



2. Early Adventists' Homiletical Principles and the Expository-vs-Thematic Sermons Discussion

Principios homiléticos de los primeros adventistas y la discusión de sermones expositivos versus temáticos

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Abstract

The current controversy about what must be considered as authentic “Adventist preaching” evidences the persistence of the dispute between “expository versus topical preaching” in Adventists circles. In this context, it is important to ask what were the homiletical principles of early Adventists —especially those related to the structure of the sermon—and what do these principles have to say about the current expository-versus-topical-preaching controversy. The purpose of this article is to present and analyze the homiletical principles of early Adventists in order to identify Adventists homiletical principles and practices as either expository/textual or topical/thematic oriented, and to draw some relevant conclusions for the current controversy about the proper method of preaching among Adventists. Since early Adventists wrote little about their homiletical principles, this study identifies these principles inductively through two methods. First, early Adventist homiletical principles are examined through their hermeneutics, because the homiletical methodology includes a previous stage of hermeneutics, in other words, people usually preach in the same way that they study their Bible. Second, the material result of early Adventists' homiletical principles —their recorded sermons— are also analyzed in order to identify the operative homiletical principles.

Key words

Early Adventists' homiletical principles — Expository preaching — Topical preaching.

Resumen

La controversia actual sobre lo que debe ser considerado una “predicación adventista” auténtica evidencia la persistencia de la disputa entre “predicación expositiva versus temática” en los círculos adventistas. En este contexto, es importante preguntar cuáles eran los principios homiléticos de los primeros adventistas, especialmente los relacionados con la estructura del sermón, y qué tienen para decir esos principios sobre la controversia actual de predicación expositiva versus temática. El propósito de este artículo es presentar y analizar los principios homiléticos de los primeros adventistas para determinar si sus principios de interpretación y sus prácticas homiléticas tenían un enfoque expositivo/

textual o a un enfoque temático, y extraer algunas conclusiones relevantes para la controversia actual sobre el método apropiado de predicación entre los adventistas. Dado que los primeros adventistas escribieron muy poco sobre sus principios homiléticos, esta investigación identifica estos principios de manera inductiva, a través de dos métodos. Primero, se examinan los principios homiléticos de los primeros adventistas a través de su hermenéutica, porque la metodología homilética incluye una etapa previa de hermenéutica; en otras palabras, las personas generalmente predicán de la misma manera en que estudian su Biblia. En segundo lugar, también se analiza el resultado material de los principios homiléticos de los adventistas primitivos, o sea, sus sermones registrados, con el fin de identificar los principios homiléticos operativos.

Palabras clave

Principios homiléticos adventistas — Predicación expositiva — Predicación temática

Introduction

Preaching is one of the most important tasks of the pastor and it plays a very important role in the life of the local church. It is not an overstatement to argue that the style and content of preaching (homiletic principles) determine what a church is.¹ Not surprisingly, *Ministry* magazine (the international journal for pastors run by the Seventh-day Adventist Church) regularly dedicates articles about homiletical principles. In the last three decades, the consensus among Adventist homileticians has been that preaching must be fundamentally expository.²

¹ Forsyth has said: "It is, perhaps, an overbold beginning, but I will venture to say that with its preaching Christianity stands and falls". P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, The Lyam Beechman Lecture on Preaching, Yale University (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 3.

² For example, see the recent interview to Walter C. Kaiser Jr., one of the most fervent supporters of the expository preaching: Tom Dombrowski, "I Will Send a Famine": An Interview with Dr. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Ministry*, July-August 2010, 30-31. See also Yan Hee Shin, "Is Expository Preaching Still Valuable in the Postmodern Era?", *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 8 (2005): 63-74; Graeme S. Bradford, "Making Expository Preaching Relevant and Interesting", *Ministry*, September 2000, 26-29; J. Grant Swank, "Excitement About Expository Preaching", *Ministry*, May 2000, 28-29; George R. Knight, "When Persecuted in One Text, Flee to the Next", *Ministry*, May 1998, 7-9; Rex Daniel Edwards, "The Art of Expository Preaching", *Ministry*, December 1994, 5-7; William G. Johnsson, "The Art of Expository Preaching", *Ministry*, May 1994, 6-9. However, the expository preaching has been around in this magazine as far as 1948: Roy Allan Anderson, "What Is Expository Preaching?", *Ministry*, May 1948, 46, 48. See also D. A. Delafield, "Wanted: More Expository Sermons", *Ministry*, December 1969, 24-27.

Accordingly, it has been said that topical sermons have “many pitfalls”,³ and that it has “not a frequent place in the pulpit”,⁴ because “biblical preaching is best described by the expository approach rather than the topical”,⁵ and “it [the topical sermon] does increase the risk of taking texts out of context”.⁶ Even more, the hyperbolic statement of Walter Kaiser⁷ dismissing topical sermons summarizes the widespread sentiment: “Preach a topical sermon only once every five years and then immediately repent and ask God’s forgiveness!”⁸

Although the current tendency is to emphasize the expository/textual preaching at the expense of the thematic/topical sermons, some modern Adventists also recognize that topical preaching has an important role in Adventist history. From this perspective, biblical-thematic preaching’s “heritage is too strongly entrenched”,⁹ and remains “a very important practice in [early] Seventh-day Adventism”.¹⁰ Other voices have been raised to note the importance of the topical sermon, but remain a minority.¹¹

The current controversy about what must be considered as authentic “Adventist preaching” evidences the persistence of the dispute between “expository versus topical preaching” in Adventists circles.¹² In this context, it is important to ask what were the homiletical principles of early Adventists —especially those related to the structure of the ser-

³ Willie Edward II Hucks, “A Conversation with the Director of the Biblical Research Institute”, *Ministry*, October 2006, 9.

⁴ Roy C. Naden, “Preparing Your Sermon”, *Ministry*, October 1984, 13.

⁵ John Osborn, “Pseudo-Sermons”, *Ministry*, July 1980, 10.

⁶ Roy Allan Anderson, “The Power of Preaching”, *Ministry*, August 1980, 17.

⁷ Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 19.

⁸ Jud Lake, “Expository Homiletics”, *Ministry*, January 2005, 19.

⁹ Osborn, “Pseudo-Sermons”, 10.

¹⁰ Lake, “Expository Homiletics”, 20.

¹¹ Floyd Bresee, for example, affirms that “topical preaching enjoys significant strengths”. W. Floyd Bresee, “Should You Try Topical Preaching?”, *Ministry*, November 1991, 26.

¹² By 1980 the editors of *Ministry* magazine have already noted the ongoing of this controversy: John Osborn, “Poverty in the Pulpit”, *Ministry*, May 1980, 12.

mon— and what do these principles have to say about the current expository-versus-topical-preaching controversy. The purpose of this article is to present and analyze the homiletical principles of early Adventists in order to draw some relevant conclusions for the current controversy about the proper method of preaching among Adventists.

Since early Adventists wrote little about their homiletical principles, this study seeks to identify these principles inductively through two methods. First, early Adventist homiletical principles will be examined through their hermeneutics, because the homiletical methodology includes a previous stage of hermeneutics, in other words, people usually preach in the same way that they study their Bible.¹³ Second, the material result of early Adventists' homiletical principles —their recorded sermons— will also be analyzed in order to identify the operative homiletical principles.

The aim of this article is to identify Adventists' homiletical principles and practices as either expository/textual or topical/thematic oriented. Therefore, it is important to present a working definition of these terms to set a clear difference in the beginning of this study, so as the reader can evaluate the evidences throughout its development. In a few words, expository preaching focuses on a specific passage¹⁴ —usually a paragraph— that is analyzed through a historical, grammatical, and literary study in its

¹³ Randolph affirms that “understanding the text is in many ways the most crucial aspect of preparing the sermon, since what the preacher asks here is precisely the question a member of his congregation will ask: ‘How may I understand this text so that I hear God speaking through it?’ For this reason, among others, the current hermeneutical enterprise is of great importance to the preacher. Understanding is the key to the hermeneutical interest... Hermeneutics is the study of the principles of interpretation—a study fundamental to Christian preaching because preaching takes its raise from a given text which is to be interpreted. David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969), 36-37. See also Raymond Bailey, “Introduction: Hermeneutics—A Necessary Art”, in *Hermeneutics for Preaching: Approaches to Contemporary Interpretations of Scripture*, ed. Raymond Bailey (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 7-26.

¹⁴ Walter Kaiser Jr. gives this definition of expository preaching: “Expository preaching is that method of proclaiming the Scriptures that takes as a minimum one paragraph of Biblical text (in prose narrative or its equivalent in other literary genre) and derives from that text both the shape (i.e. the main points and subpoints of the sermon) and the content (i.e. the substance, ideas, and principles) of the message itself”. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Toward an Exegetical Theology”, *Preaching*, Sept.-Oct. 1995, 4.

context,¹⁵ and its principal points and central message are derived from the text. The textual sermon uses the same methodology, but focuses on a shorter passage, up to three verses. The topical sermon, on the other hand, is not limited generally to a specific passage, and its structure is organized systematically. In other words, the outline and the central message of a topical sermon are based on several passages of the Scriptures.¹⁶ The doctrinal sermons are classified as topical/thematic sermons, because they are mostly based in several Bible texts.¹⁷

Early Adventists' Hermeneutical Principles

The Millerite Roots

Merlin D. Burt has noted that “William Miller, as the leader and foremost proponent of American Adventism, laid a theological foundation that has remained significant for the Adventist denominations that arose after 1844.”¹⁸ And this is especially true when it comes to the hermeneutical principles —Miller’s rules of biblical interpretation laid the hermeneutical basis for Seventh-day Adventist theology—. According to Cromcombe, Miller’s major contributions to early Adventists’ hermeneutical principles were “‘scripture interprets scripture’; ‘the Bible is perspicuous’; a literal reading of scripture; the harmonization of Bible passages; and the

¹⁵ See also Haddon W. Robinson, *Expository Preaching* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 20. John Stott’s classic work on expository preaching also makes this point: John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982).

¹⁶ Mayhue establishes this difference among this three kind of sermons: “Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that generally serves as gateway into whatever the preacher chooses to address. By contrast, expository preaching focuses predominantly on the text under consideration along with its context”. Richard L. Mayhue, “Rediscovering Expository Preaching”, in *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition*, ed. John MacArthur (Dallas: Word, 1992).

¹⁷ See Francis C. Rossow, “Topical Preaching”, in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 93-102.

¹⁸ Merlin D. Burt, “Historical Introduction”, in *Memoirs of William Miller*, ed. George R. Knight, Adventist Classic Library (Berrien Springs, MD: Andrews University, 2005), xv.

need for a ‘spiritual’ understanding”.¹⁹ Two of these principles are relevant for this study: Scripture interprets Scripture and the harmonization of Bible passages.

Miller’s hermeneutical principles have been defined as utterly rational.²⁰ Freed affirms that Miller’s method of prophetic interpretation “shared the language and categories of the scientific method during a time when this method seemed to promise direct access to ‘facts’ or ‘truth’”.²¹ During his twelve years as a deist, Miller believed that the Bible was full of “inconsistencies”.²² After a series of life-changing experiences —as his participation in the war of 1812 and the death of his father during the same year²³— Miller decided to come back to the Scriptures and “take [his] chance respecting them”.²⁴ Thus, he determined himself to harmonize the so-called contradictions of the Scriptures or remain a deist.²⁵ This search for harmony in the Bible led Miller to adopt a rationalistic view of the hermeneutical method.²⁶ After two years of study trying to harmonize the biblical text, Miller affirmed: “The Bible was now to me a new book. It was indeed a feast of reason; all that was dark, mystical, or

¹⁹ Jeff Crocombe, “A Feast of Reason’: The Roots of William Miller’s Biblical Interpretation and Its Influence on the Seventh-Day Adventist Church” (PhD. diss., The University of Queensland, 2011), 2.

²⁰ David L. Rowe, “Millerites: A Shadow Portrait”, in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarism in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 13.

²¹ Anne Freed, “A Feast of Reason’ The Appeal of William Miller’s Way of Reading the Bible”, *Adventist Heritage* 16, n.º 3 (1995): 14.

²² William Miller, *Apology and Defense* (Boston: Himes, 1845), 3.

²³ See Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller* (Boston: Himes, 1853), 28-55.

²⁴ Miller, *Apology and Defense*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁶ According to Rowe, Miller “searched for an empirical verification for faith, and he found it through hermeneutics . . . Miller decided that the scriptures themselves held the key to their validity and that by studying the Bible in a scientific way, he could provide evidence of its divine origin”. David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerite and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 10.

obscure to me in its teachings, had been dissipated from my mind before the clear light that now dawned from its sacred pages.”²⁷

One of the intellectual trends that impacted Miller's hermeneutical principles was the Baconianism that pervaded all nineteenth-century America through the influence of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy.²⁸ Baconianism had become the classical scientific method, which consists of gathering information from nature, and deriving conclusions based on these “facts”. It was also called the “inductive method”. The Evangelical movement in antebellum America applied the Baconian inductive approach as the “scientific method” of Bible study.²⁹ The net result was that “within the American academy, the Bible came to be viewed as a storehouse of objective facts needing nothing more than to be mined and systematized into an objective, timeless, universal truth.”³⁰

In the context of this “scientific” method, Miller adopted the hermeneutical principle that made it possible to synchronize the different prophecies into a coherent system.³¹ Miller explains his hermeneutical

²⁷ Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, 76.

²⁸ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 172-176.

²⁹ Bozeman sustains that “antebellum America, marked by a lively and growing interest in natural science and evangelical Protestantism, widely nurtured the comfortable assumption that science and religion, Baconianism and the Bible, were harmonious enterprises cooperating toward the same ultimate ends”. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum America Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), xv.

³⁰ Adam Van Wärt, “The Relationship of Common Sense Realism to Dispensationalism's Hermeneutics and a Priori Faith Commitments”, Southwest Regional Meeting of Evangelical Theological Society (2005). <https://bible.org/article/relationship-common-sense-realism-dispensationalism's-hermeneutics-and-ia-priorii-faith-comm> (Accessed September 2, 2013). Charles Hodge, for example, also considered the Bible as “a store-house of facts; and the method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches is the same that which the natural philosopher adopts to ascertain what nature teaches”. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1871), 10.

³¹ Miller was acquainted with the work of Thomas Newton —one of the most well known specialists in prophetic interpretation of that time— who emphasized the possibility of synchronization of prophecy through the scientific interpretation. Manuel considers that even more, Newton also shares with Miller the understanding of the Bible as a system of truth. Miller's hermeneutical principles reflected the spirit of the age. For example, there are many coinciden-

method in this way: “To get the whole truth, all those visions or prophecies must be concentrated and brought together, that has reference to the subject which we wish to investigate, let every word and sentence have its proper hearing and force in the grand whole, and the theory of system, as I have shown before, must be correct”.³² Thus, one of the major hermeneutical presuppositions of Miller was the concept of the Bible as a coherent whole in which all the parts can be harmonized. He affirms: “The Bible is a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given”.³³

These two basic principles of the Scripture interprets Scripture and the harmonization of Bible passages (actually, they are based in the presupposition of the Bible as a coherent system) also have a prominent place in his “rules of interpretation”.³⁴ For example, the fourth and fifth rules express: “4. To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence, and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in an error. 5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself”.³⁵

ces between Miller and the scientific Isaac Newton, who also was a premillennialist. Newton applied the scientific method to the study of the Bible, coming to similar conclusions to those of Miller. Manuel affirms: “There was nothing left over, no random words still unexplained, no images that were superfluous. The system was enclosed. Complete, and flawless. Newton saw his ‘methodising of prophecy’ as an ideal scientific structures, exhibiting the greatest possible simplicity and harmony”. Frank E. Manuel, *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 98.

³² William Miller, *Evidences from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843* (Troy, NY: Kemble and Hooper, 1836), 5-6.

³³ Miller, *Apology and Defense*, 6. He describes his methodology in this way: “I commenced with Genesis, and read verse by verse, proceeding no faster than the meaning of the several passages should be so unfolded, as to leave me free from embarrassment respecting any mysticism or contradictions. Whenever I found any thing obscure, my practice was to compare it with all collateral passages; and by the help of CRUDEN, I examined all the texts of Scripture in which were found any of the prominent words contained in any obscure portion. Then by letting every word have its proper bearing on the subject of the text, if my view of it harmonized with every collateral passage in the Bible, it ceased to be a difficulty.” Ibid.

³⁴ The delimitations of this research do not allow covering the development of Miller’s hermeneutical rules. For a discussion and analysis of this development, see Crocombe, “A Feast of Reason”, 60-78.

³⁵ William Miller, “Mr Miller’s Letters No. 5: The Bible Its Own Interpreter”, *Signs of the Times*, May 15, 1840, 25-26.

From these fourteen rules, it is clear that the Reformation hermeneutical principle that Scripture must be its own expositor “is central to his [Miller] interpretation”.³⁶ These principles are based on the hermeneutical presupposition that the Bible is a harmonious system. Since the Scriptures have only one Author, there is no conflict between the message of the whole Bible as a system and any particular passage, in other words, the whole as a hermeneutical key does not jeopardize the interpretation of the parts. In his conclusion about Miller’s hermeneutical principles, Rasmussen affirms that “a major assumption” of Miller’s hermeneutics “is that the Bible contains a systematic presentation of God’s words to man, and that it is a collection of harmonious truths”.³⁷ Thus, the hermeneutical presupposition of the harmony and coherence of the Bible has a prominent role in Miller’s rules of biblical interpretation. Miller stated this presupposition in this way: “There never was a book written that has a better connection and harmony than the Bible”.³⁸

Early Adventists' Hermeneutics

Miller’s rules of interpretation had a deep impact in early Adventist’s hermeneutical principles.³⁹ Timm affirms that early Adventists “continued in general, with the basic prophetic hermeneutics of Miller but went further by applying his hermeneutics to Scripture as a whole”.⁴⁰ The

³⁶ Crocombe, “A Feast of Reason”, 71. O’Leary also notes that in Miller’s view, “Scripture itself provided the key to human interpretations of the divine message”. Stephen D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 118.

³⁷ Steen R. Rasmussen, “Roots of the Prophetic Hermeneutic of William Miller” (MA dissertation, Andrews University, 1983), 100.

³⁸ Miller, *Evidences from Scripture*, 4.

³⁹ George Knight notes: “In regards to principles of interpretation, they believed Miller’s ‘Rules of Interpretation’ to be correct. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, letting each word and sentence have its proper significance, and utilizing prophetic parallelism, typology, and the interpretation of symbolic figures as outlined by Miller in his quite conscious approach to Bible study, became a foundational perspective on how the Sabbatharians looked at Scripture”. George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Beliefs*, Adventist Heritage Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 11.

⁴⁰ Alberto R. Timm, “Historical Background of Adventist Biblical Interpretation”, in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical

influence of Miller's rules can be identified in almost all of the early Adventists analyzed in the next section.

James White

James White took a systematic approach to the study of the Bible, affirming that it is necessary to “collat[e] the different portions of it”⁴¹ in order to get the complete meaning of a word, a sentence, or a doctrine. According to him, “Scripture must explain Scripture, then a harmony may be seen throughout the whole”.⁴² The approach to the Bible as a systemic whole was repeated again and again by J. White: “Let us have a whole Bible, and let that, and that alone, be our rule of faith and duty”.⁴³ Therefore, the student would be able to search “the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty”.⁴⁴ This hermeneutical approach to the Bible as a harmonious whole allowed J. White to see in the Adventist position “a connected system of truth, the most beautiful in all its parts, that the mind of man ever contemplated”.⁴⁵

Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White also emphasized the necessity of a systematic approach to the Bible. From her viewpoint, the parts of the Bible fit perfectly in the harmonious truth, like links of a chain. In 1887, she wrote: “I saw that the Word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion linking into

Research Institute, 2006), 6. He also states: “Seventh-day Adventists inherited their early views of scripture from their former denominations and the Millerites”. Alberto R. Timm, “A History of Seventh-Day Adventist Views on Biblical and Prophetic Inspiration (1844-2000)”, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 10, n.º 1/2 (1999): 487.

⁴¹ White, *Life Incidents*, 150-151.

⁴² James White, “The Sabbath”, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 7, 1851, 62.

⁴³ James White, “Gifts of the Gospel Church”, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 3, 1854, 62.

⁴⁴ James White, “The Gifts of the Gospel Church”, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 21, 1851, 70.

⁴⁵ White, *Life Incidents*, 267.

and explaining another”.⁴⁶ She understood the Bible holistically, where the parts are perfectly related among them: “The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts”.⁴⁷ She also saw the harmonious truth of the Bible as a unifying and coordinated system: “The system of truth found in the Word of God is capable of making impressions such as the great Teacher desires to have made upon the intellect”.⁴⁸ However, her emphasis in the whole as a system does not jeopardize the diversity of the Bible. In other words, Ellen G. White recognized the unity in the diversity of the Bible.⁴⁹

Based on the hermeneutical presupposition that the Bible is a harmonious system of truth, Ellen G. White also emphasized the necessity to compare Scripture with Scripture as hermeneutical procedure:⁵⁰ “The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident”.⁵¹ This procedure leads to new insights

⁴⁶ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington: Review and Herald, 1945), 220. She repeated many times this same concept. For example: “Link after link of the precious chain of truth has been searched out, until it stands forth in beautiful harmony, uniting in a perfect chain”. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:651.

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 190.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1946), 136. This also is a recurrent theme in White's writings: “But the most valuable teaching of the Bible is not to be gained by occasional or disconnected study. Its great system of truth is not so presented as to be discerned by the hasty or careless reader”. White, *Education*, 123.

⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Oshawa: Signs of the Times Pub., 1944), vi.

⁵⁰ According to Damsteegt, “Ellen White was concerned that Scriptural passages and subjects should be studied in the context of the whole Biblical canon”. P. Gerard Damsteegt, “Ellen G. White on Biblical Hermeneutics”, Paper presented to the Theology of Ordination Committee (2013), 41. <http://www.adventistarchives.org/ellen-g-white-on-biblical-hermeneutics.pdf> (accessed August 21, 2013).

⁵¹ Ellen G. White, “The Science of Salvation the First of Sciences”, *The Review and Herald*, December 1, 1891, 737; “Able to Make Us Wise Unto Salvation”, *Signs of the Times*, May 1, 1907, 4; “Search the Scriptures”, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 9, 1883, 625.

of the text, as well as it will show the beauty and harmony of Scripture.⁵² And although Ellen G. White did not elaborate a detailed list of hermeneutical principles, she emphatically endorsed Miller's hermeneutical principles. After she summarized Miller's "simple but intelligent and important rules for Bible study and interpretation", she affirmed: "The above is a portion of these rules; and in our study of the Bible we shall all do well to heed the principles set forth."⁵³ In her summary of Miller's rules, Ellen G. White emphasized the harmony of the Bible as a system of truth, and the necessity to bring all the Scriptures together about a given topic.⁵⁴

Ellet J. Waggoner

Ellet J. Waggoner articulated in an editorial of the magazine *Signs of the Times* what is considered "the first comprehensive presentation of Seventh-day Adventist hermeneutical principles."⁵⁵ In these principles the idea of the Bible as a harmonious system of truth, in which all the parts perfectly fit in the whole, is clearer seen. In addition to emphasize the full inspiration of the Scriptures as first principle, Waggoner lists:

2. The Bible is one connected, consistent, harmonious book. It is composed of many books, but these books form only one Book... This Book was written by many different persons, yet it has only one author, and that is the Spirit of God. The different parts are inspired by the same Spirit, and have one purpose; there is a vital connection between them. They are characterized

⁵² She explains: "The Bible is its own interpreter, one passage explaining another. By comparing Scriptures referring to the same subjects, you will see beauty and harmony of which you have never dreamed". White, *Testimonies*, 4:499.

⁵³ Ellen G. White, "Notes of Travel", *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, November 25, 1884, 738.

⁵⁴ "1. Every word must have its proper bearing on the subject presented in the Bible; 2. All Scripture is necessary, and may be understood by diligent application and study; 3. Nothing revealed in Scripture can or will be hid from those who ask in faith, not wavering; 4. To understand doctrine, bring all the scriptures together on the subject you wish to know, then let every word have its proper influence; and if you can form your theory without a contradiction, you cannot be in error; 5. Scripture must be its own expositor, since it is a rule of itself. If I depend on a teacher to expound to me, and he should guess at its meaning, or desire to have it so on account of his sectarian creed, or to be thought wise, then his guessing, desire, creed, or wisdom is my rule, and not the Bible". *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Crocombe, "A Feast of Reason", 178.

by oneness of thought. As Christ prayed that his disciples might be one, so that the world might know that the Father had sent him (John 17: 21), so the perfect harmony between the various parts of the Bible is proof that it came from God... As a corollary to this principle it might be stated that the Bible does not need to be "harmonized". To attempt that is a thankless task, because the Bible is already harmonized... All that the Bible student has to do is to study the harmony that already exists.

3. The Bible must interpret itself.
4. One part of the Bible cannot be fully understood when taken by itself, apart from its connection, or without reference to the remaining portion of the Bible. This might also be called a corollary to the second proposition laid down. If the Bible is one connected whole, then all the parts are necessary to the formation of that whole. There is a mutual dependence between all the parts, and therefore in considering one part, attention must be given to the other parts. True, we may not misunderstand one portion of the Bible even though we study it by itself; but it is certain that we cannot have a complete understanding of it until we study it with reference to the Bible as a whole. This principle is as true of an entire book of the Bible as it is of a single text. There is no book of the Bible upon which light is not thrown by every other book in the Bible. To say that any two books in the Bible have no connection, is almost equivalent to saying that the Bible is not all inspired by the same Spirit.⁵⁶

In Waggoner's view, the systemic understanding of the Bible needs a systematic approach that takes into account the whole Bible in the searching for a theological meaning.⁵⁷ Clearly, there is an emphasis in the overall view rather than in the meanings of the isolated parts.

⁵⁶ E. J. Waggoner, "The Bible, Commentaries, and Tradition", *The Signs of the Times*, January 6, 1887, 6.

⁵⁷ Waggoner repeats this concept in the next issue of *The Signs of the Times*, when he summarizes his hermeneutical principles: "We noted first, that the Bible is absolute truth and that anything that disagrees with it in the slightest particular must be false. Second, that the Bible, though composed of many books, is one Book with one Author; that there is perfect harmony in all its parts... Fourth, that one part of the Bible cannot be fully understood if taken out of its connection, or without reference to the Bible as a whole. There is no book in the Bible upon which light is not thrown by every other book in the Bible... Lastly, we showed that a term used in one place in the Bible must have the same meaning in every other place where it occurs, especially if the same subject is under consideration". E. J. Waggoner, "The Bible, Commentaries, and Tradition", *The Signs of the Times*, January 13, 1887, 22.

Uriah Smith

Uriah Smith shared with Miller and many early Adventists the hermeneutical principles of *sola Scriptura*, and the methodology of looking for the meaning of a word in the whole Bible. This understanding of the Bible as a system of truth that need to be approached as a whole is reflected in three hermeneutical principles that Smith outlined in an article for *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*:

It is our duty to search the Scriptures. 'Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they that testify of me.' John v,39; Isa.vIII,20; Acts xvII,11.

The Scriptures may be understood. 'The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children for ever.' Deut.xxIX,29; Ps.cXIX,105,130; Dan.IX,2; Matt.xxIV,15; Rom.x,17; xv,4; xVI,26;

2Pet.I,19; Rev.I,3.

The whole, and not a part only, of the Scriptures our Guide. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.' 2Tim.III,16,17. Ps.cXIX,128; Matt.IV,4.⁵⁸

In summary, the Bible as a harmonious system of truth was the basic primordial hermeneutical presupposition of early Adventists. At the same time, this primordial presupposition led them to adopt two basic hermeneutical principles: the Scripture interprets Scripture and the harmonization of Bible passages. Although early Adventists barely used this term, the concept of "analogy of Scripture" correctly represents this hermeneutical presupposition of Adventist pioneers.⁵⁹ The principle of analogy of the Scripture presupposes the existence of a "system" (as principle of articulation of the whole) in the Bible.⁶⁰ Since early Adventists

⁵⁸ Uriah Smith, "The Bible, and the Bible Alone", *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 19, 1857, 155.

⁵⁹ Timm, for example, sustains that "the Sabbatarians applied the analogy-of-Scripture principle consistently to the whole content of the Bible". Timm, "Historical Background of Adventist Biblical Interpretation", 7.

⁶⁰ Bernard Ramm, for example, describes analogy of faith as a system of doctrine taught by the Bible: Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Wilde, 1950), 90.

recognized the vital connection among the parts of the Scripture, the hermeneutical task was not finished to them until a word, a symbol, or a topic was studied in the light of the whole Bible.

Early Adventists' Theological Approach

The aim of this section is to ascertain what kind of theological approach was used by the early Adventist to build its understanding of the Scriptures. Although the division between the biblical and the systematic theologies not always has been clear, these two categories are used here in a broad sense, where the biblical theology is oriented to the exegetical analysis of portions of the Scriptures, and the systematic theology is oriented to the synthesis of a topic or doctrine through the whole Bible and the relationship of this doctrine to an integrated doctrinal system.⁶¹ This inquiry is important because expository preaching uses mainly the tools of biblical theology, while topical/doctrinal preaching uses mainly the tools of systematic theology.⁶²

Starting with Miller, it is clear that he used a systematic approach to the biblical text. According to Szalos-Farkas, Miller did not use the tools of biblical theology as it is now known.⁶³ Moreover, Miller was not

⁶¹ Biblical theology is mainly focused on the meanings of the texts of the Scripture, using exegetical methodology as a principal tool. Systematic theology, on the other hand, uses the outcomes of biblical theology, and focuses on the meaning of realities and the interrelationship between the different doctrines of the Bible. See Fernando Canale, "Is There Room for Systematics in Adventist Theology", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12, n.º 2 (2001): 119.

⁶² Thomas, for example, affirms that expository sermon's "central core is always biblical exegesis". Robert L. Thomas, "The Relationship between Exegesis and Expository Preaching", *The Master's Seminary Journal* 2, n.º 2 (1991): 191. Goldsworthy also establishes a close link between expository preaching and biblical theology: "The way to expository preaching is therefore the way of biblical theology". Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 121.

⁶³ However, Szalos-Farkas goes too far when he affirms that Miller used "a fully-fledged proof-text exegesis", and that he did not pay so much attention to the literary and historical context of the passage, neither the original author's intent for the original recipients. Zoltan Szalos-Farkas, *The Rise and Development of Sda [no será SDA] Spirituality: The Impact of the Charismatic Guidance of Ellen White* (Cernica: Editura Institutului Teologic, 2005), 106-107.

concerned for reading the Scriptures from the original languages.⁶⁴ And when it comes to early Adventists, although they worked in the context of the principle of *sola Scriptura*, they did not use the modern tools of biblical theology as a theological discipline.

Jerry Brown affirms that American Protestants —biblical scholars and less trained theologians— did not use the empirical tools of biblical theology until the end of nineteenth-century, and it was only at the beginning of the nineteenth-century when Harvard graduates went from New England to Germany to pursue their studies.⁶⁵ Paulien correctly affirms that Adventist pioneers did not perform biblical exegesis as it is currently defined: “When we examine the work of our SDA pioneers we quickly discover that, with the possible exception of J. N. Andrews, exegesis as we have described it here was rarely, if ever, performed by them”.⁶⁶

On the other hand, early Adventists’ view of the Bible as a harmonious system of truths led them to develop a “systematic” approach to theology. Early Adventists understood their theology as a harmonious system of interrelated doctrines with the heavenly sanctuary as its “center”. The sanctuary gave a systematic integration to Adventism because it was connected to almost all basic Sabbatarian Adventist teachings. Several early Adventists recognized the theological centrality of the heavenly

⁶⁴ For example, Bush criticized Miller’s approach because it was based “mainly upon the reading of the English text of the Scriptures”. Miller simply answered that he trusted in the scholarly of Bible translators. George Bush and William Miller, *Reasons for Rejecting Mr. Miller’s Views on the Advent, by Rev. George Bush, with Mr. Miller’s Reply. Also an Argument from Professor Bush on Prophetic Time* (Boston, MS: Joshua V. Himes, 1844), 9.

⁶⁵ Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 9. See also Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Even more, Lee sustains that the tools of the scientific exegesis of current biblical theology were borrowed from German criticism in the context of the challenges of Higher Criticism to American Protestants: “I argue that in responding to unorthodox challenges, the Bible’s theologically conservative defenders sometimes, ironically, appropriated the interpretive tools of their opponents... Increasingly, the Bible’s nature and meaning became determined less by theology and more by disciplines such as natural science, philology, and history”. Michael J. Lee, “American Revelations: Biblical Interpretation and Criticism in America, Circa 1700-1860” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2009), 2.

⁶⁶ Jon Paulien, *Three Ways to Approach the Bible: Disciplinary Distinctions—Some Suggestions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1997), 18.

sanctuary. Joseph Bates, for example, saw “a harmonious perfect chain” of truth in the antitypical fulfillment of the typology of the sanctuary.⁶⁷ James White in one of the earliest issues of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, stated that the sanctuary “has been, and still is, the main pillar of the Advent faith”.⁶⁸ He considered this doctrine to be the place where “all the great columns of present truth center”,⁶⁹ and “the great center around which all revealed truth relative to salvation clusters”.⁷⁰ In Uriah Smith’s opinion, the sanctuary is “the grand nucleus around which cluster the glorious constellation of present truth”.⁷¹ J. N. Andrews considered the sanctuary to be “the great central doctrine” in the Seventh-day Adventist system, because “it inseparably connects all the points in their faith, and presents the subject as one grand whole”.⁷² Ellen G. White summarized the general understanding about the sanctuary in her days: “The subject of the sanctuary was the key which unlocked the mystery of the disappointment of 1844. It opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious”.⁷³

Timm noted that the Sabbatarian Adventists used the “end-time eschatological emphasis as the basic hermeneutical framework for the development of a unique doctrinal system integrated by the concept of the cleansing of the sanctuary of Dan 8,14 and the three angels’ messages of Rev 14,6–12”.⁷⁴ Fortin also agrees that the sanctuary doctrine was “the

⁶⁷ Joseph Bates, *A Vindication of the Seventh-Day Sabbath, and the Commandments of God: With a Further History of God’s Peculiar People, from 1847 to 1848* (New Bedford: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1848), 90.

⁶⁸ James White, “Our Present Position”, *Review and Herald*, December 1850, 13.

⁶⁹ James White, “The Sanctuary”, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 1, 1863, 5.

⁷⁰ James White, *Life Incidentss, in Connection with the Great Advent Movement, as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation Xiv* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 309.

⁷¹ Uriah Smith, “Synopsis of the Present Truth, n.º 19”, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 25, 1858, 148.

⁷² John N. Andrews, “The Sanctuary”, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 18, 1867, 12.

⁷³ White, *The Great Controversy*, 423.

⁷⁴ Alberto R. Timm, “Seventh-Day Adventist Eschatology, 1844-2001: A Brief Historical Overview”, in *Pensar La Iglesia Hoy: Hacia Una Eclesiología Adventista*, ed. M. G. Klingbeil and M.

theological center of early Seventh-day Adventism and became the principle of articulation of all other doctrines”.⁷⁵ This early Adventist search for the inner logic of Scripture in its totality required a systematic approach that did not use the synthesis or articulation of the texts, but of teachings, notions, and ideas as main methodology.

Early Adventists did both biblical and systematic theology, but they always searched for the coherent integration of the different doctrines in the harmonious whole of the theological system, a systematic approach, for sure.⁷⁶ In summary, the SDA approach to the Bible as a system, the use of the synthesis as a methodology that seeks to put together the parts in a harmonious whole, the discovering of a “center” around which all revealed truth relative to salvation clusters, all are elements that point out to a systematic approach to the theological task.⁷⁷ However, it is necessary to clarify that systematic theology presupposes a previous task of interpretation of the text through the process of analysis that characterizes the exegetical and biblical theologies. Although early Adventists did not use the modern tools of the current scientific exegesis, they went through a process of interpretation of the text that pays attention to the context,

A. Nuñez G. A. Klingbeil (Libertador San Martín: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002), 287. See also Alberto R. Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 1995).

⁷⁵ Denis Fortin, “Nineteenth-Century Evangelicalism and Early Adventist Statements of Beliefs”, *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36, n.º 1 (1998): 65.

⁷⁶ Paulien sustains that the current formulation of fundamental beliefs, which reflects the early Adventists' view of the doctrinal structure of the Bible, was built through the methodology of the systematic theology: “If we accept the definitions offered in this paper, the fundamental beliefs of SDAs, as voted in 1980, are much more akin to systematic theology than Biblical theology”, Paulien, *Three Ways to Approach the Bible*, 19.

⁷⁷ George Knight remarks early Adventists' “theological orientation that saw ‘the sanctuary in heaven as the grand center of the Christian system,’ a concept that helped them unify all their other beliefs”, Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 74, 75. He also notes their systemic view of the theology: “Another point that we should emphasize about Sabbatarian Adventist theology during the late 1840s is that *it was a theology rather than a list of discrete doctrines...* The various aspects of that theology did not exist as isolated units. To the contrary, it was a united whole with each aspect related to the others”, *Ibid.*, 86.

but always with a systematic intention (to them, the system was always the ultimate objective).

Early Adventists' Homiletical Principles

Early Adventists wrote little about their homiletical principles. A proof is the fact that most of the first articles of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* on homiletics are reprints from other sources, and many of them are brief notes on the matter.⁷⁸ Besides, in the first articles there are more references to the way of delivering the sermon rather than to the way of structuring it. For this reason, this article looks for the early Adventists' homiletical principles mostly in their material result—the recorded sermons—to identify the operative principles.

In order to establish early Adventists homiletical tendencies, three well-known classifications used in their days are used: textual, expository, and topical.⁷⁹ During the first three decades of the nineteenth-century there was a boom of the expository preaching.⁸⁰ Lambertson describes that during this era there was “an open advocacy of expository materials such as has not been found in any previous period.”⁸¹ One of the most

⁷⁸ Turner gives a very helpful chronological list of articles on preaching in the *Review and Herald* between 1850 and 1905: R. Edward Turner, *Proclaiming the Word: The Concept of Preaching in the Thought of Ellen G. White*, Andrews University Monographs, Studies in Religion Vol. XII (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979), 149-167.

⁷⁹ Elton Abernathy, “Trends in American Homiletic Theory since 1860”, *Speech Monographs* 10, n.º 1 (1943): 68-74. See also Elton Abernathy, “An Analysis of the Trends in American Homiletical Theory” (PhD diss., State University of Iowa, 1940), 56-69. Porter defines how these categories were understood in early Adventists' days: In topical sermons, “the text merely suggests the topic and retires, leaving the preacher to treat it as he would if he had no text”. In textual sermons the “subject or subjects are suggested by the text and flow directly from it”. The expository sermons “are chiefly occupied with the exposition of Scripture”. James Porter, *Hints to Self-Educated Ministers* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1879), 91-92.

⁸⁰ Walter Homolka Alexander Deeg, and Heinz-Günther Schöttler, *Preaching in Judaism and Christianity: Encounters and Developments from Biblical Times to Modernity*, Studia Judaica XLI (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 73-75.

⁸¹ Floyd W. Lambertson, “A Survey and Analysis of American Homiletics Prior to 1860” (PhD Diss., State University of Iowa, 1930), 147. By 1832 Charles Simeon, one of the main forerunners of expository preaching, had been completed his twenty-one volumes of sermon outlines, covering the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation: Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae; or,*

basic characteristics of expository sermons is that it is based on a literary unit of thought of the Bible, and that its outline corresponds to the structure of this pericope.⁸² In the topical preaching, several biblical passages are the base of the sermon, and the outline responds to the nature of the topic (a way of preaching used in most of the New Testament sermons). In the textual sermon, a text is the base of the preaching, but its outline is not governed by the pericope.

Millerite Background

The style of preaching among Millerite's English forerunners was essentially thematic. For example, the English preachers of the eighteenth-century (Wesley and his associates) followed the topical method. Dargan sustains: "The English preachers had never been as much given to the expository homily . . . So the topical method of composing sermons, with a good deal of the scholastics analysis, had been prevalent in the preceding period and remained the dominant method in the eighteenth century, though with less elaborate refinement of division and subdivision."⁸³ The thematic/topical approach to the preaching continued to be the predominant one during the next century,⁸⁴ and one of the best exponents of this style is the second coming preacher Edward Irving (1792-1834).⁸⁵

When it comes to North America, it seems that both methods were widespread. In his study of the Puritan preaching of New England's first fifty years of settlement, Levy sustains that Puritan preachers used extensively the expository, and topical/thematic method (the latter specially in

Discourses Digested into One Continued Series and Forming Upon Every Book of the Old and New Testament (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1932). In this work, Simeon laid the basis of the modern understanding of expository preaching: See Hughes Oliphant Old, *Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening*, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 564-578.

⁸² See Jud Lake, "Philosophy of Expository Preaching". <http://sharepdf.net/read/83186/philosophy-of-expository-preaching> (accessed September 13, 2013).

⁸³ Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1954), 293.

⁸⁴ About the preaching style among English preachers of the nineteenth century, Dargan says that "the method was English; topical rather than expository". *Ibid.*, 477.

⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, 483-487.

doctrinal preaching).⁸⁶ The use of both methods in preaching is clear in the sermons of Mathew Henry (1662-1714). His well-known six-volume *Exposition of the Bible* is the fruit of years of expository preaching that accompanied the readings from the Bible every Sunday morning and afternoon. However, he also developed extensive topical/thematic series that followed the order of the Systematic Theology.⁸⁷ The style of evangelistic preaching during this era was fundamentally thematic in his approach. The prominent evangelist Dwight L. Moody, for example, followed a clear thematic style in his evangelistic series.⁸⁸

Miller's sermons can be classified as fundamentally thematic/doctrinal. Three main reasons can be given to explain this homiletical election. First and foremost, the topical/thematic sermon was a result of his hermeneutical presupposition that the Bible is a system of truth, and that the meaning of a word, a symbol, a concept, or a doctrine need to be searched through the whole Bible. As he preached to show the biblical foundation of his discoveries, he went through the whole Bible to convince people of these truths. Second, most of Miller's contemporary preachers used the topical/thematic sermon to preach—especially when it comes to doctrines. Third, thematic/doctrinal structure matched with the nature of the content of Miller's sermons. Miller preached fundamentally about only one doctrine—the literal, visible, premillennial return of Jesus—and this doctrine was conformed by the prophetic sections of the books of Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation.

One of the best examples of this homiletical approach can be found in Miller's sermon about the Kingdom of God based on Daniel 2,44, which

⁸⁶ Babette May Levy, *Preaching in the First Half Century of New England History* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1945), 89-93.

⁸⁷ Old, *Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening*, 30-34.

⁸⁸ Turnbull describes Moody's methodology: "One of his methods of preparation for the sermon was to take a theme in the Bible and use the concordance references to trace the subject... Biblical quotations used were cut out of a Bible and pasted in the proper place in his notes". Ralph G. Turnbull, *A History of Preaching: From the Close of the Nineteenth Century to the Middle of the Twentieth Century, and American Preaching During the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1974), 129.

he gave in New York City, Monday evening, November 14, 1842.⁸⁹ This sermon can be considered one of his more representative messages, as he repeated it several times in the next months during his itinerant preachings.⁹⁰ Although Miller took the title of his sermon from Daniel 2,44, the outline of the sermon does not spring from this text, but it has a logical/thematic structure. These are the four sections of the outline:

1. What it [the Kingdom of God] is
2. Whose it is
3. When it is
4. Where it is. Several biblical texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament —more than 70 passages— are quoted to make the point of each division.

The outline of the sermon and the quantity of the biblical passages quoted clearly define it as thematic/doctrinal. This same approach can be seen in many of the Miller's published sermons.⁹¹ However, when a given prophetic topic is found in a single pericope (for example, the seven churches of Revelation 1-3), Miller uses an expository approach,

⁸⁹ Joshua V. Himes published later this sermon in a pamphlet widely distributed: William Miller, "The Kingdom of God" (Boston, MA: Joshua V. Himes, 1842).

⁹⁰ James R. Nix, "Advent Preaching" (Washington, DC: North American Division Office of Education, 1989). <http://www.adventistheritage.org/article/134/resources/ advent-preaching> (accessed September 2013).

⁹¹ The book *Evidences from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843* contains 19 of the most important lectures of Miller, with topics as the "The Second Appearing of Christ", "The First Resurrection", and "The Two Thousand Three Hundred Days". In almost all of these sermons Miller follows the same methodology: first, he quotes a biblical passage, which gives the title/topic of the sermon. Then, Millers logically structure the sermon in order to develop the topic from the whole Bible. In the first sermon about the Second Coming, for example, Miller divides the structure of the sermon in the following way: "Having thus proved that the apostles directed our hope to the coming of Christ for the fulfillment of all our trials and persecution, and the completion of our faith, I shall now take up our subject in the following order: I. I shall endeavor to prove that it is yet future; viz., the coming of Christ, spoken of in the text. II. The certainty of his coming. III. The object of his coming". William Miller, *Evidences from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, About the Year 1843; Exhibited in a Course of Lectures* (Boston, MA: Joshua V. Himes, 1842), 12.

although the outline of the sermon is not based in the “exegetical ideas”.⁹² In other words, Miller chose the outline of the sermon according to the nature of the topic. Since he frequently preached about the imminence of the Second Coming from a doctrinal/systematic approach, most of his sermons had a thematic/doctrinal outline.

Early Adventists' Homiletical Principles

Early Adventists inherited the Millerite's emphasis in doctrinal preaching. However, this tendency was intensified by three main factors: First, they deepened and elaborated Miller hermeneutical principles, which led them to approach the Bible as a system of truth, and as a harmonious whole. Second, the first years of the Sabbatarian Adventists was a period of doctrinal consolidation.⁹³ Third, early Adventist developed an apologetic methodology for doing evangelism, “by challenging local preachers of other denominations to a debate on such topics as the true Sabbath or the condition of individuals in death”.⁹⁴ The general tendency to use thematic/doctrinal sermons in preaching is found in several of the following early Adventists.

James White

The analysis of James White's hermeneutical principles showed that he considered the Bible as a harmonious whole. It is from the viewpoint of this connected system of truth that James White approached to the preaching. One example of this approach is the series *Sermons on the Coming and Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ*,⁹⁵ which later would be

⁹² In this kind of lectures Miller seems to follow more closely the structure of the biblical text. However, the election of the concepts/terms explained is in function of the prophetic interpretation, not in function of the “exegetical ideas”.

⁹³ See Timm, “The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages 1844-1863”, xvii.

⁹⁴ Knight, *A Search for Identity*, 87-88.

⁹⁵ James White, *Sermons on the Coming and Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Battle Cree, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Association, 1870).

published as *Bible Adventism*.⁹⁶ James White's sermons in this series is clearly thematic/doctrinal, addressing doctrines like "The Millennium (sermon two)", "The Second Advent (sermon three)", or "The Sanctuary (sermon nine)". Although James White occasionally takes a chapter as the base for the study of a doctrine—for example, he uses Dan 7 to address the doctrine of the Judgment—his approach to the sermon is not expository, because the outline of the sermon is not based primarily on the structure of the chapter, but it is characterized by the intertextuality, quoting abundantly of other sections of the books of Daniel and Revelation. His concern for doctrinal teaching led him to choose mainly the thematic/doctrinal structure for his sermons.⁹⁷

There are also evidences that James White sporadically used the textual structure⁹⁸ in his sermons. This is the case of his sermon preached on Sabbath, March 5, 1870, in Battle Creek, Michigan. James White delivered a sermon based on Heb 4,6 entitled "The Throne of Grace". Although he did not follow an expository order, he focused in the main themes of this verse, making allusions to the general context or the Epistle. James White followed a similar procedure in his study of the seven trumpets of Rev 8 and 9.⁹⁹ Although he followed the natural order of the text—first, second, third trumpet—the focus is in the fulfillment of the prophecy rather than in an exegetical study of the text. The emphasis is in the prophecy as a whole rather than in the particularities of the text—the history

⁹⁶ James White, *Bible Adventism: Or, Sermons on the Coming and Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Battle Cree, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Association, 1877).

⁹⁷ This overall tendency of early Adventists to teach and preach on doctrines also can be seen in the lectures that James White and Uriah Smith delivered at the Biblical Institute, in Oakland, California, April 1-17, 1877. James White, *The Biblical Institute: A Synopsis of Lectures on the Principal Doctrines of Seventh-Day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam press of the Pacific S. D. A. Publishing House, 1878).

⁹⁸ Currently, the difference between the textual and expository sermons only is its extension. While textual sermons are focused in one to three verses, expository sermons embraces more than three verses, even a whole book of the Bible. However, in early Adventists' days, in textual sermons the "subject or subjects are suggested by the text and flow directly from it". Porter, *Hints to Self-Educated Ministers*, 91-92. However, the structure of the sermon was not governed by the text.

⁹⁹ James White, *An Exposition of the Seventh Trumpets of Revelation VIII & IX*, Third, Revised, and Enlarged ed. (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1875).

is the main auxiliary tool to interpret the text, rather than the exegesis. Thus, James White's main approach to preaching was the use of thematic/doctrinal sermons, alongside some textual and semi-expository ones.¹⁰⁰

Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White wrote more profusely about homiletical principles than any other early Adventist.¹⁰¹ On the one hand, she wrote vaguely about the structure of the sermon, mentioning that it needs to be clear and connected,¹⁰² and that it should be organized intelligently and reflect a general order.¹⁰³

Ellen G. White's hermeneutical presupposition that the Bible is a harmonious system of truths¹⁰⁴ led her to recommend a doctrinal preaching that shows the chain of truth throughout the Bible, but without neglecting a Christocentric approach: "Theoretical discourses are essential, that people may see the chain of truth, link after link, uniting in a perfect

¹⁰⁰ This mixed use can be seen in other series of sermons entitled *Our Faith and Hope*. In this series, the first two sermons have a clear topical approach, addressing the "Signs of the Times", and "The Gospel of the Kingdom". The next three sermons, however, are focused in the first, the second, and the third messages of Rev 14. These last three sermons have a more expository approach, where the order of the chapter is followed, but there is an extensive use of the intertextuality and there is a concern for showing the broad landscape of the end-time prophecies. James White, *Our Faith and Hope* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam press of the Pacific S. D. A. Publishing House, 18??).

¹⁰¹ See Marvyn A. Warren, *Ellen White on Preaching: Insights for Sharing God's Word* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2010); Leslie Hardinge, "An Examination of the Philosophy of Persuasion in Pulpit Oratory Advocated by Ellen Gould White" (MA Thesis, SDA Theological Seminary, 1950); "A Survey and Evaluation of the Theory of Illustration of Ellen Gould White" (B.D. Thesis, SDA Theological Seminary, 1953).

¹⁰² White, *Evangelism*, 648-649.

¹⁰³ White, *Testimonies*, 4:407, 411-412.

¹⁰⁴ In 1887, she wrote: "I saw that the Word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion linking into and explaining another", White, *Early Writings of Ellen G. White*, 220. She understood the Bible holistically, where the parts are perfectly related among them: "The student should learn to view the word as a whole, and to see the relation of its parts". White, *Education*, 190. She repeated many times this same concept. For example: "Link after link of the precious chain of truth has been searched out, until it stands forth in beautiful harmony, uniting in a perfect chain". White, *Testimonies*, 2:651.

whole; but no discourse should ever be preached without presenting Christ and Him crucified as the foundation of the gospel”.¹⁰⁵

Ellen G. White was an outstanding preacher. It is estimated that she delivered at least 10,000 sermons and public addresses on three continents.¹⁰⁶ From the analysis of the recorded sermons of Ellen G. White—mainly from the second half of his ministry—it is clear that Ellen G. White used a wider spectrum of topics and sermon structures than other early Adventists. Turner revised all Ellen G. White’s recorded public addresses, and determined that 471 of them can be classified as “sermons”.¹⁰⁷ Based on a previous study of Horace Shaw,¹⁰⁸ he made the following classification of Ellen G. White’s sermons, according to topics:

Topics preached by Ellen G. White

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Number of Sermons</i>
Health & temperance	20
Christian faith & life	284
General topics	28
Education	39
Health	31
Ministry	65
Publishing	4
Total	471

¹⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 158. She repeats this concept: “The divine Sower scattered grains of precious seed, which we cannot see until a skillful laborer, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, gathers them together and presents them to us as a complete system of truth, unfolding the depths of divine love”. Ellen G. White, “Truth Revealed to the Humble”, *Signs of the Times*, December 11, 1893, 84.

¹⁰⁶ See editor’s preface of Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks by Ellen G. White*, 2 vols. (Silver Spring, MA: E. G. White Estate, 1990), 1:i.

¹⁰⁷ Turner, *Proclaiming the Word*, 146-148.

¹⁰⁸ Horace John Shaw, “A Rhetorical Analysis of the Speaking of Mrs. Ellen G. White, a Pioneer Leader and Spokeswoman of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church” (PhD Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1959).

Thus, for example, Ellen G. White uses the distinctive topical sermons when she preached about health issues,¹⁰⁹ or when she preached at the wedding of Dores E. Robinson and Ella M. White.¹¹⁰ She also used a more thematic/doctrinal approach when she preached about the distinctive doctrines of Seventh-day Adventists.¹¹¹ This kind of sermons was characterized for the quotation of a great quantity of biblical texts from the Old Testament and the New Testament,¹¹² a characteristic shared with many of the early Adventists. In many occasions Ellen G. White commented some portions of the Scriptures, using a textual approach, in the sense that the preaching was based on portions of the Scripture, but not in the sense of that the outline was based on the pericope.¹¹³ Occasionally, she also uses a semi-expository preaching, commenting and explaining by order some of the key concepts of a chapter, but not organizing the outline according to the exegetical structure of the text.¹¹⁴

Despite having used the three basic ways to structure the sermon topical (or thematic/doctrinal, textual, and semi-expository) Ellen G. White used more frequently the topical/thematic/doctrinal sermons, alongside the textual ones. In the entry about “Preaching” of *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, Lake sustains: “While Scripture was the major source of her sermons, she used a hybrid method of the topical and textual. Her

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, the following sermons: “Diet and Health” preached at Los Angeles, California, May 16, 1884. White, *Sermons and Talks*, 1:10-12. “Temperance”, *Sermons and Talks*, 1:214-226.

¹¹⁰ “Marriage and the Christian Home”, sermon preached at Sanitarium, California, on May 1, 1905. Ellen G. White, *Sermons and Talks by Ellen G. White*, 2 vols. (Silver Spring, MA: E. G. White Estate, 1994), 2:270-273.

¹¹¹ See, for example, “Preparation for the Judgment”, preached on June 27, 1886, in Orebro, Sweden: *Sermons and Talks*, 1:25-38.

¹¹² “Christ and the Law”, sermon preached at Rome, New York, on June 19, 1889: *Sermons and Talks*, 1:105-119.

¹¹³ For example, see the sermon “Lessons from the Fifteenth of Romans”, preached at Oakland, California, on Sabbath, October 20, 1906: *Sermons and Talks*, 1:360-383; “As little Children”, preached at Lodi, California, May 7, 1908: *Sermons and Talks*, 2: 299-304.

¹¹⁴ This is the case of the sermon “Lessons from the First Chapter of Second Peter”, preached at California Conference camp meeting, Petaluma, California, Sabbath afternoon, June 7, 1902: *Sermons and Talks*, 2:193-203.

sermons, therefore, were not expository in the sense of the biblical passage controlling the outline of the sermon”.¹¹⁵ Thus, it can be concluded that “her use of Scripture did not make her an expository preacher”.¹¹⁶

Uriah Smith

The understanding of the Bible as a system of truth that needs to be approached as a whole was reflected in Smith’s hermeneutical principles, and also in his sermons. His thematic/doctrinal approach can be seen in the sermon he preached on Sabbath, October 26, 1889, at the General Conference Session held in Battle Creek, Michigan. Although he mentioned Rev 10,11 as the biblical base of the sermon, he followed a thematic/doctrinal approach. In the introduction, he said: “The theme assigned to me is the history and future of Seventh-day Adventists”.¹¹⁷ Smith followed a similar topic approach in his baccalaureate sermon (the first one for any Adventist College) preached on Sabbath June 21, 1879, at Battle Creek.¹¹⁸

It seems that Smith also was one of the early Adventists’ favorite preachers for delivering funeral addresses. Three of them are registered: the funeral address for Henry N. White (eldest son of Ellen G. White) held on Monday, December 21, 1863, in Battle Creek;¹¹⁹ the funeral address for Mrs. Sarah A. Bourdeau-Giguere (wife of D. T. Bourdeau), held in the

¹¹⁵ Jude Lake, “Preaching”, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1049. Probably Lake is following here to Turner, that affirms: “Her [Ellen G. White’s] methods appears to be a hybrid of the topical and textual. Many of her texts were a basis for the discussion of certain topics. Yet, the text did not control the outline of her sermon, neither did it provide the framework for exposition”. Turner, *Proclaiming the Word*, 105.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 104. Here, *Turner is following to Shaw*, 556.

¹¹⁷ Uriah Smith, “History and Future Work of Seventh-Day Adventists”, in *We Have This Hope: Timeless Adventist Sermons*, ed. David C. Jarnes (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2008), 128.

¹¹⁸ Uriah Smith, “Baccalaureate Sermon”, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 3, 1879, 9-10.

¹¹⁹ Uriah Smith, *An Appeal to the Youth: Funeral Address for Henry N. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1864), 5-15.

Tabernacle at Battle Creek, February 11, 1899;¹²⁰ and the funeral address for James White, held in the Tabernacle at Battle Creek, on Sabbath, August 13, 1881.¹²¹ In all of them, Smith followed a topical approach with some doctrinal remarks.

The analysis and classification of early Adventists' recorded sermons showed that they used the three basic approaches to the sermon outline, topical, textual, and semi-expository. Notwithstanding, given their clear doctrinal orientation, they made an abundant use of thematic/doctrinal¹²² sermons. Basically, they used the thematic/doctrinal sermon to preach their distinctive doctrines —the second coming, the sanctuary, and the Sabbath, for example— and the semi-expository sermon mainly in the prophetic chains of the books of Daniel and Revelation, following the order of the prophesied historical events. They also used a more topical approach in special services, such as dedicatory sermons, baccalaureate sermons, weddings, and funerals. Sporadically, the textual sermon is used.

Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis of early Adventists' hermeneutical principles of the sermons analyzed in this article, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, early Adventists used mainly thematic/doctrinal sermons. While they used the three basic approaches to the sermon structure —topical, textual, and semi-expository— the thematic/doctrinal was the one used more extensively.

Second, although some of the early Adventists' sermons were based on a biblical chapter, or on a pericope, and they followed the natural order

¹²⁰ Uriah Smith, "In Memoriam [Bourdeau-Giguere]" (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1899), 11-18.

¹²¹ Uriah Smith, "In Memoriam [James White]" (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1881), 22-39.

¹²² Here, "thematic" refers to a biblical theme or topic that is studied through the whole Bible. In this research, the term "thematic" is preferred to the more usual one "topic", because in modern hermeneutics "topical sermon" has a negative connotation, making reference to a topic that is not based in the biblical material.

of its ideas, this approach cannot be classified as expository in its current narrow definition, since the outline was not controlled by the biblical passage. Practically none of the analyzed sermons followed an expository approach as homileticians currently define it.

Third, the early Adventists' choice of thematic/doctrinal sermons was not by chance. Early Adventist hermeneutical presupposition of the Bible as a harmonious system of truth, and their systematic approach to the theology led them to use the analogy of Scripture as a tool in their theological and homiletical methodologies. Early Adventists were focused in the biblical system as a whole, rather than in the parts. Although they used the analysis in the exegetical stage, they were more concentrated in the synthesis of biblical ideas. Since they considered Adventist theology as a system of truth, and the sanctuary as the center of their doctrinal system, early Adventists found in the thematic/doctrinal sermons a suitable tool to communicate their vision.

Implications for the Present

From the previous conclusions, it seems that the topical/thematic/doctrinal sermons can hardly be regarded as intruders in Adventist pulpits. The thematic/doctrinal sermons were the norm during early Adventists' days, rather than the expository ones. Of course, not all early Adventist views and positions were biblical, and there was a progressive and corrective development of some truths, methodologies, and practices. This article is not a call to the "old good paths of the pioneers". However, as perilous as neo-restorationism¹²³ is the "chronological snobbery", which is "the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited".¹²⁴

¹²³ Neo-restorationists argue that "historic Adventism was a purer faith and that current Adventism had been drifting towards Roman Catholicism or at least away from Scripture". Merlin D. Burt, "History of Seventh-Day Adventist Views on the Trinity", *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, n.º 1 (2006): 125.

¹²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 207.

The findings of this research contribute to the current discussion among Adventists over homiletical principles. The following are some suggestions that can enrich this discussion:

First, there is a need of balance. The expository preaching is necessary, since it emphasizes a grammatical, literary, and historical study of a passage in its context, modeling from the pulpit the way to study the Bible. However, the expository preaching shares the same limitations of the exegetical methodology, focusing more in the detailed analysis of a biblical passage, but neglecting the synthetic overview of the doctrinal system. Doctrinal preaching requires the use of thematic/doctrinal sermons.¹²⁵ Modern Evangelicals are not so concerned about doctrinal preaching, which is why they emphasize expository preaching. If Adventists do not want to lose their doctrinal emphasis, they should not neglect thematic/doctrinal sermons.

Second, it is necessary to pay attention to the presuppositions of the homiletical approaches. This research shows that early Adventists chose thematic/doctrinal sermons based upon their hermeneutical presuppositions and principles. Early Adventists considered the Bible as a harmonious system where the parts perfectly fit in the whole. In this sense, it can be said that the early Adventist understanding of the Scriptures as a harmonious system of truth is in opposition to the tendency of modern biblical scholars to focus the Bible in compartmentalized and isolated parts.¹²⁶ Kaiser notes:

The presumption against the unity of the Bible, more than any other factor, has spoiled evangelicals and turned them away from searching for any inner unifying principles in biblical theology or biblical ethics and from appreciating the legitimacy of systematic theology. Success in the analytical methods of scholarship has

¹²⁵ It is impossible to teach some doctrines only based on a chapter or even a book. This is truer when it comes to the “doctrinal system” or “system of truth” that early Adventist emphasized.

¹²⁶ This is the case, for example, in the division of biblical theology in Old and New Testament studies. Ebeling, for example, sustains that the reason for the separation of biblical theology into two different disciplines, Old and New Testament studies, is not the “result of progressive specialization in historical methods of study”, but “that historical criticism of the Bible made the theological unity of the Old and New Testaments problematical”. Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (London: SPCK, 1963), 91.

taken evangelicalism away from focusing attention on synthetic types of study to the degree they are needed for interpreting the Bible theologically.¹²⁷

In other words, while the expository preaching considers the whole (the doctrinal system) as a threat for the understanding of the parts (the particular Bible passages), early Adventists considered that the parts perfectly fit in the whole. Even more, they assumed that the parts only can be completely understood in the light of the whole. If the thematic/doctrinal preaching is banned from the pulpit, the congregation won't be able to understand the harmonious system of truth that early Adventist found in the Bible.

Third, a thematic/doctrinal sermon does not need to be just a bunch of biblical passages quoted out of context. Rightly understood, the thematic/doctrinal preaching includes a preliminary stage of sound biblical exegesis, the analytical stage. Although, this previous step is not showed in the delivery of the sermon; it is in its very foundation. Early Adventists preached about doctrines after having spent months or even years studying this doctrine through the whole Bible. In this sense, it can be said that expository sermons are not more “biblical” than the thematic/doctrinal, because the latter is based in a previous stage of biblical exegesis.

Summarizing, there is a need for a balanced view of preaching that includes expository sermons alongside thematic/doctrinal ones, an analytical approach together with a synthetic one.

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¹²⁷ Walter C. Kaiser, “Putting It All Together: The Theological Use of the Bible”, in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 245-246.