

## **Education and Eschatology: Why Theological Education Is Necessary<sup>1</sup>**

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I vividly recall the situation when I was 6 years old. It was a sunny Sabbath morning during the summer, and I was going to church. On the way, I met an elder, a very fine man admired by many who asked me what my plans were for the future. With great enthusiasm, I told him that in three months I would enroll in school for my first class. He turned to me, paused, and said: “Jiří, you probably will not even go to school, because Jesus will come soon,” and then he added, “and certainly you will not finish your elementary school before Jesus will return.” I still hear those stunning words as clearly as if he were saying them today. Well, I not only finished elementary school, but also high school, college, and university studies. In addition, I became a professor at Andrews University, now function as the dean at the SDA Theological Seminary; and in a few years, I will retire, but Jesus has not yet come. Despite this fact, Jesus Christ firmly promised: “I am coming soon” (Rev 22:20 NIV). We all know that the crucial thing in this expectation is not *when* Jesus will come but *that* He will come. Christ said so, therefore it will happen (Matt 16:27; 24:27, 30; 25:31; John 5:25–29; 14:1–3, 18)! Yes, this *soon* has already lasted almost two millennia, but the reality is *that* He will come. We may feel frustrated because we have definitely waited longer than our forefathers expected, or even longer than we expected.

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### MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY

How is this long-term expectation related to education? Very tightly. Unfortunately, some people who believe in the soon coming of Christ are anti-education, anti-social, and anti-progress; and the problem is that this small(er) group of people is usually very vocal. For these believers, education is understood as something unnecessary, some kind of unwelcome luxury, a real detour and obstruction to mission. It might even be seen as dangerous or harmful because it may lead students away from God. So, is education, especially theological education, needed when we believe that Jesus Christ is coming soon? Why bother with biblical-historical-missiological studies and theological-practical training if the end of the world is at the door? Does biblical eschatology support or repudiate education? These are serious questions.

#### **Warnings of a Delay**

It is highly significant that Jesus Christ in His last sermon on eschatological events (Matthew 24–25) mentioned several times the idea of delay: first He alluded to it by speaking about “the beginning of birth pains” when nations will experience wars, famines, and earthquakes (Matt 24:8), and then He stressed the growth of wickedness and loss of love (24:12). The end will come only when “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world” (24:14). Finally, in his concluding parables, Jesus explicitly expressed three times the thought of the delay: (1) the wicked servant says in his heart: “My master is *delayed*” (Matt 24:48 ESV; emphasis added); (2) all 10 virgins who were expecting the bridegroom to come fell asleep “as the bridegroom [coming/appearance] was *delayed*” (Matt 25:5 ESV; emphasis added); and (3) a master gave his servants talents and “after a *long time* the master of those servants came” (Matt 25:19 ESV; emphasis added) expecting the talents to have been multiplied. Thus, Jesus was preparing His followers for the sad reality that His return would take longer than they expected. Life would be hard, but He assured His followers that He will always be with them till the eschaton, till the very end (Matt 28:20). Notice carefully that Jesus is not explaining *why* the delay occurs (often our main preoccupation), but He underlines *how* to live and *what* to do during the delay.

#### **Loving Service According to Abilities and Training**

These eschatological parables teach that to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ means to live a life of service and that this service should be genuine because the attitude toward the Master and our

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

motives for service to others is what counts. Jesus's last two parables in the eschatological speech of Matthews 24–25 are very eloquent. Not only were those who were expecting the Second Coming of Christ diligently working (Matt 25:14–23), but they were engaged in simple activities of working for needy people. Jesus mentions six activities four times and always in the same sequence. He states the following about the righteous: “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’” (Matt 25:34–40 NIV). The wicked, on the other hand, are described as people without any interest to help the needy. They were blind to seeing them and their needs and to care for them.

I readily admit that in order to serve in these six simple capacities (taking care of the hungry, thirsty, strangers, those with no clothes, sick, and in prison), one does not need to go through special theological training, even though it is clear that one needs to think right, has to have a positive attitude toward His Lord and King, and should allow the Holy Spirit to transform one's life; because only a loving person truly cares, diligently works, and shines.

However, one should recognize that there are other needs where people's help is of value in accordance with the level of education they have received. One example is health and medicine where a trained health-care provider can assist a sick or injured person much better than an uneducated individual, even though this individual may be good hearted. A person with the knowledge of first aid, a nurse, a family doctor, a surgeon, or a specialist in cancer or cardiovascular care can all help but each one does so on a different level according to their training, skills, and abilities. We would refuse to go to a nurse for a complicated surgery, but some dare to think that almost anybody in the church can answer deep biblical issues, theological and ethical problems, or give wise advice to solve life's problems.

### Prophet Daniel as a Model of Wisdom

The apocalyptic prophet Daniel is a remarkable and exceptional example of wisdom and understanding. He became a prophet only later in life (Dan 7:1), because he was first of all known as a wise man. He studied at the Jerusalem University and then at the Babylonian University. He received the best education and became an outstanding scholar (1:20). We read that he was among those young men who were “without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He [Ashpenaz] was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians” (Dan 1:4 NIV). After three years of study in Babylon, Daniel and his three friends are described by the following words: “To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds” (Dan 1:17 NIV).

It is noteworthy to mention that the book of Daniel has a special emphasis on *knowledge* and *understanding* (1:4, 17; 8:15, 17; 5:12; 9:23, 25; 12:4, 8, 10). *Wisdom* is highly valued, because God is the Giver of wisdom (1:20; 2:20–23, 30). I am convinced that this stress is purposely given by God's design.

It is interesting that there is also a healthy tension in the biblical text regarding Daniel's wisdom. Daniel is full of knowledge, insights, and wisdom (5:11, 14), yet he himself sometimes does not understand. He states: “I, Daniel, . . . was appalled by the vision; it was beyond understanding” (Dan 8:27 NIV; see also 12:8: “I heard, but I did not understand”). He had to search diligently the Scriptures and seek wisdom for ten years (8:1; 9:1–2) before he was able to receive and understand something of God's revelation given to him in chapter 8 (9:22–23; cf. 12:8–9, 13). Gabriel told him: “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding” (Dan 9:22 NIV).

No wonder Daniel, who wrote about the time of the end (Dan 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9), is the model of wisdom for people living in the time of the end: “Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but *those who are wise will understand*” (Dan 12:10 NIV; emphasis added). Daniel boldly declares: “*Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever*” (Dan 12:3 NIV; emphasis added).

**Christian History Corresponds to Biblical Interpretation History**

The reformers and shapers of Christian history understood how education is important. There are ample examples from the history of the Reformation to prove that theological education was important for them. I fully agree with my teacher of Christian history in Prague, Professor Amadeo Molnár, who repeatedly told us in his 1973–1975 lectures that Christian history is a history of the interpretation of the Bible. This is why right biblical interpretation is of great significance. Truth matters. Progress is built on the correct understanding of God’s Word, but unfortunately, churches have been and are divided because of theology, and even wars were fought because of controversy over biblical truth. For example:

1. In 1054 the Christian Church split into two parts (East and West), because of the theology regarding the Holy Spirit. One word was the tip of the iceberg: *Filioque* (“and the Son”). Is the Holy Spirit coming only from the Father or from the Father “and the Son?” This was the ultimate question, and the Schism of 1054 resulted in the break between what are now the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches.
2. In the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the followers of Jan Hus (John Huss) were defending (among other things) the preaching of God’s Word in the native Czech language as a model of what should be done universally wherever the Church existed, instead of worshipping in Latin. This request was accepted by the Roman Catholic Church only after the Second Vatican Council in the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1962–1965). Roman Catholicism was late in doing so by more than 550 years.
3. The Hussites also demanded, according to biblical teaching, that the cup should be served to the people and that the drinking of wine must be an integral part of the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the Holy Communion. In 1414 in the Church of Saint Martin in the Wall in Prague, theologian Jakoubek ze Stříbra (Jacob of Mies) and St. Martin’s parish priest Jan of Hradec, with consent from Master Jan Hus (even though he was already at that time in Constance, Germany), served the wine during the Lord’s Supper for the first time together with the bread to all believers. Truly a bold and big Reformation step. However,

### MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY

Crusaders were sent to fight against the Hussites as an expression of disagreement in order to defeat this heresy. The Hussites were victorious when the Hussites were united, but then by treason and inner disagreements and clashes they experienced defeat in 1434. This Hussite requirement has never been *fully* accepted even today by the Roman Catholic Church.

#### **Reformation Initiated by Educated Theologians**

It is crucial to recognize that the Reformation was initiated by very educated men.<sup>2</sup> Theology was important for all reformers. Those who made a difference in the Church were theologically trained people.<sup>3</sup> All reformers were highly educated, so they were able to preach and write pointedly.

1. John Wycliffe (spelled also Wyclif, Wycliff, Wiclef, Wyckliffe), the morning star of the Reformation, was a Seminary professor at the University of Oxford and fluently wrote his thoughts in Latin.
2. Master Jan Hus (John Huss) was a rector of Charles University, one of the oldest universities in Europe established in 1348 by the emperor Charles IV. He was the first one to publish a book *De Ecclesia* (On the Church) in 1413.<sup>4</sup> He wrote in Latin in order to be widely read among educated people. He accepted the Bible as the highest authority for the Church's teachings, proclaimed his disobedience to the pope, and accepted only Jesus Christ as the head of the church, and he wanted the world to know why.

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<sup>2</sup> However, I must stress that also heretics are usually very well-educated people, but they lack a balance in their teaching; they choose and select only specific theological point(s) at the expense of the rest, thus their teaching is not consistent and comprehensive.

<sup>3</sup> Even though Christ's disciples did not formally attend rabbinic schools, they were trained under the best Rabbi of all rabbis Jesus Christ for more than three years. Apostle Paul received the best education of his time (studied under Gamaliel; Acts 22:3), and he was used by God in powerful and amazing ways as nobody else for spreading the Gospel among the Gentiles (majority of New Testament epistles were written by him, and his three missionary journeys described in the book Acts of Apostles—or better Acts of the Holy Spirit are well known as well as his involuntary journey to Rome).

<sup>4</sup> Mistr Jan Hus, *O Církví* (Praha: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1965).

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

The material he presented was very explosive and cost him his life.

3. Leaders of the Hussites were very educated people, not only Jan Hus but also other theologians of the Hussite movement who were able to express themselves not only in Czech but also in the Latin language. They knew well the issues in dispute, and they were responding to them in such a way that even theologians on the opposition side respected them for their knowledge. They were partners in debates on theological questions. For example, Mikuláš z Pelhřimova (Nicholas of Pelhřimov), bishop of the Taborites, wrote in Latin the *Defense of Faith of the Taborites* (*Confessio Taboritarum*) where he defended that only the Bible is the ultimate judge in matters of faith. He spoke against veneration of the saints, purgatory, indulgences, and all sacraments except Baptism and the Lord's Supper (serving not only bread but also the wine), and prayers for the dead.
4. The first Reformation thinkers underlined that knowledge of biblical truth must be practical and lead to social reforms. For example, Jan Milíč from Kroměříž, the precursor of Jan Hus, changed a whore house into a place where repented prostitutes could live and begin a new life. This house was renamed Jerusalem and stood opposite to the Bethlehem Chapel (where the Gospel was preached in the Czech language). In that Jerusalem center, those who repented and wanted to live a new moral life had the chance to find support. Forerunners of Hussitism as well as the Hussites strongly believed in the eschaton, and that the eschatological hope brought a vivid engagement within society's life and reformation of social injustice. They were revived by God's Word and then engaged in the reformation of the medieval Church and helping those in need like orphans, widows, elderly, poor as well as repentant thieves, drinkers, and prostitutes. They believed in a complete reformation of all things.

The reformation put education in the forefront as they went to the original sources, *ad fontes*. Their education and depth of knowledge was documented in their ability to translate the Bible into their native languages. We today are standing on their shoulders.

*MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY*

1. John Wycliffe initiated the translation of the Bible from the Latin Vulgate into English in the year 1382, now known as the Wycliffe's Bible. It is probable that he personally translated the Gospels and possibly even the entire New Testament, while his associates translated the Old Testament. The Wycliffe's Bible appears to have been completed by 1384.
2. It is well known that Martin Luther translated the New Testament into German from Greek in one year (1522) at Wartburg and then the entire Bible with the help of others by 1534.
3. William Tyndale (1494–1536), an English scholar and a leading figure of the Protestant Reformation, is well known for his translation of the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek texts into English. This was the first English Bible translated from the original biblical languages. As you know, it cost him his life (together with other important issues). This translation of the Bible played a key role in the advancement of the Reformation in England and beyond.
4. Bible scholars and theologians of Kralice (so called *kraličtí*) translated the whole Bible from original Hebrew and Greek in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The small Church (Unity of the Brethren in Moravia) produced one of the best translations of the Bible, the Kralice Bible, with six volumes of theological explanations during 1579–1594. The Bible of Kralice, also called the Kralice Bible (in Czech: *Bible kralická*), was the first complete translation of the Bible from the original languages into the Czech language. In 1613, out of practical necessity, it was published in one volume without explanatory notes. This Kralice Bible is still used in some places today and was widely used until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
5. An excellent example of reformation thinking on the importance of education is John Amos Comenius (in the Czech language: *Jan Amos Komenský*; 1592–1670), a Czech religious refugee persecuted by the Catholic Church in the time of the counter-reformation after the Battle on White Mountain in 1620, who served as the last bishop of the Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas*



*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

*Fratrum*). He was an outstanding theologian and philosopher who was at the same time a prolific pedagogue and writer. He even wrote some textbooks for schools like *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (The Visible World of Pictures), a publication with 150 lessons that presented the entire world to pupils through instructive illustrations. It was one of the most-published textbooks in the history of pedagogy. He was the first one to innovate the use of pictorial textbooks in education. Comenius is considered the father of modern education and was an advocate of education which he explained in a comprehensive way in his book *Didactica Magna*. As an educator and theologian, he supported lifelong learning, made instruction practical, moved beyond dull memorization, and supported the idea of equal opportunity for all children, opening education to the poor and to girls.<sup>5</sup>

Our early Adventist pioneers were confronted with the reality of the imminent Second Coming of Christ. This is why they stressed that Church organization was not necessary because the world would soon experience collapse. They were also afraid of losing their freedom by being controlled by the organization. Mission was not needed according to them (just remember the shut door theology), and education was not in their focus. Emphasis on education among our pioneers started slowly. The first schools were elementary schools but later, in 1874, Battle Creek College was established which was the first higher educational institution founded by the Seventh-day Adventists. Battle Creek College was moved

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<sup>5</sup> Issues we discuss today related to social justice and the engagement of Seventh-day Adventists in society and the local communities were debated before us. For example, the Unity of the Brethren had two groups called the small and the large factions (*malá a velká stránka*), like “conservatives” and “liberals.” The larger group together with their leadership were willing to open themselves to certain things in their society, like working not only in agriculture but also in other professions. A famous example is related to a soap maker who was criticized for such a liberal attitude, so this soap maker, knowing that using soap is important for hygiene, said in his defense: “Our cows do not want to eat soap.” We smile today over such debates, but behind them was the serious question of how far to go with the culture and to be engaged in the broader life of society. One question was whether to live in the villages only or whether dwelling in town was all right. They ultimately realized that life is increasingly complex and cannot be stopped. Should we live today as our friends, the Amish people, without cars, electricity, and modern luxuries of life, and dress like people in the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> centuries?

### *MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY*

to Berrien Springs in 1901 and was renamed Andrews University in 1960.

Interestingly, recognition of the importance of worldwide mission in our Church opened the door for education. When one engages and proclaims the Gospel, then suddenly there is a need for educated leaders and for formulating what we as a denomination actually believe. Doctrines and beliefs had to be articulated and communicated. Mission necessitated the study of theology in our Church. When we opened the way for mission, we opened the door for education. Mission and education go hand in hand.

#### **Why Do We Need Theological Training?**

In today's Christian world, theology tends to be despised; and to my amazement, this aversion seems to be spreading even within our Church. Theological education in some circles is unwelcome and unessential. I have heard people asserting that time is short so there is no need to worry about Hebrew, Greek, exegesis, and hermeneutics, much less to learn about higher criticism or psychology, because natural skills and spiritual gifts are more important than education. Some even say that if you study theology you will be less able to win souls so it's better to receive only three to nine months of Bible training, and you will be prepared to lead churches and people to Christ. In addition, people say that the regular Adventist schools are expensive and disruptive to families. Expensive? Probably yes. But disruptive? No.

It appears that history repeats and the anti-educational segment in our church is growing. On two separate occasions, I had "concerned people" in my dean's office who argued with me that our Seminarians should read and study only the Bible and Ellen G. White's books in this time of the imminent *Parousia*. I agree that such studies are an important foundation of true education (Job 28:28; Prov 1:7; 9, 10), but they are not enough in today's complicated world. Paradoxically, these people are forgetting that not only did Ellen White herself have many of the best theology books in her library, but she used them while writing, because they expressed the truth she wanted to stress eloquently.

There will always be extremist's positions that will refuse to see value in education and will warn against university studies and the use of biblical languages. The belief in the imminent return of Jesus Christ has led some to reject not only general higher education but theological schools as well. To study theology is unsafe, they say, because it produces skepticism and unbelievers. There will probably always be two

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

parties/views in the Church which will be either for or against higher education. We should not be discouraged by it (frustrated—yes).

The principal tasks of educators, pastors, theologians, administrators, and Bible scholars are to present a correct image of God, cast a vision, preach, protect against false doctrines and interpretations of the Bible, and care for those entrusted to them. But how can they do these things if they do not correctly understand the important issues? These include God's character of love, the Great Controversy, the plan of salvation, the centrality of the cross, the relationship between the covenants, the end-time prophecies, hermeneutics, the meaning of Christ's intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, service in the community, noncombatancy in war, relationship to non-Christian religions, the nature and authority of the Church, immigration problems, and questions regarding contraception, abortion, divorce, remarriage, homosexuality, stewardship, near-death experiences, hell, immortality—to name a few. Addressing all of these topics depends on an understanding of theology and a constant growth in knowledge (2 Pet 3:18). We live in a complex world, and people demand meaningful and relevant answers to their issues.<sup>6</sup>

Teaching and preaching the Gospel to millennials, to *nones*, and to generation Z is the biggest challenge today. We may share the same vocabulary, but new meaning is given to the same words. We employ the same words, but use a different dictionary. We live in a post-Christian era where secularism and neo-atheism dominate the intellectual world. The thinking of our people is strongly influenced by evolutionary thinking, Eastern religions, inclusivism, mystical spirituality, formed in part by Hollywood's powerful stories, like Avatar, Star Wars, Terminator, Superman, Black Panther, to name a few. Plato stated correctly the famous dictum: "Those who tell the stories [in the most

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<sup>6</sup> The study of biology, physics, astronomy, archaeology, to name a few, is of utmost importance for demonstrating the relevance of biblical teaching. But it is also important to study science itself because it is a study of God's creation, a search for the understanding of His created world. Our stand has always been that the biblical message does not contradict true science, and science may enrich faith that searches for understanding. The scientific perspective does not automatically stand in opposition or contradiction to believing in God. Facts are facts, but the interpretation of them is a different issue and at the end what matters. One needs to make a distinction between *presuppositions*, worldview issues, philosophy, theories, and hypotheses on the one hand and the *facts* of life on the other hand. Very often people, theologians as well as scientists, confuse the *interpretation* of reality with *reality* itself.

### *MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY*

convincing way] rule society/the world.” Unfortunately, rock music and sub-cultures, films, and video games are often aimed against the values of life like honesty, obedience, respect and truth, and are vulgar, immoral, suicidal, even satanic and full of false spirituality. Violence and naturalism fill the minds and feelings of contemporary young people who listen to and play the various media; consequently, their minds and emotional lives are formed by these entertainments.

#### **Faith and Life**

According to popular view, practical faith and a pious life are what count, not theology. At first glance, this view is attractive. But how can one know without theological reflection that our faith is genuine and Christian life balanced?

This type of reasoning—that a pious life is important while a theological understanding isn’t—presents a false dichotomy. It is like saying that we need Jesus but not the Church, or that what matters is a relationship but not doctrines. These are artificial contradictions, for both are indispensable. Our spiritual growth depends on theology.

#### **Practical Theology**

I have heard others formulate their objection this way: what we need in our churches in these last days are pastors with practical skills, not theologians. This betrays a misunderstanding, because good biblical and theological training *is* and *must be* practical. Applied theology is the crown of all theological studies. Even the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek, if rightly taught, are thoroughly practical. It has been said that the most practical thing in life is theory, and here it is demonstrated: Hebrew and Greek are a fountain of theology, and an understanding of these tools helps to interpret the biblical message. The thoughts of God, the prophets, and the apostles are expressed through language, which is a mirror of their minds. The vocabulary, grammar, and syntax reflect their thinking, from which springs our understanding of how to live the Christian life.

So biblical-theological thinking is the bread and butter of every leader, educator, theologian, or pastor. It is essential equipment for those who preach the Word of God and are called to care for His people. Practically speaking, whatever we say—in our conversations, Sabbath School, preaching, articles, books, songs, prayers, and worship—about humanity, life around us, life after death, and the future, reveals our theology. These reflections must be well informed.

**The Pastor as Theological Guide—Every Believer a Theologian**

C. S. Lewis lamented that many Christians like practical religion but despise theology. He said that he personally escaped this wrong assumption because “any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available.”<sup>7</sup> He continues: “If you do not listen to Theology, that will not mean that you have no ideas about God. It will mean that you have a lot of wrong ones—bad, muddled, out-of-date ideas.”<sup>8</sup>

There is a sense in which every believer is a theologian. Theology is our human systematic and comprehensive *reflection* on God’s revelation. It involves thinking deeply on the meaning of the various aspects of life from God’s perspective. It also involves a *prospect*, that is, looking into the future. This reflecting-prospecting process is rooted in the Holy Scriptures, and it must be done with consistency.

**Theology in Community: Good Theology, Not No Theology**

True, broad, and balanced pastoral education is a *sine qua non* to acquiring right biblical-theological training that includes the study of the Bible, historical theology, dogmatics, ethics, Church history, mission, discipleship, and practical theology. The opposite of *bad* theology is not *no* theology, but *good* theology.

Let me emphasize that true theology is always practiced in the Church and for the Church. It does not make sense outside of the Church, because it is always in the service of the Church. We can aptly state that the task of Adventist theology is threefold in our eschatological time:

1. To explore and present the beauty and relevance of the Adventist message and mission—the genius of biblical truth in the Adventist belief system;
2. To advance in the understanding of the Truth, to discover new things and connections;
3. To refine the Church’s current understanding of the Bible and be an *educated* voice in the Church.

It means that theology needs to be a critical but constructive voice in the Church. The Church needs that function, and educators, theologians,

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<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1943), 135.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

*MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY*

and Bible scholars should not betray or eschew this important role. To tell the truth is about courage, not survival. If you are afraid to be fired because you say the truth, you should not be in a leadership position. We need to be guardians of biblical truth, but not possessors of truth. Jan Hus went so far as to write: "He that fears death loses the joy of life." If we do not study diligently and seriously the Scriptures, we open ourselves to bringing or cultivating sectarian thinking in the Church; and if we do not stop *anti-education* sentiments, it will produce extremism and fanaticism. Lack of education enslaves.

We need to uphold especially the SOLA SCRIPTURA principle because all our decisions and formulations, including our 28 Fundamental Beliefs, votes of the General Conference, and Church policies must be scrutinized with the Word of God and are always under the authority of God's Word and God's judgment. Our human statements never have the last word. All our formulas may have the value of the "before the last word," but the last Word belongs to God and to His Word as revealed in the Scriptures. He is the ultimate Judge of even the best of our theology. We are all under His command. This is an integral part of our prophetic mission. This leads all of us to humbleness and the need to listen to each other.

This principle is underlined in the preamble to our Seventh-day Adventist 28 Fundamental Beliefs: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."

Believers must follow balanced biblical teaching, growing in Christ and the truth rather than in their own independent thinking or traditions. Adventist theology prepares people to search for the truth, know the truth, love the truth, follow the truth, live the truth, proclaim the truth, and be ready for the Second Coming of Christ. In this way, we can see the coherency of the truth and its perfect system within the frame of the Great Controversy and the metanarrative of the Holy Scriptures. Biblical truth is a story with the Triune God at the center and all other truth clustered around this unifying and living Center.

Theology is properly a job of a community of faith which is always under the authority of the Scriptures; and well-educated pastors, non-

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

professional church members, educators, administrators, theologians, and Bible scholars are an essential part of that prophetic community and must be integrated into the process of understanding and formulating God's truth. We need to remember that God never works in isolation in discovering new truth. Better understanding of the biblical truth may be revealed to an individual and thus the new light may come to us through that individual (this is God's usual working method) but the truth never stays with that *solo* person; others need to discern the light of the new discovered truth. God's Spirit is not working with *one* person only or a few individuals; God leads the community of faith to His truth so more and more people can discern it.<sup>9</sup> For example, if someone has *new* light for the interpretation of the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38–39, the New Earth and New Heavens of Isaiah 65, the last events of Daniel 11:40–45, the Day of the Lord of Zechariah 14, or the Seals and Trumpets of Revelation 6–11, or our prophetic role as a Church, that person needs to present his/her case, but then listen carefully to others and wait to see if others recognize light in the new explanation. We are God's family, so we need to listen to each other and never work in isolation. There is not a single example in the book of Acts where the Holy Spirit was given to one individual! It was always imparted within the community of faith, either big (Acts 2) or small (Acts 9:17). If you present new truth but your brothers and sisters do not see light in it, restrain from harsh judgment and in humility be corrected or wait for a future time when God will lead others to also see what you have already understood.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In this regard, Ellen White gave valuable advice to Stephen N. Haskell. On October 21, 1858, Ellen White wrote to him concerning his teaching that it was wrong to eat pork. However, it is important to note that Ellen White did not advocate, as is sometimes incorrectly alleged, eating pork. She insisted that Haskell was wrong to make abstaining from pork a criterion for church membership, and advised him not to push the matter because if it is God's will not to eat pork, He will reveal it to the church. She stated: "If God requires His people to abstain from swine's flesh, He will convict them on the matter. . . . If it is the duty of the church to abstain from swine's flesh, God will discover it to more than two or three. He will teach His *church* their duty. God is leading out a people, not a few separate individuals here and there, one believing this thing, another that" (1T 207; emphasis added). This advice was written five years before her major health reform vision of June 6, 1863, in which she saw that people should not consume pork and that vegetarianism is the preferred diet. By 1864 Ellen White concluded that "God never designed the swine to be eaten under any circumstances" (4SG 124; also CD 392–393).

<sup>10</sup> Besides, there is plenty of room for different opinions in matters of biblical-theological interpretations which are not part of the core truth of our prophetic movement

**Additional Benefits of a Theological Education**

Church educators, administrators, pastors, theologians and Bible scholars as well as all Church members need theology. Good, balanced theological education has many benefits especially in the context of our eschatological hope and task to prepare a people ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 1:17c):

1. Theology helps all to formulate messages centered on Christ in the context of the belief in the Triune God. The indicative of the Gospel has always to be God-centered and Spirit-filled and must precede the imperative of the Gospel.
2. Theology assists in preserving biblical truth through a competent, responsible, and relevant exposition of God's Word in preaching, avoiding bad scholarship, and the sensational, emotional, and intuitional *fake news* filled with conspiracy theories.
3. Theology equips Church members as well as leaders to answer questions intelligently. Life is complex, and many in our churches have profound questions related to postmodern, post-Christian, agnostic, and atheistic convictions. Pragmatic religious materialism and religious spirituality create new issues that demand honest answers.
4. Urban settings need trained, thoughtful educators, administrators, evangelists and pastors. Cities represent a unique challenge for those who want to proclaim God's Word in a meaningful way.
5. Theology edifies the Church and keeps her memory refreshed so that we do not forget key events and past discussions related to the understanding and interpretation of the Bible, and do not commit the same mistakes.
6. Theology helps us to communicate the full Gospel to a wide diversity of cultures and worldviews.

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and do not go against the spirit and purpose of the overall system of biblical truth in the frame of the Great Controversy and sound hermeneutical principles.



*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

7. Theology gives us a big picture of God’s revelation. It points to crucial events in the drama of the biblical metanarrative, demonstrating how all truth is connected as well as defining the relationship between the Old and New Testaments.
8. Theology equips people to lead meaningful dialogues and contemporary, relevant conversations. It makes us perceptive and competent to address the Christian, post-Christian, and non-Christian religious and atheistic communities.
9. Theology brings professionalism, expertise, and confidence into our multifaceted ministry. The certainty of the understanding of the biblical truth as a coherent system strengthens the Adventist identity so pastors, educators, and administrators can speak, teach, and preach with conviction and passion for truth. At the same time, a thoughtful acceptance of our limited knowledge leads to humility and tolerance.
10. Theology does not just spell out the importance of what we believe, but also explains why it is relevant and how it should be lived, thus closely connected to ethics.

**Intellectual Laziness**

Ellen White complained that “our ministers are too well satisfied with themselves” and have become “intellectually lazy.” “They need intellectual discipline.” Instead of being “intellectual giants,” they had become “dwarfs in spiritual and mental growth.” She emphatically states: “To the diligent Bible student new light, new ideas, new gems of truth, will constantly appear, and be eagerly grasped.”<sup>11</sup>

“Hard study and hard work are required to make a successful minister or a successful worker in any branch of God’s cause.”<sup>12</sup> She laments that “they do not dig for the hidden treasure. Because they only skim the surface, they gain only that knowledge which is to be found

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<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 63, no. 14 (April 6, 1886): 210; see also *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1962), 194, and *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1881), 412–415.

<sup>12</sup> Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 71.

### MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY

upon the surface.”<sup>13</sup> This is why she warns: “The times demand an intelligent, educated ministry, not novices.”<sup>14</sup> “A great injury is often done our young men by permitting them to begin to preach when they have not sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures to present our faith in an intelligent manner.”<sup>15</sup>

She advised that “young men who desire to enter the field as ministers, colporteurs, or canvassers, should first receive a suitable degree of mental training, as well as a special preparation for their calling. Those who are uneducated, untrained, and unrefined, are not prepared to enter a field in which the powerful influences of talent and education combat the truths of God’s word. Neither can they successfully meet the strange forms of error, religious and philosophical combined, to expose which requires a knowledge of scientific as well as Scriptural truth.”<sup>16</sup> Again: “Ministers should devote time to reading, to study, to meditation and prayer. They should store the mind with useful knowledge, committing to memory portions of Scripture, tracing out the fulfillment of the prophecies, and learning the lessons which Christ gave to His disciples.”<sup>17</sup> Pastors, she says, should “search the Scriptures diligently and prayerfully that they may become giants in the understanding of Bible doctrines and the practical lessons of Christ.”<sup>18</sup>

#### **Conclusion: Broad Theological Education Existentially Needed**

The strong apocalyptic eschatological hope provides a firm foundation and results in a vibrant and purposeful theology, education, mission, and social work. Proper ministry to people’s spiritual needs depends on a broad theological understanding. It is a matter of life and death, because a person’s eternal destiny is related to a right presentation of the Gospel. Being a leader requires a total dedication of the whole person to this noble task, for it is not a job but, rather, a life vocation. I believe it is dangerous to presume that theology belongs only in the seminary and is good solely for academicians and researchers.

Prophet Hosea lamented that God’s people were dying because of the lack of understanding: “My people are destroyed for lack of

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>14</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1889), 528.

<sup>15</sup> White, *Gospel Workers*, 71.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>17</sup> White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, 412.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 415.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me” (Hos 4:6a NKJV).

In the time of the Flood, one of the sins of people was that they were destroying the meaningful and beautiful life around them (Gen 6:11–13). In the book of Revelation, it is stressed that Jesus will come to judge and destroy those “who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:19). It means that we should be the protectors of life and builders of good things. Here I need to remind you of a statement which is attributed to Luther who supposedly said in talks around the table: “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree today.”<sup>19</sup> If he said that, he made a good point. As a small boy, I had repeatedly heard a very wise saying: “We should believe that Jesus Christ will come soon, like tomorrow, but plan and work as if it would take Him hundreds of years.” This is what Luther and our pioneers were trying to convey to the next generations.

This was the practice of our pioneers. I admire them because they believed in the imminent Second Coming of Christ, yet they bought huge properties for our schools and institutions (e.g., Friedensau Adventist University, Friedensau, Germany; Adventist University of Africa, near Nairobi, Kenya, and many other institutions in the same territory; Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies and Mountain View College, Philippines; Spicer Adventist University, Pune, India; Hong Kong Adventist College; Taiwan Adventist College; Klabat University, Manado, Indonesia; Sahmyook University, Korea; Sao Paulo Adventist University, Brazil; to name at least a few of them). These campuses serve us still today.

We do not know when Jesus will come, so we should diligently work like the two faithful and wise servants in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25) which represents working in different areas of life including education and the careful study of theology. Only the one who was afraid of his Master and considered Him as a cruel and commanding boss, was characterized as *wicked* and *lazy* (see vss. 24–25), not studying nor working. Because of this wrong thinking about his Lord, he was paralyzed with non-activity. The wrong picture of God leads to a bad and idle lifestyle. Our ministry will not be a burden and an unpleasant

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<sup>19</sup> This tradition has probably the background in a Tannaitic source which reads: “He [Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai] used to say: ‘If there were a plant in your hand and they should say to you, ‘Look, the Messiah is here!’ Go and plant your plant, and after that go forth to receive him’” (*Abot de Rabbi Nathan*, 31b).

*MOSKALA: EDUCATION AND ESCHATOLOGY*

achievement but a joyful occasion, when we experience the genuine love of God. Only persons who value God's forgiveness and acceptance to be His son or daughter, can truly love and serve (Luke 7:47; John 1:12; 1 John 3:1; 5:12–13).

Theology really matters and has practical long-term implications. Martin Luther King, Jr., rightly stated: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." So, dear believers, bring the eschatological Advent hope wisely and boldly into your everyday life at home, school, work, social interactions, and wherever you go.

There is a wise and very eloquent writing inscribed on the front wall at the main entrance hall to the Astronomic Observatory in Valašské Meziříčí, Czech Republic: "Little knowledge leads to pride, much knowledge leads to humility." This well expressed and true motto aptly describes why we need a deep knowledge and clear understanding of the Bible and theology, and all that is related to it.

The Lord's declaration in Isa 66:2b summarizes this need of thorough study of the biblical message from God's perspective: "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word" (ESV). We need to study wholeheartedly and the Lord will lead and bless. Now I come back once again to Daniel who powerfully proclaims at the climax of his apocalyptic book: "Those who are wise *will shine* like the brightness of the heavens, and those who *lead many to righteousness*, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dan 12:3 NIV; emphasis added).

I would like to end with a well-known serenity prayer of the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971):

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference."

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

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