176 I. Lönning, *"Kanon im Kanon." Zum dogmatischen Grundlagenproblem des neutestamentlichen Kanon* (Munich: Kaiser, 1972), p. 45.

177 Maier, *Biblische Hermeneutik*, pp. 137, 138.

178 Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, pp. 26-40.

INTERPRETING SCRIPTURE: AN HERMENEUTICAL "DECALOGUE"

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Introduction

In the early 20th century the eminent Neo-Orthodox theologian, Karl Barth, emphasized how "every theology stands or falls as a hermeneutic and every hermeneutic stands or falls as a theology."[1] Midway through this century Rudolf Bultmann and his followers also emphasized the role of hermeneutics as a concern of crucial theological significance. In the last two decades prominent Evangelical theologians have expressed their judgment that the "key intellectual issue" in theology is the "persistent problem of authority" which concerns "especially the problem of hermeneutics."[2]

Within Seventh-day Adventist discussions of theological method during this latter period, attention has increasingly focused upon the question of hermeneutics, that is, the theory and practice of biblical interpretation.[3] For me personally, the discussion on this topic at the 1974 Seventh-day Adventist Bible Conferences changed my whole perspective on Scripture and theology.[4] Recent developments in theological thought in the church have pointed up how a given hermeneutic directly and dramatically affects the end-product of the theological enterprise.

With what hermeneutic shall we conduct our theological investigations? A bewildering array of past and current hermeneutical theories confronts us. These range from the allegorical

hermeneutic of the Alexandrian school and the medieval Catholic Church to the literal-historical and typological hermeneutic of the Antiochene school and the Protestant Reformers; from the antisupernatural, rationalist (historical-critical) hermeneutic of the Enlightenment to Schleiermacher's hermeneutic of subjective understanding; from the neo-orthodoxy of Barth and Brunner to the existentialist models of Heidegger and Bultmann; from the metacritical hermeneutical theories of Gadamer and Pannenberg to the hermeneutic of suspicion and retrieval of Paul Ricoeur; from the hermeneutics of socio-critical theory (including liberation and feminist hermeneutics) to the new literary-critical hermeneutical approaches (rhetorical criticism, New Criticism, structuralism, semiotics, narrative theory, etc.); from reader-response criticism to radical deconstructionism.[5]

In the face of this plethora of suggested hermeneutical methods, how shall we proceed? It appears evident that without a specific divine revelation on the subject of hermeneutics, we will never be able to find our way through the maze of human theories. On the other hand, if we believe in the full authority of Scripture, should we not also expect to find in Scripture the divine guidelines on how to interpret Scripture? Just as we go to Scripture to find the doctrines of God, of man, of the Sabbath, of the sanctuary, etc., so it is appropriate, yes, essential, that we should go to Scripture to discover the doctrine of Scripture, and in particular, to learn the Scriptural teaching on hermeneutics as a basis for constructing a theology that is faithful to Scripture. A theology that is to be fully biblical depends upon a totally biblical hermeneutic.

Of course, we come to Scripture acknowledging our own biases, our own pre-understandings; but we come willing, and claim the divine promise that the Spirit will bring our presuppositions ever more in harmony with the biblical presuppositions (see John 16:13; 14:16, 17, 26, etc.). In the following sections of our study we will summarize the main contours of the Scriptural presuppositions and principles of hermeneutics as they emerge from a study of the biblical passages that speak to this topic.

An Hermeneutical "Decalogue"

A discussion of the hermeneutical process, as it emerges from

Scripture's own testimony, may be outlined in rough comparison with the biblical Decalogue of Exodus 20. Just as the first "table" of four commandments deals with the divine-human (vertical) relationship, so there are four *general* principles arising out of the divine-human nature of Scripture which constitute foundational presuppositions undergirding the entire hermeneutical endeavor. Similarly, just as the second table of six commandments in the Decalogue encompasses human (horizontal) interpersonal relationships, so the *specific* hermeneutical guidelines for the interpreter may be organized under six basic headings. (Unlike the Decalogue of Exodus 20, this outline is not infallible!—but represents one way of organizing and synthesizing the fundamental principles of biblical hermeneutics.)

General Principles (The First "Table")

I. The Bible and the Bible Only (*sola Scriptura*). A fundamental hermeneutical principle is that of *sola Scriptura*. This principle constituted the battle cry of the Reformation. Against the church traditions and speculative philosophies of medieval Catholicism, the Reformers rallied under the banner of *sola Scriptura*—the Bible and the Bible only as the final authority for truth.

This principle was not invented by the Reformers; it is rooted firmly in Scripture. The classical text which expresses this fundamental biblical premise is Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (NKJV, and hereafter, unless otherwise noted).

Two corollaries are implicit in this principle: the *primacy* and *sufficiency* of Scripture. The New Testament affirms the first corollary by insisting that Scripture is the supreme and final authority, to be accepted over tradition (Matt 15:3, 6), human philosophy (Col 2:8), human reason, experience, knowledge, or science (1 Tim 6:20; cf. Gen 3:1-6; Prov 14:12). The sufficiency of Scripture is likewise affirmed by the biblical self-testimony: Scripture provides the framework, the divine perspective, the foundational principles, for every branch of knowledge and experience, and all additional knowledge and experience, or revelation, must build upon and remain faithful to, the all-sufficient foundation of Scripture (2 Tim

3:15-17; Ps 119:105; Prov 30: 5, 6; John 17:17; 2 Thess 3:14; Heb 4:12).

The appropriate human response to Scripture is not a critique of its contents, but a total surrender to its ultimate authority. Isaiah records God's perspective: "This is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and *trembles* at my word" (Isa 66:2, RSV, emphasis supplied).

II. The Totality of Scripture (*tota Scriptura*). A second biblical principle of hermeneutics must be coupled with the first. It is not enough to affirm the *primacy* and *sufficiency* of Scripture; we must also accept the *totality* of Scripture. Reformers, such as Martin Luther, and later interpreters who have failed to accept fully this latter principle have been led to reject or devalue certain portions or even whole books of Scripture. This has resulted in a "canon within a canon."[6]

The self-testimony of Scripture is clear: "*All* scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16, 17, RSV). The term Scripture includes both the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures (see 1 Tim 5:18; Deut 25:4; Luke 10:7; 2 Pet 3:14-16). All Scripture is of divine origin.

Peter concurs with and expands upon Paul's statement: "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Spirit" (2 Pet 1:19-21, NIV). Here Peter underscores the trustworthiness of Scripture, because it does not originate in the prophet nor does the prophet intrude his own interpretation.

A corollary of *tota Scriptura* follows: the Bible does not just *contain* the Word of God, but *equals* the Word of God (see 2 Chr 36:15-16; Matt 4:4; Rom 3:2; 1 Cor 2:13; 1 Thess 2:13; Heb 1:5-13; etc.). Even though the prophet is the human instrumentality used by God to deliver the divine message, with his own unique per-

sonality, individuality, style, and perspective, yet in the divine thought inspiration the Holy Spirit so "carries along" the biblical writers that what they present is the utterly reliable Word of God, the prophetic word made more certain.

A second corollary of the *tota Scriptura* principle is also implicit: just as Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, was fully God and fully man (John 1:1-3, 14), so the written Word of God is an inseparable union of the human and the divine.[7] As Jesus' humanity was sinless, so the Scriptures, though written by men, are fully trustworthy.

III. The Analogy (or Harmony) of Scripture (*analogia Scripturae*). Since all Scripture is inspired by the same Spirit, and all of it is the Word of God, there is a fundamental unity and harmony among its parts (see, for example, Matt 5:17; John 5:39; Rom 3:10-18). This principle has three main aspects:

1. Scripture is its own expositor (Scriptura sui ipsius interpres). Because there is an underlying unity among the various parts of Scripture, one portion interprets another, becoming the key for understanding related passages. Jesus demonstrated this principle on the way to Emmaus when, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27, RSV). Later that Resurrection night, He pointed out "that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45, RSV). Here Jesus gives a practical example of how all that Scripture says about a given topic (in this case the Messiah's work) should be brought to bear upon the interpretation of the subject. Other Scriptural passages clearly support this principle (see 1 Cor 2:13; Heb 1:5-13; 2:6-8, 12, 13; Isa 28:10, 13).

2. The consistency of Scripture. Jesus succinctly stated this aspect of the analogy of Scripture: "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Since Scripture has a single divine Author, the various parts of Scripture are consistent with each other. Thus Scripture cannot be set against Scripture. While the different human biblical writers may provide different emphases upon the same event or topic, this will be without contradiction or misinterpretation. For example, each of the four writers of the

Gospels recorded what impressed him most under the inspiration of the Spirit, and each facet of the whole is needed in obtaining the full and balanced picture.[8]

3. *The clarity of Scripture.* A third aspect of the analogy of Scripture is that the meaning of Scripture is clear and straightforward, able to be grasped by the diligent student (see Luke 1:3-4; John 20:30-31; Acts 17:11; Rom 10:17; Rev 1:3). The Bible is to be taken in its plain, literal sense unless a clear and obvious figure is intended (see Jesus' own distinction between figurative and literal language in John 16:25, 29). There is a single truth-intention for each passage, not a subjective multiplicity of meaning (see Acts 3:17-18, 22-24; Dan 7:16-27; 8:15-26; Matt 13:18-23, 36-43; etc.).

More difficult or obscure biblical passages are to be interpreted by the clearer passages. So in 1 Pet 1:10-12 the apostle indicates that the OT prophets may not have always clearly understood all the Messianic aspects of their prophecies. He implies that additional clearer revelation became a key to understanding the less clear passage or vision. The Bible presents an increasing spiral of understanding as later passages illuminate earlier, and earlier illuminate later.[9]

IV. Spiritual Discernment (*spiritalis spiritaliter examinatur*). A fourth general principle of biblical hermeneutics is set forth by Paul: "For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. . . . The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 2:11, 14, RSV).

Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. Since the Bible is not the product of man's mind but of the mind of God revealed through the Spirit (see 1 Cor 2:12-13), it is not possible to separate "what it meant" to the human author—to be studied without the aid of the Holy Spirit, from "what it means"—to be applied by the help of the Spirit. The Bible cannot be studied as any other book, coming merely "from below" with sharpened tools of exegesis and honed principles of interpretation. At every stage of the interpretive process the Book, inspired by the Spirit, can only be correctly interpreted "from above," by the Spirit's illumination of the mind

of the sincere seeker after God whose life has been spiritually transformed through that same Spirit (see John 7:17; Ps 119:33; Prov 2:3-7; 2 Chr 20:20; John 5:46-47).

Specific Guidelines (The Second "Table")

The specific guidelines for interpreting biblical passages arise from and build upon the general principles we have observed in Scripture thus far. These guidelines encompass essentially the grammatical-historical method. We may argue that they are simply dictated by common sense, and most evangelical writers merely list the various interpretive steps. But in actuality, all these guidelines explicitly or implicitly arise from Scripture itself.

We may interject here that many modern scholars do not consider the Bible writers' own hermeneutical practice a very helpful place to go for guidance in developing a sound hermeneutic. It is claimed that the NT writers often follow the first-century prevailing Jewish methods of exegesis that are often not faithful to the original meaning of the OT text. But the recently published dissertation by David I. Brewer (which may be destined to rock the presuppositions of current critical scholarship regarding first-century Jewish exegetical methods) demonstrates that "the predecessors of the rabbis before 70 CE did not interpret Scripture out of context, did not look for any meaning in Scripture other than the plain sense, and did not change the text to fit their interpretation, though the later rabbis did all these things."[10]

Brewer's work calls for a fresh examination of NT exegetical methods in light of these conclusions. This "fresh examination" of the NT has already begun in recent decades. A number of studies of various NT passages have concluded that NT writers were careful to represent faithfully the original plain meaning of the OT texts for the NT readers.[11]

This is not to say that every time a Scripture is referred to in passing, that the NT authors are providing a full-fledged exegesis. Just as we might say: We escaped "by the skin of our teeth" without exegeting Job 19:20, so the biblical writers are steeped in OT language and imagery, and may use Scriptural language without intending to exegete the passage alluded to. We refer rather to those

NT instances where the biblical writer is clearly expounding the meaning of OT passages.

Let us now consider the basic interpretative guidelines emerging from the Bible writers' own hermeneutic.

V. Text and Translation. Since the focus of the hermeneutical enterprise is upon the written Word, it is of great importance that the original text of the Bible be preserved as far as possible. The Bible itself underscores the vital necessity of preserving the words of sacred Scripture (see Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:5, 6; Rev 22:18-19; cf. Deut 31:9-13, 26). The principles of textual study must be carefully controlled from within Scripture.[12]

The Scriptures also give numerous examples of the need for a faithful translation of the words of Scripture into the target language (Neh 8:8; Matt 1:23; Mark 5:41; 15:22, 34; John 1:42; 9:7; Acts 9:36; 13:8; Heb 7:2; etc.). The translation of Scripture should remain as faithful as possible to both the form and content of the original.[13]

VI. Historical Context/Questions of Introduction. The Old Testament is largely a history book. The accounts of Creation, Fall, Flood, Patriarchs, emergence of Israel, Exodus, Conquest of Canaan, Judges, Kings, and Prophets of the United and divided Monarchy, Exile, Return, rebuilding of the Temple—all the persons, events and institutions of the Old Testament are presented as straightforward history. The OT prophets, Jesus, and the NT writers continually refer back to the earlier OT accounts, using these as historically reliable descriptions of God's real space-time interrelationships with His people. The historical context of biblical narratives is accepted at face value as true, and no attempt is made to reconstruct history in a different way than presented in the biblical record.

The NT writers and other early Christians, in their interpretation of the OT, show a remarkably clear acquaintance with the general flow and specific details of OT history (see, for example, Stephen's speech in Acts 7; Paul's discussion of the Exodus in 1 Corinthians 10). The typological arguments of the NT writers assume the historical veracity of the persons, events, and institutions that were types; in fact, the whole force of their typological

argument depends upon the historicity of these historical realities.[14]

In the inner-Scriptural hermeneutic of biblical writers mention is often made of various questions of introduction, and these questions sometimes become crucial to the Bible author's argument. In each case, the plain declaration of the text is accepted as accurately portraying the authorship, chronology, and life setting for the text. For example, the Davidic authorship of Psalm 110 (as stated in the superscription of the psalm) is crucial to Jesus' final clinching, unanswerable argument concerning His Messiahship (Matt 22:41-46). Again, Davidic authorship of Psalms 16 and 110 is also crucial to Peter in his Pentecost sermon to convince the Jews of the predicted resurrection of the Messiah (Acts 2:25-35).

The life setting (*Sitz im Leben*) of Abraham's justification by faith in the Genesis account is very significant in Paul's argument to the Romans. He shows that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (Rom 4:1-12). For Paul there is no need to reconstruct a hypothetical life setting to explain this account. The apostle—and all the other biblical writers—consistently accept the life setting that is set forth in the biblical text.

Thus by precept and example Scripture underscores the importance of interpreting the biblical material in its literal, historical sense, including details of chronology, geography, and miraculous divine interventions in history. For the illumination of the historical background of a given passage, it is helpful to consult appropriate Bible dictionaries, atlases, commentaries, surveys of biblical history and archaeology, etc.

VII. Literary Context and Analysis. For the biblical writers the literary context of the Scriptures was no less important than the historical context. Scripture is not only a history book, but a literary work of art. Recent study is giving increasing attention to the literary characteristics and conventions of Scripture.[15]

Scripture itself gives us countless explicit and implicit indicators of the presence of its literary qualities and the importance of recognizing these as part of the hermeneutical undertaking.

One of the first tasks in interpreting a given passage in its immediate literary context is to determine the limits of the passage, in terms of paragraphs, units, or stanzas. The paragraph and

chapter divisions of our modern versions of the Bible have been added much later than biblical times. But the Bible writers often provide indicators of passage limits and in their spirit-guided interpretation of antecedent Scripture show awareness of these discreet units of Scripture.

The book of Genesis, for example, is divided neatly into ten sections, each identified by the phrase "the generations [toledôth] of . . . ." In the Psalms, along with the superscriptions introducing individual psalms, a number contain (a) stanzas that naturally divide the sections of the psalm (see, for example, Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5), or (b) the word "selah" (71 times in the Psalms: see, for example, Ps 46:3, 7, 11), or (c) an acrostic (see Psalm 119, with each succeeding block of eight verses starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet).

The Bible writers repeatedly identify their written materials in terms of specific genres or literary types. A few samples include: "history" or "account" (Hebrew, toledôth, Gen 2:4, plus 12 more times throughout Genesis), legal material (Exod 21:1; Deut 4:44, 45; and throughout the Pentateuch), covenant making and renewal (for example, the whole book of Deuteronomy; see Deut 29:1, 14, 15), riddles (Judg 14:10-18), court chronicles (for example, 1 Kgs 9:1), psalms (with various subdivisions of types of psalms, indicated in the superscriptions) or songs (Cant 1:1), proverbs (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), prophetic oracles or "burdens" (Hebrew, massā', Nah 1:1; Hab 1:1; Mal 1:1), visions (Dan 8:1-2; Obad 1), covenant lawsuit (Hebrew, rîb, Isa 3:13; Hos 4:1; Mic 6:1), lamentation (Hebrew, qînah, Ezek 27:32; Amos 5:1; Lamentations), gospels (Mark 1:1), parables (Mark 4:2), "figures" (Greek, paroimia; John 10:6; 16:25), epistles or letters (Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 5:9; 2 Pet 3:1, 16), and apocalyptic prophecy (Greek, apokalypsis, Rev 1:1).

Each of these genres has special characteristics that emerge from a careful study, and these characteristics are often significant in interpreting the message. Literary form and interpretation of content go hand in hand.

In a more general depiction of literary genre, the Biblical materials separate themselves into poetry and prose. The poetic sections of Scripture (some 40% of the OT) are characterized particularly by various kinds of parallelism ("thought rhyme") and to

a lesser degree by meter and stanzas (or strophes). The prose may be of various kinds, such as narrative, legal and cultic material.

The literary structure, both on the macro-structural and micro-structural levels, is a crucial part of the analysis of a passage, often providing a key to the flow of thought or central theological themes. Bible writers have structured their material by such devices as matching parallelism (see the book of Jonah[16]), reverse parallelism (or chiasm, for example, the books of Leviticus[17] and Revelation[18]), inclusio or "envelope construction" (see Ps 8:1-9; 103:1, 22), acrostic (Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145), qînah (3+2 meter, as in the book of Lamentations[19]), and relationships with suzerainty treaty components (as in the book of Deuteronomy[20]).

Many other literary techniques and conventions, and stylistic elements are utilized by the biblical writers. We find the employment of irony, metonymy, simile, metaphor, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, assonance, paronomasia (pun/play on words), etc. All these literary features are important for the biblical writer as they contribute to the framing and forming of the message. They also assist the interpreter as he/she seeks to understand the meaning of a given passage.

VIII. Grammatical/Syntactical/Semantic Analysis. Scripture, and in particular the NT interpretation of the OT, provides evidence for engaging in the analysis of the grammatical forms and syntactical relationships, with attention to the meaning of words in context, in order to arrive at the plain, straightforward, sense of the passage being interpreted.

A classic example of grammatical sensitivity on the part of the NT writers is Paul's interpretation of the word "seed" in Galatians 3. Citing Genesis 12:7, 22:17-18 and 24:7, Paul recognizes that the singular form of "seed" narrows in meaning to single "Seed"—the Messiah—(Gal 3:16). A few verses later (Gal 3:29) he correctly points to the collective plural aspect of this same term in its wider context.[21]

A vivid example of the apostle's syntactical sensitivity is in the citation of Psalm 45:6-7 in Hebrews 1:8-9: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;

Therefore God, your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." The syntax of the Hebrew original points to One who is God, who is also anointed by God, thus implying the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead.

Numerous examples in NT writings reveal care in representing faithfully the meaning of crucial words in the original OT passage. See, for example, the use of "the just shall live by *faith*" (Rom 1:17 citing Hab 2:4[22]); the selection of the LXX *parthenos* ("virgin") to best represent the Hebrew *'almāh* of Isaiah 7:14 ("A virgin shall conceive . . . ," Matt 1:22-25, RSV[23]); and Christ's use of the word "gods" in John 10:34, citing Psalm 82:6.[24]

Numerous other examples may be cited, where the NT quotation of an OT passage involves the NT writer's recognition of the wider context of the OT citation. This larger OT context is frequently the key to understanding the interpretation drawn by the NT writer. For example, C. H. Dodd has shown how Peter alludes to the larger context of Joel 2 in his Pentecost sermon, and how Matthew's interpretation of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 is not taking the OT passage out of context, but rather is seeing it in the larger context of the eschatological/Messianic New Exodus motif in Hosea and other eighth-century prophets.[25]

The grammatical-syntactical and semantic-contextual analysis often becomes more involved for us today than for those whose native tongue was the living biblical Hebrew/Aramaic or *koine* Greek languages. It is wise now to make judicious use of appropriate grammars, lexicons, concordances, theological wordbooks, and commentaries.

IX. Theological Context/Analysis. The biblical writers provide abundant evidence for the need to ascertain the theological message of a passage as part of the hermeneutical enterprise.

For examples, Jesus lays bare the far-reaching theological implications of the Decalogue in His Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:17-28). The Jerusalem Council sets forth the theological import of Amos 9:11-12—that Gentiles need not become Jews in order to become Christians (Acts 15:13-21). Paul captures the theological essence of sin in various OT passages (Rom 3:8-20) and of righteousness by faith in his exposition of Genesis 15:6 and Psalm

32:1-2 (Romans 4). Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2) delineates the theology of inaugurated eschatology found in Joel 2, and his first epistle explores the theological dimensions of the Messiah's atoning work as set forth in Isaiah 53 (1 Pet 2:21-25).

The theological messages of the NT writers presuppose, build upon, and stand in continuity with, the major OT theological themes such as God, Man, Creation, Fall, Sin, Covenant, Sabbath, Law, Promise, Remnant, Salvation, Sanctuary, and Eschatology.

The NT writers also place their theological analyses of specific passages within the larger context of the multiplex "grand central theme" of Scripture as set forth in the opening and closing pages of the Bible (Genesis 1-3; Revelation 20-22[26]): creation and the original, divine design for this world, the character of God, the rise of the cosmic, moral conflict (Great Controversy), the plan of redemption-restoration centering in Christ and His atoning work, and the eschatological judgment and end of sin at the climax of history.

The theological thought-patterns of NT writers, though expressed in Greek, stay within the trajectory of biblical Hebrew thought, and do not imbibe alien thought-forms of the prevailing culture such as Gnosticism and Platonic dualism.[27]

In their exploration of the "deeper" theological meaning of Scripture—for example, the typological fulfillment of OT persons, events, and institutions—the NT writers do not read back into the OT what is not already there. Rather they remain faithful to the OT Scriptures, which have already indicated which persons, events, and institutions God has divinely designed to serve as prefigurations of Jesus Christ and the Gospel realities brought about by Him.[28] The NT writers simply announce the antitypical fulfillment of what had already been verbally indicated by the OT prophets.

The NT writers do not give an exhaustive list of OT types, but show the hermeneutical procedure, controlled by the OT indicators, for identifying biblical types. Furthermore, NT writers provide a theological (salvation-historical) substructure for interpreting the eschatological fulfillment of OT types. Based upon a clear theological understanding of the theocratic kingdom of Israel and the kingdom prophecies within the context of covenant blessings and curses, the NT reveals a three-stage fulfillment of the OT types and

kingdom prophecies: (1) in Christ, (2) in the church, and (3) in the apocalyptic concluding events of salvation history. Each stage has a different modality of fulfillment based upon the nature of Christ's presence and reign.[29] Thus the NT writers have worked out a sound hermeneutic for interpreting the types and kingdom prophecies of the OT, built upon solid controls arising from the OT Scriptures.

X. Practical Application. For the NT writers, the contemporary application arose naturally out of their theological interpretation of OT passages. We have just noted how the application of the types and kingdom-prophecies of the OT emerged from understanding the three-stage fulfillment within salvation history. All the promises of God have their yes and amen in Christ (2 Cor 1:20). Likewise all the OT types find their basic fulfillment in Him; and if we are spiritually part of the body of Christ, we share in the fulfillment of those prophetic and typological promises and yet await their final, glorious, literal, end-time apocalyptic fulfillment. These basic hermeneutical principles dealing with the fulfillment of Israel-centered prophecies in the NT provide a Christocentric approach which safeguards against dispensationalism and literalism.

The biblical writers insist that the message of Scripture is not culture-bound, applicable only for a certain people and a certain time, but is permanent and universal. Peter, citing Isaiah 40:6-8, forcefully states, "having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because 'All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the Lord endures forever.' Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Pet 1:23-25).

Most of the ethical instruction in the NT gospels and epistles may be seen as the practical application of OT passages: for example, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, (Matt 5:17-32) applying the principles of the Decalogue; James' application of the principles of Leviticus 19 throughout his epistle;[30] and Peter's ethical instruction building on "Be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16, citing Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7).

Of course, it is true that certain parts of the OT, in particular

the ceremonial/sanctuary ritual laws and of Israel's civil/theocratic laws, are no longer binding upon Christians. As I have shown elsewhere,[31] the NT writers do not arbitrarily (by a casebook approach to Scripture) decide what laws are still relevant, but they consistently recognize the criteria within the OT itself indicating which laws are universally binding.

The general principle, then, articulated and illustrated by the NT writers in their practical application of Scripture, is to assume the transcultural and transtemporal relevancy of biblical instruction unless Scripture itself gives us criteria limiting this relevancy. As William Larkin states: "All Scripture, including both form and meaning, is binding unless Scripture itself indicates otherwise."[32]

The final goal of interpreting Scripture is to make practical application of each passage to the individual life. Christ and the NT apostles repeatedly drove home the message of the gospel contained in the Scriptures in order to bring the hearers or readers to salvation and an ever closer, personal relationship with God.

At the Exodus God articulated a principle: Each succeeding generation of Israel should consider that he/she personally came out of Egypt (Exod 12:26-27; 13:8-9), and this principle of personalization was repeated many times, both to OT Israel (Deut 5:2-4; 6:20-21; Josh 24:6-8) and to spiritual Israel (Gal 3:29; Rev 15:1-2; 2 Cor 5:14-15, 21; Rom 6:3-6; Eph 1:20; 2:6; Heb 4:3, 16; 6:19; 7:9, 10; 10:19-20; 12:22-24). The Scripture should ultimately be read, and accepted as if I were the participant in the mighty saving acts of God—"I was there!"—as if God's messages were personally addressed to me (cf. Gal 2:20). They are God's living and active Word to my soul.

Biblical Hermeneutics: Past and Present

The hermeneutical approach we have seen emerge from Scripture, was continued in the early church, largely in the school of Antioch. Typical Antiochene interpreters were concerned to uphold the plain, literal-historical sense of Scripture. Their hermeneutic was founded upon the same basic presuppositions as we have set forth from Scripture, and their exegesis followed essentially the same specific guidelines as those we have found utilized by the biblical writers in their hermeneutic of antecedent Scripture.[33]

Unfortunately, this hermeneutic was overshadowed by, and finally, officially eliminated in favor of, the allegorical approach popularized by the Alexandrian school. For a thousand years the Alexandrian *Quadriga* (the "four-horse chariot" of the allegorical method) held sway in the Roman Catholic Church, although there was always a minority that, often despite persecution, accepted the full and supreme authority of the Scriptures in its plain and literal sense.

The Reformation interpreters broke with the allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and returned to the biblical hermeneutic of historical-literary-grammatical-theological analysis that became known as the grammatical-historical method. This method has had able proponents since Reformation times, although in the wake of the Enlightenment, the historical-critical method, with human reason or human experience as the final authority instead of Scripture, has often overshadowed and even eclipsed the biblical hermeneutic of the Reformation in many circles of Scripture study.

The Millerite movement had its inception in the preaching of William Miller, and Miller developed a simple set of 13 rules for interpreting the Bible.[34] These hermeneutical rules simply represent the historical-grammatical approach to interpretation as set forth in Scripture and practiced by the Reformers, and give special attention to the interpretation of prophecy. All early Adventist pioneers used these principles. In 1884 Ellen White could write: "Those who are engaged in proclaiming the third angel's message are searching the Scriptures upon the same plan that Father Miller adopted."[35] After quoting the first four of these rules, that summarize basic hermeneutical principles, she adds: "in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth."

The Adventist Theological Society unashamedly affirms the hermeneutic of the biblical writers, and their successors over many centuries —the grammatical-historical approach toward Scripture, and rejects the allegorical method of Alexandria and medieval Catholicism and the historical-critical method of the rationalistic Enlightenment and its successors.

In so doing, we also maintain the Reformers' (and Millerites') historicist hermeneutic of apocalyptic prophecy, which has been eclipsed in virtually all of Christendom today except the Seventh-

day Adventist Church. Seventh-day Adventists are the hermeneutical heirs of the Bible writers, the Reformers, and those who followed them.

The historic Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutic, reaffirmed by ATS,[36] is not mere traditionalism, an outmoded approach to Scripture held by Christian interpreters from a by-gone age. Nor is it a "hybrid" hermeneutic seeking to combine some of the old "proof-text" methodology[37] with more scientific tools of biblical research.

As we have documented here in this study, the grammatical-historical, or historical-biblical approach to Scripture, is none other than the approach based on the biblical writers themselves. It is the hermeneutic of Scripture according to the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Our study calls for a radical decision on the part of those who are willing to hear. It calls for nothing less than a conversion experience—I call it a third conversion experience. The first conversion experience is conversion to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; the second conversion experience is the conversion to the teachings of the Bible as given by the Holy Spirit (for many believers the second conversion unfortunately comes before the first); the third conversion experience is conversion to the hermeneutic of Scripture. Are we willing not only to accept Jesus, not only to accept the teachings of Scripture, but also to accept the *way* of interpretation of the inspired biblical writers—their divinely guided hermeneutical presuppositions, principles and procedures? Only this third conversion will allow us to function with a radically ("back to the roots") biblical hermeneutic. And only such an hermeneutic will provide a solid foundation for a theology that is utterly faithful to God's Word.

Endnotes

1 J. I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), p. 325, provides this summary statement of Barth's position.

2 Carl F. H. Henry, "American Evangelicals in a Turning Time," *The Christian Century* 97/35 (5 November 1980): 1062, cited in Packer, p. 325.

3 See Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1985); Gordon M. Hyde, ed., *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics*

(Washington, DC: Biblical Research Committee, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974).

4 Richard M. Davidson, "The Authority of Scripture: A Personal Pilgrimage," *JATS* 1/1 (1990): 39-56.

5 See Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) for an overview of these hermeneutical approaches.

6 See, for examples, recent discussions of the atonement that have emphasized only one aspect of Christ's work and have thereby truncated the gospel, or discussions of God's character which have emphasized only the mercy of God without His justice, thereby vitiating His holiness.

7 See Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, p. vii, and idem, *Selected Messages*, Book 3, pp. 68-70.

8 Cf. White, *Great Controversy*, p. 8, and idem, *Selected Messages*, Book 1, pp. 21, 22.

9 See, e.g., Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 134-140; Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), pp. 155-306.

10 David I. Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis Before 70 CE* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992), p. 1.

11 See Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982); George B. Caird, "The Exegetical Method of the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 5 (1959): 49-51; Richard M. Davidson, "Typology in the Book of Hebrews," chapter 7 in *Issues in the Book of Hebrews*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 4, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1989), pp. 121-186; idem, "Sanctuary Typology," in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 99-130; idem, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational' Model," in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, Adventist Theological Society Occasional Papers, vol. 1, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo Van Dolson (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), pp. 105-135; Charles H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures; The Sub-structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Collins, 1952), pp. 59, 60; R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament; His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), pp. 38-80; Walter C. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985); Lester J. Kuyper, *The Scripture Unbroken* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978); Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1983); R. M. Moody, "The Habakkuk Quotation in Rom 1:17," *ExpT* 92 (1981): 205-208; etc.

12 For a summary of the basic principles of textual analysis, see, e.g., Bruce K. Waltke, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 211-228; Gordon D. Fee, "The Textual Criticism of the New Testament," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), pp. 419-433; C. F. Sitterly and J. H. Greenlee, "Text and MSS of the OT," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 4:798-822.

13 For a discussion of the basic principles in translation method, see Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating, with Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964); John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God, With Scripture and Topical Indexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974); Sakae Kubo and Walter F. Specht, *So Many Versions? Twentieth Century English Versions of the Bible*, rev. and enl. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI:

Zondervan Publishing House, 1983); and Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991).

14 Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

15 Unfortunately, however, this frequently comes at the cost of ignoring the historical nature of the material; Scripture is often treated in the same way as a modern work of fiction, with its own fictive story world. See, e.g., Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); idem, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, pp. 471-514; Meir Weiss, *The Bible from Within: The Method of Total Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1984).

16 Gerhard F. Hasel, *Jonah, Messenger of the Eleventh Hour* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1976), p. 101.

17 William Shea, "Literary Form and Theological Function in Leviticus," chapter 5 in *70 Weeks, Leviticus, Nature of Prophecy*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 3, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), p. 149.

18 Kenneth A. Strand, "The Eight Basic Visions," chapter 2 in *Symposium on Revelation—Book I*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), pp. 36, 37.

19 William H. Shea, "The *qînah* Structure of the Book of Lamentations," *Biblica* 60/1 (1979): 103-107.

20 Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963).

21 Note in particular the usage of *zera'* in Gen 22:17, where the first occurrence of the word in the verse clearly has a plural idea in the context of "the stars of the heaven" and "the sand which is on the seashore," whereas the second occurrence of *zera'* in vs. 17b narrows to a singular "Seed" in the context of "his [singular] enemies." This usage parallels Gen 3:15, where in a similar way the word *zera'* moves from collective/plural to singular in meaning. See O. Palmer Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 93-103.

22 See Moody, pp. 205-208.

23 See Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 266-268.

24 See ibid, pp. 373, 374.

25 Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, pp. 59, 60; cf. Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 43-53.

26 Cf. Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 125, 190.

27 For analysis of Hebrew thought, see, e.g., Claude Tresmontant, *A Study of Hebrew Thought*, trans. Michael F. Gibson (New York, NY: Desclee Company, 1960); Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians, A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), pp. 191-218; and Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960) (whose basic thesis has not been overturned despite criticisms of some lines of argumentation by James Barr, *A Semantics of Biblical Language* [London: Oxford University Press, 1961]). See also G. E. Ladd, whose *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) has shown the consistent biblical salvation-historical, inaugurated-consummated eschatological pattern throughout the NT. This is also true with regard to the book of Hebrews, despite numerous claims for Platonic dualism in the book. See Ronald Williamson's decisive refutation of these claims in *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970).

28 See Davidson, "Sanctuary Typology," pp. 106, 128.

29 See ibid, pp. 106-108, 129, 130, and Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, Andrews University Monographs, Studies in Religion, vol. 13 (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1983).

30 See Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, pp. 221-224.

31 Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament," pp. 119-125.

32 See William J. Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 316, who lists various possible criteria for nonnormativeness within Scripture: "limited recipient, limited cultural conditions for fulfillment, limited cultural rationale, or a limiting larger context." Even these cases, Larkin argues, involve only the form, and not the meaning of Scripture, and call for the reduction of the cultural-specific form to a principle, and the substitution of a contemporary form compatible with it. See Larkin, pp. 316-318, for illustrations drawn from the way the NT writers used the OT.

33 See David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), pp. 103-128.

34 See the reprint of these in P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 299, 300.

35 *RH* 11/25/1884.

36 See George W. Reid, "Another Look at Adventist Hermeneutics," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 69-76, for analysis of the traditional SDA hermeneutic as essentially the same as upheld by ATS, in opposition to the new historical-critical paradigm shift in the Seventh-day Adventist Church starting in the 1950's.

37 What some describe in a distorted way as "proof-text" method is simply the principle of "the Bible as its own expositor" discussed as IIIA above and utilized by Jesus and all the NT writers. There is, of course, an illegitimate "proof-text" approach which takes biblical passages in isolation without regard for their original context, and makes them "prove" what in fact they do not teach. This illegitimate usage of biblical texts has been a pit into which proponents of the historical-critical method have fallen no less often than those following the historical-grammatical approach.

ELLEN WHITE ON THEOLOGY, ITS METHODS, AND THE USE OF SCRIPTURE

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Seventh-day Adventists consider Ellen White (1827-1915) one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its most influential writer. The following discussion focuses on how she views theology, theological method, and its use in advancing divine truth. First we will look at her attitude toward theology. Then we will investigate what she has to say about theological methods.

Ellen White distinguishes two types of theology. The theology she approves of she calls "true" or "sound" theology. Theology she warns against is popular or objectionable theology.

Ellen White's Attitude Toward Theology

Characteristics of True Theology. Ellen White would like to see "in every school" a theology characterized by "the most simple theory."[1] The Bible contains a "system of theology and philosophy" that is both "simple and complete,"[2] yet "sublime."[3] It is so profoundly simple that even a child can understand it. Yet at the same time, so profoundly sublime that it baffles the intellectual giant.[4]

Scripture's "grand central theme" consists of "God's original purpose for the world, of the rise of the great controversy, and of the work of redemption."[5] The "central truth" of a vital theology is the "atonement of Christ;" thus, students will be exposed to "the wonderful theme of redemption."[6] Its purpose is to make "us wise