



Reflections

A BRI Newsletter

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Biblical Research Institute

PURPOSE

Reflections is the official newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. It seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, and pastors.

WELCOME

To the first issue of *Reflections*, coming from the Biblical Research Institute. Our team invites you to become a reader not only of this issue but also the numbers to come. The Institute serves the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist church, and it is to strengthen this global ministry that this newsletter was designed. Our intent is not to launch yet another magazine, but rather to put valuable information in your hands in a timely and convenient form that you will find both useful and quick.

Reflections will come to Division, Union, and Conference officers and ministerial directors. But we believe the information will be helpful to many; therefore we are encouraging you to pass it on to our pastors and other church workers.

But what will this newsletter talk about? At present it is divided into four sections:

- (1) **News and Comments,**
- (2) **Focus on Scripture,**
- (3) **Scripture Applied, and**
- (4) **Book Notes**

The first, second, and last sections are self-explanatory. In the third section entitled "Scripture Applied" we will have Bible studies that pastors and lay members can use when reaching out to people

with an interest in studying the Scriptures. Our plan is to provide one Bible study per issue. These Bible studies are designed to offer a framework of the major ideas, to be fleshed out by those who want to use them.

We hope you enjoy *Reflections* and will be blessed by what it brings to you.

NEWS AND COMMENTS

THE BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE (BRI)

Four scholars/theologians work in the BRI. Presently, they are Angel Manuel Rodríguez (director), Gerhard Pfandl, Ekehard Mueller, and George Reid, now serving as special assistant to the Institute.

Let us introduce you to our website. Some of the work we do as well as the specialty areas of our staff are listed there. (<http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org>). You will want to check it out. The website also carries many documents discussing theological and church-related issues that you will find interesting. The section titled Bible Questions includes shorter responses to biblical questions. In addition, the website Bookshop acquaints you with publications that you may want to add to your library.

The BRI does not work in isolation, but has a larger advisory committee called

BRICOM. It is made up of the BRI staff, administrators of the church, including the GC President and Vice Presidents, as well leading Adventist scholars and theologians from around the world. In addition, the BRI has close connections with the Geoscience Research Institute located at Loma Linda.

BRI PROJECTS

In 2000 the BRI completed work on volume 12 of the Seventh-day Adventist Commentary and Reference series, published by the Review and Herald as *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Ten years in preparation, it contains articles from a large number of Adventist theologians. Rather than simply following the sequence of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, it is more comprehensive and brings greater depth. Each major teaching of the Scriptures is explored carefully in an extended study that may run 20 to 40 pages. This volume is an invaluable resource, a must for every serious Bible student. Although published in 2000, many pastors have yet to discover it and how it can bring them real help.

At this moment the BRI is working toward publication of a new book on the interpretation of the Scriptures (hermeneutics). The articles have been reviewed by BRICOM and the process of editing is proceeding. The goal is for its completion by early Spring.

In an effort to meet a special need among Adventist professionals and the up to 200,000 Adventists attending non-Adventist universities around the world, the GC Education Department has asked BRI to prepare a to-the-point handbook of apologetics. It will aim specifically to help Adventists respond to basic questions put to them by their non-Adventist colleagues and acquaintances, questions dealing with things such as Why should anyone believe in God? Is faith defensible in the modern world or something left from simple times? Has not scientific discovery shown long-ages evolutionary development to be universally accepted truth? Why should the Bible be listened to as a final authority?

The well-known Daniel and Revelation Committee Series is currently in the process of abridgement and modification to reach a larger audience. The core articles from *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation, Symposium on Daniel, 70 Weeks, Leviticus, and the Nature of Prophecy, Issues in the Book of Hebrews, Doctrine of the Sanctuary, Symposium on Revelation (Books I and II)*, together with *The Sanctuary and the Atonement* will appear in more readable format while preserving their insights. This will make available

the best from the larger series in a one-or-two volume edition suited for widespread use and translation.

RECENT AND UPCOMING PUBLICATIONS BY BRI SCHOLARS

Angel M. Rodríguez:

“Eden and the Israelite Sanctuary.” *Ministry* April 2002, pp. 11-13, 30.

Future Glory: The 8 Greatest End-Time Prophecies in the Bible. Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002.

“Genesis 1 and the Building of the Israelite Sanctuary.” *Ministry* Feb 2002, pp. 9-11.

Great Apocalyptic Prophecies. Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002.

“The Heavenly Books of Life and Human Deeds.” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13.1 (2002):10-26.

Introduction to Christian Ethics. Silver Spring, MD: Griggs University, 2003.

O uso de joias na Biblia. Tatuí, SP: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 2002.

“The Remnant in Contemporary Adventist Thinking.” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: hacia una eclesiología adventista*, ed. G.A. Klingbeil, et al., 269-279. Libertador San Martín (Entre Ríos), Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002.

George W. Reid:

“Three Significant Changes Facing Today’s Church.” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: hacia una eclesiología adventista*, ed. G.A. Klingbeil, et al., 421-426. Libertador San Martín (Entre Ríos), Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002.

Gerhard Pfandl:

“Ellen White and Earth Science,” *JATS* 14.1 (Spring 2003).

“Exegesis is Digging Deep in the Word.” *Sabbath School Leadership* (October 2002):9.

“General Principles of Interpretation.” *Sabbath School Leadership* (November 2002):9.

“Guidelines for Exegesis.” *Sabbath School Leadership* (December 2002):20.

“Independent Ministries.” in *Pensar la Iglesia hoy: hacia una eclesiología adventista*, ed. G. A. Klingbeil, et al (San Martin, Argentina: Univer-

sidad Adventista del Plata, 2002), 445-454.

“Israel and the Church,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13.2 (2002):15-29.

“Keep My Covenant.” *Sabbath School Leadership* (February 2003): 22-23.

“The New Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah.” *Sabbath School Leadership* (Jan. 2003):26-27.

“The Pre-Advent Judgment—Fact or Fiction?” Part 1. *Ministry* (June 2003).

“The Pre-Advent Judgment—Fact or Fiction?” Part 2. *Ministry* (August 2003).

Ekkehardt Mueller:

Come to the Throne: Sanctuary Themes in Hebrews. Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2003.

“Introduction to the Ecclesiology of Revelation.” in *Pensar la iglesia hoy: hacia una eclesiología adventista*, ed. G.A. Klingbeil, et al., 147-164. Libertador San Martín (Entre Ríos), Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2002.

Introduction to the New Testament. Silver Springs: Griggs University, 2003.

Sanctuary Themes in the Book of Hebrews. Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2003.

“The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 13.2 (2002): 30-45.

“The 144,000 and the Great Multitude.” <http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org/documents/144,000greatmultitude.htm>. 2002.

“Theological Thinking in the Adventist Church,” *DavarLogos* 1.2 (2002):125-147.

BOOK SALE

Jewelry in the Bible, Angel Rodriguez’ review of a sensitive topic now can be ordered from BRI for \$4.00. In it you will find a careful, readable examination of what the Bible actually says about jewelry, a book that brings light on a sometimes-heated discussion. Check for directions on how to order from our web page or at the close of this newsletter.

FIELD CONFERENCE

From April 29-May 8, 2002, some 45 church leaders gathered to consider how to encourage theological unity in a growing world church. Those attending included several General Conference personnel, presidents from most of the world Divisions, and a small group of theologians. The Field Conference was called by

the General Conference and organized by the Biblical Research Institute. GC president Jan Paulsen gave the keynote address entitled, “The Theological Landscape,” published as an insert to the June 13, 2002 *Adventist Review*. Those who would like copies (without charge) should contact BRI.

In addition, the following statement was voted by the Field Conference and published in the June 20, 2002 issue of the *Adventist Review*. The statement is reproduced here in full.

THEOLOGICAL UNITY IN A GROWING WORLD CHURCH: A CALL TO OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD AND HIS WORD

A. Preamble

For the past several days we leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church gathered from around the world have reflected on our doctrinal heritage and trends within our movement. We have been privileged to do so in the lands of Greece and Turkey, where the apostle Paul labored and the Christian Church took root. Our deliberations in this setting, so rich in history, have reminded us of our heritage based on the Scriptures and we give all praise and glory to Jesus, who is Lord of the Church and Word of God incarnate.

The focus of our meeting was on subjects critical to the identity and mission of the church as reflected in the call to unity found in Section B. Several factors demand that not only we but the entire Seventh-day Adventist Church give serious attention to theological integrity at this time:

1. Under the good hand of the Lord, our movement is experiencing unparalleled growth. From humble origins we are now a world family of more than 13 million baptized members, and another million or more added to the number every year. More than half of our present family have been members for less than 10 years. We rejoice in these accessions, but we recognize that our Lord’s commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is not merely to baptize but to make disciples. It is imperative that the new members swelling the church be thoroughly instructed in doctrine and be nurtured to grow up into the stature of Jesus Christ.
2. An aggressive atheism and agnosticism is gaining ground in many areas of the world, as well as a secular mindset. Adventists must be thoroughly grounded in the Bible for their own spiritual welfare and witness.

3. The spirit of the age seeks to blur doctrinal distinctions and even differences between right and wrong. It argues that all is relative; there are no absolutes. The spirit of the age emphasizes individual feelings and experiences as the ultimate values. Over against such ideas we Seventh-day Adventists have been, and must continue to be a people of the Word, with the Word as the source and standard of our teachings and the test of experience.
4. Tendencies to theological divergence and dissidence are also apparent among us. Such tendencies are not new, but the large size and complexity of the church today, together with its rapid growth, demand that we be sensitive and alert to these tendencies toward theological polarity, and that we know how to meet them.

B. A Call to Theological Unity

We have been impressed that the Lord is calling us to theological integrity through our message as articulated in the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and other commonly shared biblical understandings. Specifically, the findings of this conference are moving us to work toward shared faith and action in the following areas:

1. To make the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God, the basis for our proclamation, life and witness, so that Seventh-day Adventists may once again be truly the “people of the book.”
2. To uphold and follow the counsels of the Lord He has graciously given us through the writings of Ellen G. White and making sure our church members and especially our youth treasures this wonderful gift.
3. To make Jesus and His atonement the only source of our salvation, and of a life of obedience lived in loving response to His grace.
4. To set forth our identity as the church which bears the characteristics of the remnant humbly, gratefully and clearly as a people entrusted by God with His message to a dying world.
5. To boldly teach and proclaim that we are in the last days of earth’s history and that Jesus is coming again soon to bring an end to this world’s misery.
6. To worship God as Creator of heaven and earth who brought all things into being by His Word and thereby acknowledging that theistic evolution and progressive creation fall short of appreciating fully both the fact of creation and salvation as found in Christ.
7. To value the church as the bride of Christ, who is honored as we live and work together in love,

but who is dishonored by dissension and division, shunning whatever hinders the unity of the church and promoting whatever fosters it.

C. A Call to All Leaders

While the call to theological unity comes to every Seventh-day Adventist, it comes with particular force to leaders of the church, whether ministerial or lay:

1. Preaching: We call on all who preach to ensure that the Word of God is the foundation of their preparation and proclamation. Biblical preaching includes expounding the message entrusted to the church in a meaningful way.
2. Teaching: We call on all who teach to be men and women of integrity who know the Word, and live it, and whose instruction is grounded in God’s Word and supports the message as understood by our church.
3. Writing: We call on all who write for church publications to leave no doubt that the Word informs, guides, and tests their ideas and to make a positive contribution affirming what the church stands for.
4. Discipling: Without diminishing our emphasis on evangelism, we call for evangelists and administrators to ensure that candidates for baptism are carefully prepared having understood and accepted the baptismal vow and that proper means are set in place for their spiritual development—at a minimum, a place of worship and spiritual leadership.
5. Administering the Church: We call on all leaders to be people of the Word, to give priority to the Word of God, and to be intentional in promoting and safe-guarding the theological unity of the church. We call on them to make the business of executive committees and board spiritually focused and mission driven.
6. Leading the Youth: We call on all Adventist youth to be true to our heritage and take up the torch, and we call on youth leaders to inspire the youth with a vision of our message and mission.
7. Administering Institutions: We call on all leaders and workers in all Adventist institutions—schools, publishing houses, health care centers, food factories—to so live, work, and instruct that each institution will have a clearly Adventist identity and mission.

We are an extremely diverse and far-flung church, but the Lord has kept us together thus far. Only He can keep us together as we face the days ahead. But we have a part to play: we must be alert, informed, aware

of trends, diligent and above all in close touch with the Lord day by day. As we earnestly seek His guidance and His power, He will enable us to be faithful to the wonderful heritage of truth entrusted to us.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all in all” (Eph. 4:3-6).

BIBLE CONFERENCES FOR PASTORS

Upon request of the field, the Institute plans and presents major Bible Conferences for Divisions and Union Conferences/Missions. These help ministers or educators understand major theological issues. Often programs address persistent theological misunderstandings in a field. For additional information, contact the Institute.

BIBLE CONFERENCE FOR BIBLE TEACHERS

The Second International Bible Conference for Bible Teachers is planned for July 2006 in Turkey. The First International Bible Conference for the same group took place in 1998 in Jerusalem and proved to be a great blessing for the participants.

FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

1 JOHN 1:9 IN ITS CONTEXT

Forgiveness of sins must have been an important topic for the apostle John. Sinning is mentioned 26 times in this short letter. John seems to describe Jesus and the experience of the eyewitnesses in the introductory verses to his epistle. Then he moves to fellowship and what hinders real fellowship with God, the light, and with each other, namely the problem of sin. The remainder of the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter discuss the topic sin (1John 1:7,8,9,10; 2:1,1,2,12). The first part of chapter 3 contains a heavy concentration on the word family “sin.” A definition of sin is given and some other statements about sin are made (1John 3:4,5,6,8,9). Being a true follower of Christ and living a life of sin are irreconcilable. Jesus, the sinless one, is the solution of the sin problem (3:5) In 4:10 Jesus is described as the propitiation, expiation, or atoning sacrifice for our sins. Once more in chapter 5 John comes back to the issue of sin (1John 5:16,16,17,18). But John’s concern is not sin itself, it is the solution to the sin problem. There is confession

and forgiveness and eternal life for those who believe in Christ and “have the Son.”

1 John 1:9 is part of a larger section which includes 1:6-10. This section has a very interesting structure. All the verses start similarly. They all begin with the word “if.” Taking a closer look we notice a difference. Three of them begin in precisely the same way: “if we say that” (1:6,8,10). The other two are placed right between these statements. The beginning of vs. 7 in Greek reads “if to the contrary we walk” and vs. 9 begins “if we confess.”

All three verses that start “if we say” are negative. They contain a human claim that is false: vs. 6: “we lie and do not practice the truth,” vs. 8: “we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us,” and vs. 10: “we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.” Furthermore, an intensification takes place in the negative verses (1:6,8,10). The first group of humans mentioned in vs. 6 claims to have fellowship with God and yet walks in darkness, i.e., lives their life in separation from and in distance to God. The second group (1:8) claims to have reached a sinless state. These people do not maintain that they have not sinned in the past, but they claim that now they have reached a spiritual level of maturity that keeps them from sinning. The climax is reached with the last verse. These individuals declare that they have not sinned at all. But the solution of the problem of human existence is not found in unwarranted claims of closeness to God and spiritual maturity. The solution is found in vs. 7 and 9: “But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.” “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Both verses address the sin problem and its solution. Sin can be forgiven by God. Purification from sin comes through the blood of Jesus. Vss. 7 and 9 contain divine promises which are crucial for our lives.

The three negative verses form a sharp contrast to the two positive verses. The structure of this passage highlights the difference between human claims and God’s offer. It is not important what we say, claim, and assert. All of that can be false and self-deceptive. What counts is the fact that God offers us solutions of problems that we are never able to solve.

Following this passage comes a paragraph in which John talks about the goal for every disciple of the Lord, “so that you may not sin” (2:1). True Christians can never be content to live in sin and continue sinning after they have been saved. But the apostle hastens to add: “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the

Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (2:1b-2). John keeps the balance and tension. Our goal is not to sin. Yet, as long as we live in this world we will be affected by sin and cannot claim to have reached a sinless state. John seems to be interested in perfection but not perfectionism. Our hope is in Jesus and in Him alone.

Ekkehardt Mueller

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

IS THE BIBLE TRUSTWORTHY AND RELIABLE?

Have you ever wondered what sacred books are all about? The Bible is such a book. The word “Bible” means originally “book.” It claims to be *the* book, different from all other books. Therefore, it has also been called “Scripture,” Holy Scriptures,” and the “Word of God” and has become the foundation of the life and faith of humans throughout the centuries.

I. The Self-Testimony and the Claims of the Bible

Scripture contains a number of strong claims:

- (1) John 17:17 – The Word of God is truth. God put his word in the mouth of his prophets (Jer 1:9; 1Thess 2:13) who proclaimed it (Isa 1:20; Heb 1:1) and put it into writing (Jer 36:1-2).
- (2) 2 Pt 1:20-21 – Although the Bible is written by human authors in their language, its real author is God who inspired them (2 Sam 23:2-3)
- (3) 2 Tim 3:16 – Scripture is inspired by God. This self-testimony of Scripture tells us that the Bible is unique and is the only foundation for our faith. It is the final and highest test of truth (Isa 8:20; 66:2).

II. Facts About the Bible

What are the facts that point us to the extraordinary nature of the Bible?

- (1) The Bible was written during a long time span (c. 1500 B.C. to 100 A.D.). In spite of that long time and the changes in society it is a unified whole.
- (2) The more than thirty authors of the 66 biblical books came from different social classes. They include shepherds and fishermen, scholars and king. Yet, these books complement each other, and it is one common thread that runs through them.
- (3) The Bible consists of two major parts, the Old Testament written in Hebrew predominantly and the New Testament written in Greek. Both are in a

wonderful way depending on each other.

- (4) The Bible was written on different materials, quite often on papyrus. Because this material was not very durable and in order to share the message of the Bible with others, it had to be copied. This was done quite carefully. When Jewish scholars copied Scripture they would count the words and the letters. In 1947 a 7.2 meter long Isaiah-scroll was discovered among the Dead Sea Scroll. It was dated to the 2nd century B.C. As its text was compared to much later manuscripts, for instance, to those from the medieval ages, it was affirmed that the biblical text was basically intact and therefore reliable.
- (5) Jesus affirmed the authority and reliability of Scripture of his days and lived by it (Mt 4:1-10).
- (6) The Bible has a wide distribution. It has been translated—at least partially—into more than 1600 languages. Yearly more than 150 million Bibles and parts of Bibles are distributed.
- (7) The Bible answers the most important questions of life: Where do we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go to? It describes the origin of sin in a perfect world and its eradication through Jesus Christ, the savior.
- (8) People have changed dramatically after studying Scripture. Terrorists, murders, thieves, adulterers have become decent people and benefactors of humankind.

III. Evidence for the Divine Origin of the Bible

Prophecy is a strong indicator that the Bible is more than just a human document. The chances that its prophecies could be fulfilled were very slim, even improbable, and yet they came true.

- (1) Mt 24:1-2 –

Prediction:	c. 31 A.D., destruction of the temple, not one stone to be left on another
Fulfillment:	70 A.D. destruction by the Romans under Titus; today the Dome of Rock is found in the place of the temple
- (2) Eze 26:1-14 –

Prediction:	6 th century B.C.; Nebuchadnezzar will destroy Tyre; debris to be thrown into the sea; Tyre to become a bare rock, a place for the spreading of nets; Tyre will not be rebuilt
Fulfillment:	After a thirteen year siege Nebuchadnezzar took hold of mainland Tyre, but he could not reach the island not far from the sea shore on

which many inhabitants had fled. About 200 years later Alexander the Great connected the mainland with the island. As building material he used the debris of the old mainland city. He conquered the city on the island. Tyre became a bare rock. Today fishermen dry their nets there. In spite of the favorable location and some springs the old city was not rebuilt.

(3) Isa 13:17-22 –

Prediction: c. 740 B.C.; the Medes and Persians would fight against Babylon; destruction of Babylon; Babylon to become a deserted city

Fulfillment: 539 BC Babylon was conquered by the Medes and Persians. Although partially destroyed by Xerxes, even during the Hellenistic period the city was still densely populated. But at the time of the Roman emperor Nero (54 - 68 A.D.) the city was in ruins and was used as a quandary. Babylon was excavated but not repopulated.

(4) Another type of marvelous and precise prophecies are the Messianic prophecies. In another study we will deal with some of them.

IV. The Bible and I

Scripture points us to Jesus Christ so that we can gain eternal life through him (John 5:39). I accept it as the Word of God and make the decision to study the Bible on a daily basis (Acts 17:11).

Ekkehardt Mueller

This is a book about soteriology [the doctrine of salvation] written by a person who had been in the grasps of legalism. The message of salvation exclusively through Christ clearly rings throughout the book. Works are correctly defined as the fruit of salvation and not as a means of acceptance before God. The meaning of the cross is explored in terms of God's objective work for us. When Jennifer J. Schwirzer begins to unpack her understanding of the cross and how what happened there saves us she comes very close to ideas promoted by those involved in the 1888 Study Committee and by another book published some years ago by the Pacific Press (*Beyond Belief*). However she is less radical in her views, particularly when dealing with the "in Adam" and "in Christ" motifs (though not totally clear).

There is very little in the book about the death of Christ as our substitute, bearing our sin and guilt, a subject of extreme importance in Adventist soteriology. We wonder about what she means when she states, "When Adam fell, the human race was literally inside his procreative faculties" and that is why "we share in the bad effects of his choice" (p. 104). I suppose she means that Adam was the source of all human genetic material. But the power of sin is more than a matter of genes. What about the natural world? It also was affected by the choice of Adam. Concerning the phrase "in Christ" she writes: "As we were in the loins of the first Adam, we are in the spiritual loins of Christ" (p. 105). Those cryptic statements needed unpacking. For her being in Christ means that the whole human race was legally saved, justified and glorified independent of a personal faith commitment to him as Savior and Lord. Here Adventist soteriology goes through some transformation weakening it by de-emphasizing substitutionary atonement and by an understanding of the phrases "in Adam" and "in Christ" that does not correspond to their biblical usage.

Angel M. Rodríguez

BOOK NOTES

Jennifer Jill Schwirzer. *A Most Precious Message: My Personal Discovery of Liberating Joy in the Gospel of Jesus*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2001.

BIBLICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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