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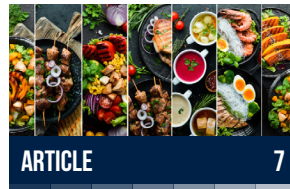
REFLECTIONS



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Reflections explores biblical and theological questions and seeks to foster theological and doctrinal unity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors, and teachers.

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Medical Aid in Dying: A Biblical Perspective

BRIEC Statement

The ethical and moral implications of physician-assisted death have increasingly become points of contention in contemporary society and Christian ethics. This practice may be defined as some form of medical aid in dying (MAID), whether active or passive, and whether or not the patient can/does agree.

There are many challenging aspects about this issue. For instance, ethicists and medical professionals struggle to define death. Biblically, death is considered to be a loss of breath or when blood as a symbol of life is shed (cf. Gen 9:4–6; Eccl 3:19–21; Ps 104:29). However, with modern medicine, breathing and heartbeat can be restarted after they stop, as well as blood given to replace that which was lost. In the past, death was medically defined by cardiopulmonary criteria as well, but is now equated with brain death in countries with access to more modern medical technology. This is because life support procedures allow someone who cannot even breathe on their own to continue “living” somewhat indefinitely. Even a vegetative state with most of the brain dead can be prolonged. This makes the issue much more complex.

Certain more philosophical questions also complicate matters. Some argue that there is no difference between allowing someone to die and actively killing. Additionally, others believe that removing life support from someone in a coma, and thus allowing them to die, is not actually killing a person, since their biographical life is no more even though their biological life technically continues. Death of social and mental capacities is also thought to make life not worth living. Further, because of the immense levels of pain that some patients undergo, and that cannot be sufficiently addressed, some think that removing one’s life support would constitute an act of mercy to allow them to slip peacefully into a death that would be soon to come anyway.

Some form of physician-assisted death is now lawful in multiple countries (such as Belgium, New Zealand, Switzerland, Colombia, etc.), and many US states (such as Montana, Oregon, New Jersey, New Mexico, Vermont, etc.). The processes which are most often used include terminal sedation (reducing pain but also hastening death), or direct administration of lethal drugs that lead to immediate death. Foregoing

life-supporting treatment (LST) is sometimes not considered part of MAID, since it is allowing nature to take its course, though death is sometimes hastened as a result.

Definitions and Bioethical Contexts

Types of MAID can be classified in multiple ways. The following chart illustrates how both passivity/activity matters, as well as whether the patient consents or not, or is even able to consent to such treatment.

	Passive	Active
Voluntary	LST withheld or withdrawn, either with consent by competent patient or in accordance with a previously signed medical directive	Physician-assisted death (patient administers) Euthanasia (doctor administers, consent by patient)
Nonvoluntary	LST withheld or withdrawn, with consent by family, as patient is unable to consent	Euthanasia (doctor administers, consent by family)
Involuntary	LST withheld or withdrawn, without consent by the patient though patient is competent	Euthanasia (doctor administers, no consent by patient)

When evaluating these cases from a bioethical standpoint, it becomes clear that involuntary MAID is always wrong because the principle of autonomy is violated. Involuntary MAID goes against the desire of the patient and/or their caregivers, either to have LST withdrawn, or to have lethal drugs administered. And yet, there have been cases of this happening around the world

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when hospitals are full, or when people are persuaded against their will that dying is in their best interest.¹

In contrast, a number of ethicists would consider voluntary or nonvoluntary passive MAID ethically viable. This is when the patient has LST withdrawn, either by consent, or when they are unable to consent. They do not consider allowing someone to die in this case the same as killing; life is sacred but it is finite and will eventually end. Natural processes that lead to death are happening, and pain can be kept to a minimum with hospice and palliative care.

Some ethicists also believe that nonvoluntary active MAID is also acceptable, as the patient is not capable of making a decision, is in a coma and not likely to recover, and cannot live on their own. The family decides to end the patient's life that was likely being kept alive through unnatural processes anyway.

The main ethical controversy surrounds voluntary active MAID, consisting of euthanasia, where the physician administers the legal dose, or physician-assisted death, where the patient administers the legal dose. Although the two cases are procedurally distinct, the ethical principles involved are the same, since in both cases, the physician acts at the behest of the patient to end the patient's life.²

On the one hand, these cases are distinct from suicide, which is frequently acted out alone and often by violent means.³ On the other hand, when a patient voluntarily decides to end their life, such a practice—formerly called physician-assisted suicide⁴—may not differ much from suicide and raises similar ethical concerns.⁵

Even for secular ethicists, there are concerns about voluntary active MAID. Studies have shown a decline in care for the elderly, the terminally ill, and the disabled in countries where euthanasia is legal. Too often, society deems disabled people as miserable and a burden, rather than providing facilities for them to live as normally as possible. In addition, most people who receive mental health treatment do not end up choosing death in the long term. Often a request to die is actually a cry for help. MAID can also conflict with the Hippocratic Oath that doctors take, which upholds the principle of preserving life.⁶

This topic is very sensitive because the majority of patients requesting MAID seek to end their lives because of extreme pain, loss of autonomy,⁷ or a sense that they lost personal dignity due to disease.⁸ Thus, they find no reason to live. While some who seek help to end their lives are people who have lived independent and affluent lives and appear to be in complete control of their decisions, most simply do not see another option because of their immense pain or even the enormous financial burden they might leave for surviving relatives.

For someone who has not experienced such amounts of pain that they are continually screaming in agony, it may seem simple to say theoretically that it is always wrong to end one's life. However, witnessing the harsh reality that people in pain go through, it is easier to understand why some might wish to die. Empathy is necessary in expressing the following foundational truths found in Scripture, as they indicate how to understand similar biblical situations as well as help understand how to respond to cases today.

Foundational Biblical Principles

For Seventh-day Adventists, the Bible is the foundational source of guidance in dealing with these complex issues. From a biblical perspective, the sanctity of human life, the sovereignty of God over life and death, and the nature of suffering are crucial to formulating a response to the ethical issues raised by physician-assisted death. The following principles must guide any discussion on a biblical understanding of issues related to MAID.

1. Death is the ultimate enemy. The Bible is very clear from the beginning to the end, that sin brings death (Gen 2:17; 3:19; Rom 6:23), and that God will ultimately vanquish death (1 Cor 15:50–57; Rev 21:1–4). Death is not normal, and will not be part of eternity.
2. Humans are made in God's image, and are infinitely valuable to God (Gen 1:27).⁹ All humans are created equal, and are of equal worth to God. Unlike the Greeks, who ascribed a superior status to the healthy and regarded the sick as weak and inferior,¹⁰ Jesus confirmed and fulfilled what the Father assigned to Him by demonstrating that God cares for all (Pss 34:18; 41:1–3; Isa 41:10; 61:1; Matt 6:25–31; 11:28–30; Luke 4:18). God's plan of redemption as revealed in Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, affirms the supreme value of every human being—not only the healthy ones, but especially the sick, weak, and those afflicted by the devil (John 3:16). Each person has infinite value, not because of what they can produce or the good they can bring to society, but because they have come from God's hands and bear God's image. No matter how disfigured or defaced by infirmities, every human being has intrinsic value and, therefore, is unique and irreplaceable. Humans do not have the moral right to decide what is worthy of life or death, as we are all God's workmanship, despite being affected or damaged by sin (Isa 64:6–9).
3. God has the ultimate say over life and death, not humans. For instance, even though Job longed to die (Job 3), he also recognized that God was the one who ultimately decided when that would happen (Job 14:5; 30:23; cf. Ps 139:16). There will be a time to die

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for every human being (Eccl 3:1–2), but no human is supposed to have “power over the day of death” (Eccl 8:8 ESV).

4. God calls His followers to choose life. Humans are to do everything they can on earth to prevent death, not to cause it. God’s followers are not to murder (Exod 20:3), and are to protect those who are helpless (Exod 23:7–9). Jesus devoted a large portion of His earthly ministry to the needs of those He met—healing, feeding, restoring, befriending, and forgiving them. Jesus did not value persons He met based on their strength, autonomy, or social status. Our bodies are temples of God, and we are to value them accordingly (1 Cor 6:18–20). Taking the life of a human being is such a grievous transgression of the created order that it entails the death penalty, even for non-human perpetrators (Gen 9:4–6).
5. Suffering can have a redemptive purpose. As Paul reminds believers, “Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom 5:3–4 NIV). Though God does not cause suffering, and calls His people to try to relieve it as much as possible, suffering may lead to spiritual growth and deeper faith (2 Cor 4:7–18; Rom 8:18–30). Jesus Himself suffered an excruciating death, and much abuse and suffering before that. Because of the incarnation, the core of the gospel message involves the humiliation and suffering of God Himself (Isa 53:3–5; Matt 26:27–68; 27:27–31; Phil 2:7–8; Heb 12:2; 1 Pet 2:23–24). Jesus not only met the requirements of the plan of redemption, He submitted Himself to God’s will and exemplified in His agony how death should be faced. In doing so, He imparted dignity and value to every agonizing person, and every suffering person can experience the consolation of having Jesus as their co-sufferer.¹¹
6. The hope of eternal life with Christ transforms the Christian perspective on death. What brought Job through his time of desiring to die was his focus on the resurrection after death (Job 19:23–27). Similarly, this is the believer’s hope today in times of despair and pain (1 Cor 15:12–28; 1 Thess 4:13–17).

Biblical Examples of Assisted Aid in Dying

Considering the above biblical principles, the following biblical examples of cases that are similar to voluntary active MAID show how God longs for all to live and not die. The biblical stories will be classified as follows: those who asked to die and ended up living, those who asked to die and ended up dying, and those who directly ended their own lives without asking for aid in death.

There are multiple examples of people close to God who expressed a desire to die. Elijah feared losing his life to Jezebel and that he was all alone, and thus wished to die and asked God to take his life (1 Kgs 19). Jonah was frustrated that his prophecy did not come true and feared he would be killed as a false prophet; he asked God to take his life (Jonah 3–4). In both of these cases, God did not berate them, but showed them compassion and different perspectives, as well as bringing them relief from their physical suffering.¹² It may also be significant that neither were willing to take their own life but asked God to do it. In the case of Job, when he wanted to die due to immense emotional and physical suffering and loss (Job 3), he was reminded by God of eternity and the hope of the resurrection, indicating that suffering comes from Satan and will not be forever (Job 19:23–27; 38–42).

The Bible also contains examples of those who wished to die and asked others to kill them, and actually ended up dying. Abimelech was in physical pain and was dying, and asked his armorbearer to kill him, and he did so (Judg 9:42–55). However, Abimelech never talked to God, and lived his whole life contrary to what God called leaders to do (cf. Deut 17:14–20), and so does not reflect God’s perspective on the value of life. Similarly, when Saul was dying, he begged his armorbearer to kill him and relieve his misery, but his servant refused. In this case, Saul ended his own life (1 Sam 31:1–5). Once again, he did not consult God, who would have wanted him to live (cf. 2 Sam 1), but instead focused only on his own pride to not die at the hand of his enemies.

There are also cases of those who died directly by suicide, where the individual chose to end their lives without asking for help or even telling another that they wanted to die. Zimri killed himself by setting fire to his own house over him when he realized he had lost the kingship (1 Kgs 16:15–19). Judas hanged himself when he realized the extent of his betrayal of Jesus (Matt 27:3–10).¹³ Samson is a unique case. He asked God to let him die with the Philistines, and then he died as a result of his own actions that brought down the building on his head (Judg 16).

Conclusions and Recommendations

In light of the aforementioned considerations, one can conclude that human beings have intrinsic value grounded in the realities of creation, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the plan of redemption, which makes salvation and eternal life available to everyone who believes. Those realities demonstrate the fact that life is always better than no life. Therefore, the active voluntary category of physician-assisted death or MAID contravenes human dignity and the example set by Jesus when He was confronted with the ugly reality of death.

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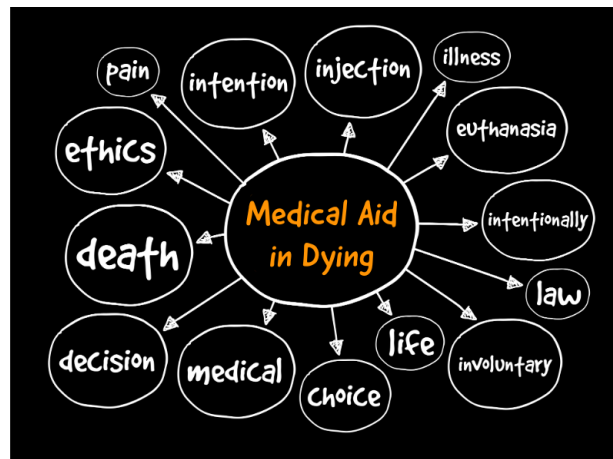
An agonizing patient who is seeking to end their life most needs the assurance that in Jesus, they can have eternal life. Jesus defeated death and called it “sleep,” thus destroying its power and finality (John 11:11). From the perspective of eternity, illness, pain, and dying have minimal and temporary force. They have already been utterly defeated by Jesus when He rose from the grave. And those who have died in Him will rise to eternal life (Col 3:1–4). In light of this hope and conviction, the following observations and recommendations can be made:

1. Immense compassion and understanding is needed for those in great pain, and they need help in order to seek hospice care, palliative care, and mental health treatment. They also need people to be there with them, since a desire for death is most often a plea for help and companionship. It is of utmost importance not to condemn them when they express a desire to die, instead treating them as God did when Job, Elijah, and Jonah expressed a similar desire.¹⁴
2. The church needs to be a welcoming environment where end-of-life decisions can be discussed in a safe and biblically informed manner that is sensitive to the complex crisis situation the person is in. Whatever people eventually decide, we have to be aware that they are in a time of deep pain and grief, and that they need grace, sympathy, compassion, and care. Communal support and empathy is vital in order for people in pain to feel loved and valued.
3. Those seeking active voluntary MAID mainly because they have lost any sense of purpose in their lives need assurance that despite their medical or physical condition, they retain their inestimable value as human beings and are unique and irreplaceable.
4. Those seeking active voluntary MAID need to be reminded that death is actually the final enemy to be defeated (1 Cor 15:26). Wholistic and complete healing will only happen in eternity. While death is an inevitable part of the human condition due to the fall (Rom 5:12), it is not the end for Christians. The hope of eternal life with Christ transforms the Christian perspective on death. The ultimate remedy for suffering is not death, but eternal life in Jesus Christ. They need to be reminded that the One who treaded the same path has set a model for facing suffering and dying.
5. The biblical view does not necessarily support prolonging life at all costs. There is a distinction between allowing natural death to occur and actively hastening death. The aforementioned biblical principles do not require medical interventions that may prolong suffering yet fail to offer any significant hope of recovery. However, this situation

is different from the intentional ending of life through euthanasia, physician-assisted death, or assisted suicide.

6. Jesus loved people as they were while inviting them to draw closer to Him. Thus, to conclude that it is suitable for someone not to exist and to act willfully to end one’s or another person’s life calls into question human dignity as revealed in the plan of redemption. Thus, those who provide and push MAID to actively end their life or that of others may ultimately represent a human attempt to usurp God’s authority over life and death.

The biblical approach to MAID must be grounded in the sanctity and value of human life, as manifested by creation in God’s image, the incarnation of the Son of God, and the plan of salvation that culminates with eternal life in Christ. While compassion for someone suffering agonizing pain is a Christian imperative, genuine compassion demands preserving life and alleviating suffering through compassionate care rather than ending life. The Bible calls upon Christians to trust in God, even in the face of suffering and death, and to uphold the inherent dignity of every human life as a reflection of the image of God. Given the intrinsic value of every human being, intentionally causing someone’s death violates the intrinsic value of the human person. However, even in the case where someone dies through MAID or performs MAID, it is important to remember God’s grace for all people, and that He understands the pain people are in and (like Elijah, Jonah, and Job) why they might want to make such a decision. Jesus also experienced the greatest pain possible, and comes close to those who are suffering; He calls all of us to do the same as we support and care for those in pain.



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Endnotes

- 1 Gregory E. Pence, *Medical Ethics: Accounts of Ground-Breaking Cases*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2021), 20–60.
- 2 For further discussion, see John F. Kilner, ed., *Why the Church Needs Bioethics: A Guide to Wise Engagement with Life's Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011); and Ewan C. Goligher, *How Should We Then Die?: A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Death* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024), 45–46.
- 3 See further statistics at “Suicide,” National Institute of Mental Health, updated March 2025, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>. For instance, women often choose less violent means of suicide than men.
- 4 See Anita Hannig, “Assisted Suicide’ Deserves a Different Name,” BrandeisNOW, July 6, 2022, <https://www.brandeis.edu/now/2022/july/assisted-dying-hannig.html>.
- 5 See the BRIEC statement on suicide, “Suicide: A Biblical Perspective and Theological Reflection,” *Reflections* 86 (April–June 2024): 2–8, <https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/Reflections-86-April-June-2024.pdf>.
- 6 For discussion on all of these issues, see Pence, *Medical Ethics*, 20–60.
- 7 Pence, *Medical Ethics*, 20–60; and Ellen Wiebe et al., “Reasons for Requesting Medical Assistance in Dying,” *Can Fam Physician* 64, no. 9 (Sept 2018): 674–679, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6135145>: “There was a difference in reasons for MAID given by people with different diagnoses; disease-related symptoms were given as the most important reason by 39.0% of patients with malignancies, 6.8% of patients with

- neurological diseases, and 28.9% of patients with end-organ failure. Loss of autonomy was given as the most important reason by 16.0% of patients with malignancies, 36.4% of patients with neurological diseases, and 23.7% of patients with end-organ failure.”
- 8 See Goligher, *How Should We Then Die?*, 17; and Kilner, *Why the Church Needs Bioethics*.
- 9 This is also affirmed in “A Statement of Consensus on Care for the Dying” voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on May 9, 2013, <https://gc.adventist.org/official-statements/a-statement-of-consensus-on-care-for-the-dying/>.
- 10 Harold Y. Vanderpool, “Death and Dying: Euthanasia and Sustaining Life (Historical Aspects),” *Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, rev. ed., ed. Warren T. Reich (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995), 555.
- 11 For further discussion, see Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).
- 12 For further discussion of God’s compassionate methods, see A. Rahel Wells, “The Depressed Prophet,” *Perspective Digest* 27, no. 2 (April 2022), <https://www.perspectivedigest.org/archive/27-2/the-depressed-prophet>.
- 13 Another similar example is in Acts 16, when Paul stops the jailer who is trying to kill himself, apparently indicating the wrongness of this action (v. 28). For further discussion on suicide, see the BRIEC statement “Suicide: A Biblical Perspective and Theological Reflection.”
- 14 See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, “A Statement of Consensus on Care for the Dying.”

“ By loving forces wonderfully sheltered,
We are awaiting fearlessly what comes.
God is with us at dusk and in the morning
And most assuredly on ev’ry day. ”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945)
The last stanza from the poem: “Von Guten Mächten” (By loving forces),
translated by Hilmar H. Werner (2010)

On December 19, 1944, the imprisoned theologian Bonhoeffer wrote a poem about the confidence of God’s presence in very dark times, while awaiting his execution for high treason which followed in April 1945

Did Jesus Declare All Food Clean? A Brief Note on the Statement in Mark 7:19b

Ekkehardt Mueller

The phrase in Mark 7:19 that supposedly Jesus declared all food clean has puzzled many Bible readers. We will take a brief look at the text and try to understand it.

I. Translations

While we are interested in the last part of Mark 7:19 only, we will take the entire statement of Jesus in Mark 7:18–19 and begin with checking some translations. We will place in bold text the phrase under consideration.

NKJV

“So He said to them, ‘Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, **thus purifying all foods?**’”

KJV

“ . . . because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, **purging all meats** [meaning ‘foods’]?”

ESV

“And he said to them, “Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (**Thus he declared all foods clean.**)” [Similar NASB and NRSV.]

NET

“He said to them, ‘Are you so foolish? Don’t you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer.’ (**This means all foods are clean.**)”

VULGATE (Latin)

“Non intelligitis quia omne extrinsecus introiens in hominem, non potest eum communicare, quia non intrat in core jus, sed in ventrem vadit, et in secessum exit, **pur-gans omnes escas?**”

LSG (French)

“Il leur dit: Vous aussi, êtes-vous donc sans intelligence? Ne comprenez-vous pas que rien de ce qui du dehors entre dans l’homme ne peut le souiller? Car cela n’entre pas dans son coeur, mais dans son ventre, puis s’en va dans les lieux secrets, qui **purifient tous les aliments.**”

LUTHER 1912 (German)

“Und er sprach zu ihnen: ‘Seid ihr denn auch so unverstandig? Vernehmet ihr noch nicht, da alles, was auen ist und in den Menschen geht, das kann ihn nicht gemein machen? Denn es geht nicht in sein Herz, sondern in den Bauch, und geht aus durch den naturlichen Gang, **der alle Speise ausfegt.**’”

LUTHER 2017 (German)

“ . . . Denn es geht nicht in sein Herz, sondern in den Bauch und kommt heraus in die Grube. **Damit erklarte er alle Speisen fur rein.**”

ELBERFELDER (older version, German)

“ . . . Denn es geht nicht in sein Herz hinein, sondern in den Bauch, und es geht heraus in den Abort, **indem so alle Speisen gereinigt werden.**”

ELBERFELDER (recent version, German)

“ . . . Denn es geht nicht in sein Herz hinein, sondern in den Bauch, und es geht heraus in den Abort. [**Damit erklarte er alle Speisen fur rein.**]”

Result: We see a marked difference between the various translations. Some declare that Jesus abolished the distinction between clean and unclean food in the Old Testament (e.g., Lev 11). Others take the last part of verse 19 as referring to the digestive process as do the older versions. NET is more open than ESV and other modern translations.

II. The Textual Issue

The difference of the translations arises from the last part of the Greek text of Mark 7:19, *katharizōn panta ta brōmata*. This part uses a present active participle

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and reads literally, “cleansing all foods.” While in Greek finite verbs contain in their endings the person/persons addressed (e.g., *legei* means “he says” and *agapō* “I love”), participles do not contain an ending indicating a specific person. But in contrast to an English participle, a Greek participle still indicates gender, case, mode, and singular or plural.¹ *Katharizōn* is a present tense active participle masculine singular in the nominative case.

The difficulty is to what the participle “cleansing” in Mark 7:19b refers. The direct antecedent of *katharizōn* (cleansing) would be the noun *aphedrōn* (toilet, latrine) which is both masculine and singular and therefore may seem to be an option, but it comes as an accusative and not as a nominative and therefore is not the perfect fit. On the other hand, the phrase “cleansing all foods” may refer back to the beginning of verse 18 where Jesus speaks and possibly could be attributed to Him. In this case, we would have agreement of case, gender, and number. But the word “Jesus” is quite removed from the participle, and Jesus’ speech would suddenly shift from a statement He made to a statement about Him. Therefore, we find other readings in different manuscripts that are trying to fix the problem. Many scholars today take the last part of verse 19 as an addition to what Jesus is saying. If the last part of verse 19 refers to Jesus, the translation in many other languages must insert the personal pronoun “he,” reading “He is cleansing all foods.”² Mark would be speaking, not Jesus Himself.³

If it refers to the “toilet,” the entire verse 19 would be a saying of Jesus. The discrepancy of cases (“cleansing” should also be an accusative just as “toilet” [Gk. *aphedrōn*] is) could be a solecism—that is, the breaking of a grammatical rule as it sometimes happens in New Testament Greek.⁴ Vulgate, KJV, NKJV, LSG, Luther 1912, and the older Elberfelder opt for the connection of *katharizōn* to *aphedrōn*. In this case, a personal pronoun would not need to be inserted. But the text is difficult and by itself may allow for different options.⁵ This explains the variance in the translations.

III. Context

To make a step forward, we need to keep in mind the context. Jesus’ critique of the Pharisees is not that they make a distinction between clean and unclean food, but that they are insisting on a new regulation not found in the Old Testament. They have made mandatory the washing of hands before eating and have elevated it to a religious requirement. The issue is not hygiene.⁶

In addition, their own traditions have led to disregarding God’s laws. Their new category of “common” (Gk. *koinos*, here referring to touch contamination) appears later in Acts 10:28 and shows that the Pharisees and many other Jews even considered non-Jews as “common” and unacceptable to associate with. In

any case, Mark 7:19 should not be construed as Jesus abolishing the laws regarding clean and unclean meat (Lev 11; Deut 14). The issue is still eating food without having washed hands ritually, not the distinction between clean and unclean meat. Furthermore, unclean animals do not become unclean because of touch contamination but are innately unclean, which is not discussed in Mark 7.⁷

IV. Intertextuality

Matthew 15 contains the parallel record to Mark 7 and is clearer. There the issue at hand is also ritual washing of hands as a requirement before eating food (Matt 15:1–20). Verse 20, the concluding verse of the passage, states, “These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” This is the same situation as in Mark 7. While most New Testament scholars argue that Jesus has abolished the food laws in Mark 7, they do not make the same argument regarding Matthew 15. While we agree that the Gospels should first be heard on their own, we would also argue that they need to be allowed to shed light on each other.

Furthermore, while the food laws of Leviticus 11 are found in the context of cultic regulations and purity laws for Israel, stipulations regarding food actually go back to the creation account and the account of the fall (vegetarian diet; Gen 2:16; 3:18). At the time of Noah clean and unclean animals were already distinguished (Gen 7:2) and the law of Leviticus 11 reflects on this situation by providing specific insight as to which animals are clean and which are unclean.

V. Historical Perspective

Eike Mueller points out that

purity scholars and Historical Jesus scholars have correctly noted that Jesus, in first-century Judaism, could not have easily dismissed the dietary regulations, especially of Lev 11, because they were too engrained in the self-understanding of Jews. The brevity and complexity of the parable (7:15) together with the grammatically incomplete narrative aside (7:19) seem quite inadequate to bear the weight of the conclusion by some scholars that Jesus is doing away with the distinction between clean and unclean animals as described in Lev 11. Furthermore, as scholars such as Räsänen and Svartik have convincingly demonstrated, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* [the history of a text’s influences and effects] of the passage does not demonstrate that the apostles or the early church understood Jesus’ saying to mean that the distinction between clean and unclean animals was abrogated.⁸

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Furthermore, Jesus' claim that the Jews could not convict Him of sin (John 8:4) would have fallen flat in Jewish minds had He abrogated the dietary law of clean and unclean meat and would have provided a good argument against His claim. No such accusation was made.

VI. Conclusion

The text in Mark 7:19 is not without difficulty. However, it is wiser to stay away from a definitive conclusion and from statements claiming that Jesus in His encounter with the Pharisees abolished the dietary laws,⁹ and, moreover, definite conclusions affecting biblical teachings should not be based on somewhat ambiguous texts. The use of brackets around the last phrase of Mark 7:19 in some translations may acknowledge the difficulty of the text. But if this is accepted as a challenging text, one

should not jump to hasty conclusions. The tenor of the Gospels indicate that Jesus did not abolish food laws, and neither did He do that with the Sabbath. Furthermore, we need to keep in mind the entire witness of Scripture regarding dietary laws and avoid focusing only on one or a few individual texts.

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Endnotes

- 1 E.g., the English present participles "saying" or "loving" do not contain in themselves gender and singular or plural. They remain as they are. For instance, "The woman explained the situation *saying* . . ." or "The man explained the situation *saying* . . ." or "The witnesses explained the situation *saying* . . ." While the English participle is not affected by gender, case, and singular or plural, the Greek participle is.
- 2 Some translations opt for Jesus *declaring* the food clean, which, however, is already an interpretation.
- 3 E.g., William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 255.
- 4 Similar in Mark 13:14 where "the abomination (neuter) of desolation" is followed by the masculine participle "standing."
- 5 Cf. Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1989), 378.
- 6 From a hygienic standpoint, it is good and advisable to wash hands before eating.

- 7 The following narrative about the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:24–30) shows that Jesus goes beyond the washing of hands and even beyond the ethical requirements implied in the list of vices (Mark 7:21–22) by showing that Gentiles are not outside the plan of salvation. Jesus includes them if they so desire.
- 8 Eike Mueller, *Cleansing the Common: A Narrative-Intertextual Study of Mark 7:1–23* (Th.D. diss., Andrews University, 2015), 246. The references to Räisänen and Svartik are Heikki Räisänen, "Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7:15," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 16 (1982): 79–100; and Jesper Svartvik, *Mark and Mission: Mk 7:1–23 in Its Narrative and Historical Contexts* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2000).
- 9 Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 378, claims "that Jesus not only declared food eaten with 'defiled hands' to be clean but 'all foods.'"



Were the Creation Days Twenty-Four-Hour Days or Indefinite Periods of Time?¹

Jiří Moskala



God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.”—Genesis 1:5, NIV

suggests that the genealogy of the heavens and the earth should be interpreted in the same way. One must be consistent; either all genealogies are literal or none are.

The creation days have been understood in different ways. Some interpret them as symbolic days; others as a poetic description or an evolutionary account of God’s creative activity; again others see it as a revelation of God and take the days as literal days. In order to determine which interpretation is correct, one must closely investigate the term *yom* (day) in the creation account (Gen 1:1–2:4) because only the context can shed light on the issue.²

Genesis 1 as a Genealogy

The immediate context of the Creation story suggests that it is a genealogy or history (Gen 2:4); it is not mythology, a prediction, a metaphor, a parable, poetry, or a hymn. A genealogy is a historic account with real meaning: for example, water in the creation story is water, vegetation is vegetation, animals are animals, and days are days. This observation is significant when one discovers that the literary structure of the whole book of Genesis is divided into ten genealogies (Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). If the genealogies of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are literal, and these persons are historical, it

The Creation Days

The word “day” in the creation week consistently occurs in the singular (in verse 14b, days have a different function). Furthermore, it is significant that the word “day” in Genesis 1 always appears as a plain noun without prepositions, suffixes, or other particles. On the other hand, a creation day is always accompanied by a numeral: “the first day,” “the second day,” etc. When the Bible, in a historical account, uses the word “day” in combination with a numeral, it consistently refers to a regular day, such as, “on the first day,” “on the second day,” etc. (Num 7:12–78; 29:1–35).

The unique phrase “and there was evening, and there was morning” always precedes the particular creation day (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 NIV). This expression provides a temporal boundary that implies the existence of a day consisting of a twenty-four-hour period.

Other scriptural texts also interpret the seven creation days in a literal way. For example, the fourth commandment contains the phrase, “For in six days God created the heavens and the earth and on the seventh day he rested” (Exod 20:11), and in Exodus 31:17 the Israelites were told to keep the Sabbath “for in six days the Lord

made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.” In both texts human beings are admonished to follow God’s example and rest on the seventh day.

Scholarly Opinions

Gerhard von Rad stresses, “The seven days are unquestionably to be understood as actual days and a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in the world.”³ Terence E. Fretheim agrees and says, “Other possibilities for understanding *day* (symbolic; sequential but not consecutive; liturgical) are less likely. Efforts to understand *day* in terms of, say, evolutionary periods, betray too much of an interest in harmonization.”⁴ Gordon Wenham concurs: “There can be little doubt that here day has its basic sense of a 24-hour period.”⁵ And James Barr aptly states, “So far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of *Genesis 1–11* intended to convey to their readers the idea that creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience.”⁶

Seven Literal Consecutive Days

The biblical teaching of a seven-day creation week is a unique account that has no parallel in any extrabiblical creation stories in ancient Near Eastern literature. The teaching that the Creator God made everything in seven days is built into the very fabric of the creation order. To remove it means a gross distortion of the doctrine of creation.

There are several good reasons for taking the days of creation as identical to our week as we know it. The fivefold evidence associated with the term “day” in Genesis 1 (singular in form, always connected with a numeral, standing as a plain noun without a preposition or any other kind of constructions, preceded by a temporal phrase, and tied to divine rest) points unequivocally to one conclusion: the author of the book of Genesis intended to say that the days of the creation week are regular days consisting of twenty-four hour periods and cannot be interpreted figuratively. It is the only time cycle that is not derived from natural astronomic phenomena and the creation week must be understood as consisting of seven literal, historical, factual, consecutive, and contiguous days. Genesis 1 provides the only evidence we have for the origin of our seven-day week. The author’s purpose was to provide an account of what actually happened during the creation week. The theology and history of the creation account fit together; they are complementary and do not contradict each other.



Jiří Moskala

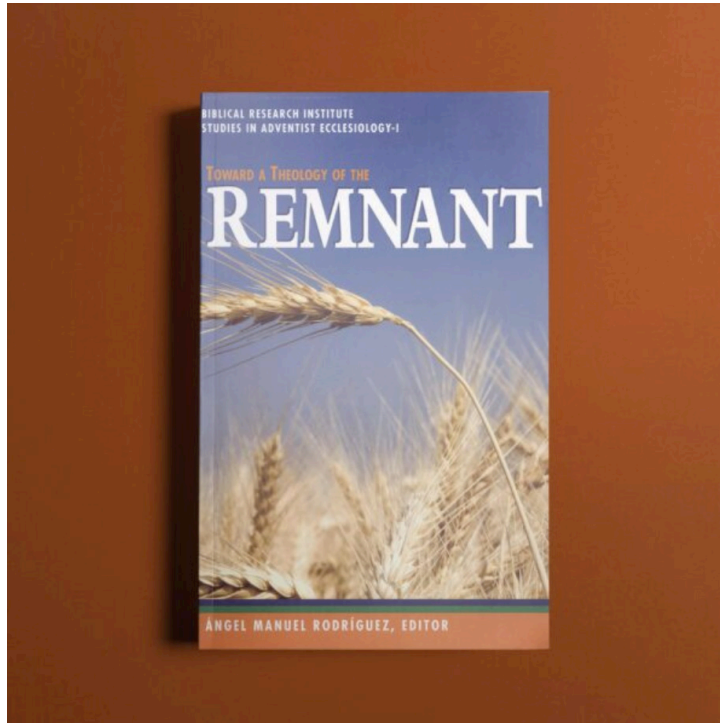
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Endnotes

- 1 This article is taken from Gerhard Pfandl, ed., *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2017), 116–118.
- 2 For a comprehensive discussion of these issues, see Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time,” in *Creation, Catastrophe and Calvary*, ed. John Templeton Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 40–68.
- 3 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John Marks (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 65.

- 4 Terence E. Fretheim, “Were the Days of Creation Twenty-Four Hours Long? YES,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1990), 12–34.
- 5 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 1:19.
- 6 James Barr to D. C. K. Watson, April 23, 1984, personal letter published in the newsletter of the Creation Science Council of Ontario 3, no. 4 (1990–1991).

Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective



Toward a Theology of the Remnant: An Adventist Ecclesiological Perspective

Editor: Ángel Manuel Rodríguez

(Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2009).

The concept of the *remnant* is essential to a proper understanding of Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology. But what is the remnant and who is the remnant? What does the Bible teach about the important theological idea of the remnant in the Old and New Testament? What are identifying marks of the end-time remnant? How have different contemporary Adventist theologians (re-)defined the concept of the remnant? Who are the remnant people in the writings of Ellen G. White? These and many more relevant questions are addressed in this important book that helps to clarify the remnant motif in the Bible and explores its significance for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is a must read for every pastor and informed church member.

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