

THE TOTALITY OF SCRIPTURE VERSUS MODERNISTIC LIMITATIONS

By Gerhard F. Hasel
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University

The topic of the totality of Scripture involves the authority of the complete Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God.

The authority of the Bible as Scripture is a topic of supreme relevance today, because the Bible's full authority is basically rejected and extensively reinterpreted by many modern Christians. Seventh-day Adventists, however, have correctly maintained that the Bible is the Word of God. It carries its own authority. The self-testimony of Scripture maintains that the Bible is entirely the Word of God. Yet there is disturbing evidence that even some Seventh-day Adventists are not immune to trends and approaches to Scripture that limit the Bible's authority for faith, life, and practice.

Two major views in modernistic thought¹ especially limit the use and authority of the Bible. One view (represented by most liberal and progressive² modern theologians) holds that the Bible is but a human word from the past which is as culturally conditioned as is any other document from the past or the present. This human conditioning means that the Bible is limited in the same way as any other human piece of writing. Harvard University theologian Gordon D. Kaufman makes a

typical statement of this position in words surprising to a person who accepts the Bible as the Word of God:

The Bible no longer has unique authority for Western man. It has become a great but archaic monument in our midst. It is a reminder of where we once were—but no longer are. It contains glorious literature, important historical documents, exalted ethical teachings, but it is no longer the word of God.³

The Bible, when understood this way, no longer functions with authority in the believer's life or in the church. Yet it allows for some principles of abiding value to be drawn out of the Bible as meaningful for modern man. These principles are taken from the Bible as from a piece of "classic" literature.⁴ The Bible is used in a functional way so as to translate some of its values and adjust them to modern standards.⁵

A second, more subtle view is held by others (particularly neo-orthodox theologians and those influenced by them). It supports modernistic, evolutionary hypotheses of science, sociology, anthropology, and other areas of study. It supposes that parts of the Bible may become at times the Word of God, depending on how they speak to a person in the modern situation.⁶ The Bible is narrative or belongs to the category of story, setting forth various patterns or models of action that can provide some guidance for today. This view, however, finds in the Bible no specific instruction or direct word that must be followed today. The Bible in this second view is again functional in purpose without giving binding directions. There are, of course, multiple variations within and among these major modernistic views.⁷

These positions, or related ones, are designated by their followers as either "liberal," "progressive," "modernistic," or the like. For our purpose the designation or label is not as important as the common denominator, namely the decided rejection of the Bible as the Word of God. A selective usage of the Bible may be maintained with perceived adjustable levels of authority. In one way or another modernity and its culture are lifted up to the level of highest norm in the interpretation

of Scripture. The Bible's inherent authority that remains valid for all times and in all places is compromised, curtailed, or fully rejected in all these schemes. The result is the subjective theological pluralism that exists all around us.

A relativizing of the Bible is achieved by typical historical critical scholars. They treat the Bible as a purely human production. It is customary for them to engage in the construction of pluralism in the Bible itself.⁸ For example, they claim that the nature of Christ in the four Gospels is so diverse that it is disharmonious and frequently contradictory; or, that the concept of salvation by faith in some letters of Paul is contradicted in other letters denied to him; or, that an alleged salvation with works is taught in the New Testament whereas Paul taught salvation by faith through grace. Thus the Bible is depicted as containing real pluralism in theology. This argument, in turn, is used to justify modern theological and even denominational pluralism. The end result is that the Bible's own positions are claimed to be relativistic without containing final authority and non-negotiable truth.

Such reinterpretations have brought about new theologies and created new movements and new denominations. The relativizing of the Bible is the cornerstone of modern congregationalism and its accompanying breakdown of the unity of the church. All in all, pluralism in theology, so prized by progressives everywhere today, inevitably is joined by pluralism in faith, pluralism in the practice of worship, and pluralism in lifestyle.

A major threat to Seventh-day Adventists is a departure from the totality of the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Such departure threatens to change the direction of the church. It undermines that which informs and gives direction to the mission of the Advent movement. It accommodates the Adventist church to the world. It tends to make us no longer simply "in" the world but part "of" the world. However, in order to fulfill our God-given mission for the end time in which we live, we need to continue to build on the sure foundation

of the Word of God as given to us in the entire Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Scripture Limited in Authority

How much of Scripture will those who would take a limited view accept? What principle or principles of selection will they support? These seem to be strange questions to ask of Seventh-day Adventists. Of course, the natural response is that all Adventists accept the Bible in its entirety with uniform authority for faith and life. Adventists of today need to maintain a high view of Scripture regardless of how much cultural pressure is exerted on them.

There are actions and practices in the Bible, it is claimed, that "embody God's ideal for a church in a particular time and place," and these "are to be observed." This sounds good, but what restrictions are implied? The key in this view seems to be that there are no longer universally valid actions or practices outlined in the Bible without being evaluated on what may be "an ideal for a church in a particular time and place."

But who decides what remains applicable "in a particular time and place"? That decision is obviously to be made in this case on the basis of what modern, cultural norms in different places and times expect or demand. It becomes evident that the key is not a sure "Thus saith the Lord" but a qualified "Thus demands my culture," namely, "in a particular place and time." In this way culture stands above the supreme authority of the Bible. The guiding Word of God is replaced by the ever changing needs of "particular times and places."

The questions must be raised, What is "God's ideal" for a particular church? What is His ideal for any "particular time and place?" On what foundations can a choice be made as to the right place and the right time for "God's ideal" to function, and what warrant is there for the claim that there is in the first place something like "God's ideal?" What God has revealed in the Bible is for real and is not to be made into some kind of abstract ideal. The Bible is filled with what has been

called by many Biblically oriented thinkers a Biblical realism. This realism is universal in design and purpose and is of divine origin. There is truth that is absolute, because it is of divine origin.

For many centuries the majority of Christians have taken the position that the Sabbath does not need to be kept at particular times and places. The seventh-day Sabbath was God's ideal for the Jewish dispensation. The majority view of today is that Sabbath keeping is not God's ideal for the Christian dispensation. In this case socio-cultural norms and experiences have determined what "God's ideal" is with regard to a day of rest for given churches at particular times and places. According to this view God's ideal is for us to rest simply on one day in seven, but not on the specific "seventh day." The argument that the specificity of the "seventh day" is for a particular time and place but the ideal of "one day of rest in seven" is for other times and places is plainly contradicted in the Bible.

Much could be said to indicate the inadequacies of the notion that Christians are called to make a selection of Biblical injunctions on the basis of time and place. The fact that the sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ certainly is not based on a principle of selection based on time and place. It is likewise not based on some abstract ideal. The statement of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, "You have heard that it was said, . . . but I say unto you" (Matt 5:27-28, and repeated several times) is prefaced by the unqualified affirmation, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matt 5:17). Jesus' affirmation is that he does not abolish or destroy the Law and the Prophets, that is, the Old Testament. He also emphasizes that none of the commandments shall be broken (see vs 18-20). What Jesus came to abolish were the unbearable man-made traditions of the rabbis,⁹ not the revelation of God and Himself as given in the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Word of God in its entirety from Genesis to Revelation is "the only rule of faith and doctrine," writes Ellen G. White.¹⁰ She also maintains that, ". . . the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."¹¹ The Word of God does not contain any principle of selection. Speaking of our own period she says, "In our time there is a wide departure from their [the Scripture's] doctrines and precepts, and there is a need to return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty."¹² These counsels from the pen of the "messenger to the remnant" are refreshing and pertinent for God's people in the end time.

From the larger arena of history we can gain a better and broader perspective of the issue of the totality of Scripture as the Word of God. This seems essential because the danger is that history may repeat itself. Could this happen even in the Advent movement?

The first great heretic of Christianity appeared in the second century of the Christian church. It was Marcion of Sinope (died ca. 160). He claimed that there was complete discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between the picture of God in the Old Testament which Marcion interpreted as depicting a God of wrath and the picture of the God of love revealed by Jesus Christ contained in much of the New Testament. He also made a sharp distinction between Israel and the Church.¹³ Incidentally, the unusual emphasis on the love of God in some segments of Christianity, and within recent years also in certain parts of Adventist thought, are not new at all. Biblical aspects of God, which include divine wrath¹⁴ to which both Old and New Testaments consistently testify, should not be reinterpreted in such a way as to turn the Bible against itself. Some of these new trends have deeper historical roots than many realize.

Marcion argued that the God of wrath depicted in the Old Testament has no place in the Christian Bible.¹⁵ Marcion

actually made his own Bible, rejecting the Old Testament and large parts of the New.

There is a "Marcionite strain," it is correctly noted,¹⁶ even in our own time. We need to recall a famous quote from the major theologian of early twentieth century liberal theology. A. von Harnack stated the liberal position as follows:

To have cast aside the Old Testament in the second century was an error which the church rightly rejected; to have retained it in the sixteenth century was a fate which the Reformation was not yet able to avoid; but still to keep it after the nineteenth century as a canonical document within Protestantism results from a religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.¹⁷

In a similar way the influential New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann, the embodiment of mid-twentieth century liberal scholarship, insisted on the "miscarriage" of the Old Testament.¹⁸ He and others who depreciate the Old Testament have been charged with Marcionite tendencies.¹⁹ This does not seem to be out of order. Many modern thinkers and theologians depreciate the Old Testament and diminish its authority for various reasons of their own.²⁰

Not too long ago John Bright, an Old Testament scholar of Presbyterian background, notes insightfully that there is not a little Marcionism in the Christian churches of today. He observed,

That is to say, there are many of our people who have never heard of the name of Marcion before and who would be horrified to learn of the company they are in but who nevertheless use the Old Testament in a distinctly Marcionist manner.²¹

We shall have to remind ourselves that the Old Testament was the Bible of Jesus Christ and the apostles. The Old Testament in its entirety and in all its parts is, and needs to remain, part of normative Scripture.²²

How true and important all parts of the Bible are for Seventh-day Adventists, particularly today when there are attempts to restrict the teaching of creation in Genesis 1-2 to the reductionistic claim that all it says is that there is a God

who created. If this reductionism is true, then Adam and Eve were not historical persons and real beings made by God. The event of the fall of mankind would not stand either. If God wished merely to say that He is Creator, then He did not need to tell us "how" He created the world, "when" He created the world, "what" He created, and in what way.²³ But he did precisely that and extensively so in Gen 1-2 and in other parts of both the Old and New Testaments. How could we fully understand, adequately comprehend, and attractively present the Bible of Jesus and the apostles, if we Adventists, who are historically known as the "people of the Book," were to adopt the new reductionistic claims of modernists and progressives and become known as the "people of a booklet" of our own making?

Progressive Revelation as Unfolding Truth

Progressive revelation is a concept with rich and variegated meanings in Christian thought. The idea of "revelation" means intrinsically the divine disclosure and unfolding of what was previously unknown by humans. The idea of "progressive" has normally meant a progression of the truth in an ever greater unfolding and expansion of that which was previously revealed. Thus "progressive revelation" has historically meant the continuing unfolding of God's eternal truth that was initially revealed by divine revelation.

In Genesis 1-3, where there is a sharp distinction between Creator and creature, Adam and Eve at first enjoyed intimate fellowship with the Creator (1:26; 2:7-25). God revealed to the first couple, and thus to humanity, by His own initiative and through His own revelatory word, knowledge about himself as Creator, His creative acts, and the reality of continuing fellowship with God. This means that epistemology (the origin and study of knowledge) begins and has its roots in and through divine revelation as far back as the Garden of Eden.

In the course of time the revelation from God was written down by inspired writers aided and guided by the Holy Spirit.

The inspired prophets wrote down God's revelation in sixty-six books which make up the canonical Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. God, of course, issued by Himself, writing with His own finger, the Ten Commandments (see Ex 24:12; 32:15-16; 34:1). Deuteronomy 28:58 refers to "all the words of this law that are written in this book." At a later time the Lord commanded Jeremiah, "Write in a book all the words that I have spoken to you" (Jer 30:2). He also commanded, "Take a scroll, and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you" (Jer. 36:2). Through the information provided by this special revelation of God we know the past, understand the present, and are informed about the future. A knowledge of the future falls outside the sphere of normal human knowledge. Isaiah 41:22 affirms this in its challenge to the heathen gods, "Let them tell us what is to happen . . . or declare to us the things to come." Only the true God can tell us by His own divine revelation what is to be in the future and what future there is to be. In the Bible alone are we given such knowledge by the revelation which God provided to His servants, the prophets. Thus in a continuous chain of revelation God unfolded His will and purposes. This continuous flow of divine self-disclosure is a continuous unfolding and enlargement of the body of truth given before. Later revelation does not contradict earlier revelation but expands and enlarges it. For a long time many Christians have called this unfolding of truth "progressive revelation." Used in this sense, the designation is proper and appropriate.

As is typical of all liberal (or progressive) theology, concepts of Scripture and theology are redefined and given new meaning. While using the same language and having the ring of what is true and correct, liberals use Biblical and theological concepts to say something different. Thus the designation "progressive revelation" refers, when liberal (or progressive) scholars use it, a vastly different concept from what it used to stand for.

"Progressive revelation" is used in liberalism as a desig-

nation for a "unilinear evolutionary progress"²⁴ in the development of religion. Liberals claim to find a development of Biblical faith throughout Biblical times based on the concept of an evolution from primitive ideas to advanced ones.

This evolutionary concept "was accepted with enthusiasm by virtually the whole of the scholarly world."²⁵ "Progressive revelation" thus perceived uses a developmental approach with later ideas seen as more advanced and thus superior to earlier ones on the same subject. Seen in this way, the earlier ideas in the Bible can be and indeed should be discarded. In the view of liberal theology today they are outdated.

F. W. Farrar, the well-known author of a widely read history of Biblical interpretation, expresses the "progressive revelation" view of modernism in a typical way. While many others²⁶ could be cited in its support, we are wise to listen to Farrar's precise words:

Is it not enough that, to us, the test of God's word is the teaching of Him who is the Word of God? Is it not an absolutely plain and simple rule that anything in the Bible which teaches or seems to teach anything which is not in accordance with the love, gentleness, the truthfulness, the purity of Christ's gospel, is not God's word to us, however clearly it stands on the Bible page?²⁷

For Farrar and all who agree with him "progressive revelation" contains a "principle of selection" built on the concept that "God's word" is neither the Bible in its entirety nor even the New Testament in its entirety, but something that is "in accordance with love."

Does it not sound inviting to lift out a certain aspect of the teachings of Jesus as the highest and only norm for faith? Have we not heard in our own time something similar to this, voices encouraging us to use love as the single guiding principle for life and church unity?

Let me go back to Farrar for an additional point in his argument. He continues as follows,

Have we not the Spirit of God to guide us, or has He abdicated His

office since the days of St. John, or, at any rate, since the days of St. Augustine?²⁸

Farrar's argument here is clear. The goal and crown of "progressive revelation" in the liberal and progressive understanding of Scripture resides ultimately beyond the Old and New Testaments. It resides in an alleged current guidance of the Holy Spirit. And this guidance, it is claims, can be totally different from what the Scriptures say. Here the final outcome of the liberal understanding of "progressive revelation" is directly enunciated.

Is it appropriate to ask, Does the Holy Spirit at a later time ever deny what the same Holy Spirit has spoken about at an earlier time? Is the Holy Spirit "progressive" in this sense? Does the Holy Spirit advance His views in such a way that a more recent word does away with an earlier one and the more recent substitutes for the earlier one? Does the Holy Spirit today say something different from what He has said in the Bible, because our situation or time is different? Is it possible that based on cultural settings the Holy Spirit adjusts or accommodates Himself in such a way that what He said at one time could be contradictory to what He says at another time? When this issue was raised during the lifetime of Ellen G. White, she stated unhesitatingly, "It is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word."²⁹ She continued to maintain that

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested.³⁰

A major Adventist leader, George I. Butler, who served twice as General Conference President in the last century, is known to have advocated "differences in degrees" of inspiration³¹ on the basis of which he made distinctions in levels of authority in Scripture. These and other variations of the principle of selectivity for levels of authority in Scripture are too familiar to need repetition here.³² Adventists in the past

have not followed these innovations and neither should Adventists do so today.

It is claimed by some persons at present that since our time is not that of the New Testament—or even that of the Victorian Age—the Holy Spirit is guiding our church in our time to make choices of the highest and best. Some suggest that we can make our selections from Scripture according to the norms that hold supreme value in the church's thinking and experience of today. It is suggested that our church can make decisions or take positions that will go beyond the Bible and may even contravene what the Bible explicitly states. This is a widely held view in Christianity at large but is it the way for us to go? Should we go down the seemingly attractive path of the liberal definition of "progressive revelation," or, perhaps, follow a culture-oriented, pragmatically relativized principle of selection of our own making? Is the Holy Spirit provided to assist us in such procedures of selection, change, or contravention? Shall our church go against the Scripture, even if it is for but a little time, or disregard some Bible principles as "time and place" may demand? Should the Seventh-day Adventist church ever follow this path, we must recognize that our church has used modern culture to elevate itself to stand above Scripture. This model of church authority over Scripture authority is best known in Roman Catholicism. Is it not valid to ask whether the "spirit" manifested by this way of doing things has anything to do with the Holy Spirit?

The relevance of the following words is penetrating: "The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."³³ If any human beings "pass judgment upon what is divine and what is human [in the Bible], they are working without the counsel of God,"³⁴ for "the union of the divine and the human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible."³⁵ The Bible by itself is Scripture in the form of the "union of the divine and the human," putting it beyond any

principle of selectivity, or any other approach, that determines what is of abiding importance and what is of supposed temporary importance. When the Bible is kept together in unity, then the community of faith, the church, will be kept together in unity as well.

Scripture Selectivity and Pluralism

The concept of selectivity from and in the Bible leads to pluralism. Pluralism is the mode of the present. Even such an influential reformer as Martin Luther had a principle of selection. He fought valiantly against the superior norms of tradition, the magisterium, and Church Councils as regards the role of the Bible for faith and life. The battle cry "the Bible only," *sola Scriptura*, rang out and determined the fate of the Reformation. Yet despite these advances, Luther himself used a principle of selection to decide what is superior in Scripture. "*Was Christum treibet*," translated "what points to [teaches, or manifests] Christ," became his principle of selectivity. He explained, "That which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if a Peter or Paul taught it."³⁶ Luther called this principle of selection the "Christological" principle and used it as a "canon within the canon,"³⁷ a rule within the totality of Scripture, to determine which parts of the Bible point to Christ. Those parts which he felt point to Christ are the true Scripture. What Luther found to be deficient, he could designate a "letter of straw" (viz. the letter of James). This principle caused distinctions of authority in the Bible. It was not based on something the Bible claimed for itself.

Luther may have been the first to distinguish between the Word of God and Scripture (Bible) in Reformation times. Scripture as a whole consists of the sixty-six books of the Bible, but the "*Word of God is not to be regarded as identical and coextensive with the Holy Scripture*,"³⁸ he said. Ironically, while Luther rejected the Pope as final authority on the meaning of Scripture, he made himself into a pope as regards what holds highest value in Scripture, although with the best

of intentions! But in this instance, as so often, the best of intentions were not good enough.

In recent years there has been an intensive search for the center (*Mitte*) in the Old Testament and the New Testament, if not in the whole Bible. This "center" is conceived as the key idea, unifying theme (J. Bright), central element (Th. C. Vriezen), fundamental principle (H. H. Schultz), unifying principle (E. E. Ellison, G. von Rad),³⁹ or the like. This modern attempt at finding a "center" is intimately related to the attempt to find in the Bible or in one Testament of the Bible an overarching principle, a "canon within the canon." Invariably, the "center" is to be used as the guiding norm for what ultimately counts or remains valid in Scripture. These attempts are largely necessitated because the Bible has been torn apart by the results of the application of the historical-critical method (also referred to as the critical historical method).⁴⁰ Many leading supporters of this method seek to distill some sort of central concept from the Bible to define what is essential and of abiding value for modern humankind.

Such dominant "centers" as election, promise, covenant, communion, kingdom of God, holiness of God, creation, rule of God and others have been suggested.⁴¹ But there is no consensus or agreement as to what the "center" or guiding principle really is. The multiplicity of supposed "centers" leads to a pluralism of meanings for the Bible.

A similar quest for a center has been undertaken with regard to the New Testament. In this case the Lutheran scholar Ernst Käsemann suggests that the "center" of the New Testament, or the "canon within the New Testament canon," is the theme of the "justification of the godless"⁴² (followed by others).⁴³ There is, of course, a rich variety of other suggestions for the "center" of the New Testament.⁴⁴

This modern obsession with finding a superior principle of selectivity, a "canon within the canon," a superior norm within the Bible that functions as the center, has as its final goal the making of value judgments on the content of the Bible

(viz. "content criticism")⁴⁵ or abstracting some kind of abiding transcultural principle.

The reason for these attempts at finding a "center" is fairly evident. Those following this method have concluded that the Bible is no longer authoritative in its entirety. Something of the Bible has value for today, but not the whole Bible.

We return to the Sabbath commandment. The majority of Christians today see an abiding principle distilled from the Sabbath commandment, that of one day of rest in seven. The *norm* of the specificity of the Sabbath as the "seventh day" of every week and binding for all mankind everywhere is reduced to a *moral principle* to observe a day of rest after six days of labor. The keeping of the Sabbath on the "seventh day" is made optional. The principle departs from the plain and explicit meaning of the identity of the "seventh day" to one day in seven days. According to this principle a *literal* seventh-day Sabbath is but a *ceremonial* symbol applicable only to Jews,⁴⁶ namely to another people in another time. Evidently any principle of selectivity breeds pluralism in faith and practice.

Foot washing as practiced by Jesus has been viewed in the light of ancient custom, as something valid for another time and place but not for today. Indeed the wearing of open sandals, the dry climate, and the dusty roads did make foot washing in the Near East a familiar practice of hospitality. It is argued, "While recognizing that Jesus' performance utilized the common custom . . . Spiritual cleansing was the primary emphasis in the act . . ." ⁴⁷ Most Christians today wish to recognize only "the primary emphasis," that is, the principle of spiritual cleansing, without following the explicit command of Jesus that his followers "ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:7). Based on "time and place" one could argue that since our customs have changed and few of us live in the Near East, there is no need to wash feet as Jesus commanded. In this case, what counts is the principle of spiritual cleansing. Furthermore, if one were to defend foot washing today as a

binding act based on the collective decision of the church, one would imply that decisions of the church have authority superior to that of the Bible. In place of these possible rationales based on modern culture a true follower of the Bible follows the Bible in all matters relating to faith and practice, foot washing included.

As we return to the matter of the "center," we recognize that there is an inability of scholars to agree on such a magic "center" for the New Testament (or the Old Testament, or the entire Bible). This demonstrates that "any selection . . . is bound to be subjective and arbitrary."⁴⁸ Even supporters of a "canon within the canon" admit that one "cannot make the 'canon within the canon' into the canon."⁴⁹

Every suggestion for a "center" seems to be based on a preunderstanding grounded in the selector's own situation, circumstances, time, and place. Do not such attempts seek to be more Gospel-like than the Gospel, and in the end to be more Christ-like than Christ? We have seen that the principle of selection is shaped by modern concerns, pragmatic needs, political interests, cultural norms, and the like. Christ said authoritatively, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:37). He also said, "You search the Scriptures, . . . and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Contrary to Christ's emphasis on the totality and binding nature of Scripture, there is a "subjective arbitrariness"⁵⁰ in any attempt at choosing a principle of selection. Time and again a given preunderstanding based on modern socio-cultural foundations is at work. The acceptance of the Bible in its fullness as the standard of truth is opposed to all such endeavors. Any principle of selection no matter how well intentioned, or any number of such principles, tend toward limiting the total truth of Scripture in its entirety.

Scripture in Its Totality

Space does not permit us to develop in depth the varieties of views concerning the relationships between the Old and the

New Testaments.⁵¹ On the basis that “all Scripture is inspired [*theopneustos*] by God” or “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16)⁵² and that “men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21) in the prophetic word of Scripture, there is an undergirding and essential unity throughout all Scripture, consisting of both Testaments. Unity and continuity are assured because both Testaments are the work of the same triune God and given by the same Holy Spirit. Unity in diversity is explicitly stressed in Hebrews 1:1, 2, “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he has appointed the heir of all things through whom he also created the world” (RSV). It is the same Father who spoke through the prophets and through the Son. The diversity of inspired Bible writers, who wrote at different times and places unfolding different aspects of truth, “broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds.”⁵³

Without reciting the voices of numerous theologians on the reality of the unity of the whole Bible,⁵⁴ it is imperative to gain an insight from the pen of the “messenger to the remnant.” Ellen White has addressed the issue of the “totality of Scripture,” its unity in diversity,⁵⁵ the relationship of both Testaments to each other, and the concept of unfolding revelation in most profound ways.

Ellen G. White never used the expression “progressive revelation.”⁵⁶ This may come as a surprise. Ellen G. White put the concept of “unfolding of truth” in place of the reinterpreted idea of “progressive revelation.” For her, truth was always there, but the understanding of truth on the part of humans was limited. Thus God gave through various inspired prophets in various times an unfolding of the truth that was already available. Humans unfortunately are limited in their understanding and thus have often been unable to see the whole truth at any time. It seems appropriate to quote a few examples of the rich treasure from her pen: “The Old

Testament does not present a religion to be superseded by the New. The New Testament is only the advancement and unfolding of the Old.”⁵⁷ Instead of “progressive revelation” where later writings and ideas are seen as representing a superior development or evolution over earlier ones, Ellen G. White presents the alternative concept of advancement and unfolding. She maintains that

many who claim to believe and teach the Gospel are in . . . error. They set aside the Old Testament Scriptures, of which Christ declared, ‘They are they which testify of me.’ In rejecting the Old [Testament], they virtually reject the New; for both are parts of an inseparable whole.⁵⁸

“The Old and the New Testament are inseparable, for both are the teachings of Christ.”⁵⁹ The Old and New Testaments are an “inseparable whole”; neither Testament can stand without the other. The Old Testament presents a torso-like appearance without the New Testament and the New Testament has no foundation without the Old.

Each Testament depends on the other, illuminates the other, unlocks the other, and unfolds the other. Ellen G. White is clear on this interdependence and reciprocity. “. . . the Old and New Testaments [are] . . . an inseparable whole—the one depending and illuminating the other.”⁶⁰ Thus there is “need to return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty.”⁶¹

“The Old Testament sheds light upon the New, and the New upon the Old. Each is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ.”⁶² Ellen White also holds that the “doors of the New Testament are unlocked with the key of the Old Testament”⁶³ and *vice versa* “the New Testament explains the Old.”⁶⁴ In this way “the Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with Scripture.”⁶⁵ “By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of Scripture will be evident.”⁶⁶

What did Christ the Lord of lords and the Teacher of teachers reveal? Did he provide in His teachings a revelation

that superseded what had come before Him? Note the words of Ellen White on this subject:

Christ's lessons were not a new revelation, but old truths which he himself had originated and given to the chosen of God, and which he came to earth to rescue from the error under which they had been buried.⁶⁷

Elsewhere she stated,

His [the Lord's] sayings were to the disciples as a new revelation; but they were not. He was but unfolding the old truths, long obscured. . . . He appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures, laying open in a clear light the spiritual truths that had become obscured through tradition and misinterpretation.⁶⁸

The truth could not be fully perceived because of tradition and/or misinterpretation, but not "because God has sought to conceal truth."⁶⁹ The concept of unfolding of truth is supreme. There is no "progressive revelation" in the modernistic sense of discarding earlier revelation but instead a constant unfolding of truth.

But what about "new truth"? "In every age there is a new development of truth, a message of God to the people of that generation. The old truths are essential; new truth is not independent of the old, but an unfolding of it. It is only as the old truths are understood that we can comprehend the new."⁷⁰ Here is another revealing sentence, "In all His teachings He [Christ] dwelt upon the *unchangeable positions* of Bible truth" (emphasis supplied)⁷¹

Conclusion

In short, Christ maintained the unity, totality, and full authority of the entire Bible as Scripture without any qualitative distinctions, and so should we. The apostles followed their Lord in this, and so should we. Ellen G. White is in full harmony with the position that the entire Bible is authoritative Scripture without any qualitative distinctions, and so should we. The Advent movement will succeed in every aspect of its challenging and glorious mission on the basis of uplifting

the totality of Scripture as the indivisible "union of the divine and the human" and the continuing authoritative rule of faith and practice. In lifting up all of Scripture we lift up the full Christ of Scripture. As God's faithful remnant in the end time we should continue to maintain the unqualified authority of Scripture, which means maintaining the unqualified authority of the Christ of Scripture and of His mission and message for our time.

Endnotes

¹ The designation "modernistic" is used here synonymously with "liberal" or "progressive" as a description of the cluster of modern theological endeavor which builds theology up from a basis other than the normativity of the Bible. "Modernistic" theology builds on contemporary experience and the requirements of reason, updating theological categories to fit contemporary cultural and social norms. Thus it is by nature relativistic and subjective, lacking the certainty of absolute truth as revealed in the Bible. See Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

² See the previous note.

³ Gordon D. Kaufman, "What Shall We Do with the Bible?" *Interpretation*, 25 (1971): 95-112.

⁴ See James Barr, *The Bible in the Modern World* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1990); similarly David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroads, 1981). A sharp and justified critique of the Bible as a "classic" is provided by Krister Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 103 (1984): 3-10.

⁵ See David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); idem, "The Bible and Christian Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 48 (1980): 385-402.

⁶ Here Karl Barth and followers come particularly to mind. See Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture*, pp. 39-55.

⁷ See Robert K. Johnston, ed., *The Use of the Bible in Modern Theology: Evangelical Options* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985); Darrell Jodock, *The Church's Bible: Its Contemporary Authority* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

⁸ For the multiplicity of problems in this area of pluralism, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 140-70.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 47.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 126.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. ix.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 204-205.

¹³ See A. von Harnack, *Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1924); E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: SPCK, 1948).

¹⁴ For a balanced view on this topic, see Paul R. Raabe, "The Two 'Faces' of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament," *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth*

- Birthday*, eds. G. S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Chelsea, Mich.: Book Crafters, 1990), pp. 283-310.
- 15 John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), p. 60.
- 16 Bright, p. 64.
- 17 Harnack, pp. 221-222.
- 18 R. Bultmann, "Promise and Fulfillment," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. C. Westermann (Richmond, Va: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 73.
- 19 Bright, pp. 69-72.
- 20 Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (4th revised and expanded ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 141-173.
- 21 Bright, p. 74.
- 22 Hasel, *New Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, pp. 171-203.
- 23 See Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Crisis of the Authority of the Bible as the Word of God," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 1/1 (1990): 18-19, 24-26.
- 24 Bright, p. 98.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 See Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament Since the Reformation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 126-46, 178-218.
- 27 F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1961), p. 431.
- 28 Farrar, p. 431.
- 29 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. vii.
- 30 Ibid., p. ix.
- 31 Butler published a series of articles in the *Review and Herald* beginning Jan 15, 1884. Ellen G. White opposed his views in Letter 22, 1889; see Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:23.
- 32 See Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Biblical Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 12-52.
- 33 White, *Great Controversy*, p. ix.
- 34 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 5:709.
- 35 Ibid., p. 747. See also White, *Great Controversy*, p. viii.
- 36 M. Luther as quoted by Farrar, p. 335.
- 37 H. Strathmann, "Die Krise des Kanons der Kirche," *Das Neue Testament als Kanon*, ed. Ernst Käsemann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), p. 41, suggests that Luther discovered a "canon within the canon" in Rom 1:17. This is independently supported by O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 297, 298.
- 38 Farrar, p. 339 (italics his).
- 39 For additional designations, see David L. Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1976), pp. 379-80; for the debate on the OT, see Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 141-73, and on the NT, see Hasel, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 144-66.
- 40 For a criticism of this approach, see Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977); Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1985).
- 41 Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 141-66.

- 42 Käsemann, *Das Neue Testament als Kanon*, p. 370.
- 43 So W. Joest, "Die Frage des Kanons in der heutigen evangelischen Theologie," *Was heisst Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift*, eds. W. Joest, F. Mussner et al. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1966), p. 198; and W. Schrage, "Die Frage nach der Mitte und der Kanon im Kanon des Neuen Testaments in der neueren Diskussion," *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann*, eds. J. Friedrich et al. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), p. 410.
- 44 Hasel, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 144-64.
- 45 E. Krentz, *The Historical Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 71, explains that content criticism "is the evaluation of the adequacy of what an author says when measured by the criterion of the central affirmation [or center] which he (or the entire Bible) makes."
- 46 F. R. Harm, "Sabbatarianism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1984), p. 963.
- 47 H. A. Kent, Jr., "Foot Washing," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, p. 419.
- 48 Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, p. 298.
- 49 Inge Linning, "Kanon im Kanon," *Zum dogmatischen Grundlagenproblem des neutestamentlichen Kanons* (München: Kaiser, 1972), p. 271.
- 50 A. Stock, *Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments* (Einsiedeln/Köln: Herder, 1969), p. 70.
- 51 See Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Unity of the Bible," *Ministry* insert (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1974); idem, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 141-73; idem, *New Testament Theology*, pp. 140-170.
- 52 On Biblical inspiration, see Gerhard F. Hasel, *Understanding the Living Word of God* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1980), pp. 66-82.
- 53 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:22.
- 54 See above n. 50 for literature on this subject and also Baker, *Two Testaments: One Bible*, pp. 363-76.
- 55 White, *Selected Messages*, 1:25: "And as several [Bible] writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony."
- 56 A review of the new CD-ROM disk of the Ellen G. White materials now available reveals that the expression "progressive revelation" is absent from her writings.
- 57 Ellen G. White, "That I May Know Him", p. 208.
- 58 Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, June 20, 1902, p. 6.
- 59 Ellen G. White comments, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol (Washington D. C.: Review & Herald Publ. Assn., 1957), 5:1094.
- 60 Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 2:255.
- 61 White, *Great Controversy*, p. 205.
- 62 Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 462.
- 63 Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 579.
- 64 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381.
- 65 White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 462.
- 66 Ibid., p. 187. Ellen G. White also insisted that to interpret a scripture passage without paying proper attention to its Biblical context was to "wrest" it. See, e.g., *Great Controversy*, p. 521.

⁶⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, p. 1689.

⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, "Christ's manner of Teaching," *The Signs of the Times*, Feb. 29, 1892, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Ellen G. White, "The Example and Teaching of Our Redeemer," *The Watchman*, April 23, 1907, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 127.

⁷¹ Ellen G. White, *The Upward Look*, p. 313.

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THE ROLE OF THE CENTRIST THEOLOGIAN IN THE CHURCH

By E. Edward Zinke

Silver Spring, Maryland

Throughout history, some individuals have changed very largely the way their contemporaries thought about God, mankind, and the world. For example, Plato, Aristotle and Kant, whether right or wrong, were catalysts for such radical key changes in world views.

Major movements have also vitally altered prior ways of viewing the world. The Reformation was such a movement. It was a religious and theological movement. Our thinking, it declared, ought not to be founded on tradition, whether of the church or otherwise, or on church councils, the pope, nature, or reason, no matter how useful these might be for other purposes. Rather, the foundation for our world view and faith must come solely from the Bible, the Word of God; hence the Reformation concept, *sola Scriptura*, by Scripture alone.

A few occasions stand out in our personal lives as particularly memorable. My visit to Constance, Germany, is one such key event in my life. I stopped to meditate at the place where John Hus and Jerome of Prague were burned at the stake approximately a hundred years before Martin Luther started the Reformation. I contemplated the significance of their lives and their willingness to die for the Word of God.

A large boulder has been located at the place where Hus was killed, commemorating his martyrdom. After meditating for a few moments, I walked around the boulder and noticed