

# Biblical Errancy And Inerrancy

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## Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The last newsletter covered the first part of the chapter on “Biblical Errancy and Inerrancy,” taken from the forthcoming book on *Popular Heresies*. The comments received indicate that there is considerable interest for this subject. Some have asked me to help them reconcile their commitment to the inspiration and authority of the Bible with the inaccuracies and discrepancies which they find in some narratives. This newsletter proposes a possible resolution to some of these problems by recognizing the divine and human elements in the composition of the Bible.

Historically the Seventh-day Adventist church has rejected those heretical positions that undermine the authority of the Bible by making it either too-human or too-divine. Instead, the Adventist church has maintained a balanced view of the Bible by acknowledging both its divine and human character. Much of the credit is due to the prophetic guidance of Ellen White who taught that the Bible is the product of the mysterious blending of divine and human participation. The source is divine, the writers are human, and the writings contain divine thoughts in human language.

The validity and relevance of the balanced Adventist position on the inspiration and authority of the Bible becomes clear as we consider first some recent developments in the introductory part of this newsletter, and then the major arguments advanced by inerrantists. Two recent developments deserve our attention because they relate to the question of Biblical authority. The first is the Episcopalian election of their first openly homosexual man as their next bishop in New Hampshire. The second is the attempt of Harold Camping, Founder and President of the popular Family Radio program, to make Sunday the Christian Sabbath by appealing to the inerrancy of the original text of the New Testament

## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH ELECTS ITS FIRST GAY BISHOP

At the 74th General convention of the Episcopal Church held in the Minneapolis Convention Center, Rev. V. Gene Robinson, 56, an openly homosexual man, was elected Bishop of New Hampshire on Saturday August 9, 2003. The nomination is subject to confirmation next month by the church's National Convention. At the same meeting Episcopalian church leaders affirmed that same-sex blessing ceremonies are “an acceptable practice in the church.”

In a profile posted on the Diocese of New Hampshire Website — [www.nhepiscopal.org](http://www.nhepiscopal.org) — Mr. Robinson describes the procedure he followed in divorcing his wife in 1986. He and his wife returned to the church where their marriage began. “In the context of the Eucharist, [we] released each other from our wedding vows, asked each other's forgiveness, cried a lot, pledged ourselves to the joint raising of our children, and shared the body and blood of Christ.”

Robinson's attempt to sanction the termination of his marriage relationship, by releasing himself and his wife from their wedding vows through a Lord's Supper ceremony, shows his total disregard for both the sacredness of the Lord's Supper and sanctity of marriage. How could Robinson in good faith expect Christ to bless the dissolution of his marriage, while violating His injunction: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mat 19:6)? To use a sacred ceremony to legitimize

the breaking up of his marriage covenant, shows disrespect for both the sacredness of the Lord's Supper and of the sanctity of marriage.

### **Can God be Honored by Committed Same-Sex Relations?**

For the past 13 years Robinson has lived with his partner Mark Andrews. The Rev. Sam Candler, pastor of the Cathedral of St. Philip in Buckhead, argued that Robinson's 13-year relationship with his partner shows that same-sex couples can make sacred commitments that honor God. One wonders how can God be honored by a homosexual relationship that has lasted 13 years, when He explicitly forbids such relationships in the first place. "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Lev 18:22). If God can be honored by a same-sex relationship that has lasted for 13 years, then why did He call for the death penalty for those involved in such relationships? "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them" (Lev 20:13).

One wonders, how can church leaders who are called upon to teach the moral principles that God has revealed, practice and justify a perverted gay-lifestyle that the Lord calls "an abomination" (Lev 18:22; 20:13) and "shameless" (Rom 1:27)? How can a bishop legitimize his living with a male partner when the Bible explicitly teaches that a man aspiring to the office of bishop, "must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, . . . He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church?" (1 Tim 3:1-5)?

The answer to these questions is to be found in the understanding of Biblical authority—the very topic we address in this newsletter. Liberal church leaders explain away those Bible teachings unacceptable to them. For example, in an interview with CNN anchor Anderson Cooper, Gene Anderson said: "what we are talking today about faithful, monogamous, lifelong intentioned relationships between people of the same sex is just simply not addressed in Scripture. The references . . . are to people who are thought to be heterosexually oriented but are acting in homosexual [ways], which is against their nature. The whole [issue] of sexual orientation is only about 100 years old."

Anderson's attempt to explain away the biblical condemnation of homosexuality by claiming that the Bible does not address same-sex committed relationships, ignores two important points. First, the Bible does not address same-sex relationships simply because they violate God's creational design for human relationship.

### **Same-sex Relations Violate God's Creational Plan**

Jesus asked the Pharisees, "Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?'" (Mat 19: 4-5; cf. Mark 10:6-8). By appealing to "the beginning" (Mat 19:8; Mark 10:6), Christ taught that all human beings and cultures are called to live according to the unchangeable standard instituted at creation. That standard is that only "male and female" can legitimately "cleave" to one another and become "one flesh." If God intended same-sex relationships to exist, He would have created and united in Holy Matrimony, not only Adam and Eve, but also Adam and Erik.

Same-sex intimate relationships are condemned in the Bible simply because they are *unnatural* relationships, motivated by "dishonorable passions" (Rom 1:26). With compelling clarity Paul describes this perversion from natural to unnatural relations. "Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error." (Rom 1:26-27).

The case of Gene Anderson exemplifies what Paul is talking about. After being lawfully married for 17 years and procreated two daughters, he decided to give up his natural relation with his wife in order to enter into an unnatural relation with his partner Mark Andrews. No matter what some Episcopal church leaders might say, the fact remains that the apostle characterizes such a relationship as a “shameless act” that dishonors God.

Second, Anderson’s contention that the question of same-sex relations is not addressed in the Bible because “the whole [issue] of sexual orientation is only about 100 years old,” is discredited by the fact that same-sex relations were well-known in the ancient world. A well-known example is Sodom and Gomorrah, which “acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust . . . [they] serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire” (Jude 7).

The reason Bible writers do not make today’s “enlightened” distinction between same-sex acts and same-sex committed relationship, is not because of their ignorance, but simply because they recognized that there is no biblical basis for such a distinction. Same-sex is evil and sinful whether done with different partners or with the same partner, simply because it violates God’s intended function for sex to unite a man and a woman into a “one flesh” relationship.

### **Some People are Born Gay**

A popular argument used to justify homosexual lifestyle is that some people are born gay and will always remain gay. It is not their fault for being gay, because they were genetically programmed to live such a lifestyle. The same argument is often used for alcoholics and addiction to tobacco or drugs.

There is no question that we are born with certain predispositions toward sinful practices (Ps 51:5; 143:2; cf. 14:3; 1 Prov 20:9; Rom 3:23; 7:14-24; 1 John 1:8). But does the universally inherited human sinfulness make sinful actions morally acceptable? The Good News of the Gospel is that God gives us power to overcome both *inherited* and *cultivated* sinful tendencies. We may be tempted by inherited sinful inclinations, but unless we yield to them, they no longer reflect our identity. “If anyone be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).

Paul offers this assurance, saying: “Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor *homosexual* offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And that is what some of you were [past tense]. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God*” (1 Cor 6:9-11 NIV, emphasis supplied). It is a reassuring promise that God’s grace can wash and clean homosexuals.

On a similar vein Ellen White writes: “God has not left us to battle with evil in our own finite strength. *Whatever may be our inherited or cultivated tendencies to wrong, we can overcome through the power that He is ready to impart*” (*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 175, 176). Again, “Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome *all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil*, and to impress His own character upon His church” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 671).

### **Led by the Spirit, not by Scripture!**

When asked by CNN anchor Cooper, how he relates to church members who opposed on biblical grounds his election to the office of bishop, Robinson replied: “We have walked [down] this road before when we were considering the ordination of women and women to be bishops. You can find Scripture against that as well. And so any time you are changing the tradition of the church and feeling that the Spirit is moving you into a

new, different direction, that is a tough thing for people. And I can understand that. None of us like change. But I do believe this is of the Spirit.”

Robinson’s answer reveals that his normative authority for deciding the ordination of women and of gay priests, is not Scripture but the alleged leading of the Spirit. He concedes that Scripture is against both practices, but this is not a problem for him because for him the leading of the Spirit overrides any teachings of the Bible. Can this be true? If the Bible was written by holy men of God who were “moved by the Holy Spirit” (1 Pet 1:21), how can the same Spirit inspire some church leaders today to disregard previously revealed biblical truths? Is the Holy Spirit culturally conditioned, that is, changes His view according to societal trends? Absolutely not! Biblical truths are unchangeable because they have been revealed by God who is “the same yesterday and today and or ever” (Heb 13:8).

Under girding the attempts of liberals church leaders like Robinson to reinterpret the biblical teachings on homosexuality, is the liberal view of biblical inspiration and authority. While they continue to work with the Bible as a religious document, they reject the normative authority of the Bible for defining beliefs and practices. Their ultimate authority is the “spirit of rebellion” that inspires them, rather than the Holy Spirit that inspired Bible writers.

From a historical perspective the recent decisions of the Episcopal church, which is part of the Anglican (Church of England) communion, reflect the political roots of the church itself. It is well to remember that the roots of the Church of England go back to struggle for supremacy between the papacy and the Tudor kings. The refusal of Pope Clement VII to dissolve Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon in order for him to marry Anne Boleyn, prompted the King to pressure the Parliament to transfer the headship of the Church of England from the Pope to himself. What this means is that the Church of England was born out of political struggles for supremacy—not out of the doctrinal reformation of the Lutheran and Calvinistic movements. The political origin of the Episcopal/Anglican church, facilitates biblical compromises in such areas as the ordination of women and gay/lesbians.

Incidentally, in 1985 when I wrote *Women in the Church*, I predicted that by rejecting of the functional role distinctions between men and women, the women ordination movement was paving the way for the ordination of gay and lesbian church leaders. My critics accused me at that time of using scare-crow tactics. The truth is that I was not trying to be scaring, but realistic. I simply reasoned that if the biblical functional role distinctions no longer matter, why should the sexual distinctions matter? Time has shown this reasoning to be correct. The increasing number of gay and lesbian men and women being ordained in various churches as priest, pastors, and bishops, should serve as a wake up call for the Adventist church. It should alert us to the danger of departing from the creational design for the well-functioning of the home and church.

## FRENCH EDITION OF *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*

In the previous two newsletters I reported on the recent Dutch edition of *From Sabbath to Sunday—Van Sjabbat naar Zondag*. Providentially the Holy Spirit impressed several Dutch Reformed Christians to translate, edit, and publish the book. In the process all of them became Sabbathkeepers. Two articles appeared in the Dutch newspaper *TROUW* on July 5, 2003, indicating that one quarter of the independent evangelical churches in the Netherlands are now in the process of moving their church services from Sunday to Saturday. The book is contributing to this development.

In this newsletter I wish to share the providential story of the French edition of *From Sabbath to Sunday—Du Sabbat au Dimanche*. The new edition came off the press on July 10, 2003, with a very attractive cover depicting the decalogue with the chiseling of the Fourth Commandment.

The story of *Du Sabbat au Dimanche* is fascinating. A Belgian Benedictine scholar, Ferdinand Poswick, who serves as Director of the Center for Biblical Information at the Abbey of Maredsous in Belgium, ordered a copy of *From Sabbath to Sunday* and read it with great interest. He was impressed by the compelling documents and arguments indicating the continuity, validity, and value of the Sabbath for our Christian life today. Poswick decided to contact me during his trip to America. He never anticipated that we would meet in Dallas at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

Poswick shared with me his great desire to translate and publish *From Sabbath to Sunday* into French, if I would grant him permission. He felt that the book could contribute to the recovery of the biblical values of the Sabbath for our tension-filled and restless society. I was delighted to grant him permission, forfeiting royalties in view of the cost of translation.

The translation was done by another Benedictine scholar, Dominique Sebire, who worked for almost two years on this project under Poswick's supervision. Together they produced a superb French translation. Poswick and Sebire did all their work as a labor of love, without receiving a cent of compensation. They were inspired by the desire to help Christians rediscover the blessings of the biblical Sabbath for today. They verbalize their desire in the "Presentation" of the book, where they encourage readers to "reexamine afresh" the values of the Sabbath which can bring spiritual enrichment to our Christian life today.

Surprisingly, in the "Presentation" Poswick admits that Jesus and Paul did not abolish the Sabbath. Alluding to my dissertation, he acknowledges that the change was motivated by the need for Christians to separate from the Jews and to identify themselves with the rhythms and customs of the Romans, at a time when Sabbathkeeping was outlawed in the Roman empire. Then Poswick makes this daring statement: "Should we not prefer the sincere and truthful celebration of the Sabbath unto God to the pharisaism of a paganized Sunday?" He closes his presentation by urging Christians to "reexamine afresh" the blessings to be found in the celebration of the Sabbath.

It is with a deep sense of gratitude to God that I am pleased to offer *Du Sabbat au Dimanche* to our French-speaking members and Christian in general. The book has the distinction of having both the reproduction of the Catholic *imprimatur-approval* and the recommendation of the Benedictine translators. This makes it possible, especially for Catholics, to read about the Sabbath with a more open and receptive mind.

The demand for *Du Sabbat au Dimanche* has surpassed my fondest expectations. Most of the 4500 copies that came off the press a month ago, are already sold out. It may become necessary to reprint the book immediately. If you or your church needs copies of *Du Sabbat au Dimanche*, feel free to contact us immediately by phone (269-471-2915) or by email [sbacchiocchi@qtm.net](mailto:sbacchiocchi@qtm.net) You can order a case of 30 copies for

only \$7.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. Thank you for informing French-speaking fellow-believers and friends about this providential book.

## HAROLD CAMPING: SUNDAY: THE SABBATH?

In recent years several deceptive attempts have been made to legitimize Sunday as the Biblical Sabbath. For example, in his Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini—The Lord's Day*, Pope John Paul II promotes Sunday observance as a moral imperative rooted in the Fourth Commandment. An extensive analysis of this important document is found in chapter 1 of *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, entitled "Pope John Paul II and the Sabbath."

European calendars perpetrate the deception of the Sunday/Sabbath by arranging the days of the week horizontally with Monday as the first day and Sunday as the seventh day. Such calendars are now beginning to appear in the USA as well. The deceptive intent is to make people believe that Sunday is the biblical seventh-day Sabbath that Christians must observe.

The most curious and irrational attempt to defend Sunday as the New Testament Sabbath, is most likely that of Harold Camping, the President and Founder of Family radio—an international radio/TV ministry with powerful stations in various parts of the world. His booklet *Sunday: The Sabbath?* and his radio/TV talks influence countless Christians in many parts of the world.

For many years Camping has been teaching that the Sunday resurrection of Christ marks the end of the Jewish Sabbathkeeping and the beginning of Sunday as the new Christian Sabbath. What is unusual about Camping is the way he defends his position by twisting the accounts of Christ's resurrection as found in Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:1,2, and John 20:1. To my knowledge not a single Sundaykeeping scholar supports his arbitrary interpretation of these texts. Yet, his views are widely accepted by an increasing number of Christians and are troubling some Adventists as well.

A reason for Camping's popularity is his appeal to the inerrancy of the Bible. He writes: "In its original autographs, or manuscripts, the Bible is the infallible Word of God. It is completely inerrant. It has no errors of any kind whatsoever. This is so because the original manuscripts were God-breathed" (p. 1). Inerrancy for Camping means that God controls such details as the plural or singular use of the word "Sabbath."

"If God had wanted it [Sabbath] in the plural, He would have written in the plural. As we saw earlier, God insists in this principle in Galatians 3:16 where God speaks of a verse in the Bible where the singular word 'seed' appears. He makes the emphasis that it is the singular word 'seed,' not the plural word 'seeds'" (p. 3)

Inerrancy for Camping means that God dictated whether a word should be plural or singular. If that were true then the language of the Bible should be that of the Holy Spirit who dictated every word to the writers. Such a notion is discredited by the difference in style, vocabulary, and sentence construction among the various books of the Bible. The grammar of the Bible is human, not divine. This is exemplified by the very example of Galatians 3:16 used by Camping.

In Galatians 3:16 Paul argues that God's promises to Abraham's seed refers to Christ, because the word "seed" is singular, not plural. The fact is that in Greek the word for seed-*sperma*, is a collective word used with both singular and plural meanings. Paul himself uses the same word *sperma* few verses later in a plural way when he speaks of believers as "Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29). The weak Pauline argument hardly supports Camping's contention that "God speaks of a verse in the Bible where the singular word 'seed' appears" (p. 3).

God cannot be blamed for Paul's faulty grammatical argument. This point will be clarified shortly in our study of the inerrancy's arguments. We will see that people like Camping argue for inerrancy to justify their doctrinal beliefs. Ultimately their concern is to justify the validity of their teachings, rather than to prove that the Bible is absolutely errors-free.

During the past 10 years I have received no less than 50 copies of Camping's booklet, *Sunday: The Sabbath?* as well as hundreds of messages from Adventists confused by its teachings. Last Sabbath, August 16, 2003, an Adventist brother stood up holding a copy of Camping's booklet at a rally in Brooklyn, NY. He asked me if I have responded to his arguments. I reassured him that I would do it in this newsletter.

The reason I have ignored Camping during the past 10 years, is simply because his interpretation of Bible texts is so irrational that hardly deserves a scholarly analysis. What has convinced me to post this response at this time, is the increasing number of fellow Adventists who have become confused by Camping's teachings. Just this past week a sister appealed to me for help, saying: "While I don't agree with what Camping says, it's hard for me to explain why. I know some Adventists who do agree with this study of the Sabbath, but I can't explain to them why this man is wrong because I am not a student of the Greek or the Hebrew languages. Can you help us out? Thanks." The following analysis is designed to provide such a help.

### **Harold Camping's Teachings**

Simply stated, Camping attempts to prove, primarily on the basis of Matthew 28:1 and related texts (Mark 16:1-2; John 20:1), that Christ's resurrection on Sunday marks the termination of the Old Testament Sabbath and the inauguration of Sunday as the new Christian Sabbath. He reaches this conclusion by twisting the meaning of these texts.

Matthew 28:1 reads: "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first *day* of the week, came Mary Madalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." Camping maintains that this KJV translation, as well as all the modern translations, are wrong. Why? Because allegedly they misinterpret the literal meaning of the plural "Sabbaths," which occurs twice in the Greek text. In his view the text should be translated as follows: "In the end of Sabbaths [plural], at the dawning of the first of the Sabbaths [not 'week']" (pp. 4-5).

On the basis of this translation, Camping concludes that "the phrase 'In the end of the Sabbaths' could be expanded to read, 'Now that the era of the Old Testament Sabbaths has come to an end . . .'" (p. 8). Similarly, he interprets the phrase "as it began to dawn toward the first of the Sabbath," to mean: "God has a new era of Sabbaths. It is Sunday morning; it is the dawning of a new era of Sabbaths. . . . It is not just one Sabbath that is beginning. God is teaching that there is a whole series of Sabbath to come. God is saying, by His own definition, that these new Sabbaths are each and every Sunday" (p. 9).

According to Camping, Christians have failed to see his interpretation of the text, because translators made two mistakes in translating the text. First, they translated the first word "Sabbaths," which is plural as singular: "In the end of the Sabbath." According to Camping the phrase should read "In the end of Sabbaths [plural]," that is, the end of the OT Sabbaths.

The second mistake is that they translated the second "Sabbaths" [plural] as singular "week." According to Camping the phrase should read: "at the dawning on toward the first of the Sabbaths— not 'week'" (pp.4-5). He interprets this to mean the inauguration of Sunday as the new Christian Sabbath. Let us now see who is mistaken, Camping or the translators.

### **FIVE MAJOR FLAWS IN CAMPING'S ARGUMENTS**

There are five major flaws in Camping's arguments which destroy the validity of his conclusions. Let us briefly examine them.

First, Camping interprets two *temporal* statements regarding the time of Christ's Resurrection, namely, "at the end of the Sabbath" and "as it began to dawn toward the

first day of the week,” to be *theological* pronouncements about the termination of the OT Sabbath and the inauguration of Sunday as the new Christian Sabbath.

Such an arbitrary interpretation reflects the lack of basic common sense. No sensible Bible student would consider turning a *temporal* statement regarding the time of Christ’s Resurrection, into a *theological* pronouncement regarding the termination of Sabbathkeeping and inauguration of Sundaykeeping. It is evident that Camping lacks the capacity to reason logically. He needs to learn to respect the nature of a passage. To turn a temporal statement into a theological pronouncement, means to violate the intended meaning of the passage.

Second, Camping ignores that in Greek the plural “Sabbaths—*ta sabbata*,” is often used with a singular meaning. His problem is not his ignorance. We are all ignorant in many areas. Rather, it is his unwillingness to overcome his ignorance by reading some standard lexicons and dictionaries which define the usages of the term “Sabbath.” For example, if Camping had taken time to read the 35 pages scholarly study on the use of “*Sabbaton*—Sabbath,” found in volume 7 of *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (which is the most respected word study of the NT), he would have learned that “the plural *ta sabbata* [sabbaths] can have three meanings: 1. several Sabbaths . . . , 2. one Sabbath (in spite of the plural) . . . 3. the whole week as in Hebrew usage” (p. 7). Each of these meanings is amply documented in the article. For the sake of brevity I am not burdening the reader with the documentation.

Had Camping taken time to learn the simple fact that the plural form of “Sabbaths” is often used in Greek with the singular meaning of a single Sabbath, he would not have made the blunder of interpreting the plural “Sabbaths” as a theological pronouncement about the termination of the OT Sabbath and inauguration on the NT Sabbaths. He would have recognized that the text speaks only about the time of the Resurrection, namely, at the end of the Sabbath and toward the dawning of the first day of the week—and not about the change from Sabbath to Sunday. The problem is not the faulty modern translation, but Camping’s ignorance of how the term “Sabbaths” was currently used.

Third, Camping ignores a basic fact that in Greek as in Hebrew the plural term “Sabbaths—*ta sabbata*” was commonly used to designate the week as a whole. The reason is that the days of the week were numbered with reference to the Sabbath. When the Romans adopted from the Jewish seven days week just before the beginning of the Christian era, they named each day of the week after a planetary god. This is how we got our planetary week. But the Jews and the early Christians numbered the days with reference to the Sabbath. Thus, Matthew 28:1 correctly refers to Sunday as “the first of Sabbaths—*mia sabbaton*.” This was the common designation of Sunday.

It is unfortunate that Camping never took time to learn this well-known usage of the term “Sabbath” to designate the week as a whole as well as the actual days of the week. Had he learned this simple fact, he would not have accused modern translators of arbitrarily changing the phrase “the first of the Sabbaths” into “the first day of the week” (p. 5). The translators knew what they were doing. It is Camping who does not know what he is writing.

A good example of Camping’s ignorance is this statement: “We find no Biblical justification for translating the Greek work ‘Sabbath’ as ‘week’ (p. 5). The fact is that there are numerous Biblical examples of the use of the term “Sabbath—*sabbaton*” to designate the week. The *Young’s Analytical Concordance of the Bible* lists 9 of them (p. 1041). One of them is Luke 18:12, where the Pharisee boasts, saying: “I fast twice a week (in Greek *sabbaton*).” By rejecting the common use of the term “Sabbath” to designate the “week,” Camping argues that “Luke 18:12 should be translated, ‘I fast twice in the Sabbath’” (p. 6).

This arbitrary translation is discredited, not only by the common use of the term Sabbath to designate the week, but also the fact that no fasting was ever allowed by the

Pharisees on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a day of rejoicing and no fasting or mourning occurred on that day. Eventually, Sabbath fasting was introduced by the Bishop of Rome as a method to lead Christians away from Sabbathkeeping into Sundaykeeping. But this is a later development, totally unrelated to the Pharisees' practice of fasting twice a week. According to *Didache* 8:1—an early Christian document dated in the last part of the first century—the Pharisees fasted on Monday and Thursday.

A fourth fact ignored by Camping is the continuity of Sabbathkeeping, especially among Jewish-Christians. His assumption that the event of Christ's Resurrection, as reported in the Gospels, marks the termination of the OT Sabbath and the inauguration of Sunday as the new Christian Sabbath, is discredited by the continuity of Sabbathkeeping, especially among the direct descendants of the Jerusalem. (For documentation, see *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pp. 156-157). How could Matthew, writing to Jewish-Christian readers, say that Christ's Resurrection terminated the OT Sabbath and inaugurated Sunday as the NT Sabbath, when these were still "zealous in the observance of the law" (Acts 21:20) in general and of the Sabbath in particular?

A fifth and final point ignored by Camping, is the lack of any liturgical significance attached to the day of Christ's Resurrection in the NT. If Christ wanted to make the Day of His Resurrection a memorial day to be celebrated on the weekly-Sunday and the annual Easter-Sunday, wouldn't He have done something about it? Wouldn't He have invited the women first and the disciples later to come apart to celebrate His Resurrection?

Note that biblical institutions such as the Sabbath, Baptism, the Lord's Supper, all trace their origin to a divine act that established them. But neither Christ or the apostles made any attempt to establish a Sunday celebration of the Resurrection. The reason is simple. The Resurrection was seen as an *existential* reality to be celebrated by living victoriously by the power of the risen Savior, not a *liturgical* practice to be observed on Sunday or Easter-Sunday.

Paul prays that he may know "the power of the resurrection" (Phil 3:10), but he never mention the day of the resurrection. In fact Sunday is never called "Day of the Resurrection" in the NT nor even in the early patristic literature. The first usage of the phrase appears in the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea (about A. D. 325).

## **Conclusion**

It has been a unpleasant task to expose Harold Camping's irrational and unfounded interpretations. The necessity was laid upon me by the influence of his teachings which reach people around the world through his radio/TV ministry and publications. I would like to believe that Camping is sincere, but sincerely wrong. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. On my part I am prepared to help him by sending him, not only a copy of this response, but also a package of my Sabbath books. If he responds, I will gladly share the information with you.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS AT THE END OF THIS NEWSLETTER**

At the end of this newsletter you will find the following important announcements:

1) The date and location of my weekend seminars for August and September 2003.

2) Information on how your church can purchase a state-of-the art HITACHI LCD VIDEO PROJECTORS at over 65% discount on the Factory Suggested Retail price. HITACHI has agreed to offer their line of outstanding LCD projectors to our Adventist churches and institutions at an incredible discount.

3) A special offer on the newly recorded PowerPoint SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR in VIDEO tapes and DVD disks. For the first time the whole seminar consisting of 8 one-hour lectures is offered for \$50.00, instead of the regular price of \$120.00

## **BIBLICAL ERRANCY AND INERRANCY – Part 2**

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The question of the inspiration and authority of the Bible rarely troubled Christians until a century ago. They looked upon the Bible as the *source* of their belief. They accepted the authority of the Bible, without defining it in terms of inerrancy. None of the major Catholic or Protestant creeds discuss the notion of biblical inerrancy. It is only beginning from the nineteenth century that this question has dominated the religious scene.

A major contributory factor has been the negative impact of liberal criticism which, as noted earlier, reduced the Bible to a collection of religious documents filled with textual difficulties and errors. This critical movement has led many Christians to abandon their commitment to the infallibility of the Bible. In order to defend the traditional Christian view of the inspiration and authority of the Bible against the attacks of liberal critics, conservative Christians developed what has become known as the “Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy.”

Defining the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is not easy, because it comes in a variety of forms. David Dockery, a Southern Baptist conservative scholar, has identified nine different types, which range from mechanical dictation to functional inerrancy. The latter maintains that “the Bible *inerrantly* accomplishes its purpose. . . . The presence of errors in no way militates against the functional purpose or authority of the Bible.”<sup>1</sup> According to this position, the Bible is without errors in its function to reveal God’s plan for our eternal salvation, not in the information it offers on various aspects of life.

**Absolute Inerrancy.** For the purpose of our study we will limit the distinction to the two most common views of inerrancy, known as “absolute” and “limited” inerrancy. Dockery provides a fine definition of “absolute inerrancy” from the perspective of an advocate: “The Bible in its original autographs, properly interpreted, will be found to be truthful and faithful in all that it affirms concerning all areas of life, faith, and practice.”<sup>2</sup>

A similar definition was formulated by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy which was formed to defend “inerrancy.” In 1978, the Council released its famous Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, which states: “We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit.”<sup>3</sup> The statement continues explaining that inerrancy is not “limited to spiritual, religious, or redemptive themes, exclusive of assertions in the field of history and science.” In other words, absolute inerrantists believe, as stated by Harold Lindsell—one of its most outspoken advocates—that “The Bible does not contain error of any kind,” whether it speaks on history, geography, astronomy, chronology, science, or any area whatsoever.<sup>4</sup>

The acceptance of this position is seen by many evangelicals as a watershed of orthodoxy. They equate the authority of the Bible with its inerrancy, because they assume that unless the Bible can be shown to be without error in non-religious matters, then it cannot be trusted in the more important religious areas. They go as far as claiming that Christians cannot be legitimately be considered evangelical unless they believe in the absolute inerrancy of the Bible. The denial of such a belief is supposed to lead to the rejection of other evangelical doctrines and to the doom for any denomination or Christian organization.

**Limited Errancy.** Advocates of limited inerrancy object to conditioning the authority of the Bible to its inerrancy. They restrict the accuracy of the Bible only to matters of salvation and ethics. They believe that divine inspiration did not prevent Bible writers from making “errors” of historical or scientific nature, since these do not affect our salvation. For them the Bible is not inerrant in all that it says, but it is infallible in all that it teaches regarding faith and practice.

A good example of this position is Stephen T. Davis. In his influential book *The Debate about the Bible: Inerrancy versus Infallibility*, Davis writes: "The Bible is *inerrant* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any topic whatsoever. The Bible is *infallible* if and only if it makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice. In these senses, I personally hold that the Bible is infallible but not inerrant."<sup>5</sup> Again Davis states: "The Bible is infallible, but not inerrant. That is, there are historical and scientific errors in the Bible, but I have found none on matters of faith and practice."<sup>6</sup>

## A Brief History of the Inerrancy Debate

Before examining some of the problems of the absolute inerrancy position, it is helpful to mention briefly its history. Most historians trace the origin of the inerrancy debate among evangelical to the late nineteenth century, when battles took place between liberal critics and fundamentalists. The so-called Princeton divines, A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, were most influential in championing the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Their "Princeton theology" became an haven sought by all sorts of fundamentalists who were facing the threats of evolutionism and biblical criticism.<sup>7</sup>

The inerrancy position developed by the Princeton divines assumes that the Bible must be inerrant if it is in a real sense the "Word of God." Simply stated, their reasoning is that if God is perfect, the Bible must be perfect (inerrant) because it is the Word of God. This absolute view of inspiration, despite protests to the contrary, results in a "dictation" view of inspiration which minimizes the human factor. This view was opposed by James Orr and G. C. Berkouwer, both of whom defended the limited inerrancy view.

***The Battle for the Bible.*** The debate began to heat up again the 1960s and reached a boiling point with the publication of Harold Lindell's *The Battle for the Bible* in 1976. In his book Lindell documents the alleged negative impact of the limited inerrancy view in evangelical churches and seminaries. He names the leading offenders and defends vigorously absolute inerrancy as a cardinal doctrine of evangelical churches.

The reactions from both sides were intense. Fuller Theological Seminary defended its limited inerrancy position both in a special alumni newsletter and in a symposium of essays edited by Jack Rogers, a Fuller professor.<sup>8</sup> At the same time the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy was formed to defend the absolute inerrancy position as expressed in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

The following year Lindell wrote his sequel, *The Bible in the Balance*, in which he responds to the criticism generated by his previous book. During the same year Jack Rogers and Donald McKim provoked a firestorm from the inerrantist camp by publishing *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: A Historical Approach*. In this book they argue that the belief in absolute inerrancy is new and foreign to historic Christianity.

Since 1980 eminent evangelicals have joined the inerrancy debate. Among those who have defended the absolute inerrancy view are Carl F. H. Henry, Earl D. Radmacher, James I. Packer, John Warwick Montgomery, Francis Schaeffer, James M. Boice, E. J. Young, Norman L. Geisler, and Gleason L. Archer. Those on the side of limited inerrancy include Paul Jewett, Jack Rogers, Donald McKim, Daniel Fuller, William S. LaSor, George Eldon Ladd, Robert Mounce, F. F. Bruce, and Charles Kraft.

The debate has somewhat subsided, but evangelicals remain deeply divided in two camps: absolute inerrantists versus limited errantists. It appears that what is fueling the inerrancy debate and causing Christian people to fight one another over this question, is a vested interest in defending denominational interpretations of key doctrines. We shall see that the ultimate question is the interpretation of Scripture, rather than its inerrancy.

## Arguments for Inerrancy

Four major arguments are usually presented by the defenders of absolute inerrancy. The first is known as the Biblical argument. It maintains that the Bible implicitly teaches its inerrancy by claiming to be inspired. It is assumed that to be truly inspired the Bible must be inerrant. The second may be called the historical argument. It claims that most of the Church Fathers, including the Reformers, believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. Thus, this belief has been the normative view of the church.

The third is known as the epistemological argument. Essentially it states that if even one of the Bible's statements is in error, then any other statement becomes suspect. The fourth argument may be described as the slippery-slope argument. It holds that surrendering inerrancy is a slippery-slope that can eventually lead to the surrender of all orthodox doctrines. Let us briefly examine each of these arguments.

**Biblical Argument.** The Biblical argument is based on the assumption that if the Bible is inspired—God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16)—it must be inerrant, because God controlled the minds of the writers to ensure that they wrote exactly what He wanted them to write. Lindsell expresses this view clearly saying: “Once it has been established that the Scriptures are ‘breathed out by God,’ it follows axiomatically that the books of the Bible are free from error and trustworthy in every regard.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, for inerrantists, as Everett Harrison puts it “inerrancy is a natural corollary of full inspiration.”<sup>10</sup>

**Evaluation.** Is this a sound syllogism? Does inspiration presupposes absolute inerrancy, that is, a text free from inaccuracies or errors of *any* kind? The Bible testifies to its own inspiration, but not to the inerrancy of all the information it provides. Inspiration is never defined in the Bible in terms of inerrancy. Nowhere does the Bible teach its own inerrancy. One will search in vain for a biblical passage that teaches that there are no inaccurate or misleading statements in the Bible. The reason is that its writers were not apologists or systematic theologians who had to deal with the modern critical views of the Bible that question its authority.

The two classic statements on inspiration tell us that “all Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16), and “no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21). The question is: In what sense is the Bible “inspired—God-breathed” and written at the “moving” of the Holy Spirit? The Bible does not explain this mystery. What we know is that Bible writers did not passively write down what God whispered in their ears, because each of them uses his own language style and sources available. It is a known fact that many of the books of the Bible were compiled from older documents, history of kings, genealogies, and oral traditions. The fallibility of these sources is clearly reflected in the discrepancies we find in the Bible. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

There is a significant discrepancy in the result of the census ordered by David and carried out by Joab, the head of his army. According to 2 Samuel 24:9 we are told that Joab reported to David that “there were in Israel eight hundred thousand strong men, capable of bearing arms; and in Judah five hundred thousand.” But in 1 Chronicles 21:5, Joab informs David that “there were in the whole of Israel one million and one hundred thousand men capable of bearing arms; and in Judah four hundred seventy thousand men capable of bearing arms.” Obviously, there is a substantial difference between the two sets of figures. One of them is inaccurate.

Another example is the price David paid to Arauna, the Jebusite, for the property where he built an altar and offered sacrifices to stay the plague that was decimating the people. According to 2 Samuel 24:25, David paid only fifty shekels of silver for the property, but according to 1 Chronicles 21:25, David paid six hundred shekels of gold for the same property. The difference between 50 shekels of silver and 600 shekels of gold is enormous and can hardly be explained as a scribal error.

It appears the two writers used two different sources. The Holy Spirit could have overcome the problem of the errancy of the sources by whispering the correct figure in the ears of the two writers. Such method would have eliminated the presence of discrepancies such as these in the Bible. But the fact is that the Holy Spirit did not choose to suspend or suppress the human faculties of the writers to ensure absolute inerrancy. Instead, He chose to allow for inaccuracies that do not affect our faith and practice. It is unwise for anyone to tell God what kind of Bible He should have produced in order for its books to be inspired and inerrant.

We have no right to define “inspiration” according to our subjective criteria of inerrancy in order to meet the challenge of biblical criticism. Instead, we simply need to look and see what sort of Bible has been produced under the supervision (inspiration) of the Holy Spirit. An open-minded look at the Bible *does* support the claim that it is inspired and authoritative for determining our beliefs and practices, but it *does not* validate the claim that it is inerrant.

**Were the Original Autographs Inerrant?** Defenders of absolute inerrancy claim that only the original autographs were inerrant, not the existing Bible. This means that existing discrepancies and errors are supposed to be the result of transmissional errors. The original copies of the various books of the Bible were without error. It is said that they were inerrant because God inspired the Bible writers to write without error.

The appeal to the original manuscripts to explain away existing errors leaves a permanently open door of escape for inerrantists. No matter how evident an error is, they can always evade the question by arguing that it is an error of transmission, which was not present in the original manuscript. This argument, as Stephen Davis points out, “does seem intellectually dishonest, especially if there is no textual evidence that the alleged error is indeed due to a transmission problem.”<sup>11</sup>

The scientific study of the variant readings of Bible manuscripts has advanced to the point where scholars can establish with amazing accuracy the reading of the original manuscripts. Moreover, these problems are few in comparison with the whole text of the Bible and do not affect its teachings.

The inerrantists’ attempt to limit inerrancy to the original manuscripts is discredited also by the fact that Jesus, Paul, and other New Testament writers, treated the Old Testament books as inspired, though they never saw or used an original manuscript. Apparently, Paul regarded even the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament—as Scripture, for he quotes from it in Romans 4:3, adding: “What does the Scripture say?” If a writing is inspired if and only if it is inerrant, then how could Paul treat the Septuagint as “Scripture,” when it is well-known to be inaccurate in several places?

Finally, “if having an inerrant Bible is a crucial as defenders of inerrancy imply—why God didn’t somehow ensure that we today possess an inerrant text, either the Biblical autographs themselves or else flawless copies of them?”<sup>12</sup> The answer is obvious. The fact that no Christian since apostolic times has ever seen original manuscripts or flawless copies, suggests that God did not see it vital for us to have an inerrant Bible.

Our conclusion, then, is that the Bible is inspired, authoritative and normative for defining our beliefs and practices, but inspiration does not presuppose inerrancy in all the information the Bible provides.

**The Historical Argument.** Inerrantists claim that belief in the inerrancy of the Bible has been the historical and normative position of the Christian Church. For example, in his book *The Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell argues that most, if not all, of the Church Fathers and Reformers upheld in principle the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Consequently, such doctrine was not invented by nineteenth century fundamentalists, but reflects the historical position of the Christian Church.<sup>13</sup>

It must be admitted that some Church Fathers and Reformers do give the impression that they believed in absolute inerrancy. For example, Luther stated: "Scripture cannot err," and "The Scriptures have never erred."<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Calvin referred to the Scriptures as "the inerring standard," "the infallible rule of His Holy Truth," "free from every stain or defect."<sup>15</sup>

**Evaluation.** Statements such as these can lead uninformed readers to conclude that Luther and Calvin believed in biblical inerrancy. However, this conclusion fails to recognize two things. First, the Reformers speak of the inerrancy of the Bible in the context of their rejection of the Catholic Church's authority to define doctrines. For them "inerrancy" essentially meant the infallible authority of *Sola Scriptura* versus the interpretative authority claimed by the Catholic Church. In their book *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach*, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, compelling show that the contemporary notion of inerrancy was unknown to the Reformers and during much of Christian history.

Second, the Reformers' notion of inerrancy was conditioned by their doctrinal beliefs. For example, it is a known fact that Luther had little respect for such books of the Bible as James and Revelation, because they did not support his overriding teaching of justification by faith. Similarly, Calvin displays a rather cavalier attitude toward some of the difficulties in the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

To some extent this is also happening today. The primary concern of those who are arguing for absolute biblical inerrancy, claiming it to be the historical position of the Christian Church, is not so much to reinforce the normative authority of Scripture, but to validate their system of doctrines and practices. The inerrancy which they attribute to Scripture is transferred to the doctrines which they espouse. The ultimate concern of inerrantists is to prove that their doctrines are without error, because they are based on an inerrant Bible.

The problem with this strategy is that the long-running struggle to defend biblical inerrancy has not been successful in guaranteeing doctrinal uniformity. Christians equally committed to inerrancy interpret Scripture differently. For example, there are inerrantists who believe in the ordination of women and inerrantists who are opposed to it. The crucial issue is not inerrancy but interpretation.

Finally, the historical position of the Christian Church on any teaching does not guarantee its orthodoxy. Most church leaders have historically believed in the immortality of the soul, eternal torment, and Sunday sacredness, yet Biblical research has shown that these teachings are foreign to Scripture.

**The Epistemological Argument.** This argument appears in different forms. The basic idea is that unless the Bible is without error in every single statement it makes, then the trustworthiness of all its teachings becomes suspect. For the inerrantist, the presence of even one error in the Bible would result in the loss of confidence in all of its teachings. As Dan Fuller puts it, "If even one of its [Bible's] statements could be in error, the truth of any of its statements becomes questionable."<sup>17</sup>

**Evaluation.** The fundamental problem of this argument is its unproven assumption that unless every single statement of the Bible is without error, all of its teachings become suspect. To condition the trustworthiness of Bible's teachings to the absolute accuracy of its historical, geographical, or scientific details, means to impose on Bible writers modern criteria of inspiration which were foreign to them.

Nowhere do the Bible writers claim that all their statements are inerrant. The reason is that, for them, the major events or message, were more important than its circumstantial details. Two examples will serve to illustrate this point. The first is the "staff" problem. In sending out His disciples on a preaching mission, Mark tells us that Jesus allowed them to

take a staff: "He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts" (Mark 6:8).

Matthew and Luke, however, have Jesus *specifically prohibiting* the taking of a staff: "Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff" (Matt 10:9-10). "Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money" (Luke 9:3).

It is evident that the two accounts are inconsistent and at least one of the Gospels is in error. But this inconsistency does not destroy confidence in the event reported, namely, Christ commissioning His disciples. Apparently, for the Gospel writers the event was more important than its details.

The second example is the problem of the date of Christ's death. According to the Synoptics Jesus was crucified on Nisan 15 after eating the Passover with His disciples the night before (Mark 14:12-25; Matt 26:17-29; Luke 22:7-20). But, according to John the crucifixion took place on Nisan 14 before the eating of the Passover (John 19:14).

The discrepancy between the two dates of Christ's crucifixion can hardly be attributed to transmissional errors, because it appears in all available manuscripts. Most likely the Synoptics had their own reasons for dating Christ's crucifixion differently than John. Countless attempts have been made to reconcile the two chronologies. In my book on the *Spring Festivals* I propose a possible resolution.<sup>18</sup>

In this context our concern is not to resolve the discrepancy between the two dates of the crucifixion, but simply to show that the presence of such a glaring "error" does not destroy our confidence in the fundamental truth of Christ atoning death. From a biblical perspective, fundamental truths such as Christ's death and resurrection, are not conditioned by the accuracy of the circumstantial details of the events.

Even Edward Carnell, a staunch defender of inerrancy, admits that "It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to coax all the biblical data into a neat harmony. But this want of precision in no way affects the substance of the biblical system."<sup>19</sup> The credibility of the great doctrines of the Bible does not depend upon the precision of circumstantial details. The fear that if inerrancy collapses the great doctrines of the Bible collapse also, is groundless. The fact is that such doctrines are universally believed even by Christians who do not subscribe to inerrancy.

**The Slippery-Slope Argument.** This argument is similar to the epistemological argument just considered. Its basic difference is that it correlates inerrancy, not with the overall trustworthiness of the Bible, but with its impact on the future of churches and institutions. It basically claims that surrendering inerrancy eventually leads denominations and seminaries to the surrender of all the other biblical doctrines.

Harold Linsell argues that without the linchpin of inerrancy, evangelicalism is a house of cards. He explains how the infection spreads, saying: "History affords us notable examples of institutions and denominations that have gone astray. At times it is not easy to perceive *how* this happened. The trend away from orthodoxy may be slow in movement, gradual in its scope, and almost invisible to the naked eye. When people awaken to what has happened, it is too late."<sup>20</sup> He continues, comparing the rejection of inerrancy to a cancer, that begins as a small blemish, and, if left unchecked, grows and spreads to the whole body.

**Evaluation.** This argument is based on the mistaken assumption that an individual or institution that denies inerrancy will eventually abandon other Bible doctrines. This assumption is discredited by the fact that most Christians accept Biblical teachings on the basis of what is explicitly taught in the Bible, irrespective of the possible presence of inaccurate secondary details.

It is true that the rise of Biblical criticism has eroded the commitment of people and churches to fundamental Biblical doctrines. But this is not a reason for making inerrancy an obligatory doctrine for all Christians. The fact that Biblical criticism has had a devastating impact upon denominations and institutions does not mean that the same will be true with the denial of inerrancy. The proof is the existence of numerous evangelical churches, including my own Seventh-day Adventist Church, which firmly believe in the trustworthiness of the Bible and in its fundamental doctrines, while rejecting the notion of absolute inerrancy.

Inerrancy does not guarantee orthodoxy. Jehovah's Witnesses hold strongly to inerrancy, yet their teachings are hardly orthodox. Among other things they deny the divine preexistence of Christ—a fundamental biblical truth that guarantees the saving value of Christ's atoning sacrifice. The ultimate question is not what will be the pragmatic effects of believing or not believing in biblical inerrancy, but whether such doctrine is true.

Furthermore, the slippery-slope argument is insulting and divisive. It is insulting to suggest to Bible-believing Christians, that unless they accept the absolute inerrancy of the Bible, they will eventually find ourselves sliding into the slippery-slope to apostasy. It is divisive, because it questions the commitment to the authority of the Bible of those who do not believe in absolute inerrancy, and it encourages inerrantists to separate from such people. The fallacies and negative impact of the slippery-slope arguments should lead responsible Christians to abandon it.

**Conclusion.** The doctrine of inerrancy was attractive a generation ago in the context of the battles Christians had to fight against liberal criticism. But there is no need today to fight those battles again. We have seen that the arguments commonly used today to defend the absolute inerrancy of the Bible have proven to be devoid of biblical and historical support. Ultimately such arguments expose the Bible to the criticism of liberal critics who are only too glad to capitalize on the fallacies of such arguments to attack the trustworthiness and authority of the Bible.

Our challenge today is to convince people, not that the Bible is errorless in all its details, but that it provides a trustworthy and infallible revelation of God's plan for our present life and future destiny. We need to help people to steer clear of the Scylla of errancy and of the Charybdis of inerrancy. Both heresies undermine the authority of the Bible by making it either too-human or too-divine.

## SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE

Seventh-day Adventists hold the Bible as a unique revelation of God's will and plan for humanity. They accept it as the infallible and normative authority for defining beliefs and practices. They believe that in this Book God provides humanity with the knowledge necessary for salvation.

The first Fundamental Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist Church offers a concise statement of the church belief about the Bible: "The Holy Scriptures, Old And New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In His Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history."

This Fundamental Belief shows that Adventists agree with conservative Christians that the Bible is divinely inspired and contains the infallible revelation of God's will for our lives. They fully accept the divine authority and complete reliability of the Scriptures, but they have never advocated the doctrine of biblical inerrancy.

**Adventists Objections to Inerrancy.** There are five major reasons why Adventists do not subscribe to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. First, Adventists believe that Bible writers were God's penmen, and not the pen of the Holy Spirit. They were fully involved in the production of their writings. Some of them, like Luke, gathered the information by interviewing eyewitnesses of Christ's ministry (Luke 1:1-3). Others, like the authors of Kings and Chronicles, made use of historical records available to them. The fact that both the writers and their sources were human, makes it unrealistic to insist that there are no inaccurate statements in the Bible.

Second, the attempts of inerrantists to reconcile the differences between the biblical descriptions of the same event, often results in distorted and farfetched interpretations of the Bible. For example, Harold Lindsell tries to reconcile the divergent accounts of Peter's denial of Jesus at the crowing of the cock, by proposing that Peter denied Jesus a total of six times!<sup>21</sup> Such gratuitous speculations can be avoided by simply accepting the existence of minor discrepancies in the Gospels' account of Peter's denial.

Third, by basing the trustworthiness and infallibility of the Bible on the accuracy of its details, the doctrine of inerrancy ignores that the main function of Scripture is to reveal God's plan for our salvation. The Bible is not intended to supply us with accurate geographical, historical, or cultural information, but to reveal to us how God created us perfectly, redeemed us completely, and will restore us ultimately.

Fourth, Adventists find the doctrine of biblical inerrancy to be devoid of biblical support. Nowhere do the Bible writers claim their statements to be inerrant. Such a concept has been deduced from the idea of divine inspiration. It is assumed that since the Bible is divinely *inspired*, it must be *inerrant* also. But the Bible never equates inspiration with inerrancy. The nature of the Bible must be defined inductively, that is, by considering all the data provided by the Bible itself, rather than deductively, that is, by drawing conclusions from subjective premises. An inductive analysis of the existing discrepancies in the Bible does not support the absolute inerrancy view.

**Ellen White's Teachings.** A final reason for the Adventist rejection of absolute inerrancy, is the teachings of Ellen White and the example of the production of her writings. She clearly recognized the human role in the production of the Bible. She wrote: "The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several authors. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Tim 3:16); yet they are all

expressed in the words of men. The infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants.”<sup>22</sup>

Inspiration, according to Ellen White, impressed Bible writers with thoughts, not with words. “It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts.”<sup>33</sup>

God inspired men, not their words. This means, as Ellen White explains, that the Bible “is not God’s mode of thought and expression. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”<sup>24</sup>

Ellen White recognized the presence of discrepancies or inaccuracies in the production of the Bible and in the transmission of its text. “Some look to us gravely and say, ‘Don’t you think there might have been some mistakes in the copists or in the translators?’ This is all probable . . . [but] all the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.”<sup>25</sup> “There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scripture.”<sup>26</sup> For Ellen White, the presence of inaccuracies in the production or transmission of the Bible text is only a problem for those who wish to “manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.” The reason is that the presence of inaccurate details does not weaken the validity of the fundamental truths revealed in the Scripture.

**Ellen White’s Writings.** The production of Ellen White’s writings has helped immensely the Seventh-day Adventist Church to avoid the pitfalls of inerrancy. Over a period of 70 years Ellen White wrote under divine inspiration numerous books and articles which have enriched the spiritual life of millions of believers. While the original manuscripts of the Bible are no longer extant, most of Ellen White’s manuscripts are carefully preserved and readily available for investigation. A look at her manuscripts shows her painstaking efforts to improve the style by making corrections on the margins or above the text itself. In some manuscripts the corrections appear in different ink colors, reflecting the several attempts that were made to improve the style and grammar.

Sometimes the editing process continued even after the publication of her manuscripts. For example, corrections were made in the preparation of the new 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*. In fact, Ellen White specifically asked the various publishing departments and canvassing agents, both in America and overseas, to submit in writing their request for any correction they deemed necessary. European and American researchers participated in this project by locating documents needed to correct some of the historical inaccuracies.

Ellen White welcomed the participation of those who helped in making the necessary corrections in the new edition of *The Great Controversy*. She expressly stated: “I am thankful that my life has been spared, and that I have strength and clearness of mind for this and other literary work.”<sup>27</sup> The fact that Ellen White insisted on the divine origin of her messages, but never claimed her writings to be inerrant or infallible in every detail, gives us reasons to believe that same is true for the biblical text. The supervision of the Holy Spirit did not prevent Bible writers from making statements which may not be accurate in every detail. Its concern was to ensure the trustworthiness and infallibility of the vital truths that affect our eternal salvation.

**Scripture as Divine and Human.** The Adventist view of the Bible is based on two important verses: “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16) and “No prophecy came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21). These verses emphasize the divine-human character of the Bible. The messages of Bible writers originated from God, but were expressed in human language, reflecting the cultural and educational background of the writers.

The recognition of the divine-human nature of the Bible rules out the two mistaken views of the Bible we have discussed in this chapter. The first, is the inerrantists' view that exalts the divine aspect of Scripture and minimizes the human participation in order to ensure that the text is completely free of all errors. The second is the liberal view of the critics who maintain that biblical writings simply reflect human ideas and aspirations. They believe they are the product of religious geniuses who were influenced—not by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—but by the culture of their time

Adventists reject the mistaken views of the Bible held by inerrantists on the one hand and by liberal critics on the other. Instead, they hold to a balanced view of the Bible based on its testimony (2 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 1:21) about its divine-human character. The divine-human aspects of the Bible are mysteriously blended together, somewhat similar to the union of the divine and human nature of Christ.

The book *Seventh-day Adventist Believe . . .* states: "A parallel exists between the incarnate Jesus and the Bible: Jesus was God and man combined, the divine and human in one. So the Bible is the divine and human combined. As it was said of Christ, so it can be affirmed of the Bible that 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). The divine-human combination makes the Bible unique among literature."<sup>28</sup>

**The Humanity of the Bible.** The humanity of the Bible can be seen, for example, in the use of the *koine* Greek, which was the language of the market place, rather than that of classical literature. It is evident also in the poor literary style of such books as Revelation which has a limited vocabulary and some grammatical errors. It appears in the use of oral traditions by men like Luke, or of written records by the authors of Kings and Chronicles. It is reflected in the expression of human emotions in places like Psalm 137 which describes the feeling of the Hebrew captives in Babylon, saying: "O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall be he who requites you with what you have done to us! Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" (Ps 137:8-9). Such violent language expresses the hurt of human emotions, rather than divine love for friends and foes.

**The Divinity of the Bible.** The divinity of the Bible is suggested by the underlying unity of the teachings of the Bible. About 40 authors wrote 66 books over a period of 1600 years, yet they all share the same view of creation, redemption and final restoration. Only divine inspiration could ensure the underlying thematic unity of the Bible over the centuries of its composition.

Another indication of the divine character of the Bible is its impact upon human lives and societies. The Bible conquered the skepticism, prejudism, and persecution of the Roman world. It has transformed the social values and practices of societies that have embraced its teachings. It has given new value to life, a sense of worth to the individual, a new status to women and slaves, it has broke down social and racial discriminations, it has given a reason for living, loving, and serving to countless millions of people.

The divine character of the Bible is also indicated by its marvellous conception of God, creation, redemptiom, human nature and destiny. Such lofty conceptions are foreign to the sacred books of pagan religions. For example, in the Near Eastern creation myths, the divine rest is generally achieved either by eliminating disturbing gods or by creating mankind.<sup>29</sup>

In the creation Sabbath, however, the divine rest is secured not by subordinating or destroying competitors, nor by exploiting the labor of mankind, but rather by the *completion of a perfect creation*. God rested on the seventh day because His work was "finished . . . done" (Gen. 2 :2-3). He stopped *doing* to express His desire for *being* with His creation, for giving to His creatures not only *things*, but *Himself*. Such a marvellous concept of God who entered into human time at creation and into human flesh at the

incarnation in order to become “Emmanuel—God with us,” is absent in pagan religions, where the gods typically partake of human failings.

The remarkable nature of the Bible is also indicated by its miraculous preservation through history, in spite of relentless efforts to destroy it. Earlier we mentioned the past attempts to suppress the Bible by Roman Emperors, Christian Kings, and communist regimes. In spite of the deliberate attempts to destroy the Bible, its text has come down to us substantially unchanged. Some of the oldest manuscripts brings us close to the composition of the originals. They reveal the amazing accuracy of the text that has come down to us. We can be confident that our Bibles are reliable versions of the original messages.

Ultimately the validity of the Bible is vouched for by conceptual and existential considerations. Conceptually, the Bible provides a reasonable explanation of our human situation and of the divine solution to our problems. Existentially, the teachings of the Bible give meaning to our existence and offer us reasons for living, loving, and serving. Through them we can experience the rich blessings of salvation.

## CONCLUSION

We have briefly traced the controversy between the errancy and inerrancy of the Bible. We have noted that the Bible is being attacked today by friends and foes. The pendulum is swinging to both extremes. On the one hand, the liberal critics reduce the Bible to a strictly human, error-ridden book, devoid of supernatural revelations and miraculous manifestations. They treat the Bible strictly as a human literary production. On the other hand, some conservative evangelicals elevate the Bible to such a divine level that they overlook the human dimension of Scripture. They affirm that the Bible is absolutely without error in all its references to history, geography, chronology, cosmology, science, and so forth.

Ultimately both the errancy and inerrancy positions are extreme, heretical views that undermine the authority of the Bible by making it either too-human or too-divine. The solution to these extreme positions is to be found in the key word *balance*—a balance that recognizes both the divine and human character of the Bible.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has historically maintained a balanced view of the Bible by acknowledging both its divine and human character. Much of the credit is due to the prophetic guidance of Ellen White who unequivocally stated: “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen.”<sup>30</sup>

Simply stated, Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Bible is the product of a mysterious blending of divine and human participation. The source is divine, the writers are human, and the writings contain divine thoughts in human language. This unique combination offers us a trustworthy and infallible revelation of God’s will and plan for our present life and future destiny. As stated in the first Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief: “The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”

## ENDNOTES

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9. Harold Lindsell, "The Infallible Word," *Christianity Today*, August 25, 1972), p.11. See also R. C. Sproul, "The Case for Inerrancy: A Methodological Analysis," in John W. Montgomery, ed., *God's Inerrant Word* (Bethany Fellowship, 1974), p. 257.
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11. Stephen T. Davis (note 5), p. 25.
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13. Harold Lindsell (note 4), pp. 41-71.
14. Cited by James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (Grand Rapids, 1990), p. 159.
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23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
26. *Ibid.*, p 20.
27. "The 1911 Edition of *The Great Controversy*. An Explanation of the Involvements of the 1911 Revision," p. 13.
28. *Seventh-Day Adventist Believe . . .* (Washington, D. C., 1988). p. 8.
29. For a discussion, see R. Pettazzoni, "Myths of Beginning and Creation-Myths," in *Essays on the History of Religion*, trans. H. T. Rose, 1954, pp. 24-36. A brief but informative treatment is found in Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath*, SBL Dissertation Series 7, 1972, pp. 174-182. For example, in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma elish* the god Marduk says, "Verily, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the gods, that they might be at ease!" (James B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 1950, (UT krt A 206-211), p. 68.
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## **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of August and September 2003. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Thank you for informing your friends about the time and place of the seminars.

### **AUGUST 2: CHICAGO: BURR RIDGE SDA CHURCH**

Location: 725 75th Street, Darien, Illinois 60559. The church rents the Lord of Life Lutheran Church

For information call Pastor Ante Jeroncic at (630) 963-1036 or (630) 730-3075

### **AUGUST 8-9: TORONTO EAST SDA CHURCH**

Location: 170 Westwood Avenue, Toronto, ON M4K 2B1, Canada.

For information call Pastor Vaudre Jacques at (905) 660-0136 or (416) 696-5784

### **AUGUST 15-16: NEW YORK: GETHSEMANE SDA CHURCH**

Location: 357 Empire Boulevard, Brooklyn, NY 11225

For information call Pastor Jean-Marie Charles at (718) 444-2125

### **AUGUST 29-30: OTTAWA FRENCH SDA CHURCH**

Location: 375 King Edward Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1N 7M5, Canada

For information call Pastor Max Pierre at (613) 740-0041

### **SEPTEMBER 5-6: LA: VALLEY CROSSROAD SDA CHURCH**

Location: 11350 Glenoaks Boulevard, Pacoima, CA 91331

For information call Pastor Reginald Robinson at (805) 499-1006

### **SEPTEMBER 12-13: ST. PAUL FIRST SDA CHURCH**

Location: 1915 Princeton, St. Paul, MN 55105

For information call Pastor Mark Smith at (651) 731-5180.

### **SEPTEMBER 19-20: ORLANDO: MT. SINAI SDA CHURCH**

Location: 2600 Orange Center Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32805

For information call Pastor Brent Waldon at (407) 944-1091 or (407) 298-7877.

### **SEPTEMBER 26-27: CHICAGO: ALL NATIONS FELLOWSHIP SDA CHURCH C/O UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Location: 15 W 100 Plainfield Road, Burr Ridge, Illinois 60467

## **SPECIAL OFFER ON HITACHI VIDEO PROJECTORS!!!**

If your church is looking for a state-of-the-art LCD video projector, you will be please to receive this exciting news. The HITACHI corporation of North America agreed to offer their line of projectors to our Adventist churches and institutions at over 65% discount, through one of the major distribution center in New York.

Let me explain briefly what happened. During the past two years I have bought five different video projectors to present my popular PowerPoint SABBATH and ADVENT SEMINARS. I was looking for the best video projector on the market for my itinerant ministry around the world. After buying and trying over a 20 video projectors, including SONY, IN-FOCUS, PROXIMA, PANASONIC, EPSON, SANYO, I found that the HITACHI CP-S370W 2200 LUMENS VIDEO PROJECTOR, outperforms any video projectors in its class. It is light and bright, surpassing in performance all the other projectors of the same lumens that I have tried.

Many of the churches where I have presented my PowerPoint seminars were so impressed by the outstanding performance of the HITACHI CP-S370W video projector, that they asked me how to get one at a reasonable price. I contacted the HITACHI corporation of North America and I told the marketing manager that I am their best field representative, since I use their projector every weekend.

HITACHI saw the light and they decided to authorize me to offer their projectors to our Adventist institutions directly through one of their major North America Distribution Center. The special price is over 65% discount on the factory suggested retail price. You can read below the list of their projectors together with the special price. This means that your church can purchase any of the dozen models of HITACHI projectors ranging from 1200 to 4500 lumens at an incredible low price.

For example, if your churches wants to purchase the HITACHI CP-S370W 2200 LUMENS VIDEO PROJECTOR which I am use every weekend with great satisfaction, the special price is only \$2200.00, shipping expenses included. This is a bargain price for such a marvelous projector, considering that the factory suggested retail price is \$6995.00.

The procedure is very simple. Once I receive your order, I will pass it on directly to the major HITACHI distributor in New York. He will FEDEX you the projector directly to your address. It is as simple as that. I do not handle or store any projectors. I only pass on the orders to the major North America HITACHI distributor center who takes care of everything.

Over 100 churches have already bought an HITACHI video projector. Some pastors are so happy that they have ordered a second and a third projector for their district churches.

During the past two years I have tried more than 20 different makes of video projectors in the various churches where I presented my seminars. None of them perform as well as the HITACHI CP-S370W 2200 LUMENS VIDEO PROJECTOR that I carry with me every weekend in my catalogue briefcase together with the TITANIUM MAC laptop computer. I am talking from experience, not from hearsay. The projector is small, light (only 7 pounds) and exceptionally bright. I have used this HITACHI CP-S370W VIDEO 2200 LUMNENS PROJECTOR even in large auditoriums with 2000 people with excellent results.

If your church is interested in a smaller or larger model, below is a partial the list of the HITACHI PROJECTORS that are available. They are listed with both the suggested Manufactured Suggested Retail Price and the special discount that HITACHI offers to our churches. You can see that the discount is over 65%. For example, the price of the HITACHI CP-S370W 2200 LUMENS VIDEO PROJECTOR is only \$2200.00, instead of the suggested price of \$6,995.00

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<b>Model</b>	<b>Res.</b>	<b>Brightness</b>	<b>Weight</b>	<b>MSRP</b>	<b>Your Price</b>
CP-X275W	XGA	1200 Lumens	5 lbs	\$5,495	\$1900.00
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CP-S317W	SVGA	1700 Lumens	6 lbs	\$5,995	\$1800.00
CP-X327W	XGA	1800 Lumens	6 lbs	\$6,795	\$2000.00
CP-S370W	SVGA	2200 Lumens	7 lbs	\$6,995	\$2200.00
CP-X385W	XGA	2200 Lumens	7 lbs	\$7,995	\$2800.00
CP-X430W	XGA	2500 Lumens	9.9 lbs	\$8,995	\$3300.00
CP-X880W	XGA	3000 Lumens	12.6 lbs	\$10,995	\$4000.00
CP-X885W	XGA	3500 Lumens	12.6 lbs	\$12,995	\$4700.00
CP-X995W	XGA	4500 Lumens	14.3 lbs	\$12,995	\$4900.00

If your church is interested in one of these projectors, feel free to call me at home at (269) 471-2915 or on my cellular at (269) 208-1942.

I look forward to help your church purchase a state of the art video projector at a bargain price.

Christian regards  
Samuele Bacchiocchi  
Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

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