



Reflections

The BRI Newsletter
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The Biblical Research Institute and the Issue of Women's Ordination to the Pastoral Ministry

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

1. BRI and Women's Ordination

The issue of women's ordination to the pastoral ministry has been with the Seventh-day Adventist Church for many decades. With the new developments this quinquennium, BRI members were asked to participate in various committees. Some wrote papers; a few addressed the topic publicly. In each case, BRI members shared their personal opinions on the issue of women's ordination to ministry. As of now the BRI as an entity of the Church has not taken an official position on the issue. It has neither opposed nor endorsed women's ordination. The ultimate decision remains with the worldwide Church.

2. Concerns

The BRI is quite concerned about some fallouts of the current debate. It seems that after the Theology of Ordination Committee (TOSC) finished its work, the dispute reached a new level that, in our opinion, is detrimental to the Church and to church members—that is, those directly affected and those listening to the debate. We have the impression that the discussion is no longer on a biblical-theological and factual level but that individuals and groups are being heavily criticized and condemned by others. In theology we refer to these as *ad hominem* arguments. Here are some potential effects of such an approach:

(1) *Ad hominem* arguments not only hurt people but may also create hostility between the attacker and the attacked, destroy trust, and hinder future cooperation and teamwork. In the end we may have a split within the Church—if not visible, then invisible. This may hinder the unity and mission of the Church for years to come.

- (2) Quite likely, onlookers will also be affected. Non-Adventist observers of the debate may be appalled by what they see happening in Adventist circles and what they read on the Internet. Thus the debate may have negative effects on the Church's outreach and on its reputation in the general public.
- (3) The same may be true of our church members and young people. The ordination debate has nothing to do with the Bible's most fundamental teachings. It does not belong to the core of Adventist beliefs. Hence, it is all the more disturbing to church members when they see people involved in the debate avoid, offend, and judge one another because they are on different sides of the ordination debate—and they see little to nothing of the divine love that Jesus wants His disciples to exhibit. This may raise serious doubts about the Church in the minds of church members.
- (4) Another major problem is the erosion of biblical authority and hermeneutics. It is perplexing, especially for young people, to see people who hold a high view of Scripture come to different results. As a result, they may conclude that the Bible is irrelevant to some or all issues that we face today, and that the Church has failed to articulate a methodology that brings us all to the same conclusions. This is very serious because such a conclusion would destroy the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

3. Response

Responding to these challenges, we urge those directly involved in the debate to be extremely careful when presenting their own views as well as those of others. Be gracious and kind. Our pioneers were able to handle different theological perspectives and still work together in mutual esteem. They were even able to live with unresolved issues until an agreement was reached years later. So should we.

We also need to consider the cost of our actions. Persons involved in the debate must look ahead and ask themselves: How could what I present adversely affect the Church and church members, not just here and now but also in the future?

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What would be gained if my position were accepted but people lose their faith in God and Scripture and their trust in the Church? When the debate ends, healing will be necessary. How can I contribute to that healing process already today? Is the issue of women's ordination really so big that the cost of it does not matter?

The time has come to stop rhetoric that hurts others. Individuals and institutions should foster peace and refrain from adding fuel to the fire. All of us need to reach out to others in respect and love, even if some differences remain.

To the observers we would like to say: do not be disturbed. Scripture is the Word of God. The Bible not only speaks to the past but it also speaks to our times. Typically, the problem is not Scripture but the human interpreter. Since all of us are fallible human beings, differences in interpretation will occur. However, there are biblical passages and topics not directly addressed in the Bible that are more difficult to understand and on which legitimate differences of opinion still exist in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For example, this is the case with certain passages in Daniel and Revelation. The Holy Spirit still has some work to do with us, and we must allow this process to happen. These biblical passages and theological topics that are not yet completely clear to us do not affect our fundamental understanding of God and His message for us. That we wrestle with issues is good; that we disagree in some areas is not necessarily all bad either. Still, Scripture is the final authority in all matters of faith and Christian life, revealing to us God's wonderful plan of salvation and of our crucified and risen Redeemer, Lord, Example, and Mediator Jesus Christ, whom all tongues will praise some day.

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Genesis on Marriage and Sexuality

STEPHEN BAUER

Is the Bible relevant for informing our moral views concerning sexuality, sexual behavior, and marriage in the twenty-first century? The question is important, for the inquiry itself assumes something critical about the Bible. We do not find people asking questions such as, *How is Plato's view of love relevant today?* or *Are Aesop's fables meaningful for in 2014?* Such questions are irrelevant because we see neither Plato nor Aesop having moral or spiritual authority in our lives. They are merely human authors whom we can take or leave without consequence.

The question of biblical relevance assumes some kind of prescriptive authority over our lives because we take the Bible to be different from Plato or Aesop. We accept the Bible's own claims to be God's revelation and therefore a moral and spiritual authority. On these assumptions, we ask the question of relevance. As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, the sole authority for faith and life-practice, and thus we wrestle with the question of relevance. How can a book we claim to be the supreme

spiritual and moral authority be meaningful in the twenty-first century when its literature was penned about three and half millennia ago? Is the Bible merely a quaint yet outdated moral guide, suitable for pre-scientific ages, and one that has outgrown its relevance?

I would like to suggest two reasons why the Bible is still relevant for modern people. First, I believe human nature has not substantively changed since the time it was written by Moses and others. Technology, society, political structures, nations, and religions come and go, but human nature remains essentially unchanged. We have the same fundamental ambitions, de-



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sires, and fears as past generations. The expressions and details of these concerns have changed, but not the underlying nature of humanity. Thus, themes and counsels on love, marriage, and sexuality will always be relevant.

Second, and more critically, we believe that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (1 Tim 3:16, RSV). The inspiration of Scripture means a claim to timeless moral and spiritual authority. Peter asserts that Scripture is more reliable than eyewitness testimony (2 Pet 1:16–21), while Christ said it cannot be broken (John 10:35). Thus Jesus and the apostles viewed Scripture as normative for the Christian. Just as human nature has not fundamentally changed, God has not changed. He says, “I the LORD do not change” (Mal 3:6, RSV). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever” (Heb 13:8, RSV). Divine inspiration and consistency demand that the follower of Christ view Scripture as God’s timeless and authoritative word to humankind. Unless one is willing to assert, either that the Bible is simply a product of Jewish and Christian religious communities and thus is not divinely inspired, or that God was mistaken in what He revealed to the biblical authors, then we must accept Scripture as an authoritative message from God to be taken seriously in all ages, at all times.

Resistance to the relevance and authority of Scripture comes, in part, from perceived tensions between current societal beliefs or desires and the claims of Scripture. Just as the biblical view of origins stands in sharp contrast to some beliefs and theories of materialist evolution, biblical norms for sexual behavior and marriage also stand in stark contrast to a number of contemporary values and practices. This contrast is especially pronounced when one believes God instituted marriage, designing it and the accompanying erotic expression of it for specific, holy purposes. This clash between contemporary and biblical values tempts some to conclude that the inspired wisdom of antiquity concerning intimate relationships is no longer relevant in a scientific age.

Considering these factors, I assert that biblical insights into sexual behavior and romantic relationships are exceedingly relevant. I shall illustrate this relevance by surveying such issues in the book of Genesis.

Foundations

The book of Genesis functions as the theological and philosophical introduction to the Bible. Genesis 1–4 gives the philosophical definitions for God, man, and the nature of reality used by the rest of Scripture. In addition, persons and themes that play a vital role in the rest of biblical theology are introduced throughout the book. For example, Paul builds his doctrine of righteousness

by faith in Romans, and to some degree Galatians, based on Abraham’s story—“Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6, NIV). Genesis thus provides the primary, foundational basis for Paul’s argument. In addition, Paul’s depiction of sin as a domineering, enslaving power (Rom 3:9; 5:12, etc.) seems rooted in the first biblical use of the term “sin” in Genesis 4. Here sin crouches at the door like a predator stalking Cain, who is called to gain mastery over it, and hence depicted as a predatory power—a theme Paul extensively uses. Based on these examples, we can reasonably expect that Genesis also provides a moral and theological introduction and foundation for themes involving romance, marriage, and sexuality.

It is no surprise then that both Jesus and Paul use the creation story to ground moral standards for marriage and sexual behavior (Matt 19; 1 Cor 6; Eph 5). Genesis 1–2 says that because it was not good for humans to live alone, God created a corresponding partner of a differing gender, so that in marriage a male and a female would become “one flesh.” Moses treats the creation of Eve for Adam as a prototypical moral example for mankind and declares, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24, RSV). Interestingly, both Jesus and Paul quote from the Septuagint (LXX)¹ version of Genesis 2:24 in which the LXX has the word “two,” namely, “the *two* shall be one flesh” (Matt 19:5; Eph 5:31). By adding “two,” the LXX translators nuance the context of Genesis 2 to more clearly depict the ideal of one man plus one woman—two people in total—as constituting the ideal marriage.

Jesus upholds the Edenic ideal of “one flesh” as a moral foundation calling us to treat the marriage union as something permanent that is not to be violated or broken (Matt 19:5, 6).² This strong emphasis on uniting man and woman in marriage seems to explicate part of what it means for humans to be made in the image of God. As God is a plurality united in oneness (the Trinity), similarly husband and wife are to be a plurality in oneness. Jesus’ application shows that the ideal from Eden is a permanent marital union of one man to one woman with exclusive sexual privileges. This ideal, however, was eroded by sin.

In the story of the Fall in Genesis 3, the ideal for marriage begins to degrade as Adam and Eve lose their oneness by falling into dysfunctional blame games. One’s spouse becomes at least a part-time enemy to be blamed for personal problems. Neither Adam nor Eve is willing to take responsibility for their actions or for their own contributions to the developing mess. Self-preservation and selfish desires erode the unity and sanctity of the bond, fragmenting the relationship. Such dynamics are amazingly similar to marital dysfunction today. But

these Edenic dysfunctions caused by the Fall were only the beginning of the departure from God's design.

Distortions

Polygamy

The story quickly proceeds to a new development in Genesis 4. Lamech, a descendant of Cain, takes two wives (v. 19). Here we have the first recorded deviation from God's design for sexuality and marriage and, most interestingly, it is a case of polygyny.³ In the biblical record of history, polygyny precedes promiscuity and other deviations from God's ideal. It suggests that the first steps from the divine ideal occurred in a context of ostensibly preserving the concept of marriage while redefining it to include multiple marriage partners. Polygyny appears to have been a tipping point that opened the way for more daring deviations in the future.

Polygamy is certainly a relevant subject today. With marriage under radical redefinition in the Westernized culture, polygamy is being reintroduced into political and moral discussions as a legitimate option for legal and moral approval. Additionally, in many parts of the world where cultures are not strongly influenced by Judeo-Christian morality, polygamy is permitted or encouraged. In polygamous cultures, the wives are viewed, to some degree, more as property of the man than as full, independent persons made in the image of God.

Polygamy again rears its head in Genesis 16 and 21 with Hagar. What seems to be a help to Abraham in getting his promised son turns into a relationship nightmare between Sarah and Hagar. Sarah demands Abraham to abandon Hagar and send her away with Ishmael. The dynamics of family dysfunction, rejection, divorce, and abandonment resonate with many modern people thrust into similar circumstances. The drama continues in Genesis 29 with Jacob's plural marriages to four women, doubling the numbers of Abraham's marriage partners. The dysfunction in Jacob's family, how he came to take four wives, and the resulting intrigue, deception, alienation, kidnaping, and slavery do not commend Jacob's clan as God's ideal for family life. As polygamy gains more media attention as a legitimate alternative form of marriage, the dynamics of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, as well as Jacob's family introduce a deeper biblical theme of negatively recording polygamy and its effects.

Voyeurism

Returning to Genesis 4, having started the downfall from God's ideal with polygamy, we descend to voyeurism in Genesis 9. Here we have an odd little story about Ham viewing his father's nakedness while Noah was drunk. In the context, God had recently reiterated the Edenic blessing and command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen 9:1). Before leaving the ark to

start filling the earth, God reaffirms the value of human life and makes a covenant never to destroy the earth by a flood. With these assurances, Noah and his sons leave the ark (9:18) to begin fulfilling the task of being fruitful and filling the earth.

The first thing Noah does is plant a vineyard and get drunk. The Hebrew text says "Noah lay uncovered in his tent." In that context, it appears Ham was playing the voyeur, turning the situation in to a live peep-show. The strong reaction of Noah to Ham's voyeurism, combined with the other two brothers' extreme reverence not to look, reinforce the suspicion that the incident with Ham was more than merely seeing his unclothed father. Noah's reaction points to something very serious. Certainly such a story seems relevant in an age of pornography and voyeuristic pleasure, reinforcing the sanctity of sexuality and God's design for it to be a private act between husband and wife, and not a public spectacle for voyeuristic pleasure.

At this point in the Genesis narrative, the trajectory of deviation from God's ideal for sexuality has moved from polygamy to voyeurism that reinforced separation of sexuality from marriage, recasting it as merely a means of achieving personal pleasure. With the story of Lot and his daughters in Sodom (Gen 19), we descend further into three new forms of deviance.

Homoeroticism

The first new manifestation of deviance presents itself when the men of Sodom want to "know" the male guests in Lot's home. Sexuality in Sodom seems to have shifted from the Edenic ideal of heterosexual marriage, past voyeurism and polygamy, to same-sex promiscuity and violence. It is significant that Lot immediately declares the proposed homoerotic activity as "acting wickedly" (Gen 19:7). The fact that Lot offers the virginity of his two daughters as a substitute suggests that he saw the rape of his daughters as a lesser evil than male-to-male sex,⁴ whether consensual or not. Certainly, Lot's reaction to homoerotic sexuality is relevant to the contemporary discussion of gay and lesbian rights in Western culture.

Rape

Genesis 34 records the story of Dinah. Traditionally, this is viewed as a story of rape, a view endorsed by its similarity with the story of Amnon's rape of Tamar.⁵ Most likely Dinah was forcibly raped. Consequently, the violent treachery of her brothers against *all* the men of Shechem (not just against Hamor) would seem to indicate that they saw her violation as an act of forced humiliation, justifying their forceful, deadly action.

Others would argue that Dinah's involvement was consensual. We would then have the issue of premarital

sex. If Dinah's involvement was consensual, we would then be introducing the issues of pre-marital and extra-marital sex, which are again highly relevant issues for current society. Whichever way one interprets this story we have one that resonates with current victims of sexual behaviors deviating from the Edenic ideal.

Prostitution

Genesis 37 introduces the Joseph narrative. As soon as Joseph is sold to Potiphar, the author breaks from Joseph's story, inserts Genesis 38 with Judah and Tamar, and then returns to Joseph being sold to Potiphar in Genesis 39:1. If we were to cut out and discard Genesis 38 few would even miss it. Furthermore, the fact that Genesis 38 focuses on the sordid sexual behaviors of Judah's sons, and by Judah himself, makes it seem relatively unrelated to the Joseph story. I would suggest, however, that the author is using Genesis 38 to further reveal the character of Judah as a villain and thus to set up a contrast with the heroic, virtuous Joseph in the ensuing chapters. The most obvious contrast is the two stories in Genesis 38 (Judah and Tamar) and 39 (Joseph and Potiphar's wife).

For our purposes, first we encounter Tamar being widowed when her first husband (Judah's firstborn) is slain by God for an unspecified evil. Subsequently, Onan is called to raise up a son for his deceased brother by entering into a Levirate marriage with Tamar. He practices *coitus interruptus* (the withdrawal method) to prevent Tamar from getting pregnant. Onan also displeases the Lord with his action and eventually dies, leaving Tamar childless.

Tamar then expects Judah to give her his other son, but when Judah does not, she disguises herself as a prostitute and lures her father-in-law to have sexual relations with her, a situation that results in her getting pregnant. For our purpose, it suffices to note how easily Judah got himself involved with a presumed prostitute. It appears that such an exploitive affair was normal in those times. Prostitution is also a relevant theme in modern western society where some sell their bodies to get money while others buy sex to have pleasure. Such distortion of sexuality has not fundamentally changed over many millennia.

Adultery

Turning to the story in Genesis 39, we encounter Potiphar's wife who appears to view sex as an expression of power over another, and refuses to respect Joseph's "no." How many date rapes occur because one does not respect the other's expressed refusal? The themes and issues in this story are certainly areas with which twenty-first century citizens can identify.

Joseph stands in stark contrast to the sexual attitudes exhibited by his brother and Potiphar's wife. What is

even more impressive is that at this point of the story he is unmarried, and yet demonstrates amazing moral discernment. First, he clearly refuses the inappropriate advances, even to the point of running out of the room. Second, his moral rationale is stunning. "But he refused and said to his master's wife, 'Lo, having me my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand; he is not greater in this house than I am; nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife; how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'" (Gen 39:8, 9, RSV).

Joseph's argument is first based on the duty to not violate Potiphar's trust in him. Potiphar entrusted Joseph with the management of his entire personal business, without reservation in any area. Thus, when we get to Joseph's clinching point, "how can I sin against," logically, we are expecting the sin to be against Potiphar. Joseph appeals to her sense of spousal loyalty by asking, "how could you tempt me to violate your husband's trust in me?" It is brilliant in simplicity and powerful in emotive appeal, yet just as we expect Joseph to clinch the point as a sin against Potiphar, he brings in God from seemingly nowhere. How is this a sin against God?

The key moral concept in the exception Joseph mentions is: "he is not greater in this house than I am; nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself." Joseph essentially argues that in that household there was no observable difference in role and function between Potiphar and him. "He is no different from me in this house." *EXCEPT*. Ah, there is something that differentiates Joseph from Potiphar, and what is it? "You." To expand, he argues that the sole point of differentiation is that "he has you sexually and I don't." Thus to engage in sexual sport with Potiphar's wife would erode the one mark of distinction, undermining the uniqueness and exclusivity of Potiphar and Joseph's in that household economy. In Joseph's mind undermining that marital exclusivity is a sin not only against Potiphar (by implication) but a sin against God (openly stated). It violates God's design for sexual expression, first expressed in Eden but now unpacked theologically by Joseph.

In conjunction with Joseph's declaration, the entire Genesis record reveals that God's primary purpose for sexual expression is not for personal pleasure or to get a baby to prop your psyche. Furthermore, sex is not meant to be a tool to manipulate others or a means to exploit or wield power over another. *The primary purpose for sexual expression, highlighted by Joseph, is to create and foster a sense of uniqueness, exclusivity, and specialness between a husband and wife in their marriage.* Genesis thus provides a rich record of the drama

and dysfunction that accompanies departure from God's ideal. Joseph's theology, in my view, is the apex of a theology of sexuality in the five books of Moses, setting the tone for the rest of Scripture.

Conclusion

God's ideal, then, is lifelong fidelity to one's spouse. Genesis gives us a hint of this in Genesis 2:24 where a man leaves his father and mother, is joined in a permanent bond to his wife, and only then adds the one-flesh union which fosters and maintains that sense of uniqueness, exclusivity, and specialness.

Although sin has distorted marriage and sexuality—as in polygamy, voyeurism, homoeroticism, rape, prostitution, and adultery—the Bible reveals God's plan and purpose for intimate relationships. In a world where divorce, separation, and infidelity are rampant, the Scripture promotes lifelong fidelity to a spouse. As noted above, Genesis provides not only the major theological foundations for the rest of Scripture in terms of romantic love, sexuality, and marriage but supplies suitable and relevant themes that inform the relational dynamics of the twenty-first century.

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¹The Septuagint is a Rabbinic translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek from approximately two centuries before Christ. Scholars use with the Roman numeral LXX (70) as an abbreviation of the full name "Septuagint" due to the legend that 70 Rabbis made the translation.

²Paul uses the text to ground marital union (Eph 5:31) and the phrase "one flesh" as a euphemism for sexual relations (1 Cor 6:16).

³Polygyny, from the Greek *poly* (many) and *gynē* (a wife or woman), is to have multiple wives. Polygamy, from the Greek *poly* (many) and *gamos* (marriage, wedding), is the general term for having multiple marriage partners. Polyandry, from the Greek *poly* (many) and *anēr* (a man or husband) is the practice of one woman having two or more husbands. All polygamous relationships mentioned in the Bible are polygynous. Polyandry is not recorded in the Bible.

⁴See John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012), Gen 19:8.

⁵Both narratives use the verb "force," "humiliate" (*'ānā*). Genesis 34:2 says that Siquem "forced" Dinah, while 2 Samuel 13:14 says that Amnon "forced" Tamar.

"When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature" (Ellen White, Patriarchs and Prophets, 46).

BRI Ethics Committee Releases Statements on Transgenderism

October 2014

In recent months the Ethics Committee of the Biblical Research Institute has received a number of inquiries about the pertinent topic of transgenderism. As transgender persons accept Jesus and join the Seventh-day Adventist church, some crucial questions emerge, two of which are addressed in the statements below. The first deals with whether a transgender person should get married. The second addresses how the Church and its members may relate to sex-change surgery. After close reflection and study of the Bible, the committee formulated two positions to help the Church deal with these issues in a biblical way.

Marriage of Persons who Have Experienced Sex-Change Surgery A Current Position

The question of whether marriage should be considered by transgender people who have experienced sex-change surgery¹ or whether it should be discouraged by the Adventist Church is a delicate question.² Oftentimes the affected persons have suffered emotionally and spiritually because of their feelings of gender incongruity and rejection by others. So they need all our love and respect.

However, if marriage of transgender persons is being considered, a few considerations are in order.

- (1) The Bible teaches clearly that according to God's plan and design only one male and one female can be joined together in marriage. In strongest terms Jesus upheld heterosexual marriage and ruled out polygamy as well as homosexual relations. These biblical norms are binding for humanity at all times and under all circumstances. Therefore, they need to be adhered to when pondering marriage of transgender people.

- (2) The Biblical Research Institute Ethics Committee currently works with the assumption that a male to female surgically-changed transgender person should be considered female and a female to male surgically-changed transgender person male, even though the new state is not perfect as constant dependence on hormone therapy indicates. If a transgender person has not had a sex-change surgery, the committee would consider that person to be male or female according to his/her biological sex, even if that person has adopted a first name associated with the sex opposite of his/her biological sex.
- (3) This would mean that a marriage between a non-transgender male and a transgender male or between a non-transgender female and a transgender female would be understood as a homosexual relationship,³ prohibited by Scripture.
- (4) A transgender person may be attracted to the same sex but may dislike sexual relations, for instance, as a male with another male and therefore may seek sex-change surgery, which would open the way to have sex with a male now as a female. Such behavior appears to be a sophisticated form of homosexual behavior that would also militate against the biblical perspective of homosexuality.
- (5) Regarding the question of whether a surgically-changed transgender person should attempt to reverse the prior surgery, we do not expect persons who have undergone sex-change surgery to attempt to revert to their former state, because presently sex-change surgery is irreversible. Under this assumption it would theoretically be possible for a transgender female to marry a male and a transgender male a female, unless the sex-change surgery was undertaken for homosexual desires. Yet even if marriage would be potentially possible, we believe that transgender persons who have had a sex-change surgery should abstain from seeking it.
- (6) A marriage between a transgender person and a non-transgender person can be a tremendous challenge, especially if total transparency is lacking. The non-transgender partner would need to know that the future spouse originally had the same biological sex that the other partner still has. Some partners might be able to live with such a situation, while others may find it challenging or impossible to live in a marriage relationship with a transgender person. In addition, the issues of sexual relations and having children would need to be raised between the partners that want to marry. For instance, a male to female transgender person cannot bear children naturally.
- (7) Even if both partners were transgender persons, reasons for getting married, issues of sexuality, having children, forming a family, etc. would militate against such a marriage.
- (8) As much as heterosexual marriage of non-transgender partners is a blessing, it also means work and adjustment of the partners to each other. This does not end after an initial period of a few months or even several years but continues for as long as a marriage exists. Today some heterosexual marriages are ending in divorce even after thirty or forty years because the spouses can no longer stand each other's idiosyncrasies and standard behavioral attitudes. If this is true for marriages that are entered into by persons who have not had their gender identities compromised in any way, it is an even greater challenge for persons who come into a marriage relationship with strong psychological burdens as a consequence of feeling trapped in the body of the other sex. Marriage is not a way to bring psychological healing to individuals struggling with gender identity issues.

For these reasons we strongly caution transgender people against a transgender getting married. However, even if the Church would not approve of a couple's choice to marry, the local pastor should still minister to those entrusted to his care.

Sex-Change Surgery A Current Position⁴

The rise of transgender issues to social prominence raises important questions for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In particular, the question of sex-change surgery (also called sex reassignment surgery) challenges the Church with sensitive questions. Although the transgender question is important, the scope of this document is limited to providing some guidance regarding sex-change surgery. We acknowledge that questions related to sex-change surgery are not merely clinical, but involve human beings who are experiencing deep emotional distress as they try to grapple with their personal gender identity. These people need our love, prayers, support, and guidance.

There are two areas of questions for believers in reference to sex-change surgery. The first is whether those who are already members of the church but experience gender identity tensions should have sex-change surgery. The second regards those who first have had sex-change surgery and then come to Christ and the Church.

Believers and Sex-Change Surgery

Gender identification usually aligns with one's birth sex. Sometimes, however, genetic, chromosomal, hormonal, and intrauterine influences may result in ambiguity of anatomical sexual differentiation. In these situations anatomical development of genitalia can result in a spectrum of disorders spanning the gamut from definitely female to overtly male. Those born with ambiguous genitalia may well benefit from corrective surgical treatment.

There is another group of persons whose anatomical gender identity is clearly male or female but who identify with the opposite gender of their biological sex. Such individuals sometimes request surgical intervention to change their genitalia into that approximating the opposite sex. They are the focus of the following considerations.

- (1) While the struggles and challenges of those identifying as transgender have some elements in common with the struggles of all human beings, we recognize the uniqueness of their existential situation and the limitation of our knowledge in such issues.
- (2) As Christians we look to the Word of God for guidance. First, from a biblical perspective the human being is a psychosomatic unity. This means that sexual identity cannot be entirely independent from one's body as is frequently asserted. In fact, in Scripture, our gender identity is, to a significant extent, determined by our birth sex with God being the author of gender identity (Gen 1:27; 5:1, 2; Mark 10:6; Ps 139:13, 14). Second, the Bible reminds us that each person with his/her mind and psyche is part of the creation that is corrupted by sin (Rom 3:9; 7:17; 8:20–23; Jer 17:9; Gal 5:17) and needs to be renewed by God (Rom 12:2). Our emotions, feelings, and perceptions are not fully reliable indicators of God's designs, ideals, and truth (Prov 14:12; 16:25). We need guidance from God, through Scripture, to determine what is in our best interest (2 Tim 3:16).
- (3) A human is meant to be an undivided sexual entity. The claim that some individuals experience a psychological sexual identity incompatible with their biological sex reveals a serious type of psychological dichotomy. Such psychological disturbance or brokenness is an expression of the damaging effects of sin on humans. It remains unclear, however, if this disturbance or brokenness can be overcome through sex-change surgery. Such treatment may disturb the patient even more.
- (4) So far, sex-change surgeries are irreversible. Persons undergoing these procedures have to use hormones for the rest of their lives, which indicates that an integrated sexual identity is not achieved through surgery. Surgery does not solve the problem completely. What aggravates the situation is that while surgery is irreversible, people may change psychologically as they grow and mature, seeking again a new identity.
- (5) In some cases, sex-change surgery may be motivated by a sophisticated desire for homosexual activity. Undergoing sex-change surgery in order to satisfy the homosexual urge to have sex with a person of the same sex would violate the ethical and moral biblical principle of sexual activity being limited to heterosexual marriage.
- (6) The Scriptures call humans to manage their emotions and passions by bringing them under the lordship of Christ (Gal 5:24; Jas 4:7). Sexual drives and identities are not to be satisfied on the grounds that, since they are considered to be normal or natural, we should let nature run its course. Sin and evil have corrupted human nature, including gender identity and sexuality. While self-discipline is indispensable in bringing both into harmony with biblical values and principles, God has promised the Holy Spirit to help us face our sinful impulses and our attraction to sin.
- (7) Since surgery does not solve the situation, a person is more likely to find wholeness and healing by learning to live with his or her sexual condition of a real or perceived dichotomy in sexual identity while leaning on the Lord for constant help.

For these reasons the BRI Ethics Committee strongly cautions against such a radical and irreversible procedure and urges pastors and church members to demonstrate care and regard toward those who struggle with this challenging issue. Should individuals seek to use sex-change surgery as a way of circumventing biblical principles addressing human sexuality and the proper way to satisfy such desires, they would be acting against God's revealed will. The Church must remain loyal to its commitment to the will of the risen Lord as revealed in the Scriptures and therefore display love for all.

New Converts with Pre-Conversion Sex-Change Surgery

The situation becomes even more complex in the case of persons who underwent sex-change surgery before coming to know Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. How should the Church deal with them when they ask to become members of the community of believers? To answer this crucial question we make the following recommendations:

- (1) That we treat these persons with love and respect, demonstrating our serious interest in their wellbeing. Those involved in the conversation should do their utmost to avoid aggravating the new converts' emotional condition. Adding pain to persons who have been hurting most of their lives is not an expression of Christian love.
- (2) That we recognize that God called them to salvation in the state in which they were found by Him, lacking wholeness, and that they accepted the call to salvation.
- (3) That we do not coerce these persons to reverse their surgery. It could be argued that although the Lord finds us in a state of fragmentation, He wants to transform and restore us, and that, therefore, new believers should begin a process of medical reversal that will take them back as close as possible to their pre-surgery physical condition. Such an attempt would create significant problems because complete surgical reversal remains impossible, and even a partial reversal may seriously endanger the health of the persons involved.
- (4) That we do not deny church membership to persons who have undergone sex-change surgery but are committed to the Lord and His will. The only thing that we can biblically require is what the Bible requires from all of us: to allow the Spirit of the Lord to bring inner healing to us and to live a life of moral and sexual purity while looking forward to the moment when the Lord will restore wholeness to all of us.⁵

The irreversible nature of sex-change surgery, the fact that the Lord touches the hearts of transgender persons and accepts them as His children, as well as the recognition that all of our bodies have not yet been redeemed (Rom 8:23), makes us very cautious when interacting with them. Our respect and care for these persons follows Christ's example of serving others while being fully committed to God and His revealed will.

¹Other designations are sex reassignment surgery, gender reassignment surgery, sex affirmation surgery, gender confirmation surgery, or sex realignment surgery.

²For the question of whether the BRI Ethics Committee would recommend or discourage sex change, see the statement on sex-change surgery.

³See the two official statements of the Adventist Church on homosexuality: <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/0/homosexuality/vitality/service/> and <http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/statements/article/go/0/same-sex-unions/beliefs/en/>.

⁴The BRI Ethics Committee is indebted to Ángel M. Rodríguez on whose work this statement is based, e.g., <https://adventistbiblical-research.org/sites/default/files/pdf/sex-change%20surgery.pdf>.

⁵For a discussion of the issue of transgender and marriage, see the related BRI Ethics Committee's opinion.

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Lessons from Daniel 2

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

Are you interested in the future? Daniel 2 is one of the best-known chapters in Scripture that deal with future developments. It contains an astonishing prophecy, reaching from the time of Daniel to the end of this world.

I. Discussion of the Chapter

A. The king's dream cannot be interpreted

1. **Verse 1**—During his reign as king of the Babylonian Empire, Nebuchadnezzar receives a special revelation from God.

2. **Verse 2**—Daniel and his friends are not invited with the wise men to interpret the dream.

3. **Verses 3–12**—*How does the king contrast with the wise men?*

The king:

- He does not tell them the dream.
- He is distrustful and afraid of a false interpretation.
- On one hand he pressures them; on the other he offers honor and gifts.
- His distrust increases.
- He succumbs to wrath and issues a death decree.

The wise men:

- They demand to know the dream.
- They exhibit only human wisdom and a

seemingly arbitrary interpretation.

- They make a second demand to be told the dream, exposing their insecurity and trickery.
- They refuse to meet the king's request on the grounds that it is humanly impossible to fulfill.

4. **Verse 13**—Although they are not present, Daniel and his friends are affected by the king's decree.

5. **Verses 14, 15**—Daniel gets more information.

6. **Verse 16**—*Why does the king grant Daniel's request for additional time when he had denied the wise men's request in verse 8?*

- The king is still disturbed by the dream and may be glad for another interpretation of the dream.
- Daniel was not with the other wise men when the king first asked for an interpretation. Possibly, the king considered it fair to allow Daniel to try.
- The wise men demanded to know the details of the dream. Daniel requests only time and not the details.
- God is involved behind the scenes.

B. The prayer and its fulfillment

1. **Verses 17–23**—What do we learn about Daniel's devotional life, especially his prayer life (see also Dan 6 and 9)?

- Daniel approaches God for help. He trusts God. Therefore, there is no need for him to lament and complain.
- He has a season of prayer with his friends.
- He does not forget to express his gratitude. He praises God.
- Daniel is intensely, and on a daily basis, involved in prayer.
- He even risks his life for his desire to seek God regularly in prayer.

What does Daniel know about God?

- God is omnipotent and omniscient.
 - God is the Lord of history.
 - God is associated with light (e.g., John 8:12)
- Daniel considers himself to be a servant and steward. He remains humble.

C. Daniel before the king

1. **Verses 24–30**—*What about Daniel's character and philosophy of life can be derived from verses 24–30?*

- Daniel does not care only about himself. He attempts to help the wise men and his friends too. He supports the statement of the wise men in verses 10 and 11.

- He points to the true God and is a witness of God while being involved with the ruler of the Babylonian world empire (see also v. 37).

- This takes faith and courage.
- Daniel does not boast but regards himself a tool in God's hand.

Daniel became a "man of God" because of his prayer life and his determination not to compromise but remain faithful to God's will. This commitment allowed him to have great experiences with God.

2. **Verses 29**—Nebuchadnezzar's dream is about the future.

D. The dream

1. **Verses 31–35**—These verses contain a record of the dream. Even without the details, one notices that earthly things are transient and do not last.

E. The interpretation of the dream

1. **Verses 36–45**—*What is the time frame of the dream?*

- It starts with Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom.
- It ends with the kingdom of God.

The dream describes world history from the Babylonian time till the end of the world. The image consisting of different metals represents earthly kingdoms/empires.

Gold	–	Babylon (606–539 BC)
Silver	–	Medo-Persia (539–331 BC)
Bronze	–	Greece (331–168 BC)
Iron	–	Rome (168 BC–AD 476)
Iron-clay	–	Empires of Western Europe (AD 476–end of the world)

Some people have identified the following iron-clay nations:

Alemanni	–	Germany
Anglo-Saxons	–	Great Britain
Burgundians	–	Switzerland
Franks	–	France
Herulians	–	destroyed
Lombards	–	Italy
Ostrogoths	–	destroyed
Sueves	–	Portugal
Vandals	–	destroyed
Visigoths	–	Spain

The last part of the dream, which deals with the stone, is described in great detail.

What statements are made about the iron-clay mixture?

- It is a divided kingdom, and no longer a world empire.
- It still contains some of the hardness of iron. To some extent Rome continues to live on in the subsequent nations.
- All attempts to unify these nations fail. European politics of intermarriage between the royal houses did not work. Attempts to unify Europe under Charles the Great (eighth century), Charles V (sixteenth century), Louis XIV (seventeenth and eighteenth century), Napoleon (nineteenth century), Emperor Wilhelm II (twentieth century), and Hitler (twentieth century) were not successful. Today the European Union struggles to survive.

The climax of the prophecy is the stone. In the Old and New Testaments the stone is an image for God/Jesus (2 Sam 22:2; 1 Pet 2:4–8; Matt 21:42, 44). Our destiny depends on how we relate to Jesus Christ. He will return soon and establish His indestructible and eternal kingdom (Rev 11:15).

F. Reactions of the king and Daniel

1. **Verses 46–49**—Because of Daniel’s faithfulness and trust in the Lord, Nebuchadnezzar paid attention to the true God. Daniel again cares for his friends.

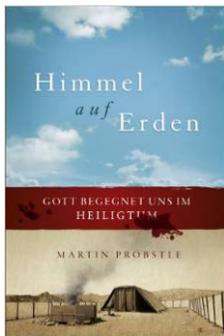
II. Application

- We do not fully understand world history. We do not see what happens behind the scenes. We are tempted to regard history as a purely human enterprise in which God is not involved.
- Yet history has a goal and is moving toward Christ’s Second Coming and the establishment of His kingdom.
- God is involved in human history. Even though humans make their free decisions, God still pursues His plans.
- As God guides human history, He is willing to guide my personal history and life and bring it to a good conclusion.

Conclusion

Because God is the Lord of history we commit our lives to Him. We trust Him, and are looking forward to a marvelous future.

BOOK NOTES



Martin Pröbstle, *Himmel auf Erden: Gott begegnet uns im Heiligtum* (St. Peter, Austria: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2013), 259 pp. US\$20.00.

Martin Pröbstle is an Old Testament professor at Bogenhofen Seminary in Austria. *Himmel auf Erden* is an expanded version of his book *Where God and I Meet: The Sanctuary* (Review and Herald,

2013) in German. It was the companion book for the Sabbath School Study Guide for last quarter of 2013.

In chapter one the author presents the biblical evidence for the existence and reality of a sanctuary in heaven, a multifunctional place that reveals God’s character as almighty King, merciful Savior, and righteous judge. He sees the heavenly sanctuary as the interface between God and His creation. Chapter two focuses on the earthly sanctuaries: First the Garden of Eden, and then the tabernacle in the desert and the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. While the earthly sanctuary is not a one-to-one copy of the heavenly, it is the antitype of the heavenly

sanctuary (Heb 8:5). Chapters three to six deal with the sacrifices and services in the earthly sanctuary. The author emphasizes the typological and substitutionary nature of the animal sacrifices. Like the potential sacrifice of Isaac, they all prefigured the sacrifice of the Son of God.

The earthly sanctuary was not only the place where God manifested His presence in the midst of Israel and where they worshipped Him, beyond that it illustrated for the people of Israel the plan of salvation in tangible form. Every article in the sanctuary was symbolically significant. For example, on top of the ark of the testimony, which itself was a symbol of God’s presence, rested the mercy seat with its two cherubim, also called “atonement cover” (Exod 25:17–21, NIV), where once a year God reconciled His people with Himself. In Romans 3:25 Paul refers to Jesus as “atonement cover” (the sacrifice of atonement) because Jesus Himself is the place of redemption, the one through whom God has made atonement for our sins (p. 82). Similarly, the Israelite feasts, of which the Day of Atonement was the most important, illustrated the plan of redemption.

The service at the sanctuary had two phases of atonement: (a) the daily service which included the morning and evening sacrifices and the special purification offering (sin offering) for personal sins, reminding the Israelites of the continued availability of divine

forgiveness, and (b) the yearly service on the Day of Atonement on which the sanctuary was cleansed from all kinds of sin and ritual impurities accumulated upon the sanctuary throughout the year. In this context, the author addresses the question on what basis God can forgive the guilty sinner. He can only do so by assuming the guilt of the sinner, i.e., God Himself must bear the punishment of the sinner. That is the legal reason why Christ had to die so that His people might be saved (p. 97).

At the center of the yearly Day of Atonement service was the ritual with the two goats. The ritual with the goat for the Lord involved neither confession nor transference of sin. The high priest, therefore, was able to cleanse the sanctuary with the blood of this goat. The goat for Azazel (Satan), on the other hand, was not sacrificed, but the sins of the people were laid on it and it was led into the desert to perish there. The author explains this ritual with the law of the malicious witness in Deuteronomy 19:16-21. Just as the malicious witness received the punishment he or she intended for the innocent, so the sins of God's people are rolled back on Satan, the originator of sin (p. 120).

The second half of the book deals with Christ and His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The prophecies of the suffering servant and their fulfillment in the death of Jesus are clearly presented in chapter seven, "Christ Our Sacrifice." The next two chapters, "Christ Our Priest" and "The Pre-Advent Judgment" explain the two phases of Christ's heavenly ministry, both foreshadowed in the daily and yearly ministries of the earthly sanctuary. These chapters are the central core of the book. Christ is shown to be our advocate, intercessor, and mediator (Rom 8:34; 1 Tim 2:5) who appears before God for us (Heb 9:24).

While some argue that Christ began the Day of Atonement ministry in AD 31, the author shows convincingly that Christ began the first not the second phase of His ministry after His ascension. For example, in the book of Hebrews, whenever the plural form *ta hagia* (lit. the holy [thing, place]) appears by itself, it refers to the whole sanctuary and not to the holy or Most Holy place. In Hebrews 9:8, therefore, *ta hagia* refers to the first tabernacle on earth in contrast to the heavenly sanctuary mentioned at the beginning of verse 8. Furthermore, the Greek word for goats in Hebrews 9:12 is not used for the goats on the Day of Atonement but for those at the inaugural ritual of the sanctuary (LXX: Num 7:17, 23, etc.).

Chapter ten outlines the events on the eschatological Day of Atonement beginning in 1844. The author presents in brief the results of his careful exegesis of Daniel 8:9–14 in his doctoral thesis that focused on this passage. In this Pre-Advent judgment God restores His people, their worship, and the sanctuary to their rightful positions. In the process God Himself is vindicated (p. 200). Chapter eleven is a study of the three angels' messages in Revelation 14, and chapter twelve provides an overview of the cosmic great controversy that began in heaven and will be completed at the end of the millennium. The final chapter points out the practical consequences of the sanctuary teaching for our daily life.

This book is a much-needed and well-written presentation of the Seventh-day Adventist sanctuary doctrine. It is also the first book on this topic written in German by a German theologian. There have been two or three English books on the sanctuary that have been translated and published privately, e.g., M. L. Andreasen's *The Sanctuary Service*, but *Himmel auf Erden* is the first German book on this topic published by a publishing house of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is written with lay-members in mind, but it has many footnotes for the enjoyment of the scholarly community.

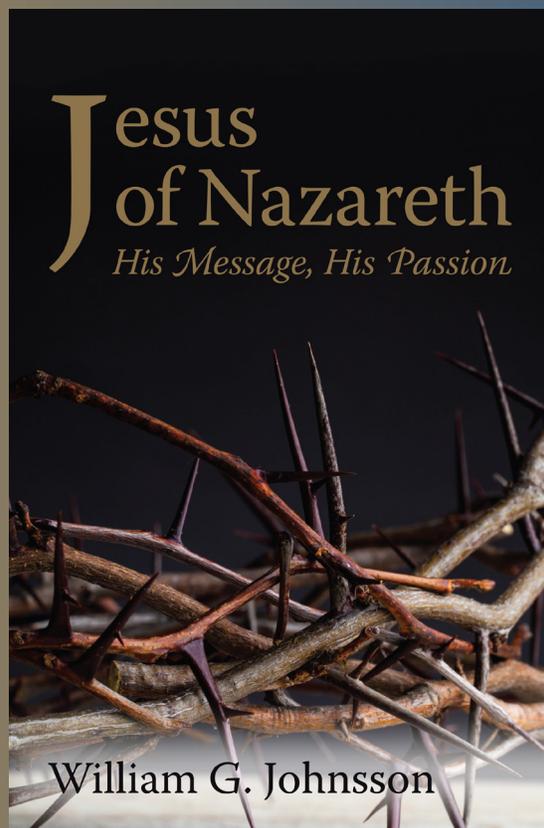
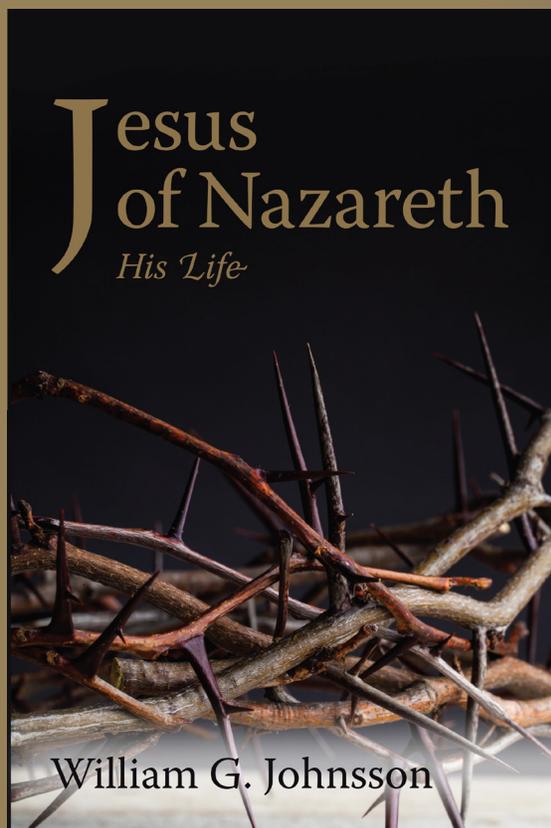
I appreciate the author's statement that the daily sacrifices were also brought on the Day of Atonement (p. 116, otherwise those living after 1844 would have no hope), but I missed the text in Numbers 29:11 that mentions the daily sacrifice (*'olat tamid*) on the Day of Atonement. In connection with Daniel 9:25 he mentions correctly that the decree of Artaxerxes I in 457 BC fulfills the prophecy (p. 204), but it is not clear what he means by the statement that this decree involved both the reconstruction of the temple as well as the rebuilding of Jerusalem. According to Ezra 6:15, the reconstruction of the temple was completed in 515 BC, about sixty years earlier.

A Scripture and subject index would have enhanced the usefulness of this volume. Nevertheless, this book is a milestone in the history of German-speaking Seventh-day Adventists. It is a resource that should be in every German-speaking Adventist home. Ministers will find it a great help in preparing Bible studies and sermons on this topic, and theology students will be grateful for this clear and comprehensive treatment of a vital subject for Seventh-day Adventists.

Gerhard Pfandl
Biblical Research Institute

“Now *this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.*” Heb 8:1–2.

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