

Salving their consciences while they teach our people distrust and disobedience to Scripture

# The Philosophy Underlying the New Theology

**Our readers will recall the dramatic events of Wednesday afternoon, July 6, 1995, when the question of women's ordination was presented to the delegates in attendance at the 1995 Utrecht Session.**

**There were two astonishing aspects to that event: First, that the delegates should even be asked to vote counter to the Bible.**

**But, second, that an actual philosophy of disobedience to Scriptural truth would be presented!**

New theology advocates have actually devised a reasoned basis for rejecting the words of God! This would seem incredible.

But it need not be. The liberals in Australia and North America have been working on this for over a decade.

It would be well, at this juncture, to analyze their reasoning. Perhaps if we understand the thinking behind it, we will be better prepared to withstand it when local pastors, recently graduated from our Australian and North American colleges and universities, try to use it to instill liberal views in our local churches.

Most of you either heard the 20-minute defense of women's ordination, presented by Raoul Dederen on that fateful Wednesday afternoon or you read a transcript of it in the *Adventist Review*.

So we will here analyze a companion piece, written by J. David Newman. He was editor-in-chief of *Ministry* magazine for over 10 years. In *Adventist Today*, a liberal journal published in the Southeastern California Conference, he recently wrote this:

"The 1995 General Conference will go down in history as the venue [location] for two radically different methods of interpreting Scripture. In the ordination of women debate, Gerard Damsteegt presented the literal approach to understanding Scripture. This method has the advantage of simplicity and easy understanding. What could be simpler than following exactly what Scripture says?"—*J. David Newman, Stuck in the Concrete, Adventist Today, July-August 1995, p. 13.*

Newman, who is writing this, was one of the most influential writers in our church for more than a decade. Adventist pastors valued his articles. Now he clearly states the basis for what he was trying to teach them in those essays.

Prior to hearing from the delegates and calling for the vote, by prearrangement, Dr. P. Gerard Damsteegt, Department of Church History at the Seminary, gave a most excellent presentation, in which he pled with the delegates to remain faithful to Scripture. Thank God for such men! He told the delegates that God's Word had always been the basis of our denomination, and why should we abandon it now?

Then Dr. Raoul F. Dederen, Department of Theology and Christian

Philosophy at the Seminary, and its former dean, arose and presented the basis for the liberal position.

Newman, in his brief article, nicely summarizes the basis of Dederen's position—and revealed that it is the standard liberal position.

"Raoul Dederen presented a *principle approach* to understanding Scripture. Behind every admonition there is a principle. Find the principle first, then see if the application given in Scripture is valid today. If it is, follow it. If not, using the same principle, decide what application should be followed. The advantages of this approach are clear. A person does not get caught up in the debate of what literal passage to accept or reject."—*Ibid.*

Every word you have read is important. Let us note the startling contrasts:

#### *Historic Adventism:*

- This is the "literal approach to understanding Scripture." You take the words as they read.
- It is simple and easy to understand God's Word, when following this method. Just take what it says and obey it.
- "What could be simpler than following exactly what Scripture says!"

#### *Liberal, modernist Adventism:*

- Deduce a reasoned theory about each concept or passage in Scripture.
- Use the rationalism you devised to judge God's Word. The objective is to see if it is "valid today"; that is, does it really mean that now, and do we need to obey it now? Maybe it was just something that our old foggy grandfathers needed, which we moderns can discard.
- Your mind is the master of Scripture. You might even decide that a given

*Presidents: Worldwide Divisions and Unions, and North American Division Conferences—*

Our church has fallen on hard days. We fear for our people. They need our prayers. —And they need your leadership.

Right where you are, stand true to God's Word!

Refuse to yield an inch to these liberals who are trying to take over our denomination!

If you will remain faithful to God in the days ahead, you may be denied advancements, but you will be rewarded by God with eternal life. And what earthly reward can equal that! —*vj*

passage is still valid, then you won't need to tear that one out of your Bible.

- But, if the verse seems useless, try to figure out what that verse might be good for. Perhaps you can still salvage a use for it. Use a little imagination; turn it on its head; read it backwards. Try reinterpreting the passage again, but still relying on your own frail reasoning as the judge and arbiter.

- The advantages of this approach to Bible study are outstanding. You can use subterfuge to sidestep any passage you do not want to obey.

We have here a recipe for disaster. It is also a mixture designed to fool the sincere, but unwary in our churches, entrap young minds in our schools,—and captivate the shallow minded who want nothing more than an excuse to enjoy the world, while calling themselves Seventh-day Adventists.

Keep in mind that everything being discussed here applies equally to the Spirit of Prophecy, as well as the Bible. The liberals among us want to destroy the literal meaning of both, and historic believers are determined not to let it happen. They intend to defend the validity of both. There is a war going on in our denomination.

But Newman has not yet concluded his summary of the rational foundation underlying the new theology taught in our schools.

He tells us there is an additional advantage of this liberal philosophy. In the next paragraph, Newman explains it:

“The difficulty with this approach is the high level of abstract thinking required. Most people have not learned to reason abstractly. This is why the literal approach is so appealing. Children begin with concrete and literal understandings of life. It is not until around 10 years and older that they can begin to conceptualize and reason in the abstract. If people learn only the proof-text method of Bible study they will never develop a principle-based approach and will always remain children in their understanding.”—*Ibid.*

Two points are clearly brought

out in the above paragraph:

The first point is this: Only certain highly intelligent people are able to correctly understand what the Bible means. If you are not gifted with high mental attainments, please do not attempt the task; it will just be too much for you. Poor thing, you should not try to do what nature has not equipped you to do. To try to figure out the Bible will only mean confounding yourself in error.

—My friend, that is what Rome has taught and practiced for nearly two millennia! For thousands of years, Catholicism withheld the Bible from the people—by declaring that common people could not understand it, and would only embroil themselves in error if they read it! For centuries it was held that only the priests, trained by the schoolmen, could properly interpret it.

The message of liberals in our church is that only doctoral theologians and their seminary-trained pastors are qualified to explain God's Word to you!

What have we come to in our church when such heresy is printed—and over the signature of a former editor of *Ministry* magazine!

The second point is that if you do not think like the modernists, you are just dumb. Something is wrong with you. Your ignorance is showing. Only dumbbells accept the Bible for what it says.

Such talk goes over well with immature academy- and college-level youth. It is an appeal to conceit. Listen, students, if you accept our liberal interpretations of Scripture, you are gifted with abstract thinking. But those people out there who still take the Bible literally are childish. They are really babies who never grew up. Indeed, you dare not accept one—even one—proof text in the Bible, for if you do, you will never mature. Your reasoning ability will be permanently damaged for all time to come!

Sounds like strong language? That is exactly what he said!

“If people learn only the proof-text method of Bible study they will never develop a principle-based approach and will always remain children in their understanding.”—*Ibid.*

Friends, you had better keep your children and youth away from such teachers!

Newman concludes with this thought:

“The method that rules in the coming years will determine whether the Adventist Church will continue to grow and mature or whether it will always remain in an infantile state.”—*Ibid.*

Catch the message, and you will understand the deadly purpose beneath the attack: Only babies obey the Word of God.

This rationale helps explain the thinking of these men:

- The world may have been made millions of years ago. Genesis should not be taken literally.

- Jesus did not really take the nature of Abraham's descendants, even though Hebrews 2:16 says so.

- It is not necessary, in Christ's strength, to obey God's law, because He doesn't want you to, and it might be legalism.

- There is no sin, except separation from God.

- We were all saved at the cross, so have assurance that you will be saved in your sins.

The entire theory of these men is based on an error: Dederen, Newman, and their fellow travelers presume that the proof-text method violates Bible principles. The truth is that taking the Bible literally as it reads—each of its verses or all of it together—exalts and teaches the principles of the Bible!

If we cannot believe what the Bible actually says, what can we believe?