially the issue of time. At the end of each of the first six chapters a short theological section follows the scientific explanations. These chapters

are written in an irenic, friendly tone attempting to build bridges to those who hold different views.

Obviously, the authors try to help their audience to understand that with regard to creation and flood there are many unresolved questions, in which--according to their view--sometimes an evolutionary approach seems to make better sense. They suggest: "One should not base a belief in Scripture on scientific evidence, because that puts science above the Bible and reason and sense perception above revelation, tempting us to discard the Bible when the scientific evidence is found to be incompatible with our understanding of Scripture" (p. 62).

The authors' methodological approach comes to the fore in a number of places. It is this approach which may raise serious questions among the readers and keep them puzzled:

(1) They present different options with regard to creation and time models from which their readers can freely choose whichever they prefer (cf. p. 75). Also, the authors' first principle of interpreting biblical texts that deal with nature lists the use of "metaphor and simile" (p. 14), but does not point out where in Genesis 1 and 2 it is used and how that would influence our understanding of the two chapters. Readers may conclude that it is sound to interpret Genesis 1 and 2 in a non-literal way.

(2) Statements such as, "No clear answer as to exactly what kind of death sin brought into the world exists, so perhaps different individuals can reasonably have different opinions" (p. 48), and "I realized that life issues of the greatest importance don't have geometry-type proofs" (p. 48), may be partially true, but seem to lead toward doctrinal and theological relativism and pluralism (cf. p. 36) and a denial of what could be called objective truth (cf. p. 11).

(3) This impression is heightened by the repeated affirmation that persons are more important than doctrines and "being right," and that winning people is more important than winning arguments (cf. pp. 8, 70, 79).

(4) Repeatedly, the evolutionary approach to origins seems to be portrayed as superior to the creationist approach or as the only reasonable approach so far, and creationists are blamed directly or indirectly for not being honest with the data (cf. pp. 45, 57-61, 76). There seems to be a certain incongruity in so far that evolutionists are not subjected to the same verdict, although it is acknowledged that both positions have their problems (cf. p. 11).

(5) Most serious, however, is that the authors seem to perceive an almost unbridgeable dichotomy between faith and science, between the work of a scientist and a Christian who believes in Scripture (cf. pp. 8, 80). A leap of faith is required to get from a purely scientific methodology to the data of Scripture, from one realm to another, while the two have not much, if anything, in common. In this sense the authors have left us with nothing apart from an insurmountable chasm between science and faith. This is the major weakness of *The Book of Beginnings*.

The problem is not only with what the book says, but also with how it is said, what is not said, and the underlying philosophical approach. Although it contains good material, due to the methodology employed in the first six chapters its usefulness for the Adventist readers in general is limited. It raises legitimate questions, but does not sufficiently reaffirm faith and may create an atmosphere of uncertainty. More helpful are without doubt Ariel Roth's, *Origins: Linking Science and Scripture* (Review and Herald, 1998) and the volume by Leonard Brand and David C. James, *Beginnings: Are Science and Scripture Partners in the Search for Origins?* (Pacific Press, 2006).

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

Jon L. Dybdahl, *A Strange Place for Grace*, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006. 143 pp. US\$12.99.

The author of this book, the theme of which is expressed in the subtitle "Discovering a Loving God in the Old Testament," was for many years a missionary in Singapore and Thailand, professor of world mission at Andrews University, and more recently president of Walla Walla College. Apart from the introduction and chapter one, in which Dybdahl raises the question whether God has a split personality, the author divides the book into six sections: (1) Grace in Old Testament Stories; (2) Grace in Institutions, Rituals, and Symbols; (3) Grace in Texts and Words; (4) Responses to Grace; (5) Objections to Old Testament Grace; and (6) a concluding chapter entitled "What New Testament Christians Can Learn About Righteousness by Faith in the Old Testament."

In the introduction Dybdahl offers the reason for this book. Many Christians consider the Old Testament to be a book of laws rather than of grace. In this book, the author supplies the reader with a pair of glasses that provide new ways of looking at the Old Testament. He endeavors to show that not only the New Testament, which portrays Jesus as a loving, forgiving Savior, but also the Old Testament with its judgments on the nations of Canaan as well as on some Israelites, e.g., Nadab, Abihu, and Uzzah, is a revelation of God's grace.

Those who have struggled to see how all these stories fit together to give us a consistent picture of a God, who is worthy of our worship, will find this book very helpful. For example, the way Moses in the Pentateuch records the history of the patriarchs and of Israel teaches a very important truth — grace always precedes duty. "God always begins in love and grace and saving — not in requiring. The requirements of God can be understood only by those already experiencing the saving grace of God. Only freed slaves can offer the kind of obedience desired by a loving God" (p. 27).

Dybdahl honestly wrestles with some of the difficult texts in the Old Testament (e. g., the wars of Israel and the sins of David) and finds God's grace shining through them all. Each chapter also includes a modern story that

illustrates how God's grace works in our world in the same way it did in biblical times. This reviewer found the section on "Responses to Grace" (worship, remember, and obey) particularly insightful.

Dybdahl does not claim to answer all the questions about the Old Testament. "I don't know all the answers," he says. "Learning to live with questions may in the end be more fruitful than arriving at final answers. I won't ever know how to explain fully *why* God seems to have behaved as He did, but He's God, and I'm man. I don't think He minds my asking, but I do believe He may not expect my human mind to fathom it all" (p. 130). While the reader may not agree with everything the author says, pastors and church members alike will be blessed by a thoughtful reading of this volume.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

Tyner Stuart, *Searching for the God of Grace*, Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006. 303 pp. US\$17.99.

This is a useful book for anyone interested in what Tyner has correctly identified as the center of both biblical theology and the Christian life. Stuart Tyner is one of the pastors at the La Sierra University Church in Riverside, California. He traces the presence and history of God's saving grace beginning with the OT, through the NT, and in the history of Christian thought. He rejects any Marcionistic view of grace and maintains that both Testaments proclaim salvation by grace. He describes the conflict between legalism and grace in Christian history and how the saving power of grace was obscured and even rejected by the Christian church. The book also describes his journey as an Adventist from legalism to grace. He is primarily writing for Adventists who never understood what saving grace is and who are allegedly afraid of it. His discussions on saving grace in the writings of E. G. White is a good introduction to the topic.

His emphasis on salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, and through Christ alone is welcomed. It would have been good for Tyner to explore in more detail and with a little more theological precision what grace is. Here is one of the weaknesses of the book: It repeats again and again that salvation is by grace, without any contribution from us, but it does not explore how that grace saves us. He is working with an understanding of the atonement that is never clearly articulated leaving the reader wondering and disoriented concerning his underlying assumptions. He is clear on what grace is not: It is not salvation through our works and neither is it a combination of salvation by grace supplemented by our good works. But what is it? How does God's grace save us? There is no serious attempt to address that extremely important concern. Because of that limitation one could be led to conclude that grace is divine sentimentality lacking any serious concern for divine justice and integrity. That does not seem to be what Tyner is promoting.

Missing in the book are three other important issues related to salvation by grace in Adventist thinking. The first one is judgment. We can hardly avoid discussing saving grace independent of a human contribution without at the same time dealing with judgment by works. This is probably the most serious challenge to salvation by grace in the mind of some Adventists and among many other Christians. Somehow Tyner missed it. It would have been good for him to raise the issue in his brief discussion of the origin of the Adventist movement in 1844. He chose to tip toe around the prophetic origin of the Movement and never raised the issue of the investigative/pre-advent judgment. He did refer to the concept of judgment among the Egyptians and interpreted it as a pagan example of salvation through human works. His silence on the subject is surprising to me.

The second issue absent in the book is a serious discussion of obedience to the law and grace. The discussion is not totally absent from the book. There are several places in which Tyner makes a clear and valid distinction between

the two indicating that obedience is not instrumental in salvation. What I could not find was a systematic analysis of an issue that is located at the heart of the Adventist message and theology. While Protestants emphasize grace we proclaim grace and obedience to God's eternal law. We do not see them as incompatible and neither do we consider obedience to be against salvation by grace alone.

The third issue absent in the book is related to the limits of God's grace. This is also important in Adventist thinking. Although grace is totally free and reaches us as a gift from God, a Christian can fall from grace. We reject predestination or the idea "once saved always saved." We also talk about the eschatological end of God's mercy and grace toward unrepentant sinners. How does that relate to a grace that is totally free and always available to sinners? Most of the theological depth of the topic still remains untapped. This book helps, but it is not yet a full exposition of an Adventist biblical view of it. It is closer to the traditional evangelical view.

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