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THEOLOGICAL
FOCUS

A Fantastic New Resource: The New Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists (ESDA)

By Dragoslava Santrac

How did the work of Seventh-day Adventists start in Ghana? Who was the first single female Adventist missionary in Korea? Who were the Adventist martyrs in Europe? Who founded the Seventh-day Adventist church in Myanmar? What is the history of Avondale University College? What is the SDA Medical Cadet Corps? We now have reliable answers to these and many other questions related to the Adventist history at our fingertips.

A new, online *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* (ESDA) was released online July 1, 2020. This incredibly valuable resource is the Seventh-day Adventist Church's first online reference work. ESDA currently contains over 2,200 articles on Adventist history, crucial events and themes, people, organizations, and institutions; over four thousand photographs; and a growing collection of videos. Hundreds of new articles and photographs will be added to the encyclopedia in the upcoming weeks and months, with thousands being added in the following months and years. ESDA draws on the expertise of over one thousand authors and editors worldwide, reflecting the many cultures and ethnicities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Visit the ESDA website at encyclopedia.adventist.org.

What Is the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-Day Adventists*?

The ESDA is a global church project with a goal of completing approximately 8,500 articles with accompanying photographs, media, and original documents. It was officially voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day

Adventists at the 2015 Spring Meeting and serves the needs of a worldwide, expanding, and united church. The ESDA is a great tool—not only for those seeking to learn more about the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, its institutions, organizations, teachings, mission, and the people who were connected with it all, but also for those looking to witness to others. It provides reliable and well-documented information that can be quoted and used to present our church to the public. This free online resource will be periodically updated and expanded.

Almost twenty-five years after the second revised edition of the *SDA Encyclopedia*, and more than half a century after the publication of the first edition, the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs a new reference work: one that accurately depicts the Adventist Church of the twenty-first century and reflects its tremendous growth of the last fifty years, its shifts in global membership, and the development of Adventist theology and historical scholarship over the last quarter century. The online *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* provides readers with easy access to download articles and the ability to share the content digitally on online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or email, inviting interactive engagement with readers.

How Is the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists* Different From the *Encyclopedia* Produced in 1996?

The new ESDA is much larger in scope than the printed edition of the *SDA Encyclopedia* and is revolutionary as a digital reference work. Every article is care-

fully researched and can be continually updated. Like its predecessor, articles are peer-reviewed by Adventist experts in the field before they are accepted and made available to the public. The articles in the new *ESDA* also include historical data from world regions that could not be included in the print edition of the *Encyclopedia*. While the authors of earlier editions definitely tried to include an international worldwide perspective, many articles were written largely from a North American perspective. The new *ESDA* draws on the expertise of hundreds of Adventist authors worldwide. The editorial team comprises more than thirty-five assistant editors, sub-editors, editorial consultants, and research assistants, along with fifteen consultant editors from the Adventist Church's thirteen world divisions, the Middle East and North Africa Union, the Ellen G. White Estate, and the Biblical Research Institute.¹ The *ESDA* team is guided by the *ESDA* main office at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, MD, and is composed of the editor, managing editor, editorial assistant, and website developer.

The advantage of having worldwide contributions and a global involvement is that assistant editors in each division of the world church were able to identify authors with local (and expert) knowledge. They have been able to collect materials from local churches, such as letters and diaries. They have also recorded oral traditions and conducted interviews with surviving relatives or people who experienced key historical events. Much of this information would probably not have survived were it not for the *ESDA*'s goal of preserving a memory of these things for future generations.

Goals of the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*

The *ESDA* has several important goals and objectives:

- Supply reliable and authoritative information on Adventist history, crucial events and themes, organizations, entities, institutions, and people.
- Strengthen Adventist identity and unity in a fast-growing worldwide movement, heightening awareness of our distinctive doctrinal framework and prophetic beliefs.
- Provide a reference work for those new to the Adventist faith, as well as for those not of the Adventist faith, to learn about as many aspects of Adventism as possible.
- Illustrate the role of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's organization in fulfilling its mission.
- Highlight the missional challenges still remaining in order to "reach the world" and inspire the reader to learn from the dedication and sacrifice of those who have gone before us.
- Reflect the global nature of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church today, both in subject matter and in the team of writers and editors who contribute to the *ESDA*.

The *ESDA* is already proving to be an invaluable

resource—not only for doing research on Adventist history, but also for preparing devotionals, sermons, mission stories, youth and children's programs, and study materials for classes, prayer meetings, and other events. The many pictures and videos help users visualize the people and places explored in the entries, bringing a personal touch to the historical information. The advanced search options on the *ESDA* website allow readers to browse articles by category. Readers can also browse articles by church divisions, article titles, and keywords. All *ESDA* articles are signed and include reference notes and sources.

More Authors Are Needed

Adventist authors from all walks of life who have expertise on a given subject—not only scholars of history and theology—are welcome to contribute to the *ESDA*. Everyone has the potential opportunity to make a significant contribution to the understanding of our church in an honest, open, and thorough way. Readers who are interested in helping may browse the list of unfinished article titles at <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/unfinished-articles> or contact the *ESDA* main office at encyclopedia@gc.adventist.org. They should also consult the author guidelines and other useful materials at <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/author-materials>. The *ESDA* team would be grateful for any help in this immense undertaking to make this resource even better.

Except as We Shall Forget

The end-time prophetic voice for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and an important pioneer of the movement once stated, "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."² This familiar statement by Ellen G. White is the guiding light for the *ESDA*. In order to better understand the Bible's teachings and God's leadings in this movement, we need to know the facts, people, and major events of our history. May God help us fulfill this inspired admonition so that we can remember, record, and rehearse the history of God's church together and move forward fearlessly and full of hope.

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Adventists*



¹ Articles that deal with the history of theology and with ethical questions are edited by Frank M. Hasel and Denis Kaiser. On their work for the *ESDA* with these articles see the interview by Dragoslava Santrac and David Trim with Frank M. Hasel and Denis Kaiser, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flXgXo-C2B1k> (accessed August 30, 2020).

² Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 196.

Lessons from Matthew 12

By Clinton Wahlen

Matthew 12, through miraculous healings and several scenes of conflict, brings to the forefront the issue of Jesus' identity as the messianic "son of David." The first two conflict scenes, arising from Pharisaic scruples, reveal what constitutes true and lawful Sabbath observance (Matt 12:1–14). This is followed by the longest of Matthew's twelve Old Testament fulfillment quotations, applying the first of Isaiah's Servant Songs to Jesus (Matt 12:15–21; cf. Isa 42:1–4). The largest part of the chapter revolves around the charge the Pharisees level against Jesus: that He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons (Matt 12:22–37; cf. 9:34). This is followed by Jesus' reply to the demand for a sign by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 12:38–45). The chapter includes sayings of Jesus that imply that His person and His work are greater than the temple (Matt 12:6), Jonah (Matt 12:41), and Solomon (Matt 12:42), and concludes with Jesus identifying those who do the will of the Father as the members of His spiritual family (Matt 12:46–50).

Interpretation of the Chapter

1. Verses 1–14 (Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath)

- The Pharisees were especially concerned with the correct observance of the law, as we learn from rabbinic traditions that descended from them. They classified work into thirty-nine separate categories (*m. Shab. 7.2*; cf. CD X.14–XI.18), several of which the disciples violated (reaping, threshing, winnowing, and segregating).
- In all three Synoptic Gospels, these Sabbath incidents are paired, but only in Matthew is the grain field episode the Sabbath's first mention. This placement shows that the controversies over Sabbath observance do not concern *whether* the day should be kept but *how* and that the Pharisaic traditions actually hindered rather than helped one's obedience to God.
- Matthew's note that the disciples were hungry makes the connection with the hunger of David and his men to which Jesus referred in order to demonstrate that eating to sustain life does not infringe on the holiness of the Sabbath, just as the eating of showbread by David and his men did not compromise the temple's holiness (cf. 1 Sam 21:1–6).
- Although harvesting was forbidden on the Sabbath (Exod 34:21; cf. 31:15; 35:2), the civil laws of Israel provided for satisfying one's hunger by picking grapes or plucking heads of grain, but the quantity was limited to what one could eat at the time (Deut 23:25). So this

was not harvesting—not "work" as such—and therefore could not be considered a Sabbath violation. The disciples were "guiltless" (Matt 12:7) and the Pharisees should have known that.

- The ceremonial law specified that the showbread was only to be eaten by priests (Exod 29:32; Lev 8:31). The bread itself was holy (1 Sam 21:4)—not common, despite David's rationalization to the contrary (1 Sam 21:5)—which is why it was to be eaten in a holy place (Lev 24:9). But physical sustenance is also necessary and need not conflict with the priestly obligation to preserve the holiness of the temple, as Ahimelech, the high priest, recognized.
- Jesus' assertion in Matthew 12:5 that the priests "profane" (*bebēlousin*) the Sabbath is based on the fact that they have more work on that day, not less. In addition, they circumcise infants on the eighth day regardless of whether it falls on a Sabbath or not (Lev 12:3; cf. John 7:22). Thus the priests treat the Sabbath in the same way as other days for the purpose of circumcision, and it is treated as even more important for the purpose of worship and offering sacrifice. Jesus in no way suggests that by doing such work they break the Sabbath, as many translations claim (e.g., CSB, GNT, NAS95, NRSV). Similarly, the work of preaching and kingdom ministry by Jesus and the disciples had to be carried forward every day, and especially on Sabbath. Reconnecting people with God points to the original purpose of the sanctuary (Exod 25:8) and of the Sabbath itself as God's Edenic gift to humanity (Gen 2:1–3; Exod 20:8–11).
- Present among them (Matt 12:6) was something (the gospel of the kingdom) and Someone greater than the temple (cf. John 1:14)—the "Desire of All Nations," whose glory would exceed that of Solomon's Temple (Hag 2:7–9)—but their cultural and religious prejudices blinded their eyes (cf. Isa 8:9–10; 29:9–10).
- Jesus' quotation of Hosea 6:6 points to the similarity between Pharisaic legalism and the pretended holiness of Israel and Judah: in both cases a true knowledge of God was missing, which would understand that divine love and compassion is the source of life from which faithfulness springs.
- At the center of these two Sabbath incidents is Jesus' own statement of His relation to the Sabbath. Since He is Lord (*kyrios*)—that is, the God of the Old Testament (cf. 1:20, 22, 24;

2:13, 15, 19; 3:3; 4:7, 10; 5:33), He is the Law-giver (cf. Isa 33:22) and the One best able to interpret and apply the law.

- Matthew links both incidents by referring to “their” (i.e., the Pharisees’) synagogue. In the time of Jesus, this Jewish institution tended to expound traditions that the Pharisees had ensconced over Scripture—traditions Jesus rejected and removed—which led to the issue of whether it was lawful to heal a man’s hand on the Sabbath (Matt 12:10).
- Although most first-century Jews would agree that rescuing an animal from a pit would not contravene the Sabbath, those in Qumran taught that “no one should help an animal give birth on the Sabbath; and if it falls into a well or a pit, he may not lift it out on the Sabbath” (CD XI.13–14). But just as saving life was permissible on the Sabbath (cf. Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9), so doing good (a point recorded only by Matthew) was in harmony with its intent.

2. Verses 15–21 (Jesus is the Servant of God)

- Jesus, recognizing that the Pharisees were plotting to destroy Him (Matt 12:14), as He similarly observes elsewhere (John 7:19; 8:37, 40), “withdrew” (*anachōreō*) to safety (Matt 12:15). The word is used previously of the wise men’s hasty departure (Matt 2:12), Joseph and Mary’s flight with the baby Jesus to Egypt (Matt 2:13–14), the family’s departure to Nazareth to avoid Archelaus (Matt 2:24), and Jesus’ withdrawal to Galilee after John the Baptist’s arrest (Matt 4:12).
- Jesus’ attempt to avoid publicity so as not to aggravate the authorities even more and thus threaten His mission is the occasion for Matthew’s longest Old Testament quotation, taken from Isaiah 42:1, which begins the first of Isaiah’s four Servant Songs (Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).
- Since Jesus has already been identified as this Servant by the voice from Heaven (Matt 3:17; cf. 12:18) and as the one who brings the Holy Spirit by John the Baptist (Matt 3:11), and His ministry to the Gentile centurion has also been noted (Matt 8:5–13), it is the meek manner of Jesus’ ministry (cf. Matt 11:29) that is the focus here (Matt 12:19–20), though these other elements also fulfill this prophecy.

3. Verses 22–37 (Jesus and the Kingdom of God)

- The controversy has four parts: the miracle and reactions to it (Matt 12:22–24), Jesus’ refutation of His opponents’ arguments (Matt 12:25–30), His warning about blaspheming the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:31–32), and His assertion that God’s judgment will reveal the “treasure” of each individual’s heart (Matt 12:33–37).

- Healing blindness characterized Jesus’ messianic ministry (Matt 9:27–31; 15:30–31; 20:30–34; 21:14–15; cf. John 9:1–6), signifying His ability to give sight to the spiritually blind (cf. Rev 3:17–18). The added difficulty of muteness recalls the demon previously cast out by Jesus when the Pharisees’ leveled the same charge against Him of partnering with the ruler of the demons (12:24; cf. 9:32–34).
- The Greek form of the question, “Could this be [*mēti houtos estin*] the Son of David?” reveals some hesitancy by the crowds about making an identification with potentially explosive religio-political consequences (cf. 22:42). Yet Matthew from the beginning has made clear that Jesus is the messianic Son of David (Matt 1:1, 16–17), a fact that even the blind recognize (Matt 9:27; 20:30–34).
- Beelzebul (derived from *Ba’al*, “lord, master”) refers to Satan (see Matt 12: 26–27) as the ruler of the demons (cf. John 12:31; 16:11) and of this present world (John 14:30; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2).
- Matthew highlights the clash of kingdoms: that of Satan/Beelzebul (Matt 12:26) now being confronted by the kingdom of God (Matt 12:28), and the crucial question as to whether Jesus is the Son of David or the agent of Beelzebul (Matt 12:23–24). Jesus cannot be advancing Satan’s kingdom; otherwise, His casting out demons would prove that the devil’s kingdom was divided and that it would collapse on its own. But if it is by the Spirit of God that Jesus casts out demons, then the power of God’s kingdom has dawned and the threefold gospel proclamation of John, Jesus, and the disciples is true (Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7).
- The effects of these two kingdoms are also in opposition: the kingdom of heaven gathers; the kingdom of this world scatters (Matt 12:30). To not join Jesus’ work of gathering Israel back to God is to join Satan’s efforts at blocking the Spirit’s work and, if this persists, to commit the unpardonable sin (Matt 12:31–32).
- The embedded parable of the strong man’s house (Matt 12:29) equates the strong man with Satan, his armor with demons, the One stronger with Jesus, and the goods plundered with those freed from demon possession. To oppose Jesus’ work is to take Satan’s side and, implicitly, to advance his kingdom.
- Jesus uses the image of a tree bearing fruit (whether good or bad) to explain how one’s words show what he or she treasures in their heart (cf. Ps 1; Jer 17:5–8) and to contrast the two ways (of the righteous and of the ungodly) that will be on full display in the day of judgment. Since words flow from the heart, these are indicative of whether one will be finally justified or condemned (Matt 12:37).

4. Verses 38–50 (Jesus’ Warnings to This Generation)

- The request for a sign by “some of the scribes and Pharisees” escalates their demand for Jesus’ authentication of His ministry to the level of unmistakable proof (cf. Exod 8:23; Isa 7:11; 38:7–8), whereas Jesus calls for faith on the part of His hearers. It is actually their lack of faith that proves this generation to be evil—“a perverse generation, children in whom is no faith” (Deut 32:20; cf. 32:5; Matt 17:17).
- The sign of Jonah refers to the prophet’s death-like experience, buried in the fish’s belly in the depths of the sea, and miraculously “brought up . . . from the pit” (Jonah 2:5–6) after “three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17), typifying Jesus’ death and resurrection (Matt 12:40).
- The parable of the unclean spirit’s return (Matt 12:43–45) culminates in Jesus’ pronouncement of judgment on “this generation” (Matt 12:39, 41–42, 45)—a designation always negative in Matthew (see also Matt 11:16; 16:4; 17:17), pointing to their rejection of Jesus and, as a result, their doom and the doom of their capital (Matt 23:36; 24:34).
- This negative context of judgment on unbelief helps us understand that the interruption from Jesus’ mother and brothers was for no good purpose (Matt 12:46–47). “Their unbelief cast a shadow over the earthly life of Jesus. It was a part of the bitterness of that cup of woe which He drained for us.”¹ Only a spiritual union with Christ, which enables us to do the will of God, constitutes us members of His heavenly family (Matt 12:48–50).

Application of the Chapter

Important lessons gleaned from this chapter include:

1. Concerns over holiness and correct observance of the law should never trump human need. Rightly understood, they support each other.

2. Our understanding of Scripture can always grow and we should be careful not to allow our preconceived ideas to blind us to its real message.

3. Knowing God is everything—it is eternal life (John 17:3)—because His Word and presence will guide us safely and guard us from falsehood and deception.

4. Our words not only have the power to heal or to harm; they also reveal our heart’s treasure and the present direction of our destiny.

5. Jesus’ parable of the unclean spirit’s return is a graphic warning against trifling with sin, because it prevents the infilling of the Holy Spirit and our belonging to Christ.²

6. Remembering that Jesus experienced opposition from close friends and family can strengthen us when our faith is attacked or even ridiculed by those we love.



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¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 325.

² *Ibid.*, 24.

God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him. (MH 479)

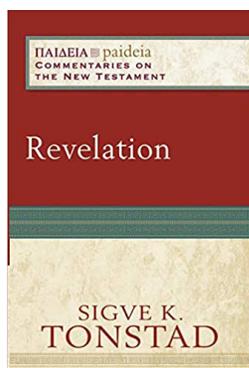
All that has perplexed us in the providences of God will in the world to come be made plain. The things hard to be understood will then find explanation. The mysteries of grace will unfold before us. Where our finite minds discovered only confusion and broken promises, we shall see the most perfect and beautiful harmony. We shall know that infinite love ordered the experiences that seemed most trying (9T 286).

Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 64.

Sigve K. Tonstad,

Revelation:
Paideia
Commentaries on
the New Testament

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
Academic, 2019), 398 pp.
\$35.00



Sigve K. Tonstad, a prolific Adventist scholar of Norwegian origin, has published a number of books and scholarly articles in different areas. His published dissertation¹ has positioned him well to write a commentary on the book of Revelation. Tonstad’s major interest lies in theological interpretation of biblical texts, which features prominently in all of his books. The present work reflects this same interest.

Since the commentary was published by a non-Adventist publishing house in the Paideia series, this is not a typical Adventist commentary. Some important issues are muted (e.g., the 1260 days and the sanctuary), not discussed at all, or interpreted in ways that will not be familiar to most Adventists. The author concentrates on some major themes (e.g., the cosmic conflict and the question of theodicy), while leaving out other major theological issues or dealing with them only in passing. This approach must be kept in mind when reading the commentary. The work is not a verse-by-verse treatment of Revelation, but rather a commentary on larger rhetorical units, discussed in the order of the narrative. Introductory matters are treated to some extent, but the focus is on tracing the thought of Revelation’s narrative and exploring theological issues raised by the text that are of interest to contemporary Christian readers in hopes of enabling them to see the “big picture,” as opposed to the atomistic treatment of typical commentaries.

Tonstad’s central argument is that the book of Revelation meets a critical existential need: it unveils misrepresentation, mudslinging, and falsehood, since it is not only God who is at work in the universe. He convincingly argues that Revelation is to be understood as exposé. The adversary has a clear name: the “ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev 12:9). Tonstad takes this description seriously. Not only are the true character and the strategies of the deceiver revealed, but also God’s way of dealing with evil—the character of the One whose ways are defined by the “slaughtered Lamb.” In contrast to Satan, “the slanderer,” Jesus offers access and transparency (open heaven, open scroll, open book)—the essential building blocks of trust in a healthy society.

A major strength of the commentary is that it takes seriously the problem of evil and its subtle character. This is extremely important because, in a post-Holocaust, terror-scarred world, any discussion of the love and benevolence of God requires careful articulation. A major challenge for Christianity is to speak intelligently and credibly about God in view of the recent past that cannot be erased. This necessitates taking up the task of theodicy. This commentary is a creative attempt to understand how love works in a context of freedom and how it can bring healing and restoration amid lies about the divine government by the fallen star, the deceiver.

The commentary provides a strong argument

against the retribution-oriented reading of Revelation, a view that wrongly envisions God as acting arbitrarily against the forces of evil, setting up an eschatological holocaust at the end of history. Tonstad’s commentary demonstrates that God is not a tormentor, but His economy is rooted in love, freedom, and responsibility: He takes His created beings seriously, but He also allows that the evil be defeated by its own schemes. This argument has value in the current non-Adventist discussions on Revelation in which the question of violence is one of the most heated and most complex issues.² The commentary clearly and strongly demonstrates that the hallmark of God in His dealing with evil is neither power nor violence, providing a forceful defense of God’s fairness.

Of no less importance for the argument of the commentary is the cosmic conflict theme, which provides the fundamental conceptual framework for the theological inquiry. Giving close attention to the cosmic scope of Revelation’s story reveals that the concept of “war” is central to the drama that unfolds in the book. The commentary demonstrates how the clash between an economy of life and an economy of desolation is woven into the book from the very beginning until the very end. This war is fought primarily in the realm of opinions and it is characterized by intention of evil forces to deceive. Therefore, words are more important than weapons in this war. For Seventh-day Adventists who place the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan at the core of their philosophy of history, Tonstad’s commentary provides some significant insights regarding the theological details of the cosmic scope of Revelation.

Concerning the temporal horizon of Revelation’s reading, Tonstad does not align himself with any main school of interpretation. He makes a strong case against the preterist approach, pointing out consistently throughout the commentary the fact that the Roman imperial reality’s foot is too small for the shoe of John’s imagery. Revelation’s cosmic scope calls for a larger character who is the antagonist of God and His purposes. The case is the strongest in the discussion of Revelation 13 and 17, in which the Nero Redivivus myth is exposed as a mismatch. It is also noted that futurist interpreters show little concern for textual and historical control; their interpretations are rather set by the time of the current reader. Therefore, futuristic works are mostly ignored by respectable commentaries. According to Tonstad, the greatest problem with the historicist “school” is the constantly changing map of events, with continual revision as time passes. This problem is also widely recognized among Adventist interpreters of Revelation. However, in my opinion, the variety of interpretations is not a compelling argument for discounting the validity of historicism as a proper approach, which is indicated by an exegetical argument from the very beginning of the book of Revelation: an allusion to Daniel 2:28, 45 in Revelation 1:1, suggesting that Revelation is to be interpreted in line with the historicist principles laid down in Daniel 2.

Tonstad raises the question of whether “these -isms” do justice to John’s priorities. He acknowledges that the scope of Revelation runs from ancient times to the eschaton, which “might be used as more than token support for the historicism aspiration” (p. 28). However, he warns about the danger of reading Revelation as such a time-bound specific road map. He defines his own approach as a value-centered interpretation that prioritizes values over events, and is God-centered rather than time-centered. Despite this approach, at some points Tonstad draws a clear line from the symbols to historical realities. Some examples are interpreting the beast of chapter 13 as a “Christian empire . . . papal Rome” (p. 215), the prostitute of chapter 17 as an apostate “faith community,” the church in the post-Constantine period (p. 267), or claiming that some of the details of Revelation’s prophecy are still future, such as the “ten kings” of Revelation 17. Nevertheless, historic specificity is not a matter of interest for Tonstad—an approach foreign to the Adventist historicist interpretation of Revelation. This is evident in the commentary’s non-historicist interpretation of the seven seals and seven trumpets.

It is important to hear fresh insights rooted in the text and grow in our understanding of the book of Revelation. Tonstad’s commentary gives many of them, but at the same time many Adventist readers would argue with some details in Tonstad’s commentary—for example, the interpretation of the mourning in Revelation 1:7, the angels of the churches in chapters 2–3, the first horseman of chapter 6, the interpretation of the earth beast in chapter 13, the concept of judgment in chapter 14, or the seven kings of chapter 17. Moreover, they would object to Tonstad’s failure to align clearly with the historicist school of interpretation. However, the merit of Tonstad’s commentary lies in the area of the theology of Revelation, which is his primary research interest. So the strong and fresh voices of the cosmic conflict theme, the importance of the deception/revelation motifs, and reading Revelation as a theodicy are not to be muted despite the above objections. It is also to be acknowledged that the commentary affirms some Seventh-day Adventist topics in a creative way, such as the question of Sabbath, the understanding of the millennium, and the state of the dead. It is hoped that these voices will be heard by non-Adventist readers of the Paideia commentary.

A major weakness of the commentary is the interpretation of Revelation’s judgment theology. Tonstad argues against the retribution-oriented reading of Revelation, but the impression at the end is that the baby is thrown out with the bathwater. His argument against the arbitrariness of God’s judgment is brilliant and his demonstration of how evil is defeated by its own scheme has some validity. However, it seems that a clear definition and exposition of God’s wrath in the context of His dealing with the problem of evil is sacrificed on the altar of defending His fairness. Also, the need for an investigative judgment is ignored by interpreting the arrival of “the hour of His judgment” (Rev

14:7) as a “critical moment” and relating it to a matter of revelation simply. Closely related to these weaknesses is Tonstad’s interpretation of the wrath of God, which is quite muted in the work.³

Three further issues deserve some discussion. First, history and theology are not strangers to each other; neither are they enemies. They are to be seen as allies in interpreting Revelation. Tonstad is right that in the theological outlook of Revelation “the Revealer is more important than his exposé,” but Revelation reveals not only the character of God and the schemes of the deceiver, but also “what must soon take place” (Rev 1:1). Second, giving close attention to the heavenly temple motif would have strengthened the argument of the commentary, since the motif brings out sharply the cosmic perspective on things happening on the earth and the role of judgment in God’s plan of salvation. Third, the Greco-Roman and Jewish background deserves at least some hearing, but it is almost completely banished from the interpretation because of the strong and convincing case against the preterist perspective, which builds almost entirely on the imperial background.

Research on the theological aspects of Revelation is a fruitful field for scholarly investigation and may yield significant insights for Adventist interpreters. Interestingly, Ellen G. White speaks of the need to understand the “lessons” emerging from Revelation, as well as the details of its fulfillment.⁴



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¹ Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation*, The Library of New Testament Studies 337 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2007).

² See, e.g., Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, The Library of New Testament Studies 586 (London: T&T Clark, 2018).

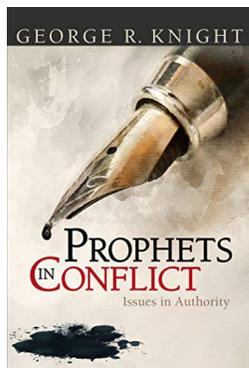
³ This is also noted in Frank M. Hasel, review of *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense*, by Sigve K. Tonstad, *Reflections* 63 (2018): 11–12.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 113.

George R. Knight,

Prophets in Conflict: Issues in Authority

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George Knight's latest book is *Prophets in Conflict: Issues in Authority*. In "A Word to the Reader" at the start of the book, he says, "In 2017, I published *Adventist Authority Wars, Ordination, and the Roman Catholic Temptation*. The thread that unites that book with the present one is the temptation to misuse religious authority," which he says Adventists have had an inclination to do, whether in the ecclesiastical sphere or the prophetic realm (p. 9). He adds this caution: "The sad news is that being wrong in the area of authority opens the distinct possibility of going astray on everything else" (ibid.).

The book's title grows out of the opening chapter, which compares how two nineteenth-century prophetic leaders—founders of their respective churches—viewed modern-day prophetic authority. Ellen G. White and Joseph Smith make for a sharp contrast on this crucial point. While White saw her work as "a lesser light, to lead men and women to the greater light" (the Bible), Smith saw his work as superseding Scripture—correcting its supposed errors and giving God's revelation for the current age. Though he gave the Bible lip service, he considered it "an insufficient guide." The distinction between Smith and White on this point could not be more dramatic.

Smith and the leaders after him led their followers to regard his writings and those of subsequent Mormon prophets as the ones that were most important for them. Mormon theology teaches that the latest prophetic authority is superior to all that has gone before and takes precedence over it. Knight refers to this as the "Mormon Temptation"—to regard modern prophets above Scripture, or as interpreting Scripture for us, which is tantamount to the same thing. In the second chapter, Knight draws on early Adventist history as well as more recent events to show how Adventists, who especially in the early years were clear on the proper relation of spiritual gifts to the Bible, have not been entirely immune to the Mormon Temptation. These two chapters comprise part 1 of the book, "The Relation of Biblical Authority to the Authority of Modern Prophets."

Here we find what appears to be a major thesis of the book: that we should not use the authority of post-canonical prophets to try to establish doctrine or settle biblical or theological disputes. In introducing the book, Knight asks,

On what basis do we as individuals and as a church make decisions on how we will live our lives and run the church? What is our authority? . . . Adventists and other Christians are quick to point out that the Bible is their most important authority. But is it really? And what does that claim mean, especially in a movement that has a modern prophet in its midst? (p. 7).

These are good questions, though not everyone will be satisfied with the answers Knight provides.

The two opening chapters will be new to many Adventist readers. Most of the remainder of the book, however, is likely to be more familiar, having been drawn from Knight's earlier books, his contributions to various other works, or his articles published in *Ministry* magazine.

Part 2, "Frameworks for Understanding Ellen White's Prophetic Authority," brings together a number of significant chapters. "The Purpose of Ellen White's Writings" lists seven key purposes, familiar to those who have read *Reading Ellen White*. "Ellen White's Major Themes" (also seven in number) is drawn from another book in that series, *Meeting Ellen White*. Reading it again here was a welcome refresher. "The Myth of the Inflexible Prophet," from *Myths in Adventism*, shows how White could adapt her counsels and apply principles to varying situations. "Principles for Understanding Ellen White's Writings" combines material from several of Knight's publications to elucidate important interpretive principles. "Ellen White and Change" deals with how White could take different positions over time, whether by way of clarification, progressive development, or even reversal when new light called for it. "The Case of the Overlooked Postscript" focuses on questions of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Both of these latter chapters were originally *Ministry* articles.

Part 3, "The Authority of Compilations," consists of two chapters, exploring both the positive values and some problems that arise in compilations of White's writings. With some today questioning the legitimacy of compilations, this treatment is generally helpful in understanding and navigating the issues. Part 4, "Proper and Improper Uses of Ellen White's Authority," also has two chapters: one dealing with the often-contentious issue of the human nature of Christ, and the other a lengthy chapter on White's view of proper education, set against the background of the church's evolving application of it. The book closes with two chapters in part 5, "Authority Applied and Closing Thoughts." The first of these deals in a pastoral way with how we apply White's counsels to ourselves and to others. The brief final chapter looks at the field of Ellen G. White studies from the perspective of a nearly lifelong involvement, making cogent observations about the directions future Ellen G. White studies may profitably go, whether done within the church or by scholars outside of Adventism.

While some might be put off by the fact that most of the chapters have been published elsewhere, I was not. These materials have significant, needed points to make to those who care about White's writings, and I see their being brought together in this form as a benefit rather than a liability. In general, I felt the book was uplifting and predominantly positive.

Even so, there are aspects of the book that I found disappointing. Chief among these is a need for more clarity on the stated subject of prophetic authority. What authority does Knight see for a modern-day

prophet? Quoting a number of passages from White that express her desire that her writings not be used to settle disputes over such biblical matters as the law in Galatians or “the daily” from the book of Daniel, Knight cautions against our appealing to her authority in trying to resolve such matters (the Mormon Temptation). He focuses rather on her substantial authority to speak to our hearts individually on matters of Christian living and to speak to church leadership regarding the institutions and emphases of the church (see, e.g., p. 163).

But is that all there is? I would like to have seen some substantial treatment of her statement that God gives visions in the last days “not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of His people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth.”¹ What is the extent and limit of prophetic authority in that last clause? Other such statements invite similar examination. The light God has given her is to “correct specious errors, and to specify what is truth.”² “Serious errors in doctrine and practice were cherished. . . . God revealed these errors to me in vision and sent me to His erring children to declare them.”³ The book also makes no mention of her having taken a strong stand against the theological views of Dr. Kellogg on pantheism or of A. F. Ballenger on the sanctuary. White’s vigorous involvement in opposing those views indicates that she saw a role for prophetic authority in theological matters, and a book on prophetic authority should explore what it is.

A fuller elucidation of legitimate prophetic authority might have prevented Knight from using the book to accuse church leadership of succumbing to the Mormon Temptation in the proposed “Statement of Confidence in the Writings of Ellen G. White” that the 2019 Annual Council voted to send to the next General Conference session. According to Knight, one paragraph of the statement “departs from mere affirmation and indicates that one purpose of Ellen White’s writings is to ‘correct inaccurate interpretations imposed’ on the Bible.” This, he claims, “places the modern gift of prophecy in an unbiblical position and pushes Adventism off the Protestant platform and back into the sectarian realm” (p. 44).

Are we really to believe that the modern gift of prophecy has no such legitimate role at all? The statements quoted above seem to indicate otherwise. And the church has long affirmed such a role. The “Methods of Bible Study” document says,

Seventh-day Adventists believe that God inspired Ellen G. White. Therefore, her expositions on any given Bible passage offer an inspired guide to the meaning of texts without exhausting their meaning or preempting the task of exegesis (for example, see *Evangelism*, 256; *The Great Controversy*, 193, 595; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 665, 682, 707–708; *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 33–35).⁴

The term “guide” suggests something less than a com-

mentary or a Mormon role; the qualifying expressions here back us away from the Mormon Temptation. The current proposed “Statement of Confidence,” quoted more fully, says something quite similar:

We believe that the writings of Ellen G. White were inspired by the Holy Spirit and are Christ-centered and Bible-based. Rather than replacing the Bible, they uplift the normative character of Scripture and correct inaccurate interpretations *imposed* upon it [emphasis supplied]. They also help us to overcome the human tendency to accept from the Bible what we like and distort or disregard what we do not like.

For certain, we are to study the Bible; this is primary. But this need not make us rule out a helpful role for White in enlightening our understanding.

The book occasionally speaks disparagingly of last generation theology or last generation perfectionism, which Knight says characterized him in his earlier days. This provides a basis for one of his critiques of compilations, specifically *Counsels on Diet and Foods*. He sees the compilers as promoting a theology White did not endorse when in the chapter “Flesh Meats” they included a section called “Preparing for Translation” and followed it with one called “Perfecting Holiness.”⁵ The latter section, which he characterizes as “in the context of preparing for translation” (p. 135), makes no reference to translation or perfection. Its major quoted portion, he claims, while dealing with meat eating, is concerned with “the attitudes of those involved in the struggle [over Dr. Kellogg’s reform efforts] even more than flesh eating itself, which Ellen White repeatedly asserted was not to be made ‘a test of fellowship,’ even if it was not God’s ideal” (p. 134).

However, a fair reading of the whole manuscript from which the passage comes does not, I think, establish this claim, which is based more on Knight’s reconstruction of the historical setting. The statement itself clearly deals with flesh eating, not just for its effects on physical health, but for its spiritual effects as well. The heading to which he objects, “Perfecting Holiness,” is a biblical expression about living a godly life: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). White’s statements under that heading are exhortations to spiritual and moral cleansing and advancement, specifically relating to diet. Is there no fit here? I think there is. Though I was initially persuaded by Knight’s presentation on this point, a closer look has made me question it and made me more cautious toward his other examples regarding problems in compilations. I should also note in passing that his statement that White “repeatedly” denied that flesh eating was “a test of fellowship” seems exaggerated; I could find only two such references, about twelve years apart. The others are in various compilations, quoting a single reference in *Testimonies for the Church*.⁶

In a number of places (such as in chapter 6 on principles) Knight correctly calls readers to take a balanced view of White's writings. However, I noticed that essentially all of the book's illustrations of failure to do so come from Adventism's theological right; I did not notice any from the left, unless one puts LeRoy Froom and *Questions on Doctrine* on the left. Perhaps this imbalance is simply because the right generally seems more involved with White's writings than the left. But is there really such a dearth of examples from the left? I believe I can think of some, where an author quotes White selectively to support a position that she did not take or that she even opposed. Inclusion of such things would extend the book's applicability, improve its balance, and might make it easier for those on the right to hear what is being said.

Similarly, might the "Mormon Temptation" apply to those who find their prophetic voices in other sources, such as science, sociology, or various politically inspired movements? These sources, being more recent than White's writings or the Bible, seem to have greater authority for some, particularly on the left, in such areas as creation/evolution, among others. Touching on matters of this kind would broaden the book's scope. The Mormon Temptation concept offers wide ground for serious thought.

The final purpose of White's writings listed in chapter 3 is missiological purpose. Knight correctly urges us to read her writings with her mission in mind, to avoid making them "do things that they were never written to accomplish" (p. 55). But there is a danger here, too, of being reductionistic, of limiting the writings by our own view of her mission or by other standards that we may devise. I would welcome some wrestling with that concern. While some take matters to extremes in one direction (such as in kneeling for every prayer, as mentioned under the sixth item in this chapter), others

today, claiming to live by a principle-based approach, may seem too willing to dismiss anything that goes against their own ideas. Where do we find the balance? A revision of the book might address such issues as these, strengthening what in many instances is a helpful presentation.

Despite these and other issues, I was blessed in reading *Prophets in Conflict: Issues in Authority*. Interested readers who can overlook a tendency to interpret White's writings through the author's own reconstruction of social and historical context or his own theological viewpoints will find in it much useful information and a largely positive and appreciative outlook on White's writings and work.

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¹ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1882), 78, emphasis supplied.

² Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 32.

³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1855–1909), 5:655–656.

⁴ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, "Methods of Bible Study," October 12, 1986, <https://www.adventist.org/articles/methods-of-bible-study> (accessed September 15, 2020), sec. 4.12 (L).

⁵ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938), 380–384.

⁶ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9:159.

It is not theoretical knowledge you need so much as spiritual regeneration. You need not to have your curiosity satisfied, but to have a new heart. You must receive a new life from above before you can appreciate heavenly things (DA 171).

Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 137.

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