

PURPOSE

Reflections is the official newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. It seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors, and teachers.

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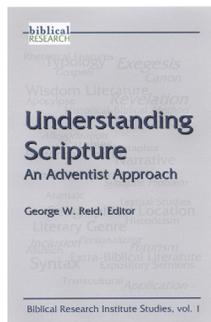
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NEWS AND COMMENTS

AUTUMN MEETING OF BRICOM

The Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM) met at Andrews University, October 19-21, 2006. Papers dealing with ecclesiology and hermeneutics were presented and discussed. It is our goal to produce a number of books that could be useful in the development of an Adventist ecclesiology. The first volume will be out toward the end of 2007. It will address the concept of the remnant as foundational in an Adventist ecclesiology. The volume will explore the biblical roots of the concept, its apocalyptic significance, and its theological and doctrinal meaning for the Adventist church.

The other set of papers will be part of the second volume on hermeneutics. The first is already in print (*Understanding Scripture*), the second will be ready for the press next year or early in 2008. This volume will



illustrate how to interpret difficult biblical questions. We are very grateful to the Adventist scholars who are helping us to make these projects a reality.

BRICOM has also endorsed the production of four textbooks for the training of ministerial students. We hope that these volumes will be translated into other languages and be used as textbooks by the world church. The four areas are: Daniel and Revelation; Christian Beliefs; Christ's Priestly Work in the Heavenly Sanctuary; and the Spirit of Prophecy. The production of these volumes will take around five years. Your reaction to this particular idea would be greatly appreciated.

In addition BRICOM has discussed the production of books dealing with the biblical Sabbath.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

BRI MEETS PhD/THD STUDENTS

It was a first of sorts—a meeting between the PhD/ThD Seminary students on the campus of Andrews University and the BRI team, on October 16, 2006. In attendance, besides the 15 or so doctoral students, were professors John Baldwin and Roy Gane. Called at the behest of the latter, Director of the PhD/ThD program, the meeting was aimed at mutual acquaintance of the BRI and the doctoral students. The informal nature of the meeting afforded a good deal of humor. After a brief overview of the duties of the Biblical Research Institute by Ángel Manuel Rodríguez (Director), the rest of the BRI team filled in with some details of their individual tasks and assignments. The

students had the opportunity to ask a variety of questions ranging from the authority of the BRI to what prospects they may have to contribute to the ongoing theological challenges facing the church. After about 90 minutes of free interaction, the meeting came to an end with the palpable feeling on both sides that this was an event worth repeating as often as possible.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI

FAITH AND REASON—A COMMENT

It is almost understandable that Pope Benedict XVI could be surprised at the overreaction to his September 12, 2006 speech at the University of Regensburg. After all there is a several hundred year tradition of disregard for papal views. Luther burning a copy of a papal bull comes to mind. And Benedict might have thought the speech would drift by as anonymously as some of his landmark documents as Prefect for the Congregation of the Faith. Some of them made good press releases, but the full import of such items as “Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past” and the “Declaration ‘Dominus Iesus:’ On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church” seem to have slipped by most commentators.

But everything has a context and this speech sat conspicuously close to September 11 memorials and the growing dialog about the real Islam. In fact the Pope had already opined that Turkey might not share the same values as the rest of Europe and be culturally incompatible with the European Union it hoped to join. His comments led directly to a rejection of the developing European constitution and the sure exclusion of Turkey.

France, like other European nations, has an increasingly restive immigrant, mostly Islamic, population; and not too long before had been overwhelmed by days of rioting. Once tolerant Holland is writhing in protectionist ire after a series of religious assassinations, and the Danish cartoon fracas had barely died down. No, the context would scream caution in mentioning Islam or the prophet Muhammad.

Most of the news clips do just that and clip the whole speech down to the Pope quoting a discussion between Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian in 1391, during the Siege of Constantinople. The news and the resulting outrage focused on the comment of the Emperor: “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman.” Predictably that inflamed the Islamic world—and for most of Islam they became the pope’s words not the emperor’s.

One website commentary I looked up was written by Rosemary Radford Ruether, a prominent Catholic theologian and leading scholar in feminist theology and

Palestinian issues. She faults the pope for ignoring the fact that “the Fourth Crusade (1201-4), called by Pope Innocent III, was diverted into an assault on the capital of the Byzantine empire, Constantinople. The Crusaders pillaged and occupied the city, leading to a weakening of the Byzantine world and its eventual fall to the Moslems.”¹ Perhaps both the author and the Pope forgot that John Paul II had apologized for the sack of Constantinople in a till-now futile attempt to reconcile with the Eastern Orthodox churches.

The real issue of the speech is farther reaching than language obviously designed to get attention, if not make offence. Early on he states the issue of violent conversion. Or, as Manuel II said “Not to act reasonably, not to act with *logos*, is contrary to the nature of God.”

What the Pope was dissecting was the relationship between faith and reason. Obviously he knows the dark history of Roman persecution and the various battles of faith. He chose to use the negative to outmaneuver his opposition theologically. Under the guise of acknowledging the apparent Greek origin of a reasonable Christianity, he at once sanctified its better part and acknowledged the Greek and Roman stamp to Christianity. That is, the authority of Rome.

There are many trenchant passages in the speech. While Pope Benedict made a valid point in critiquing the underlying “pathology” of religion abroad in the world, I find his statement dismissing when “the subjective ‘conscience’ becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical” as preparing the way to require that individuals obey the dictates of a rational church authority, namely Rome.

It is certain that Rome has begun a pushback against Islam. The initial call is for “reciprocity.” And that is a reasonable point for an Islamic worldview that will not allow adherents to change faith and at best severely restricts the ability of other religions to dialog with them. But I think the real approach is more far-reaching.

First, in somewhat ambiguous terms Benedict puts on the table, without an itemized rejection, the dehellenizing views of Adolf von Harnack. “Harnack’s goal was to bring Christianity back into harmony with modern reason, liberating it, that is to say, from seemingly philosophical and theological elements, such as faith in Christ’s divinity and the triune God.” By not specifically reaffirming Christ’s divinity and the Trinity, Benedict, by my analysis, must have been throwing an olive branch to Islam—for the Koran is most specific on many occasion in condemning Christians for the primary error of elevating Jesus to Godhood—“God has no son,” the Koran says specifically. In fact Sura V, verses 75, 76 says “They do blaspheme who say: ‘God is Christ the son of Mary’. . . They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity.”

Now, months after the speech, it seems obvious that Rome is determined to stake out a position on not only the issue of violence, but more particularly its role as the

critical center of what it is to be Western. I heard a long report on the BBC in mid November which documented the cultural rift in Europe between the Europeans and mostly Islamic immigrants. France was of particular focus. The program ended with a Catholic priest intoning the mass in Latin and then lecturing his audience on how Christianity defines what it is to be European. The call was to reclaim Europe. Not so different from what we are seeing in the United States, is it?

After the shouting dies down, there remains for us the same challenge as the Pope is tackling on behalf of Rome. Are we ready to be condemned as dangerous literalists if our faith position is seen as too extreme or out of sync with the civilized world I seem to remember Ellen White's narrative of the time of trouble recounting just such a charge against us from the Sunday-keeping majority. It may be that violence is not the real issue at all, but a view of Christ and ultimate authority.

Lincoln E. Steed, Editor Liberty Magazine

¹Rosemary Radford Ruether, "What the Pope Should Have Said to the Islamic World," <http://Nccinterfaith.blogspot.com>, September 17, 2006.

WHAT THE BIBLICAL TEXT MEANT AND WHAT IT MEANS

It is quite interesting to sit in a Sabbath School class and listen to the discussion of a biblical passage listed

Although we have to distinguish between the situation of the original hearers of the biblical message and the situation of the present listeners to the same message, is the message basically still the same or should it be modified and adapted to a modern culture and setting?

in the Bible Study Guide. There are some classes who stay with the historical perspective of the text. They discuss the text or story in its original setting, for example, the Book of Daniel

in its sixth century B.C. context. Seldom, if at all, is the text used to address our current situation. There are other classes which apply a biblical text directly to our times without taking in consideration the time and circumstances, when the biblical book was written, although it can be quite helpful to understand what was, for example, going on when the Book of Amos was penned (c. eighth century B.C.).

Obviously both approaches are extremes, and it would be best to deal with both issues, the past and the present. However, an important question must be raised: Although in one way or another we have to distinguish between the situation of the original hearers of the biblical message and the situation of the present listeners to the same message, is the message basically still the same and does it address

us even today or should it be modified and adapted to a modern culture and setting?

I. *The Concept "What a Text Meant and What It Means"*

K. Stendahl has discussed and defended the concept—widely accepted in theological and scholarly circles—that we must clearly distinguish between what the text meant in its original setting and what the text means for us today.¹ This has also influenced Adventist theologians, pastors, and church members. Some have suggested that issues such as homosexuality, divorce and remarriage, and the wearing of jewelry must be interpreted in light of the present cultural situation rather than in the context of the ancient texts of Scripture.

It is true that we are living in the twenty-first century A.D. and not in the seventh century B.C. or in the first century A.D. and that our world today is different from the ancient Near East. Most of us speak languages other than those used by the writers of the Bible, and most of our cultures including their respective world views, customs, food, art, and many other things differ from the cultures described in the Bible. Therefore, we are called to carefully investigate the biblical texts and try to understand the languages, the times, and the circumstances under which these texts were written. We must try to see with the eyes and hear with the ears of those who lived centuries ago. By attempting to overcome these barriers of time, language, and culture, we believe that we can come close to the biblical text and can apply it to our situation today. Still the question remains whether or not we need to sharply distinguish between what the text meant and what the text means.

II. *Problems with Such a Concept*

Oftentimes behind this question lies the idea and the agenda that the biblical text must be reapplied to our present situation in an absolutely new way. When this is done, biblical vocabulary is still used, however with a completely new meaning. For example, it is claimed that the resurrection of Jesus, which according to the New Testament is a guarantee for the future physical resurrection of the redeemed, was not a historical and physical resurrection. Therefore, it merely points to a spiritual resurrection of the believers to a new dimension of life here and now, whatever that may mean.² By following this approach we would replace God's original intentions with the authority of the human interpreter and would open the text to innumerable interpretations, running the risk of replacing truth with relativism and pluralism.

If Scripture is the Word of God written by human authors, it will transcend cultural and other boundaries and reach us even today.

If biblical texts evolved by natural processes without divine revelation and inspiration—as sometimes assumed—

their message is certainly limited to a specific time and culture. If on the other hand Scripture is the Word of God written by human authors, it will transcend these boundaries and reach us even today.

The letter to the Colossians was not limited to that church (Col. 4:16), but was also important for the church in Laodicea. The Book of Revelation by being addressed to seven churches points to its universal importance; and by containing a blessing for all those, who would hear and read it, surpasses the boundaries of place, time, and culture. In 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11, Paul stresses twice that Israel's history is an example for the New Testament church. Between these two statements Paul warns against idolatry, fornication, presumption, and grumbling against God by using historical accounts dealing with God's covenant people in the Old Testament. In Hebrews 11, the heroes of faith are introduced. In Hebrews 12:1-2a, a conclusion for the author's audience is drawn: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith . . ."

Scripture also points to the principle of personalizing biblical texts. What God has done for the Exodus generation applies likewise to later generations. They still participate in his saving actions (Deut. 5:2-4). Similarly, the Christian believer participates already here and now in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension (Gal. 3:29; Eph. 2:6). If, however, the principle "What the text meant and what it means" is applied in a radical way, the present-day correspondence or application could have little to do with the original intention of the text.

Furthermore, we need to keep in mind that in spite of differences there is also a high degree of continuity in humanity independent of time, culture, and circumstances especially when it comes to moral issues as well as

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broad psychological and anthropological principles.³

"The Bible clearly teaches that the unity of humankind derived from their first parents is more basic than the

diversity of cultural expression. Paul states the proposition succinctly: 'From one man he made every nation of men' (Acts 17:26). The creation accounts of our first parent, Adam, in Genesis 1 and 2, describe man made in the image of God. Following the empirical method, anthropologists and psychologists have also discovered a unity in humankind, a commonality which they locate in the felt needs and functional, perceptual, and intellectual operations that are constant from culture to culture. . . Not only does God address cultural tasks to man as man

(Gen. 1:28; 9:1-3), he calls and directs individuals as key leaders in his saving work irrespective of their culture. . . The unity of humankind created in God's image, so unequivocally maintained from beginning to end in the Bible, flies in the face of . . . epistemological and moral cultural relativism . . ."⁴

Although we believe that God through the prophets spoke in certain situations, His message transcends these

Scripture is not culturally or historically conditioned but culturally or historically constituted.

situations. It has been correctly said that Scripture is not culturally or historically conditioned

but culturally or historically constituted. It is given in a specific time and cultural setting, but it goes beyond these cultures and impacts us today.⁵

III. The Usefulness of "What a Text Meant and What It Means"

In spite of the problematic nature of the concept "What a text meant and what it means today" it can be useful in the following ways: (1) It reminds us that while studying Scripture we must give sufficient attention to both the text in its original setting and its significance for modern readers. (2) This concept helps us to be aware of the issue of permanence in Scripture. When dealing with the Decalogue it is quite evident that what the text meant and what it means are identical. The New Testament writers have affirmed the lasting nature of the Ten Commandments (Rom. 7:7, 12; 13:8-9; Jam. 2:8-12) and so have Jews and Christians throughout the centuries. But what about other commandments such as the one that a rebellious son should be killed (Deut. 21:18-21)? Is what the text meant still the same today or does the text mean something else? Which parts in Scripture are permanent even in details, and which parts contain only a permanent principle?

We will now turn to this issue. A look at the different kinds of biblical texts may prove helpful in answering the questions just stated.

(1) *Passages Dealing with Biblical Doctrines.* Scripture contains entire passages focusing on the presentation of a specific biblical doctrine.⁶ Biblical doctrines are independent of time and culture. A biblical teaching may not be fully understood by a particular generation, but, for instance, the

A biblical teaching may not be fully understood by a particular generation, but, for instance, the biblical doctrine of the second coming of Christ is not true today and wrong tomorrow.

biblical doctrine of the second coming of Christ is not true today and wrong tomorrow. Biblical doctrines may to a certain degree be couched in cultural terms--Hebrews 1 presents Jesus as king, and in the rest of the book He is the High Priest--but even today

we understand that a king is the supreme ruler and that a priest functions as a mediator. Thus, there is no difference in what the text meant and what it means when it comes to biblical doctrines.

- (2) *Prophetic Passages and Promises.* A similar picture emerges with regard to biblical prophecy, predictions, and promises. Isaiah 53, describing God's suffering servant, Psalms 2 or 110, pointing to the Messiah, or Daniel 2 and 7, picturing world history until the final consummation, are transtemporal and transcultural. However, we must keep in mind that some prophecies and most promises contain an element of conditionality. Furthermore, we must distinguish between predictions and promises addressed to a certain individual or to a group of people and those predictions and promises that are addressed to all of humanity. The prophecies and promises directed toward specific individuals and groups cannot be applied to us today directly, although the underlying principles are still valid. On the other hand, the prophecies and promises given to humanity in general must be taken as they are.⁷
- (3) *Passages Containing Narratives.* Scripture contains many narrative sections including shorter or longer biographies. These do not always contain an evaluation of the behavior of the hero, and contemporary readers should not deduce from Scripture's silence that it condones the hero's actions. Narratives are to be distinguished from legal texts. Yet they must be made "relevant for contemporary believers without making them say something the original author did not intend to say."⁸ The basic principles underlying the narrative need to be uncovered and applied to the contemporary reader.
- (4) *Wisdom Passages.* Wisdom literature as found, for instance, in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes contains proverbial sayings which "reflect what is typical or normal without suggesting or implying that there are never exceptions."⁹ Many of these sayings are so plain and make so much sense independent of culture and time that their application will be more or less an elaboration of what is already said.
- (5) *Passages Containing Commands.* The real challenge comes with passages that contain commands. Fortunately, Scripture tells us that some command-

"The basic assumption of our approach is that all biblical teaching—commands, promises, and statements of truth—is normative unless Scripture explicitly indicates otherwise." W. J. Larkin, Jr.

ments or laws are not of a permanent nature such as the sacrificial and ceremonial laws.¹⁰ Likewise, the enforcement of the theocratic and civil laws of the Old Testament came

to an end, when the theocracy ended.¹¹ Some laws were merely temporary concessions to the hardness of hearts of the Israelites (Matt 19:8), and in the New

Testament Jesus restored God's original will (Matt 19:4-6, 8). The New Testament clearly teaches that the Ten Commandments are still valid and that certain Christian forms, such as baptism, foot washing, and the Lord's Supper, cannot be replaced or substituted by other forms, because they are "rooted in Jesus' explicit example and command."¹² In order to distinguish between permanent and non-permanent laws we should—among others—(1) explore the respective passages and their contexts to determine whether or not vocabulary is used that may point to a limited form of practice, (2) keep in mind that a limited audience may point to a limited application of a specific practice, and (3) trace the topic of investigation throughout the Bible to see whether or not changes have taken place, which may point to a limited application.¹³ "The basic assumption of our approach is that all biblical teaching—commands, promises, and statements of truth—is normative unless Scripture explicitly indicates otherwise."¹⁴ If after careful study it cannot be determined whether or not a practice is permanent, "apply the Biblical precept of humility"¹⁵ and follow its practice precisely, even today. Permanent commands are valid in the same way they were before, while in the case of limited commands the underlying principle should be presented and applied to the present situation.

Conclusion

The principle that distinguishes between what the text meant and what it means has some validity when we look at certain biblical narratives, investigate prophecies and promises addressed to individuals or a specific group, and study texts dealing with divine commandments of a non-permanent nature. These passages cannot be transferred to our present reality on a one-to-one basis. The underlying principles contained in them must be found and applied to our present situation.

However, from the perspective of a close reading of Scripture the principle has serious flaws when it is used to discredit historical accounts, to reject supernatural interventions in the history of humanity, and to deny that there are innumerable one-to-one correspondences in Scripture in which what the text meant is precisely what it means today.

Therefore, we would suggest as a general rule that what the biblical text meant in its original setting, is in principle what the text means for us today. Jesus himself was convinced that Scripture was directed not only to the original audience but also to the generation of his time as well as to those to come, without subjecting it to a dehistoricizing or demythologizing process.¹⁶

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

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¹Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 5 vols., ed. George A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:418-432.

²This process is also called category translation. See, Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *The Journal of Religion* 41 (July 1961):204.

³For instance, to take one's neighbor's spouse is more or less unacceptable on a universal scale. The experiences of suffering, sickness, rejection, and death are familiar to almost all humans. The desire to be accepted, to be loved, to enjoy friendship and social interaction is common to all of us. See also Maslow's hierarchy of needs in James F. Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communications: Its Theory and Practice* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 112-114.

⁴William J. Larkin, Jr. *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 199.

⁵Frank M. Hasel, "Reflections on the Authority and Trustworthiness of Scripture," in *Issues in Revelation and Inspiration* (Berrien Springs: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1992), 208-209.

⁶Genesis 1-2 portrays the creator and creation. In Matthew 24 Jesus discusses His second coming. In Romans, Paul explains righteousness through grace by faith, and in 1 Corinthians 15 he spells out the doctrine of the resurrection. Revelation 20 contains the Millennium.

⁷When Jesus announces Peter's denial and the possibility of his subsequent conversion (Luke 22:32, 34), he does not address us, although we are indirectly called not to follow his example, but to examine ourselves and repent, if needed. Cf. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 259. On the other hand, when Jesus promises eternal life to those who believe in him (John 3:36), all true disciples of Christ are included.

⁸Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 212.

⁹Chisholm, 258. For example, Proverbs 14:11 states that "the house of the wicked is destroyed, but the tent of the upright flourishes," which is oftentimes true. However, sometimes believers are perplexed when they see "the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:3). Yet there is a future dimension in which this statement will come true.

¹⁰They were pointing to Jesus and have been fulfilled in Him (Heb. 10:1-18).

¹¹Cf. Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series vol. 12, ed. by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 85-86, who has shown that the Old Testament itself already pointed to their limitations.

¹²Davidson, 86.

¹³Cf., Larkin, 353-356.

¹⁴Ibid., 354.

¹⁵Virkler, 228.

¹⁶See, e.g., Matt. 5:17-48; 24:20 and Exod. 20.

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

CHRIST AS *MONOGENĒS*: PROPER TRANSLATION AND THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The controversy over the doctrine of the Trinity in the church is now present in several parts of the world field. One of the arguments used to support the idea that Christ

was not eternal but that He had a beginning is that the title *monogenēs* means "only begotten." As we will indicate, this is a misuse and a mistranslation of the Christological title. That term appears nine times in the New Testament and always designates human objects: a son (Luke 7:12; 9:38), a daughter (Luke 8:42), Jesus (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9), and Isaac (Heb 11:17). We will begin by examining the etymological meaning of the term and its usage.

I. Etymology

The term *monogenēs* is derived from the adjective *monos* ("single," "only," "unique,") and the verbal substantive *genos* ("race," "kind," "species"). Based on that information it can be suggested that *monogenēs* means "only one of its kind," "unique."¹ This has become the most common rendering of the term in English. However, since *genos* is related to the verb *ginomai* ("be born," "be made," "become"), *monogenēs* could also mean "only begotten." The question is whether or not the use of *genos* always expresses the verbal etymological idea of origin or birth.

Before we arrive at any conclusion we should examine some additional evidence. First, we should acknowledge that there are cases in Greek literature in which *monogenēs* seems to be connected to the idea of generation. This is particularly the case when the term is applied to humans or to offspring. For instance, in cases where it is stated that someone is the "only" child of a specific couple, *monogenēs* could mean "only child born to someone."

Second, there is linguistic evidence indicating that by the time of the New Testament the idea of derivation or birth was detached from the verbal substantive *genos*. Hence we find terms like *homo-genēs* ("of the same kind") and *hetero-genēs* ("of a different kind"), in which *genēs* has absolutely nothing to do with birth or derivation. In fact, there are usages in the Greek literature in which the term *monogenēs* itself is totally disconnected from the idea of derivation. For instances, the liver is described as *monogenēs*, that is to say as a "unique" organ; the heavenly bodies are qualified as *monogenēs*, "unique." There are certain trees that are *monogenēs*, "the only ones of their kind."²

Third, we should be careful not to press the argument of etymology too much.³ The study of semantics indicates

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that the meaning of a term is not determined by its etymology but by the way the author employs it. That is to say, the context in which the term is used should determine how it is being used by the writer. In the study of words it is

*There is linguistic evidence indicating that by the time of the New Testament the idea of derivation or birth was detached from the verbal substantive *genos*.*

incorrect to force the etymological meaning of a term into every usage of it. We have already shown that *monogenēs* is often used without any connection at all to the idea of generation of birth while in other places it seems to retain some of the etymological significance. The conclusion is that in both cases the context was the determining factor in establishing the meaning of the term. We will examine the New Testament materials in the light of that conclusion.

II. Non-Christological Usages

Monogenēs is used to designate the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12). He is “the only son [*monogenēs*] of his mother.” At first one could conclude that he is the only begotten son of the widow, but contextually that does not seem to be the case. That piece of information is not provided to establish a genealogical connection between the two, but to describe the desperate situation of this lady. She was already a widow and now she lost her *only* child; for her there is no other like him. The usage intensifies her pathos and invites those ready to sympathize with her.

The same applies to the daughter of Jairus who is described as “his only [*monogenēs*] daughter” (Luke 8:42). She is unique in the family because she is the only daughter and consequently her death would be a great tragedy.

The father of the boy with an evil spirit refers to his son as “my only [*monogenēs*] child” (Luke 9:38). Like in the other cases the emphasis is on the loss or the threat of a loss of someone that is precious and unique to the mother or the father. Although one could not totally rule out the

The translation “only begotten” is ruled out by the fact that Isaac was not the only son of the patriarch.

idea of generation, the interest of the biblical writer is not found there but in the fact that those individuals

are facing a serious painful tragedy. In that case the translation “unique” is more appropriate in that it stresses the enormous magnitude of the loss. There is no other like this child/daughter; they are irreplaceable.

In Heb 11:17 Isaac is described as Abraham’s “one and only [*monogenēs*] son.” The translation “only begotten” is ruled out by the fact that Isaac was not the only son of the patriarch (Gen 16:3-4; 25:1). He is unique, the only one of his kind, in the sense that he is “the only son of the promise”⁴ (Gen 21:12).

III. Christological Usages

When the title is applied to Jesus several theological ideas are expressed that help to clarify the meaning of the term. First, He is the *monogenēs* in the sense that He is divine. This is expressed in John 1:18⁵ where we find the strange phrase, “God the One and Only [*monogenēs theos*]” applied to Jesus. The idea of generation does not fit the context at all. In this case *monogenēs* stands in ap-

position to “God” and serves to shed light on the usage of this term. Although Jesus is human, He is also divine, and consequently He is and has always been “unique;” there has never been anyone like Him in the universe. This phrase summarizes what John has been saying from the beginning of His gospel, namely that the divine *Logos* became flesh (John 1:1, 14). That explains why Jesus was free to say, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

Second, the title *monogenēs* is applied to Christ to indicate that He is the only and unique revelator of God: “We

Jesus is the monogenēs in the sense that He is divine.

have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only [*monogenēs*],

who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). As in the previous passage the title *monogenēs* is used in the absolute, i.e. the term son is not attached to it.

The context indicates that He is unique in that He is the only one who can reveal the glory of God to us. This is possible because He is divine. In other words, the title *monogenēs* speaks of Jesus as unique in nature and in function. These two ideas are found in John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” His divine nature and His closeness to the Father enable Him to be the only and unique revelator of the Father.

The title monogenēs is applied to Christ to indicate that He is the only and unique revelator of God.

Third, the title *monogenēs* identifies Jesus as the one and only redeemer through whom God’s saving love reaches us: “This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son [*monogenēs*] into the world that we might live through him” (1 John 4:9). Here we find

The title monogenēs identifies Jesus as the one and only redeemer through whom God’s saving love reaches us.

two terms together, *son* and *monogenēs*. In His redemptive mission Jesus demonstrated to

be God’s unique and only Son, i.e., to have a unique relationship with God that made possible our redemption. In fact, the Father loved us so much that He “gave his one and only Son” to save those who believe in Him (John 3:16, 18).

When the title *monogenēs* refers to Jesus it designates the uniqueness of His nature, the uniqueness of His relationship with the Father, His uniqueness as the revelator of God, and His uniqueness as redeemer. There is no other like Him; He is the only one of His kind. The idea of “the only *begotten*” of the Father does not appear in those passages and is not required in their contexts. They deal with Christ’s nature and mission.

IV. From “Unique, Only” to “Only Begotten”

The translation “only begotten” came into our Bibles through the Latin versions.⁶ The early Latin manuscripts rendered *monogenēs* in the Christological passages as

unicus (“unique”), but in Jerome’s Latin version it was changed to “only begotten” (*unigenitus*). The shift apparently took place during the Arian controversies. Arian and his followers taught that Christ was created. The apologists argued that Christ was begotten before all creation. According to them the generation of the Son from the Father was eternal and therefore He was not a created being. In other words, when the phrase “only begotten” was applied to Jesus they intended to establish Christ’s eternal equality with the Father.

The biblical and Adventist emphasis on the cosmic conflict places the uniqueness of Christ at the center of theological analysis. There is an enemy that claims to be like Him and who in heaven as well as throughout human history attempted and continues to attempt to usurp His uniqueness. The title *monogenēs* makes clear that there is no one like Christ in the totality of the cosmos. He is indeed the only one of His kind!

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

The biblical and Adventist emphasis on the cosmic conflict places the uniqueness of Christ at the center of theological analysis.

¹See, J. A. Fitzmyer, “*Monogenēs*,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the NT*, vol. 2, edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 439.

²For these examples consult, Gerhard Pendrick, “*Monogenēs*,” *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 588; and Fitzmyer, 440.

³This was done, among others, by James M. Bulman, “The Only Begotten Son,” *Calving Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 56-79.

⁴Fitzmyer, 440.

⁵There are some textual problems here, but the reading found in most modern translations appears to be the best one.

⁶On the history of this change see, Dale Moody, “God’s Only Son: The Translation of John 3:16 in the RSV,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72 (1953): 214-216; R. L. Roberts, “The Rendering of ‘Only Begotten’ in John 3:16,” *Restoration Quarterly* 16 (1973): 2-3, 6-7.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

A NEW PARADISE

There is hardly a human being that does not long for peace, fulfillment, harmony, and happiness or, in other words, for some type of a paradise. The Greek talked about Elysium, the land of the blessed, in which good people would be able to live without worries. Germanic tribes dreamed about Valhalla, a splendid palace, where the warriors would feast on the flesh of boars and drink liquor. They would spend their days with sports, fighting, and hunting. Muslims are looking forward to a garden with abundant food to eat, wine to drink, and noble virgins to serve them. Many have tried or are still trying to create a paradise of their own on this earth. In any case, many yearn for complete satisfaction and perfect bliss.

The first two chapters of Scripture talk about a paradise that humanity has lost, the last two chapters about a paradise which we may gain.

I. *Time and Place of the New Paradise*

- Rev. 20-21 After the Millennium, when Satan and his followers will be destroyed, a new heaven and a new earth will be created (Rev. 21:1).
- Rev. 21:1-2 The new paradise will be found on planet earth, probably because it was here that the drama of redemption unfolded, and it was here that Jesus had lived and had been crucified.

II. *The Features of the New Paradise*

1. *The City (Rev. 21:10-27)*

The New Jerusalem reminds us of the garden of Eden and the temple, and it replaces both. In addition, it is found in stark contrast to the great, but wicked city Babylon (Rev 18:10, 21).

- *Wall* (Rev. 21:12, 17-18): about 210 feet/70 meters high, suggesting security, protection, and peace.
- *Twelve gates* which are constantly open (Rev. 21:12-13, 21): suggesting free access for all those whose names are written in the book of life (v. 27), independent of race, nationality, gender, etc.
- *Size of the city* (Rev. 21:16): about 1380 miles/2200 km, if one side is meant, suggesting that there is sufficient room for everyone (cf. John 14:1-3). The New Jerusalem resembles the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary (1 Kings 6:20) containing also the throne of God (Rev. 22:1, 3).
- *Twelve gates and twelve foundations* containing the names of the old and new people of God (Rev. 21:12, 14, 19-20): pointing to God’s faithful people throughout the centuries.
- *Materials such as gold, precious stones, and pearls* (Rev. 21:18-21): pointing to the glory, beauty, and durability of the city.

2. *The Nature (Rev. 22:1-2)*

- *Water and fruit*: suggesting that eternal life has been secured and that all needs will be taken care of.
- The Old Testament contains also allusions to the end time paradise mentioning a perfect earth and an ideal climate (Isa. 35:6-7).

III. *Beings Involved*

1. *Humans (Rev. 21:4, 7-8, 27; 22:5)*

- Only those humans will enter the new paradise who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord and have completely committed themselves to Him. Revelation calls them “overcomers.”
- They will have taken part in the first resurrection (Rev.

20:6) or will have been transformed at Christ's second coming. Their bodies will be real bodies (concerning the resurrection body see Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:42-44; Luke 24:36-43).

- They will be freed from all sickness, suffering, and distress (cf. Isa. 35:5-6).
- They will be delivered from death, because death will be no longer.
- Because God enlightens them, they will have more and more opportunities to gain knowledge and an ever-deepening understanding of God and His plan of salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). However, past events will no longer affect them negatively (cf. Isa. 65:17).
- They will participate in God's reign.

2. God (Rev. 21:3, 22-23; 22:3-5)

- God will directly dwell among His people. His children can see and meet Him face to face. God and humans will be reunited. Direct access to the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit will be given. Finally, we will be at home. This is the climax of what the new paradise is all about.
- Since God will be personally present and will "tabernacle" among the redeemed (Rev. 21:3), the new Jerusalem will have become the temple.
- God's glory will provide light and warmth in all areas of life. Therefore, heavenly bodies are no longer necessary as sources of light.

The new paradise will surpass the old paradise by far. Satan and sin will be no more. Instead God will live among His children. It is worth to get there. Therefore, I make sure that my name is included in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27).

BOOK NOTES

Herbert E. Douglass, *Truth Matters*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006. 214 pp. US\$15.99.

With *Truth Matters* Herbert Douglass marches boldly but nimbly into contested territory with an analysis of the Megachurch Syndrome, particularly Rick Warren's Saddleback Church and its *Purpose Driven Life* icon. One layer below the surface, however, Douglass is challenging that pillar of modern materialist thought, that more must be better, and numerical growth is guarantee even of divine endorsement in the case of a religious organization. The overhanging flaw in such an assumption is that many movements of questionable virtue exhibit rapid growth. More is not necessarily better. Is the current substitution of subjective experience in place of revealed truth really valid?

Douglass is well-known and respected among Adventists, having a long and distinguished service career in such posts as President of Atlantic Union College, Associate Editor of the *Adventist Review*, leadership in an Adventist-related health care center, and other assignments. He has

been and remains a prolific author of books and journal articles and often is the featured speaker at major events. His theological expertise often surfaces in his work, as is the case in *Truth Matters*.

Here Douglas traces and deepens a furrow pioneered by Adventist administrator Tom Mostert in his recent *Hidden Heresy* (Pacific Press, 2005). Douglass, however, deals in substance with a wider array of issues and focuses on analysis.

In addressing the Rick Warren phenomenon Douglass repeatedly makes favorable comments, noting that *Purpose Driven Life* with its multi-million copy circulation has proven helpful to many of its readers, that it clearly has filled a gap between the church and secularized people, and has drawn enthusiasts in large numbers. Douglass notes, however, the minimal place given to biblical doctrine. In his analysis of Saddleback's eight-point doctrinal statement he notes its general orthodoxy within Evangelical thought but a reductionistic brevity which shifts the focus toward meeting human needs, with minimal attention to the constellation of revealed truths to be found throughout the Bible.

Douglass' commitment to biblical truth and respect for the Spirit of Prophecy writings come through strongly and in balance. The book is very readable, broken into eighteen short chapters, the first eleven devoted to his analysis of the Saddleback program, which he critiques gently. Yet he identifies serious problems that render the Saddleback system unsuitable as a model for Adventists, whose identity is tied to revealed truth.

The initial chapters satisfy the announced purpose of the book, following which the author shifts in a new direction as he advances insights from an Adventist understanding which could contribute to Saddleback.

Two or three observations may be helpful. The format of the Megachurch development with its need-oriented point of view lies in the contemporary postmodern value system. There, truth is discovered rather than revealed objectively. The focus is on human experience. Of course, this bypasses in large degree the full biblical teaching that guides every aspect of the believer's life. The objective unity of revelation is forfeited in favor of the postmodern denial of absolutes. As a consequence, the nature of Christianity becomes modified. In avoiding a clear review of the postmodernist background, Dr. Douglass' analysis leans toward addressing symptoms more than the foundational problem. The finest current analysis by an Adventist of how postmodern values impact Christian thought and life is to be found in Normal Gulley's *Prolegomena* (Andrews University Press, 2000), which is the initial volume of his forthcoming Systematic Theology.

Nevertheless, Douglass' book is certain to exert a helpful influence among Adventists. To date it offers the clearest analysis yet of a system that has attracted a sizable number of Adventists, particularly in the ministry.

On a passing note, *Truth Matters* carries a few minor errors that in no way weaken the message of the book, yet deserve attention in a reprint. As examples, the proper name is Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (p. 18 and others.). It was Clovis, not Constantine, who was involved in the notorious river baptism (p. 80). Aside from such trivia, *Truth Matters* is well worth reading by any Adventist who wants a careful guide to the Megachurch phenomenon.

George W. Reid, former director BRI

Leonard Brand and David C. Jarnes: *Beginnings: Are Science and Scripture Partners in the Search for Origins?* Nampa, ID.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2006. 175 pp. US\$15.99.

In this book, the authors pursue a unique line of inquiry into the relationship between science and faith. Brand and Jarnes are open about their methodological commitments. Rejecting the common approach which assumes that science and faith follow separate paths, the authors propose to seek a way in which the two fields challenge each other towards more careful study and research. Implied in this new approach is a respect for both science and faith. The authors are not prepared to relegate religion merely to values and morality, but allow it to speak to the issues of origins and the history of life on earth. Yet, they are committed to the scientific method of observation and experimentation. They only reject its naturalistic assumption that the cosmos has never known any supernatural intervention, arguing that no evidence demands its adoption. Brand and Jarnes are convinced that “neither scientific results nor the words of Scripture tell lies,” but that sometimes “we read something between the lines that isn’t really there” (p. 7-8). These methodological matters occupy the first three chapters of the book’s twelve short chapters. From these methodological perspectives, Brand and Jarnes examine issues of biological origins and history (chapter 4-8) as well as geological history (chapter 9-10). The book concludes with a discussion on why these issues matter (chapter 11) and a short concluding reflection (chapter 12).

The authors begin the discussion on the genesis of life with a consideration of the opposing options of abiogenesis (the naturalistic approach) and the interventionist approach (supernaturalist approach). The discussion is set in the context of the contemporary understanding of the complexity of the cell and molecular biology. The nature of biomolecular machines and biological molecules as information convinces the authors of the improbability of abiogenesis.

On the history of life, Brand and Jarnes look favorably to microevolution and speciation without presuming that they should lead one necessarily to accept megaevolution (the idea that genetic changes through natural selection can

lead to new life forms). They believe that the supernatural origin of life, together with microevolution and speciation in the context of changed environments, explains the minor diversities such as color, size, and body proportions that we see in organisms (microevolution). Beside the serious challenge that Behe’s theory of ‘irreducibly complex systems’ and molecular embryology’s HOX genes pose for Darwinian evolution theory (85), Brand and Jarnes provide reasonable scientific evidence to counter arguments for megaevolution based on such phenomena as vestigial organs, homology (similar structural patterns), and imperfect design (chapter 6). Furthermore, the authors encourage scientists to consider carefully the scanty and unconvincing evidence on which megaevolution is based, citing in particular arguments based on variation in genes for some groups of proteins and insects’ resistance to insecticides. In view of this paucity of evidence, Brand and Jarnes suggest that “evolutionary science merely assumes the existence of a genetic process that can evolve new structures or gene complexes” (p. 84).

Without minimizing the challenge that an interventionist approach to the issue of origins faces, Brand and Jarnes consistently raise questions to force the scientific community to consider all the evidence candidly. This means that with respect to fossils, for example, the scientist must be vigilant to question the assumptions upon which radiometric (potassium-40 and carbon-14) dating are based (pp. 101-105). Similarly, in the study of the geological column and other related geological matters such as rapid geologic activity, one should not dismiss quickly the evidence that point in the direction of short-age geology (pp. 111-115).

Brand and Jarnes should be commended for the clarity and simplicity with which they address issues that are very technical in nature. For this reason everyone may benefit from reading their work. More importantly, the value of this book to a person of faith struggling with the issues of origins and life is significant. Without avoiding the difficult questions, the authors provide plausible, albeit rudimentary, ways of looking at the facts in a different way. The challenges that science presents to religion are examined carefully. The improbability of abiogenesis is fairly discussed. Almost all the relevant challenging biological and geological questions in the faith-science debate are reasonably evaluated. Perhaps the greatest value of the book is the methodological discussion which shows that at least from this perspective, megaevolution has not yet hit a ‘home run.’ It is, therefore, appropriate and indeed necessary for science and faith to confront each other and thus force further research. The authors give pointers to the direction in which this kind of research could be beneficial (chapter 12).

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