

## **The Duties and Responsibilities of the Seventh-day Adventist Theologian<sup>1</sup>**

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### **I. Introduction**

The duties and responsibilities of the Adventist theologian in relation to the message, mission, and unity of the Church are both definable and elusive. On the one hand we intuit what they are. On the other hand there are differing ideas of just what those duties and responsibilities entail.<sup>2</sup> Even if there were consensus, there will always be something about them that is hard to put into words. Sometimes (and for some of us) the deeper level of the theologian's duties and responsibilities isn't often thought about, let alone articulated. We could easily spend time enumerating the obvious, the more measurable tasks and duties of interpreting Scripture (exegesis, hermeneutics, biblical theology), instruction and classroom pedagogy, scholarly research and publishing, guiding students in their projects, speaking in behalf of, consulting or critiquing the Church, penetration of influential social spheres (media, fellow scholars, seminaries), even constructing a systematic interpretation of the vision and conviction of biblical faith.

However, I would have us look at a larger more intangible perspective that is often forgotten or overlooked in the nitty-gritty of the duties and responsibilities which fill our lives and daily routines (and

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<sup>1</sup> The forgoing was originally one of the plenary presentations at the Second International Bible Conference sponsored by the 2006 General Conference Biblical Research Institute and held in Izmir, Turkey, July 14, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Granfield, *Theologians at Work* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1967); Monika K. Hellwig, *The Role of the Theologian in Today's Church* (Sheed & Ward, 1987); Philip E. Hughes, "The Creative Task of Theology," in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology* (ed. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969).

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toward which we so often gravitate in our thinking when asked, “What do you do?”). For some, that larger more intangible perspective includes things like being a myth-maker, a fool who destroys myths, a comforter, a builder who constructs a systematic interpretation of the vision and conviction of faith, an archivist, a critic, an archeologist, a ghost (ideas generated become so accepted that the theologian’s name who generated the idea is forgotten).<sup>3</sup> The intangibles we will focus on here include matters of stewardship, biblical focus, character, and worldview.

It would be easy to consider the matters I am about to explore in this paper as more pastoral than theological, more for the elder or pastor than the scholar or theologian, as somehow less scholarly or academic and more hortatory (preaching) than this topic requires, but I would argue that the greatest challenge of Seventh-day Adventist scholarship and theology today lies precisely in the issues I raise. Our great need is more a matter of character and spirit, biblical focus and measure, attitude and frame of reference, than in creative thinking, solid scholarship, and academic freedom. God has blessed His Church with able thought leaders who are profoundly skilled to deal with both Scripture and the issues His people face. There is creative thinking, solid scholarship, as well as large freedom in which to work new ideas and press new frontiers consonant with our Seventh-day Adventist faith. Yet, the power and effective influence of their scholarly contribution and theological work is diminished in proportion to how the deeper, more intangibles we discuss here are both realized in their personal (and shared) experience and seen as a fundamental base-line of their duties and responsibilities.

In the midst of outlining some very tangible duties and responsibilities of the Church’s first-century thought leaders, the Apostle Paul reminds Timothy of the deeper, intangibles of his role as a young leader/theologian of the Church. In the fourth chapter of 2 Timothy, he tells of a time when people will not put up with sound doctrine (2 Tim. 4:3).<sup>4</sup> They “will turn away their ears from the truth” and “turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:4). They will stop listening to truth, refuse it, reject it, desert it. They will swerve off truth’s straight path toward mere myths. In effect, people will not put up with correct biblical teaching. They will

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<sup>3</sup> Hellwig, *The Role of the Theologian in Today’s Church*.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on Pauline authorship see George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 4-52; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (vol. 46; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), xivi-cxxxv.

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tune out what they don't wish to hear and follow teachers (theologians or would-be-theologians) who say what they want to hear. In every period of Christian history there have been times during which men refused to listen to sound doctrine. We know that the apostasy, which Paul envisioned, happened very early in Christian history and was even at work in his day (2 Thess. 2:3-7; Acts 20:28-31). But the implications here are that as history continues onwards toward the consummation, this situation grows only worse. It does not go away. It will not go away.

“Who will have a passion for the biblical truth when I am gone? What will happen to the gospel?” This was the question that dominated and vexed Paul's mind as he lay in chains, and to which he addressed himself in this second letter to Timothy. Already in his first letter Paul had pleaded that Timothy keep safe “the deposit” of biblical truth and understandings, which had been entrusted, to him (1 Tim. 6:20). But since his first letter, the situation had worsened and the apostle's appeal thus became more urgent. So he reminds Timothy that the precious gospel was now committed to him (2 Tim. 1:13, 14), and that it was now his turn to assume responsibility for it, to teach it and preach it, to defend it against attack and against falsification, and to ensure its accurate transmission to the generations to come.<sup>5</sup> Guard the truth, Timothy. Suffer for the truth, continue in the truth, proclaim the truth, explain it, and press it. Preserve what you have received concerning it, at whatever cost, and hand it on to faithful men who in turn will be able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2).

In this second letter of Timothy we find a seasoned theologian mentoring a younger theologian for the theological realities ahead.<sup>6</sup> In

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<sup>5</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> The Epistles of Timothy (and Titus) have long been known as Pastoral Epistles, but this designation is not strictly correct because they cannot be called manuals of pastoral theology. Nevertheless, these works contain written instructions about methods and procedures in the respective churches for which Timothy and Titus were temporarily responsible. They were not “pastors” in the usual, present-day sense of the term. They were not ministers of local congregations as much as they were vicars of Paul, i.e., his special envoys or deputies sent by him on specific missions. They were entrusted with concrete assignments according to the need of the hour. Their task was to perform their spiritual ministry here or there, carrying forward the work, which Paul had started, and then reporting to him their findings and accomplishments. While these Epistles are no “manual” of pastoral theology, per se (let alone biblical or systematic theology), they are nevertheless rich in theology and furnish worth-while and timeless theological direction for the Church's thought leaders, whoever they might be. Only a narrow perspective of theology, or of “doing”

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the process we catch a glimpse of how such theological realities impact the nature, message, and mission of the Church.<sup>7</sup> Looking over Paul's shoulders as he engages Timothy, we see some of what both the tangible and intangible duties and responsibilities of the Seventh-day Adventist theologian entail.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that Paul's thoughts to Timothy (as with other New Testament writers) reflects somewhat of an apologetic tone. He is assertive and defining, unequivocating and direct. We should not be embarrassed or ashamed of a similar posture, or retreat from it. Yet, like Paul we must avoid being negatively critical. Rather, we must be proactive, articulating positive things. When Paul writes apologetically he is not writing against someone or attacking ideas, per se. He is not putting anyone down (although he does drop some names, identify theological trends, and describe the kind of teachers whose motives and integrity can be legitimately questioned, cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-13). He simply understands human nature. He knows how the average church member living in a real world with a real body and with real pressure from their contemporary culture, thinks, struggles, reacts. Paul has a realistic grasp of how things can and will go morally and spiritually in individual lives and in the life of the Church if specific moral and spiritual matters are not related to with candor and clarity. In effect, Paul models how the theologian must be assertive, positive, defining—because of human nature and weakness, and because of the power of contemporary culture to encapsulate human beings into its worldview and life.<sup>9</sup>

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theology, would deny either such theological richness of Paul's words to Timothy and Titus, his theological mentorship of them, or their role as theologians in training. Paul's theology becomes evident in the context of his gospel proclamation and leadership and in a sense rises to clarity within the exigencies at hand. See Jon Dybdahl, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part I," *Ministry*, (November 2005): 19. See also, Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1971), 584; William Hendriksen, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 4; Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 3; Michael Moss, *1, 2 Timothy & Titus* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 1994), 11, 12.

<sup>7</sup> As Mounce observes, "More than perhaps any book in the NT, exegesis of the PE [Pastoral Epistles] is affected by one's critical assumptions" (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, xivi.). Such is true not only regarding Pauline authorship, but with the theological value of Paul's communication to young ministers, to second generation believers in Ephesus, and to a young church facing a pagan world in Crete.

<sup>8</sup> See discussion below under stewardship, pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> Throughout Scripture we have a blend of building up and warning against, i.e., the Revelation's Three Angel's Messages where there is the gospel call followed by candid warning followed again by incredible promise (Rev. 14:6-13).

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Can we build up without warning? The theologian must critique and warn as well as build up. But theological critique or warning must never undermine biblical faith or put others down (even one's theological enemies). We must not theologize against, but for—for God in all His matchless glory, character, faithfulness, love and grace, and for the truth of the gospel in all its wonder, beauty, hope inspiring and heart freeing reality. People are not to be driven from error but drawn to the truth in all its beauty. The theologian's work is that of building up even when it is compelled to be critical. It is to be constructive. Creative. Positive. Defining.<sup>10</sup> And yet, as with Paul in the early Church, it will always take place in an uneasy context.

Calvin compares the work of God among his ancient people with the theological challenges of his own day: "God still wishes in these days to build his spiritual temple amidst the anxieties of the times. The faithful must still hold the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other, because the building of the church must still be combined with many struggles."<sup>11</sup>

It is not difficult to sense that the day of itching ears, of which Paul informs Timothy, is upon us even now. No other passage of Scripture describes more accurately the day in which we live. If this is so, like Paul and Timothy, the Seventh-day Adventist theologian works within the context of the anxieties of our eschatological times and the struggle for minds and hearts in the Great Controversy. It is from this perspective that the duties and responsibilities of the Seventh-day Adventist theologian are set and ultimately defined. It is a perspective that reminds us that the theologian works within an uneasy context. There is need for the theological enterprise and faith-affirming theology.

### II. Stewardship

When Paul exhorts the young theologian, Timothy, in regard to his duties and responsibilities, such duties and responsibilities are envisioned as "stewardship." Timothy is to guard (φύλαξον –keep safe, protect, defend) what has been entrusted to his care (1 Tim. 6:20). There is a "pattern" (ὑποτύπωσιν –pattern, model, example, outline) of sound words and teaching (theology) which Timothy had received from his theological mentor (Paul)—a pattern from God's Word and the things He

<sup>10</sup> See Louis Berkoff, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 58, 59; Hughes. "The Creative Task of Theology," 9-25.

<sup>11</sup> In his Commentary on Daniel 9:25.

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has revealed in His Word about Himself, our human condition, salvation, how we are to live, last things, etc. (2 Tim. 1:13, 14).

Elsewhere Paul asserts that the Church's thought leaders are "servants of Christ and stewards [οἰκονόμους] of the mysteries of God, and that it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy" and might I add, faithful (1 Cor. 4:1, 2). Overseers are "stewards of God" (Tit. 1:7). Paul envisions such stewardship to be practically expressed in things like preaching the Word, being ready in season and out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting with great patience and instruction, enduring hardship, doing the work of an evangelist, fulfilling the ministry we have been called to perform (2 Tim. 4:2, 5). All this is in the context of the challenges to individual and corporate life and faith.

More specifically, in Paul's thinking, the church is steward of the Word of God<sup>12</sup>—steward of the truth: "but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). The Church is the repository of the oracles of God (Rom. 3:2; Heb. 5:12). Ultimately, the theologian's stewardship is the stewardship of biblical truth! It is important here to note that this does not mean that either the church or its theologian "has" the truth. The Church doesn't have the truth. Truth does not belong to the Church. Truth is revealed by the One who is the Truth.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the Church is a receiver and conduit. But it is also constituted by truth, changed by it, and holds it in sacred trust to where that very truth flows on from it to the world. The Church is granted the privilege of seeing truth (or parts of it, at least), understanding it, being transformed by it, proclaiming it, teaching it, being possessed by it. Truth is based on Scripture as Paul asserts (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; cf. 4:2-4; Jn. 17:17). The Church is the pillar and ground of truth when it stewards the truth, which God has entrusted to it. This is the nature and mission of the Church! And so with the Adventist theologian.

As a theologian, Timothy was to hold fast the pattern of right teaching and guard carefully what has been entrusted to him (2 Tim. 1:13-14). Evidently, something has been entrusted to the Church, to us.

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<sup>12</sup> Charles E. Bradford, *Timothy & Titus* (ed. George R. Knight; Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1994), 144.

<sup>13</sup> Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 32-38; Paul Tillich, "What Is Truth," *Canadian Journal of Theology*, 1, no. 2 (1955): 117-122.

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We have been given a pattern of truth. A pattern of sound teaching. A gospel DNA so to speak. The idea of truth or a “pattern” of doctrine means that the theologian is dealing with ideas—ideas and words that are concrete, objective, propositional.<sup>14</sup> Truth as ideas or words can be spoken, heard, written down, read, and kept. It is everywhere assumed in Scripture that these words and ideas of truth carry understandable form, content, and most important, meaning. There is a correspondence of ideas, which words convey to the realities they represent. True words can be relied on because they accord with reality. These true words encompass right action (ethically correct behavior) as well as correct knowledge.

These Epistles to Timothy (as well as Titus) are important because of the wealth of information they contain concerning theology and the theologian’s work in terms of practical matters of Church life and organization—its nature, mission, and unity. Timothy was to know and articulate “how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). The conduct Paul envisions includes public worship, the selection and qualifications of church leaders, the pastor’s personal life and public ministry, how one confronts sin in the church, the role of women, the care of widows, and how to handle money. There are also important doctrinal truths about Scripture, salvation, and Christ. In 1 Timothy, Paul gives instruction concerning false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3-20), instructions concerning life within the Church (1 Tim. 2:1-3:16), instructions concerning false teachers (1 Tim. 4:1-16), instructions concerning pastoral responsibilities (5:1-6:2), instructions concerning the man of God (6:3-21). These all fall under the umbrella of the theologian’s stewardship.

Corresponding to these earlier themes, 2 Timothy outlines elements of a strong spiritual life, the dangers of false teaching, standing against apostasy, the centrality and work of Scripture, faithful preaching, and faithful evangelistic ministry. The core message of 2 Timothy is “guarding the gospel”<sup>15</sup>— which, in the context of Paul’s thinking, has to do with “truth”. Again, these very practical perspectives fall under the umbrella of the theologian’s stewardship.

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<sup>14</sup> We need to be careful in defining “propositional.” Here we understand that it means biblical revelation has cognitive content, that it informs us about revelatory events and their meaning. See Holmes, *All Truth Is God’s Truth*, 74.

<sup>15</sup> Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy*, 21.

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Theology then, is the fundamental framework and impulse for such praxis. There is no competition between theology and praxis. Theology anticipates praxis and praxis demands theological grounding and direction. As such, praxis is often the occasion in which theology is consciously worked out, expressed and clarified in terms of implications for life's exigencies and culture's context.<sup>16</sup>

Such theology presupposes the teaching Church. It presupposes the teaching, which is always going on within the Church. It is a teaching that defines "true" doctrine, life, and practice. It bases and examines the doctrinal content of what is being taught within the Church.<sup>17</sup> "Theology is a function of the Church."<sup>18</sup> Theology is the task of criticizing (in a constructive way) and revising the Church's language about God.<sup>19</sup> That does not mean, however, that the theological enterprise changes the Church's teaching about God, or the Word of God. But it does mean that there can be no theology without the Church. Theology is done in the framework of the Church. The theologian himself/herself is part of the Church.

More specifically, the theologian "is always the theologian of a particular church. He receives the truth in her communion, shares her convictions, and promises to teach and propagate her values as long as they do not prove to be contrary to the Word of God."<sup>20</sup> These teachings constitute a "bias" and this is perfectly acceptable. No one ever does theology without any presuppositions. Every theologian entering upon their theological task has certain convictions which he or she cannot set aside at will, because one cannot eliminate one's self.<sup>21</sup>

This is assumed of the Seventh-day Adventist theologian—that they are possessed by the DNA of biblical Adventism and work within its organizing reality. Theology must be done against Seventh-day Adventist distinctives<sup>22</sup> and their corresponding confessional context.

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<sup>16</sup> See Jon Dybdahl, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part II," *Ministry*, (January 2006): 19-22; Dybdahl, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part I," 19-22.

<sup>17</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics Vol. I* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 80.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God: Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics, being Vol. i, Part I* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Berkoff, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Adventist distinctives comprises the understanding of the Adventist community as a prophetic movement fulfilling the specifications of the end-time remnant identified in the book of Revelation (Revelation, chapters 12-14). The moral imagery of an eschatological

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Furthermore, this stewardship means that mission and theology go together. True theology should move the church to mission.<sup>23</sup> It is with this in mind that Paul exhorts the young theologian Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Theology must give birth to (as well as arise out of) and serve the goal of the Church's mission and work in the world.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, it must facilitate that mission. The theologian must envision himself/herself as an evangelist with persuasive purposes if they are to feed the Church's mission.

As Miroslav Kiš notes, as a "pillar and bulwark of truth" (1 Tim 3:5) the Church has the right to expect all those who hold leading position or who teach in her name to do everything in their power to defend her teachings (2 Tim 4:1-5). As a body of Christ (Col 1:18), the church has the right to expect that every member, especially its thought leaders, will remain united and loyal to her call, her message and her mission.<sup>25</sup> As a steward of God's truth, the church has the right to decide who can be her spokesperson, and teach in her name (2 Titus 1:10, 11). "If a brother is teaching error, those who are in responsible positions ought to know it; and if he is teaching truth, they ought to take their stand at his side. We should all know what is taught among us; for it is truth, we need it. We are all under obligation to God to know what He sends us."<sup>26</sup> The Church reserves the right to watch with diligence over interpretation, teaching, and preaching of that Word, lest strange world views, and

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people maintaining a rhythm of obedience (Rev. 12:17; 14:12), holding to a prophetic/apocalyptic worldview and the life it articulates, i.e., the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17), who are personally undefiled and blameless (Rev. 14:3-5), and who proclaim the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14:6-13), highlights personal faithfulness in keeping with theological truth. Such implied moral excellence (both in relation to theology and lifestyle) is not cultural in that the theologian is merely part of a particular church whose values she is obligated to uphold. Rather it authentic in that Adventist DNA literally possesses them in the totality of their commitment to following the Lamb wherever He goes (Rev. 14:4).

<sup>23</sup> Dybdahl, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part I," 19.

<sup>24</sup> Dybdahl, "Doing Theology in Mission: Part II," 22.

<sup>25</sup> Miroslav Kiš, "A Seventh-day Adventist View of Ethical Issues in Dissent," (Denver Faith & Science Conference, August, 2004), 3. This unpublished manuscript was presented at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists sponsored "Faith and Science Conference" held in Denver, CO in August, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1915, 2002), 300, 301.

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private agendas, influence the minds of its ministry and, through it, its students and members (Titus 2:7, 8).<sup>27</sup>

For the church to steward the truth it has been entrusted with, it needs theologians who faithfully steward that very trust. As the essence of life is not ownership but stewardship—the faithful management of all that God entrusts to us<sup>28</sup>—so the theologian’s duties and responsibilities are one of stewardship. She is to faithfully manage (interpreting, teaching, guarding, proclaiming, etc.) the biblical truths God entrusts to His Church. Stewardship has to do with the theologian’s vision and influence, her commitment and mind. There is more here than mere articles of faith. Stewardship has to do with shared vision, with heart, attitude, and spirit.

Fundamentally, the duties and responsibilities of the Seventh-day Adventist theologian are faith-affirming, constructive, and on the cutting edge. The Adventist theologian is a steward of truth and a resource for the Church. The Adventist theologian probes the deep things of God for the benefit of leadership, pastors, and church members, and to assure there is only one theology in the Church.<sup>29</sup> The theology of the leaders, pastors, and parishioners should be the same as that of the seminary scholars and theologians.<sup>30</sup> The Adventist theologian’s duties and responsibilities enables such unity of vision, faith, and life.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The corollary to this is that the Adventist theologian’s own inner self resonates with the stated aims and values of the Church and is responsible for one’s own influence, teachability, conscience, and continued employment in matters of dissent.

<sup>28</sup> Dave Sutherland and Kirk Nowery, *The 33 Laws of Stewardship* (Camarillo, CA: Spire Resources, Inc, 2003), 10.

<sup>29</sup> In asserting that the duties and responsibilities of the Adventist theologian include assuring there be “only one theology in the church,” I am suggesting neither a blind Adventist orthodoxy nor the loss of academic freedom. Nor am I overlooking the profound diversity of theological reflection our world work demands in terms of contextualizing our message and mission to given cultures. But I am suggesting that the Church’s nature, mission and message possess a profound unity that eschews any notion of pluralism. Like a photograph of a given object can be either monochrome or in full color, it is still the same reality. The cultural diversity of both the Church’s need (and questions) and the thinking of its theologians can bring incredible color and richness and at the same time exhibit profound unity of purpose and direction.

<sup>30</sup> Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 6.

<sup>31</sup> This suggests a profound community among Adventist theologians who mirror for the Church diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace where there is “one body and one Spirit . . . one hope . . . [of the church’s calling], one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all”(Eph. 4:3-6). Such community is nurtured by a conscious understanding of the Trinity whose

### III. Biblical Focus

Ultimately the theologian's use of the Word of God is integral to his/her stewarding truth on behalf of the Church. Paul's assertions regarding the inspiration and practical nature of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:14-18) serve as an interpretive hinge between his two assertions regarding the moral/spiritual dysfunction and theological needs which the Church will face (2 Tim. 3:1-13 and 4:1-8). Like an Oreo cookie of white cream between two chocolate wafers, verses 3:14-18 about the inspiration and authority of Scripture place verses 3:1-13 and verses 4:1-8 about moral/spiritual dysfunction and theological needs in context and vice versus. Here Paul's language is both fluid and informative. Scripture (3:16), what is taught (3:16; 4:2), the Word (4:2), sound teaching (4:3), and truth (4:4) are nearly synonymous. Scripture, Word, and truth are linked (cf. 2:15). What is taught (doctrine, theology) flows from this matrix if it is to be sound. For Paul, theology is biblical teaching, and biblical teaching includes applying Scripture to life. Scripture is the Word that is to be preached, and the truth that is to be articulated flows from the inspired writings. This biblical focus is what causes itching ears and the desire for accommodating theology which Paul asserts is inevitable. There will be individuals unable to endure (put up with) sound biblical teaching and who yearn for an easier theology. They will be inclined to turn aside to mere human constructions reflecting their own values (4:3,4). Whenever the Word is applied, it demands response and decision, and this calls for radical change.<sup>32</sup> People of Paul's day as well as contemporary man wants to be set free from the doctrinal and ethical absolutes of Scripture. Theological trends in our modern age are attributable to the increasing extent to which it is becoming infected with the same quest to be free and the arrogance of human self-sufficiency.<sup>33</sup>

In Paul's understanding, doctrine (theology, what was taught and preached) was drawn from the Word of truth (Scripture). In outlining concrete doctrine he was simply theologically integrating and assuming the basic elements or principles of Scripture.<sup>34</sup> Theology thus integrates

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community they reflect (Jn. 17) as well as a mutual humility and submission between themselves and before the Church's nature, message, and mission in light of the revealed Word of God. It also means a "coming into line" (Ellen G. White, *GCB*, March 30, 1903, par. 43; *RH*, Feb 16, 1905; *Letter* 32a, 1908).

<sup>32</sup> Bradford, *Timothy & Titus*, 145.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, "The Creative Task of Theology," 22.

<sup>34</sup> Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition*, 7.

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Scripture. It brings together the kaleidoscope of scriptural statements on any subject, and allows us to see their common pattern. It identifies the great unifying themes underlying biblical passages, and shows how any particular passage illustrates such a theme. To be a theologian is not to dispense with Scripture, but to become so immersed in it that its common themes and patterns begin to emerge.<sup>35</sup> This is what Paul envisions for the young theologian Timothy when he speaks of “rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). A clear path of truth from the “word of truth” (Scripture) is to be articulated in correctly following and teaching God’s message. Like a laser focusing light toward some specified purpose (rather than mere dispersion of a floodlight), the theologian focuses Scripture’s meaning so that it penetrates or pinpoints or illumines or guides or cuts.

Adventism uncompromisingly takes the principles of *sola scriptura* and *prima scriptura* to its logical conclusion. No tradition, no creed, no belief is recognized unless supported by a clear “thus saith the Lord”. However, another method continually challenges our posture. Rather than *sola scriptura*, there is the press to bring together Scripture, science, reason, and experience (otherwise known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral) in a way that these four entities each have equal ground in determining reality. In effect, four equal votes. *Sola scriptura*, of course, does not discount either reason, experience, or science. They each have an important and authoritative voice. However, *sola scriptura* demands that the Bible becomes the hermeneutic—the lens—for determining data from every other source.

As Canale asserts, the Seventh-day Adventist theologian’s “commitment to the *sola-tota scriptura* principle requires a departure from the traditional multiple sources of theological matrix and the hermeneutical guide drawn from philosophical and scientific ontologies.”<sup>36</sup> This is a critique that Evangelical scholars themselves are beginning to sound. Ben Witherington’s *The Problem With Evangelical Theology: Testing Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism*,

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<sup>35</sup> Alistere McGrath, *A Cloud of Witnessess: Ten Great Christian Thinkers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 9.

<sup>36</sup> Fernando Canale, “From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—Part II,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 16, no. 1-2 (2005): 141.

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*Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism*<sup>37</sup> examines the exegetical foundations and theological structures of three streams of evangelicalism (Reformed, Wesleyan, and Dispensationalist views) and suggests that in what passes as theology in the Church's proclamation are not just glaring weaknesses but real problems of exegesis. He suggests that Evangelicalism has lost touch with its Reformation principles of *sola scriptura* and *prima scriptura* and in particular with its necessary rigorous attention to details of the Bible and the need to stick to the text. "The problem with Evangelical theology at this juncture," Witherington asserts, "is that it is not nearly biblical enough."<sup>38</sup> Here we find the major reformers still dependent on the philosophical foundations of earlier theologians.

Canale registers a similar, however clearer critique, not just toward Evangelical theology, but towards Seventh-day Adventist theology as well.<sup>39</sup> Is it possible that one of the problems with Adventist theology at this juncture in our history is that it is not nearly biblical enough? That we have lost our biblical focus? That Scripture no longer haunts our imagination and is the well from which we drink? That we are busy reading so much theology, even doing exegesis, that we no longer really read Scripture any more? Every Seventh-day Adventist theologian must ask himself/herself this question. "Am I really biblically focused in my work? When all is said and done, do my projects lead to the Word and are they built solidly on the Word? Am I biblical enough?"

Only Scripture has the necessary information to produce Christian theology.<sup>40</sup> More pointedly, only Scripture has the necessary information to produce Seventh-day Adventist theology. "The basic elements of Christian theology [and I would add Seventh-day Adventist theology]," Canale asserts, "are biblical elements, not philosophical teachings introduced later via church tradition."<sup>41</sup> All theologians work their

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<sup>37</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Problem With Evangelical Theology: Testing Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>39</sup> Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition*; Canale, "From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—Part II," 114-142; Fernando Canale, "The Quest for the Biblical Ontological Ground of Christian Theology," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 16, no. 1-2 (2005): 1-20.

<sup>40</sup> Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

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reflections using a methodology and presuppositions. The source of theological knowledge is the basic grounding issue on which theological methodology stands.<sup>42</sup> There is need not only of the *sola Scriptura* principle but the *prima Scriptura* principle whereby the Adventist theologian gives hermeneutical and interpretive priority to the truth of Scripture over the truths we derive through philosophical and scientific methodologies. Moreover, we criticize and understand the latter in light of the former.<sup>43</sup> This is a fundamental part of the Adventist theologian's "rightly handling the Word of truth."

The ongoing exegesis/theology debate naturally comes into view here. Increasingly more Seventh-day Adventist theology and thinking is being both questioned and stifled today in the name of exegesis. On the other hand, so much of Adventist theology and thinking is assumed as biblical and no longer in need of closer biblical examination or further development, corrective balance or change. In some arenas careful biblical exegesis no longer takes place. Some of us are like the fly crawling on the Sistine Chapel while others are the tourists looking up from thirty-feet below. We are either too narrow in our perspective (exegesis) or dizzied by our trying to take in the whole (theology). Either way Scripture becomes distorted or fragmented, unwittingly robbed of its voice, depth, and breadth. What we need is exegesis that informs theology and theology that guides exegesis. The Seventh-day Adventist theologian will recognize the strengths and limitations of exegetical methodology, biblical theological method, and systematic theological method, and work to coordinate these respective resources in their proper priority and balance.

Ultimately, theology is biblically measured and so must be the theologian. While studying for my Ph.D. comprehensives I was preparing for questions regarding historical theology. While tracing theology's fortunes during Christian history, I was struck with the reality of so much theology and approaches to theology that literally distorted Scripture. So many sincere theologians have come and gone (giants like Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley) honestly wrestling with the biblical message, but unwittingly distorting it through their own bias, culture, and anxieties of the times. Somewhere in that journey towards my comps, I came to the realization that everyone of us have the capacity to distort Scripture—including myself. I find the thought terribly humbling: *I have*

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

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*the capacity to twist Scripture to my taste.* I also have the capacity to hang on to my distorted views when challenged by my colleagues, or the Church's Message or Mission, Protology or Eschatology, Christology or Ecclesiology, whatever, or even by the plain teachings of Scripture itself.

It makes me wonder about doing theology, and anything new and creative, or deeper and richer, that I might find in the process. Will I become more excited about my own ideas than about God's Word and what in fact it really reveals? I may have a great idea, but if it is not biblical, it is not great at all. Furthermore, I would assert that if I am immersed in Scripture, any ideas I draw from it are really never my own as if I can copyright them and claim credit. If I ever consider theological projects as my own, apart from Scripture or the mission and message of the Church, I unwittingly detach myself from the humble role of a servant the steward of Scripture and position myself as authoritative.

Paul's thoughts on theological understanding and the theologian's ability to adequately articulate theology is instructive: "we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13 NIV). Paul would remind us that understanding spiritual things (what's in God's mind and why He does what He does) is dependent on the Holy Spirit's work on the theologian's mind. Likewise the ability to put those spiritual things into proper words (theology)—living words, practical words, picturesque words, words that grab attention and which at the same time present deep eternal truth (Eccl. 12:10)—is dependent on the same Spirit. Scripture belongs to the Holy Spirit not the theologian.<sup>44</sup> The phenomenon of Holy Scripture is a *mystery*.<sup>45</sup>

On one's own the theologian is unable to connect with the deep spiritual things of God. On one's own the theologian is unable to put the deep spiritual things which she might discover in their work into words that not only inform, correct, or exhort, but inspire spiritual response. Paul assures us that the mind of Christ can be known, plumbed, and mirrored (1 Cor. 2:16). The Adventist theologian needs the Spirit to grasp spiritual themes and to find the right words to articulate those spiritual truths. This calls for humility before God and His Word. It means understanding one's bias, one's limitations, one's spiritual journey, and one's capacity to twist Scripture to their own taste. It calls

<sup>44</sup> Hughes, "The Creative Task of Theology," 16.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

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for the workings of the Holy Spirit in our mind and heart. When this happens our words (theology) will be received not as the words of human beings, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which will powerfully work in those who chose to believe (1 Thess. 2:13). Such is demanded by a generation not so sure anymore whether they are following mere Seventh-day Adventist culture and traditions and who yearn for foundations and certainty beyond just another institutionalized religion.

The Seventh-day Adventist theologian is thus biblically focused, biblically measured. He gives hermeneutical and interpretive priority to the truth of Scripture over the truths arrived through philosophical and scientific methodologies. She understands that her authority and power and as well as that of the Church in the world lies in the Word of God. The Church has no authority or transforming power of her own. When her theologians both understand and model this reality, she will remain biblically focused and biblically measured, both as a corporate community and individual Christians.

**IV. Character**

The making of theology is closely related to the making of a theologian. The theologian makes the theology. The man—the whole man or woman—lies behind the theology. It is the outflow of a life. The man makes the theologian. Theology deepens and grows spiritually and biblically because the theologian grows and deepens spiritually and biblically. The theology is holy because the theologian is holy. The theology is full of divine anointing because the theologian is full of the divine anointing.

Paul makes this moral/spiritual link between the person of the theologian and the heart of theology when he writes to the young theologian Timothy: “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness” (2 Tim. 3:10 ESV). In other words, “You know what I teach, Timothy, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is” (NLT). And again, “as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it” (2 Tim. 3:14). You can trust the theology (what you have learned) because you know the source. Paul asserts that he and those working with him were on a higher moral and spiritual level—godly—than the evil impostors who not only deceive, but have themselves become deceived (2 Tim. 3:12, 13). The implication is that because of that, their theology (teaching) is likewise

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on a higher moral and spiritual level. This moral/spiritual link between theologian and theology, which Paul envisions, includes Paul himself, those working with him, many witnesses, and “faithful men” who will be able to adequately teach others as Timothy extends the stewardship of the gospel to them (2 Tim. 2:2). Even more directly Paul exhorts the young theologian, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16). Watch your life and your theology, Paul urges.

Life and theology go hand in hand. Again, the theologian makes the theology. The character of the heart determines the character of the theologian’s theology. Dead theologians teach dead theology, and dead theology (even if it is right theology, orthodox theology) kills. But living theologians bring life. Their theology resonates with the soul and the spiritual realities of God. Hurting theologians create a comforting theology. Offended theologians engender defensive theology. Sidelined theologians articulate independent theology. These are generalizations for sure, yet there is more truth to these assertions than not. This is the *being* and *doing* that must be kept in balance. Not only is there the *being* of the Church in relation to its going (doing of mission), but a being of the theologian in relation to theological work. Devotion qualifies the theologian’s duty in immeasurable ways.

Furthermore, theologians are not mere theology makers but men-makers, theologian-makers, pastor-makers, and saint-makers. The soul of the theologian leaves its fingerprints on the soul of the Church, the soul of individuals within the church (2 Tim. 2:2; 3:10, 14). Who the theologian is in her character and spiritual life influences who the Church sees herself to be in her character and spiritual life. Who the theologian is in his character and spiritual life influences any theologian they may be working alongside of and those they are mentoring as future thought leaders in the Church. This is how the theologian’s character and spiritual life effectively touches the Church’s nature, mission, and unity.

Just as there is a moral frame of reference on the part of those with “itching ears” who are no longer able to endure sound doctrine because their values and passions draw them in another direction, there is a corresponding moral frame of reference on the part of the theologian who would preach the Word, and be ready in every season to reprove and rebuke and exhort with great patience and careful instruction (3:1-9; 4:2-4).

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Life and theology always go together both on the part of the theologian and the hearer (the Church). The theologian's moral/spiritual life affects the spiritual/moral power as well as accuracy of the theology. The Church member's moral/spiritual life determines the spiritual/moral quality of theology they can either tolerate or desire. No wonder they don't want to hear sound doctrine. The unconverted heart prefers senseless myths rather than solid truth. I don't want to hear about my attitude or my habits or my values. I want to do what I want to do. "The prophets prophesy falsely . . . and my people love to have it so," says Jeremiah (Jer. 5:31). How can the theologian rebuke or reprove or correct or exhort or lift to a higher standard if their own hearts are polluted?

There is a link between ethics and doctrine. The true nature, mission, and unity of the Church calls for moral/spiritual excellence on the part of its theologians, because such moral/spiritual excellence is at the very heart of her nature, mission, and unity, and her theologians must both work and speak from that heart. As the Church is holy, so must her theologians be, otherwise their work and influence will unwittingly undermine (1 Thess. 2:10-13).

In speaking of the challenge of leadership formation, Clouzet suggests that theological training has "overlooked the inner person of the would-be parson."<sup>46</sup> He outlines the ascetic, scholastic, encyclopedic, mentoring, and professional paradigms for ministerial training and posits how each has fallen short in nurturing moral and spiritual formation of seminary students. Studies Clouzet cites show that the preponderance of what is considered valuable for the pastor's effectiveness in ministry are not, in fact, ministry skills, or leadership skills, but character values. This accounts for the lack of power in spiritual leadership and the inability to influence a world careening to self-destruction.<sup>47</sup> The challenge of leadership formation has to do with whether seminary students can see God in their mentors, teachers, and administrators—together with spiritual passion, integrity, and Holy Spirit power.<sup>48</sup> The challenge of theological leadership is likewise moral and spiritual formation of the inner person to where there is not only facility

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<sup>46</sup> Ron E. M. Clouzet, "The Challenge of Leadership Formation," *Perspective Digest*, 11, no. 1 (2006): 29.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 33.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

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with divine truth, but close communion with God and the living presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In his book *Power Through Prayer*, E. M. Bounds writes that “Men are God’s method. The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. . . . What the church needs today is not more or better machinery, not new organizations or more and novel methods. She needs men whom the Holy Spirit can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come upon machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer.”<sup>49</sup>

The same is true for theology. The Church is looking for better theologians. God is looking for better men and women. What the Church needs today is not better theology, nor a new theology, a theology to meet the times or culture, or more and novel theological methods. She needs men and women whom the Holy Spirit can use. Men and women of character and spiritual depth. The Holy Spirit does not flow through theology or theological systems, but through men and women. The Holy Spirit does not anoint theology, He anoints men and women so the theology is biblical, spiritual, empowered. God needs theologians who will live holy lives.

P. T. Forsyth notes that the theologian “should first not be a philosopher but a saved man, with eternal life working in him.”<sup>50</sup> Philip Hughes asserts that “The creative task of theology is, first of all, the task of the redeemed who, through the prior grace of God, have returned to the Father by the Son, and though the inner workings of the Holy Spirit *have been put in tune with the mind of Christ.*”<sup>51</sup>

Theology that kills is often orthodox. Nothing is so dead as a dead orthodoxy. Theology can engross, harden, and estrange the heart from God by the neglect of personal moral and spiritual discipline. The theologian may lose God in his theology. Thus the theologian must keep his spirit in harmony with the divine nature of his high calling. Only the heart can learn to do theology. So we must do the work of the heart. The theologian is to be a praying man, a praying woman. Theology is made in the closet. The theologian is made in closet. The theologian’s study must become a closet, an altar, a ladder, so that every thought might ascend heavenward before it goes toward the written page,

<sup>49</sup> E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Whitaker House, 1982), 8, 9.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and Modern Mind* (London, 1907), 13, 305.

<sup>51</sup> Hughes, “The Creative Task of Theology,” 25. Italics mine.

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classroom, or Church. God commits the keys of His kingdom to the theologian who understands that her own spiritual moral growth is her main business. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.

Why is this so important and fundamental to the theologian's duties and responsibilities? Because of the deep spirituality of the theologian's work and because the nature and mission and unity of the Church demands it. And if we would move our generation for God, we must rise to a new level of "theology making" by a new level of "theologian making." I would add as prayer makes the man or the woman, prayer makes the theologian. Prayer makes the theology (as Paul exhorts Timothy and models prayer in his own life, cf., 1 Tim. 2:1, 2, 8; 2 Tim. 1:3). Every theologian who does not make prayer a mighty factor in his own life and teaching and writing is weak as a factor in God's work. She is powerless to advance God's cause in this world. All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared with our closets.

True theology is God-touched, God-enabled, and God-made. The theology may be true, but even divine truth has no life-giving energy alone. It must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. If the inner man has never broken down and surrendered to God and His word, His inner life will not be a great highway for the transmission of God's message, God's power. He will be a spiritual nonconductor. This brings us again to the reality that the theologian's ability to adequately articulate theology is Holy Spirit dependent and thus a spiritual phenomenon: "we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words" (1 Cor. 2:13 NIV).

The Adventist theologian understands how her own moral spiritual person impacts one's theological enterprise and the power of her theological influence to truly spiritually transform lives. Again, the theologian makes the theology, dead theologians produce and/or teach dead theology, living theologians are God-touched, God-enabled, God-made and produce true and living theology. Living theologians are spiritually tuned to the mind of Christ. They are self surrendered to the Word of God. Their personal life is in harmony with moral vision of Scripture. They are constantly nourished on the words of faith and the sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16). They are growing intellectually, spiritually, and on the issues that matter to the Church. They are patterning themselves after faithful and godly theologians. These are the

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duties and responsibilities of the Adventist theologian in light of the nature and message and mission of the Church.

**V. Worldview**

Early in my ministry I was listening to a colleague who had just finished his advanced degree. We were at a pastor's worker's meeting in one of our Conferences, and he was the main speaker for the three days the pastors of our field were together. I vividly remember listening to my colleague's presentations and something deep down inside me saying—"He's no longer a Seventh-day Adventist in his thinking." Here was someone I looked up to. Respected. Loved. He was far more gifted and articulate than myself., a charismatic, thought provoking speaker. Now suddenly I was struggling with how what he was saying rang both with my grasp of the topic under discussion and my understanding of Seventh-day Adventist identity and thinking. "Who am I," I thought to myself, "to question my brother's theology and Adventist focus." There was no question about sincerity, or honesty of purpose, but vision and orientation.

Because we were friends, I pulled him aside during a couple of the breaks and engaged him on some exegetical and theological points from the Scripture he was expounding. While his answers seemed good, there was something about them that didn't seem quite right. I hadn't had all the privileges of advanced studies at the time, so I couldn't quite figure it out just then and clarify exactly where and why things felt amiss. It was at that worker's meeting where most of my pastor colleagues were drinking in the latest theological trend of apocalyptic interpretation, that I quietly bowed my heart and said, "Lord, something's not right here, or perhaps it's me. Am I missing something? And . . . if you ever give me an opportunity for advanced study, I will use it in faith-affirming service."

Fifteen years later I received my Ph.D. That very spring, in fact a month or so before my graduation, my esteemed colleague was released from ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church taking most of his congregation with him and leaving a trail of confusion, sorrow, and bitterness. The day I graduated, I sat in my car holding my doctoral diploma in hand thinking back 15 years when it all began. "I knew he was no longer an Adventist in his thinking way back then," I said to myself. "And it has taken 15 years for it to become so painfully plain to others. Why did it take so long? Didn't others see? Why could I see so

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quickly, even before my Ph.D., and so many take so long to see and respond?”

In his book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*,<sup>52</sup> Malcolm Gladwell speaks of how individuals are able to intuit things long before others even have a clue. How a little bit of the right knowledge can go a long way. How decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as those made cautiously and deliberately. How some snap perceptions and resulting decisions may even be the best.

Gladwell writes how our snap judgments and first impressions can be educated and controlled, and how we should take our instincts seriously and learn how to use them correctly. There is as much value in the blink of an eye as in months of rational analysis. Gladwell calls this intuitive skill “thin slicing.” “Thin slicing” is the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behavior based on narrow slices of experience. It is rapid-cognition that allows one to zero in on what really matters. There is power in the glance, where one intuits the essence of something. Something one hears or sees, a tone of voice, something said or left unsaid, something done or not done.

Paul has the theologian’s intuitive skills—“thin-slicing”—in mind when he tells Timothy to “be ready in season and out of season” in order to reprove, rebuke, exhort (2 Tim. 4:2). The theologian must read between the lines—at all times, everywhere, and anywhere.<sup>53</sup> The theologian’s preparedness—“be ready”—is not merely in the sense of a preparedness to respond (i.e., that one is up on the theological issues or knows where to find things in the Bible or in their library), but preparedness in the sense of being able to actually recognize what’s happening, where people are headed, what the issues are, where matters lead to their logical theological and experiential conclusion and what needs to be done—quickly before it’s too late.

Our biggest challenge for “thin-slicing” as Seventh-day Adventist theologians is all the exposure we ourselves have to evangelical thinking and theology, non-Adventist seminaries, mega-church praxis, contemporary culture, and a host of Christian literature, some that is biblical and much that is socio-psychological in perspective. We are in

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<sup>52</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Paul gives example of this with reference to individuals who’s folly in time will become obvious to all, but which he is now able to intuit (2 Tim. 3:6-9, 13). The reality of deceiving impostors who deceive gullible people implies those deceived were not able to thin-slice the issues or the impostors.

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danger of losing our theological edge to intuit the impact on Seventh-day Adventist distinctives because some of those very distinctives have already become blurred in our thinking against the encapsulating power of these powerful realities. The Church needs for its theologians to see where things are headed. They need to know what the Church is actually doing. They must intuit the implications for the nature, message and mission of the Church if lifestyle, praxis, music, entertainment, worship, preaching, and theology continue in certain directions. God forbid that the itching ears in our midst find in us (the Seventh-day Adventist theologian) the very teachers in accordance to their own desires—however unwittingly on our part. Or that the myths they turn to are unwittingly facilitated by us—Adventist theologians. Nothing has greater potential for calling into question the nature, message and mission of the Church than the Church’s theologians themselves.

Before we react too strongly to these assertions, we should be reminded that this theological intuition of which Paul writes, this “theological thin-slicing,” takes place against the backdrop of history and the moral/spiritual trends in history within both the Christian and secular worlds. There is a worldview that frames Paul’s theology and his theologian-making of Timothy. Paul tells Timothy that “the time will come” when “they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own ideas, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). He isn’t speaking here of a general falling away—something every age experiences. Rather, this *kairos* (time) on the horizon is the apostasy within the Church itself of which Paul writes about more clearly in his letters to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:3-4). There he speaks of the “mystery of iniquity” (KJV) in the context of the Church in history (2 Thess. 2:7). He refers to some sinister entity working behind the scenes that can be identified (intuited, “thin sliced”) but which cannot be entirely described or explained or even believed by some as really there at all. It’s a secret entity acting secretly, but which at some point in history will become visible, and when it does become visible it will still act disingenuously. It will be a known entity existing on two levels, one relatively open and benign, but serving to mask the true, hidden function. According to Paul, that evil force was already operating in a hidden way behind human activity and was determined to gain supremacy over the Church. Theologians and theology would alike be involved.

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More specifically, Paul's reference to "the apostasy" in 2 Thessalonians 2 was no general apostasy. It was a direct link to the prophetic "little horn" power of apostasy we read about in Daniel 7.<sup>54</sup> The flow of Paul's ideas in 2 Thessalonians 2 follows those of Daniel 2 and 7 and also Christ's outline of last things in Matthew 24 (where Jesus too, refers back to the book of Daniel, see Matt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). It is evident that Paul had been explaining biblical prophecy to the Thessalonians, patterning his thinking after both Daniel and Jesus in Matthew 24 (2 Thess. 2:6).

This was no new prophecy, no new development in the scheme of things. The knowledge of the sequence of events in Daniel 2 and 7 was essential to understanding Paul's thinking about a prolonged retardation of the emergence of the antichrist because of the existence of a restraining power—"And you know what is restraining him now" (2 Thess. 2:6). The apostolic church apparently had no question about the identity of this "restraining" power (2 Thess. 2:6). Given Daniel 2 and 7 and the words of Jesus in Matthew 24, believers knew that Rome would be the last major empire before the apostasy would break out in its fullness.<sup>55</sup>

Young Timothy undoubtedly heard Paul speak of these things many times. Like every Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic enterprise, these were the "traditions" that new believers were to hold on to (2 Thess. 2:15). When Paul encourages the Thessalonians to "hold to the traditions" (NASB), he seems to picture a gale, in which there is danger both of being swept off one's feet and of being wrenched from one's handhold. In face of this moral/spiritual hurricane force wind of apostasy, he urges them to stand their ground, planting their feet on terra firma, and to cling to something solid and secure, as if clutching for dear life. In the context of his thought, those "traditions" were the historical-prophetic understandings of the Book of Daniel. So, knowing what lay ahead and "thin-slicing" his way through the coming moral/spiritual confusion would be integral to Timothy's theological leadership.

Are you "thin-slicing" where I'm headed? Can you intuit the Adventist theologian's duties and responsibilities in these matters? His or her worldview? How it touches on the nature and mission and message of the Church? Paul is writing within a historical-prophetic

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<sup>54</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *How To Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: The Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Sarasota, FL: First Impressions, 1997), 66.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

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context and understanding of reality. We refer to it as the great controversy between Christ and Satan, which has been waging through the great epochs of salvation history. Paul has all the moral spiritual issues (ethics and theology and spiritual life) that come into play within that historical-prophetic vision. Patrick Cranfield writes “There is need for the prophet-theologian who is a prophet in the biblical sense of the word—individuals who are perceptive to both the needs of the word and the voice of God, in order to proclaim and interpret present history.”<sup>56</sup>

In the Book of Revelation we read how the Dragon is angry with an end-time people who exhibit both a rhythm of obedience and a prophetic impulse (Rev. 12:17; cf., 19:10). Revelation’s vision of the saint’s clash between the Dragon and a fallen world is a “prophetic conflict.”<sup>57</sup> It is prophetic truth against prophetic delusion or the denial of the prophetic. Worldview is at the center of the controversy.

The Dragon is angry not merely because there is a prophet in the church (how we often narrowly interpret this Seventh-day Adventist identifying passage). He is angry because of what the prophet encourages the Church to accept Revelation (and from Daniel) about Jesus and the Great Controversy between Himself and Satan—and the moral spiritual issues at stake. He is angry because there will be theologians in the Church who choose to believe this apocalyptic prophecy and its defining worldview. He is angry that there will be theologians in the Church who understand how the everlasting Gospel is set in an apocalyptic historio-prophetic context, and how that unique setting of the Gospel brings understanding and urgency to a host of biblical truths and compels decision for Christ. He is angry because these theologians understand what such a worldview says about the nature and mission and message of the Church. He is angry because the Church follows the lead of her theologians and turns around and gives this testimony of Jesus to a confused and bewitched world. He is angry because his cover is blown, his game-plan revealed, his real motives exposed. The Dragon knows the power of apocalyptic prophecy where Jesus is fully unveiled and the Gospel unfolds against a Great Controversy backdrop taking place in real history and real time.

God’s remnant people find their roots and message and mission in apocalyptic prophecy—Daniel and Revelation. And so will her

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<sup>56</sup> Granfield, *Theologians at Work*, xx, xxi.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 120.

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theologians. Revelation points toward a penetrating prophetic consciousness on the part of those whom the Dragon vents his anger. There is a driving prophetic worldview and impulse. The crisis of Seventh-day Adventist identity in contemporary times is closely linked to the loss of this prophetically defining theological vision. In this context, the Adventist theologian's duties and responsibilities take on profound and urgent significance. The Adventist theologian is propelled by a prophetic psyche that enables defining theological vision and nurtures a clear Adventist identity. That defining vision encompasses the DNA of Adventist identity, message, and mission: a vision drawn from the books of Daniel and Revelation, the everlasting gospel, judgment, Sabbath, sanctuary, nature of man, creation *ex nihilo*, obedience to God's covenant commandments, the prophetic gift, remnant identity, the historical-prophetic understanding of the great epochs of salvation history within the great controversy between Christ and Satan as well as the emergence of religious/moral/political apostasy within the Church itself. This is the defining worldview which enables the Seventh-day Adventist theologian to "thin slice" a host of practical matters including theology, fundamental beliefs, life-style, ethics, entertainment, music, worship, sexuality, mission and in doing so stay true to the Church's nature, message, and mission.

The theologian's students—pastors in training, young minds under formation—need to hear a certain and clear message in the classroom. Not questions without answers. Not doubts that lead individuals hanging. They need to see a modeling of their mentor's own journey and humility before the Word of God. In a time when it is easier to criticize than affirm because affirming means commitment and action, the Adventist theologian would both ask penetrating questions and give defining answers. Defining answers to critical questions of faith and life demand taking a position on such matters. As stewards of the heavenly vision, their influence and commitments, the Seventh-day Adventist theologian will have purposefully taken such a personal position. They will identify with the truth articulated in those defining answers.

For the sake of the nature and mission and message of the Church, the Church's theologians must be willing to take a position, take a stand, sound a certain trumpet. The Seventh-day Adventist theologian must be assertive, positive, defining. He must "thin slice" for the sake of the Church. Such theological instruction, nurture, and guidance, however,

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must be done (as per Paul) with patience, compassion, and love (2 Tim. 4:2; Eph. 4:15).

The reality of theological “thin slicing” is that theologians “thin slice” matters that their colleagues may not be able to see, at least at first. A theologian who intuits correctly on a matter may himself be in need of being “thin sliced” by their colleagues on a matter they may not be aware of in their own positions and assertions. Theologians then, must come along side one another and listen to what one another sees or hears or intuits as theological reality—both from a critical and constructive perspective. There are moments when every theologian needs corrective “thin slicing” from his or her colleagues or the Church. There are moments too, when others intuit the far-reaching contribution or perceptive direction of a theologian’s idea’s or projects better than the one articulating and it at the time and need to come along side with words of encouragement. It’s about both holding one another accountable and encouraging one another in our stewardship as a theological resource for the Church.

Being open to the “thin slicing” of one’s peers demands a stewardship of submission not only to the nature, mission, and message of the Church, but to one another as thought leaders within the Church. In this way the Holy Spirit enables organic corrective, empowerment, synthesis of thought, passion and defining vision. This calls for a humility and mutual submission of purpose and thought in behalf of one another and the Church. The combining of our thinking and coming into line with one another as well as pushing the edge with one another will enable a vibrancy for the Church that is needed for the Church to fulfill its mission in the world—especially as the Church becomes increasingly younger and conservative. This closing-of-ranks, coming into line, and faith-affirming theology on the cutting edge, together with a prophetic-impulsed “thin slicing” enables the Church to remain properly oriented toward the open future it faces.

It is in this way that the Seventh-day Adventist theologian is a sentinel as well as a steward. She is watching from the walls, looking both within (into the Church) and without (into the world), cutting a straight line (2 Tim. 2:15). He is thin slicing. Understanding the times and the issues. This enables one to “keep their head” theologically, emotionally, psychologically, morally, spiritually—in terms of the pattern of truth and prophetic vision of things—in all situations (2 Tim.

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4:5 NIV).<sup>58</sup> He/she does not bend under the pressures of the times. Nor is he or she influenced by the murmuring or frightened or demanding leaders or lay-people.

Worldview is a fundamental perspective and tool in one's theological duties and responsibilities. It enables one to stay on their feet and steady the Church in the anxiety of our confusing and challenging times. It enables one to steady those around them with calm assurance in the Word of truth and where God is leading His people through the sure word of prophecy (1 Pet. 1:19). The Seventh-day Adventist theologian will be able to affirm that the pattern of truth entrusted to us will still be the truth — today, tomorrow, the day after, during earth's final moments, and when Jesus comes, because truth never dies. They will be able to affirm a heavenly sanctuary and that it isn't going anywhere just because some say it doesn't really exist. They will be able to affirm a pre-advent judgment that is still going on. How God still hates pride. How men are still born in sin. How men must still be born again. That dead folk are still dead. That Christ is still our only Savior. That lifestyle matters. That none but the righteous shall see God. That our prophetic message is still valid and very much relevant. That the Creation account is more than theological or metaphorical. And if we stand around waiting for our truth to change, we're exactly like the rest of Christianity who want the Sabbath to change, and Creation to change, and lifestyle matters to change.<sup>59</sup> But the Word of God with its sure word of prophecy (2 Pet. 1:19) clarifies and prioritizes the issues: Sabbath/Sunday, spiritualism, sensuality, Scripture, soul (nature of man, state of man in death), creation, sanctuary, second coming, Spirit of Prophecy, Christian values and lifestyle, salvation by faith alone.

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<sup>58</sup> Paul uses the Greek *νήφω* — clearheaded, self-controlled, self-possessed, free from every form of mental and spiritual excess or confusion. Any conscientious theologian who faithfully stewards the Word of God for the people of God knows that it is not an easy task. Pressures (from theological adversaries who attack or malign, pragmatic leaders who want results, itching eared members who want the comfortable, controversial issues defying easy answers, the conservative-liberal debates, extremists, etc.) not only tempt one to abandon or adjust their theology, but can be emotionally and spiritually exhausting rendering one vulnerable to personal moral and spiritual compromise. Our identity, reputation, personal life, hurts and history are entwined in our work.

<sup>59</sup> C. D. Brooks. "I Want My Church Back," in *Here We Stand: Evaluating New Trends in the Church* (ed. Samuel Koranteng-Pipim; Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Affirm, 2005), 94.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The duties and responsibilities of the Seventh-day Adventist theologian are both definable and elusive. We have chosen here to explore four of the more elusive aspects.

**First:** The Seventh-day Adventist theologian stewards truth (the pattern of sound doctrine) entrusted to the Church by God for its redemptive mission in the world. His/her duties and responsibilities provide a competent theological resource to the Church. Stewarding the truth means surrendering to the truth. Growing deeper in the truth. Walking long in the way of truth. Never being ashamed of the truth. Sharing the truth at every opportune moment. Casting it like seed in the church and the world.

**Second:** The Seventh-day Adventist theologian is biblically focused and measured, giving hermeneutical and interpretive priority to the truth of Scripture over the truths arrived through philosophical and scientific methodologies (i.e., he/she understands that his/her authority and power and as well as that of the Church in the world lies in the Word of God—the Church has no authority or transforming power of her own).

**Third:** The Seventh-day Adventist theologian understands that his/her own moral spiritual person impacts their theological enterprise and the power of their theological influence to truly spiritually transform lives (i.e., the theologian makes the theology, dead theologians produce and/or teach dead theology, living theologians are God-touched, God-enabled, God-made and produce true theology).

**Fourth:** The Seventh-day Adventist theologian is propelled by a prophetic worldview that enables defining theological vision and nurtures a clear Seventh-day Adventist identity and which enables the Adventist theologian to keep his/her head (theologically, emotionally, psychologically, morally, and spiritually) in order to steward the truth and guide the church in confusing times.

That graduation day on which I sat in the car holding my Ph.D diploma in hand and thinking back 15 years to when I “thin sliced” my colleague concluding in my heart, “He’s no longer a Seventh-day Adventist in his thinking,” I reminded myself of my own capacity to both distort and stray from the pattern of truth given us as an Adventist people. That day I took my diploma, my dissertation, my doctoral sash designating advanced accomplishments in theology, and went into the sanctuary of the Church where I pastor. There all alone down by the pulpit where my congregation gathers weekly for its garden of prayer, I

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knelt down before God and praised Him for hearing my prayer so long ago and opening the way for my advanced studies. There I told him that all that I am and all that I had accomplished were His gracious gift. There I humbled myself before Him and dedicated my heart, my mind, my influence, my vision, my energies—myself as a theologian and my theology—to faith-affirming service. As a Seventh-day Adventist theologian, I am not my own. I am a thought leader for God in His Church. Everything that I am and do is consecrated to Him.

Such consecration is a daily matter, because as we have learned, the theologian makes the theology.

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