

ment. *Zum 65. Geburtstag herausgegeben*, eds. L. Schmidt und K. Eberlein (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 71-77.

93 See Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath*, pp. 7-9; Robinson, pp. 30-32.

94 A more recent supporter of this hypothesis is H. H. Rowley, "Moses and the Decalogue," *Men of God* (London, 1963), pp. 1-36.

95 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Worship in Israel. A Cultic History of the Old Testament* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966), p. 87.

96 Recently still Negretti, pp. 33-45.

97 So a long time ago H. Webster, *Rest Days. A Study in Early Law and Morality* (New York, 1916), pp. 188-92, 101-23.

98 Ernst Jenni, *Die theologische Begründung des Sabbatgebots im Alten Testament* (Zollikon-Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1956), pp. 7-16.

99 Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath*, p. 273.

100 N.-E. A. Andreasen, "'Festival and Freedom.' A Study of an Old Testament Theme," *Interpretation* 28 (1974):281-97; idem, "Recent Study of the Old Testament Sabbath," *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 86 (1974):453-69.

101 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., 1903), p. 173.

102 Very insightful are the remarks on this limitation by Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 1:38-50; Stuhlmacher, *Vom Verstehen des Neuen Testaments*, pp. 30-32; idem, *Schriftauslegung auf dem Wege zur biblischen Theologie*, pp. 128-65.

103 See the insightful analysis of miracles during the last two hundred years in Colin Brown, *Miracles and the Critical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984).

104 S. Westerholm, "Sabbath," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 717.

105 Pannenberg, 1:39-47.

106 Gary R. Habermas and G. N. Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1987); Norman L. Geisler, *The Battle for the Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 4/1 (1993):47-64.

Article copyright © 1993 by Bruce Norman.

PRESUPPOSITIONS: THE KEY TO THE FORMULATION OF BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

By Bruce Norman

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies

Manila, Philippines

Introduction

Over the years, there have been and are some Seventh-day Adventists who would like to adopt a modified form of historical-criticism, claiming that it can be used without accepting its presuppositions.¹ But, one wonders whether or not this is possible?²

It has been said by some that our most important characteristic is not what we think *about* but what we think *with*.³ Consciously or unconsciously, everyone, including Christians, operate with certain assumptions.⁴ Neither conservatives nor liberals, theologians or exegetes can claim to be free from them.⁵ Because one's assumptions about truth and ultimate reality affect the way that a person thinks and acts, one must reckon seriously with their own contexts when interpreting the text of the NT.⁶

This raises the question of the relationship between presuppositions, interpretational method, and the formulation of doctrine. Does the method chosen to interpret Scripture when constructing a system of biblical teaching affect the final shape of that system? If so, should a person select one interpretational method over another when attempting to build their belief system?

The purpose of this paper is to examine briefly the issue of presuppositions, interpretational method, and their effect on the

development of doctrine. Because of the many varied methods of interpreting Scripture,⁷ this study will limit itself to an investigation of some of the major presuppositions of two currently popular hermeneutical methods being used in Adventism, i.e. historical-critical approach and historical-biblical approach,⁸ spelling out their effects upon the formulation of a doctrine of cosmology as found in the book of Ephesians.⁹ This will be done by (1) examining one of the major presuppositions undergirding the aforementioned hermeneutical methods, (2) determining if and/or how this presupposition has affected the formulation of a doctrine of cosmology ("great controversy" for Adventists) as expressed in the book of Ephesians, (3) drawing out the implications of the results of each method's interpretation of the cosmological language of Ephesians for faith and preaching, and (4) deriving some conclusions about the use of hermeneutical methods and the formulation of SDA doctrine. Our goal is to determine whether or not Seventh-day Adventists can use hermeneutical methods apart from the presuppositions that are associated with that method.

Hermeneutical Presuppositions

The Historical-Critical Approach to Scripture. One of the most controversial points in historical-critical methodology lies in its theological and historical assumptions expressed by Ernst Troeltsch. Troeltsch asserts that religious tradition must be subjected to historical criticism. This means that in the field of religion, we can only; (1) see religious truth in terms of probability and not as absolute, (2) utilize present experiences and occurrences as the criteria for the possibility that something could take place in the past, and (3) interrelate all historico-religious phenomena as causes and effects.¹⁰ The implication is that all knowledge and/or truth is historically conditioned.¹¹ There is no absolute truth.

However, this creates a tension within theology. It does not account or allow for the historic supernaturalistic understanding of biblical history. Rather, biblical history is set within an unbroken historical continuum without intrusions or "interference" from beyond this world.¹² Therefore, it excludes God as a causative factor in history.¹³

As a result of this, historical-critical scholars hold that the

Bible is exclusively the words of men, i.e. that it is strictly a historical document.¹⁴ One interprets the Bible, therefore, in the same sense that one "interprets" other human books.¹⁵ Hence, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon the need to avoid being controlled by the presuppositions of faith. Consequently, such biblical events as a virgin birth or resurrection from the dead, which cannot be historically verified, are *ipso facto* excluded from serious consideration when interpreting biblical history.¹⁶ The working of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Scriptures is hardly mentioned because it does not belong to the normal categories of critical inquiry. Much is said, however, about the human authors since they wrote what we have in Scripture.¹⁷ The assumption that history is a closed continuum without supernatural intervention has led historical-criticism to emphasize that the Bible contains the words of men which are to be solely understood in the context of human history rather than as divinely-inspired propositions of truth given by God.

The Historical-Biblical Approach to Scripture. In contrast to the historical critical approach, the historical biblical method holds that there is a divine revelatory dimension in biblical history. Since the Bible is the revealed Word of God, one must make room for the supra-historical dimension of divine activity, i.e., that the supernatural invades and intervenes in this world's affairs.¹⁸

Because God can and does intervene in human affairs, scholars using the historical biblical approach believe that the Bible is in its entirety the Word of God which has been given in the language of men. They assume that God has revealed himself in history by both deeds and words. History is the vehicle of the divine self-revelation of God.¹⁹ The Bible is the Word of God which has been given under God's inspiration.²⁰ This implies that one cannot ignore the historical context of Scripture because that context is foundational to comprehending its basic message. But, the determinative factor in understanding Scripture is that God gave his revelation of truth in the Bible through men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:20, 21).

Obviously, each of the foundational presuppositions of the foregoing methods is different and cannot be harmonized with one another. The former holds an anti-supernaturalistic assumption of

history as a closed continuum while the latter emphasizes that God does work in human history. The first sees the Bible as a merely historical document comprised of the words of men whereas the second takes the Bible as divinely inspired, written by men who were guided directly by the Holy Spirit. The question then arises as to whether the foundational presuppositions of both methods affect Biblical interpretation and the formulation of doctrine, and if so, how? We will attempt to answer this question by examining how each method approaches some of the basic tenets of cosmology found in the book of Ephesians.

The Cosmology of Ephesians

It has been said that the modern interpreter works in a very different historical and contextual milieu than the biblical writer. The modes of thought about the universe in ancient times are very different from our modern scientific world-view.²¹ This raises the question of how to understand the New Testament, written many centuries ago in an ancient language and culture, so that it might have relevance for the twentieth-century person.²² The problem is particularly acute when discussing the world-view (cosmology) of the book of Ephesians with its account of "principalities and powers" (1:21; 3:10; 6:11-12), the "prince of the power of the air" (2:2) and its view of the "devil" (6:11-12). We will now, in the light of their presuppositions, attempt to see how both the historical-critical method and the historical-biblical method approach Scripture and interpret the cosmological language of Ephesians. Our goal is to determine whether or not their presuppositions have affected the formulation of a doctrine of cosmology and if so, how?

Ephesian Cosmology in Historical Criticism. As we have already seen, though, historical criticism has attempted to solve the question of how to understand the cosmology of the NT, within its milieu which is said to be so different from our modern world. It holds the words recorded in Scripture to be in fact the words of men. One must, therefore, get behind the mind of the ancient community and discover what the intent of the authors was and then attempt apply truth to the needs of the person living in the twentieth century. This has led the critic to take a more existential approach when explaining the cosmology of Ephesians.

Dibelius' work *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus* (English *The World of Ghosts in Paul's Belief*²³) has contributed significantly to the current trend of treating the Ephesian statements on the powers as irrelevant to the modern world. They are to be either demythologized or dismissed.²⁴ This has resulted in the powers and authorities of Eph 1:21 being interpreted as names for indeterminate powers hostile to man's best interests. They represent such "modern" ideas as hate, prejudice, racism, nationalism, etc.²⁵ Accordingly, modern authors represented, for example, by Walter Wink²⁶ view the cosmic powers (Eph 1:21) as the inner spiritual essence or *Gestalt* of an institution or state or system rather than as spiritual beings.²⁷

In regard to the "prince of the power of the air," the historical critic maintains that this terminology represents the evil power or force that is working in the world. Satan, therefore, does not have a material existence.²⁸ If he was intended to be designated as the personal ruler of the world, one might expect that he would be described as the "god of this world" in a similar fashion as 2 Cor 4:4.²⁹ Since he is not, the ideas behind the term "prince of the power of the air" are not those of a personal being but those of the deadly enemies of selfishness, envy, hatred, and various kinds of prejudice,³⁰ evil suggestions and desires,³¹ or the immoral conditions from which mankind wishes to be saved.³² What is emphasized is how closely the powers of evil crowd in on human life. So much so is this the case that the very "atmosphere" of human activity is impregnated with this "force" of evil.³³

A similar interpretation holds true for Eph 3:10. While for the writer of Ephesians, these forces may have been real superhuman forces of evil which dominate life, for modern man they are something completely different. They are simply the forces that attempt to wreck human life and undermine its existence, i.e., the senses of insecurity and fear, the absorption in material things, rivalry, race-hatred, and selfishness.³⁴ Some even consider the terminology of Eph 3:10 to be an impressive rhetoric which may have meant as little to the writer of Ephesians as it means to us.³⁵

The previous sentiments are echoed in the interpretation of Eph 6:11-12. The whole conception of the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places must be transported into an entirely

different view of the universe before it can be made relevant to our own day. The phraseology, no doubt, had a mythological significance in NT times which it has lost today. We are told that belief in demons and angels is no longer relevant for our "enlightened age." To give the *pneumatika* (6:12) the meaning of spiritual armies or hosts in the sense of separately existing beings is to depart wholly from the ordinary use of the word in its milieu. Giving up this rendering as untenable, one must translate Eph 6:12 as the spiritual forces or elements of wickedness which function in our world since our own changed cosmology can only admit to a force of evil operating in our world.³⁶ The principalities and powers are only intangible entities and social, economic, historical, or psychic structures or institutions which concretely exist in this world.³⁷ The darkness refers to the moral and intellectual climate of a pagan world which stands over and against the kingdom of God.³⁸ Christians must prepare themselves to fight against these impersonal forces, i.e. the devil's "wiles" and his allies, which consist of all sorts of tricks such as false ideals and prejudices to exercise control over our minds.³⁹ The Christian does not do battle with real spiritual beings but with ideas. One needs the symbols and concepts of the demonic, but not necessarily its cosmological expression implying that they are real beings.⁴⁰

It is here in the terminology "principalities and powers" of Eph 6:11-12 that one particularly notices the distance which separates us from the thought of Ephesians.⁴¹ Since in our time the ideas of spirits and devils are disappearing from our vernacular, the language of Ephesians about the principalities and powers has no meaning for us. The antiquated mythological terminology of Ephesian thought must, therefore, be demythologized or removed in one way or another. For example, Carr is obliged to say that Eph 6:12 is a later addition to the text because it departs from Paul's notion of the world and the Christian life.⁴² Whether the writer of Ephesians conceived of these powers as real beings makes little difference to us. Our task is to get to the essence of the message of Ephesians and what it is saying concerning the work of Christ and man's existence.

The presupposition of historical-criticism that history is a closed continuum which cannot be broken by divine intervention

has led the historical-critic, then, to describe Ephesian cosmology in terms of impersonal evil forces working in our world. The cosmological language or passages are held to be possibly a rhetoric which made little sense even to the original writer, or as a later addition to the text, or as not reflecting a divine reality because it/they do not "fit" with our own modern "scientific" world-view. It is the existential or psychological interpretation of the cosmology of Ephesians which must be underlined.

Ephesian Cosmology in Historical-Biblical Method

The scholars using the historical-biblical approach are also faced with the same problem that the historical critic is, i.e., how to interpret the language of the "principalities and powers" for today's society. And yet, they have taken a completely different stance because of their presuppositions which do not shut God out of the workings in the world.

This approach, from its very onset, assumes that God can and does intervene in human affairs and history. He does this by working through his court of beings (angels), who although only seen by visionaries under extraordinary circumstances, nevertheless exist to execute God's will. These beings are as real as humans. They do exist as evil beings also (Eph 1:21).⁴³ What is clear is that the reference to the "principalities and powers" in Eph 1:21 refers to beings who exist in reality and who affect what goes on in the world.⁴⁴

The same position is taken in regard to the prince of the power of the air who is mentioned in Eph 2:2. God has tenanted the world with innumerable hosts. On the earth, the cohorts of Satan are engaged in their destructive missions against humanity. During the present age, Satan and his demon hosts dominate, pressure, and control every person who is unsaved.⁴⁵ In fact, Eph 2:2 gives a personal emphasis to the solidarity of evil. In other words, the evil person is under the control of a ruler, a supernatural being (Satan) who is hostile to God's redemptive purposes.⁴⁶

This idea is confirmed in Eph 3:10. The powers and principalities are now called the *archais* and the *exousiais*, the abstract plurals referring to concrete beings. In other words, the *archais* and

exousiais are literal beings who actually have authority and rule in this world.⁴⁷

In modern times, the historical-biblical scholar observes, there is a strange phenomenon which exists. Along with the increased disbelief in the existence of the devil is an increased demonic and occultic involvement. Partly because of this dichotomy of modern humanity rejecting the existence of the devil and their increasing involvement in the occult, the biblicist is led to hold that Scripture is clear about Satan's real and personal existence and the fact that he carries out his work of destruction through his invisible demons who are constantly working in the world around us.⁴⁸ We find this sentiment expressed in Eph 6:11-12 where the unseen and invisible world is itself a scene of violent conflict and war. Apparently, throughout the ages, there is combat, antagonism, and conflict of which we are an inexorable part. And, this conflict will continue until the end of the ages.⁴⁹

The historical biblical scholar, then, on the basis of his or her presupposition which is based on the Bible itself maintains the supra-historical dimension, God can and does act in history. This scholar understands the "principalities and powers" to be personal, supernatural intelligences, emissaries of Satan who attempt to influence the world and mankind for ill at all levels. This means that these beings have intellects and wills, can speak and be spoken to, and are capable of purposeful activity. Hence, the Christian is at war with these beings, and especially their ruler, Satan, in a life or death struggle, for Satan and his hosts are attempting to thwart the plan of redemption.⁵⁰

Implications of Presuppositions and Interpretational Method

Thus far we have perused some of the fundamental presuppositions of both the historical-critical and the historical-biblical methods of interpreting Scripture, especially in regard to the cosmological language of Ephesians. The former held, based on certain philosophical notions, that history is an unbroken continuum which cannot allow divine intervention, while the latter held the opposite view, basing it on the Word of God. The Bible for the critic is the words of men while for the historical-biblical scholar it is the Word of God. As a result of the given presupposition, the histori-

cal-critic existentializes or psychologizes the cosmology of Ephesians. The historical-biblical scholar, on the other hand, emphasizes the real nature of our struggle with spiritual beings who are bent on destroying humans. We would now like to draw out some implications of the results of the use of the two methods of interpretation and their presuppositions in determining a doctrine of cosmology for faith and preaching.

Faith

One of the reasons, it seems, for the widespread ignorance and the neglect of the Bible is the failure to study it from the viewpoint of faith. All too often, it is assumed that a serious examination of the Scriptures can only be undertaken when one considers them as historical documents. In a great deal of modern investigation, the Bible is regarded as a mere collection of historical or quasi-historical materials. This can be clearly seen in the examples of interpretation of Ephesians just undertaken with regard to historical critics.

Some maintain that the cosmology of Ephesians is so different from today that we cannot understand it.⁵¹ The conflict between Satan, God, and God's people is seen to be the relic of an ancient mythology and cosmology. What these images really represent are the impersonal forces which impinge upon man's life. The "principalities and powers" then lead one to think in terms of an impersonal God who really cannot act in this world. Thus, the great controversy in which Christ triumphs over Satan and his hosts of evil angels and wicked men no longer has meaning. The so-called "enlightened mind" must accept a more modern scientific cosmology and world view. The text of Scripture should be applied only in the realms of psychology and existence. The "war" on this earth is fought on the couch of the psychiatrist or through the inner resources of men and women themselves. Education and scientific thinking will solve the problems encountered by modern humanity. Faith now resides in the knowledge and advancement of men and women, not in a God who is able to turn the tide of evil in this world.⁵²

As a result, a large number of people find the Scriptures difficult, at best, to understand.⁵³ The only thing that some modern interpretational methods can offer is theories about what the prin-

cialties and powers might have meant, what their source was, and who possibly recorded them. But they cannot determine whether the great controversy is a supernatural event or not nor can they prove or disprove whether Jesus is the Christ who triumphed over the powers or whether he is the one who gives us the power to resist Satan and thus inherit eternal life.⁵⁴ The historical critical method, by invalidating the clarity of the Bible in its rejection of supernatural intervention in this world, has destroyed the certainty of faith. It has made the modern person uncertain of where the living God is speaking because Scripture is not the Word of God but the words of men. And if we do not know where God is speaking, then we can no longer know who is speaking and the question "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" remains unanswered.⁵⁵

It should be noted that the matter of the cosmic war between God and Satan is a matter of great importance in Scripture. Redemption (the great controversy resolved) is a demonstration of God's power and ability before both good and evil angels to save sinners from their sins. Our conflict is with these fallen angels who are continually attempting to hinder our way to salvation and faith in Christ who has died to make all free (Eph 6:12-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22). Satan and his hosts have tried to destroy God's kingdom from the very beginning but will ultimately be overthrown (Rev 20:10-15).⁵⁶

The thought of a personal devil is found in nearly every part of the NT (see, for example, Matt 4:1-11; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-10; 1 John 5:18; and Rev 12:7-9, 17). And although this idea is not popular today, it must be accepted as true because Scripture tells it to be so. The insidiousness of sin and spiritual temptations can hardly be more aptly or more powerfully described than when they are explained in Scripture in terms of the personal agencies who bring such to men and women.⁵⁷ It requires one to have faith to see the great danger besetting us. For we cannot know what biblical authority is nor even what submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ means until we are ready to bend our own opinions, presuppositions, values, mental structures, and methods of interpreting Scripture to what Scripture itself teaches. Our presuppositions and/or methods of interpreting Scripture must not contradict or interfere with the message of the Bible. Where they conflict, it is

we who must change to reflect what Scripture is telling us and not the Bible that must change. Only in this way can one have faith and have that faith grow.

Preaching. Historical-critical scholarship has raised the issue of how the Bible can be understood as a historical document and yet still be used for preaching and worship. If the Bible is, as historical-critical scholarship claims, a book of men's words given at a particular time and place, then how can one find its relevance today? Similarly, if God cannot act in a historical continuum, then what is the "message" of such an ancient historical source?⁵⁸ Is it just an ancient tradition to be expounded?

It would be strange indeed if the scholarly inquiry about Scripture should render accounts of subjects related to divine revelation subject to the same rules of methods that apply to the subjects that have to do with nature or human history.⁵⁹ Yet this is precisely what has happened in regard to the cosmology of Ephesians (great controversy). The players are not real but only general broad principles working themselves out in human history. There is no virgin birth or bodily resurrection because these do not fit into the so-called modern scientific presuppositions of the historical-critical scholars. However, if there is no virgin birth or bodily resurrection, then there is no need to believe in a "great controversy" since that idea goes hand in hand with a mythological cosmology. What is left is a psychological or existential view of Scripture. It is certainly not the Word of God nor the words of Jesus. How then, can one expect to preach repentance to men and women so that they might receive eternal life if the Bible does not teach a great controversy in which there is salvation from sin?

The true test of a preacher is whether the biblical message is proclaimed from Scripture and applied in the lives of those who listen.⁶⁰ The Bible is divinely inspired timeless truth, a timeless universal truth, which breaks through the portals of time and place everywhere and at any time and speaks to the condition of the human heart.⁶¹ But because of a deliberate suspension of personal participation with the text, historical criticism has encouraged a trained incapacity to deal with the real problems actual living persons face in their everyday life.⁶² People find it nearly impossible to respond to the preaching of today because the preaching itself

fails to recognize the biblical Christ whom the church preached as Lord, one who was born to a virgin, actually lived, was crucified, rose from the dead, and is alive today ministering in the heavenly sanctuary. It is only this living Jesus as taught to us by Scripture who provides the decisive and distinctly Christian and biblically faithful interpretation of Scripture and its understanding of the great controversy, or, in other words, redemption.⁶³

Within the church, it is the Bible which should be and is the text for preaching and teaching, for it provides unique access to divine truth, and above all, to Jesus Christ and his triumph over the evil beings attempting to destroy each believer. It is not sufficient if treated as a collection of historical source material or as an anthology of works of literature. It needs to be accepted, studied, and heard as what it claims to be and is, the Word of God, a word which is the power unto life eternal.⁶⁴

Conclusion

As we have previously mentioned, there have been and are some Adventist scholars who would like to adopt historical-criticism, or a modified form of it, claiming that it can be used without accepting all its presuppositions. Even our brief study of only one of the presuppositions of two hermeneutics illustrates the fact that one cannot simply set aside the presuppositions and approach the text from a detached viewpoint and reach objective scientific results quite untainted by assumptions.⁶⁵ An interpretation of Scripture is always oriented towards a specific way of asking questions, towards a specific point of view.⁶⁶ Hence, the philosophical framework within which the theologian and exegete works impinges on how they go about their work, i.e., their methodology.⁶⁷

We have already seen that the presuppositional foundations of historical-criticism, as well as the historical-biblical approach for that matter, has in no small way affected the content of the doctrine of cosmology. Historical-criticism takes an existential approach to the doctrine, which at times approximates an allegorical orientation with a subjectivistic personalist understanding of the cosmological language in the book of Ephesians. The "principalities and powers" are something which can be overcome by more education, more modern scientific thinking, and more self-introspection.

Thus, the control for determining the content of the doctrine of cosmology, or the great controversy, remains in the hands of the individual or subjective, rather than with the objective truth of Scripture. Some Seventh-day Adventists may wish to "update" their allegedly "outdated" view of reality and propose a more "scientific" world-view as they accept the use of the historical-critical method and its resultant conclusions regarding cosmology. Those who do this will also change this foundational Adventist doctrine and will most assuredly bring about changes in other areas.

The acceptance of the historical-critical method, even in whatever modified form, will inevitably mean the acceptance and use of its presuppositions.⁶⁸ And if the presuppositions of the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture are at work when constructing a system of biblical doctrinal beliefs, especially that of cosmology (the great controversy), then we may find ourselves believing, as it presupposes, that it is impossible for God to give changelessly true affirmations of truth. The cumulative effect of this direction of thinking is to lead one towards relativism, pragmatism, and functionalism in theology.⁶⁹ If we are to avoid such a pitfall and build a biblical theology and biblical doctrines, we must reject the anti-supernaturalism that is inherent in the historical-critical method and its resultant view that the Scriptures are solely the words of men since those presuppositions determine, to a great degree, what the content of our doctrine of cosmology will be. There is such a profound linkage between method and presuppositions that to reject the latter means to reject the method itself. It is futile to accept these presuppositions and then hope to build a biblical theology either with the remaining rubble or in the clouds of a noumenal dimension where faith has fled from science.⁷⁰

The victory of Christ over Satan and his hosts can only be understood within the revealed purposes of God and the ongoing fight with those spiritual beings who are attempting to destroy each and every Christian. Christ has triumphed over the "powers" in order that we might have eternal life (Col 2:15).⁷¹ One thing remains irrefutable, however. We cannot be certain about the triumphant God and his victory through Christ over Satan and the principalities and powers unless we believe that our source of information about that great controversy, the Scriptures, is accurate, true,

and is the Word of God and not the words of men. The belief in the truthfulness of God and his ability to intervene in human affairs, to produce miracles such as the virgin birth and the resurrection, and to resurrect Christ bodily from the dead, is the basic presupposition for theology, particularly Seventh-day Adventist theology today.⁷² Any hermeneutical method which is based upon presuppositions that exclude God's activity in this world and views the Bible as a mere historical document or as the words of men instead of the Word of God must be rejected since one cannot accept these presuppositions without affecting the content of doctrine. Hence, Seventh-day Adventism cannot accept the use of historical-criticism, even in a modified form, for then Adventist doctrine would no longer be Adventist.

Endnotes

1 See for example Raymond Cottrell, "Sanctuary Debate: A Question of Method," *Spectrum* 10 (March 1980):16-26; John Brunt, "A Parable of Jesus as a Clue to Biblical Interpretation," *Spectrum* 13 (Dec 1982):35-43; Larry Herr, "Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective," *Spectrum* 13 (Dec 1982):51-62; and Jerry Gladson, "Taming Historical Criticism: Adventist Biblical Scholarship in the Land of the Giants," *Spectrum* 18 (April 1988):19-34, where on page 23 he writes: "It is not necessary to accept the narrow Troeltschian model of historical criticism to make use of this method. We can divorce historical criticism from rationalist presuppositions and employ it in the service of our Lord."

2 In fact, the question of the use of historical-criticism was one of the catalysts which brought about Consultation II. See J. Robert Spangler, "Why Consultation II?" *Ministry*, Feb 1992, pp. 26-29. The agitation on the issue became the basis for a study commission on the methods of Bible study. It produced a document which was voted as an official action at the 1986 Annual Council. For the text, see "Methods of Bible Study," *Ministry*, April 1987, pp. 22-24. This action took the strong position that Seventh-day Adventists could not accept the historical-critical method without also adopting its presuppositions.

3 Norman Geisler and Paul Funberg, *Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 70. The term used in this study is "presupposition." It can be defined as something which is assumed or supposed in advance. It is an antecedent condition which tends to conclude something before an investigation is commenced. Josh McDowell, *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (n.p.: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1975), p. 3. While the words "prejudice" and "presuppositions" have often been used as synonyms, their meaning is not exactly the same. The word "presupposition" is used here to indicate both the philosophical and theological starting positions taken by a person and the personal factors which affect the judgment of the interpreter. See A. Nygren, *Meaning and Method: Prolegomena to a Scientific Philosophy of Religion and a Scientific Theology* (London, 1972), pp. 160-162, and Graham Stanton, "Presuppositions in

New Testament Criticism," in *New Testament Interpretation* (hereafter referred to as *NTI*), ed. I. Howard Marshall (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1977), p. 61.

The question of presuppositions arises in all scientific, historical, and theological, and interpretational studies (Stanton, p. 60). In fact, the conservatives of the nineteenth century were keenly aware of the role of presuppositions in scholarship long before it was fashionable to talk about the sociology of knowledge spoken of by such scholars as Michael Polyani or Thomas Kuhn. Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 23.

4 Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1987), p. 16.

5 Stanton, p. 64, and McDowell, p. 3. See also Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis, *Integrative Theology, Vol. 1: Knowing the Ultimate Reality of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 35, and Anthony Thistleton, "The New Hermeneutics," in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics* (hereafter referred to as *GCH*), ed. Donald McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 92.

6 Donald McKim, "Introduction," in *GCH*, xvii-xiv, and D. Gaede, *Where the Gods Dwell: On Understanding the Human Condition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 91. As Krister Stendahl has written, "We can smile when we see how earlier generations of Biblical scholars peddled Kantian, Hegelian, or Ritschelian ideas, all the time subjectively convinced that they were objective scholars who only stated the facts. All of this naturally calls for caution. . ." (*Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], pp. 21-22).

7 For an extended treatment of the various methodological and hermeneutical choices confronting the modern interpreter of Scripture, see Anthony Thistleton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

8 In the past, the historical-biblical method has been called historical-grammatical method. But the latter term, in my opinion is more limited because it primarily focuses on the structure and use of linguistics in biblical interpretation. Context and other factors have been somewhat eclipsed. For this reason, I have adopted the term historical biblicism without implying that the method is any more or less correct than historical-criticism. See Richard Davidson, "Revelation/Inspiration in the Old Testament: A Critique of Alden Thompson's 'Incarnational Model,'" in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration*, ed. Frank Holbrook and Leo van Dolsen (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), pp. 105-115.

9 For Seventh-day Adventists, we are referring to what is known as the "great controversy" theme. What we are interested in here is the major presuppositions which each method holds and how that has affected the formulation of doctrine. We will not, therefore, delve into the various nuances of each method, nor how they carry out their program, but to examine the positions taken in regard to the cosmological language of Ephesians as expressed in the literature of both approaches.

10 Ernst Troeltsch, "Über historische und dogmatische Methode in der Theologie (On Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology)," *Zur religiösen Lage, Religionsphilosophie und Ethic* (Tübingen, 1922), pp. 729-753. See also Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 55-56, and Daniel Harrington, "Biblical Hermeneutics in Recent Discussions," in *GCH*, 15.

11 Krentz, 56.

12 George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 45-49. See also Peter W. Mackey, "The Coming Revolution: The New Literary Approach to New Testament Interpretation," in *GCH*, 265, and McDowell, pp. 5-7.

13 Krentz, p. 58. The implication that can be drawn here is that one can deny even the possibility of miracles occurring (*Ibid.*, 58). As a result of this, Bultmann propagated his famous program of "demythologization" which rejected an upper-world view in favor of a this-world subjective view of history which led to a subjective view of faith. See, for example, Walter Kaiser Jr., "Legitimate Hermeneutics," in *GCH*, 133, and Donald Guthrie, "The Historical and Literary Criticism of the New Testament," in *Biblical Criticism* (hereafter referred to as *BC*) by R. K. Harrison, et. al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 94.

14 Ladd, p. 39. Hence, the person who believes the Bible to be the inspired word of God cannot be scholarly or critical (9). See also Krentz, p. 66, and Patrick Keifert, "Mind Reader and Maestro: Models for understanding Biblical Interpreters," in *GCH*, p. 222.

15 Krentz, p. 62.

16 Ladd, p. 31. OT scholarship becomes the study of the ancient near east whereas NT scholarship belongs to the study of the Graeco-Roman world. Arthur Wainwright, *Beyond Biblical Criticism* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 2-3.

17 Guthrie, p. 110. This has led modern critical scholarship to posit that the Gospel records are unreliable. As such, they do not offer us the words of Jesus but the words of the early church about Jesus. The implication is that the NT no longer has any truth to speak to us. See Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), pp. 69-73.

18 Ladd, pp. 33, 40 and LaSor, pp. 52-53. This historical context requires that the exegete deals with words, syntax, and historical backgrounds in order to be able to fully understand the message of Scripture (*Ibid.*, pp. 51-52).

19 Ladd, pp. 12, 26-27.

20 Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), pp. 9-10.

21 Harrington, p. 17, and Wainwright, pp. 115-116.

22 Donald McKim, "Introduction," in *GCH*, xiv.

23 *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1909).

24 See Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, 2 vols., in *The Anchor Bible*, ed. William Albright and David Freedman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 174.

25 Leslie Mitton, *Ephesians*, in *The New Century Bible Commentary*, ed. Ronald Clements and Matthew Black (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1976), p. 72, and Lincoln, p. 64.

26 *Naming the Powers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), especially pp. 3-35, 60-64, 151-163.

27 Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, in *Word Commentary*, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), p. 64.

28 Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983 [reprint]), p. 69.

29 T. K. Abbot, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, in *International Critical Commentary*, ed. Charles Briggs, Samuel Driver, and Alfred Plummer (New York: Scribners Sons, 1897), p. 40.

30 G. H. Thompson, *The Letters of Paul to the Ephesians, to the Colossians,*

and to Philemon, in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, ed. P. Ackroyd, A. Leaney, and J. W. Packer (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), p. 44.

31 Abbott, p. 42.

32 Edwin Freed, *The New Testament: A Critical Introduction* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing, 1986), p. 330.

33 George Butterick, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 10, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), p. 640.

34 Thompson, p. 57. This represents a psychological approach to the text but one, it seems, is not able to hear the Word of the Lord.

35 Mitton, p. 127.

36 Abbott, p. 183, and Butterick, pp. 736-738.

37 Barth, 2:800-801.

38 Butterick, p. 738.

39 Thompson, p. 94. See also Freed, 332, and Walter F. Taylor, *Ephesians* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), p. 87.

40 Butterick, p. 738.

41 J. Merle Rife, *The Nature and Origin of the New Testament* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1975), p. 39.

42 W. Carr, *Angels and Principalities* (Cambridge: University Press, 1981), esp. pp. 93-111. See also P. T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context* (hereafter referred to as *BITC*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 119-128.

43 Barth, pp. 181-182, 154. It is possible, Barth posits, that these principalities and powers mentioned in the Pauline epistles include the demons, that according to the Synoptic Gospels, especially Mark, were expelled by Jesus (p. 173).

44 William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary - Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 101, and Lincoln, p. 64.

45 Hendriksen, p. 114, and John MacArthur, *Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), p. 56.

46 Lincoln, p. 95, and MacArthur, p. 57.

47 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing, 1961), p. 481.

48 MacArthur, pp. 338-343. In Eph 6:12, Paul, instead of writing *pneumata*, substantivizes the adjective so that it does not denote the spiritual principles of the Satanic powers but Satan and his hosts of spiritual beings with a reality of existence (Lenski, p. 661).

49 W. A. Criswell, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p. 292. It seems that this is the only place in the Pauline corpus (Eph 6:12) where believers are explicitly said to be in a battle against evil personal beings (Lincoln, p. 443).

50 O'Brien, pp. 131-141. This view seems to have the support of Scripture as a whole (see, for example, Rev 12:7-17, Dan 7-12, Job 1-2, etc.).

51 O'Brien, p. 131.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

53 Wainwright, pp. 8-9.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

55 Maier, pp. 48-49.

56 MacArthur, p. 49.

57 Foulkes, pp. 172-173.

58 Krentz, pp. 66, 72, and McKim, xiv.

59 Maier, p. 53.

60 Stendahl, p. 55.

61 LaSor, p. 55, and David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Precritical Exegesis," in *GCH*, p. 65.

62 Thistleton, p. 90.

63 Wainwright, pp. 18-19.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

65 Stanton, p. 65. An interpreter, then, already brings to the text a certain amount of cultural and linguistic baggage even before he or she reads the text. See D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 128, and Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983-1985), p. 26. As Gerhard Hasel reminds us "Absolute Objectivity is impossible . . . for if the interpreter knows the biblical languages, for example, he obviously has learned the meaning of words and gained an understanding of grammar and syntax which generations of scholars have helped to determine." (*Understanding the Living Word of God* [Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1980], p. 77). This implies that the attempt to interpret the NT from a detached, neutral standpoint with a scientific and presuppositionless method is impossible (Stanton, pp. 65-66).

66 Otto Kaiser and Werner Kümmel, *Exegetical Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 43. In fact, according to Stanton (p. 65), behind every question asked of the NT lies the inquirer's presuppositions. The problem one encounters in presuppositions is that one is often unaware of the basic premises that guide one's life. This is due to the fact that they are almost unconsciously determined at an early age through culture and our families (Geisler and Funberg, p. 70).

67 Erickson, pp. 66-67. This is especially true of the biblical interpreter because the presuppositions adopted consciously or unconsciously are far more influential in the NT than disagreements over method (Stanton, p. 60).

68 Most recently, historical-criticism's validity for interpreting Scripture has been questioned precisely on the point of its presuppositions. See, for example, Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), and Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity . . . What?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 103-150.

69 Demarest, p. 35.

70 Edmund Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), p. 13.

71 O'Brien, p. 133.

72 Ryrie, p. 16.

Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 4/1 (1993):65-93.

Article copyright © 1993 by Norman R. Gulley.

DISPENSATIONAL BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION: ITS PAST AND PRESENT HERMENEUTICAL SYSTEMS¹

By Norman R. Gulley

Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists

The Past

Modern liberal, progressive scholars divide biblical data through the historical-critical method and its constituent procedures. Dispensationalists, also a modern phenomenon,² divide biblical history into separate and unrelated dispensations. Though different, these methods share a common result: the Bible is robbed of its full right to be its own interpreter (*sola scriptura*). This can be a real danger for some Adventists as they focus on the alleged differences in Scripture rather than being informed by biblical unity, and who view the Bible as a mere casebook.³ We would do well to ponder Grant Osborne's perceptive description of the transformational power of modern historical criticism:

Due to the development of the historical-critical method and of modern theology . . . this view of infallible propositional authority (of Scripture) has collapsed and been replaced by an understanding of Scripture as a symbolic expression of God's redemptive activity, which must be 're-described' in functional terms for our day. In short, in this approach the Bible ceases to contain a revealed set of doctrines that must be believed but rather becomes a *case-book* that provides models to follow in constructing a modern Christianity.⁴

Modernistic methods, such as the historical-critical method, Dispensational and Casebook methods, may construct "a modern Christianity," but only at the expense of biblical authority and