

Institute for Christian Teaching

SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY

David C. Smith

**417-00 Institute for Christian Teaching
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904 USA**

**Symposium on the Bible and Adventist Scholarship
Juan Dolio, Dominican Republic
March 19-26, 2000**

Scriptural Foundation Symposium**SUMMARY**

**David C Smith
Union College**

When academicians meet together in the spirit of academic freedom, commitment to the full authority of Scripture, and an honest search for truth, good things often result. Such was the case March 19-25, 2000, when an interdisciplinary group of Adventist scholars along with their spouses assembled in the Dominican Republic to study the foundational role of the Bible in Adventist education and in each of the disciplines represented. This was a time for sharing ideas, analyzing research and data, discussing theories, reading Scripture, worshiping together, and ultimately publishing revisions of the papers that were presented. Among the special blessings that resulted from this exchange were the outstanding Bible-based devotionals by John McVay.

Goals

The specific goals of this conference were:

1. to make available to Adventist scholars and students: position statements, resource material, broad philosophical contexts, and discipline-specific studies which focus on Scripture as foundational and authoritative in all areas of scholarship.
2. to identify positions that deny or circumvent Scriptural authority and to provide guidance for how these stances might best be avoided or corrected.
3. to share pedagogical practices which would enhance Scriptural-based study in various disciplines.

4. to identify future projects or topics to be addressed which might further the cause of Bible-centered, life-transforming Christian education.

Themes

Although each paper presented at this conference was unique, it became clear as the week progressed that certain themes connected many of them. These connections, the result of the content of the papers presented and of the discussions which followed each reading, identify some of the main concerns and issues that emerged during our interaction.

The most obvious connecting link, and perhaps the most important one, is the affirmation in each paper of the full-authority of Scripture to guide the educational process. Papers written by R. Davidson and Zinke tackle this issue directly, while many studies examine the foundational role of the Bible within the context of particular academic disciplines. Fagal provides seminal Ellen White quotes which illuminate this issue. A corollary belief expressed by Brand, Kis, and others is that the Bible involves propositional revelation. It communicates God's word to us and transforms us according to His will and the working of His Spirit. All presenters address the all-sufficient role of Scripture in providing the framework, divine perspective, and foundational principles for personal life and academic pursuits, making this the primary theme of the Conference.

In papers and discussions alike, the necessity of being guided by the Holy Spirit and of having a personal relationship with God in order to understand Scripture and respond to it according to God's will was made plain. Brand, Fagal, Zinke, and Younker draw particular attention to these important

precursors to Christian scholarship.

In like manner, a portion of each of these papers identifies positions opposed to the foundational role of Scripture and discusses how these can best be responded to. In particular, authors like R. Davidson, Kis, Rasi, Zinke, and Fagal provide good material for identifying and counteracting higher criticism, naturalism, secular humanism, post-modernism, and the many other philosophical movements which have sprung from these.

Some authors, Rasi, Kennedy, and Habenicht among them, explore world views which govern academic study and which directly link to the interpretation of data. Others, including Chadwick, Zinke, Haluska, Kennedy, J. Davidson, Brand, and Younker identify ways that Christian scholars might misapply Scripture in their academic endeavors or might supercede appropriate bounds in their efforts to prove Scriptural positions. All of these studies define many of the dangers a Bible-based, Christian scholar faces when engaging in contemporary research.

Positive approaches to research applications are made as well. Younker and Chadwick provide examples of how research can serve as a corrective to Scriptural belief in those cases where the belief is misleading.

Some conference participants, including Baldwin, Kis, and Brand, offer comprehensive philosophical contexts for Scriptural approaches to particular academic disciplines. Helpful as well are the historical contexts provided for their respective disciplines by Haluska, Habenicht, and others. These aid the Christian scholar in understanding the evolution of secular thought in each field

and in identifying the challenges that present themselves to one dedicated to a Bible-as-authority approach for a particular field of study.

One exciting outcome of this symposium was the attention devoted to a holistic approach to biblically-based studies. J. Davidson's study of biblical aesthetics is particularly stimulating, but the notes added by Fagal, Chadwick, Brand, and Habenicht, provide many ways of appreciating the holistic nature of Scripture and human nature. Recognizing this concept should do much to help the Bible-based scholar maintain balance in academic research and study.

Pedagogical Applications

Secondary but still important to the intent of this symposium are pedagogical applications and philosophical contexts. Several papers provide Adventist educators with techniques and outlooks designed to enrich the classroom experience and to ground it more firmly in the Scriptures. Rasi, Habenicht, Zinke, R. Davidson, Baldwin, and others provide help with incorporating an Adventist world view into the curriculum. Examples of effective close readings of Scripture, including intertextual analysis and narrative analysis, are provided by R. Davidson, J. Davidson and Baldwin. J. Davidson presents a very helpful study of aesthetics and how such a study might impact our classrooms while Baldwin models close reading and intertextual analysis in the philosophy of science he presents.

Ideas useful to Christian educators take many forms in these studies. Kennedy advocates increasing earth science instruction at all levels and argues the importance of teaching critical thinking to enable

students to differentiate between data and interpretation. For the field of psychology, Habenicht offers a number of teaching suggestions as does Haluska for the field of literary studies.

Practical as well are guidelines, methods, and applications for research studies explored by Kennedy, Brand, Chadwick, Habenicht, Younker, and Kis. Their observations offer help for the Adventist researcher wanting to apply a biblical foundation to hypotheses formulation and data interpretation.

What Now?

In the academic arena, apart from the eternal truths of Scripture, ideas and scholarship are never static. Scholars are always eyeing the next project or study to be undertaken. Symposiums create an environment ripe for fostering change and launching scholarship in new directions. Our experience certainly illustrates this. As we look to what comes next, we recognize the need to build on what we have done by promoting the following actions:

1. engage in a more thorough study of aesthetics from a Scriptural viewpoint, identifying this area's potential applications to the Seventh-day Adventist church in general and to Adventist education in particular.
2. create more opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogs about issues faced across the curriculum by Adventist scholars.
3. continue to study how the Bible can be applied to different disciplines.
4. establish a venue for studying the relationship between Scripture and human reason.
5. consider the potential for interdisciplinary cooperation to pursue further studies in the

relationship between science and Scripture.

6. explore an Adventist position for the integration model in the field of psychology.
7. further study ways to introduce Bible-based concepts into Adventist classrooms.
8. develop an Adventist, biblically-based system of ethics.

To participate in this symposium was very gratifying. The fellowship, intellectual exchange, spiritual sharing, and personal growth that were part of the experience affirmed for all the participants the value of this type of meeting. We trust that in the future, church leaders will see the merits of providing more opportunities for this kind of dialog between experienced, dedicated Adventist teachers who represent a variety of disciplines. We wish to sincerely thank the Rasi's, the Zinke's, and the Archbold's for making such an inspiring experience possible, and we trust that the work we have done will be blessed by the Holy Spirit to benefit those who read it.