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ARTICLES

A Perspective on Bribes and Bribery

By Ann Gibson

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners notes that in 2020 corruption (defined as bribery, extortion, illegal gratuities, and conflicts of interest) was the most common fraud scheme in every global region of the world. The median loss for these schemes was \$200,000.¹ Thus, to assume that the issue of bribery is somehow “out there,” something practiced only in corrupt organizations, is naive. While more common in some areas of the world than in others,² bribery can be found in all societies. Because bribery and extortion are so widespread, there is a very high likelihood of encountering them when traveling or living in cultures not one’s own. It is therefore important to understand what bribery is and to consider the guidance that Scripture may offer on this subject.

Bribery and Extortion Defined

Using legal language, John R. Boatright defines bribery as “a payment made with the intention to corrupt. More specifically, the payment is made with the intention of causing a person to be dishonest or disloyal or to betray a trust in the performance of official duties.”³ Extortion, on the other hand, is when an official uses “his office to extract improper fees from a person who reluctantly yields to the official’s demands or pressure.”⁴ Often with extortion there is a threat of something bad happening if the individual does not comply, whereas with a bribe, there is a suggestion that one would receive desirable treatment or an advantage if they paid the requested sum. While there is a technical distinction between bribery (when the person or firm initiates the payments) and extortion (when an official,

by virtue of his/her position or office, demands a payment to complete an action), for ease of discussion in this paper, we will lump these two concepts together under the general term “bribery.”⁵

Bribery and extortion are illegal by all countries’ standards and laws. There is no defense of bribery as a “local tradition” that should be respected. However, the definition of “bribery” differs across cultures. In countries where the culture is not steeped in a strong, commonly held legal tradition, any specific laws forbidding bribery may be ineffective, because recognizing a bribe as a bribe may be unclear to those who come from outside of the culture.⁶

For example, in European societies and the Western societies established with European cultural and legal traditions, the individual is viewed as the arbiter and thus responsible for right conduct. These societies are more legalistic and rule-oriented than societies in other parts of the world. From the perspective of these cultures, the rules assure the members of society that decisions are made that are impartial to everyone.

In other cultures (e.g., Asian cultures), moral obligation arises from a specific relationship, the arbitrator of the decision is the group, and the primary quality is loyalty. Ethical obligations depend on what each party owes the other in the relationship. Relationships create a need for reciprocity. Each party must take care to return all favors received so as to preserve a balance. As a result, what may look like a bribe to an individual coming from a rule-oriented culture may, in fact, be an action to return a favor in a relationship-based culture. Boatright’s definition of

bribery emphasizes motivation and/or intention. Motivation and intention are difficult enough to determine in a culture where actions are expected to conform to written laws and well-understood legal norms. However, in cultures where relationships rather than the law are expected to be the ultimate ruler of whether or not an action is ethical and/or appropriate, motivation and intention are extremely difficult to judge. Additional observations about the effect of culture on one's understanding of whether or not bribery has occurred will be discussed later. But first, let us consider two types of bribes—the transactional bribe and the variance bribe.

Transactional Versus Variance Bribes

W. Michael Reisman defines the transactional bribe as “a payment routinely and usually impersonally made to a public official to secure or accelerate the performance of his prescribed function.”⁷

Such a bribe has the following characteristics: First, the payment's purpose is to assure quick action on the part of the official, not to engage the official in action other than what normally is part of the official's job. Second, the service requested is available to everyone who needs it—that is, to the general public rather than a unique service to one individual.⁸

An example of a transactional bribe is when a missionary goes to the customs office to pick up his/her personal goods from customs. The customs officer indicates that the goods may be available in five days, but if a small sum were paid, the goods could be available tomorrow. Such a requested exchange is sometimes called a facilitating payment or a “grease payment.” The purpose is to “lubricate” the bureaucracy and get things done. In many countries where officials are poorly paid, the local culture expects that individuals will pay these officials the requested small sums to facilitate or expedite services, and thus supplement the official's low pay.⁹ These payments are not considered bribes under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the law in the United States that forbids all United States corporations from engaging in bribery, irrespective of where they operate across the globe. That is not to say that there are no local laws against “grease payments” in the countries that expect them. It is just that such laws are seldom enforced and, under the legal definition of bribery, are not considered to be bribes, as there is no intent to corrupt or to ask the individual to betray a trust or to be dishonest.¹⁰

A variance bribe, however, is “not to facilitate or accelerate acts substantially in conformity with a norm but rather to secure the suspension or non application of a norm.”¹¹ Continuing the previous example, if the missionary's personal goods contained items that were forbidden to be brought into the country, or that could be brought in only at a considerable duty charge, and the missionary offered the customs official a sum of money in order to let the goods enter the country

illegally or without paying the duty, the bribe would be a variance bribe. A variance of the norm (or law) of the country would be requested in exchange for the payment of money. Reisman's distinctions between transactional bribes and variance bribes may be helpful as we look to Scripture for guidance on the subject of bribery.

Bribery in Scripture

Both experience and observation confirm that people *will* offer and *will* accept bribes, irrespective of the laws of the country. Proverbs 17:8 explains the reason succinctly: “A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds.”¹² Proverbs 18:16 says, “A gift opens the way for the giver and ushers him into the presence of the great.” In this world, as Solomon rightly notes, bribery appears to work—at least most of the time (see Prov 6:33–35; 22:16). Yet Scripture tells us that the righteous do not accept bribes (Ps 15:5; Isa 33:15), even though the wicked person's hands may be filled with them (Ps 26:10; Prov 17:23).

Scripture provides numerous examples and warnings regarding bribery. We are told that one of the reasons the elders of Israel went to Samuel and asked for a king was because Samuel's sons did not “walk in his ways,” but rather sought “dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice” (1 Sam 8:3). Samuel himself apparently accepted this accusation against his sons because he noted in his farewell address that *he* had not accepted bribes (1 Sam 12:3). Judas, however, was willing to take a bribe to betray Jesus to the chief priests, even though he knew they were seeking to get rid of Jesus (Luke 22:4–6). The guards at Jesus' tomb were willing to be bribed by the chief priests to spread a false report about how Jesus' tomb came to be empty. Their report was especially important as they had been placed on guard to prevent anyone from stealing the body, and with the body missing, they were expected to explain.

The preacher in Ecclesiastes informs his readers that “extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart” (Eccl 7:7). Old Testament prophets relentlessly accused the leaders of Israel of using bribes to pervert justice, especially justice toward the innocent and those who represented the vulnerable sector of society—the poor, the fatherless, the widow (Isa 1:23; 5:22–23; Amos 5:12; Mic 3:9–11; 7:1–3).

The most commonly quoted Scripture that speaks against bribery is Deuteronomy 16:18–20, where Moses tells Israel to appoint judges that will not pervert justice or show partiality, and will not accept a bribe, as a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous. The same thought is expressed in Leviticus 19:15 and repeated in Proverbs 17:23 and 18:5, where again the concern is with the perversion of justice and the show of partiality to either the rich or the poor. The issue of partiality and the denial of justice, particularly to the poor, is also addressed in Exodus 23:3, 6. Thus, the two most

often-cited scriptural reasons to avoid bribery are because 1) the bribe will pervert justice and 2) the bribe will make one partial to one party over other parties. Proverbs 17:15 states, “Aquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent—the Lord detests them both.”

A third scriptural reason to avoid bribery is that a bribe may lead to false accusations. In the context of Exodus 23:3, 6, Exodus 23:7–8 states, “Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.” The same close association of the possibility of false accusations and twisted truths with partiality and perversion of justice is found in Leviticus 19:16. A specific curse on bribery is given in Deuteronomy 27:25 because a bribe might be offered to one to kill an innocent person. The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, in commenting on this verse, notes that perhaps this caution was specifically warning judges who might be subjected to a bribe in connection with a murder case.¹³

Finally, in Deuteronomy 10, Moses outlines what God expects of Israel—to love Him and serve Him with all one’s heart and soul and to observe all that the Lord has commanded. But in verse 17, Moses makes it very clear that doing all these things will not win God’s favor (which has already been bestowed on Israel) because God accepts no bribes and shows no partiality. God does not accept bribes because His justice is perfect and He will not engage in partiality or permit humans to seek His favor for themselves over other humans He has created. It logically follows that if we wish to mirror the acts of God, then we too will not offer or accept bribes.

In summary, attempting to gain favor through the misuse of money or influence, or to act with the intent to corrupt the individual or to ask that individual to betray a trust or to be dishonest or disloyal, would be to engage in a variance bribe. To engage in variance bribes would dishonor the inherent dignity of the person as granted at creation and would violate Christian commands to seek justice and love mercy.¹⁴ It also would cause one to act in ways contrary to God’s character. Therefore, these are actions that a Christian should not undertake.

But what about transactional bribery—those facilitating payments that “grease” transactions? Some note that such payments are expected because the government officials who are often the recipients of these payments are underpaid, with the expectation that they will supplement their salaries by such facilitating payments. Often these facilitating payments are equated with tips given to restaurant personnel in many Western societies, who also receive low wages because of the expectation that they can “make it up” through earning tips because of the excellent service they provide. Individuals coming from non-Western societies, however, often equate the common Western practice of tipping for service as a form of bribery.¹⁵

Recognizing whether an action is transactional bribery or variance bribery when the action occurs in a culture not one’s own may be difficult, and caution should be exercised before jumping to conclusions.

Richard L. Langston points out that in Scripture the Hebrew word *shachad* is used to refer to bribery twenty-three times. In fifteen of these occurrences, the context clarifies that variance bribes are referred to. In five occurrences, the passages deal with unique circumstances, such as when one ruler gives a gift to another to gain assistance (1 Kgs 15:18–20; 2 Kgs 16:8), or when a gift to pacify a jealous husband is not given (Prov 6:35), or when a ruler refuses to let captives free through the paying of a gift (Isa 45:13).¹⁶

This leaves only three verses [out of twenty-three verses] Deuteronomy 10:17; 16:19; and 2 Chronicles 19:7 where transactional bribes might be in view. The key idea that all three verses have in common is impartiality. In other words, when a transactional bribe causes someone to be partial in his administration of justice, then from a Scriptural standpoint it is a bribe, and hence condemned. If on the other hand it does not result in partiality, it is not necessary to classify it as a bribe according to the Scriptural boundaries.¹⁷

Bernard Adeney suggests that when considering whether a bribe is a transactional or a variance bribe, that:

(A) moral distinction may be made on the basis of whether a person has the freedom to give or not to give. If a small gift is freely given to obtain better service and there is no fear or threat involved, it is possible to consider it a tip. Presumably the service would be given in any case, but would probably take a little longer. The tip speeds up the process and benefits both parties. Little or no harm is done to the poor who either do not need the service or can obtain it with a little more time. On the other hand, if fear or force is involved, or if the expected delays are extreme, the freedom that characterizes a gift or a tip is removed. A gift or a tip is never compulsory.¹⁸

The present study suggests that the reader *also* take into consideration the following questions when attempting to distinguish between a transactional (i.e., a facilitating payment) and a variance bribe: Does the facilitating payment pervert justice? Does it encourage partiality to one party over others? Does it lead to false accusations against a person, even to the extent where the accused person might lose their life? Does it twist the truth about the situation in question? The quote from Adeney raises one more question: If the poor cannot afford to bribe, is a justice question raised

because the privileged rich can take advantage of the situation unfairly?

Finally, one additional question may be in order: does the action lead to dishonest gain? Building on the story of Samuel's sons (see previous discussion and 1 Sam 8:3), Richard Langston notes that bribery is forbidden because it is a form of dishonest gain. "The desire for personal gain by Samuel's sons influenced the elders of Israel to request a king and become more like the surrounding nations (1 Sam. 8:5). As a result, the people of Israel became less like the people of God."¹⁹

The Influence of Culture

In business, the answer to the question of whether or not a bribe has been offered is: "It depends." "It depends" rests on whether there are basic social structural elements such as 1) respect for life; 2) basic trust in order to have a transfer of goods, services, and money, and for orders to be accepted and filled; and 3) honor of contracts and agreements made. Without these factors, business as conceived by capitalism cannot be conducted at all, let alone conducted ethically.²⁰

For example, in Russia, a significant part of the culture is based on the philosophical perspective known as *avos*, which implies intervention in life as given by the divine beings, rather than as a result of human forces or choices.²¹ The difference between this philosophy and Western philosophy can be illustrated by the action of engaging in bribery. Because Western philosophy emphasizes free will, free choice, and accountability as cultural foundations,²² individuals are believed to be personally responsible for their actions. Therefore, if one chooses to engage in bribery, which is considered unethical (and illegal), *the individual* must have been unethical because he/she had freedom of choice and did not have to engage in such behavior.

A Russian, however, coming from the cultural background of *avos*, would say, "Because this is the way things are (having been given to us by the gods), we are not responsible. Permissions are required by individuals in a corrupt system or institution. The *system is corrupt*, so we must focus on keeping the relationship intact so we can get what we need. It is the institution that is corrupt, not the individual."²³ Therefore, in this context there cannot be personal responsibility or accountability for bribery because the individual could not influence the situation. In such a culture, a discussion as to whether the act of bribery by an individual is an ethical or unethical action poses unique challenges.

In addition, there are cultural practices that might be interpreted as bribery by some cultures, but not seen as bribery in other cultures. For example, it is almost impossible to do business in Japan without gift giving. To the Japanese, whose culture emphasizes group belonging and respect, gift giving is a sign of acceptance into the group. To those influenced by Western philosophy where the culture emphasizes individual responsibility and action, gift giving may appear to be a

bribe. It may be impossible to fault a culture's emphasis on belonging and respect, just as it may be impossible to fault a culture's emphasis on individual responsibility and action. Therefore, when in Japan, in order to respect Japanese culture, it may be necessary to tolerate more gift giving than would be acceptable elsewhere. Motorola, a company with strong principles and therefore stated policies against gift giving and receiving, has faced and dealt with this problem in a creative way. In Japan only, limited gift giving and receiving is acceptable under specific guidelines: cost limits, gifts to be given only at certain times of the year, and any gift to a Motorola employee must be displayed in and remain with the office after the recipient departs.²⁴

With respect to "gifts," Scripture offers some interesting illustrations. In 1 Samuel 9, Saul was looking for his father's donkeys, but could not find them. His servant suggested that they seek guidance from Samuel as to where they might find the animals. Saul was concerned, as they had nothing to give to the prophet as a gift, which, according to Ellen G. White,²⁵ was the custom when seeking assistance from a prophet. The servant told Saul that he had a quarter of a shekel, and Saul was satisfied and agreed that they should seek Samuel to find out where the donkeys could be found. It was at that time that Samuel anointed Saul privately to be king of Israel and shortly after, Saul learned that the donkeys were found and were safe.

But then there is the story of Naaman, who attempted to give a gift to Elisha after he was healed of his leprosy. Elisha refused the gift, as White says,²⁶ because he did not want Naaman to believe that what God had given him—that is, healing from leprosy—could have been purchased. When Elisha's servant ran after Naaman in order to receive some of the gifts for himself, Naaman's leprosy fell on the servant.

Special difficulties and pressures to make "lubricating" payments may arise in cultures where there is an expectation that one will hire a "middleman" to transact business—particularly the business of purchasing items. Agents are often used when a firm is unfamiliar with a country's conventions, rules, and regulations. In many Middle Eastern countries, companies must use agents because the culture requires that the company doing business must be properly introduced. Agents are generally used to bring firms and government officials together and to assist a firm in entering a market without violating local rules or customs. Often these cultures do not have a fixed price list to which the organization can refer when buying items, as would be true in the United States and many other Western societies. Thus, it is up to the negotiator to determine the price. In this context, the agent or middleman may become a conduit to provide bribes to officials or to offer bribes to facilitate the procurement of goods. In such situations the company and the bribed official are at arm's length, making it possible that the company may not even know that bribery has occurred.²⁷

Resistance to Bribery and Extortion

In their case study about the Motorola Corporation, E. B. Peach and K. L. Murrell tell the story of Motorola's decision to delay the opening of a plant in a country where local officials wanted a bribe/facilitating payment before they would issue the operating permit required to open the plant. It was tempting to pay rather than undergo an expensive delay in beginning production. However, Motorola chose to wait. The word spread that Motorola was unwilling to pay the requested money and ultimately, the required permits were issued.²⁸

It is one thing to be a major company like Motorola and have the financial resources to wait out the local officials who seek "facilitating payments." But what if you are a local businessperson who does not have the clout of a multinational corporation or the financial resources to wait months until the local official issues the permit? Should a local entrepreneur be held to the same ethical standard as a multinational corporation?

Richard De George thinks that often they should not be held to the same standard because the multinational corporation has greater responsibilities in the situation and the local entrepreneur may not have the same options available to them.²⁹ Gene Ahner states,

The challenge of business in the face of bribery and corruption is to work toward convincing locals of the benefits of playing by the rules of good business. Perhaps there is a special role here for multi-national corporations who have greater resources, more power, and easier access to independent credit. Some degree of ethical commitment to fair exchange is the basis for a free-market economy to prosper. In some markets there is no way of avoiding payment of bribes, except by exiting the market. In fact, many companies will not even attempt to do business in a country ruled by corruption and bribery. Again, it is the common people who suffer most.³⁰

The local entrepreneur must operate in a country, even one engaged in unethical practices such as bribery, because it is his/her own country. The local entrepreneur does not have the same resources, power, or wealth to stand up to local corruption as the multinational corporation has. The multinational corporation may be a desirable entity in the eyes of the government because it will bring jobs, taxes, and other benefits to the country, while the local entrepreneur may be too small to be seen as beneficial to the local officials. In many ways, the multinational corporation and the local entrepreneur do not operate in the same situation, and thus their responses may not be able to be the same. With more power comes more responsibility. Therefore, to immediately fault the local entrepreneur for his/her actions may show one's lack of understanding of the situation where social structures may be unmanageable from an

individual perspective. Langston notes that

it is often easier for those who have some social standing or financial resources to resist, than it is for those who are at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. Those at or near the bottom of the socio-economic scale in Third World countries often have so few resources upon which to fall back, that their very survival may be at stake if they try to resist... In light of these realities, when God's people see or hear of a victim of extortion, they should look on him as the victim he truly is; and not be judgmental of him for not resisting.³¹

These are difficult cases to consider and confront. Jesus's cautionary words in Matthew 7:1-5 to not judge, and to check for the plank in one's own eye before attempting to remove the speck in one's brother's eye, seem appropriate for such instances.

Seeking Wealth

In many cases, the incentive to offer bribes is to obtain some good, opportunity, or service that will be of financial benefit, and which appears to be unavailable without the money or gift. The hope is that by bribing and obtaining the desired item, the briber will be better off financially and thus move closer to the goal of increased wealth. Proverbs warns its readers of the power of money and its ability to change who we are or who we wish to be. Specifically, the wisdom literature warns of the results of using fraud to gain wealth.

First, the misuse of money makes one dishonest and corrupts one's integrity.³² Job 36:18 states, "Be careful that no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside." Proverbs 20:17 warns, "Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel." Job agrees, noting that in such cases one will not enjoy the profits from one's trading (Job 20:12-18).

Second, the misuse of money makes one ruthless.³³ Proverbs 20:14 describes the sharp bargaining by the buyer who claims the goods are inferior, but who knows that a hard bargain has been struck and in fact leaves the scene to boast about his gain. Proverbs 28:8 reminds the reader that increasing wealth by exorbitant interest is forbidden and to engage in such activity results in loss (Job 27:16-17).

Third, misuse of money makes one proud,³⁴ "wise in his own eyes" (Prov 28:11). The wise man prays (Prov 30:7-9) that he might be kept from both poverty and riches so that he does not ask, "Who is the Lord?"

Fourth, Jesus warns against the misuse of money that can make one busy with the less important things of life.³⁵ In Luke 12:16-21, Jesus tells the story of the rich farmer who built new barns to store all his wealth so that he might enjoy his goods for many years. But the rich farmer failed to be rich toward God, and while

gaining temporary riches for a short period of time, was deprived of the riches that last.

Rather than using one's wealth to obtain goods or services through dishonest means, it is better for the Christian to take seriously Paul's warning to Timothy about the power of money. Paul says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim 6:10). Timothy Keller writes,

The only true solution to the power of money over you is to see yourself rich in Christ. In him we are "rich toward God" (Luke 12:21; cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9). Riches on earth bring some short-lived status, but we are children of the King of the universe. Riches on earth bring some security, but "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called" (Romans 8:28). Riches on earth bring power, but we will rule with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12). Christ has paid the only debt that could destroy us (Luke 7:42-43), which makes all other debts inconsequential. In Christ you are truly rich.³⁶

Is It Bribery?

Langston offers the following applicational questions when dealing with gifts and bribes in cultures other than one's own. These questions may be particularly helpful when encountering transactional bribes, or when trying to determine if the situation involves a variance or a transactional bribe.

1. Is it pursuing justice or distorting justice? Is it hurting or taking away the rights of the innocent? Is it letting the wicked escape justice? Does it promote or obscure the carrying out of duties?
2. Is it undercutting impartiality and promoting favoritism? Is it impairing the judgment of those who are otherwise impartial? Are they making statements or pronouncements they otherwise would not have made? Does it result in favoritism toward some and unfavorable treatment of others?
3. Is it motivated by greed or dishonest gain? Is it associated with extortion in any way? Is it solicited or demanded? Is it given secretly and cunningly? What do righteous men (and women) do in this situation in this culture?³⁷

Langston adds a special caution with respect to justice when considering transactional bribes. He notes, "Extreme care must be exercised in evaluating whether a particular payment would uphold or undercut justice, because we tend to see justice from our own partial view point. What is one man's justice is another man's injustice."³⁸

For each of the situations described in the follow-

ing scenarios, use Langston's criteria to decide whether or not transactional or variance bribery has occurred. On what basis did you make your decision?

Scenario 1

The pastor and his driver bump their way over ancient roads in a war-torn country. They are stopped by armed militia but the pastor cannot tell if these are the police or the rebels. The driver hands a book to the head of the militia, who takes it to the nearby table, opens it carefully, and then returns it. The militia let the car pass. Perhaps ten miles further down the road, another checkpoint is encountered, with the same scene repeated—and then another. After they reach their destination, the pastor realizes that the book was not a mileage diary, but merely the method by which money was exchanged to ensure their safe passage. The pastor remembers seeing cars along the road, totally stripped of anything valuable, with no people in sight.

Scenario 2

The missionary is rushing to an appointment to renew his visa and drives his motorcycle a bit too fast through town. The policeman stops him and informs him that he must issue a speeding ticket to the missionary. However, the policeman says, if the missionary would pay a small fee (approximately \$1.00), the ticket would be "forgiven." The missionary knows the policeman's pay is inadequate to support his family, that the policeman expects those who are stopped for a traffic violation will pay the requested amount, and that to insist on receiving the ticket will result in days spent in court, explaining the situation to the judge.

Scenario 3

An international business organization wishes to bring its health care products into the country, but to do so, it must first establish a relationship with the local business that handles health care products for the region. The conversations appear to be going well, but no definite agreement has been reached. The parties adjourn for yet another day, and the international organization's negotiators wonder what it will take to be sufficiently accepted in the country in order to do business. At the next meeting, the local business manager arrives with an expensive gift, which he presents to the head of the international organization's negotiating team. He assures the chief negotiator that upon acceptance of the gift, they are ready to sit down and seriously discuss the offered contract.

Scenario 4

A local business organization wishes to build its new factory in a controversial location. The location is near a flood plain and current regulations regarding building in the area are extensive, in an effort to discourage development. The organization hires a professional lobbyist to work with local and regional government officials to obtain the necessary building permits and the required relaxation of flood plain

regulations so the factory can be built at the desired location. No monies are exchanged between the organization and the local government officials, although the lobbyist is paid according to the agreed-upon contract.

Conclusion

Whether one lives in or moves between a relationship-based culture and/or a culture defined by laws and individual responsibility, one recognizes that our world is fallen and our moral choices are not always perfect. As Christians, we understand the prohibitions of Scripture, particularly those outlined in the Ten Commandments that speak against lying, killing, working on Sabbath, and adultery. We might also add bribery to this list, given the strong words spoken against bribery in the Old Testament. Perhaps we break these commands because we are weak, unwise, caught off-guard, or hope that the action taken will prevent an even greater evil. Perhaps the situation seems unclear to us or unmanageable from a human perspective, and in our confusion or fear, we rely upon our own judgment and fail to trust God. But no matter what our rationale, we have broken God's moral law, and our actions are serious.

Jacob chose to deceive his father in order to obtain the birthright that belonged to his older brother, Esau. Jacob and his mother believed that God intended the birthright to come to Jacob, but they chose to "make it happen" rather than to wait for God's timing and direction. As a result of his deception, Jacob left home and fled to Mesopotamia to his mother's family. Twenty years later he determined to return to Canaan, but on the way he learned that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men. Terrified, he separated his own company into two bands so that if one was attacked, the other might escape. He himself went across the river Jabbok to pray for deliverance. While there he was attacked by an unknown assailant, whom he fought, as he believed it to be one of Esau's men who had found

him. It was not, and Jacob realized the assailant was more than human when he was overpowered.

White describes the scene that night, particularly stressing Jacob's state of mind as he reviewed his danger brought on by his sin against Esau. She notes,

When in his distress Jacob laid hold of the Angel, and made supplication with tears, the heavenly Messenger, in order to try his faith, also reminded him of his sin, and endeavored to escape from him. But Jacob would not be turned away. He had learned that God is merciful, and he cast himself upon His mercy. . . . It was by self-surrender and confiding faith that Jacob gained what he had failed to gain by conflict in his own strength. God thus taught His servant that divine power and grace alone could give him the blessing he craved.³⁹

Jacob's path to forgiveness was his confession of his sin. His strength was the mercy of God. For us, when confronted with difficult and—from a human perspective—impossible situations, Jacob's experience shines as a beacon down the path of humility, forgiveness, and mercy. In an increasingly complex world, such a beacon can also lead us to hope and grace, and confidence in God as we negotiate difficult situations.

Ann Gibson

Vice President of Finance
Adventist Development
and Relief Agency (ADRA),
Professor Emerita School of
Business Administration,
Andrews University



¹ <https://www.acfe.com/report-to-the-nations/2020/Default.aspx>
Downloadable PDF: <https://acfe-public.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/2020-Report-to-the-Nations.pdf>

² Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2019* (2020), www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/analysis (accessed September 5, 2021), focuses on public funds, particularly with respect to bribery, in its survey of corruption in 180 countries. It notes that in 2019, Denmark, New Zealand, Finland, Singapore, Sweden, and Switzerland were the least corrupt, while Venezuela, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and Somalia were the most corrupt countries. However, two-thirds of the 180 countries scored below 50 (on a scale of 1 to 100, with 100 being the cleanest countries). The average score was 43/100. Unfortunately, many of the cleanest countries engage in corruption—particularly bribery and money laundering—in other countries, while being "clean" at home. For example, in 2019, Iceland (eleventh in the list of "clean" countries, with a score of 78/100) was cited for bribes paid to officials in Namibia in exchange for trawling rights (Jon Henley, "Bribery Allegations Over Fishing Rights Rock Iceland and Namibia," *The Guardian*, November 15, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/15/bribery-allegations-over-fishing-rights-rock-iceland-and-namibia> [accessed September 5, 2021]). By way of comparison, the United States ranked twenty-third in the list of "clean" countries, with a score of 69/100.

³ John R. Boatright, *Ethics and the Conduct of Business*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2009), 432.

⁴ Richard L. Langston, *Bribery and the Bible* (Singapore: Campus Crusade Asia, 1991), 17.

⁵ E. B. Peach and K. L. Murrell, "Establishing and Maintaining an Ethical Posture in a Global Multi-Cultural Environment: Motorola, a Case Study" (presented at the Academy of Management Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, August 9, 1999).

⁶ Rajib Sanyal, "Determinants of Bribery in International Business: The Cultural and Economic Factors," *Journal of Business Ethics* 59 (2005): 139–145.

⁷ W. Michael Reisman, *Folded Lies: Bribery, Crusades, and Reforms* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 69.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

⁹ C. Van Rijckeghem and B. Weder, "Bureaucratic Corruption and the Rate of Temptation: Do Wages in the Civil Service Affect Corruption, and by How Much?," *Journal of Development Economics* 65 (2001): 307–331.

¹⁰ Boatright, 432.

¹¹ Reisman, 75.

¹² All biblical quotations are from the NIV84, unless otherwise indicated.

¹³ Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,

vol. 1, *Genesis to Deuteronomy* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1953), 1049.

¹⁴ Bernard Adeney, *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 150.

¹⁵ Students' comments in business ethics classes taught by the author at Andrews University between 2002 and 2019.

¹⁶ Langston, 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸ Adeney, 151.

¹⁹ Langston, 28.

²⁰ Richard T. De George, "Entrepreneurs, Multinationals, and Business Ethics," in *International Business Ethics* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 271–280.

²¹ Eileen Morgan, *Navigating Cross-Cultural Ethics: What Global Managers Do Right to Keep from Doing Wrong* (London: Routledge, 1998), 65.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁴ R. S. Moorthy et al., *Uncompromising Integrity: Motorola's Global Challenge* (Schaumburg, IL: Motorola University Press, 1998), 18–24.

²⁵ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 608–610.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 250–252.

²⁷ Boatright, 434.

²⁸ Peach and Murrell.

²⁹ De George, 271–280.

³⁰ Gene Ahner, *Business Ethics: Making a Life, Not Just a Living* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2007), 200.

³¹ Langston, 44–45.

³² Timothy Keller, *God's Wisdom for Navigating Life* (New York: Viking Press, 2017), 295.

³³ *Ibid.*, 297.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 298.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 305.

³⁷ Langston, 32–33.

³⁸ Langston, 64. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 201–203.

³⁹ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 201–203.

ARTICLES

Core Tenets of the Trinity

To see and download this poster, please use the link below:

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You may freely use this poster when a reference to the BRI is given and a link where you found it.

CORE TENETS OF THE TRINITY

GOD IS ONE. HE IS THE ONE AND ONLY GOD.

The **Loah** (is) our God, the **Loah** is one! **Deut 6:4**
I am the **Loah**, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. **Isa 45:5**
We know ... there is no other God but one. **1 Cor 8:4**
You believe that there is one God. You do well. **1 Pet 1:3**
I am the **Loah**, who makes all things, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself. **Isa 44:24**

EACH PERSON OF THE THREE IS FULLY DIVINE, THUS COEQUAL AND COETERNAL.

THE FATHER IS GOD*
And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. **John 17:3**
My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? **Matt 27:46**

THE SON IS GOD*
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **John 1:1** cf. **1:14**
Then the **Loah** rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the **Loah** out of the heavens. **Gen 19:24**
Angel of the **Loah** = God = **Loah**. **Gen 16:7-13; Exod 3:2-6; Judg 13:17-23**
Unto us a Son is given ... And His name will be called ... Mighty God, Everlasting Father ... **Isa 9:6**
My Lord and my God! **John 20:28**
... our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. **Titus 2:13**
This is the true God and eternal life. **1 John 5:20**
Before Abraham was, I AM. **John 8:58** cf. **Exod 3:14**
... who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God. **Phil 2:6**
For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. **Col 2:9**
I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. **Rev 22:13** cf. **1:8; 21:6 & Isa 44:6; 48:12**

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD*
Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? ... You have not lied to men but to God. **Acts 5:3-4**
... the eternal Spirit ... **Heb 9:14**
The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet ... **Acts 28:25-26** cf. **Isa 6, 8-10** (speaker is the **Loah/Lord**)

*God in the sense of having a divine nature

GOD IS THREE. HE IS THE TRIUNE GOD, A TRINITY OF FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT.

... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Matt 28:19**
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **2 Cor 13:14**
... elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. **1 Pet 1:2**

THE THREE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY ARE DISTINCT FROM ONE ANOTHER.

And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." **Luke 3:22**
Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him. **Matt 12:32**
And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, ... He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak. ... He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. **John 14:16-17; 16:13-14**
Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits ... and from Jesus Christ ... **Rev 1:4-5**

All Scripture quotations are taken from the NKJV.

SON OF GOD
"Son" is a metaphor, it does not denote biological descent (e.g., **1 Kgs 20:35; Neh 12:28-29**).
"Son of God" means: same nature as the Father, but distinct from Him, in eternal, loving relationship with Him; representing the Godhead to creatures, eventually becoming man, and as such living in dependence upon the Father.

UNIQUE (IN KIND)
Jesus is "unique in kind" *monogenēs* (**John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9**). This denotes his unique personhood, his relationship to the Father, and his mission (cf. Isaac as Abraham's "only son" of promise in **Heb 11:17** NKJV).
monogenēs comes from *monos* "only, alone" and *genos* "kind." *not gennaō* "beget, give birth to."
The translation "only begotten son" is misleading. It goes back to the Latin Vulgate, which wanted to make clear that Jesus is not a created being. The King James Version derived the reading "only begotten" from the Vulgate.

FIRSTBORN
Title for the Messiah and Davidic King (**Ps 89:27[28]**); preeminence, not chronological order: "the firstborn from the dead" (**Col 1:18** cf. **Matt 17:3**); preeminence over all creation (**Col 1:15**).

SUBMISSION OF THE SON
It is a voluntary functional submission of Jesus which embraces the time of his incarnation and the redemptive process (**Matt 24:36; John 4:34; 5:19, 30; 10:17-18; 14:28; 1 Cor 15:28**). Before and after His incarnation, Jesus is glorified with His Father (**John 5:23; 17:5; Phil 2:6, 9-11**).

- TRITHEISM**
There are three separate deities.
- ADOPTIONISM**
God adopts the man Jesus as His son at his baptism.
- ARIANISM**
The Son was created.
- SEMI-ARIANISM**
The Son came forth from the Father, is "of similar substance" (but not equal) with Him and hence subordinate.
- SUBORDINATIONISM**
The Son is subordinate to the Father by nature.

- TRITHEISM**
There are three separate deities.
- MODALISM/SABELLIANISM**
One God manifests himself in three modes: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are identical in person.
- PATRIPASSIANISM**
Jesus is God the Father who is incarnated and suffers as the Son.



EVER CLEARER STATEMENTS FROM ELLEN G. WHITE

Christ and the Father are both "persons," with Christ having "a form like" the Father. "Said Jesus, 'I am in the express image of My Father's person.'" **EW 54, 77**

"Christ [..] was one with the eternal Father,—one in nature, in character, and in purpose" and "one in power and authority with the Father." **GC 493, 495**

The Holy Spirit is "the Third Person of the Godhead." **Letter 8, 1896; SpTA10 25, 37; DA 671** Jesus is "the only true God." **Ms 25, 1896**

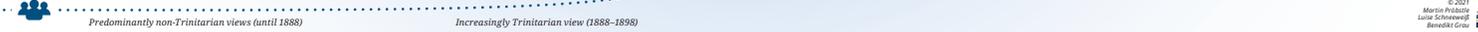
"The three highest powers of heaven [..] Three distinct agencies" **Ms 27a, 1900** and "the three great personal dignitaries of heaven." **Ms 92, 1901**

"The Holy Spirit is a person," "has a personality," and "must also be a divine person." **Ms 20, 1906; Ev 617**

Statement of Faith, no. 2: "Godhead, or Trinity" (Adventist Yearbook)

Endorsement: First official vote on the fundamental beliefs by the GC

DEVELOPMENT IN ADVENTIST HISTORY



Lessons from Matthew 16

By Clinton Wahlen

From the geographical note given in Matthew 15:39, we learn that Jesus has returned to Jewish territory on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee (with His disciples, cf. Mark 8:10).¹ Almost immediately, He is met by a delegation of Pharisees and Sadducees demanding a sign from Him (Matt 16:1–4). Then Jesus and His disciples return to the boat and head to the northern side of the lake near Bethsaida (cf. Mark 8:22), because their eventual destination is Caesarea Philippi in the far north of Israel (Matt 16:13).² Upon reaching the shore, a discussion ensues in the wake of Jesus’ warning about His opponents’ leavening influence (Matt 16:5–12). Subsequently, on their journey north, Jesus elicits reflection on who He is, Peter confesses Him as the Christ, and Jesus reveals for the first time to His disciples that He will suffer and die (Matt 16:13–23). Utilizing a teachable moment, Jesus emphasizes the cost and reward of discipleship (Matt 16:24–27), concluding with a somewhat startling statement about the kingdom (Matt 16:28).

Interpretation of Matthew 16

1. Verses 1–4

- Interestingly, this is the first time in Matthew that the Sadducees confront Jesus. We see their somewhat unexpected alliance with the Pharisees also in connection with the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt 3:7; cf. John 1:19, 24). Apparently, both men were perceived as a significant threat to the religious status quo.
- The request to “show them a sign *from heaven*” (Matt 16:1)³ is really a demand that Jesus prove His messianic credentials with incontrovertible evidence (such as that given by Moses at the time of the exodus). Their evil intent is indicated by the word *peirazō* (“test, tempt,” cf. Matt 4:1, 3) found in all three Gospel accounts of this demand (see also Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16; cf. 1 Cor 1:22). Jesus’ healing and freeing people of demon possession had already been used as supposed evidence of His being in league with the devil (Matt 12:22–24, 38; cf. 10:25). According to John, even the miraculous feeding of the five thousand was not convincing enough (John 6:30; cf. 5:36).
- Frequently, as also here, Jesus turns the tables on His would-be interrogators; He notes their ability to read signs in the sky to tell the weather, yet their utter inability to

discern the more vital “signs of the times”—how Jesus’ kingdom message and ministry fulfills prophetic expectations. He likens these leaders to the wicked wilderness generation who saw miraculous signs but perished without entering the promised land because of their unbelief (Num 14:22–23, 32–35; Deut 32:20). Consequently, only “the sign of the prophet Jonah” would be given to them (cf. Matt 12:39–40).⁴ The sorrow Jesus felt at the unbelief of these leaders is described by Mark: “He sighed deeply in His spirit” (Mark 8:12).

2. Verses 5–12

- The sudden departure by boat may have led the disciples to forget to buy more bread, providing the background for the ensuing discussion of “leaven.” Earlier this same image was used positively to describe the spread of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 13:33), but here it is used negatively, of something evil and harmful (cf. 1 Cor 5:6; Gal 5:9). Its previous metaphorical usage should have alerted the disciples that Jesus probably meant it metaphorically here also (cf. Matt 13:10–17).
- The importance of Jesus’ warning is underscored with two Greek words in the imperative, *horate* (“take heed”) and *prosechete* (“beware”). Used frequently by Jesus in various admonitions and warnings, they appear together only here.
- Jesus is concerned that the minds of the disciples not be negatively influenced by the unbelief of the Jewish leaders, especially since He is about to give them more focused attention and instruction regarding who He is and what He is about to suffer.
- Unfortunately, the disciples took Jesus’ saying about leaven literally, fretting over the fact that they did not bring enough bread. Jesus, aware of their thoughts (cf. Matt 9:4; 12:25), gently reproves them and, in the process, identifies the reason for doubts that hinder a correct understanding of His words: “little faith” (cf. Matt 14:31; 17:20).
- Interestingly, rather than explaining directly what He means by “leaven,” Jesus asks a series of questions regarding the twin feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand from just a few loaves of bread to open their

understanding—an essential preparation for them to understand what He is about to disclose about the nature of His messiahship, which was so sharply different from the expectations of the Pharisees and Sadducees of a militaristic messiah that would deliver Israel from Rome and raise it to worldly preeminence.

3. Verses 13–20

- According to both Matthew and Mark, it is not in Caesarea Philippi itself, but in the vicinity of nearby villages that Jesus asks (while they are still on the road, Mark 8:27) about people’s understanding of His identity. From Bethsaida, this journey would have taken at least two days.
- Jesus uses the title “Son of Man” of Himself, especially in connection with His identity and mission (nine times so far; Matt 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 32, 40; 13:37, 41).⁵ Going forward, it is used nine times of His sufferings and death (Matt 17:9, 12, 22; 20:18, 28; 26:2, 24 [2x], 45) and nine times of His future coming in glory (Matt 19:28; 24:27, 30 [2x], 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:64).
- From the disciples’ answer to Jesus’ question, most seem to consider Him a prophet but none, apparently, consider Him the Messiah. The mention of John the Baptist and Elijah together reminds readers that Jesus has identified the two (Matt 11:14), and the mention of Jeremiah is significant because Matthew sees Jesus fulfilling some of his prophecies (Matt 2:17; 27:9).
- Clearly expecting a better answer from His closest followers, Jesus asks the twelve (literally translated), “And you men—who do you say that I am?” The disciples saw the miracles Jesus performed, listened carefully to His teachings, and repeated and explained them to others (Matt 10:7). Now Peter sums up the faith of the disciples, identifying Jesus as the Messiah, and, more specifically, not just as the messianic “son of David,” but as “the Son of the living God” (cf. Matt 22:41–45). They accept Jesus’ claim of having a unique relation to God as His Father (Matt 7:21; 10:32–33; 11:25–27; 12:50; 15:13).
- Jesus does not credit Peter, a “flesh and blood” human being, with insight, but attributes his understanding the truth about Jesus to a special revelation given to Peter by the Father (cf. Gen 41:16; Dan 2:27–28).
- In commending Peter’s confession of faith, Jesus hints that the meaning of the apostle’s words are much deeper than any of His followers may have realized. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, as expressed by Isaiah,

“Mighty God, Everlasting Father,” the one in whom “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9, NAS95).

- Jesus’ famous words about the “rock” as the foundation on which the church is to be built have been interpreted in three main ways: 1) the rock is Peter (whose name means “rock”), 2) the rock is the faith confession articulated by Peter, or 3) the rock is Jesus in contrast to Peter. Catholics generally affirm the first interpretation and most Protestant scholars today endorse the second. Nevertheless, there remain good reasons to affirm the third possibility—that Jesus points to Himself as the Rock on which He will build His church.
 - God as Israel’s Rock is frequent in Scripture (Deut 32:4, 30–31; Ps 18:2, 31, 46; 31:3; 62:2, 6–7; 71:3).⁶ Prophecies also describe the coming Messiah as a foundation stone and rock (Ps 118:22–23; Isa 8:14; 28:16; 32:2), which Jesus Himself and other New Testament writers point to as fulfilled in Him (Matt 21:42; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:6–8). In another context, Jesus points to Himself as the source of living water (John 7:37), alluding to the water God supplied to Israel from the rock struck by Moses (Exod 17:6), which points to Christ being stricken for us, a connection recognized also by Paul in his identification of Jesus as this Rock (1 Cor 10:4).
 - The difference in Greek between Peter (*Petros*) and rock (*petra*) suggests both a comparison and a contrast between the two. “Petra refers not to a small stone but to a massive rock, including bedrock.”⁷ Peter was supposed to be like a rock (cf. Gal 2:9), which is why Jesus gave him this name (John 1:42) but, unfortunately, he did not always live up to his name. Moments later he rebukes Jesus who deservedly calls him *satan* or adversary because Peter sought to keep Him from His mission to die for us (Matt 16:22–23). During the trial he denies Jesus three times (Matt 26:69–75), just as Jesus predicted in light of Peter’s boastful claim (Matt 26:33–35). Many years later, Peter acts hypocritically by separating from Gentile Christians when Jewish Christians arrive (Gal 2:11–14). The contrast between Peter’s unreliable dispo-

sition and the solid foundation on which the church must be built is emphasized by Jesus' use of the demonstrative pronoun *this* Rock.

- The only other reference by Jesus to *petra* in Matthew is in the Sermon on the Mount. Those who hear Jesus' words and do them are likened to a wise man who builds his house on a rock. The same parable in Luke describes digging down deep to a solid foundation made of *petra*, "bedrock" (Luke 6:48).
- Importantly, not only Paul but Peter also refers to Jesus either as the stone or rock (*petra*, 1 Pet 2:4, 7–8) or the foundation (*themelios*) of the church (1 Cor 3:11).
- There is no need to see a contradiction in the idea of Jesus both building the church *and* being the Rock on which it is built. Paul describes Jesus in a similarly active role in His leadership of Israel in the wilderness: "For they drank of that spiritual Rock [*petras*] that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:4).
- The "gates of Hades" (Heb. *she'ol*), mentioned also in the Old Testament (Job 17:16; Isa 38:10), refer to the "gates of death" (Job 38:17; Pss 9:13; 107:18). Therefore, Jesus promises that the church—believers who proclaim His teachings—will help others to be saved from death by following Jesus in the path to the heavenly kingdom and eternal life (Matt 7:14; 19:16–17, 29).
- The "keys of the kingdom of heaven" present a similar picture and refer to the power given to Peter and the other apostles, who represent the church (Matt 18:18; cf. Isa 22:20–23; Acts 15:14–17), to open the way to life through their preaching of the gospel of Christ and teaching what it means to follow Him (Matt 28:19–20).⁸

4. Verses 21–28

- The command to tell no one that He was the Messiah (Matt 16:20) was necessary because of the false conceptions people had been given, whereas the Scriptures foretold that Christ would suffer and on "the third day" be resurrected (e.g., Isa 53; cf. Matt 12:40; Luke 24:46; Acts 17:2–3; 1 Cor 15:3–4).
- Just as Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to avoid the cross (Matt 4:8–10), so now he uses Peter to try to turn Him from the path of suffering and death.
- There is an implied sequence of steps in following Jesus: 1) deny oneself, meaning to give oneself to Jesus and submit to His will; 2) take up one's cross, meaning a readiness to

suffer any cost, even surrendering life itself, to further the gospel; and 3) follow Jesus in the path of obedience, "who for the joy that was set before Him," of seeing people saved in His kingdom, "endured the cross" (Heb 12:2). "Jesus did not count heaven a place to be desired while we were lost."⁹

- Jesus' reference to His coming "in the glory of His Father with His angels" and rewarding "each according to his works" points to the pre-advent, investigative judgment in the time of the end (cf. Rev 22:11–12), a glimpse of which He promises to some of His disciples (Matt 16:28), a prophecy that meets its fulfillment just six days later (Matt 17:1).

Application of the Chapter

Some of the lessons we may glean from Matthew 16 include:

1. Jesus' reply to well-educated skeptics is a reminder that knowledge by itself, even a knowledge of the Scriptures, is not enough; we should also see the big picture as presented in prophecy, type, and their fulfillment.
2. Doubt and skepticism—as expressed in the demand for a sign—may, like leaven, work invisibly in the heart and will eventually control what a person thinks, says, and does. Even worse, its influence may taint the minds of others, blinding them to the truth and, through them, spread doubt and unbelief still further.
3. Like the disciples who worried that they didn't bring enough bread, often we worry and fret over things that don't matter nearly as much as other things to which we give little or no attention; we "strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel!" (Matt 23:24). We may, for example, be so preoccupied with physical needs that spiritual needs are underestimated or even completely overlooked (Matt 6:25–34).
4. Since spiritual things, which by their nature are not physical or tangible (e.g., Matt 16:6; John 3:3–8), must necessarily be explained in metaphorical terms, the Holy Spirit is needed for spiritual discernment (cf. 1 Cor 2:13–14), and the Bible is to be its own interpreter when seeking the meaning of words, phrases, and images (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).
5. Unfortunately, sometimes major theological disagreements are ignored or deliberately set aside in order to advance political agendas within the church, such as was done by the Pharisees and Sadducees when they united against Jesus. This type of activity may hinder our unity and mission.
6. The closer and longer we walk with Jesus, the more clearly we will understand His

teachings and be equipped to share them with others kindly, clearly, and accurately, opening the way for people to become citizens of the kingdom of heaven and heirs of eternal life (Matt 16:17–19; 19:28–29).

7. Peter's sudden reversal from speaking the truth of the Father to urging Satan's will upon Jesus warns us to remain His humble, teachable, and correctable followers (cf. Jas 4:6–10).
8. It would be well for us to contemplate how we may become more "mindful of the things of God" rather than "the things of men,"

and what it would mean to lose one's life for Jesus' sake, which the church must be built is emphasized by Jesus' use of the demonstrative pronoun *this* Rock.

Clinton Wahlen
Associate Director
Biblical Research Institute



¹ Dalmanutha, an otherwise unknown location, is perhaps another name for the region around Magdala or a nearby point where boats could anchor. See Clinton Wahlen, "Lessons From Matthew 15," *Reflections* 74 (April 2021): 12, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/Reflections-74-April-June-2021.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2021).

² Cf. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 407.

³ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴ For further discussion, see Clinton Wahlen, "Lessons From Matthew 12," *Reflections* 71 (July 2020): 5, <https://adventistbiblicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/Reflections-71-July-September-2020-Final-2.pdf> (accessed September 5, 2021).

⁵ For further discussion, see Clinton Wahlen, "Lessons From Matthew 8," *Reflections* 67 (July 2019): 11.

⁶ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity,

2010), 733, write, "The word rock is used in Scripture with a wide variety of meanings, almost all associated with God, either as a secure foundation or stronghold or as an obstacle to evildoers" (emphasis original).

⁷ Clinton Wahlen, "Lessons From Matthew 7," *Reflections* 66 (April 2019): 6. Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 809, define *petra* as "bedrock or massive rock formations."

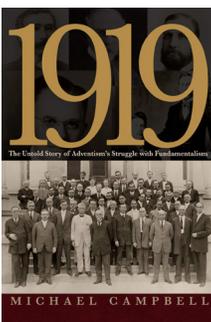
⁸ Cf. White, 413–414: "'The keys of the kingdom of heaven' are the words of Christ. All the words of Holy Scripture are His, and are here included. These words have power to open and to shut heaven. They declare the conditions upon which men are received or rejected. Thus the work of those who preach God's word is a savor of life unto life or death unto death. Theirs is a mission weighted with eternal results."

⁹ *Ibid.*, 417.

BOOK NOTES

Michael Campbell
1919:
The Untold Story of
Adventism's Struggle
with Fundamentalism

(Nampa, ID:
Pacific Press, 2019).



1919: The Untold Story of Adventism's Struggle with Fundamentalism

By Dojcin Zivadinovic

For the one hundredth anniversary of the 1919 Adventist Bible Conference, Pacific Press published a short volume written by Southwestern Adventist University professor Michael W. Campbell, entitled *1919: The Untold Story of Adventism's Struggle with Fundamentalism*.¹

In a little more than one hundred pages, plus eight pages of historical photographs and pamphlets, Campbell examines the proceedings and perceived significance of the 1919 Bible Conference, held from July 1 to August 9 on the campus of Washington Missionary College (now Washington Adventist University). The conference addressed various issues in

Adventist theology, including the nature of inspiration as exercised by the Adventist self-described "messenger of the Lord," Ellen G. White.

Summary

In this volume, Campbell argues that the 1919 conference was a pivotal event that shaped Seventh-day Adventist theology after the death of Ellen White.

In the first two chapters, Campbell begins his exposition explaining the context in which the 1919 Bible Conference took place. The early twentieth century saw a consolidation of the evangelical fundamentalist movement that opposed the rise of modernism and historical criticism within Christia-

nity. While fundamentalists stressed, among other points of concern, the Bible's inerrant reliability, modernists attempted to reinterpret and/or relativize the text of the Bible to better fit the culture and science of the time. Campbell argues that in this context, Adventists were much closer to fundamentalists than to modernists.²

In chapters 3 and 4, Campbell discusses the logistical details of the 1919 conference—namely, the dates, the venue, the topics, and the participants. Campbell reports sixty-five participants and eleven major topics for the conference. Neither the alleged verbal inspiration of the Bible nor Ellen White were actually on the list of topics for the conference (p. 47).

Due to heated discussion and divergences, stenographers were asked not to record the entire conference. Hence, it is difficult to fully assess the collective arguments of either perspective at the symposium. Especially was this the case with the parallel conference, the Bible and History Teacher's Council, which took place in the evenings from July 1 to August 9, 1919, with only twenty-nine participants.

According to Campbell and his sources, it was the Bible and History Teacher's Council that actually addressed the issue of White's inspiration the most, though only 15% of the council is actually on stenographic record (pp. 47–48). In spite of the fact that 85% of the discussion is missing, Campbell believes we can fully reconstruct the major gist of the debates and their implications for us today.

Due to the controversial nature of the various deliberations, the transcript files of the 1919 conference were placed in the General Conference archives in Silver Spring, Maryland,³ and were forgotten along with other records of denominational minutes and proceedings until half a century later, when in 1974 a researcher by the name of F. Donald Yost found them while compiling documents for the *SDA Encyclopedia*.

Reading Campbell's description, it is not clear how long the actual 1919 conference lasted. On page 47 Campbell states, "The conference began on July 1 and continued through August 9, 1919." However, on page 48 Campbell writes that "the Bible conference (July 1–19) was held concurrently with the *Bible and History Teacher's Council* which continued for another three weeks until August 9." So it appears that Campbell is combining two different conferences into one, as he says on page 53, "The 1919 Bible conference covered a wide array of topics during the course of six weeks of presentations and discussions."

Chapters 5 and 6 of Campbell's book describe various issues of Adventist interpretation discussed at the 1919 conference (e.g., the ten horns of Daniel 7, the "King of the North" in Daniel 11, the AD 538 date, the "daily," the Trinity). While these two chapters are insightful for tracing the development of Adventist scholarship, it is chapters 7–10 that appear to be the crux of the book.

In chapter 7, Campbell describes various discussions during both the 1919 conference and the parallel held Bible and History Teachers Council regarding potential historical inaccuracies in Ellen White's books, specifically in *The Great Controversy*. Certain conference participants expressed their view that Ellen White was inspired but not infallible. Others were uneasy with such an assessment and wondered as to the extent of the historical inaccuracies God allowed in her books. Are her errors limited only to grammar and historical facts, or might they include doctrine, eschatology, and other major categories? How might her writings remain useful for instruction if they include major errors?

Administrators and scholars such as W. W. Prescott, Arthur Daniells, and E. F. Albertsworth, accompanied by William Clarence White (Ellen White's son who was not present in 1919), favored a "thought inspiration" model of Ellen White and the Bible. They pointed to certain historical and grammatical inaccuracies that God allowed in Ellen White's writings and also in the Bible. Confronted with the prospect of Ellen White's loss of authority, some of the 1919 participants seem to have resorted to the denial of these observations, thus retreating toward a more limited verbal model of inspiration (e.g., Wilkinson, Washburn, Holmes).

After praising the efforts made at the 1919 conference to professionalize Adventist scholarship in chapter 8 of his work, Campbell investigates the aftermath of the conference in chapters nine and ten. Campbell concludes that Adventist leaders were not able to resolve the issues surrounding verbal versus thought inspiration at the 1919 conferences. Instead, the 1919 conference participants pushed the issue of inspiration "under the rug," recorded only a fraction of the discussion through stenographs, and buried the records of the conference in hardly accessible denominational vaults.

This, according to Campbell, made the denomination vulnerable and unprepared for the future crises and membership defections that occurred when Ellen White's literary borrowings⁴ and (potential) historical errors⁵ were "uncovered" and publicized by Ronald Numbers, Walter Rea, Desmond Ford, *Spectrum* magazine, and others during the 1970s and thereafter.

Reflections

Overall, *1919: The Untold Story* is helpful in shedding light on an important yet largely forgotten conference that offered an opportunity for Adventists to better define their major eschatological views and to examine their position on the Bible's and Ellen White's inspiration. Unfortunately, Adventists did not have any other major theological conferences until 1952. Campbell correctly notes a principal lesson of this episode—that issues placed under wraps tend to resurface and cause problems sooner or later.

While helpful in shedding light on this controversial episode in Adventist history, some chapters of Campbell's volume could be more balanced and precise.

In the first two chapters, which discuss Adventism in a cultural war between the fundamentalist and the liberal modernist movements, Campbell appears to consider the threat of fundamentalism to be a much more serious danger than liberal modernism. While fundamentalism certainly has some serious deficiencies, Campbell does not discuss positive aspects of the conservative Christian resistance to secularism and biblical relativism at the time.

Instead, Campbell portrays "fundamentalism" as a completely negative ideology. Any relationship twentieth-century Adventists might have had with fundamentalist thought is depicted as a "dangerous flirtation" (p. 17). On the other hand, modernism receives little if any criticism in Campbell's short volume. This lack of balance is rather unfortunate and seems to express certain theological biases of his own.

Another problem in Campbell's volume is that the author appears to conflate fundamentalism with contemporary mainstream Adventist hermeneutics. Campbell attempts on several occasions to identify the verbal-mechanical view of inspiration and a literalistic hermeneutic with contemporary Adventist hermeneutics in general. Unfortunately, Campbell offers no attempts to make a distinction between the established Adventist approach to Bible study⁶ and classical fundamentalist hermeneutics. Yet, fundamentalism and conservative Adventist theology are significantly different.⁷

For example, when some fundamentalists see passages such as "Women should keep silence in the churches" (1 Cor 14:34a),⁸ they often tend to take an over-literalistic approach, concluding that women can never sing, talk, share, preach, or teach in the congregations—not even teach children's classes at church.⁹ However, mainstream Adventists, rather than following a restricted and literalistic interpretation, tend to consider *everything* the Bible has to say on a topic in a balanced way that takes into consideration the context in which things were written.¹⁰

Besides hyper-literalism, another important difference between fundamentalism and Adventist systematic hermeneutics concerns the concept of the verbal inerrancy of Scripture. Some fundamentalist concepts of an absolute inerrancy of Scripture seem to be influenced by certain philosophical presuppositions that are rooted in the Greek idea of God's timelessness and unchangeable perfection. These concepts spill over into the theological understanding of God's sovereign predestination that also includes the perfect divine inspiration of Scripture. Both Ellen White and contemporary Adventism reject such a Calvinistic understanding of rigorous predestination that ultimately even denies human freedom. Ellen White and Seventh-day Adventists affirm the divine-human dimension of inspiration and believe in

the full trustworthiness and reliability of the Bible as God's written Word to us, which accomplishes what God intended it to accomplish.¹¹

Isaiah the prophet expresses it this way: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please" (Isa 55:11). Ellen White affirms the same, writing, "If God reproves His people through an individual He does not leave the one corrected to guess at matters and *the message to become corrupted* in reaching the person it is designed to correct. God gives the message and then takes *especial care* that it is not corrupted."¹²

Unfortunately, while Campbell asserts Ellen White's "errancy" throughout the entire volume, nowhere in the book does he qualify what that means. What is the extent of Ellen White's errancy, and how much does it affect the actual message from God she is trying to communicate? The reader is left to wonder if Ellen White's errancy means that she is not a reliable messenger of God. Unfortunately, this feeds into the modernism and relativism that Campbell does not critique in his book.

Reading Campbell's conclusion, some readers might be left thinking that the church at large is still following "fundamentalist tendencies" that were present with some of the 1919 ministers. In one of his concluding statements, Campbell argues that, at present, the rise of liberalism has "caused some conservatives to retreat to the comforting, if intellectually and spiritually moribund, enclave of Fundamentalism" and concludes, "In this way, the same dynamic of polarization evident in 1919 continues to exist within Adventism today" (p. 115).

Campbell seems here to be equating the situation in 1919 with the Adventist theological situation today. The reality is that most mainstream Adventist theologians and institutions today have accepted the reasonably "progressive" position of Prescott, Willie White, and Daniells—many indeed going far beyond it—and few if any Adventist professionals today adhere to verbal inspiration or hyperliteralism.¹³

A more differentiated and balanced interaction—not just with some fundamentalist tenets in the past, but also with more recent liberal thoughts and trends that have significantly affected Adventist theology—would have helped give a fairer description of pertinent factors and would have helped avoid some short-circuited conclusions.

Campbell is correct that polarization still exists today in Adventism, but the polarization we face today is of a different quality from the controversies back then. While in 1919 virtually all Seventh-day Adventists could unreservedly affirm a literal creation, the high priestly ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary, and the full trustworthiness and infallibility of Scripture, today several Fundamental Beliefs are questioned outright by an increasing number of liberal-minded Adventists. One reason for such a

radically different understanding of what is essential for Adventist theology are that new methods of biblical interpretation have crept in.¹⁴

Campbell is probably correct in his assertion that after the 1919 disagreements, Adventists needed more Bible conferences—not less—to iron out differences, to pray and seek for the Holy Spirit, and to facilitate unity. Unfortunately, this did not happen. The result was an eventual confusion and lack of clarity among ministers and lay members about the true nature of inspiration. Unfortunately post-1919, many Adventists adopted some deficient form of verbal inspiration that almost bordered on a mechanical understanding that would be easily challenged by liberal representatives in Adventism in the 1970s.

Campbell's book attempts to throw the blame for our contemporary theological crisis upon the old pioneers and their presumed lack of spiritual discernment. The younger generations are portrayed by him as "victims" of the mistakes of their forefathers committed more than a century ago. If history can teach us anything, it is that the "victim mentality" only leads to a sense of entitlement and further alienation. Speaking as an early millennial myself, I believe that what the new generation needs is to be educated not to see itself as a victim, but to be taught to see itself as a "repairer of the broken walls" (Isa 58:12).

In conclusion, *1919: The Untold Story* contributes to the world of Adventist history research. We can learn much from our past and Campbell is to be commended for his thought-provoking analysis, examination, and reporting of the conference. However, the book lacks clarity on the exact nature and extent of Ellen White's "errancy." Additionally, the virtual absence of a critique of modernism, together with Campbell's conflation of fundamentalism with mainstream Adventist hermeneutics, suggests that his book might reflect a "dangerous flirtation" with liberal thoughts on inspiration. What is needed is a proper balance in reading God's inspired writings and a clearer assessment of the present state of Adventist theology in relation to the issues addressed.

Dojcin Zivadinovic
Professor of Religion,
Weimar University



¹ This volume is based on the dissertation by Michael Campbell, "The 1919 Bible Conference and Its Significance for Seventh-day Adventist History and Theology" (PhD diss., Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 2008). Besides this short volume, Campbell has published or co-published three other books in the last four years. Among them are Michael W. Campbell and Nikolaus Satelmajer, eds., *Here We Stand: Luther, the Reformation, and Seventh-day Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017); Michael W. Campbell and Jud S. Lake, *The Ellen G. White Pocket Dictionary* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018); and Michael W. Campbell, *Pocket Dictionary for Understanding Adventism* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2020).

² Adventist commonalities with fundamentalist convictions were not restricted to the issue of inerrancy, as fundamentalist concerns were much broader than that. From the 1920s to the 1940s, to be a fundamentalist meant only to be theologically traditional, a believer in the fundamentals of evangelical Christianity. "Conservative" was sometimes used as a synonym. The following five fundamentals became the identifying core of fundamentalist concerns: 1) the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible, 2) the virgin birth of Christ, 3) the substitutionary atonement of Christ, 4) Christ's bodily resurrection, and 5) the historicity of the miracles. These five fundamentals were believed to be the sine qua non of Christianity. For a perceptive analysis and critical interaction of fundamentalist convictions and Adventist theology, see Frank M. Hasel, "Was Ellen G. White a Fundamentalist?," in *For You Have Strengthened Me: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Gerhard Pfandl in Celebration of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Martin Pröbstle, Gerald A. Klingbeil, and Martin Klingbeil (St. Peter am Hart: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2007), 347–359.

³ The records were accessible upon request only at the General Conference archives.

⁴ That Ellen G. White borrowed from other authors was openly acknowledged by herself (cf. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911], xi–xii) and by people close to her (cf. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 3 vols. [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958–1980], 2:451–465). Ellen White's thought borrowing from other authors is not plagiarism and does

not deny inspiration of her writings, but merely enhances the expression of the inspired thoughts given to her by God. For further clarification, see R. W. Coon, "Ellen G. White and the So-Called 'Plagiarism' Charge: An Examination of Five Issues" (Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University, April 30, 1999); H. E. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 458–465; and Fred Veltman, "The Desire of Ages Project: the Conclusions," *Ministry*, December 1990.

⁵ For the discussion on Ellen White's "historical errors," see the statement by William C. White (Ellen White's son), in White, *Selected Messages*, 3:463; cf. also this statement of his: "In some of the historical matters such as are brought out in Patriarchs and Prophets and in Acts of the Apostles, and in Great Controversy, the main outlines were made very clear and plain to her, and when she came to write up these topics, she was left to study the Bible and history to get dates and geographical relations and to perfect her description of details" (*ibid.*, 3:462). The natural conclusion is that God led Ellen White in selecting the best information available. Had she corrected the historians of her day on some dates or events, she would have been criticized for contradicting "history" or "science." Hence, some non-consequential details that do not affect or change the spiritual or theological message were allowed by the divine economy.

⁶ "Methods of Bible Study," Seventh-day Adventist Church, <https://www.adventist.org/documents/methods-of-bible-study/> (accessed September 5, 2021), is an official statement on Adventist hermeneutics approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists' Executive Committee in the Annual Council held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986.

⁷ For some of the key differences, see Hasel, "Was Ellen G. White a Fundamentalist?," 347–359.

⁸ All biblical quotations are from the NKJV, unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ See, e.g., Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 71–72, who recounts how the elders of her local church refused to allow a woman to teach teen Sunday School, though they could teach teenage girls (*ibid.*, 129); cf. the sermon by

Presbyterian pastor John MacArthur, “Does the Bible Permit a Woman to Teach?” (Grace Community Church, Sun Valley, CA, November 8, 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8ncO82ZJ0> (accessed September 5, 2021).

¹⁰ For a recent exposition of Adventist Biblical hermeneutics, see Frank M. Hasel, ed., *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute/Review and Herald Academic, 2020).

¹¹ On Ellen G. White’s understanding of the revelation/inspiration process, see Frank M. Hasel, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1087–1101.

¹² Ellen G. White to John Andrews, June 1860, in Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 1 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981), 306, emphasis supplied.

¹³ See, e.g., Merlin Burt, ed., *Understanding Ellen White: The Life and Work of the Most Influential Voice in Adventist History* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2015).

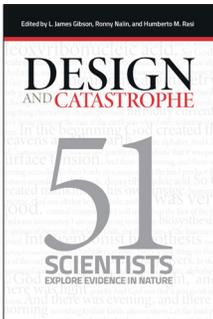
¹⁴ See North American Division, *Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report* (November 2013), 8, 25–26. See also the discussion in Frank M. Hasel, “Recent Trends in Methods of Biblical Interpretation,” in Hasel, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 405–461.

BOOK NOTES

L. James Gibson,
Ronny Nalin, and
Humberto M. Rasi

**Design and
Catastrophe:
51 Scientists Explore
Evidence in Nature**

Berrien Springs, MI:
Andrews University
Press, 2021



Design and Catastrophe: 51 Scientists Explore Evidence in Nature

By Glauber S. Araújo

The book *Design and Catastrophe: 51 Scientists Explore Evidence in Nature* comprises nine sections and offers a collection of fifty-one essays, produced by different authors from various fields of science.

Ranging from biology to engineering and astronomy, these specialists share their views on a wide range of different topics, covering the fine-tuning and complexity of the cosmos, the origin of life and organic molecules, botanic processes, aquatic and aerial organisms, animal life and behavior, human anatomy and behavior, fundamental interdependence and cooperation, natural evil and catastrophic events, and sedimentary layers and fossils. In the last section, the book presents evidences for or vestiges of a past global catastrophe.

Although published with varying styles of writing and topics of discussion, the book presents numerous examples for its main argument: the existence of an intelligent Creator or Designer. Be it in the complexity of smaller organisms, or the elegance and organized structure of the universe, the observable phenomena seem to point to an intentional and organized creation of everything. Whether we look at the properties of subatomic particles or larger molecules, each indicate some deliberate and purposeful planning before its actual coming into being. In general, the elements that compose our universe seem to tell a consistently elegant story about the organization and function of matter at its most fundamental level. Even the laws governing the interaction between all matter testify of a precision that could not have been acquired by mere chance. A minute alteration of any constant could inhibit the formation and adequate development of the universe. Some have struggled to disprove the

argument for an intelligent Creator through different experiments, such as Conway’s Game of Life. However, despite their best efforts, these experiments fail to comply with their fundamental presupposition: the use of chance and randomness to produce variety, complexity and, ultimately, life itself.

While no example is conclusive in and of itself, in the grander view of reality, all created things seem to speak of a Creator endowed with knowledge, wisdom, and aesthetic taste. Or, to use a recurring expression in the book, nature “points to an intelligent Designer.” To sum up, one could say that the book presents two main evidences for the existence of an intelligent Creator: 1) Life, even in its simplest form, is extremely complex, making the possibilities for its gradual, unguided, and evolutionary development practically impossible. 2) Life is also extremely elegant, ordered, and beautiful, indicating that only a Creator with these qualities could bring into being such a reality.

While we agree with these arguments and with a literal reading of the biblical record of creation, the reasoning in the book, at times, could be improved. For instance, while the complexity argument is useful for debating evolutionary ideas, it seems that the idea of *irreducible* complexity is an even stronger argument that has greater convincing potential. Many evolutionists, such as PZ Myers, have publicly manifested their frustration at the continuous use of the complexity argument, while perhaps not understanding that what points to a Creator is not the fact that natural processes and organisms are complex even at their most fundamental levels, but that they are *irreducibly* complex, meaning that without its component parts all set and ready to go, there would be no evolutionary use for them, turning Darwin’s

argument obsolete. Few chapters in this book list examples of irreducible complexity, which I believe would have made an even stronger case for an intelligent Designer.

Another issue is the relationship between the Designer and the catastrophic (or evil) aspect of creation. It is common practice among creationists to point to the beautiful, elegant, structured, and altruistic condition of creation as evidence of a benign and intelligent Designer. However, how can we see that same Designer in nature when we look at the horror, chaos, sickness, and disasters so common in nature? Is it possible to point to evidence of a Designer when we study earthquakes, predation, or diseases? Richard Dawkins points to this dilemma in his book *The Greatest Show on Earth*:

The Cheetah, if we are going to talk design at all, is superbly equipped for killing gazelles. But the very same designer has equally evidently strained every nerve to design a gazelle that is superbly equipped to escape from those very same cheetahs. For heaven's sake, whose side is the designer on?¹

Here, Dawkins shows that we need to look not only to the beautiful and pleasant aspect of life, but also to its grim and deadly face. In other words, how can biblical creationists explain the existence of predators and of death if they believe in an intelligent and benign Designer? While dedicating many chapters to present the evidence for a past global disaster, it would have been helpful if the book could have also given explanations of how we can still identify today the fingerprints of the Creator in the deadly and bloody animal struggle for survival. Can we confidently say that the claws of a lion, the venom of a scorpion, and the teeth of a shark “point to an intelligent Designer”? Or did these come about by a different process or cause? If “we can think of God as an artist who loves order and beauty” (p. 90), what should we make of tornados, tsunamis, and pandemics? It would be important and worthwhile to give more attention to these issues.

On a more theological note, L. James Gibson in his chapter argues that our ability to appreciate beauty and to admire God's creation in all of its sensorial complexity is unique in the biological realm, and should be taken as evidence “that humans were created in the image of a Creator who loves beauty, and that our brains were designed to be able to share the appreciation of beauty with our Creator” (p. 124). While I wholeheartedly agree with his second point, some would find it biblically difficult to defend the first. I am aware that there is an ongoing discussion as to what it exactly means to be made in the image of God, and that some prefer to define the *imago Dei* based on the immediate textual context of Genesis 1:26, while others prefer to define it based on the

existing differences between humans and animals. For example, for centuries it has been taught that human beings, created in the image of God, are rational creatures who experience feelings while animals are unable to experience these things because they are moved solely by instinct. This discourse, however, has been significantly challenged after scientists have recently been able to show that animals are able to produce rational thought, communicate, and experience feelings in a very humanlike fashion. Consequently, many feel that we should not continue associating these aspects of our existence to the *imago Dei* since we now see them in some animals as well. The same argument could be made about beauty. Can we really prove that animals do not have an aesthetic taste? Are they not able to appreciate the different colors, tastes, and fragrances that exist in the natural world? And even if they do not, does that really mean that beauty should be associated with the *imago Dei* simply because of their lack of it? Couldn't it be possible that God attributed different characteristics to each species, such as radar to bats, night vision to felines, and aesthetic perception to humankind, without any other theological significance? I leave these questions for consideration.

The book lists many examples of how an intelligent Creator would be the best explanation for the complexity we see around us. Filled with details of natural processes or minuscule organisms, the reader may find himself/herself a bit at a loss in the middle of all the scientific terminology (a few more visual diagrams and illustrations would, at times, be helpful). But overall, the book is easy to understand and motivates the reader to appreciate the beauty and complexity of all creation. A few chapters particularly caught my attention and heightened my appreciation for the care God put into creating the universe with the properties it currently holds: Alfredo T. Suzuki discusses the current asymmetry problem that physicists face in relation to antimatter. Ryan Hanes and Susan Thomas describe the photosynthetic process and subsystems—a marvel of creation with all its ingenious complexity. David Nelsen and Rivelino Montenegro masterfully present their appreciation for the ability that spiders have to produce eight different types of silk. Lucinda Spencer unravels the complexity of hearing. Noemí Durán's text on “Cooperation, Empathy, and Altruism in Nature” leads the reader to the conclusion that organisms are not always in a struggle for survival, but can at times cooperate and help weaker organisms without any apparent survival benefit.

At the end, one is left with a profound sense of gratitude and awe for the intricate and marvelous elements found in nature that point towards God the Creator. Whether one looks at the macro or the micro components of reality, everything seems to speak of a Superior Mind, a Greater Power, an Intelligent Designer who masterfully dedicated His attention, care,

and power to bring forth a universe teeming with ecosystems, organisms, colors, and sounds. As such, it is hoped that the book will receive wide distribution and should find its place in the library of any serious student of nature.

Glauber S. Araújo
Editor, CPB –
Casa Publicadora
Brasileira



¹ Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: Evidence for Evolution* (London: Black Swan, 2010), 384.

NEWS

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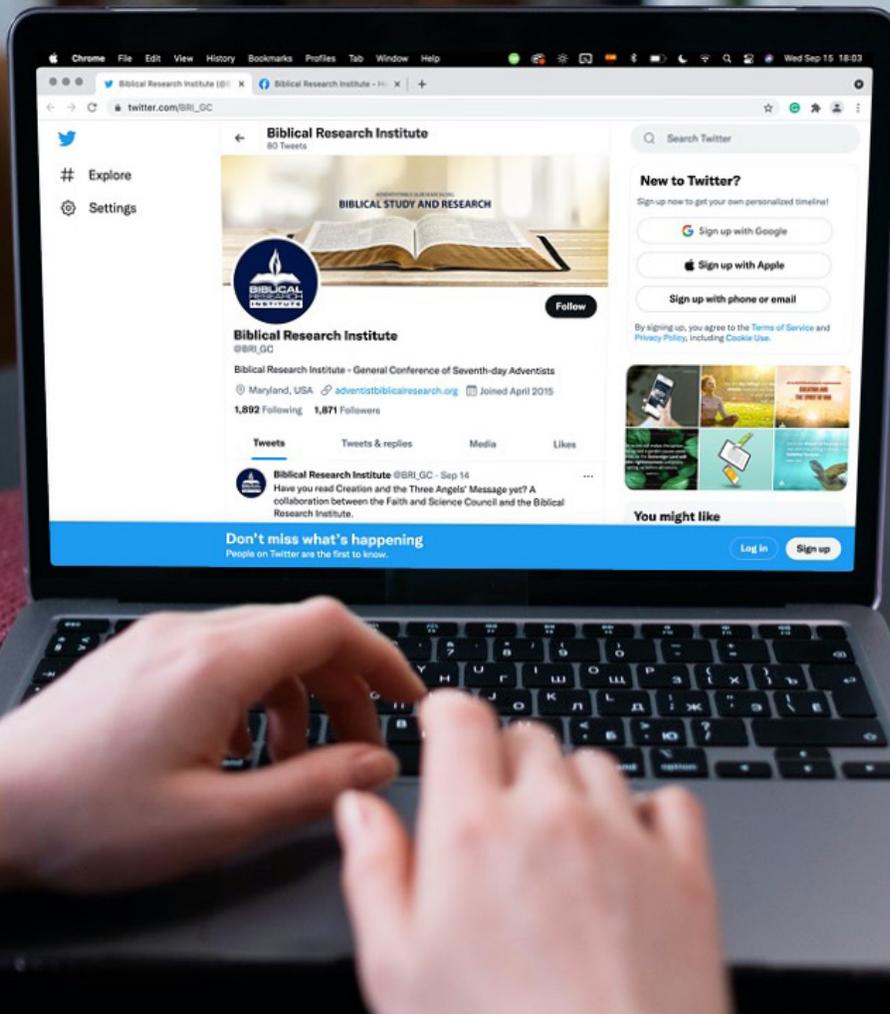
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Biblical Research Institute
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA
Phone: 301.680.6790
Fax: 301.680.6788
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