

# HERMENEUTICS AND THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

## I. WHY DO WE NEED HERMENEUTICS?

The term hermeneutics in its traditional meaning indicates the discipline that deals with principles of interpretation. Although it may sound like a set of sophisticated techniques, the reality is that we are consciously or unconsciously taught hermeneutics from birth. Hermeneutics is used in daily life simply because human beings need principles of interpretation for understanding everyday verbal and non-verbal events.

Words are fickle, making human language by nature “largely equivocal.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, language represents a perception of reality, which may be understood in more than one way. In the case of written language, the perception of reality is both the author’s and reader’s. The author attempts to persuade us to see things his or her way, while readers decipher meaning from their own contexts. There would be no disputes or misunderstandings about speech or writing if that were not the case.

It is common practice to place what is said or written in its historical, linguistic, or cultural context for understanding. The same should be true when reading the Bible. There are significant linguistic and cultural differences as well as a vast historical gap between author and reader in the modern reading of the Bible. Without recognizing these issues in our reading of Scripture, it is more likely that modern readers will apply their customary ways of reading to the reading of the Bible. But the Bible is not just any other book.

On one hand, the Bible is a divine book. It is a

unique, Spirit-produced collection exhibiting coherence, interconnections between the books, and a paradigm of prophecy and fulfillment. As a divine book, it also contains uniquely inspired content—it is authoritative and truthful and includes divine revelation, miracles, prophecy, nature, and plan. As a divine book, it has a unique purpose; it has spiritual worth, with the capacity to change lives, and is understandable.

On the other hand, the Bible is a human book. First, it uses human language with words and grammar of the time. Serious interpreters must study linguistics, syntax, and semantics to gain an accurate reading. Second, it uses common genres and literary conventions known at the time of writing. Comparing parallel genres from the biblical world provides cultural and literary contexts with which the Bible may be understood in depth. Third, it was written by human authors in their own time and space, and their historical background and culture should be learned. And, finally, it communicates through the plain sense of the text. No effort should be made to look for a hidden or mystical sense.

As in daily life, there is no absolute guarantee that anyone will ever completely understand the words in the Bible. The immediate recipients of biblical texts had the advantage of a shared context; but for later readers, the words and their meanings can be difficult to pin down.

This should not, however, lead to thinking that problems lie in the Bible. For the most part, the Bible is clear and understandable. There are not many words or sentences that perplex to the degree

that doctrines and practices will change. After all, the God who became human also used language—not just signs or miracles or mystical visions—to communicate divine truth to humanity. The Bible is given for understanding. Communication between author and reader of the Bible naturally takes place in the reading experience.

The Bible is a “book in which a child can wade, and an elephant can swim.”<sup>2</sup> There are thus some difficult passages in the Bible. There also are some teachings that require hermeneutical skills, not only to find the meaning but also to properly apply it in modern context. With the use of a proper set of hermeneutics, an attempt can be made to bridge the distance that separates modern humanity from the biblical text and its world.

Recognizing the significance of hermeneutics from the outset, the NAD Theology of Ordination Study Committee began by establishing a hermeneutic for the given assignment.

## II. ADAPTATION OF THE “METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY” HERMENEUTICAL METHOD

**A. Action.** The committee agreed on the importance of establishing a hermeneutic at the outset before drawing further conclusions. We read together the “Methods of Bible Study” document voted by the General Conference Annual Council in 1986, and, after some discussion, voted to utilize its presuppositions, principles, and methods of biblical hermeneutics.

**B. Rationale.** The “Methods of Bible Study” document was written and voted 27 years ago, and as such does not address a whole new movement in biblical studies which the last twenty years have seen; however, it still provides a good hermeneutical framework for guiding the study of this committee. In particular, the document outlines the boundaries concerning two significant areas.

**1. Thought Inspiration:** This document adopts thought inspiration as the official Adventist approach to interpreting Scripture.

“The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and objective information; in turn they expressed these in their own words. Therefore the Scriptures are an indivisible union of divine and human elements, neither of which should be emphasized to the neglect of other.”

**2. Historical Approach:** The document also provides these specific recommendations (among others):

- As far as possible, ascertain the historical circumstances in which the passage was written.
- Take note of grammar and sentence construction in order to discover the author’s meaning.
- In connection with the study of the biblical text, explore the historical and cultural factors. “Archaeology, anthropology, and history,” it argues, “may contribute to understanding the meaning of the text.”<sup>3</sup>

What is significant here is to note that this official document, voted by the General Conference, emphatically advises the interpretation of Scripture in its cultural and historical context.

**3. Authorities.** The committee further agreed to affirm three authorities: (a) Holy Scripture, as inspired revelation from God; (b) the writings of Ellen G. White, as inspired guidance for the Adventist Church; and (c) the 28 Fundamental Beliefs, as expressive of Adventist doctrinal understanding. All committee members felt strongly that establishing these authorities at the outset set the boundary within which this committee was to operate.

### III. TWO MAJOR SETS OF HERMENEUTICS IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

The committee quickly discovered that Ján Barna's study<sup>4</sup> succinctly summarizes two major hermeneutical strands prevalent in the Adventist Church today. These two strands are being used to look at the biblical evidence on the issue of ordination, particularly those controversial texts that speak directly to the issue of headship, which is the most contentious textual issue bearing on this topic.

#### A. Plain, Natural, and Literal Reading

Barna identifies the preferred method of those opposed to women's ordination as the "historical-grammatical"<sup>5</sup> method, which places strong emphasis on a plain, natural, and literal meaning of words. This approach was even referred to as "the common sense approach,"<sup>6</sup> which leads to the discovery of the "natural and normal sense of the text."<sup>7</sup> Literal reading, therefore, predominantly characterizes this method. This approach amazingly presupposes "a correlation of meaning between then and now."<sup>8</sup> In other words, modern readers' common sense and

their plain reading take charge of the interpretive process.

This approach, though historical, has a strong tendency to avoid employing any extra-biblical sources. The authority of the Bible is upheld with the phrase *Sola Scriptura*, "which embraces not only using the Bible as *the evaluative source* (epistemological meaning) for extra-biblical sources, but also using the Bible as *the only (sole) source* (hermeneutical limitation) excluding or minimizing the use of extra-biblical sources."<sup>9</sup>

Basic to this historical-grammatical method is, in Barna's opinion, the acceptance of Scripture as the verbally inspired and inerrant word of God. Barna summarizes it this way: "The Bible is inerrant, not only in matters of salvation and theology, but also in matters of science and history, down to the very last detail. The assumption of *absolute* biblical inerrancy is firmly rooted in and necessitated by the opponents' concept of *full* inspiration."<sup>10</sup>

It is true that several influential figures in the opponents' circle hold either this view of inspiration or a very similar one.<sup>11</sup> It is also probably true that the grassroots theory of biblical inspiration, often found among those who don't favor the ordination of women, strongly runs along this line of thinking. This view of inspiration may have consequently served as an influential backdrop against which the ordination of women is fiercely opposed.

To be fair, it must be noted that Barna's summary and conclusion on this issue are based mainly on two Adventist writers, and doesn't necessarily represent the view held by others who are not in favor of the ordination of women. It is theoretically and practically possible to establish a view that opposes the ordination of women without subscribing to this mode of inspiration.

With this plain, literal approach to the Bible, the ordination of women is not possible unless there is

a clear biblical mandate. This argument seems to be quite weak because none of the texts used against the ordination of women specifically address the issue and because a literal reading of these texts assumes a “hermeneutical principle that is neither acceptable nor traditionally practiced in Adventist theology.”<sup>12</sup>

### **B. Principle-Based Reading**

The preferred method of the proponents of the ordination of women is described as including “principle-based, contextual, linguistic and historical-cultural reading strategies...at the heart of their biblical approach.”<sup>13</sup> This approach, consequently, sees most of the so-called controversial passages in the “context of family relationships, [and] some emphasize a two-way submission.” With the use of this approach, no conclusive evidence prohibiting the ordination of women can be found in the Bible.

Those who take this approach believe that hermeneutical inquiries should be discussed within the larger framework of the topic of inspiration and revelation. Although they differ in technical points, their plenary view of inspiration becomes their *modus operandi* in the discussion of this topic. As verbal inspiration was historically rejected by the Adventist church in the nineteenth century, they do not adopt “a verbal-mechanical-dictation concept both in terminology and in the analysis emphasizing more the personal-dynamic aspect in the inspiration theory.”<sup>14</sup> This view of inspiration is supported by Ellen White when she says: “The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. 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>15</sup>

The practitioners of this approach believe in the complete reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible in terms of its salvific message while moving away from “an absolute inerrancy view.”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, a proper discernment between temporal, cultural elements and transcultural, permanent elements is fundamental to this approach, for the Bible was written in a certain space and time.<sup>17</sup>

### **C. An Issue of Hermeneutical Justice to the Text**

Overall the committee thinks that both methods fit within the broad range of what the “Methods of Bible Study” document approves to be within the appropriate realm of reading in the Adventist church.

A plain and literal reading strategy would be sufficient to understand most of the Bible. Yet the committee believes that there are occasions when we should employ principle-based reading because the passage calls for an understanding of the historical and contextual settings.

Method is not the end but rather a means by which we access the meaning of Scripture. It should not be idolized or esteemed over the text. The history of biblical interpretation testifies that people tend to select the hermeneutic that works best for their own interests. Perhaps no hermeneutical method is final. But the biblical text still remains, even after a particular method is not in vogue.

One question will be considered by an honest reader of the Bible: Which approach or reading strategy does more justice to the meaning of the text? This question is especially important when considering difficult passages or issues, and is fundamental to the proper interpretation of Scripture. Method is a means for tackling the text. The text determines which method may be more appropriate for interpretation. The text takes priority over the hermeneutical method.

Furthermore, an ethical reader of the Bible will assess the outcome and ask: Who benefits from this particular interpretation? This stems out of recognition that interpretation may become a power issue. The interpretation then needs to be assessed within the framework of the totality of Scripture. When one's reading contradicts the overall picture of God and the major driving themes of the Bible, such reading should be rigorously scrutinized.

When should we decide not to use one method and switch to another? What should be our criteria for determining the proper use of a contextual or principle-based approach? These questions must be answered for the proper reading of the text. The general rule of thumb is that when two or more interpretations are claimed for a passage, the one that works with all information gathered should serve.

#### **D. When to Adopt a Principled-Based Approach**

The following interpretive situations are best addressed with a principle-based approach.

- 1. Conflicting Interpretation:** When there is a challenge of conflicting interpretations due to textual variants and/or particular historical and cultural contexts.
- 2. Historical Background:** When an understanding of the historical background greatly enhances the reading. The Bible, in most cases, doesn't provide detailed information about historical or cultural situations behind a passage. For example, while the people in Corinth obviously would have known the context in which Paul wrote to them, it is not possible for us to become first-century readers and fully understand the context. Yet the Bible is given for human understanding and spiritual wellbeing. It is the solemn task of readers to exert their best effort to understand the context as much as possible.

**3. Contradiction:** When an interpretation of a specific passage contradicts the teaching of Scripture on a point. The Bible is a unified book in its salvific message.

**4. Essential Need of Reasoning:** When the use of reasoning seems to be necessary for our reading. The act of interpretation is also an act of logical reasoning. While divine inspiration is absolutely assumed, that doesn't preclude the use of reason in reading. Since the Bible is given in the form of human language and therefore appeals to human reason, it invites serious investigation when current interpretation doesn't make sense.

**5. Illumination of the Holy Spirit:** When the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (John 16:13), illuminates what is revealed in Scripture, so that "we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12). The ministry of the Holy Spirit is primarily not about communicating new truth but helping to show the salvific work of Jesus Christ in wider scope and beyond our cultural and contextual boundaries. It doesn't expect the discarding of common sense and logic in Christian faith.

These guidelines can lead the modern-day Adventist reader to consider many of the difficult passages regarding the ordination of women in their linguistic, historical, and cultural contexts.

## **IV. A HERMENEUTIC OF REDEMPTIVE HISTORY**

Since the Bible is a divine and human book, written in particular space and time, it is necessary to find a set of principles to distinguish that which is trans-cultural from that which is cultural. As long as the twenty-first-century Christian takes the Bible as the norm for life, hermeneutical issues are fundamental in assessing the normative status of commands and practices in the Bible.

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What hermeneutical approach should we generally take in our reading of scriptural texts? How should the biblical text be applied in the contemporary world? What hermeneutics should be developed to distinguish that which is merely cultural from that which is timeless? How can common ground be established where there is hostility within the Adventist community? What components of the biblical text have ongoing practical significance and what components are limited in application to the original audience?

These questions must be answered to interpret the Bible as a unified whole. One persuasive way to do that is to adopt a “redemptive movement hermeneutic,”<sup>18</sup> which can be applied to many issues that emerge when reading difficult passages. This redemptive hermeneutic is fundamentally based on the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in whom we find the complete revelation of God, and also in whom we find the ultimate climax and fulfillment of all of redemptive history in Scripture. Furthermore, this redemptive, historical characteristic in the Bible can well serve as our reading strategy when it comes to difficult texts in Scripture.

This approach looks for the redemptive spirit (or “trajectory”) in the text to discern what still applies today. God moves His people to the fullest realization of His will for them, that is, what is more righteous, equitable, loving, and just. It is based on a firm belief that “relative to when and where the words of Scripture were first read, they spoke redemptively to their given communities.”<sup>19</sup> For example, some of the counsel in Scripture was intended to redemptively temper the harsh treatment of slaves without outlawing slavery; but that doesn’t represent the conclusive stance of the Bible on that issue. When the entire Word is considered in the context of redemptive history, slavery is not tolerated.

This approach is contrasted with a “static” hermeneutic, which is interested in interpreting the text as an isolated entity and does not recognize the direction in which the Bible is moving. This “static” hermeneutic can even justify slavery or other unjust acts, because the Bible seems to endorse or tacitly recognize them.

One of the tasks for interpreters in reading Scripture is to consider how it should be applied today. The command that women suspected of adultery should go through the water-purification rite of Numbers 5 was intended to protect women from arbitrary charges in a patriarchal society, not to single them out for punishment. This command, in its cultural setting, improved the life of women. Today both men and women may be implicated or responsible in cases of adultery. The fundamental basis of this hermeneutical approach is that we should not restrict the application of the biblical text to the cultural world of the Bible, but let its redemptive spirit or redemptive movement guide the modern reader.

Some modern interpreters of Ephesians 6:5–9 maintain that employees should submit themselves to their employers. Such an interpretation wrongly applies the text to contemporary society. Employees are not required to submit to employers, but to faithfully fulfill the terms of their contract. The faithful execution of a job brings glory to God, and in a way functions as a witness to others.

The same is true of slavery (Exodus 21:28–32). It is not the assumption of modern society that wives

are the property of their husbands (Exodus 20:17). These texts should not be read in a static or fixed state. The redemptive movement of the text dictates the proclamation that all human beings, slaves or free, are equal, and that wives are equal to their husbands.

The Bible speaks to culture-specific issues as well as those that transcend culture and time. Slavery is specific to a former culture, while the love-your-neighbor command is directly applicable across all cultures. It is the task of a modern reader of the Bible to distinguish between cultural and transcultural values within the Bible. Such efforts help readers avoid the pitfall of being trapped into rigid literalism.

## V. LOCATION OF MEANING AND A HERMENEUTIC OF HUMBLENESS

### A. Text and Meaning

Biblical hermeneutics is mainly preoccupied with the interpretation of Scripture and the complexities of the relationship between text and reader. The Adventist Church has successfully dealt with the issue of hermeneutics to a certain extent. It has not, however, addressed the complex issues between reader and text, mainly due to the traditional placement of meaning in the text. The Adventist stance is that “the Bible is the only creed,” but this sheds some light on the assumed location of meaning. Adventists take an “archaeological” approach: since meaning is in the text, it is the responsibility of the reader to dig for that meaning.

Adventists have long held an exegetical stance that the reader should seek to discover the author’s intended meaning, the only true meaning, and must avoid superimposing meaning on the text. The meaning of a passage is determined or fixed by the author and is not subject to modification by readers. The role of the reader is to discover the meaning.

The reading process is not as simple as it seems on the surface, and the same is true for biblical interpretation. There are three foci in biblical interpretation. While some readers are entirely committed to one focus, others attempt to integrate two or three.

1. **Focus on the author.** The task is to dig for authorial intent. Verbal meaning is whatever the author has willed to convey by a particular sequence of words that can be shared by means of linguistic signs. The author’s truth-intention provides the only genuinely discriminating norm for discerning between valid or true interpretations and invalid or false ones.<sup>20</sup>
2. **Focus on the text.** The task is to delineate the world within the text. The text, once written out and produced, represents its own world. The language, its structure, and its literary context become the source of meaning.<sup>22</sup>
3. **Focus on the reader.** Fundamental to this approach is its recognition that the text is semantically independent of the intention of its author. The text is primarily seen as a construct, insofar as meaning is taken to reside in the encounter or interchange between text and reader. Meaning thus emerges as an outcome of interplay between text and reader, both of which are culturally and historically conditioned.<sup>21</sup>

Focusing on the author is probably the only absolute choice for the denominational hermeneutic. Text has a specific determined message that the author attempts to deliver to the reader. Readers embark on a journey to discover the author’s intended meaning. In other words, for Adventists meaning is a property of the text rather than the result of a reader’s engagement with the text.

Even after recognizing this author-focused interpretative tradition in the Adventist church, it is helpful to recognize what the other two foci might

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bring to the reading experience. Note the case of 2 Peter 1:12. When considered in context, 2 Peter 1:12 is a positive affirmation of the apostolic message, of which Peter is committed to reminding his readers. It is an “authoritative statement...

of the Christian eschatological hope as he [Peter] has been expounding it.... He makes it all the more impressive and solemn by casting it in the form of a valedictory message, or last testament, penned by the Apostle himself in full consciousness of his imminent martyr-death.”<sup>23</sup> Early Adventists, however, took “the present truth” in 2 Peter 1:12 and progressively applied it to their newly awakened messages such as the Sanctuary and the Sabbath<sup>24</sup> that, in their opinion, prepared people to be perfect or holy. For many nineteenth century Adventist readers, with their particular set of theological immediacy, this was the primary understanding in their encounter with the passage.

The truth of the matter is that no interpreters are immune from such an encounter in their reading of the text. As humans, we are naturally inclined to read the Bible in our current context, which influences our interpretation and application of the text, for good or for ill. All interpreters have preconceptions. The bottom line is that regardless of whether interpreters openly and candidly recognize it, they bring themselves to the text. Recognizing one’s social location in reading of the text provides a candid platform for interpretation. It doesn’t necessarily indicate that we have to be swayed by our own social location.

As one case study of 100 readings of Nehemiah 5 shows,<sup>25</sup> the differing contexts of the readers, with their particular concerns and problems, influence the reading of Scripture. Most Anglo-Saxon readers

find in Nehemiah 5 teachings on various topics such as family planning, proper exercise of anger, exemplary living, and principles of Christian leadership. Many in the developing world, along with several Anglo-Saxon readers, feel that

Nehemiah 5 addresses aiding the poor and the role of ideology, government, and the masses. Readers in North America see little about today’s poor, but feel that proper money management is a main idea in this chapter.

Current context is an interpretive lens for readers, whether or not they recognize it. Applying a contemporary filter to the biblical text is the only point of departure for contemporary readers. Such a departure can mask the meaning of the text. An ethical reading of the text calls for the admission that we unavoidably read the Bible first through eyes conditioned by our own culture and experience. It must be noted, however, that a new understanding of a text, especially reached from within a different culture and context, doesn’t contradict a traditional understanding of the text, but enriches interpretive traditions.

To be sure, different cultures do not control interpretation, but the text “itself provides the most important control for distinguishing between interpretations properly or improperly influenced by contemporary context.”<sup>26</sup> It is true that ambiguity sometimes prevents the evaluation of this influence. However, even in this case, the text should “restrain” the imagination.

### **B. A Hermeneutic of Humbleness**

Christians are often confused by contradictory interpretations of the same passage. Each interpreter claims that his or her interpretation

is biblical. Furthermore, the term “biblical” has sometimes been abused to justify one interpretation over another. To make matters worse, very few interpreters openly acknowledge the potential for misinterpretation that accompanies, for example, the ambiguity of human language, distance in time, or pre-conceived ideas.

Interpreters may disagree about the meaning of text for various reasons:

**1. Hermeneutical.** Confusion or misunderstanding over the relationship between meaning (interpretation) and significance (application) creates an interpretation not carried out to its fullest possible degree.

**2. Authorial.** Due to the vast gap in time and space, there aren't sufficient data about the historical setting such as culture, history, language, and ideology. Interpreters work with the most updated historical data in their hands. Even the most recent historical data in many instances are more likely to be a reconstruction of earlier data based on reasoning and arguments.

**3. Textual.** Ambiguity in a text opens up many different possibilities for interpretation. Interpretive ambiguity must be admitted and accepted. To be sure, interpreters are to be blamed if they inadequately analyze or identify the structure and genre of a particular text.

**4. Reader.** Interpreters come to a text with different analytical ability and skill. They also approach text with different sets of pre-understanding such as knowledge, personal experience, and preconceptions.

Not many readers candidly acknowledge these issues in their reading process. The worst possible case is to superimpose preconceptions upon an interpretation and call it biblical. To be sure, there is also an issue of individual competency.

The Bible has a prominent place in the life of

Seventh-day Adventists. It plays a crucial role in our theology and practice. We may not have every exegetical answer to difficult or perplexing passages. We should, thus, adopt a hermeneutic of humbleness in our reading of the Bible; that is, to acknowledge above all a possibility of misunderstanding or incomplete understanding on our part, and allow other interpretations to enrich our reading.

If the reading of the Bible joyfully results in a prophetic community with lives lived faithfully before God, Adventist interpreters should, above all, recognize themselves as capable of manufacturing, knowingly or unknowingly, a forced reading. These virtuous readers of the Bible, regardless of their theological orientation, must be humbly prepared to repent of their sometimes forced (and sometimes superficial) readings, acknowledging that their interpretation may not be “biblical” in the end and being open to correction.

At the same time, the Adventist hermeneutic of humbleness should recognize a place for the Holy Spirit in our interpretation. The Spirit “sanctifies the reader, removing pride and prejudice and creating the humility of heart and mind ready to receive something not of its own making.”<sup>27</sup> The Holy Spirit leads us, in all its cultural variety, into a deeper appreciation of the text, finding the meaning of a text for our contemporary faith community. The objective meaning in the text is “best approximated by a diversity of reading contexts and communities.”<sup>28</sup>

#### IV. CONCLUSION: HERMENEUTICAL INTEGRITY

This paper is not aimed to discuss in detail the so-called difficult or controversial passages regarding the ordination of women. These difficult passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11:1–3 and 14:33–36, 1 Timothy 2:1–15, Ephesians 5: 21–33, have been sufficiently

dealt with in detail by many faithful, Bible-believing Adventists in the past.<sup>29</sup> Most of these studies attempt to read these passages in context, analyze semantic backgrounds, or explore the historical-cultural background for interpretation. These approaches are in line with the guideline set in the “Methods of Bible Study” document, which recommends, among other things, to explore the biblical texts in their cultural and historical context. The overwhelming majority of the committee feels that these difficult passages require the modern Adventist reader to employ a principle-based reading.

The “Methods of Bible Study” document also recommends that the Bible should be looked at in its entirety or unity. Many studies done by Adventists follow this approach by focusing on different aspects of the issue: (1) some theologically discuss equality of man and woman, especially in the Genesis Creation story, which is in direct opposition to the headship and submission argument;<sup>30</sup> (2) some consider Jesus’ revolutionary way of treating women, especially in the context of the cultural and historical conditions of the first century Jewish society;<sup>31</sup>

and (3) some discuss the New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts, with an emphasis on women being equal recipients of spiritual gifts alongside of men.<sup>32</sup> All of these studies argue for the ordination of women in the Adventist Church.

The issue of women’s ordination in the Adventist Church provides a valuable lesson for the denomination in the area of hermeneutics. Hermeneutical integrity is demanded in our reading, which implies hermeneutical responsibility. Being responsible in hermeneutics means being equipped with hermeneutical virtues. Hermeneutical tools technically equip readers to rightly divide the word of truth, free from arbitrariness and unrestrained play with texts. It is not sufficient, however, to know and use the right approach in reading the biblical text. Adventist readers should cultivate hermeneutical virtues too, which are openness, wisdom, humility, receptivity, and honesty. These spiritual qualities lead readers to a fuller knowledge of God’s redemptive history in its entirety. Cultivating these hermeneutical virtues will undoubtedly lead to the reading practice that best corresponds to the ethos of the Bible study done by the early Adventists. ■



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