

## **From Vision to System: Finishing the Task of Adventist Biblical and Systematic Theologies—Part II**

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In the first article of this three article series, we traced the more salient turns in the development of the Adventist hermeneutical vision from its origins to the present. This summary overview brought to light some important facts about the way Adventists do theology. For early Adventists the Sanctuary doctrine became the hermeneutical vision guiding the discovery of a complete system of theology and truth. This system of theology, in turn, guided the practice of ministry and led to the growth and worldwide expansion of the Adventist church.

### **1. Review**

During the second half of the twentieth century, Evangelical Adventism rejected the Sanctuary doctrine because it contradicted their theological understanding of justification by faith drawn from the Protestant system of theology. Consequently, they abandoned the pioneers' historicist interpretation of prophecy, the Sanctuary doctrine, and the understanding of salvation as historical process. Simply put, this sector in Adventism became convinced that the pioneers' prophetic interpretation and eschatological understanding of theology was wrong. We need to recognize this fact and move on.

Another casualty in this process of theological development was the replacement of the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle by the multiple sources of theology matrix. Evangelical Adventism, then, does theology from the hermeneutical light of justification by faith.<sup>1</sup> Progressive Adventism uses the hermeneutical

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<sup>1</sup> This is the hermeneutical approach followed by Luther's approach to biblical interpretation and the construction of Christian doctrines. Jaroslav Pelikan explains, "Luther could sometimes dwell upon the centrality and the authority of the gospel with an almost obsessive intensity, testing liturgical practice, ethical precept, and even theological dogma by this criterion rather than by the norm of conformity to the literal meaning of the biblical text" (*The Christian Tradition: A History of*

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

light provided by a combination of the gospel and science (historical-biological evolution).<sup>2</sup> These paradigmatic changes in the macro hermeneutical level of Adventist theology spun dramatic changes in the practice of ministry, leading to the charismatization of Adventism and the willingness of these sectors to join spiritually in the ecumenical movement.

During the same period, Biblical Adventists reaffirmed the *sola-tota Scriptura*<sup>3</sup> principle and the Sanctuary doctrine<sup>4</sup> but failed to use it as hermeneutical guide to do theology and practice ministry. The results of this paradigm shift in the macro hermeneutical level of Adventist theology has produced irreconcilable theological pluralism in Adventist theology and practice. This pluralism affects not the periphery or nonessentials of belief but their core and foundations. Through them, it extends to the entire range of beliefs and practices of the church. However, the existence and mission of the church requires unity in the way we do and teach theology in seminaries, universities, and churches around the world. Without unity of thought, there can be no community or explosive mission.<sup>5</sup> Because the cause that generated theological pluralism is intellectual in nature, we need to overcome it intellectually.

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*the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols., [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1971–1989], 4:181). This methodology makes the *sola Scriptura* principle subservient to the justification by faith principle (Luther's understanding of the gospel). Stephan Pfürtner tentatively concludes, "the Reformers, with their theologically influential supporters and their communities, pursued a highly intensive 'study' of the new paradigm, in its interpretative framework" ("The Paradigms of Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther: Did Luther's Message of Justification Mean a Paradigm Change?" in *Paradigm Change in Theology*, ed. Hans Küng and David Tracy [New York: Crossroad, 1991], 130–160). See also Hans Küng, *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Continuum, 1995), 539–577.

<sup>2</sup> "Adventist theological thinking should be dynamically tripolar—that is, related to three bases or 'poles,' three fundamental concerns that mutually support and limit one another in a creative spiritual and theological interaction. In other words, our thinking about our religious experience, practice, and beliefs should be a kind of three-cornered conversation" (Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* [Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 1999], 225). Immediately, Guy identifies the three poles that mutually interact with each other in shaping our theological understanding of what we believe. They are, "The *Christian gospel*, which is our spiritual center; our *cultural context*, which is where we live, worship, witness, and serve; and our *Adventist heritage*, which is the foundation of our theological identity" (ibid.).

<sup>3</sup> For an affirmation and explanation of the *tota Scriptura* principle, see Gerhard Hasel, "The Totality of Scripture versus Modernistic Limitations," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 30–52; and Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen, Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2000), 60–61.

<sup>4</sup> For affirmations of the Sanctuary doctrine and solutions of contended issues see, for instance, Richard Davidson, "In Confirmation of the Sanctuary Message," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 93–114; William H. Shea, "When did the Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24 Begin?" *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 115–138; C. Mervin Maxwell, "In Confirmation of Prophetic Interpretation," *JATS* 2/1 (1991): 139–151.

<sup>5</sup> By "unity" of thought, I do not mean "identical" understanding of every text, doctrine, and practice. Instead, I am speaking about agreement in the basic principles of theological methodology. We should recommit Adventist theology to the *sola-tota-prima Scriptura* principle of early Adventism. From this base, we should discuss and agree on the way we will interpret the macro hermeneu-

## JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Are Evangelical and Progressive Adventists right in their views about scholarly honesty, truth finding, and evangelistic outreach to secular postmodern audiences? Are we compelled to follow the lead of Evangelical and Progressive Adventists to be intellectually honest? Can we be “intellectually honest” while still doing theology from the hermeneutical light beaming from the Sanctuary doctrine and the historicist interpretation of prophecy as the pioneers did? If we can, what should we do at the theological level to see the complete system of theology and truth they saw? What will happen if the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary doctrine conditions theological methodology? Should we use a new understanding of theological method<sup>6</sup> rather than following a supposedly universally accepted theological method?<sup>7</sup> Are there scholarly areas that need further development in the theology of the Church? What are the repercussions of paradigm changes in the theological methodology and system for the unity and mission of the church? Is it possible to reach contemporary secularized persons within and without the church community with an intellectually compelling, spiritually fulfilling, and experientially satisfying message?

### 2. Introduction

To answer these questions, we need to explore the role of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision from which to discover a complete and harmonious system of truth at the scholarly level of scientific research in postmodern times. Yet, before considering this broad issue in the next article (third article), we need to turn our attention in this article to the disciplinary landscape. This will help us to understand where we stand and give us a broad overview about

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tical principles of theology, notably, the principle of reality (being, God, human nature, and the world), articulation, and knowledge. Agreement in the interpretation of these two apriori conditions of the theological method is necessary for the unity and coherence of any theological program. Once a community reaches implicit or explicit agreement on these issues, theological research will produce different but complementary and harmonious views. Difference will not be divisive, but will progressively add to the perfection of our understanding of divine truth. Ellen White also saw variety as essential to perfection and expressed it by way of a brief metaphor. “There is variety in a tree, there are scarcely two leaves just alike. Yet this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole” (*Selected Messages*, 3 vols. [Washington: Review and Herald, 1958, 1980], 21).

<sup>6</sup> Because Fritz Guy thinks there is no Adventist theological method, he freely borrows from classical and modern theological methodological principles. Adventism “does not have its own separate way of thinking theologically” (ix).

<sup>7</sup> Theological method correlates to the specific theological system of Christian theology it supports. Each specific theological system depends on the concrete decisions taken at the grounding level of the theological methodology. “Conceptions of method emerge only in the context of an interrelated web of beliefs. Method is not simply a self-sufficient programmatic enterprise that can be readily abstracted from the rest of theology. Rather, decisions made about the method of theology both *inform* the entire conceptualization of the theological model and are themselves *informed* by the theological conclusions that emerge from that model” (Stanley Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 12). Thus, there is no universal theological method, but various competing methodologies producing competing theological systems.

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

the unfinished business of Adventist theology. In a fourth article, we will look at the role that theology plays in the ministry and mission of the church.

Why was the use of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision from which to understanding Scripture and its complete system of truth forgotten, neglected, and replaced in contemporary Adventist theological scholarship?<sup>8</sup> As with all historical events, we must assume that contemporary forgetfulness, neglect, and replacement springs from a variety of causes. Here, I want to explore briefly the possible role that the disciplinary matrix of scholarly Adventist theology has in this situation. Besides, to understand the role that the hermeneutical vision has in scholarly theology, we need to consider the status of the disciplinary matrix in Adventist theology.

To gain an introductory awareness of the disciplinary matrix in Adventist theology under the hermeneutical guidance of the Sanctuary doctrine, I will take the following steps. We will start by considering (1) “the new playground” for theological activity by highlighting some features of the scholarly theological research ongoing in Adventist universities and seminaries. Then, we will see how (2) the parting of theological ways shows in the controversy regarding the historical-grammatical and historical critical methods of biblical exegesis. Next, we will explore (3) the limits of exegetical methodology, and, (4) the nature, center, and limits of biblical theology. Finally, we will turn our attention to systematic theology as a biblical theological discipline.

In the midst of theological pluralism, Evangelical, Progressive, Historical, and Biblical Adventisms seem to share one common unsaid and probably unthought assumption: We have all the truth we need. Thus, most Adventists do not see the need for Bible study or theological research. Contemporary Adventists do not see that further discovering and understanding biblical truth will foster unity and mission. What will unite the church and foster her mission is applying the truth we already have to our contemporary situation, they think. In time, “applying” became “adapting.” Adapting is shaping us into the image of Protestant Charismatic Christianity.

In this and the following article, I would like to suggest that this assumption is wrong. Instead, we need to further discover and understand biblical truth. In the Scriptures, early Adventist pioneers discovered the hermeneutical basis for a

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<sup>8</sup> In 1980, Fritz Guy explained with clarity that the experience of the pioneers with the Sanctuary doctrines “was 136 years ago, in a historical situation that was very different from ours. In terms of technological and cultural change, we are as far removed from 1844 as 1844 was from the time of the New Testament. Ours is a time of hand-held electronic calculators, instant global communication (audio plus video in color) and jet lag” (Fritz Guy, “Confidence in Salvation: The Meaning of the Sanctuary,” *Spectrum* 11/2 (1980): 44). He continues explaining why, according to him, the pioneers’ understanding of the Sanctuary doctrine was lost for his generation. “We have not lived through the Advent expectation of 1844 or its bitter disappointment; *however much we respect the Adventist pioneers and want to identify with their experience, it remains their experience, not ours.* So we must ask the question, What does the doctrine of the sanctuary mean for us today, in 1980?” (ibid., emphasis provided).

### JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Copernican revolution in theological methodology and the understanding of Christian theology. They only started a revolution that following generations have left unfinished through forgetfulness, replacement, and neglect. Discovering the hermeneutical role the Sanctuary doctrine plays in theological methodology and how its application opens to view the complete system of theology will help Adventism overcome present theological divisions. Completing the theological task the pioneers left unfinished will generate unity in the worldwide church and motivate it to engage in the final mission.

### 3. The New “Playground”

When Adventist theology moved to the university setting, it entered a new “playground” with new rules to play the theological “game.” This playground includes various independent theological disciplines, each with their own methodologies, presuppositions, and goals. They form the “disciplinary matrix” of scholarly Christian theology. Theological disciplines as we know them today originated during the Enlightenment in the middle of the eighteenth century when biblical theology was born as independent discipline.<sup>9</sup> Yet, we can trace the first attempt to do theology from the *sola Scriptura* principle back to the Protestant Reformation.<sup>10</sup> Before the Reformation, theologians interpreted Scripture and constructed Christian teachings following what we today know as systematic theology.<sup>11</sup> Among the disciplines involved in the task of doing theology

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<sup>9</sup> In the historical process that gave rise to biblical theology as an independent discipline, Gerhard Ebeling sees a decisive turning point taking place with the publication of *Gedanken von der Beschaffenheit und dem Vorzug der biblisch-dogmatischen Theologie vor der alten und neuen scholastischen* [Reflexions on the Nature of Biblical Dogmatic Theology and on Its Superiority to Scholasticism Old and New] (1758), by Anton Friedrich Büsching [*Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 87]. By this step, biblical theology has moved from being a discipline subsidiary of dogmatics to becoming “a rival of the prevailing dogmatics [scholastic theology]” (ibid.). Biblical theology “set itself up as a completely independent study, namely, as a critical historical discipline alongside dogmatics” in 1787 with a programmatic lecture by Johann Philipp Gabler (ibid., 88; Anthony C. Thiselton, “Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, ed. David F. Ford [Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997], 520). Gerhard Hasel gives a slightly earlier date for the independence of biblical theology from dogmatics. “As early as 1745 ‘Biblical theology’ is clearly separated from dogmatic (systematic) theology and the former is conceived of as being the foundation of the latter” (*Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, rev. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 18).

<sup>10</sup> Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, 82. “In fact [explains Ebeling], one is bound to say that Reformation theology is the first attempt in the entire history of theology to take seriously the demand for a theology based on holy scripture alone” (ibid.). For a scholarly overview of the post-Reformation Reformed theology, see Richard A. Muller, *Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 251–276.

<sup>11</sup> Thus, in the prolegomena to his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas did not speak about how various theological disciplines may work together, but about how theology should relate to philosophy (trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. [New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947], I, 1, 1 and 4).

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

we find biblical theology, systematics, practice of ministry, missiology, ethics, history of theology, history of the church, philosophy, and a number of related sciences involved in the practice of ministry and missiology.<sup>12</sup>

As we saw briefly in the first article, Adventist theology began as lay theology.<sup>13</sup> Initial intellectual endeavors engaged the disciplines of history<sup>14</sup> and chronology.<sup>15</sup> Early in its intellectual history, Adventist scholarship emphasized “biblical theology rather than the systematic theology of the general Protestant seminaries.”<sup>16</sup> Systematic theology was suspect because of its disciplinary ties to non-biblical philosophical principles. Back then, Adventists thought this disciplinary emphasis would help to keep their beliefs and experience closely tied to Scripture. We can understand the emphasis placed on biblical theology easily if we keep in mind the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle on which Adventist theology stands.<sup>17</sup> The disciplinary emphasis in biblical theology characterizes Adventist theological education around the world to the present time. Studies in systematic theology were mere summaries of biblical teaching.

Emphasizing Old and New Testament studies came naturally to Adventists. Involvement in biblical scholarship seems the continuity and crowning of their commitment to the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle. Newfound scholarship will help check Adventist teachings generated by the “lay” reflection of Ellen White and the pioneers. The new way to study Scripture was exegesis, “the branch of theology which investigates and expresses the true sense of Sacred Scripture.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ekkehardt Müller describes briefly the theological encyclopedia in Adventist Education, “Theological Thinking in the Adventist Church,” *DavarLogos* 1/2 (2002): 128–129.

<sup>13</sup> This does not mean they did not have a method or apply careful reasoning to the study of Scripture. William Miller’s method was influential in early lay Adventist theology. Shortly put, he distrusted traditional interpretations, adopted the *sola Scriptura* principle, followed a literal interpretation unless the context requires otherwise, drew its categories of interpretation from Scripture, and followed an historical interpretation of Prophecy. For a brief comment on his Bible study method, see Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant: Denominational History Textbook for Seventh-day Adventist College Classes* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1979), 32.

<sup>14</sup> In this area, the work of Le Roy Edwin Froom is notable. See his *The Conditionalist Faith of our Fathers: The Conflict of the Ages over the Nature and Destiny of Man* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1965–66); and, *Movement of Destiny* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1971).

<sup>15</sup> In this area, see, for instance, Sylvester Bliss, *Analysis of Sacred Chronology: With the Elements of Chronology and the Numbers of the Hebrew Text Vindicated* (Boston: J. V. Himes, 1851); and Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

<sup>16</sup> Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, 489.

<sup>17</sup> See Fundamental Belief 1, in General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1988), 4.

<sup>18</sup> J. J. Maas, “Biblical Exegesis,” in *New Advent: Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. K. Knight (Online edition: <http://www.newadvent.org/>, 2003). “The term *exegesis*—explains Moises Silva—is a fancy way of referring to interpretation. It implies that the explanation of the text has involved careful, detailed analysis. The description gramatico-historical indicates, of course, that this analysis must pay attention both to the language in which the original text was written and to the specific

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

Scholarly exegesis is “scientific” because it results from the application of method.<sup>19</sup> Adventists found scholarship using two different exegetical methodologies: the grammatical-historical method originating in Luther and the Reformation and the historical critical method originating in the Enlightenment.<sup>20</sup> Biblical Adventists follow the grammatical-historical method, while Progressive Adventists follow a “modified” version of the historical critical method.<sup>21</sup>

During the last fifty years, biblical studies have developed extensively throughout Biblical Adventism. Exegetes, using mainly the grammatical-historical method of the Reformation, have examined carefully the biblical texts from which the pioneers derived the Adventist pillars and sanctuary vision. Thanks to ongoing research, we know these doctrines stand on solid biblical ground and have richer and deeper meanings than previous generations understood.<sup>22</sup>

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cultural context that gave rise to the text” (Walter C. Kaiser, and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 21).

<sup>19</sup> Thus, Richard Davidson defines exegesis as the application of what he calls the “historical-biblical hermeneutical method.” Exegesis, then, is “the attempt to understand the meaning of the biblical data using methodological considerations arising from Scripture alone” (“Biblical Interpretation,” 94).

<sup>20</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 3–6.

<sup>21</sup> Jerry Gladson, “Taming Historical Criticism: Adventist Biblical Scholarship in the Land of the Giants,” *Spectrum* (April 1988): 19–34. As a result of this affirmation, “we have among Adventists today more or less two hermeneutics, one the historical Seventh-day Adventist approach with minor modifications, the other a hermeneutic based on substantially differing foundations as we have described above. This latter involves modalities prominent in historical criticism (or the historical-critical method) but which claims to have purged its most obvious humanistic presuppositions, such as denial of the supernatural” (“Another Look at Adventist Hermeneutics,” *JATS* 2/1 [1991]: 72). Gladson argues that we should accept the historical developmental dynamics of historical criticism and reject its naturalistic assumptions (ibid., 22). This proposal, however, is a straw man. Historical criticism in biblical theology has always accepted divine transcendence. Transcendence, however, belongs to the timeless spiritual realm, not to the historical realm where historical criticism rewrites biblical history, stripping it of divine actions in historical sequences in time. For a careful study of the development of the historical critical method, its dependency on philosophical categories, and the way it accommodates divine transcendence while rewriting history, see, Raúl Kerbs, “El método histórico-crítico en teología: En busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte 1),” *DavarLogos* 1/2 (2002): 105–123; and, “El método histórico-crítico en teología: En busca de su estructura básica y de las interpretaciones filosóficas subyacentes (Parte II),” *DavarLogos* 2/1 (2003): 11–27. George Reid correctly remarks, “The crux of the question is whether a blending of the historic Adventist approach with historical criticism is possible. Some argue that much in historical criticism is helpful in exegesis and theology. Ultimately a great deal rests on whether historical criticism is actually a system or whether it is simple a pool of isolated techniques that can be drawn upon pragmatically according to individual usefulness” (ibid., 73). Unfortunately, method cannot be an isolated pool of techniques. Even affirming transcendence, Gladson’s proposal still stands on the philosophical foundations of historical criticism.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, the scholarly dialogue on the interpretation of the veil in the heavenly sanctuary according to the book of Hebrews. Davidson presents the view of Biblical Adventism in response the Young’s arguments from the Evangelical Adventist perspective. Roy E. Gane, “Re-

#### 4. Watershed

History is essential not only to the Adventist understanding of prophecy but also to its understanding of Christian teachings. In prophetic interpretation, Biblical and Historical Adventisms still work within a historicist interpretive tradition.<sup>23</sup> Theologically, Adventism also thinks historically from within the Great Controversy dynamics. Both trends assume the real historical presence and direct activities of God within the spatiotemporal flux of human history. As we will see in the next article, in both fields, Adventist theology stands alone. No other tradition or school of Christian theology shares the Adventist view on prophetic interpretation and the Great Controversy matrix for systematic theology. Why is this so? Are there methodological reasons behind this unique approach to Christian theology?

**The Historical-grammatical Method.** Exegetically, Biblical Adventism operates with the historical-grammatical method. This method assumes Scripture speaks about real historical events in space and time. The procedures involved in the historical-grammatical method help to determine the meaning of biblical texts better than to establish the historical reality of their referents. Mainly, exegetes assume Scripture describes historical events as they really took place in history. Thus, the historical-grammatical method was helpful in establishing the meaning of biblical events but did not help much in the theological arena. A theological method supplemented the exegetical one in determining in what sense the actions of a timeless, non-historical spiritual God are real. In an implicit sense, then, the historical-grammatical method was incomplete and open to correction from theological and philosophical reflections. Because of the limits of exegesis (see below, section 5), the historical-grammatical method is not enough to ground the historicist interpretation of prophecy and the Great Controversy approach to systematic theology. This methodological limitation may be one of the factors contributing to the rise of Evangelical Adventism.

**The Historical Critical Method.** With the advent of modernity and historical consciousness, exegetes adopted the historical critical method of biblical

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opening Katapetasma ('Veil') in Hebrews 6:19," *AUSS* 38/1 (2000): 5–8. Norman H. Young, "Where Jesus has Gone as Forerunner on our Behalf (Hebrews 6:20)," *AUSS* 39/2 (2001): 165–173. Richard Davidson, "Christ's Entry 'Within the Veil' in Hebrews 6:19–20: The Old Testament Background," *AUSS* 39/2 (2001): 175–190. Norman H. Young, "The Day of Dedication or the Day of Atonement?: The Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19–20," *AUSS* 40/1 (2002): 61–68. Richard Davidson, "Inauguration or Day of Atonement? A Response to Norman Young's Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19–20 Revisited," *AUSS* 40/1 (2002): 69–88.

<sup>23</sup> Jon Paulien, "The End of Historicism?: Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part One]," *JATS* 14/2 (2003): 15–43; see also, Reimar Vetne, "A Definition and Short History of Historicism as a Method for Interpreting Daniel and Revelation," *JATS* 14/2 (2003): 1–14.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Modernity generated paradigmatic changes in epistemology that, in turn, produced a new way to study historical events. On the surface, the modern emphasis on history seems to affirm the historicists' approach to prophetic interpretation, Bible interpretation, and systematic theology operating in Adventism.

Is historical critical methodology compatible with biblical thinking and Adventist theology? Should Adventists use the historical critical method or avoid its conclusions and criticize its operations epistemologically?<sup>25</sup> Briefly put, because the application of the historical critical method leads to a reinterpretation of *what actually took place in history*, Adventist theology cannot use it without forfeiting the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle and the complete system of theology and truth the Sanctuary hermeneutical vision opens to view.<sup>26</sup> Let us remember that the historical critical method reinterprets not only the "History of Israel"<sup>27</sup> but also God's salvific acts in the Old and New Testaments. As a result, two different accounts of the same history stand side by side: the "scientific" account of what "*really took place*" stemming from the application of the historical critical method to biblical history, and the biblical account of what "*really took place*" from the perspective of the common everyday experience of history. Because Bible history presents God acting within the flow of history as an agent among others, science cannot accept it as real, but only as a mythological product of religious imagination.<sup>28</sup> In fact, empirical science unleashes the modern

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<sup>24</sup> I have found Steven MacKenzie and Stephen Haynes, ed., *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application* (Louisville: John Knox, 1999) to be a very useful and comprehensive introduction to the complex matrix of historical critical exegetical methodologies.

<sup>25</sup> For a negative answer, see Edward Zinke, *Historical Criticism* (<http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/historicalcriticism.htm>: Biblical Research Institute, 1981); for a positive answer, see Gladson.

<sup>26</sup> For a critical treatment of the historical critical method, see, for instance, Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St Louis: Concordia, 1977); and Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–25.

<sup>28</sup> Answering a charge that his position involves relativism, Troeltsch explains that he is not speaking of a process "immanent in human history" (*ibid.*, 67). In the evolutionary process of history, argues Troeltsch, each moment has "a direct relationship to God which belongs only to it. They are temporally discrete, and yet also approximations to the Absolute Life" (*ibid.*). From this metaphysical objective non-historical ground, "religious thought unfolds in its own unique manner. In so far as it seizes upon every means of stimulation and expression, religious thought most closely resembles the artistic imagination, yet it remains distinct from it by the experience of a compelling superhuman reality revealing itself everywhere. Every expression is mythical, symbolic, poetic; but in the expression something is grasped that bears within itself in a specifically religious manner its own inner necessity and compelling power" (*ibid.* 57). In this way, religious language originates. In this way, Scripture originated. Clearly, Troeltsch's historical criticism for biblical investigation and *religionsgeschichtliche Methode* (history of religions methodology) is not "naturalistic." That is to say, it accounts for the "transcendence" presuppositions Gladson requires as necessary conditions

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

reinterpretation of Christianity that reaches the ground, the method, and the system of Christian theology. From the scientific perspective, the Scriptures are myths generated by human imagination and labeled *Heilsgeschichte* (History of Salvation).<sup>29</sup> One cannot miss the fact that historical criticism follows from a strict understanding of reality that prevents us from accepting the biblical account of God's acts in history as "real." Yet, is the scientific view of reality absolute? Is there another understanding of reality that may ground the historical facticity of biblical *Heilsgeschichte*? We will return to this question in our next article.

Instead of exploring this possibility in the areas of ontology and epistemology, Progressive Adventists argue in favor of a "modified" version of the historical critical method. Jerry Gladson suggests, "The Adventist biblical scholar should make use of a modified version of historical criticism, so long as it does not remove the transcendent level or challenge the theological authority and inspiration of Scripture." His plea, however, falls short on two counts. First, Troeltsch's rendering of historical critical methodology does not build on naturalistic presuppositions but assumes divine transcendence.<sup>30</sup> Second, there are varied ways to interpret the inspiration of the Bible. For instance, Paul J. Achtemeier suggests that the Holy Spirit's inspiration acted not on individual authors but on the community following the evolutionary process described by historical critical scholars.<sup>31</sup> According to his view, the "inspiration" of Scripture means the leading of the Holy Spirit in the community as it formed the contents of Scripture and formulated it in writing.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the historical critical method can work, assuming the transcendence of God and the inspiration of Scripture, without requiring any substantial modification.

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for an Adventist appropriation of the historical critical method. Obviously, we need more than Gladson's suggestion that we can use the historical critical method only by assuming "transcendence" instead of Troeltsch's "naturalism" (27).

<sup>29</sup> Describing the way in which traditional dogmatics deals with history, Ernst Troeltsch explains, "the dogmatic method also claims to be based upon 'history.' But this is not the ordinary, secular history reconstructed by critical historiography. It is rather a history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*), a nexus of saving facts which, as such, are knowable and provable only for the believer. These facts have precisely the opposite characteristics of the facts that secular, critical historians can regard, on the basis of their criteria, as having actually taken place" (*Religion in History* trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991], 21).

<sup>30</sup> Troeltsch builds on Kant's transcendentalism and Schleiermacher's encounter account of revelation. He speaks of an "irrational" apriori in human reason. There is "a concentration of the religious consciousness upon itself by virtue of the objective-religious element included in subjectivity" (*Religion in History*, 59). Later on, he identifies "irrational" apriori in human reason with God. "The present [affirms Troeltsch] is completely filled by the immediate nearness of God" (*ibid.*, 66).

<sup>31</sup> The evolutionary thinking of Hegel plays a structural role in the interpretation of Scripture gestation, according to the historical critical method matrix (Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, 59).

<sup>32</sup> *Inspiration and Authority: Nature and Function of Christian Scripture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 118–121.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

Though Gladson makes some good observations about ad hoc uses of “soft core” aspects of historical criticism by some Adventist authors, he does not succeed in explaining the differences between the modified Adventist version he envisions and the actual academic practice of historical criticism in contemporary scholarship. Short of drawing a clear methodological line on the sand, Adventist scholars adopting a not yet clearly defined “modified version” of historical criticism will unavoidably adopt conclusions that distort biblical thinking, break the flow of God’s historical actions, and run against the Great Controversy dynamics of Adventist theology. As explained above, the application of historical criticism to the interpretation of Scripture and the understanding of Christian doctrines requires paradigmatic changes<sup>33</sup> in not only the understanding of the inspiration of Scripture and the *sola Scriptura* principle that ground Adventist theological thinking, but also in the interpretation of God’s being and actions assumed in the hermeneutical vision of the Sanctuary doctrine.

**In Search of an Alternate Method.** We need to distinguish between historical criticism proper and the broader “historical criticism” umbrella designation. The former refers to the historical criticism of the events described in Scripture to ascertain their historical reality.<sup>34</sup> The latter becomes the label that congregates a variety of related studies of biblical texts, all assuming the results of the historical critical method proper. In this broader sense, the historical critical method includes a multiplicity of components or interrelated investigations of Scripture usually known as “criticisms.” Among them we find, for instance, historical criticism proper, and building on it, source, form, tradition, redaction, social-scientific, canonical, rhetorical, structural, narrative, reader-response, poststructuralist, feminist, and socioeconomic criticisms.<sup>35</sup> At least theoretically, this distinction allows us to adumbrate the possibility that the criticisms enunciated above may render different results when applied from a different approach to the historical investigation of Scripture. What Biblical Adventism finds objectionable and unscientific<sup>36</sup> is the historical critical method proper and its open enmity against the historical reality of biblical events.

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<sup>33</sup> “Give the historical method an inch and it will take a mile. From a strictly orthodox standpoint, therefore, it seems to bear a certain similarity to *the devil*. Like the modern natural sciences, it represents a complete revolution in our patterns of thought vis-à-vis antiquity and the Middle Ages. As these sciences imply a new attitude toward nature, so history implies a new attitude toward the human spirit and its productions in the realm of ideas” (Ernest Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, 16; emphasis mine).

<sup>34</sup> “Historians seek objectivity. They are interested in discovering and reporting what really happened in the past, as opposed to collecting and passing on fanciful stories, writing ‘docudramas,’ or producing revisionist accounts of the past for propagandistic or ideological purposes” (Mackenzie and Haynes, 18).

<sup>35</sup> Mackenzie and Haynes, table of contents.

<sup>36</sup> Ian W. Provan correctly explains that the modern scientific historiographical model that the historical critical method of biblical investigation applies has collapsed (“Knowing and Believing: Faith in the Past,” in *Behind the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

If Adventist exegetes continue to solve the methodological question by choosing between the historical-grammatical and historical critical methods, present divisions in Adventism will multiply and become stronger. Yet, are these the only possible alternatives? Could Adventist thinkers address the methodological question critically, seeking to ground, articulate, and formulate a new exegetical methodology? Finishing the unfinished task of Adventist theology requires rethinking the issue of exegetical methodology. We need to find a new methodological alternative responsive to all the characteristics of the biblical texts. Overcoming the present theological pluralism in the church requires a deconstructive task of epistemological criticism of the historical critical method proper. Moreover, we also need to engage in the constructive task of grounding and devising a new scientific historical method of biblical interpretation.<sup>37</sup>

However, how do we do it? How do we study and produce exegetical methodologies? Is there a theological discipline where we can analyze, criticize, and formulate new methodological approaches? I will argue below that to deal seriously with methodological issues, Adventist theology needs to enter new scholarly territory. We need to engage in a fundamental theology to study the scholarly status of theology, its methodology, the disciplines required to process its data and achieve its goals, internal and external interdisciplinary relationships, the origin of theological knowledge, the general structure of interpretation, etc.

The question remains. Why do some Adventist scholars feel so strongly that we should use the historical critical method in Adventist theology while others feel the opposite with the same passion? The answer to this question is not simple. Part of the answer revolves around the explicit or implicit theological and philosophical preconceptions we bring to the task of exegesis. Before considering them, we need to become aware of the limits of biblical methodology and biblical theology.

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et al. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 244). Therefore, its patterns, presuppositions, and procedures we cannot take seriously any longer. Unfortunately, biblical scholars continue to build on methodological views postmodern historiography has criticized and abandoned. So, what is next in historiography? Provan correctly interprets “the crisis with regard to the scientific model of historiography—and indeed the self-defeating postmodernist response to this crisis—as an invitation to revisit some fundamental questions about epistemology” (ibid.). In other words, one has to suspect that problems in the modern scientific historiographical model stem from errors in the broader level of epistemological and ontological presuppositions. We need to reassess our understanding on these issues, and from them generate a better scientific historiographical model we can apply to the study of history in general and biblical history in particular.

<sup>37</sup> Perhaps this is what Gerhard Hasel and Richard Davidson had in mind when they spoke, respectively, of a “theological biblical method” and a “historical biblical method.” See Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today*, 113; and, Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” 94.

### 5. The Limits of Exegesis

Although the application of the grammatical-historical method of exegesis and the development of biblical theology have strengthened Biblical Adventism, their *modus operandi* does not have room for a consistent application of the Sanctuary doctrine as a vision from which to discover the complete system of theology and truth present in Scripture. Understanding these methodological and disciplinary limitations of exegetical scholarship may help us understand further the forgetfulness of the Adventist vision and its related system of theology among Biblical Adventists. As our preset methodological and disciplinary limitations come into view, we will be able to adumbrate the task that remains ahead: to finish the unfinished business of Adventist theology and overcome the present pluralism and stagnation in the thinking and mission of the church.

I would rather have one of my esteemed and wise exegete colleagues write on the limits of biblical theology. I know this is a sensitive issue for many involved in Adventist theology. The reason is simple. From the limited perspective of my personal experience, I have not found Adventist exegetes expressing the need for support, complementation, and correction from other theological disciplines, such as systematic or fundamental theologies. My exegete colleagues and students should realize that this proposal does not attempt to challenge but to complement what they are already doing. Some years ago, after speaking about the limits of biblical exegesis to the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary doctoral club at Andrews University, a group of Old and New Testament students found the notion threatening to their scholarship and Adventism. They did not explain the reason for their feeling. I imagine their reaction might be somehow connected to our common fear of the unknown.

Biblical Adventism largely equates exegetical methodology with theological method. This implicit disciplinary mindset assumes we do theology exegetically. By rigorously applying exegetical methodology to the biblical text, we discover truth and apply it to our present situation. Shortly put, to discover biblical truth we only need exegetical methodology. Consequently, many are convinced that for the discovery of biblical truth, we do not need disciplines such as systematic and fundamental theology. At best, systematic theology may be useful in presenting in an orderly way the results that biblical theology achieves through exegetical methodology.<sup>38</sup> Overall, we should avoid them because they can harm our attempt at faithfully building our theology on the *sola Scriptura* principle and the hermeneutical guidance of the Sanctuary doctrine. There are many reasons for disciplinary suspicion of systematic theology and fundamental

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<sup>38</sup> If a tradition decided to build Christian theology on the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, one wonders about the role of systematic theology. If biblical theology not only discovers what the biblical writers meant back in their day, but also decides what the text means for us today and presents us with a complete report of the interconnected theology of Old and New Testaments, is there any need of systematic theology? The answer seems to be no. In this regard see my, "Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology," *JATS* 12/2 (2001): 110–131.

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

theology built on the multiple theological sources matrix. This suspicion should not diminish in Adventism. On the contrary, it should motivate an intensive project of theological deconstruction.

Here, however, we need to concentrate on the limitations of biblical exegesis, calling for complementary disciplinary methodologies to join it in the discovery of biblical truth. For our purposes in this article, we need only to consider briefly two limitations. One comes from the side of the hermeneutical presuppositions and the other from the data and object of exegetical method.

**Presuppositions.** We need to bear in mind that method is a way we follow to achieve some goals.<sup>39</sup> Bernard Lonergan correctly describes method as “*a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results.*”<sup>40</sup> In a technical sense, method is a set of procedures or rules prescribed with the purpose of facilitating the achieving of a goal.<sup>41</sup> As scientific method, theological method also has conditions that regulate its activities, procedures, and operations. Besides the concrete (1) goals it attempts to reach, theological method also requires (2) data and (3) the necessary hermeneutical presuppositions and criteria to process the data and reach its goals. Goals are issues requiring theological interpretation and explanation. Data are the information about God required to spark issues that require explanation, produce interpretation, and construct theological explanations. Necessary hermeneutical presuppositions are the principles that guide theological interpretation and construction.<sup>42</sup> In short, method’s goals are its teleological condition, data its material condition, and the ideas it assumes its hermeneutical condition. All conditions in close interaction shape the concrete profiles of theological and scientific methods.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Fernando Canale, “Evolution, Theology and Method Part I: Outline and Limits of Scientific Methodology,” *AUSS* 41/1 (2003): 65–100. 70–71

<sup>40</sup> *Method in Theology* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1990), 5. He further explains that “there is method, then, where there are distinct operations, where each operation is related to the others, where the set of relations forms a pattern, where the pattern is described as the right way of doing the job, where operations in accord with the pattern may be repeated indefinitely, and where the fruits of such repetition are, not repetitious, but cumulative and progressive” (Ibid., 4). Consequently, Lonergan organizes his discourse on method as an identification and explanation of the operations involved in the task of doing theology (ibid., 6–25). John Macquarrie agrees with Lonergan’s definition of method, but goes on to apply it in a different way to the task of theology (*Principles of Christian Theology*, 33).

<sup>41</sup> René Descartes explained that “By method I means certain and simple rules, such that, if a man observe them accurately, he shall never assume what is false as true, and will never spend his mental efforts to no purpose, but will always gradually increase his knowledge and so arrive at a true understanding of all that does not surpass his powers” (“Rules for the Direction of the Mind,” in *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins [Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952], 5).

<sup>42</sup> By “construction,” I mean the procedure from which we arrive at conclusions and teachings by connecting texts and ideas. That takes place in exegesis but in a larger degree in biblical and systematic theologies.

<sup>43</sup> For further clarification on the conditions of theological method, see my “Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology? In Search of a Working Proposal,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systema-*

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

The data in biblical exegesis are the texts of the Old and New Testaments. The goal is to understand them. However, where do the hermeneutical conditions or presuppositions come from? Some years ago, an official statement of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Annual Council addressing the issue of Bible study identified some of the presuppositions we carry to the task of biblical interpretation and that therefore form part of our method of biblical studies.<sup>44</sup> This document affirms that (1) the divine inspiration of Scripture, (2) its authority over reason, and (3) the role of the Holy Spirit are necessary presuppositions arising from the claims of Scripture. The document only enumerates and outlines the content of these basic presuppositions without explaining how we get to know they are in fact presuppositions and arrive at their contents.

Thus, it becomes evident that exegetical methodology and studies are limited because they require the identification and interpretation of some broad and influential notions exegetes assume. Since the goal of exegetical method is the understanding of biblical texts, and they do not address the question of method or its presuppositions, its dependence on non-exegetical reflection becomes apparent at the very grounding hermeneutical level where it originates. Because, traditionally, exegetes and theologians have derived their hermeneutical presuppositions from philosophy, the General Conference's statement on "Methods of Bible Study" advises Adventist scholars to draw their presuppositions from Scripture itself.<sup>45</sup> There should be a scholarly way, then, to analyze, discuss, discover, describe, and decide what presuppositions are necessary for biblical exegesis and how we should understand them on the basis of the *sola Scriptura* principle.<sup>46</sup> This task requires the involvement of a different theological discipline, namely, fundamental theology. We will come back to this issue in the next article.

**Textuality.** Let us consider the limitation that appears from the side of the objective of theology, namely, the understanding of the text. One of the methodological procedures exegesis must follow derives from the nature of its data, the biblical texts. Both the historical-grammatical and historical critical methods agree that texts flow from within an historical matrix. Thus, determining the

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*tische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43/3 (2001): 371–375; and, Kwabena Donkor, *Tradition, Method, and Contemporary Protestant Theology: An Analysis of Thomas C. Oden's Vincentian Method* (Lanham: U P of America, 2003), 43–74.

<sup>44</sup> General Conference Committee Annual Council, "Methods of Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles and Methods" (Rio de Janeiro: Biblical Research Institute, 1986).

<sup>45</sup> See footnote 44.

<sup>46</sup> Gerhard Hasel correctly indicates that in Adventist theology, "presuppositions must be open constantly for modification and enlargement on the basis of Scripture. Any preunderstanding that is bound to concepts such as naturalism with its closed universe of an immanent cause-and-effect network, to evolution with its developmental axioms, or to scientism, humanism, rationalism, or relativisms is alien to the Bible. The Word of God must not be forced to fit such foreign concepts or their presuppositions" (*Biblical Interpretation Today*, 104).

## CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

historical context provides a grounding frame of reference for understanding all biblical texts.<sup>47</sup> The historical nature of biblical writing prohibits exegetes from interpreting any biblical text on the basis of ideas found in later biblical texts. The exegete must attempt to look at the text from the author's and the original audience's ideological perspective. This shows another limitation of exegetical methodology. We will never be able to reconstruct the full historical context. Exegesis always produces partial understanding of texts. For instance, exegetical methodology does not allow us to use the cosmic conflict presented in Revelation 12:7-9 as a historical context for Genesis 1:3.<sup>48</sup> Adventist theology works within the Great Controversy dynamics. It understands Scripture and salvation in the context of the cosmic conflict preceding the creation of our planet (Genesis 1-2), continuing through earth's history, and ending with the final purification of the planet and its recreation. When rigorously applied, the exegetical approach (historical-grammatical and historical critical methods) does not allow for such a reading of Scripture. It conflicts with the historical sequence of the texts and the development of biblical thinking.

The historical limitation of exegetical method and the implicit scholarly assumption that there is no other scholarly way available to deal with Scripture may have contributed to forgetting and replacing the Sanctuary doctrine as the hermeneutical light of Adventist theology.

### 6. Biblical Theology

When we define the theological enterprise from the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, the need for and role of exegetical methodology and biblical theology are not in question. Without them, Adventist theology cannot exist. Yet, does Adventism need to develop its own biblical theology, or can it rely on the biblical theologies produced by the academy and other Christian denominations? Moreover, do the limitations of exegetical methodology also limit the results that biblical theology can achieve?<sup>49</sup> Specifically, is the scholarly discipline of

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<sup>47</sup> Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," 70-74.

<sup>48</sup> It is true that Old Testament scholars cannot completely ignore the existence of the New Testament as they interpret the Old Testament (Gerhard F. Hasel, "Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology," *AUSS* 34/1 (1995): 25-26. Old Testament scholars cannot use New Testament theology and data as hermeneutical presuppositions to find the theological historical meaning of the Old Testament text. Biblical theologians, however, can use Old Testament motifs, types, and theology to ascertain the meaning of New Testament passages. For instance, Richard Davidson uses convincingly the inauguration ceremony of the Old Testament Sanctuary to ascertain the meaning of Christ's entrance into the heavenly Sanctuary after his resurrection as presented in Hebrews 6:19-20 ("Christ's Entry 'Within the Veil' in Hebrews 6:19-20: The Old Testament Background," 175-190; and, "Inauguration or Day of Atonement? A Response to Norman Young's Old Testament Background to Hebrews 6:19-20 Revisited," 69-88.

<sup>49</sup> So far, we have considered only a few instances of limitations in exegetical method. Later we will address other limitations coming from the side of the objective of exegetical methodology and biblical theology.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

biblical theology the beginning and the end of our search for the meanings and truth of Scripture? Does it share its task of discovering biblical truth with systematic theology?

**Nature.** Let us start first by considering the nature of biblical theology. As a theological discipline, biblical theology attempts to understand the text of Scripture. It starts with individual texts and then moves on to biblical authors and books. The ultimate goal is to bring together the broad theological motifs and teachings of the Old and New Testaments to outline the theology of the entire Bible.<sup>50</sup> Since this brief enunciation of the nature and task of biblical theology seems to fit the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle of Biblical Adventist theology, one would expect that Adventist scholars could freely use biblical theologies produced by the academy or other Christian denominations.

Old Testament scholar Gerhard Hasel thought differently. In his last publications, he outlined a new approach to biblical theology as a scholarly discipline. The reason for Hasel's proposal is methodological. He correctly understood that all models of biblical theology are built on a "functional" view of Scripture.<sup>51</sup> Thus, his proposal revolves around the nature and role of Scripture, "understood to be the norm of biblical theology."<sup>52</sup> According to Hasel, biblical theology should not follow the view of reality and Scripture we find as the basis of the historical critical method and most approaches to biblical theology.<sup>53</sup> Instead, it "calls for a theological-historical approach which takes full account of God's self-revelation as embodied in Scripture with all its dimensions of reality."<sup>54</sup>

Hasel works at the level where biblical theology as intellectual enterprise generates the meaning of the biblical texts. As an Adventist, he is not satisfied with what he finds in the scholarly world because existing models of biblical theology work on the assumption that Scripture is the product of human imagination and tradition.<sup>55</sup> A different scholarly approach to Scripture appears when

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<sup>50</sup> Ekkehardt Müller reports that biblical theology "starts with the theology of a biblical book or author, e.g., the theology of Mark. Which theological emphases can be found in his gospel? How are they developed? What did the author want to express? From the theologies of individual biblical books, students of Scripture move toward a theology of the OT and a theology of the NT respectively and finally toward a biblical theology. Biblical theology stays strictly with the biblical text and does not raise issues that are of importance today but are not directly addressed in the Bible" ("Theological Thinking in the Adventist Church," *DavarLogos* 1/2 [2002]: 129).

<sup>51</sup> For an extended explanation grounding the "functional" view of Scripture, see, for instance, Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).

<sup>52</sup> "Proposals for a Canonical Biblical Theology," *AUSS* 34/1 (1996): 23.

<sup>53</sup> For brief scholarly introductions to various models of Old Testament theology, see Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 11–51.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>55</sup> Including Childs' "canonical approach to biblical theology" (*ibid.*).

*CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM*

we change our understanding of the material condition of method,<sup>56</sup> that is, the nature of Scripture.

Hasel correctly sees that biblical theology “has the dual task of (1) providing summary interpretations of the final form of the individual biblical documents or groups of writings and of (2) presenting the longitudinal themes, motifs, and concepts that emerge from the biblical materials.”<sup>57</sup>

**Center.** At this point, a structural limitation of biblical theology as a scholarly discipline comes to mind. Arriving at an integrated summary of the entire Bible as a coherent whole has proven difficult due to the textual nature of exegetical methodology. Finding the elusive “center” of Scripture that may bring all the pieces of the biblical puzzle together has been a major source of disagreement among scholars. Biblical scholars searching for the center of biblical theology find little help in exegetical methodology. Apparently, they look for it by trial and error. They identify an important biblical motif and play it as center to see how it works out in practice.

Consistent with his affirmation of the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, Hasel remind us that the search for the center or key that may help us weave all parts of Scripture into a coherent whole must grow out “of the biblical materials themselves.”<sup>58</sup> For this reason, biblical theology should not follow the “God-man-salvation” grid systematic theologians use to bring together the contents of Scripture.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Hasel reviews the suggestions for the center of biblical theology that leading Old Testaments scholars have formulated to play the integrative role of “center” of Old Testament theology. He finds them wanting because “they are too narrow a basis on which to construct an OT [or biblical] theology which does not relegate essential aspects of the OT [or biblical] faith to an inferior and unimportant position.”<sup>60</sup>

According to Hasel, “God is the dynamic, unifying center of the OT.”<sup>61</sup> All the other suggestions for “center” have in common an aspect of God or his activity for the world or man and so, inadvertently, point to God as center.<sup>62</sup> However, since God is not only the center of Old Testament theology but also, simultaneously, the center of both biblical and systematic theologies, a disciplinary limitation of biblical theology comes to view. Let me explain. By the word “God,” we refer to both meaning in biblical texts and a reality that operates in life. The first belongs to the textual field of investigation that biblical theology

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<sup>56</sup> On the material condition’s place in theological method, see above and footnote 43.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>58</sup> *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 98.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Some of the proposed centers for biblical theology Hasel reviews are “covenant” (Eichrodt), “election” (Wildberger), “communion” (Vriezen), “promise” (Kaiser), “the kingdom of God” (Klein), “the rulership of God” (Seebass), “holiness” (Hänel), “experience” of God (Baab), “God is Lord” (Köhler). *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

explores. The second belongs to the ontological field of divine operations that fundamental and systematic theologies explore. In Biblical Adventism both biblical and systematic theologies connect via their data (*sola-tota Scriptura*) and their center (God).

The “God” that is the center of biblical theology is not the meaning of a word but the nature and action of a reality. Biblical theology helps us understand the meaning of texts. Systematic theology helps us use our understanding of biblical texts (we gain through exegetical methodology) to understand the reality and actions of God. In this way, biblical and systematic theologies connect via their data (Scripture), object (God), and methodological limitations. The method of biblical theology helps us understand the meanings of texts through which we receive the information about God’s reality and actions. The method of systematic theology helps us use ideas transmitted in texts to understand the meaning of realities. Systematic theology depends on exegetical methodology to understand its data, namely, the biblical texts that reveal the reality and actions of God. Biblical theology depends on systematic methodology<sup>63</sup> to understand the meaning of the center it assumes in gathering all the materials of Scripture.

We started this section by asking if Biblical Adventism can rely on biblical theologies produced by scholarship. Because Biblical Adventism operates from the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, it cannot freely adopt the approaches of the academy or of other Christian denominations as long as they assume the contents of Scripture are the product of human imagination and follow the historical critical method. Faithfulness to the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle, then, requires a rethinking of biblical theology as a scholarly discipline along the lines of Hasel’s theological-historical proposal. Yet, even Hasel, a strong supporter of the historicist interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy and the Sanctuary doctrine,<sup>64</sup> did not call for the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary doctrine as vision from which to understand a complete system of theology and truth as Ellen White did. This brings us to the limitations of biblical theology as scholarly enterprise.

**Limits.** Do the limitations of exegetical methodology considered above also limit the results biblical theology can achieve? The answer to this question seems to be affirmative. By definition, biblical theology is a textual discipline. It works by way of the exegetical method. The limits of exegetical methodology are also limits of biblical theology. This limitation came to view in the search

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<sup>63</sup> As we will see below, both biblical and systematic theology depends on philosophical methodology, helping both to determine the kind of reality we assume for the God of Scripture.

<sup>64</sup> Gerhard Hasel, “The Identity of ‘The Saints of the Most High’ in Daniel 7,” *Biblica* 56 (1975): 173–192; *The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9:24–27* (Washington: Biblical Research Institute, 1976); “Studies in Biblical Atonement I: Continual Sacrifice, Defilement/Cleansing and Sanctuary,” in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, ed. A. V. Wallenkampf (Washington: Review and Herald, 1980), I: 87–114; “The ‘Little Horn,’ the Saints, and the Sanctuary in Daniel 8,” in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, 177–220.

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

for a center that might connect the analytical results of exegesis. Thus, the limits of exegetical methodology seem to impinge on the theological outcome of biblical theology.

Biblical theology is not the place where the Sanctuary doctrine opens to view a complete system of theology and truth. Instead, it is the place where biblical data on the Sanctuary doctrine are processed, understood, and connected to the rest of biblical materials through texts about God. The fact that Adventist scholarship has developed mainly as biblical theology may be one contributing factor in the progressive forgetting and replacing of the Sanctuary doctrine as the Adventist hermeneutical vision.

If biblical theology is the only way to discover and understand biblical truth, the hermeneutical role that the Sanctuary doctrine played in the formative thinking of early Adventist pioneers may find no place in scholarship. The search for the center of biblical theology, however, suggests that biblical theology shares with systematic theology in the discovery of biblical truth.

#### 7. Systematic Theology

So far, we have not found the scholarly discipline or disciplines in which the Adventist pioneers' use of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision that opens to view a "*complete system of truth, connected and harmonious*"<sup>65</sup> may be articulated and utilized in a scholarly way. Perhaps the idea of "system" may be the key to finding a scholarly home for the hermeneutical role the Sanctuary plays in Adventist theology. Could the system help us understand biblical materials better and discover the inner logic of biblical thinking? Could systematic theology be the scholarly home for the complete system of truth our pioneers "saw" in Scripture with the hermeneutical "vision" the Sanctuary doctrine opened before them? With these questions in mind, let us turn our attention briefly to systematic theology.

If systematic theology is the natural scholarly home to the complete system of truth early Adventist pioneers adumbrated through the hermeneutical vision of the Sanctuary doctrine, we have serious theological catching up to do. George W. Reid reports, "We Adventists are known for our intensive work in biblical studies, from which we have secured a strong grasp of the Bible's teachings, giving special attention to eschatology. This emphasis means our doctrinal understandings tend to be colored by an end-time anticipation of Jesus' return. We have not distinguished ourselves, however, in systematic theology, that enterprise which seeks to integrate biblical truths into a single overall comprehensive system."<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 423 (emphasis mine).

<sup>66</sup> "Review of Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*," *Reflections: A BRI Newsletter* <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>, no. 6 (2004): 8.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

Here we will introduce ourselves only briefly into the scholarly field of systematic theology to assess whether it is (1) related to the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary doctrine experienced in early Adventist theology; and (2) needed in finishing the unfinished task of Adventist theology. With these goals in mind for this section, we should explore the following questions. What is systematic theology? How does it compare and relate to biblical theology? How does systematic theology work? Can the Adventist hermeneutical vision flowing from the Sanctuary doctrine find its disciplinary scholarly home in systematics? Does the unfinished business of Adventist theology require pioneering work in this area of scholarship?

These questions are important because the scholarship of Biblical Adventism has developed mainly within the biblical theology discipline. Progressive Adventism, on the contrary, has developed both biblical and systematic theologies. They develop biblical theology studying biblical texts from the general perspective and hermeneutical guidance of the historical critical method and systematic theology in close relation to religious studies.<sup>67</sup> Since systematic and religious studies combine a multiplicity of sources, we can call them biblical only in an indirect derivative sense. In contrast to this approach, Biblical Adventism needs to consider seriously whether the discovery of biblical truth requires the methodology and contributions of a biblically conceived systematic theology.

**Nature.** Different theological schools and traditions understand the relationship between biblical and systematic<sup>68</sup> theologies in different ways. Within the broader field of classical and modern traditions, Brevard Childs perceived the existence of “an iron curtain” separating biblical theology from systematics.<sup>69</sup> In the biblical evangelical and Biblical Adventist traditions, however, the problem is quite different. Instead of differentiation without relation, there is identification without distinction. In other words, many Biblical Adventists and evangelicals have a difficult time distinguishing between biblical and systematic theologies.<sup>70</sup> They are not to blame. Traditionally, Adventist scholars teaching

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<sup>67</sup> Religious studies attempt to study the phenomena of religion rather than divine revelation. This discipline grows from the application of the historical critical method to theology. As the historical experience and imagination of the community replaces divine traditional understanding of revelation and inspiration, historical studies of religious phenomena replace systematic studies of biblical teachings. In Progressive Adventist circles, Christianity is also studied from the perspective of religious studies.

<sup>68</sup> “Systematic” theology corresponds to what other schools call, “dogmatics,” or simply, “theology.”

<sup>69</sup> “Soon I became painfully aware that an iron curtain separated Bible from theology, not just at Yale, but throughout most of the English-speaking world. I am sure that the fault lay with both disciplines, but deep suspicion and disinterest prevented any serious interaction” (Childs, xvi).

<sup>70</sup> For an introductory attempt at distinguishing between them, see, Fernando Canale, “Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology?” *JATS* 12/2 (2001): 110–131.

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

Christian doctrines did not clearly explain the difference between biblical theology and systematic theology.

According to Wayne Grudem, for instance, systematic theology studies what the Bible teaches today on any topic.<sup>71</sup> The task of systematics consists in “collecting and understanding all the relevant passages in the Bible on various topics and then summarizing their teachings clearly so that we know what to believe about each topic.”<sup>72</sup> There is little difference between the definitions of the task of systematic theology and the task of biblical theology as described above.<sup>73</sup> Millard J. Erickson’s notion that systematic theology “contemporizes” the raw material it takes from biblical theology helps even less.<sup>74</sup> After all, biblical theologians claim not only to produce a summary of all biblical materials but also to tell us what they mean for us today.<sup>75</sup>

Bruce A. Demarest and Gordon R. Lewis bring the issue to a clearer focus by recognizing that while biblical and systematic theologies share the same source of data, Scripture, they differ in *aim* and *organizing principle*.<sup>76</sup> In aim, while biblical theology focuses on understanding texts, systematic theology focuses on understanding reality. They also differ in organizing principle. While biblical theology follows the historical organization of the text,<sup>77</sup> systematic theology follows a “topical” and “logical” organization.<sup>78</sup>

Recently, Norman Gulley broke new ground “by producing the first true systematic theology to come from an Adventist hand.”<sup>79</sup> He brings the task of systematic theology into sharper focus. To Demarest’s and Lewis’ “aim” and “organizing” principle, Gulley adds the “hermeneutical guide of biblical metanarrative,” which he also calls “worldview.” The biblical metanarrative operates as a guiding light orienting our interpretation of Scripture and biblical doctrines. It also identifies and “corrects any interpretation that does not fit in

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<sup>71</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 21.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> See above, 131.

<sup>74</sup> *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 26.

<sup>75</sup> This notion also seems ingrained in Adventism; see, for instance, Ekkehardt Müller, “Theological Thinking in the Adventist Church,” 130.

<sup>76</sup> *Integrative Theology*, 2 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 1:23.

<sup>77</sup> Biblical theology, “aiming to be a descriptive science, is organized around the chronological and cultural development of a given biblical writer’s own terms, categories, and thought forms in his historical and cultural context” (ibid.).

<sup>78</sup> Systematic theology “aims to produce normative guidelines to spiritual reality for the present generation; it organizes the material of divine revelation topically and logically, developing a coherent and comprehensive world view and way of life” (ibid.). However, perusing Childs, one discovers the same topical organization in biblical theology. Fritz Guy also believes that the difference between biblical and systematic theologies revolves around the way they organize their materials (*Thinking Theologically*, 203–219).

<sup>79</sup> George W. Reid, “Review of Norman R. Gulley. *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*,” 8. Actually, only the first volume of a multivolume works is in print.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

with the biblical worldview.” Finally, it guides us in understanding the inner logic of biblical thinking.<sup>80</sup> The metanarrative-worldview Gulley has in mind is the “Great Controversy” between God and Satan.<sup>81</sup> Finally, Gulley correctly concludes, “*the center of a theological system must be the same as the underlying center of Scripture, if the system is to be true to Scripture.*”<sup>82</sup> In this way, the centers of biblical and systematic theologies are identical.

According to Hasel, the center of Scripture is God. God, then, is the center of both biblical and systematic theologies. How should we understand the relation of this center and the Great Controversy “metanarrative-worldview” about which Gulley speaks? Moreover, what is the scholarly discipline dealing with the role and contents of the metanarrative systematic theology assumes?

**Method.** We are now in a position to understand further the way in which systematic theology operates. At least we have “on the table,” so to speak, some components of the systematic approach to theology. Systematic theology results from the interplay of several factors, namely, data, their interpretation, and an objective. These are the material, hermeneutical, and teleological conditions of the theological method.<sup>83</sup>

When we approach Christian theology from the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle as Biblical Adventism does, biblical and systematic theologies share the same data (Scripture) and hermeneutical principles.<sup>84</sup> The difference requiring different scholarly disciplines, therefore, comes from the teleological condition of method. Briefly, biblical theology is textual (it attempts to understand biblical texts), while systematic theology is ontological (it attempts to understand reality). Since we have explored briefly the textual nature of biblical theology, we will turn our attention to the ontological nature of systematic theology.

Systematic theology tries to understand the integrated interrelation of living beings with God as the center of life. As such, it is not a textual but an ontological scholarly enterprise. The difference in aim calls for difference in methodological activities and procedures. Through its history, Christian theology has

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<sup>80</sup> “A systematic theology [explains Gulley] penetrates the biblical material and reaches the foundational story of Scripture in which all other stories are best understood. This is the metanarrative. It enables each doctrine to be understood within this biblical worldview and thus corrects any interpretation that does not fit in with the biblical worldview. It therefore allows the biblical worldview to be better understood and to act as a hermeneutical guide in a consistent interpretation of all biblical doctrines. It provides a framework in which the various biblical doctrines can be thought through in their inner-relationship and inner-coherence” (*Systematic Theology: Prolegomena* [Berrien Springs: Andrews UP, 2003], 140).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 713. The origin, interpretation, and role of metanarrative in the construction of systematic theology require scholarly analysis and method—in other words, the operation of a scholarly discipline. We will address these issues in the next article.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 146 (italics in the original).

<sup>83</sup> See above, page 127.

<sup>84</sup> We will deal with hermeneutical principles in more detail in the next section.

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

approached systematic theology from a multiplex of sources matrix and a hermeneutical vision drawn from human philosophical teachings.

Biblical Adventism, instead, builds its understanding of reality and the manifoldness of life as it relates to God from Scripture as its sole source of light, wisdom, and information and takes its hermeneutical vision from the Sanctuary doctrine. From this base, systematic theology does not attempt to understand the doctrines<sup>85</sup> of Scripture or church beliefs,<sup>86</sup> but nature and life as they relate to God. While biblical theology carefully follows textual evidence and links, systematic theology follows ontological evidence and links present in the texts of Scripture.

As the ontological aim leads the systematic search for the meaning of reality, a theological interpretation and construction takes places by interlinking the manifold interactions of the various beings Scripture describes. The center of such interactions is God's reality and actions. The result is the conception and formulation of the teachings of the Church. The systematic method does not conceive Christian teachings as an isolated, disconnected string of beads.<sup>87</sup> The hermeneutical vision and the focus on reality allow systematic theology to discover the inner logic of Christian thinking. Following the way God interrelates with reality as a whole brings to view the inner logic of Scripture and Christian teachings.

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<sup>85</sup> Understanding doctrines is not the task of systematic theology. Biblical theology helps us understand biblical doctrines. Historical theology helps us understand church doctrines. Systematic theology is the process though which we understand created realities in the light of Scripture and in relation to God (the center of theology). From this understanding, systematic theology constructs the doctrines or teachings of the Church.

<sup>86</sup> This is the modernistic view of systematic theology derived from the history of religions tradition. Fritz Guy's way of "thinking theologically" seems to correspond to the modern notion of systematic theology. "As the interpretation of faith, *thinking theologically is thinking as carefully, comprehensively, and creatively as possible about the content, adequacy, and implications of one's own religious life*" (*Thinking Theologically*, 10 [emphasis in the original]). Guy proposes that theology studies religious life. I propose that we study life in the light of Scripture.

<sup>87</sup> "Seventh-day Adventists need an integrated theology! Don't get me wrong. Adventism's 27 fundamental beliefs are well defined and adequate in what they attempt to do as individual statements. It is not the 27 that I am questioning, but the way they are presented. To put it bluntly, the 27 fundamentals are set forth as a list somewhat like a string of beads with each bead having the same size, shape, and weight" (George R. Knight, "Twenty-seven Fundamentals in Search of a Theology," *Ministry* 74/2 [2001]: 5. This article shows the unfinished task of Adventist theology affecting the practice of the ministry. Unfortunately, Knight bypasses the question of theological integration that requires the development of systematic theology and deals with the question of presenting the 27 Fundamental Beliefs to the church. Thus, his models to "organize" the 27 Fundamental Beliefs divide them into three areas: Christ [Christian experience], doctrines [understanding of Bible teachings], and lifestyle [ethics]. The relative importance of these areas begs the question of their theological integration. Moreover, the models presented assume an implicit systematic theology. Since systematic theology attempts to understand reality from the perspective of biblical thought, it should reveal the way in which Christian doctrines understand the integration of experience, theory, and doing.

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

**Limits.** One limitation of systematic theology derives from the ontological nature of its object. Because systematic theologians see their objects through the text, their methodology is not suited for the scholarly understanding of texts. This limitation leads to distortion in the understanding of the data. As exegetical methodology allows seeing “less” in the texts because of its accountability to the historicity of the writing process and the dynamics of textual communication, systematic methodology allows seeing “more” in the text because systematic theologians see it from the perspective of the ontological nature of their intended referents. Unfortunately, this seeing is accountable to the reality the texts speak about and not to the text itself as structure communicating meaning. Thus, systematic theologians “see” in biblical texts not only meanings not supported by them, but, at times, also meanings that contradict what they explicitly say. This limitation of systematic methodology calls for exegetical corrections. Systematic methodology builds on the results of exegetical methodology. Biblical systematic theologians should use it to process their data and to deconstruct traditional doctrinal constructions.<sup>88</sup> Thus, biblical theology is the basis and the permanent corrective of a biblical systematic theology.

Another limitation of systematic theology comes from the side of its hermeneutical presuppositions. As biblical theologians, systematic theologians assume the interpretation of the hermeneutical presuppositions. Biblical and systematic methodologies do not generate the interpretation of the methodology and hermeneutical principles they assume. Traditionally, the philosophical disciplines of ontology and epistemology have generated the interpretation of the hermeneutical principles guiding theologians in the construction of Christian doctrines. In the next article in this series, I will argue that theologians should not leave to philosophers the interpretation of this fundamental area of Christian theology. Instead, they should address the criticism and interpretation of theological methodology and its hermeneutical conditions in a new independent scholarly discipline.

**Hermeneutical Vision.** In classical and modern traditions of Christian theology, the hermeneutical light guiding theological interpretations and constructions is some philosophical or scientific idea.<sup>89</sup> In Biblical Adventism, however,

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<sup>88</sup> On the role of biblical theology in theological deconstruction, see Fernando Canale, “Deconstrucción y teología: Una propuesta metodológica,” *Davar/Logos* 1/1 (2002): 3–26.

<sup>89</sup> For instance, consider the purpose of the scholastic method of theology. “When the dogmatic material with the help of the historical method has been derived from its sources, another momentous task awaits the theologian: the philosophical appreciation, the speculative examination and elucidation of the material brought to light. This is the purpose of the “scholastic” method from which “scholastic theology” takes its name. (J. Pohle, “Dogmatic Theology,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (Online Edition, 1912). This “philosophical appreciation” of the material (data) brought to light corresponds to the hermeneutical vision or role the Sanctuary doctrine plays in Biblical Adventism.

### CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM

the hermeneutical light guiding biblical and systematic theologies in their interpretations and constructions flows from the Sanctuary doctrine.<sup>90</sup>

Let us consider briefly an example of the way in which the Sanctuary doctrine functions as hermeneutical vision guiding the interpretation of Scripture and the construction of Christian teachings. When we read Scripture with the ontological aim of systematic theology, we attempt to understand the Sanctuary doctrine as a reality.<sup>91</sup> As early Adventists studied the biblical doctrine of the Sanctuary, they understood its heavenly reality historically. This broadly departed from classical and modern readings that understood heavenly realities as timeless and spiritual.<sup>92</sup> The historical temporal reality of the heavenly Sanctuary played a decisive hermeneutical role in understanding Daniel 8:14. After the death of Christ, the Old Testament Sanctuary met its antitype. Hebrews and Revelation show that after Christ's resurrection, God's redemptive actions flow from the heavenly Sanctuary. Thus, it became obvious to Adventists that the purification of the Sanctuary ontologically referred not to a spiritual reality already contained in God's eternal being or his death on the cross, but to a new redemptive historical act God actually performed in favor of the saints in heaven around our year 1844. This insight had not only prophetic but also theological implications. It led Adventists to understand the doctrine of salvation as a historical process still in progress.

#### 8. Summary

During the last fifty years, Adventist theology has entered a new playground where theologians approach the study of Scripture and Christian doctrines by using carefully defined rules (methodology).<sup>93</sup> Theologians have divided the playground into disciplines. Because Adventism is strongly committed to the *sola Scriptura* principle, the scholarly discipline of biblical theology has attracted the imagination and efforts of most Adventist theologians. Soon, disagreement on exegetical methodology divided Adventist biblical scholars. Evangelical and Progressive Adventists sided with what they call "a modified version" of the historical critical method.<sup>94</sup> Biblical Adventists are implicitly

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<sup>90</sup> Norman Gulley speaks of a "metanarrative" or "worldview" as the guiding hermeneutical light of systematic theology. I will address the way the biblical metanarrative of the Great Controversy relates to the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical light in the next article.

<sup>91</sup> As we will see in our next article, the ontological referent (reality in life) of biblical thinking can be interpreted in ways that differ widely.

<sup>92</sup> For a brief introduction, see, Fernando L. Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *AUSS* 36/2 (1998): 183–206.

<sup>93</sup> We will discuss theological methodology in the next article. See also Fernando Canale, "Evolution, Theology, and Method, Part 3: Evolution and Adventist Theology." *AUSS* 42/1 (2004): 5–48.

<sup>94</sup> I am not aware of any Adventist study on exegetical methodology clarifying the nature of the "modifications" Evangelical Adventists and Progressive Adventists bring to the historical critical method. Replacing the naturalistic bias of scientific empiricism with divine transcendence and the

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

working on a methodological alternative to the historical-grammatical and historical critical methodologies Gerhard Hasel called “theological biblical” and Richard Davidson calls “historical biblical.”<sup>95</sup> As Adventist scholars further develop a comprehensive alternative to exegetical methodologies standing on the *sola Scriptura* principle, young Adventist scholars will find a better way to navigate the scholarly world and use it to unite the theology of the church and share it at the highest scholarly levels. God may use these efforts to spread the Adventist theological revolution across denominational barriers.

Exegetical methodology has limitations. First, it requires the use of presuppositions. We need to carefully study, evaluate, and select the presuppositions involved in exegetical methodology. Fundamental theology provides the tools and disciplinary space for such a task. Second, the textual nature of the data it attempts to understand also limits exegetical methodology. Because exegetical methodology is closely tied to the history of the generation of the texts, it cannot explore the history of salvation the texts uncover. Systematic theology provides the tools and disciplinary space for such a task.

The extra-biblical sources from which all biblical theologies define the conditions of exegetical methodology has left the door wide open for a new approach building from a biblical interpretation of the conditions of method. Such an approach is consistent and fully supports Biblical Adventist theology. However, biblical theology requires a center from which to bring together the vast variety of issues, histories, and teachings present in biblical texts. Exegetical scholarship has not yet agreed on what biblical motif should be the center. Hasel correctly discards all biblical motifs and chooses God as the center of biblical theology. By tying the centers of biblical and systematic theologies together, we implicitly recognize their structural disciplinary limitations and interdependence. Thus, the proper expression of the Sanctuary doctrine as hermeneutical vision of a complete and harmonious system of truth requires the contributions of new approaches to biblical and systematic theologies.

Systematic theology attempts to understand reality as it relates to God. In Biblical Adventism, systematics differs from biblical theology because of its aim. While the aim of the former is ontological (nature and life as they relate to God), the latter is textual. Biblical systematic theology explores the inner logic of biblical thinking by discovering the interrelation of events related and interpreted in Scripture. Such an ambitious task requires the hermeneutical guide of broad hermeneutical presuppositions about reality Gulley groups under the “metanarrative” and “worldview” labels. The task of systematic theology reveals the presence and hermeneutical guidance of broad and far-reaching ideas about reality (hermeneutical conditions of theological method) working throughout all

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inspiration of Scripture, as Gladson suggests, does not modify the historical critical method, but it shows the reasons why his application does not contradict classical and Protestant systems of theology.

<sup>95</sup> See above, footnote 37.

### *CANALE: FROM VISION TO SYSTEM*

traditions and schools of theology. Christian scholarly tradition has interpreted the far-reaching ideas it uses as hermeneutical light from philosophical and scientific ontologies. From the perspective these broad ideas open to view, Christian theologians have advanced their interpretations of Scripture and constructed the teachings of Christianity. Biblical Adventism interprets the same far-reaching ideas from Scripture. From this foundational level, the Sanctuary doctrine becomes the hermeneutical light guiding in the interpretation of these far-reaching ideas (hermeneutical conditions of theological method) and in the understanding of the complete and harmonious system of Christian theology.

While the hermeneutical role of the Sanctuary vision of early Adventist pioneers finds its scholarly home in fundamental theology, the complete system of truth connected and harmonious finds its scholarly home in systematic theology. As we suggested in passing, the same hermeneutical vision also operates, though in a more implicit than explicit way, in biblical theology. We will consider the role of the Sanctuary doctrine in fundamental theology in our next article of this series.

### **9. Conclusion**

Our brief review of the basic scholarly disciplines involved in the task of doing Christian theology at the academic level of the university allows us to answer partially the questions that framed our search.

Evangelical Adventists and Progressive Adventists are not correct in their view that scholarly honesty requires the adoption of a universally accepted methodology, tradition, and science. Because method involves conditions we can interpret in different ways, Adventist scholars do not need to consider academic and traditional approaches to theology binding. On the contrary, Adventist commitment to the *sola-tota Scriptura* principle requires a departure from the traditional multiple sources of theology matrix and the hermeneutical guide drawn from philosophical and scientific ontologies. Biblical Adventists are not compelled to follow the lead of Evangelical and Progressive Adventists to be intellectually honest. They need, however, to give close attention to methodological, traditional, philosophical, and scientific questions to ground, formulate, and explain their theological positions in the wider world of scholarship.

Biblical Adventism can be “intellectually honest” while doing theology from the hermeneutical light beaming from the Sanctuary doctrine and the historicist interpretation of prophecy, as the pioneers did. This requires extensive scholarly work that Adventism has not yet produced. To see the complete system of theology and truth the pioneers saw at the academic level of scholarly research, Adventism needs to develop its own scholarly approaches to fundamental, biblical, and systematic theologies. Biblical theology has the tools to understand the biblical text. Systematic theology has the tools to discover and formulate the biblical system of truth. Fundamental theology has the tools to discover and formulate the hermeneutical vision and methodological conditions

*JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY*

biblical and systematic theologies assume. Paramount among these tools is the hermeneutical light of the Sanctuary doctrine. Contemporary Adventists need to incorporate it in the hermeneutical conditions of theological method. The formulation of an Adventist approach to biblical and systematic theologies, then, calls for groundbreaking scholarly work in these areas. From this hermeneutical vision, Adventism will be able to see the complete and harmonious system of biblical truth and formulate it as a viable scholarly alternative. We will turn our attention to fundamental theology in our next article of this series.

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