

## Recent European Attempt to Legislate Sunday

BY KAREL NOWAK

Late last year, Catholics and Protestants again joined together to urge that Sunday be legislated as an official day of rest. Their immediate goals include closing shops and restricting other business activities on Sundays.

Two religious organizations, the Commission of Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC), gained public attention during debate on proposed amendments to the European Directive 2003/88/EC, which deals with work schedule regulations. These two organizations, the first one Roman Catholic and the second one ecumenical (comprising a majority of the traditional Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican churches), were created primarily to interface politically with European institutions.

Article 5 of the actual directive (2003/88/EC) titled "Weekly Rest Period" reads as follows:

*Member States shall take the measures necessary to ensure that, per each seven-day period, every worker is entitled to a minimum uninterrupted rest period of 24 hours plus the 11 hours daily rest referred to in Article 3.*

*If objective, technical or work organization conditions so justify, a minimum rest period of 24 hours may be applied.*

The initiative proposed to add a third clause to this article:

*The minimum rest period referred to*

*in the first paragraph shall in principle include Sunday.*

Interestingly, this wording is not new. It used to be part of a similar directive (93/104/EC) from 1993. But in 1996, the European Court of Justice annulled this phrase stating that "the Council has failed to explain why Sunday, as a weekly rest day, is more closely connected with the health and safety of workers than any other day of the week" (ECJ, Case C-84/94). That is why the 2008 initiative proposed an additional paragraph in the



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rationale at the beginning of the directive. The proposed paragraph (6a) would read:

*The likelihood of sickness in companies that require staff to work on Sundays is greater than in companies that do not require staff to work on Sundays. The health of workers depends, among other factors, on*

*their opportunities to reconcile work and family life, to establish and maintain social ties and to pursue their spiritual needs. Sunday, as the traditional weekly rest day, contributes to these objectives more than any other day of the week.*

The common documents of COMECE and CEC explain the proposed amendments and seek to supply argumentation to rebut the finding of the European Court of Justice.

The directive was discussed by the European Parliament in mid-December 2008. The amendments proposed by COMECE and CEC and supported by several members of the EU Parliament were dismissed for formal reasons and therefore not even discussed. This fact suggests that the idea of legally

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## EDITORIAL

## Testing the Prophets



Is everything a true prophet says under inspiration to be accepted or can we evaluate the messages and decide what to accept and what to reject? Some theologians think that Paul teaches this approach in 1 Cor 14:29, appealing to versions such as the NIV in support: “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said.”

In practical terms, this would mean that when God gives a specific message to a prophet the rest of the congregation should sit in judgment on whether the message is valuable or not, whether it should be accepted or not. However, Jesus did not say “Beware of the false elements in the sayings of my prophets” but “Beware of false prophets,” calling them “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matt 7:15). The idea that every church member should “listen carefully and evaluate each statement, distinguishing what he or she felt to be good from the less good, what was thought to be helpful from the unhelpful, what was perceived to be true from false”<sup>1</sup> is utterly at variance with the rest of Scripture. The driving force behind this new understanding of 1 Cor 14:29 is not biblical exegesis but the justification in Protestant churches of modern “prophets” who admit that sometimes their prophecies are wrong.

To understand what Paul means here, it should be recognized that the Corinthian church had many problems: division in the church (1 Cor 1–4); immorality (1 Cor 5); members taking members to court (1 Cor 6), etc. In 1 Cor 14 Paul deals with spiritual gifts and their misuse. The key issue in v. 29 is the meaning of the word “judge” (Gk. *diakrinō*). Does it mean to judge the words of a true prophet or does it mean to judge between true and false prophets? *Diakrinō* has a variety of meanings one of which is “distinguishing” between people. Peter says that God “made no distinction [*diakrinō*]” between Jewish and Gentile believers in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:9); Paul asks the Corinthians, “Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge [*diakrinō*] a dispute between believers?” (1 Cor 6:5 NIV); and James says to fellow Christians, “have you not discriminated [*diakrinō*] among yourselves” by making a difference between the rich and the poor? (Jas 2:3-4). This meaning of *diakrinō* also makes perfect sense in 1 Cor 14:29 as the NASB shows: “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment [as to who is a true prophet].” Eric Wright, therefore, concludes, “The discrimination believers are to make is not just between truth and falsehood in a prophecy [as some people claim], but between true and false prophets. Any error denoted a false prophet.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, in 1 Thess 5:21, after exhorting the believers not to despise prophecy (v. 19) Paul says, “Test (*dokimazō*) all things; hold fast what is good.” Paul did not encourage the acceptance of every message claiming divine authority and even warned that false teachers would enter the church (Acts 20:29-30). Paul’s teaching is consistent, admonishing Christians to test anyone claiming to be a prophet, including whether this new “revelation” is in harmony with previous revelation (cf. Acts 17:11). Once a prophet is recognized as from the Lord, however, fallible human reason should not sit in judgment on the messages God gives. We must seek to understand it and apply it to our lives.

Gerhard Pfandl, BRI

<sup>1</sup>Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians* (New York: University Press of America, 1982), 60.

<sup>2</sup>E. E. Wright, *Strange Fire?* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1996), 286.

**PURPOSE**

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Articles for Theological Focus, which address current issues that are important for Adventist theology, are written at the invitation of BRI and should not exceed 2,500 words. All invited submissions should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* in general matters and *The SBL Handbook of Style* for more specialized questions, including abbreviations of primary and secondary sources and the transliteration of ancient texts according to the general-purpose style. They should be sent by e-mail as word processing document attachments to the editor at [brinewsletter@gc.adventist.org](mailto:brinewsletter@gc.adventist.org).

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## THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

# God's End-Time Remnant and Charges of Exclusivism and Triumphalism

BY ÁNGEL MANUEL RODRÍGUEZ

Adventists have found in Rev 12:17 and 14:6-12 a description of their identity and mission as God's end-time remnant people. The application of that biblical motif to themselves has led some to conclude that the Adventist understanding of the remnant is offensive, exclusivist, and triumphalist. This opinion is based on a distorted understanding of the biblical data and of the way Adventists apply it to themselves. There are several specific things that we can say in response to those charges.

### 1. The Remnant as a Particular Group

The application of the remnant concept to a specific group of persons through whom God is fulfilling His design for the human race in a particular way, is found throughout the Scriptures. There is Noah, the only one found to be righteous in his generation (a faithful remnant), proclaiming judgment against humanity (Gen 7:1). Elijah and seven thousand Israelites remained faithful to the Lord during the national apostasy of Israel (1 Kgs 19:10, 18). In fact, Elijah spoke against the apostasy and announced God's judgment against His people. Would it be correct to say that when the prophets and those who join them in the preservation and practice of God's truth saw themselves as God's faithful ones they were being offensive, exclusivist, and triumphalist? The same would apply to Jesus and His message, to the work of the disciples, and to the apostolic Christian community constituted by Him as His faithful remnant. Throughout history, the remnant people of God have simply been fulfilling the task God assigned them. In doing that they revealed their true identity and the depth of their commitment to their Redeemer. Their faithfulness set them apart from those who chose a life of rebellion and covenant violations.

### 2. Spiritual Crisis and the Remnant

The Scriptures make clear that God's remnant people very often appeared at critical social and spiritual moments in the life of the

larger people of God. This usually happened in the context of apostasy and oppression, e.g., the ministry of Elijah (1 Kgs 17–19; see also Zeph 3:11-13). In the Bible, we find significant references to the remnant shortly before the exile, during the exile, and after the exile. In these historical periods, Israel and Judah violated the covenant made with the Lord but He preserved a remnant for Himself of faithful ones. In that setting, one of the roles of the remnant was that of servanthood. They were called by God to serve others by calling them to His undivided service (e.g. Isa 66:18-20). In fact, at times they themselves had to go through a purifying experience, thus suggesting that they were also in constant need of God's grace (e.g. Zeph 3:9, 13; cf. Rev 3:14-22). Therefore, God's remnant people were called to humble service to Him who in His grace called them to His service. There is no room in the biblical concept of the remnant for self-glorification and triumphalism.



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### 3. Inclusivity and the Remnant

The existence of the remnant does not mean that salvation is exclusively theirs. It is true that the history of the concept of the remnant shows that it has been misused along exclusivist lines. This was particularly the case in the Qumran community located near the Dead Sea. But the truth is that God's people are not restricted to a particular social, ethnic, or religious group. They are found everywhere. A biblical remnant ecclesiology presupposes that God is actively involved in the salvation of people outside the remnant. The work of the Holy Spirit reaches every

individual even in the absence of a concrete expression of the people of God. The Spirit, like the wind, “blows wherever it pleases” (John 3:8). We can suggest that the totality of God’s people is larger than the remnant (cf. Rev 12:17; 18:4). This should put to rest once and for all any charges of exclusivism in Adventist ecclesiology and soteriology.

#### 4. Message of the Remnant

The biblical remnant has always had a message that was of relevance and importance to God’s people at a particular historical moment. It often contained elements of judgment against the larger religious community, but its intent was to proclaim salvation (cf. Isa 58:9-14). The real aim of the message of the remnant has always been salvific and may have included restoration of truth and rejection of apostasy (Isa 8:16-20; Rev 14:6-12). This is what we find in the biblical prophets, in Jesus, and in the apostolic church.

#### 5. Common Threats for All Christians

Any religious community claiming to have a particular identity and mission (i.e., claiming to possess a message of universal value and relevance and/

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or requiring from potential members the acceptance of specific beliefs and practices that are considered non-negotiable for the life of that community) could

be open to the charges of arrogance, triumphalism, and exclusivism. However, those claims by themselves do not necessarily make the religious community that way.

We, as Adventists, should do all we can to avoid giving wrong impressions that may, in the opinion of some, provide reason to raise those charges against us. It is, therefore, important for us to express our remnant ecclesiology clearly when interacting with other Christians. There is no need to offend anyone through the proclamation of our message. In case the charges continue to be raised, it is important for us not to be intimidated by them nor to consider them valid. If we know who we are and if we also know that the charges are incorrect, then we should go on fulfilling our mission as God’s end-time remnant people.



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## Scripture and Experience

BY ALBERTO TIMM

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was grounded originally on the hermeneutical principle of *sola Scriptura* (the exclusiveness of Scripture). Much emphasis was placed on the grammatical-historical meaning of the biblical text. Other sources of religious knowledge, such as tradition, reason, and experience, were regarded as acceptable only if in harmony with what was understood as the teachings of God’s Word. But this approach has lost much of its power under the influence of philosophical existentialism, encounter theology, Pentecostalism, and postmodernism. Today, many Christians rely more on their own subjective experience than on the objective teachings of Scripture.

By contrast, Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as a special end-time prophetic movement raised up by God “to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, if true Christian religion consists of a living experience with God and being loyal to the teachings of Scripture, what specific roles do Scripture and experience play in the Christian life? How can they be integrated in order to avoid the risk of overemphasizing one to the detriment of the other?

The present article discusses briefly four distinctive attempts to integrate Scripture and experience into the Christian life. The main purpose is to evaluate critically each of those attempts in the light of God’s Word, trying to identify the model that better reflects the biblical view of the subject.

### 1. Scripture Overruling Experience

Christian denominations tend over time to replace the teachings of Scripture by anti-biblical components of contemporary culture.<sup>2</sup> Attempting to reverse that process, some people end up overruling personal experience with a strong emphasis on the teachings of Scripture. Under this model, the objective dimension of religion speaks much louder than the subjective one, and obedience to a given body of rules overshadows a living relationship with Christ. The natural outcome of this approach may be formalism and legalism.

Undoubtedly, the cognitive content of Scripture plays a foundational role within the Christian life. The apostle Paul argues that, for someone to believe in God, he or she needs to have an objective knowledge of God (Rom 10:13-15). According to Alister McGrath, “we don’t just believe in God, we believe certain quite definite things about him. In other words, faith has a content as well as an object.”<sup>3</sup>

Christ defined His genuine followers as those who live by “every word that comes from the mouth of God”

(Matt 4:4),<sup>4</sup> and who hear His “words” and put “them into practice” (Matt 7:24). In the Revelation of John we are warned that “if anyone adds anything” to the words of the prophecy of that book, “God will add to him the plagues described” in it; and “if anyone takes the words away from” that book, “God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city” (Rev 22:18, 19). And Peter adds, “we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). So, we are not allowed to disregard the wording of Scripture, for it is actually God’s Word in human language.

However, as meaningful as biblical doctrines are, true religion is much more than just intellectual convictions. It means a spiritual conversion that works from the inside towards the outside of the person (see John 3:1-21), so that he or she becomes a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). Neither rationalism nor social activism can generate such saving experience.

## 2. Experience Overruling Scripture

Departing from the cold formalism of a mere intellectual religion, many Christians have overruled the cognitive component of Scripture with some kind of existential or charismatic form of religion.<sup>5</sup> Influential in this process was Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*, suggesting that our formal “I-It” relationships should be replaced by more personal “I-You” ones, that is, treating people (and God) as *persons* with whom fulfilling relationships may be formed rather than as *objects* to fulfill our needs.<sup>6</sup> This approach helped to shape the so-called “theology of encounter”<sup>7</sup> whereby knowing God personally and individually is the aim rather than knowing about Him.<sup>8</sup>

Many modern Christians, who trust the supposed “voice of the Spirit” speaking to their own minds more than the Bible text, try to justify such an attitude with Paul’s statement that “the letter [*gramma*] kills, but the Spirit [*pneuma*] gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). But the context of the statement reveals that Paul is simply contrasting the old and the new covenants. The old (referred to as “the letter”) was indeed a limited shadow of the new (see Heb 8). Yet, if we assume that the old was faulty in its very essence, then we have to assume also that God established an erroneous way of salvation for Israel. The problem was not with the covenant itself, but rather with its misinterpretation, first, by ancient Israel, and, later on, by the church in Corinth. Ralph Martin suggests that the “letter” here refers to “a certain interpretation of the Torah which prevailed at Corinth” or, in other words, “a misuse of Moses’ law seen as an end in itself and which

fails to appreciate its true purpose (Rom 10:4: *telos*) as leading to Christ, its fulfillment (Gal 3:24).”<sup>9</sup>

Despite the distortions proposed by both encounter theology and charismatic theology, personal experience with God is basic for the Christian religion. In contrast to the Greek emphasis on knowing oneself, the Bible places the relationship with God as the basis of all true knowledge. Isaiah invited Israel, “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near” (Isa 55:7). Hosea added, “So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD” (Hos 6:3, NASB). Jesus declared that “eternal life” means to know both God the Father and Christ Himself (John 17:3). Such knowledge includes a deep relational aspect, well expressed in Christ’s own analogy of the vine and the branches (John 15:1-17), Paul’s expression “in Christ” (Rom 8:1, 39; 16:3, 7, 9, 10; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 1:22; 5:6; Eph 1:13), and John’s mention of having “the Son of God” (1 John 5:12).

Acknowledging that both Scripture and experience play a foundational role within the Christian religion, there remains still the need to consider in more detail how they interrelate within the Christian life.

## 3. Experience Equaling Scripture

Seeing the need of keeping together both Scripture and experience, some Christians are tempted to equate experience with Scripture. A classic example of this is the so-called “Wesleyan quadrilateral,” in which Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are placed on the same level of authority. However, Donald A. D. Thorsen points out that the image of a quadrilateral may not be the best representation of John Wesley’s theology:

If one insists on choosing a geometric figure as a paradigm for Wesley, a tetrahedron – a tetrahedral pyramid – would be more appropriate. Scripture would serve as the foundation of the pyramid, with the three sides labeled tradition, reason, and experience as complementary but not primary sources of religious authority.<sup>10</sup>

Any attempt to raise experience up to the same level of Scripture creates a certain kind of divided loyalty, in which sometimes Scripture overrules experience and at other times experience supercedes Scripture. Often-times human reason and personal taste decide which of these elements should have primacy. So, those teachings of the Bible with which one agrees and which are to one’s liking are recognized as normative. On the other hand, those scriptural portions which he or she considers senseless or tasteless are regarded as culturally conditioned and obsolete. Even though the authority of

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Scripture is acknowledged, that authority is frequently overshadowed by experience.

In contrast to encounter theology and charismatic theology, which tend to replace Scripture with experience, the biblical text itself seems to be taken more seriously in postmodern hermeneutics. But, by employing “reader-oriented criticism” in connection with Scripture,<sup>11</sup> the postmodern approach is concerned not so much with what the biblical text actually says or how it was understood by its original readers but with how people today understand the text and what meaning it actually has for them. By moving the focus of authority from Scripture to its readers, postmodernists open up the biblical text to a variety of subjective interpretations, all of which are equally valid. Consequently, there is no longer a clear and consistent Word of God, but rather many conflicting words attributed supposedly to God.

Addressing the subject of “relevance and ambiguity of experience,” Anthony C. Thiselton warns that if experience “is abstracted from Scripture, tradition, and reason, it is notoriously capable of unstable or diverse interpretation.”<sup>12</sup> So, in order to avoid this danger, we have to take more seriously into consideration what the Bible has to say about itself and its relationship to experience.

#### 4. Scripture Mediating Experience

The Bible states clearly that our saving experience with God has to be informed and mediated by God’s written word. In the book of Psalms the word of God is metaphorically called “a lamp” to our feet and “a light” to our path” (Ps 119:105). Christ stated that His followers should live “by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). Paul explains, “‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they

***Christian maturity includes becoming increasingly dependent on God and His Word.***

are sent?” (Rom 10:13-15). Those and other biblical invitations to live faithfully by God’s Word imply that the Word precedes experience. According to Artur Weiser, “faith is always man’s reaction to God’s primary action.”<sup>13</sup>

Scriptural evidences indicate that the “word” by which Christians should live is not subjective im-

***By moving the focus of authority from Scripture to its readers, postmodernists open up the biblical text to a large variety of subjective interpretations.***

pressions of the Holy Spirit on the conscience of the Christian. That “word” refers to the objective prophetic voices recorded in Scripture. Isaiah warns, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn” (Isa 8:20). The apostle Peter explains, “And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:19-21).

Even accepting the primacy of Scripture over experience, many Christians today read the Bible no longer to *learn* truth, but only to *nourish* their mystical relationship with Christ.<sup>14</sup> Obedience to the valuable components of biblical ethics is regarded as deriving spontaneously from a personal relationship with Christ. Those components which do not derive in that way are regarded as meaningless and irrelevant. As attractive as this notion might be, we have to realize that the acceptance of Christ as one’s personal Savior does not automatically lead to concrete obedience to lifestyle components such as Sabbath observance, tithing, and health reform. When someone accepts Christ, the principle and motivation for obedience is implanted in his or her life (see Phil 2:13), providing no room whatsoever for human merit in salvation; but obedience in concrete terms has to be learned from Scripture.

Speaking of Christ’s own experience, the Bible declares that “he grew in wisdom” (Luke 2:52). Ellen G. White adds that from Mary’s “lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He [Jesus] learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother’s knee.”<sup>15</sup> And the apostle Paul counseled Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:14, 15). This means that the saving knowledge of God must be learned from Scripture and practiced in the daily life.

#### Concluding Remarks

Since true Christian religion is a personal experience with God and with fellow human beings (Matt 22:34-40), we cannot discard its experiential element without ruining our whole religion. But many Christians

today are accepting an experience-centered approach that leaves Scripture open to a large variety of subjective interpretations. Those who support the *sola Scriptura* principle will never regard experience as of the same or higher value than Scripture. The same Holy Spirit who inspired the canonical prophets will guide the believers into full conformity with God's word. According to Christ's own words, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). In other words, our experience should be mediated and guided by Scripture. This means that our personal experience with God, instead of departing from His Word, should grow closer and closer to it.

Independent thinking is regarded as a basic characteristic of a mature person. Undoubtedly, Christians should "be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts."<sup>16</sup> But, at the same time, Christian maturity also means becoming increasingly dependent on God and His Word. In reality, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa 40:6-8).

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1911), 595.

<sup>2</sup>An insightful approach to that process is provided by Jacques Ellul

in his book *The Subversion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>Alister McGrath, *Understanding Doctrine: Its Relevance and Purpose for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 39.

<sup>4</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New International Version (NIV).

<sup>5</sup>A helpful assessment of this phenomenon can be found in Vanderlei Dorneles, *Cristãos em Busca do Êxtase*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Engenheiro Coelho, SP, Brazil: Unaspres, 2003).

<sup>6</sup>See Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, transl. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).

<sup>7</sup>This approach permeates Charles B. Ketcham's whole book *A Theology of Encounter: The Ontological Ground for a New Christology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978).

<sup>8</sup>An example of the negative impact of such a theology on the authority and function of the Bible may be found in Herold Weiss, "Revelation and the Bible: Beyond Verbal Inspiration," *Spectrum* 7, no. 3 (1975): 53.

<sup>9</sup>Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Word Biblical Commentary; 52 vols.; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), 40:55.

<sup>10</sup>Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 71.

<sup>11</sup>For non-Adventist expositions of postmodern biblical hermeneutics, see, e.g., Edgar V. McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-oriented Criticism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1988); Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992); George Aichele et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 451, 453.

<sup>13</sup>Artur Weiser, "pisteuō ktl.," in Gerhard Friedrich, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, transl. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (10 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 6:182.

<sup>14</sup>See Morris Venden, *Love God and Do as You Please: A New Look at the Old Rules* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup>Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 70.

<sup>16</sup>Ellen G. White, *Education* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 17.

## SCRIPTURE APPLIED

### The Creation

Although various confessions of faith used by different Christian churches still mention God as the Creator of all things, many Christians have chosen to accept evolution as the concept to understand origins. A multitude of approaches are available today such as creationism, intelligent design, evolution, theistic evolution, and progressive creation. What does Scripture teach, and what was Jesus' approach to the question of origins?

#### I. Creation in the Bible

Throughout Scripture God as Creator of all things

is confirmed. He was not dependent on preexisting matter but created material things and life through his Word (Heb 11:3; Ps 33:6). The Creator must always be distinguished from creation. It is only He who can create (Heb. *bara*; Gen 1:1, 16, 27; 2:3, 4), while humans can reshape matter.

#### 1. Creation in the Old Testament

Gen 1:1-2:4a

This comprehensive report of creation teaches that God created life on earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. Chronological statements in Genesis and elsewhere in Scripture make it clear that creation

	took place only some thousands of years ago.
Gen 2:4a-25	This passage focuses on creation from a slightly different angle but is complementary to what goes before it, filling in details about the creation of Adam and Eve. The issue of choice and the possibility of death are introduced through the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Death is a reality only after the Fall (Gen 3–4).
Exod 20:8-11	The Sabbath and the seven-day week are rooted in creation.
Pss 19:1-6; 33:6	The wisdom books confirm God as the Creator of heaven and earth and all life (see also Job 38–41; Ps 8:4-10; 104:5-30; 136:4-9).
Isa 40:26	The prophetic books give a similar testimony (see also Jer 10:11-13; 27:5; Amos 4:13; 5:8).

• **How can light exist if the sun, moon, and stars do not appear until the fourth day?** It is possible that the light on day one came from God Himself, who is light (see a similar description of the new creation in Rev 21:23). The point is that God should be worshipped and not the heavenly bodies as was and is done in pagan religions.

• **How long are the days in Genesis 1?** Some have suggested that the days consisted of thousands or millions of years. Thousands or even millions of years are not sufficient for macroevolution to work; 2 Peter 3:8 is not about creation but asserts that God is not limited to our concepts of time. Genesis is a historical narrative. It should not be understood metaphorically. The statements that each day of creation consisted of a dark period and a light period, the numbering of the days, the term “day” itself which in Genesis points to a literal day (2:17; 3:5, 8 etc.), and the connection of the creation days to the origin of the week and the weekly Sabbath (Exod 20:8-11) show that the author of Genesis had in mind normal days.

## 2. Jesus and Creation

Jesus not only pointed back to Genesis 1 and 2 but also referred to Abel (Matt 23:35), Noah (Matt 24:37-39), and the Flood (Matt 24:39), showing that He understood these persons and events literally—including the creation account.

Mark 13:19	The universe and all life were created by God. God’s activity was the starting point for human history.
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Mark 2:27-28	Jesus refers to the Sabbath commandment in Exod 20 where the Sabbath, understood as a 24-hour day, is made for human beings.
Matt 19:4-5	While discussing divorce Jesus quotes Gen 1:27 and 2:24, affirming that humanity was directly created by God.

The contribution of the New Testament to the creation debate, among other things, is that Jesus is the Creator (John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-16; Heb 1:2, 10). It provides a cosmic perspective which includes more than the creation of life on earth. It also makes clear that the One who *created* all things is able to *reconcile* all things through His blood shed on the cross. It is inconsistent to claim that Jesus provided salvation through His death and yet maintain that He created us through an evolutionary process of millions of years. Because of the Fall, we need to be recreated spiritually (Eph 2:10; 2 Cor 5:17).

## 3. Other New Testament Writers and Creation

1 Tim 2:13	Paul, like Jesus, based his theology on a literal reading of the Genesis accounts of Creation (Heb 4:4) and the Fall (2 Cor 11:3). Adam and Eve are real historical personages (1 Cor 15:22).
Rev 14:7	John indicates not only that God created all things (Rev 4:11; 10:6) but that the message of creation is part of God’s last message to this world. The tree of life (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 19) and the springs of the water of life (21:6) as well as the serpent (Rev 12:9, 17; 20:2) remind us of the original paradise (Gen 2:9-10; 3:1, 3, 14, 22, 24). Revelation 21–22 pictures paradise restored in a new heaven and a new earth with the new Jerusalem.

## II. Points about Evolution

1. Although the theory of evolution is widely assumed to be part of the scientific enterprise, the question of origins deals more with history and not with present circumstances replicable in a laboratory.
2. The theory of evolution is also dependent on philosophical presuppositions. Often it is based on naturalism

which excludes supernatural activity. Theistic evolution allows God's involvement in the evolutionary process but sets limits on what He can do.

3. Serious questions have been raised in relation to chemical evolution, irreducibly complex systems, missing links and, when working on a macro level, the mechanisms of mutation and natural selection.
4. The theory of evolution has also influenced the study of the humanities, including theology (e.g., the evolution of biblical books as a natural process apart from inspiration).
5. Ethical questions arise out of the concept of the survival of the fittest as it seems to allow for genocide, exploitation of the under privileged, and absolute materialism.

### III. Consequences of Evolution for the Biblical Worldview

1. The theory of evolution postulates death, not as an enemy (1 Cor 15:26) nor as the result of sin, but as bringing about better adaptations for life's challenges. However, according to Scripture, death is the result of sin. If sin is not biblically defined as the transgression of divine law, no savior is needed. Also, resurrection and a new earth without evil or death becomes merely a pious but unrealistic dream and human life is essentially meaningless.

2. The theory of evolution can easily lead to nihilism. Its acceptance also leads to the denial or drastic modification of major biblical doctrines.
3. The theory of theistic evolution also paints a strange picture of God, not as almighty but subject to natural law; not as loving but cruel because He has used a process for creating life that requires extreme suffering and death.
4. If the theory of evolution is correct, the biblical Sabbath becomes a human invention and can be easily discarded.
5. Also, the acceptance of evolution leaves us no future except through the unbiblical concept of an immortal soul, but such deification of humanity is even more questionable.

### III. Conclusion

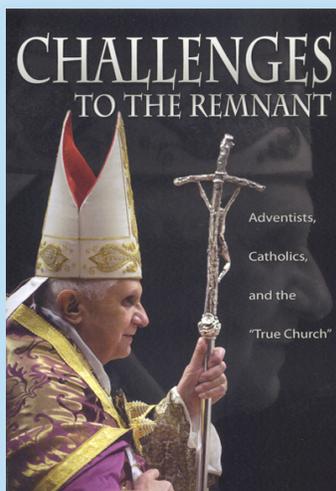
Neither evolution nor creation can be proven scientifically. Even though we do not have all the evidence to support divine creation, we do not need to postulate blind faith. The doctrine of creation is clear from the Word of God and remains the best explanation for the origin of life. It also provides a satisfying and harmonious biblical worldview.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

### BOOK NOTES

Marvin Moore. *Challenges to the Remnant*. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2008. 256 pp. US\$16.99.

In *Challenges to the Remnant* the author attempts to trace God's remnant throughout history until the end of the age, noting three main challenges common to God's remnant: persecution, deception, and mission. The task is executed in twenty-two chapters and four appendices. Devoting the first three chapters of the book to a discussion of the Vatican's 2007 reaffirmation of the Roman Catholic Church as the only true church, the author already hints at what he discusses explicitly in chapter four: the issue of the remnant as a topic of ecclesiology. Here the author defines the *church* as the "universal" or "invisible" church which comprises "all true believers in Jesus, be they Adventists, Catholics, Methodists, Baptists, or those who don't belong to any denomination" (p. 40). Chapters five to twenty-two contain the discussion of



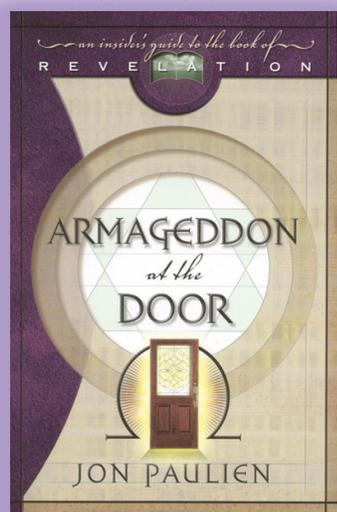
the history of the remnant, beginning in heaven and also ending there. In each of these chapters, historic moments of conflict between the faithful and the unfaithful are discussed.

In chapters five and six, the author examines the events surrounding the fall of Lucifer and the first human pair respectively, labeling the former the "first church fight" and the latter Satan's attack on "God's first church on earth." The sweep of biblical history in the Old Testament is surveyed under the heading "God's Church in a Broken World" in chapter seven, but unfortunately the discussion seems somewhat truncated. Chapters eight to ten deal with the New Testament church although eight and nine are devoted to Daniel's predictions about Satan's attacks on the church in the Christian era. After a brief discussion of the Protestant Reformation and the Great Awakenings in Europe and America in chapters eleven, twelve, and thirteen respectively, the remaining half of the book takes up the story of the prophetic rise and development of the

Adventist church as well as its fortunes until the millennium.

Not only does the author depict each of the stages discussed in the book as historic moments of the “church,” he sees the faithful in each stage as constituting a “remnant.” For this reason, the society in heaven that is governed by God’s laws “is God’s church in heaven” (p. 48), and after the war in heaven, “the loyal angels who remained in heaven could be called the remnant” (p. 54). Similarly Adam and Eve formed a “miniature version of the church in heaven,” (p. 57) although in this case, the time of the fall is “the only time in the history of God’s church on earth when He has not had a loyal remnant left” (p. 58). Obviously the author uses the terms “church” and “remnant,” not in a strict, theological sense. However, the freedom with which the author uses both terms enables him to weave the basic concept of the remnant into the history of the Great Controversy in a way that is appealing and simple to understand. In this way, the quick survey of events and personalities in the Reformation, but more especially of the Great Awakening and its interpreters of the prophecies of Daniel, leading up to the Advent Movement, will be quite rewarding to the general Adventist reading public. On the other hand, the more theologically inclined reader may feel that the book’s title promised a more focused discussion of the biblical concept of the remnant than the author delivers.

Kwabena Donkor, BRI



Jon Paulien. *Armageddon at the Door*. Hagerstown, MD: Herald Publishing Association, 2008. 223 pp. US\$15.99. Jon Paulien, dean of the School of Religion at Loma Linda University, has recently published a number of books. The volume that we are going to review briefly is an

interesting and important book dealing with the concept of Armageddon in John’s Apocalypse. The book consists of twelve chapters and an appendix and is directed to church members.

The first two chapters deal with politics, namely Islamic terrorism and the “Western Response” which

focuses primarily on the American response. This part is somewhat disconnected from the rest of the book which focuses mostly on the biblical interpretation of Armageddon and takes the readers through Rev 16–19 with excursions into Rev 12–14.

Paulien shows that Armageddon as a concept in Revelation is broader than the single passage of Rev 16:16 where the term is mentioned. He clarifies what the term itself means and what the battle of Armageddon entails through a study of the Old Testament background and of important New Testament passages. He connects the battle of Armageddon with the Mt. Carmel event in the Old Testament, but with reversed effects. Fire comes down on the wrong altar, and people are being deceived so that it will be extremely difficult even for true believers. They can no longer trust their senses but must rely on God’s Word against their perceptions.

The battle of Armageddon is the final battle of world history and is a battle for the minds of human beings. There will be “three worldwide confederacies”: the saints or remnant, Babylon, and a political confederacy consisting of the secular powers (p. 143). Since Babylon and the secular powers join forces there will be only two groups at the end of time, God’s people with the true gospel and Babylon supported by the secular powers which are united under a false gospel. Such a situation will lead to confrontation and the persecution of the saints. Relief comes through divine intervention. The secular powers will turn against Babylon when they realize that they have been deceived. Both of these confederacies will be destroyed, and the saints will triumph with the Lamb.

After having interpreted the final battle, Paulien summarizes his results in chapters ten and eleven and provides a kind of outline of end-time events. Chapter twelve contains helpful practical implications. Paulien briefly returns to the war against terrorism and suggests that this may be a “sort of dress rehearsal for the end of time” (p. 184). He also speaks about “The Islamic Side of Adventism” (p. 187) where he suggests that if some jihadist leaders would become “convicted by the claim of Jesus” and become “associated with the work of the biblical remnant... almost overnight there would be a million new jihadist suspects in North America” (pp. 187-88). Here he may be referring to Adventists and a future political persecution. However, he also stresses trusting in God, the need of discernment, obedience, and being grounded in the Word of God. The appendix deals with the seven heads of the beast in Rev 17.

The volume is easy and good to read. In spite of the difficult subject matter there is great clarity. Illustrations and charts help in understanding the issues and fixing them in the minds of the readers. The book contains very valuable exegetical and theological insights which deserve a reading. Paulien also deals with questionable

interpretations of church members that identify these heads with seven popes starting from AD 1929 but which do not do justice to the text and which sometimes lead to “‘soft’ date setting” (p. 216). He challenges these as well as preterist interpretations.

On the other hand, as is to be expected with a book on this subject it contains a number of minor issues with which other students of Revelation would not fully agree. For instance, some may take exception with understanding the Euphrates River, the kings of the earth, the many waters, the earth dwellers, the beast of Rev 17, the ten horns and the seven kings of the same chapter as more or less parallel (p. 165), although they would agree that these are evil powers. Some readers may regret that the papacy is mentioned only in passing (pp. 142, 212) and that there is a much stronger emphasis on Islam, although they would agree that “the religious confederacy of the very end will be bigger than any single religion” (p. 142).

Some stories may be too elaborate and even irrelevant. There is some unnecessary repetition of con-

cepts (e.g., the reference to difficult parts of the Bible on p. 201 and in many other places) and of almost verbatim statements on the same page (e.g., mentions of the U.S. being too powerful to defeat, p. 24). The first two chapters sound as if the author has insider knowledge and knows political decisions made behind closed doors. However, references are missing, and we do not know why, for instance, George Friedman’s analysis is the “best” (26).

Regarding Paulien’s discussion of the beast of Rev 17 (221), readers may also wish to consult the present reviewer’s recent treatments of the subject (see *Reflections*, no. 5, January, 2005, pp. 2-8; *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary*, vol. 10 [2007], pp. 27-50, 153-76).

Overall, the exegetical-theological material, which constitutes most of the volume, is extremely helpful to read and gives valuable insights into the battle of Armageddon. It is crucial for an Adventist audience curious about end-time events. Paulien’s biblical and balanced approach must be commended.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

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## Recent European Attempt to Legislate Sunday

(continued from page 1)

imposed Sunday rest actually has little support in the parliament and especially in the EU Commission (a kind of European central government). The COMECE expressed its disappointment at the ruling in a December 17, 2008 news release. On February 11, 2009, the secretariat of COMECE issued a news release welcoming a new attempt by several members of the European Parliament to ask the House to approve a written declaration asking for “protection of a work-free Sunday as an essential pillar of the European Social Model and as part of the European cultural heritage.”

Although we recognize and support many of the values being urged by the proponents of Sunday rest legislation (such as family, health, ecology, and economic advantages), we regret that these initiatives do not take into consideration the consequences such legislation would have upon minority groups that observe a day other than Sunday as their day of religious rest.

Several European countries have traditionally had strong laws prohibiting shops from opening on Sundays and restricting activities that disturb the peace.

The growing number of exceptions, pressure from large supermarkets who want to remain open on Sundays and the rather permissive and indifferent attitude of a large portion of Europeans helps to explain the position of the European parliament.

To date, all initiatives to legislate Sunday as a day of rest throughout the European Union have failed. This does not mean that proponents of this legislation have given up on the idea. On the contrary, we have witnessed an increasing number of articles promoting Sunday rest appearing in a variety of publications with the purpose of altering public opinion. For example, the January 25, 2009 issue of the Belgian Catholic weekly *Dimanche* published an article addressing the issue of shops opening on Sundays. The author of this article quotes, among others, Pope Benedict XVI, who wrote in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* that the struggle in favor of Sunday continues to be a part of the church’s concerns. In the same way, the COMECE’s December 17 news release called for further mobilization and the uniting of voices to promote Sunday rest.

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