

Andrews University

## Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Faculty Publications

---

Summer 2015

### The Spiritual Gift of Scholarship

Martin Hanna

Andrews University, mhanna@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hanna, Martin, "The Spiritual Gift of Scholarship" (2015). *Faculty Publications*. 2151.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/2151>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

# THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF SCHOLARSHIP



By Martin Hanna

Christians are sometimes “schizophrenic” about scholarship. We agree with Francis Bacon that “knowledge is power,” and we get as much as we can, and we use it to defend and proclaim gospel truth. At the same time, we recognize that scholarship can undermine some of our preferred perspectives. So we wrestle with the question: How can we wholeheartedly welcome scholarship when it sometimes seems to undermine what we thought was true?

An answer to this question may be discovered by a study of scholarship as a spiritual gift given to the church by Christ.<sup>1</sup> Through this gift, Christians may safely use scholarship to correct and deepen our faith without compromising truth. In subsequent sections of this article I propose that a Bible-based and Christ-centered spiritual gift of scholarship empowers church growth and an international mission that is cosmic in scope.

**1. Bible-based.** The Old Testament drama of Daniel and his friends illustrates how God is the source of the spiritual gift of scholarship. “God gave them knowledge and skill” (Daniel 1:17)<sup>2</sup> so that they were “gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand” (1:4). Also, in the New Testament, this spiritual gift is indicated in Paul’s statement that “God has appointed teachers in the church” (1 Corinthians 12:28; cf. Ephesians 4:11) along with “the word of wisdom” and “the word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8).<sup>3</sup>

One of the reasons this gift is needed is because some parts of the Bible are difficult to understand. Peter writes that “our beloved brother Paul, . . . has written . . . some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15–16).<sup>4</sup> While only God has perfect understanding

of the Bible, we should study diligently since (as Peter indicates) some misunderstandings can be catastrophic.

The Bible-based spiritual gift of scholarship helps the church discern the difference between true and false scholarship. Paul warns Christians to: “Beware lest anyone deceive you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world (*kosmos*), and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).<sup>5</sup> Here, Paul is rejecting philosophy that is contrary to Christ while proposing a Christ-centered philosophy.

We are all  
*woven together*  
in the web  
of  
**HUMANITY**

**2. Christ-Centered.** Jesus, the Master Teacher, instructed His scholars that “the Holy Spirit” “will teach you all things” in a Christ-centered curriculum since “He will testify of Me” (John 14:26; 15:26). Therefore, “it is to your advantage that I go away” because “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (16:7, 12–13). Paul also teaches concerning “Christ in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2–3).

The spiritual gift of scholarship is supported by salvation through Christ, as illustrated by the experience of

Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace when king Nebuchadnezzar said: “Look! . . . I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:25). Similarly, at “the time of the end” (12:4), “Michael shall stand up” (12:1) for His people as He stood up for them in the fiery furnace. “Michael the archangel” (Jude 1:9) is “the Lord Himself” who “will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

**3. Church growth.** While we wait for the return of Christ, we are to make use of the spiritual gift of scholarship for the purpose of church growth. In this way, we can become wiser than Daniel, who wrote: “Although I heard I did not understand” (Daniel 12:8). Daniel was told to “shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end” when “knowledge shall increase” (12:4). This prophecy is to be fulfilled in the church since “none of the wicked shall understand” (12:10) this increase in knowledge.

The spiritual gift of scholarship supports growth in faith, knowledge, and ministry or service. “When He ascended,” Christ “gave gifts” (Ephesians 4:8) to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for edifying the body of Christ, till we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (4:12–13). This involves an “increase that is from God” (Colossians 2:19) through Christ. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him” (2:9–10) since “He is the head of the body, the church” (1:18; cf. 1:24).

**4. International Mission.** The purpose of church growth is to accomplish an international evangelistic mission.

Equipped with spiritual gifts, including scholarship, the church will reach the nations. “The mystery . . . revealed to His saints” (Colossians 1:26), which “God willed to make known . . . among the Gentiles [ethnos, the nations],” “is Christ” (1:27). This mission includes the scholarship of teaching, because “we preach” by “teaching” everyone “in all wisdom” “in Christ Jesus” (1:28). Daniel describes our destiny this way: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

Christ-centered scholarship in the church seeks the profit of all humanity. Ellen White teaches us that “every church member should feel an interest in all that concerns the human brotherhood as well as the brotherhood in Christ.”<sup>6</sup> “We are all woven together in the web of humanity.”<sup>7</sup> “Let us bear in mind that Christ is the great central heart from which the life-blood flows to every part of the great body of humanity. He is the head from which extend the nerves that reach even to the most minute and most remote parts of the body [of humanity].”<sup>8</sup>

**5. Cosmic Scope.** In order to effectively fulfill our mission to the nations, we must increase our understanding of the universal scope of the spiritual gift of scholarship. While no one person can perfect even one area of scholarship, each Christian is called to exercise their gift “for the profit of all” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Anything less than this is a dishonor to Jesus, our Master Teacher.

Christian scholarship is as comprehensive as the cosmos because: by

Christ “all things were created. . . . And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16–17) and are reconciled (1:20). Christ “is the head of all principality and power” (2:10).<sup>9</sup> As Bruce Norman points out, “Paul used some of the common cosmological terminology” of his time and infused it “with a different meaning” whereby “Christ” is “the beginning and the end of cosmology.”<sup>10</sup>

Inspired by this cosmic Christ, Ellen White welcomes a two-way illumination between science and theology. She writes that: “The book of nature and the written word do not disagree; each sheds light on the other. Rightly understood they make us acquainted with God and His character by teaching us something of the wise and beneficent laws through which he works. We are thus led to adore his name and to have an intelligent trust in his word.”<sup>11</sup>

**Conclusion.** This same inspiration actuates an appeal Ellen White made at the Battle Creek College in 1883: “Dear youth, what is the aim and purpose of your life? Are you ambitious for education that you may have a name and position in the world? Have you thoughts that you dare not express, that you may one day stand upon the summit of intellectual greatness; that you may sit in deliberative and legislative councils, and help to enact laws for the nation? There is nothing wrong in these aspirations. You may every one of you make your mark. You should be content with no mean attainments. Aim high, and spare no pains to reach the standard.”<sup>12</sup>

A Bible-based and Christ-centered spiritual gift of scholarship empowers a church growth and an international

mission that is cosmic in scope. With such a gift from God, we must dare to be like Daniel and his friends. “As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding of visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17). “In all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better” than everyone else (1:20).



Martin Hanna, PhD, enjoys serving as a teacher and as co-editor of *Andrews University Seminary Studies* at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. In his home country—the Bahamas, and in Jamaica, he served as a counselor, dean of men, research center director, and chair of the theology department. He enjoys even more his marriage to Henrietta (PhD in Nursing) and is proud of their children, Pharez, Melody, and Zachary.

## Endnotes

- George E. Rice, “Spiritual Gifts,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald), 610–650.
- All Bible texts are quoted from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).
- Robert A. Harris, *The Integration of Faith and Learning* (Eugene OR: Cascade, 2004).
- John D. Moores, *Wrestling With Rationality in Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989).
- Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 7:292.
- Ellen White, *Temperance* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1949), 208.
- Ellen White, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 16, 1894.
- Martin Hanna, *The Cosmic Christ of Scripture* (Berrien Springs, MI: Cosmic Christ Connections, 2006).
- Bruce Norman, “Pauline Cosmology: Relic or Relevant?” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 3:2 (Autumn 1992), 131–132; John Collins, “New Testament Cosmology,” in *Cosmology and Theology*, eds., David Tracy and Nicholas Lash (New York: Seabury, 1983), 3–7.
- Signs of the Times*, March 20, 1884; Martin Hanna, *The Use of Science in Theology: Case Studies of Langdon B. Gilkey and Thomas F. Torrance* (PhD Dissertation, Andrews University, 2004).
- Ellen White, *Messages to Young People* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 36.