

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Biblical Research Institute Goes to Africa	1
Politicization of Religion in America	1
Document on Creation Voted by the Annual Council 2004	2
Current Events: Recent Resurgence of Catholicism	3
Dealing With "Discrepancies" in the Bible	5
Immortality?	6
Book Notes	7

NEWS AND COMMENTS

THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE GOES TO AFRICA

In December 2004 the BRI staff met with an ad hoc committee at Valley View University, Accra, Ghana. This committee was organized by the African Divisions to deal with issues of a spiritualistic nature that affect the churches in Africa. The idea to begin a dialogue came about as a result of a rather unexpected interest in a paper on magic presented by Dr. Brempong Owusu-Antwi at the Faith and Science Conference in the Ivory Coast organized earlier in 2004. Drs. Andrews L. Ewoo and B. Owusu-Antwi impressed upon Dr. Angel M. Rodríguez, Director of BRI, who happened to be in attendance at the conference, the need to hold a special meeting to examine the issues on spiritualistic manifestations and their impact on our churches in Africa. The result was the

convening of a committee which brought together theologians, administrators, and departmental leaders from the three African Divisions, Will Eva, the editor of *Ministry* magazine, and the BRI staff. In a way, the conference at Valley View was historic, being the first of its kind on the African continent.

Following two days of intense brainstorming and reflections on the issues, the group came up with fourteen topics on the subject, to be dealt with in papers that will be presented mostly by African theologians at a future meeting in Africa. The topics identified ranged from magic through witchcraft to ancestor worship. The papers on these topics will seek to discuss the biblical view on these matters and recommend appropriate practical, personal, and pastoral ways of responding to the problems the church faces. There was a general feeling among the participants that these discussions will be of great value not only to the church in Africa, but to the church worldwide.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

POLITICIZATION OF RELIGION IN AMERICA

The Public Relations and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference has consistently worked to prevent efforts designed to make churches the surrogates for political parties. These efforts take place around the world. One such effort is currently playing out in the United

States. In this struggle we face serious odds as the White House is firmly in favor of passing a law that would allow political parties to recruit churches to join their party machines and use churches as political party cells to further their political agendas. The bill in question is not a bill with wide support among churches. Rather, it is a bill designed by politicians, for politicians, at the expense of the integrity of churches. So far we have prevailed against a very well coordinated, powerful effort in 2004. No doubt, we'll face it again this year.

We also have some major challenges coming up at the U.S. Supreme Court this year. Maybe one of the most serious is the challenge to the Religious Land Use & Institutionalized Persons Act. In 1990 the U.S. Supreme Court reinterpreted the freedom of religion provision in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. No longer, the Court stated, would the government be required to provide a "compelling interest" before placing a burden on religious freedom. Now, the Court declared, all the government must show when it inhibits the free exercise of religion is that the government did not directly intend to violate someone's religious freedom and that the law or action in question applies to everyone. This ruling opened the door to significant governmental abuse of people of faith. The two areas initially impacted by the U.S. Supreme Court's weakening of the protection for religious freedom, was zoning for churches and religious activities in prisons.

Zoning laws govern if a building can be built, whether it can be altered, and how a building may be used. After the U.S. Supreme Court's decision, municipalities increasingly passed zoning laws that ensured that churches could not build in their communities. Of course the laws did not target churches specifically. Rather, following the Supreme Courts lead, the laws were written to apply to everyone equally – at least in theory – but the net effect was that more and more often congregations trying to build a church in their community were refused the right to do so. In other cases, churches were prohibited from renovating their buildings. Some communities even banned churches from providing charitable services from their church because they did not want the poor coming to their community for help. Because all of this was done with laws that did not appear on their face to be aimed at churches and that applied to everyone equally, they could be enforced under the U.S. Supreme Court's new weak interpretation of what the state must do to ensure freedom of religion for its citizens.

A similar problem developed in some prisons. For example some prisons enforced rules that limited prisoners access to literature. This made it very difficult to get Bible studies, inspirational books, and other types

of religious literature to prisoners. It is hard to believe this happened—after all, the point of prison is to reform prisoners, and there is no force capable of reforming the human heart equal to the power of the Holy Spirit—but it did.

In response to these problems, the U.S. Congress passed the Religious Land Use & Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA). RLUIPA mandated that before local governments could ban churches and other houses of worship from building a new structure, altering their building for their needs, providing help to the poor, or using their building in any other way, the government must prove it has a "compelling" reason to impose the limitation. Similarly, it required that prisons show they have a "compelling" reason before banning the religious practices of prisoners. The Seventh-day Adventist Church played an important role in getting it passed and virtually all those interested in religious liberty were delighted by the passage of RLUIPA.

But not everyone was happy. Some local governments did not want the burden of showing a compelling reason before banning churches from locating in their districts. Further, some state prisons did not want to take reasonable steps to accommodate the religious needs of their inmates. In addition to these two groups, some expounded the theory that RLUIPA violates the separation of church and state because it protects religion but not non-religion. That is, RLUIPA ensures that houses of worship get preferential treatment over non-religious structures. The fact that the U.S. Constitution explicitly provides protection for religion in its text was not enough to convince them that, yes, protecting religious freedom not only is permissible under the U.S. Constitution, it is mandated.

Those unhappy with the religious liberty protections in RLUIPA brought a law suit, and this year that law suit will be heard at the U.S. Supreme Court. Once again, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is involved supporting the constitutionality of RLUIPA through an amicus brief that has been delivered to the U.S. Supreme Court. We are watching this case carefully, a negative decision could have a seriously negative impact on religious liberty across the board.

James Standish, Public Relations
and Religions Liberty

DOCUMENT ON CREATION VOTED BY THE ANNUAL COUNCIL 2004

The document we are sharing with you, "Response to An Affirmation of Creation," was voted by the Annual Council in 2004. After three years studying the interaction of faith and science the organizing committee of the two International Faith and Science Conferences,

sponsored by the General Conference, presented its final report to the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council. The report indicated that there was an overwhelming support for the biblical doctrine of creation in six literal and consecutive days followed by the seventh-day Sabbath rest. It also indicated that there were some differences of opinions among some theologians and scientists. As a response to the report the Council voted the document that we are sharing with you.

What the response affirms is not new in Adventist doctrine and theology. It is simply a reaffirmation of the traditional, biblically based position of the church. This reaffirmation was considered necessary because a small number of individuals were misinterpreting the Fundamental Belief on Creation reading into it what the church never intended to say. Hence, the response reaffirms the historicity of Genesis 1-11, emphasizing in a particular way that “the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.”

The value of this document will be determined by the way it will be used by pastors, church leaders, professors and theologians in their respective work as they seek to nurture the church and contribute to the formation of new generations of Adventist church members. The Council did a significant service to the church, which it represents, by clearly stating what the Bible and the church proclaim to be biblical truth in the setting of the first angel’s message. This message calls the human race to “worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water” (Rev 14:7).

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

Response to An Affirmation of Creation

VOTED, To approve the following statement in response to the International Faith and Science Conference Organizing Committee’s report, An Affirmation of Creation, subject to the changes that were voted in the previous action, to read as follows:

Whereas belief in a literal, six-day creation is indissolubly linked with the authority of Scripture, and;

Whereas such belief interlocks with other doctrines of Scripture, including the Sabbath and the Atonement, and;

Whereas Seventh-day Adventists understand our mission, as specified in Revelation 14:6, 7, to include a call to the world to worship God as Creator,

We, the members of the General Conference Executive Committee at the 2004 Annual Council, state the following as our response to the document, An Affirma-

tion of Creation, submitted by the International Faith and Science Conferences:

1. We strongly endorse the document’s affirmation of our historic, biblical position of belief in a literal, recent, six-day Creation.
2. We urge that the document, accompanied by this response, be disseminated widely throughout the world Seventh-day Adventist Church, using all available communication channels and in the major languages of world membership.
3. We reaffirm the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the historicity of Genesis 1-11: that the seven days of the Creation account were literal 24-hour days forming a week identical in time to what we now experience as a week; and that the Flood was global in nature.
4. We call on all boards and educators at Seventh-day Adventist institutions at all levels to continue upholding and advocating the Church’s position on origins. We, along with Seventh-day Adventist parents, expect students to receive a thorough, balanced, and scientifically rigorous exposure to and affirmation of our historic belief in a literal, recent, six-day creation, even as they are educated to understand and assess competing philosophies of origins that dominate scientific discussion in the contemporary world.
5. We urge church leaders throughout the world to seek ways to educate members, especially young people attending non-Seventh-day Adventist schools, in the issues involved in the doctrine of creation.
6. We call on all members of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist family to proclaim and teach the Church’s understanding of the biblical doctrine of Creation, living in its light, rejoicing in our status as sons and daughters of God, and praising our Lord Jesus Christ—our Creator and Redeemer.

Source: Adventist News Network

CURRENT EVENTS: RECENT RESURGENCE OF CATHOLICISM

The world in which we live is changing so rapidly that it is difficult for us to clearly identify the significance of the constant flow of that change. Not long ago we used to interpret changes in nature, society, and religion as “signs of the times,” that is to say as evidence that the coming of the Lord was near. It may be good to stop and reflect for a moment about events that have occurred that appear to be harbingers of the soon return of Christ. I am referring particularly to

recent and significant changes that have taken place in the Christian world.

Christianity is increasing its presence and influence in the world. This is certainly of great prophetic significance for us as Adventists. The secular mind-set of the Western world, tensions between Christianity and the non-Christian religions, and to some extent terrorist acts motivated by political and religious concerns, have contributed to make the Christian church more globally visible; its influence is increasing. In America, conservative evangelicals are making their presence felt in the political arena and in the debate over important social issues. In some of those cases Catholics have joined them in a common cause. In the United States it is said that the re-election of President George Bush was influenced by the work and involvement of the Protestant churches in politics. Allegedly, a large number of Catholics joined them in their efforts. This tendency toward the union of religion and state is viewed in biblical prophecy as extremely dangerous and as playing a significant role at the close of the cosmic conflict.

But perhaps what is more significant for the Christian world is what has happened in the Catholic Church. Pope John Paul II placed the church in a noteworthy position in global leadership. His tremendous influence gained him the designation of the moral leader of humanity. His long sickness contributed in a significant way to attract the eyes of the whole world to Vatican City and to the Catholic Church. Unquestionably, his influence transcended religious and cultural boundaries. But it was his death that placed the spotlight on the magnitude of his influence and the tremendous respect the world has for the head of the Catholic Church. Religious and political leaders from around the world went to Rome to participate in a Roman Catholic *religious service*. The President of the United States and two former presidents participated in the religious ceremony and bowed their knees before the coffin of the pope showing respect and honor to him and to what he stood for.

Never before in the history of Christianity had the world seen and the church experienced something as impressive and massive as the funeral of the pope. It was more than a funeral; it was a display of the tremendous global influence of Catholicism. It has been estimated that more than two billion persons from around the world watched on TV the pope's funeral service. This was indeed a phenomenon of global dimensions that placed this church in a position of great influence in the eyes of political and religious world leaders.

The election of Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI may have been a surprise to some. Only those who elected him know why he was chosen. He is unquestion-

ably a very capable and intelligent man, characterized by an undeniable commitment to Catholic dogma and tradition. Before his election as pope he represented Catholic dogma and the unwillingness of the church to change it. There have been some changes in the Catholic Church, but when it comes to Catholic dogma and tradition, the church remains the same. Cardinal Ratzinger was a living symbol of that mentality.

As Adventists we should not speculate concerning the future of the new pope and his role in the religious and political arena. It is important for us to understand that we live in a world in which our voice can also be heard, and that we should continue to speak up. The global religious market place is available to us in new ways through different means of communication, and we should go there and display the message the Lord entrusted to us for the world. God is increasing the influence of the Remnant, and He will increase it even more. We should make clear that although the press may have given the impression that the pope is the leading voice of Christianity, he is not our spokesman. He does not speak for us. He is one voice, certainly a very influential voice, but he is not the only voice. Let our voice continue to be heard in truth, kindness and love.

It is unquestionable that the Catholic Church has relocated itself at a central place on the stage of modern history. Prophecy anticipated this amazing event. Its sphere of influence has significantly increased throughout the world. We carefully observe the phenomenon, and wait for new developments. Meanwhile, we should not forget the tragic events that took place during the Middle Ages, and occasionally since then, as a result of the union of the secular and religious powers. To forget them could very easily result in an attempt to repeat them in a global dimension. We should not let the human race forget the dangers of religious intolerance and the use of civil power to promote and enforce religious dogmas. In the performance of this task we are doing a service to Catholics, Protestants, and to the whole world.

We as Adventists are very much concerned with Catholicism as an institution and not as a community of believers. The system promotes not only a religious agenda, but also a political one. We are interested in the main goals and teachings of the institution, but refrain from condemning individuals. Adventists who have attacked a particular person within the Catholic Church, identifying him with the apocalyptic beast of the book of Revelation, have gone beyond what we as a church stand for. We do acknowledge that many of those who committed themselves to the Catholic faith have done much good for humankind throughout history. But we affirm that in the light of Scripture we find the doctri-

nal and theological system promoted by the Roman Catholic Church to be seriously deficient. We point to those deficiencies in good faith, hoping that the call for reformation raised by God's instruments during the 16th century may continue to be heard today.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

DEALING WITH “DISCREPANCIES” IN THE BIBLE

What is a discrepancy in the Bible? For our purpose, a discrepancy in Scripture would be an idea, a thought, or a statement that appears discordant with or contradictory to other ideas or statements elsewhere in the Bible. Now the critical question is this, Are there discrepancies in the Bible? This question, in its essence, addresses the nature of the Bible. Does the Bible, in its nature, contain conflicting and inconsistent ideas and information? As with defining the nature of anything, we cannot and should not restrict our understanding of the nature of the Bible to these phenomena. In other words, what the Bible *is* is not fully defined simply by what it *appears* to us to be. An illustration might be helpful here. A rod plunged partially in a pool of water often appears to be bent. This is a phenomenon. However, there are causal reasons for the rod to appear to be bent, while it is not really bent.

It is quite evident that looking at the phenomena of the Bible, that is, looking at it as it appears to us, there are discrepancies. When critics of the Bible point to inconsistent dates, numbers, etc. they are dealing with the Bible formally as a phenomenon. However, the issue becomes a little bit more difficult when we begin to pay attention to other causal reasons regarding the nature of the Bible. Closer examination leads us to ask, for example, how the Bible came about and for what ends it was written. It is these latter kinds of questions that condition our answer as to whether in its nature the Bible contains contradictory and inconsistent facts and ideas. In other words, just as with the apparently bent rod there were causal reasons to show that the rod was not really bent, these questions force us to ask whether there may be causal reasons for the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in the Bible.

First, what do we know about how the Bible came into existence? The classic texts of 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:19-21 show in a fundamental way human and divine agencies working together to produce the Scriptures. This fact cannot be ignored. Scripture is not just a human product. God was involved in its production. Furthermore, without even completely understanding the dynamics and logistics of the divine-human

interaction, 2 Peter 1:19 makes it clear that the divine influence endowed the product with firmness, certitude, and stability. This is the essence of the use of the Greek word *bebaioteron* in the text. The foregoing points are causal factors that cannot be ignored in any quest to try to understand the nature of the Bible.

Second, what do we know about the ends for which the Bible was written? Here again 2 Peter 1:19 is helpful. However we interpret the “lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts” the text is unequivocal about the end for which the Scriptures are given: We walk in a dark world, and God through His grace has given us a lamp, the Scriptures, for reproof, guidance, and correction. The intent of the text is that the course of our lives should be directed by the word of God.

How do these factors regarding how the Bible came into being and the ends for which it came into existence help us in dealing with alleged “discrepancies” in the Bible? First, without succumbing to the view of “inerrancy” which associates the perfection of the Bible with God's timeless perfection, should not the fact of God's involvement in the production of the Bible mean something when we talk about discrepancies in the Bible? Second, it would seem that the divine involvement in bringing about the Scriptures was necessary to give it the certitude, surety, and stability that would be needed for it to function as a light and guide for our walk. An unsure and uncertain guide would not be much of a guide. In this connection it is a bit difficult to see how the Bible in its nature could be inconsistent and contradictory and still function effectively as a light and guide for our walk.

The point I am making in bringing up these causal factors in connection with the phenomena of Scripture is to say that by its very nature, Scripture encourages us to approach the Bible as a harmonious, consistent, trustworthy document which may still show evidence of human imperfection due to the human agency involved in its origin. The tension between the divine and human contributions to the production of Scripture is a creative tension that should not be flippantly resolved either in the direction of total divine control as in verbal/mechanical inspiration or in the direction of human

Scripture encourages us to approach the Bible as a harmonious, consistent, trustworthy document although it may show evidence of human imperfection.

ingenuity as in encounter revelation. Therefore, assuming the essential harmony of Scripture, we should seek to resolve apparent contradictions or discrepancies as far as possible by observing, among others, the following points: (1) Read texts in their contexts by paying atten-

tion to time and circumstances of writing; (2) be aware that biblical authors may legitimately use former writers and point out aspects that are not readily discerned in the original statements; (3) keep in perspective oriental metaphors and hyperboles; (4) take note of the practice of giving several names to one person, e.g. Edom/Esau and Gideon/Jerubbaal; (5) remember that different authors may be emphasizing different viewpoints; (6) consider the use of different modes of reckoning; and (7) study the different principles of arranging ideas and data.

Although we may be willing to acknowledge tensions and discrepancies in Scripture, it should not be the function of the interpreter to focus on them. Bible students look at the impressive unity and beauty of Scripture. Many scholars have adopted the foregoing approach to Scripture and in the process resolved what hitherto seemed unresolvable discrepancies. Perhaps it should not surprise us that we will sometimes have to search and dig hard and long to see the harmony and beauty of biblical truth. Some discrepancies may be solved in the future as some were resolved in the past. Some texts containing tensions may be harmonized, others may not. Let us study diligently. Jesus, in the parable of the hidden treasure (Matt 13:44) and the parable of the pearl of great price (Matt 13:45-46), seems to suggest that things of tremendous worth do exist that may not be apparent to the casual observer. Joy awaits those who find hidden treasures. If we cannot find a solution, let us not become obsessed with some details losing sight of the whole picture. Let us learn to suspend our judgment, because we are just humans dealing with the Word of God given to us in human language.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

IMMORTALITY?

“Is death necessary?“, asked biologist G. R. Taylor and stated that in 1968 in the USA alone more than a thousand teams of scientists were working on the issue of growing old and the problem of death. Some people are frozen at their death. They want to be revived as soon as a cure for their disease or the aging process has been found. Most of humanity seems to have the desire to live forever. Many people claim that although their body is mortal, their soul is not. Therefore the question must be asked: Is there a natural immortality of humans or their soul?

I. The Immortal Soul and Scripture

1. Scripture and Immortality

There are only two biblical passages using the word “immortality”:

- (1) 1 Tim 6:14-16 - God alone possesses immortality.
- (2) 1 Cor 15:51-54 - Only at their resurrection, when Jesus comes again, will believers receive immortality.

Eternal life is always dependent on Jesus. Without Him there is no everlasting life, not on earth, nor in heaven, nor in hell - Rom 6:23; John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 5:11, 12.

2. Scripture and Soul

The Hebrew and Greek terms translated “soul” can be rendered in different ways. They stand for “life” (Gen 9:4; Matt 2:20), “heart” (Eph 6:6), “emotions” (Song 1:7; Mark 14:34), and frequently for “person”:

- (1) Humans do not have a “soul” but are a “soul” - 1 Cor 15:45; Gen 2:7.
- (2) Even animals are “souls” - Gen 1:20; 9:10; Rev 16:3.
- (3) The “soul” can weep - Jer 13:17.
- (4) “Souls” can be taken captive - Jer 52:28-30.
- (5) “Souls” can be baptized - Acts 2:41.
- (6) The “soul” can die - Eze 18:4; Jas 5:20; Rev 20:4; Ps 89:48; Job 36:14; Lev 19:8; 21:1, 11.

Result: Very often the term “soul” designates the entire human being. It is not used in connection with immortality. The concept of an immortal soul is not found in the Bible.

II. The Idea of Immortality in History

1. Support for the Natural Immortality of the Soul

- (1) Satan - Gen 3:4 (in contrast to Gen 2:17)
- (2) Pagans - The doctrine of the immortal soul has been called a characteristic of paganism and has led to ancestor cult, human sacrifices, building of the pyramids, etc.
- (3) The Greeks - Plato called the body the prison of the soul and understood death as the liberation of the soul. Aristotle shared similar views.
- (4) Churches - Probably during the 3rd century AD the platonic doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul had already permeated the Christian church. Representatives were Athenagoras, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustin. It was

fully developed by Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. In December 1513 the dogma of the natural immortality of the soul was proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church. Most Protestant Churches have also accepted this doctrine.

2. *Opposition to the Natural Immortality of the Soul*

- (1) God - Eccl 9:5, 6, 10
- (2) Israel - Dan 12:13
- (3) Jesus Christ - John 6:40. Jesus did not experience his death as the liberation of his soul from the prison of his body which he, therefore, should have desired and accepted happily. He suffered.
- (4) Christians - Early church fathers such as Justin the Martyr, Tatian, Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp rejected this doctrine. Luther was ambivalent. A number of well-known modern Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Oscar Cullmann also believe that it has no foundation in Scripture.

III. *Consequences*

1. *Teachings which Are Not Found in Scripture Are Grounded on the Idea of the Natural Immortality of the Soul*

These doctrines include (1) purgatory, (2) indulgences, (3) prayer, alms, and masses for the dead, (4) the constantly burning hell, (5) veneration of Mary and the saints (cf. 1 Tim 2:5 and Exod 20:4), (6) reincarnation, and (7) spiritualism - Deut 18:10-12; 2 Cor 11, 14.

2. *Biblical Teachings Are Darkened*

- (1) *The Second Coming of Christ*. During church history the second coming of Jesus lost its importance in the Catholic Church and in many Protestant churches.
- (2) *Resurrection of the Dead*. The resurrection is the divine antithesis to the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul.
- (3) *Judgment at the End of the World*. Such a judgment would be superfluous if the souls were already in heaven, purgatory, or hell.

3. *God's Character Is Darkened*

- (1) God would appear to be a liar who cannot be trusted (cf. Gen 2:17).

(2) God would be without compassion allowing people who supposedly had made it to heaven to watch the pain and suffering of their loved ones still living on earth without being able to intervene.

(3) God would be an unjust tyrant who punishes people in hell forever, although they have sinned for a limited time only.

The doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul creates a cruel picture of God and distorts Scripture. However, Scripture teaches that God is love and cares for us (1 John 4:8-9; Mal 1:2). We have to make the decision whom to trust.

<p><i>God's Statement</i></p> <p>↓</p> <p>"You will surely die."</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Jesus is the gate to eternal life</p>	<p><i>Satan's Statement</i></p> <p>↓</p> <p>You surely will not die!</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Death is the gate to eternal life</p>
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Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

BOOK NOTES

Jacques B. Doukhan. *The Mystery of Israel*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004. 143 pp. \$9.99.

J. Doukhan, the author of *The Mystery of Israel* teaches at Andrews University and has written a number of other works, especially on Daniel and Revelation. In this book he wrestles with the question whether or not Israel has been rejected by God and replaced by the church, the so-called Rejection or Supersession Theory traditionally espoused by many Adventists. He also addresses the interpretation of Dispensationalism. Both of these approaches he rejects. Instead he suggests a new model, called the Two-Witness Theory. According to this theory God has not rejected Israel. He uses two witnesses to point to the fullness of His revelation, the Jews and the Christian Church. Both are imperfect. Both are being called to service, which does not necessarily imply salvation. The Jews point to the law, neglected by Christianity, whereas Christians point to Jesus as the Messiah, neglected by many Jews. The messages of both witnesses are brought together in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In an appendix he deals with E. G. White's statements on Israel and the Jews.

Doukhan must be applauded for heightening the awareness of the Adventist church to the Jewish question, for pointing out the problem of anti-Semitism which may affect even the most devout Christians, and for pointing Adventists through the writings of E. G. White to the importance of the mission to the Jews as well as their role in the final days of earth's history.

The work contains many interesting insights, but it may also trigger mixed reactions. It seems that the author reads the New Testament through the lenses of

the Holocaust. The danger of such an approach is to use the New Testament selectively and to avoid showing that at least in the first century—according to the witness of New Testament books—Jews created problems for Christians. There is no question that Christianity in the later centuries failed, often miserably, but a full picture of what happened, as far as it is accessible to us, would be helpful. The exposition of biblical texts as well as the interpretation of E. G. White material differs sometimes substantially from serious work done by other well-known Adventist scholars. This can be expected to some extent, but some tentativeness of one's own insights would be appreciated. In addition, some tentative suggestions early in the book become certitudes later on so that the work tends to sound dogmatic in a number of places. Some conclusions drawn by the author may be overstatements, e.g. to accept the Rejection Theory does not necessarily mean to exclude "the law from the plan of salvation" (p. 75). A definition of Israel is found rather late in the book (pp. 109-113). A definition of the law and a discussion of the issue of the law and its different aspects with which the first century church had to wrestle, is missing. While Jesus confirmed the law, he criticized the Jewish interpretation of the law. Paul showed that some elements of the law came to an end with Christ's death on the cross and that salvation is not accomplished by keeping the law. This understanding of the law caused problems not only with Judaizing elements of the early church but also with Judaism. It would have been good to explore these aspects. It seems that the Two-Witness Theory is not able to reconcile all historical data, nor is it supported by the New Testament. Obviously, a reconciliation of the law and the Messiah is not only found in the Adventist church. It was already present in New Testament times, when Paul stated that in Christ the barrier between those being circumcised and those being uncircumcised has been done away with and that Christ has created "one body," the church (Eph 2-4).

The book raises many questions. It alerts us to fight any tendency of anti-Semitism and tactfully reach out with the full gospel, the Messiah and the law, to the Jewish community. This may be its contribution. Whether or not its main thesis is helpful for the church is another issue.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

Richard Lehman. *La Foi de Moïse*. Dammarie-lès-Lys: Éditions Vie et Santé, 2003. 124 pp. €15.00.

Richard Lehmann is currently serving as president of Salève Adventist University. He is the author of a number of books especially on the Apocalypse. As a well-known NT scholar he has turned to the OT and

written this volume dealing with the faith of Moses. Normally, when we talk about Moses, we associate him with the law as does also the NT. But it is intriguing to deal with the person of Moses from the perspective of faith (French *foi*) instead of the perspective of the law (French *loi*), although Lehmann does not omit this important topic. The book consists of an introduction, an epilogue, and six chapters all of them dealing with aspects of faith, such as the birth of faith, faith and power, faith and love, and faith and grace. It traces the story of Moses with a strong emphasis on the time up to the Exodus as well as the events associated with Sinai. Lehmann not only describes faith but also deals with other crucial topics such as liberty, covenant, the Sabbath, all of the Ten Commandments, and the sanctuary. In the epilogue he touches on Moses' resurrection and his appearance on the Mount of transfiguration.

Lehmann furnishes interesting and helpful background information, points out connections to the NT, and applies the biblical message contained in these narratives and legal passages to the present reader. Although this book has devotional aspects and is easy and fascinating to read, it does not lack scholarly depth. It contains helpful and sometimes extensive footnotes. There are a few places where the reviewer had some questions, e.g., when the wrath of God is defined as the expression of cosmic disorder created by us through our carelessness from which God alone can keep us (p. 95). But overall this is a book worth reading. It is not only a volume on Moses and his faith but also, in a special way, a book on God and our response to Him.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

Alden W. Thompson. *Escape from the Flames*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005. 192 pp. \$14.99.

Alden Thompson's latest book, *Escape From the Flames*, is written out of his concern for a certain streak of fundamentalism in Adventism that forces some to make a choice between "thinking" and "believing." In his view, fundamentalism's attachment to "inerrancy" leads not only to an authoritarian attitude towards Scripture and E. G. White's writings, but forces one not to be "honest" with these texts. The problem, as he sees it, is that an inerrant view adopts an all-or-nothing approach which says, "If you find one error, you can throw the whole thing out." The result is that inerrantists "place the Bible and themselves in a hard place," since the Scripture supposedly contains "contradictions."

Thompson's goal in writing this book is to help those who may feel somewhat uneasy about the mixture of apparently harsh, legalistic, and authoritarian elements, especially in the Old Testament, with the seemingly

more gentle and loving elements in the New Testament. Formally then, his way of making sense of these varied elements in Scripture, as well as in the writings of Ellen White, is to advance a certain interpretation of the concept of “inspiration” which he revisits from a rather personal, biographical perspective.

Although Thompson’s approach raises many questions, he addresses important methodological issues that should not be dismissed lightly. However, it is important to note that in this work he provides no formal definition of “inspiration.” Unfortunately, he does not devote much space to 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. Based on quotations from E. G. White, it is apparent that Thompson works with a certain understanding of “thought inspiration” in which the human dimension is given well-nigh free reign. What we have is a “phenomenological” approach to inspiration in which we are told, based almost exclusively on the phenomena of Scripture with little attention to the self-testimony of Scripture, what the doctrine of inspiration should accommodate. What the doctrine of Scripture is made to accommodate is based on Thompson’s interpretive value judgment that the New Testament reflects a higher ethical standard than the Old Testament. Stated in other words, he observes that the Old Testament demonstrates “God’s power” whereas the New Testament reflects “God’s goodness.”

On the basis of the foregoing fundamental principle he turns the doctrine of inspiration into an ethical construct, using it to account for what he perceives as difficulties, contradictions, and errors in Scripture and in the writings of E. G. White, e.g., God uses violence for the ultimate good. Imperfections, ambiguities, misconceptions, contradictions, and even “errors” may be accommodated in anticipation of a future, greater good. However, we would argue that according to Scriptures’ own testimony (such as 2 Tim 3:16: 2 Pet 1:19-21) the divine superintendence of the process of inspiration endows the text with firmness, stability, and certitude (see the use of *bebaioeron* in 2 Peter 1:19). While this divine element may not imply a rigid, literalistic application of God’s Word, it does mean, however, the rejection of any approach that may potentially relativize it, as seems to be the case here. The fact remains that the application of Thompson’s ethical principle of the one, the two, the ten, and the many may not be as free from ambiguity as he hopes. On what principles are human needs and human love established? Or do we not need any such principles?

There are other matters that may be looked at and interpreted differently. For example, has the case really been made that E. G. White developed from an “authority mode” and from the fear of God to the joy in the Lord? One could argue, for example, that if there

is a message that is less legalistic, highlighting God’s love for the sinner, it is the message of ‘righteousness by faith’. Interestingly Thompson uses a quote from E. G. White in connection with the Waggoner dispute, in which she says in effect that the message of righteousness by faith has marked “all the years of my experience” (p. 164). Also, should the fact that God uses imperfect speech to communicate His will, be interpreted to mean that He veils His truth? To what extent is the New Testament free from the attitude of authority and absolute obedience? In connection with the last point, for example, Matthew 5:17-18 sounds quite authoritative and absolute.

It is laudable for Thompson to take into consideration the phenomena of Scripture as he wrestles to formulate a doctrine of Scripture. It would be better yet, if he could confront Scripture’s self-testimony as well and articulate an understanding of the Bible that reflects a rapprochement of its phenomena and self-testimony.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

William G. Johnsson. *Mark: The Gospel of Jesus*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005. 144 pp. \$9.99.

William G. Johnsson, editor of the Adventist Review and author of a number of books, has made another contribution to the understanding of the New Testament by writing *Mark: The Gospel of Jesus*. This work was designed as companion book to the Sabbath School Study Guide of the second quarter of 2005, but, as with other companion books, it can stand alone as a resource on the Second Gospel. The book is easy to read. It combines background information, exegetical and theological insights, and applications for the reader. Johnsson does not avoid more difficult issues such as the questions regarding the synoptic problem, priority of the gospel writers, and the ending of Mark. He states that the words of Mark’s Gospel should be taken at face value and that the Gospel presents “an accurate account about Jesus” (p. 13), the writer being inspired by the Holy Spirit. Since “no one Gospel is sufficient” and only all four portray “the complexity of Jesus of Nazareth” (p. 25), he sporadically takes a look at the other Gospels as he interprets Mark. However, scholarly questions are handled in such a way that the practical impact of the book is not minimized. A homiletical tone is maintained throughout this work in which the author successfully tries to follow Mark’s emphasis that Jesus is the Son of God and the victor over death.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

Mike Tucker. *Journal of a Lonely God: The Book of Genesis Reveals God’s Deepest Longing—You!* Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2005. 95 pp. \$9.99.

Mike Tucker's book is not a commentary on selected passages of Genesis, but a sermon and devotional treatment of Gen 1-3, 6-8, 12, 16, 22, 27-28, 32, 37-39, 46-50 with references to the NT. Although quotations are found frequently, they lack references. Readers who expect a careful exposition of biblical passages may be disappointed. On the other hand, it was not the author's intention to provide an in-depth study of Genesis. Tucker's main thesis that God is lonely is

questionable and does not take sufficiently into account God's self-sufficiency, transcendence, independence of His creation, and His trinity. It would be better to talk about a God who longs for us, than about a lonely God. Having said this it must be added that overall the book is good and inspiring to read. It calls us to make a decision for the God who loves us so much that he desires to live with us.

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