

## 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, pastors, and teachers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Guidelines for Biblical Research Committees . . . . .	1
“ <i>Deus Caritas Est</i> ”: Pope Benedict XVI’s Encyclical Letter . . . . .	2
The Catholic Church and the Bible: A Review of <i>The Gift of Scripture</i> . . . . .	3
Ten Commandments: Out of the Courthouse and Back into the Church . . . . .	5
The Gospel of Judas and Scripture . . . . .	6
Afraid or Not Afraid?—Heb 11:27 . . . . .	8
Is Death the End? . . . . .	9
Book Notes . . . . .	10

## NEWS AND COMMENTS

### GUIDELINES FOR BIBLICAL RESEARCH COMMITTEES

The General Conference Administrative Committee voted a set of guidelines to be used in the creation of Biblical Research Committees in the divisions. The need for the guidelines surfaced as several divisions expressed the desire to have their own BRC in order to address issues that are to some extent peculiar to the life of the church in their respective territories. Such committees would also contribute to the exchange of ideas among theologians within the division as they address theological and doctrinal issues and challenges faced by the church in their areas of the world. As the church continues to grow, it is important for church leaders to provide room for serious theological discussion that will strengthen the unity of the church and that will contribute to the fulfillment of its mission. We should not ignore the fact that church growth can bring with it diversity of views in different areas

of the life and thinking of the church. The guidelines seek not only to provide room for the interaction of theologians and administrators, but also to create awareness of the fact that such interaction and conversation should take place, having in mind the interests and concerns of the world church. In other words, the guidelines attempt to contribute to the formation of BRCs that will work in union and dialogue with the world church and never in isolation from it. Each committee should constantly be in touch with the world church as it addresses topics of peculiar interest to the church within a particular division. This is indispensable as we intentionally work for the unity of the global church as it accomplishes the mission entrusted to it by our beloved Savior. The guidelines are offered to the ecclesiastical leaders with the intention of contributing to building up God’s end-time remnant people.

VOTED, To approve the following to serve as a guide for divisions that are planning to create a Biblical Research Committee.

#### I. Objectives of a Biblical Research Committee (BRC)

1. Study and prepare materials addressing biblical, doctrinal/theological, and ethical issues of relevance to the church within the division.
2. Evaluate materials of doctrinal and theological content that will be used by the church throughout the division.
3. Prepare responses that will address issues raised from outside and from inside the church which challenge the message and mission of the church.

4. Coordinate activities that will build up Christian fellowship among Adventist theologians and religion teachers in the Division and that will contribute to strengthening their personal commitment to the message and mission of the church.
5. Work closely with the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) and the Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM) to ensure that in its work BRC is able to integrate the global vision of the message and mission of the world church.
6. Address issues of faith and science from within the Division in conjunction with the Faith and Science Council of the General Conference.

## II. Membership

The members of BRC, its terms of reference, and the chairperson and secretary will be determined by the Division. It is recommended that the group be between 12-20 persons. This will provide a critical mass for meaningful discussions.

- Officers of the division are members ex-officio.
- Ministerial Secretary/Director
- Educational Director
- Religion professors from the colleges and universities of the division (one or two from each school)
- Director of BRI or designee
- Associate Director of BRI who functions as Recording Secretary of BRICOM
- Two representatives from other divisions
- Other members of BRI as invitees
- Ellen G. White Research Center Director

## III. Terms of Reference

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| 1. Serve as a resource center on theological and doctrinal issues. | 1. Power to act in consultation with ADCOM. |
| 2. Prepare and evaluate materials for publication.                 | 2. Power to act.                            |
| 3. Select writers for research projects.                           | 3. Power to act in consultation with BRI.   |

Angel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

times, the subject of love may reflect the foundations of the kind of theological thinking that will guide his papacy.

### I. Analysis

In the first part of the encyclical the approach is speculative and somewhat philosophical. The analysis begins with the nature of love. The author grapples with the question whether the different usages and manifestations of love belong to a single reality. Does the New Testament's preference for *agape* and its failure to use the word *eros* denounce this kind of love and therefore lead Christians to "poison" the term as they have often been charged?

While acknowledging a certain relationship between love and the Divine, Pope Benedict XVI points out that what Christians denounce is the counterfeit deification of *eros* that is rooted in a dualistic view of man. If humans aspire to be only spirit, *eros* degenerates into pure sex. What is needed is a call "for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing" of *eros*, whose tendency is "to rise 'in ecstasy' toward the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves" (*Deus Caritas Est*, p. 4, par. 6). The pope concedes that love is indeed "ecstasy," namely, it is in its essence to go "out of the closed inward-looking self toward its liberation through self-giving, and thus toward an authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God" (p. 6). Once *eros* is purified of its counterfeit tendencies, it becomes evident that it is of the same reality as *agape*. *Eros* (ascending love) without *agape* (descending love) is impoverished, while *agape* without *eros* is not functionally complete. A purified love is a practicing love. As he puts it, "love is the service that the church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs" (p. 11).

The service of love is made sacramental, and the pope indeed calls it a "sacramental 'mysticism.'"

Having established the idea that the essence of love is "to go out" the pope carefully grounds it in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ. In Him "the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move" (p. 8). But this act of Christ, to which the pope refers as an "act of oblation" (p. 8), has been given an *enduring presence* in the Eucharist. Here then is an attempt to objectify Christ's sacrificial love. Thus, the pope makes the Eucharist the *efficient means* that "draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation" (p. 8), not just statically, but into a dynamic of self-giving. The service of love, then, is made sacramental, and the pope indeed calls it a "sacramental 'mysticism'" (p. 8) which is grounded in God's condescension toward us. Furthermore, he argues that this sacramental mysticism is *social* in character, by which he means church communion. As far as the pope is concerned, it is only on this christological and sacramental basis that Jesus' teaching on love can be understood. Indeed, he argues that Jesus' command to love our neighbor is not simply a matter of morality, but

## "DEUS CARITAS EST": POPE BENEDICT XVI'S ENCYCLICAL LETTER

"God is love," and "we have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us." These words from 1 John 4:16, according to Pope Benedict XIV's encyclical letter,<sup>1</sup> summarize the heart of the Christian faith and life. Although the pope justifies the choice of the subject for his encyclical by reference to the hatred and violence of our

something which can only happen in a “sacramental re-actualization” (p. 8, par. 14).

The second and more practical part of the encyclical underlines certain principles by which the practice of this mystical sacramental love should proceed.

- The service of love (charity) is a responsibility which the church cannot disregard. Since the church seeks to evangelize the world by word and sacrament, and since the essence of charity is sacramental, “the church cannot neglect the service of charity any more than she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word” (p. 12).
- The call for the church to take up the service of love does not necessarily lead to the neglect of seeking justice. The encyclical provides insights into the Catholic thought on Church and State relations. (1) The just ordering of society is a responsibility of the State which is carried out through practical reason. (2) Practical reason, however, is always in danger of blindness. (3) Therefore, the church’s involvement is needed to (a) purify reason through faith, (b) help form consciences in political life, and (c) awaken spiritual energy.
- The service of love in the context of globalization means co-operation between Church and State agencies and inter-church agencies. The church’s service of love, however, must be characterized by (1) the touch of Christian love which is not just another form of social assistance, (2) independence from parties and ideologies, (3) freedom from proselytizing, and (4) activity at all levels of the church.

## II. Evaluation

The encyclical is impressive both from the perspective of the subject matter as well as in the manner in which the argument is structured and developed. While the secular world has parsed the word “love” to the point of trivializing it, love remains the rallying theological point and center in an increasingly ecumenical, postmodern, and doctrine-averse religious climate. The effort on the part of the pope to emphasize the true nature of Christian love in such a

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climate is indeed commendable. As far as the structure of the argument is

concerned, the systematic move from theory to the practice of love is done brilliantly.

The encyclical should also be commended in terms of the principles that are suggested to guide the church’s delivery of the service of love. In particular, the emphasis on the need to guard the church against a service of love that is reduced to just another form of social assistance is a welcomed corrective.

In spite of the overall positive appeal of the encyclical, a few particular observations need to be made. It appears that the pope takes pains to emphasize the sacramental and indeed mystical nature of the service of love so as

to establish a *necessary* connection between it and the church. This seems to be in line with the trend in the Catholic community to see the church itself as a sacrament. One wonders whether this is the view being reflected in the encyclical. The efficacy of the service of love (in the context of Catholic understanding of sacraments) in pre-saging and making the kingdom available is an idea about which Protestants may need clarification. If it is indeed the case that in the context of globalization the Catholic Church stands ready to co-operate with charitable agencies of other churches and ecclesiastic communities, will the contribution of these other Christian communities in such endeavors be qualitatively different from that of the Catholic Church? Or what is the status of the service of love of these ecclesiastic communities who have different ideas about the sacrament?

The issue of Church and State relations appears in the context of the encyclical’s discussion on justice and poverty. There are very clear statements in the encyclical in which the distinction between the temporal and spiritual realms is acknowledged. Yet the encyclical senses a relatedness of the two spheres because of the “ethical blindness” of practical reason by which justice is pursued. The encyclical sees politics and faith meeting on this particular point. In this encounter, faith, which opens up horizons beyond reason, has the role of purifying reason. How will the practical reason of the practitioners of politics be purified? One would have wished to know in clearer terms how the church may put this ideal into practice, because in spite of the encyclical’s effort to express the separation of Church and State, the idea is also conveyed that “the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution toward understanding the requirements of justice and *achieving them politically*” (p. 15; emphasis mine). Within what political arena will this contribution be achieved? It may be that the strategy for the political achievement of this ideal may vary from political situation to situation, but at least knowing its basic principles could be helpful. Since this is an issue that goes to the foundation of Church and State relations, ultimately, a great deal of the encyclical’s value, at least for Seventh-day Adventist, rests on what this strategy entails.

Kwabena Donkor (BRI)

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<sup>1</sup>The 25-page full text of the encyclical may be seen at the Vatican’s website, <http://www.vatican.va>.

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## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE BIBLE: A REVIEW OF *THE GIFT OF SCRIPTURE*

In 1521, Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and declared: “My conscience is captive to the Word of

God.” Called to account for his teachings, he argued that neither pope nor church council had authority above the Scriptures. His study of the Bible, especially the books of Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, had brought the gospel to him. So when he went into hiding at the Wartburg Castle, following the Diet of Worms, he began translating the Bible into the language of the common people.

Nearly 500 years after Luther, where does the Roman Catholic Church stand today in relation to the Scriptures? What, if anything, has changed from Luther’s time, and what has not changed?

A new teaching document, *The Gift of Scripture* [London: The Catholic Truth Society, 2005], suggests answers. The 60-page booklet was released last year by the Catholic Bishops’ Conferences of England and Wales, and of Scotland, on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dei Verbum*, an important document of the Second Vatican Council. According to the statement on the back cover, *The Gift of Scripture* sets out to explain *Dei Verbum* and subsequent Church documents: “What the Catholic Church has to say about the Holy Scriptures builds on ancient insights as well as utilizing modern understandings.”

*The Gift of Scripture* is written in clear, easy-to-read English. Its tone is irenic and overtly ecumenical. “In this third Christian millennium, we, the bishops of England and Wales and of Scotland, offer this new teaching document on the Bible first to Catholics, but also to all those who are drawn to the Holy Scriptures, so that they may engage with the Scriptures more deeply and more fruitfully” (p. 11). After a Foreword and Introduction, *The Gift of Scripture* unfolds in five sections: Part One: Hearing the Word of God; Part Two: Understanding the Word of God; Part Three: Reading the Old Testament; Part Four: Reading the New Testament; and Part Five: Living the Word of God.

Throughout the booklet, one finds a high view of Scripture maintained and a call to study it, value it, and live by it. Luther would be pleased. Given the inaccessibility of the Bible in his day, he would be startled by statements like: “We have rediscovered the Bible as a precious treasure, both ancient and ever new. We have received so much from those who have dedicated their lives to making the Scriptures more accessible to us [Does this include Luther’s contribution?]. The Catholic Church is proud to share the endeavor of bringing Scripture alive with other Christians. The anniversary year of *Dei Verbum* is a good time to turn to the Bible again and to deepen our understanding and love for the Scriptures” (p. 6).

When one gets beyond such lofty statements and examines what the bishops mean by Bible study, a different picture emerges:

1. *The method followed in The Gift of Scripture*: The writing throughout merges the text of Scripture with official

Church documents, especially *Dei Verbum*. For Luther, the Bible stood apart, authoritative above all other works. Example: “*Dei Verbum* teaches that we continually receive ‘the bread of life from the table both of the word of God and of the Body of Christ’ (*Dei Verbum*, 21).”

2. *The role of tradition*: Again, contra Luther, Scriptures are to be approached through the tradition of the Church. “We approach the Scriptures with reverence asking for the enlightenment of that same Spirit who inspired their writing. We approach the Scriptures as members of the family of the Church, seeking the guidance of the living Tradition of the teaching Church. We are more and more aware that Scripture and Tradition are closely bound together, coming from ‘the same divine source’ (*Dei Verbum*, 9).” In fact, Scripture and Tradition, the document states, “constitute the one sacred deposit of the word of God entrusted to the Church,” and they both are to be “accepted and honoured with equal devotion and reverence” (p. 15). Such statements carry with it two important implications. First, the “word of God” is not the Scripture but the Scripture and Tradition as a unity. This seems to be the meaning of the phrase “word of God” throughout the document. Second, it is implied that Tradition and Scripture are not to be differentiated on the basis of authority. They have equal authority because, supposedly, Tradition is founded on the Scripture.

3. *The Magisterium*: Luther aimed to put the Bible in the hands of everybody so that the man at the plow would know it better than popes and prelates. Each Christian, individually, was to read, study, and decide his or her conscience captive to the Word of God. But listen to *The Gift of Scripture*: “The task of safeguarding the understanding of the Word of God is given to the teaching authority of the Church, the bishops in union with the pope. Their duty is to serve the Word, by teaching it, listening to it attentively, protecting it conscientiously and explaining it faithfully (*Dei Verbum*, 10). The teaching authority, or Magisterium, seeks to ensure that new insights are faithful to the Word of God” (p. 17). In this important respect catholic theology has not changed.

4. *The role of the Eucharist*: *The Gift of Scripture* raises the Eucharist to a place not afforded it in Scripture. This teaching document merges the Scriptures with the Eucharist: “We know well that Christ comes ‘in word and sacrament to strengthen us in holiness’ (*Roman Missal*). We are fed by the sacrament, but also by the Word. We are invited to ‘take and eat’, to ‘take and drink’, but also to ‘take and read’...” (p. 11). “In the Eucharist the Church never ceases to take the bread of life and to offer it to the faithful ‘from the table both of the word of God and the Body of Christ’ (*Dei Verbum*, 21)” (p. 53).

5. *Selectivity of Scripture*: Although *The Gift of Scripture* applauds “the proliferation of groups of people who gather around the Bible, to read and to study, to reflect and to pray” (p. 56), its emphasis falls on the *selective* read-

In *The Gift of Scripture* the “word of God” is not Scripture but Scripture and Tradition as a unity.

ing of Scripture. For instance, “catechesis will naturally select those texts which are of the greatest moment in Scripture, Decalogue such as the and the Sermon on the Mount” (p. 52). The role of Scripture in liturgy, the Mass and other sacraments is stressed, as well as in the homily, hymns, and prayers. The public reading of Scripture, with the importance of the office of reader, is underscored. (pp. 52-56). In all these activities, the hearing of Scripture is tied to the Church, not to the individual.

So what has changed in 500 years? In terms of the role of the Roman Catholic Church vis-à-vis the Bible nothing at all. The more Rome changes, the more she stays the same. Luther would have the very same complaints, if he were to rise from the dead.

In closing, I will note a couple of other items of interest to Seventh-day Adventists. First, *The Gift of Scripture* continues to include the Apocrypha in its description of the Old Testament (pp. 23-24). Second, it accepts in some measure the historical-critical approach to Scripture. Thus, concerning “the early chapters of Genesis”: “It became clear that the material found in these chapters of Genesis could not simply be described as historical writing. Though they may contain some historical traces, the primary purpose was to provide religious teaching (*The Jewish People* 27-28).” The bishops accept the late date for the Book of Daniel, which stands “on the threshold of the New Testament” (p. 32). Turning to the New Testament, while *The Gift of Scripture* accepts the Markan priority (first Gospel to be written, p. 36), it nevertheless holds that the Gospels are “four trustworthy accounts from the testimony of the apostles and the developing understanding of the early Christian communities” (p. 34).

Recently I toured Reformation sites in Germany. I saw the Augustinian cloister where, as a monk, Luther tortured his body in a futile quest to find peace with God. I stood by the pulpit in the town church of Wittenberg, where as pastor Luther preached thousands of sermons from the Word of God. And I climbed the stairs to the upper room of the Death House in Eisleben where he breathed his last. Seventh-day Adventists are children of Luther. We must stand uncompromisingly on the Bible and the Bible alone as the source of doctrine and the rule of faith and practice. *The Gift of Scripture* makes abundantly clear that such a stance is needed as much today as it was in the great Reformer’s time.

William G. Johnsson,  
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## TEN COMMANDMENTS: OUT OF THE COURTHOUSE AND BACK INTO THE CHURCH

The day the two ton Ten Commandments monument was hauled out of the lobby of the Alabama Supreme Court was, for some, a watershed moment. Preachers and politicians across the nation spoke up en masse against the court decision, and the implications they saw in it. Is it any wonder that sexual promiscuity, dishonesty, violence, and disbelief have swept the nation when all remnants of God are swept from the public square, they asked. What kind of society denies the very foundation upon which it was built?

For many Americans the answers to these questions were clear. In the 1950s, about 5% of American children were born out of wedlock, now over a third of America’s children are born outside of marriage. And even those children born to a married couple frequently live through the excruciating emotional pain of their parents divorcing sometime during their childhood. In the 1950’s, homosexuality was considered a perversion. Today, despite the well-documented harm it does to those engaging in it, homosexuality is celebrated as something healthy to be proud of. In the 1950’s, sexually transmitted diseases were limited to the margins of society. Today, it is estimated by health professionals that 50% of Americans will contract a sexually transmitted disease by the time they reach 25 years of age, and 45 million Americans are infected with at least one *incurable* sexually transmitted disease. Combined with a loss of civility, rampant dishonesty, wanton destruction of the environment, exploitation of workers, the growing gap between the haves and the have-nots, the explosion of drug abuse, murder, abortion, and assault, America has become a society completely at odds with the American mind set of the 1950’s.

What went wrong, and why? Is our national moral decline a result of the removal of the Ten Commandments and an end to prayer by public school teachers in the classrooms? Or is it the arrival of the pill, prosperity, and television that were the primary drivers? Has the dishonesty of our leaders and the engagement in unnecessary foreign wars undermined faith in all things associated with the establishment—including traditional morality? Or is the refusal of religious leaders to uphold moral absolutes themselves the primary cause for our decline?

It would be presumptive to assume to answer these complex questions outright, but there is good reason to believe that the removal of government displays of the Ten Commandments is not a significant contributor to our moral ills. By and large, Ten Commandment monuments are alive and well on U.S. public buildings. Indeed, even the U.S.

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such as the and the Sermon on the Mount” (p. 52).

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Supreme Court has a large statue of Moses holding the Ten Commandments on its east frieze. Only in a very few instances in which the Ten Commandments are displayed in a way designed specifically to use the government to advance a religious agenda have they been found unconstitutional. We can hardly ascribe the moral degradation of our society over five decades to a few isolated cases involving the governmental removal of the Ten Commandments during the last few years. If governmental displays of the Ten Commandments in court houses were a barrier against moral decline, why haven't the many hundreds of displays in courts all the way up to the Supreme Court saved us up until this point?

In truth, we have to admit that whatever the disposition of the government, it is the job of churches to uphold the law of God and to teach how it relates to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, not the role of the state. Sadly, for many decades, churches have done a very poor job in this respect. Rather than uplifting the Ten Commandments as a reflection of God's character, we have been told by the nation's leading clergy that the commandments are nailed to the cross and no longer apply to Christians. Rather than being told about the life changing power of the grace of Christ, we have been told that living a Christ-like life is an exercise in legalism. Rather than being told of a righteous God who will sort the wheat from the tares on judgment day, we have been told about a friend who will accept us no matter what manner of evil we unrepentantly perpetrate on others. Rather than being told about the offensiveness of sin to a holy Savior, we have been lulled by our religious leaders into a comfortable compromise with the world.

Today, many in the Christian church are demanding the state do what the church has refused to do. But the state is not equipped to change lives. That is the essence of the role of the church by turning people toward the transforming grace of Jesus Christ. Rather than demanding that the Ten Commandments be returned to a place of honor in our courthouses, maybe it is time for us to reinstall the Ten Commandments in a place of honor in our churches, not as an end in themselves, but rather in the context of the saving grace of Christ who can do all things--even change a corrupt society, one life at a time.

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Public Relations and Religious Liberty

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## THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS AND SCRIPTURE

### I. Background

The Gospel of Judas has received a lot of attention recently, when the National Geographic Society ran an article in its magazine.<sup>1</sup> This society has also received the right to publish the gospel and cover it in print and on television. The Gospel of Judas is a Coptic text that was found late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and was kept in a bank safe

deposit box in Hicksville, New Jersey, for about seventeen years, because the Egyptian dealer was not able to get the money he had hoped for. When it finally was sold, it was already in a bad condition, but it is considered to be one of the most important textual finds in decades.

Although the Gospel of Judas is available for everyone only now—R. Kasser, M. Meyer, G. Wurst, and F. Gaudard have provided a translation<sup>2</sup>—it was known for centuries that this gospel had existed. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon (c. A.D. 180) mentions it in his work *Against Heresies* and attributes it to a gnostic sect. W. Schneemelcher has dealt with it in his *New Testament Apocrypha*.<sup>3</sup>

Using the radiocarbon method scholars have dated the extant copy to the period between A.D. 220 and 340. However, the original text must have been older, since Irenaeus mentions it toward the end of the second century. Probably it was written between A.D. 130 and 170. The content of the copy has not been preserved completely. Lines are missing. Nevertheless, it is possible to get an idea of what the gospel is all about.

### II. Contents

The Gospel of Judas relates encounters between Jesus and the Twelve and conversations that Jesus had with Judas Iscariot. According to the introduction, the Gospel is a secret account of what Jesus shared with Judas three days before Passover. Jesus explains both a vision that the Twelve had concerning the temple and the priesthood and a vision that Judas had dealing with cosmology/creation. The gospel ends with the betrayal of Judas.

The Gospel of Judas seems to have a kind of mystical aura. It is said that Jesus oftentimes appeared among the disciples as a child. Judas confesses that Jesus is from the immortal area or kingdom of Barbelo. God is the Self-Generated One. In addition, there are twelve aeons, seventy-two aeons, seventy-two luminaries and seventy-two heavens, three hundred sixty luminaries, and millions of angels.

Jesus laughs at the prayer of the Twelve. Repeatedly he talks about their god, in whom they believe, as distancing himself from them, although he has called them to be his disciples. In other words, this gnostic Jesus seems to reject the God of the Old Testament. In a vision the Twelve see the temple and twelve immoral and vicious priests. Jesus tells them that they are these priests leading people astray as ministers of error.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul is found in the document. The doctrine of creation is quite different from the biblical teaching. The divine Self-Generated One came forth from a cloud. Other beings emerged from

If the Gospel of Judas were the only gospel that we have, we would know very little about Jesus, and it would be very difficult to have a personal relationship with Him.

other clouds. Not only are there aeons and other creatures, but the activity of creating beings is not restricted to God. The luminaries are created, and yet they make other luminaries to appear. The angel Nebro created six angels as his assistants, among them Saklas who in turn addressed other angels saying that they should create a human being “after the image [the image is not identified].” So Adam and Eve were created. Eve in the cloud was named Zoe, which means life.

However, most important is the role of Judas. In a vision he sees that the Twelve were stoning and persecuting him. Jesus tells him that he would be cursed by other generations and yet would one day rule over them. Judas would exceed all others. So Judas betrays Jesus and does him a favor. “The key passage comes when Jesus tells Judas: ‘You will sacrifice the man that clothes me.’ In plain English, or Coptic, Judas is going to kill Jesus—and thus do him a favor. ‘That really isn’t Jesus at all.’ says Meyer. ‘He will at last get rid of his material, physical flesh, thereby liberating the real Christ, the divine being inside.’”<sup>4</sup>

The gospel ends as abruptly as it began. It does not mention the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### III. Evaluation

The Gospel of Judas is the product of a second century author with gnostic inclinations. It is neither an eyewitness account, nor is it written by Judas Iscariot. In contrast, the canonical gospels were written in the first century A.D., and at least two of them are attributed to eyewitnesses.

The Gospel of Judas begins very late in the life of Jesus and ends suddenly. If this were the only gospel that we have, we would know very little about Jesus, and it would be very difficult to have a personal relationship with Him. In this respect it differs completely from the canonical gospels. In the Gospel of Judas there is nothing on Jesus’ birth, baptism, and the first years of his public ministry. It

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mentions that Jesus did miracles but does not report a single one. It basically consists of dialogues. Apart from the section on creation no

discourses such as the Sermon on the Mount, and His preaching in parables are found. Since the death and the resurrection of Jesus are not mentioned, post-Easter meetings with his disciples and His ascent to Heaven are left out too. This is understandable, because Gnostics were not much interested in the human Jesus but rather in the divine Christ (cf. 1 John 2:22; 4:1-3). There is a complete lack of future eschatology. The topic of salvation is not developed. The character of Jesus is clouded: First, we do not have enough data that would allow us to get a picture of Jesus’ character. Second, Jesus laughs repeatedly, namely

at his disciples and Judas, and sometimes it seems to be a scornful laughter.

Neither does the gospel point to geographic locations in which Jesus stayed at a certain time, nor does it present chronological information that would help us to locate Him in time. Therefore, the historical information provided is minimal.

That in many respects it does not agree with the canonical gospels is evident. The bad character of the canonical gospels is the one who alone understands Jesus and brings about the desired end. The other disciples are all mistaken and worship the wrong God. When it comes to truth, not all gospels can be considered reliable and trustworthy. We have to make the decision whether or not to accept the canonical gospels as authentic and use them to determine the status of other gospels. However, not only the canonical gospels raise their voices against the authenticity and historical reliability of the Gospel of Judas; the letters of the New Testament and the witness of the Old Testament do the same. Furthermore, Scripture’s understanding of the Godhead as well as its teachings about creation, salvation, and anthropology contradict the message of the Gospel of Judas.

Unquestionably the discovery of the Gospel of Judas is an important event for scholars, as was the discovery of the Coptic Gospel of Thomas. It allows us to get a clearer picture of the second century A.D. in which the orthodox church had to fight many heresies. However, it does not offer any historical or theological insights that demand a reinterpretation of Scripture.

The popular excitement about this discovery may have been fueled by Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* which claims that the truth of Jesus’ marriage has been hidden by the church throughout the centuries and has to be recovered. Supposedly, it is not to be found in the Bible but in esoteric writings which paint a different picture of Jesus, a Jesus who had a love relationship with Mary Magdalene and had a child with her. With the Gospel of Judas we have another book from the past which claims that the accounts of the canonical gospels have to be questioned and revised. For many people this is exciting just because of its novelty, or for the reason that it contradicts the position of traditional churches, or because it does not demand personal conversion and a change of one’s life style, or because it fits the present climate of syncretism. However, in the end the issues remain the same: (1) Is Jesus the biblical Jesus; is he the Messiah and Son of God? (2) Is the Christian Bible reliable, and is it the Word of God? We have good reasons to answer these questions in the affirmative.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

<sup>1</sup>Andrew Cockburn, “The Judas Gospel,” in *National Geographic*, May 2006, 78-95.

<sup>2</sup>[http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/\\_pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf](http://www9.nationalgeographic.com/lostgospel/_pdf/GospelofJudas.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume 1: Gospels and Related Writings*, revised edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 386-387.

<sup>4</sup>Cockburn, 91.

## FOCUS ON SCRIPTURE

### AFRAID OR NOT AFRAID?—HEBREWS 11:27

In Hebrews 10:35 the readers are called not to throw away their confidence, for those who persevere will receive the promise, the focus of which is the second coming of Jesus and final salvation (10:36-39). How is this possible? By faith! Heb 11:1 stresses that faith is “seeing” the unseen. Faith focuses on God (11:6) and endures just as the heroes of faith have endured. The most famous among these heroes of faith were Abraham and Moses.

In reference to the latter Hebrews 11:27 says: “By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.” If this is a reference to Exodus 2:14-15, the question is, “Was Moses afraid or not?” because according to the Exodus passage Moses was afraid and fled to Midian. Which text is correct, Exodus or Hebrews? Has the author of Hebrews forgotten the Exodus narrative or has he reinterpreted an OT quotation? If the latter is true what are the implications?

The author of Hebrews was well versed in the OT. Quoting it repeatedly and alluding to it, he based his understanding of Jesus and his work on the OT. Hence, it would be extremely strange for him to make such a plunder. If he did it deliberately, we would question the author’s trustworthiness. He would belong to those who embellished ancient stories just to make the hero blameless and almost superhuman. Both options are problematic.<sup>1</sup> Therefore scholars have looked for solutions that do justice to both passages, Exodus 2:14-15 and Hebrews 11:27. Here are some suggestions:

- (1) Hebrews 11:27 does not refer to Moses’ flight to Midian (Exod 2:14-15) but to the Exodus from Egypt. When Moses and the Israelites left the country, Moses did not fear Pharaoh, but trusted God.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) Hebrews 11:27 alludes to Exodus 11:8 where Moses announces the last plague. It is suggested that the author of Hebrews understood the phrase “in hot anger” as referring to Pharaoh instead of to Moses as found in Exodus.<sup>3</sup>
- (3) When Moses fled to Midian he increased the wrath of Pharaoh which otherwise may have cooled down. Although he fled out of fear, his renunciation of a court position was an act of faith.<sup>4</sup>
- (4) Moses fled to Midian because he was afraid, but he still had faith that God somehow would use him to deliver his people.<sup>5</sup>
- (5) “. . . the author’s focus here is simply on Moses ‘leaving Egypt behind’ as Abraham left his homeland behind and as the addressees left their place in their

society behind.”<sup>6</sup> He is not specifically interested in the flight to Midian or the Exodus.

- (6) According to Hebrews 11:23 Moses’ parents were not afraid of Pharaoh’s decree, a detail not found in Exodus 2:2. In the same way the parallel statement in Hebrews 11:27 stressing that Moses was not afraid of Pharaoh does not occur in Exodus. The author of Hebrews wanted to state that by faith Moses overcame any fear of Pharaoh, a thought implicitly found in the OT. By keeping the invisible God before him Moses overcame “his fear through faith.”<sup>7</sup>

The majority of interpreters see Exodus 2:14-15 as the background of Hebrews 11:27. Their interpretations are complimentary to some extent. The problem with the Exodus interpretation is that Pharaoh and his people wanted the Israelites to go. At that time there was no reason to be afraid. Furthermore, the chronological sequence of events portrayed in Hebrews 11:27 and 28 would be destroyed, if the Exodus would precede the Passover. Although the author of Hebrews does not always proceed chronologically (Heb 11:8-19), in our passage he seems to do it. When dealing with Moses he uses five times the phrase “by faith.” The first refers to his birth, the second to his adulthood, the third to his departure from Egypt, the fourth to Passover, and the fifth to the passing through the Red Sea. Therefore, it seems better to connect Hebrews 11:27 with Exodus 2:14-15.

Exodus 2:14-15 is interesting insofar as Moses’ fear is not directly connected to his flight.<sup>8</sup> Neither is the wrath of the king directly expressed. This may be one reason why Philo (*Moses* 1.49-50) and Josephus (*Antiquities* 2:254-256) have not linked the motif of fear with the departure from Egypt.<sup>9</sup> The author of Hebrews may have decided to take a similar approach. He certainly does not deny that Moses was afraid, but aside from his fear there was faith.

The two parallel statements in verses 23 and 27 are striking: “they [Moses’ parents] did not fear the decree of the king”; “he [Moses] did not fear the wrath of the king.” In the end, Moses was moved by faith rather than by fear. Faith triumphed over fear, because Moses kept the Unseen before his eyes. In this manner the readers of Hebrews, those in the first century A.D. and those throughout the centuries, including us, can persevere.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

<sup>1</sup>Yet they have been supported by some expositors. See James Moffat, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 182.

<sup>2</sup>For a discussion of this view see William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, Word Biblical Commentary 47B (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1991), 374-375.

<sup>3</sup>Cf., Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistles to the Hebrews*, The New In-

ternational Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 615.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1: The Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 432. See also Moffat, 182.

<sup>5</sup>Francis D. Nichol, (ed.). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 7:477.

<sup>6</sup>David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 412.

<sup>7</sup>Lane, 375.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, Publishing Company, 1972), 321-322.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Lane, 375.

## SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

### IS DEATH THE END?

Blaise Pascal, supposedly, stated that all he knew was that we would die soon. Indeed nothing in human life is ascertain as death. However, death is not an end in itself (John 3:16). There is a resurrection.

Some people claim that the concept of a resurrection is clearly unacceptable and unbelievable. At the same time they believe so many other things and trust so many persons—the pharmacist, the bus driver, the newspaper, and the TV. Why should we not trust Scripture? Others claim that nobody ever came back from the dead. It seems Jesus did. Again some say that they believe only what they can see. Yet we do not see electricity, radiation, and electromagnetic waves. The question whether or not there is a resurrection of the dead is a matter of faith, not science. The proposal that there is no resurrection must be believed as much as the statement that there is a resurrection. Therefore, we listen to God's Word.

#### I. Why We Will Be Resurrected?

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| (1) Jesus guarantees the resurrection.                                   | John 6:40; 11:25-26      |
| (2) Death is compared to a sleep. There is an awakening.                 | John 11:11-13            |
| (3) Jesus himself was raised from the dead.                              | Matt 28:6; Luke 24:36-47 |
| (4) More than 500 witnesses testify that Jesus was raised from the dead. | 1 Cor 15:3-8             |
| (5) Since Jesus was resurrected, we will be too.                         | 1 Cor 15:20-21           |

#### II. Who Will Be Resurrected?

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
| (1) All humans will be raised from the dead.                            | 1 Cor 15:22  |
| (2) Jesus points to two different resurrections. Both are still future. | John 5:28-29 |

It is our human lot to die and be raised again. Therefore, the sentence "All humans must die" must be supplemented by the statement "All humans will be raised." In the play "The Boozed Boll," the land owner Boll, who always is a little drunk, one day at noon finds himself in front of a church. He sees the four stone-hewn Cherubim with their trumpets. Suddenly it appears to him that they were alive and called for God's judgment saying: "Come out of your tombs you who are dead. No excuse about decay! Come out!"

#### III. When Will We Be Resurrected?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (1) There is a resurrection order - 1 Cor 15:23-26:  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus Christ,</li> <li>• the believers,</li> <li>• the unbelievers.</li> </ul>   |
| (2) The believers - 1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:50-53: | At Christ's second coming, the believers will be raised from the dead with an imperishable body. Those believers who will be still alive at that time will be changed and will be like those who were "asleep." |
| (3) The unbelievers - Rev 20:4-6, 12-15:             | The unbelievers will be raised after the Millennium and will experience the final judgment including their destruction.   |

The date for the beginning of the Millennium and therefore the dates for the two resurrections depend on Jesus' second coming and are not known. What we do know is the order of events.

#### IV. What Will Happen Afterwards?

The good news is that the resurrection will be followed by a new earth on which death is no longer known--Rev 21.

Since there is only the possibility to take part in the first resurrection or the second resurrection, we must make a decision. An Italian, who had lived in the United States for about twenty years, paid a visit to his home country. Because he encountered certain difficulties and problems, he turned to the American Embassy and asked for help. The officer asked him whether or not he had become an American citizen. He had not. "Then there is nothing that I can do for you," the officer declared. A second Italian who had come from the United States to Italy ran also into problems and needed help. He had moved to the United States only recently and his English was

still bad. However, he had become an American citizen. The officer replied to his inquiry: “All Americans are on your side.” We need the right citizenship to take part in the first resurrection, and we have it, if our life belongs to Jesus our Lord and Savior.

“Lord, where shall we go? In the end death awaits us on all roads of the world. But you, you alone, have and give eternal life.”

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

## BOOK NOTES

Steve Wohlberg, *End Time Delusions*. Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 2004. 220 pp. US\$13.99.

Will Christians vanish in a rapture? Will a future antichrist control the world? Will earth's nations attack Israel at Armageddon? These are some of the questions Steve Wohlberg is addressing in this book which carries the subtitle “The Rapture, the Antichrist, Israel, and the End of the World.” The book is divided into four sections: (1) Rapture Delusions; (2) Seven-Year Tribulation Delusions; (3) Antichrist Delusions; and (4) Israel Delusions. The bulk of the book deals with the last two delusions.

The pre-tribulation rapture doctrine, says Wohlberg, has become “the great evangelical escape clause for the avoidance of the end times” (p. 36). On the basis of Scripture, the author shows that the second coming of Christ will be unmistakably visible and that the church will go through the tribulation. Furthermore, he refutes the idea that those who will not be raptured will have a second chance during the seven years of tribulation.

“The seven-year period of tribulation” theory, says Wohlberg, is a “massive mega-myth. It may even go down in history as the ‘greatest evangelical misinterpretation of all time’” (p. 47). He provides ten cogent reasons why the 70<sup>th</sup> week in Daniel 9 cannot be applied to the future, and why he believes that it was fulfilled nearly two thousand years ago.

The “Left Behind” theology teaches that the antichrist will be an evil person who will appear after the rapture, enter the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem, and declare himself to be God. The implication of this popular interpretation is that Paul's antichrist prediction in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 has nothing to do with the Christian Church. Wohlberg argues that whenever Paul used the word *naos* (temple) “he always applied it to the Christian Church and never to a rebuilt Israeli temple” (p. 74). Using Paul's letters and texts from the books Daniel and Revelation he shows that the antichrist Paul was referring to was to appear soon after Paul's days.

Wohlberg cites a number of theologians and historians (pp. 78-79) who for hundreds of years have claimed that the antichrist has been active in the Christian Church since the “restrainer” (the Roman Empire) was taken out of the way in A.D. 476 (2 Thess 2:6-7). To support his identification of

the antichrist with the institution of the papacy Wohlberg cites scholars from Martin Luther to Martin Lloyd-Jones (pp. 90-93).

While the book focuses on the “Left Behind” theology with its future antichrist, Wohlberg also takes issue with the preterist interpretations of the antichrist as the Roman Emperor Nero. Throughout the book he defends the historicist interpretation of the symbolic visions of Daniel and Revelation (p. 132).

The last 70 pages of the book deal with the issue of Israel and biblical prophecy. Has modern Israel a role to play in the biblical end-time scenario? Wohlberg says “no.” He carefully goes through the biblical texts concerning Israel and comes to the conclusion that there are two Israels – Israel after the flesh (the physical descendants of Abraham) and spiritual Israel (Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ). What about the promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament? These, says Wohlberg, will be fulfilled “to any human being who follows Abraham's example and who becomes part of His Israel in the Spirit through faith in the Messiah” (p. 157). Thus the “seventy weeks” of Daniel 9:24 “represented the limits of national forgiveness for the Jewish nation – as a nation” (p. 166), and “all Israel” that will be saved according to Romans 11:26 consists of “believing Jews and Gentiles who have responded to the good news” (p. 170).

*End Time Delusions* is a welcome academic and theological challenge to the popular dispensationalist theories of the end-time. In a readable and engaging style Wohlberg lays out the various errant ideas and refutes them with Scripture in one hand and history in the other. He is not afraid to call Mohammed a “false prophet” (p. 119), or to characterize the popular prophetic theories about modern Israel “delusions” (p. 143). This book, like a heat-seeking missile, is seeking to explode and destroy dangerous theories. Its intention is not to promote anti-Semitism (the author is himself a Jew), or to offend Bible-believing Christians. Rather, its goal is to expose error, promote truth, and save souls. Any pastor and church member who is interested in prophecy, or who is in contact with evangelical Christians, will want to read and digest this volume.

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Zoltan Szalos-Farkas, *The Rise and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality*, Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 1. Cernica, Rumania: Editura Institutului Teologic Adventist, 2005. 324 pp.

This dissertation, presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at King's College, University of Aberdeen, Scotland, is a volume on Adventist church history. While it covers Adventist history from the Millerites to the present, it focuses specifically on Seventh-day Adventist piety and the various factors contributing to it. Adventist piety or spirituality is defined as (1) “the personal and corporate religious experiences and practices of Seventh-day Adven-

tists;” and (2) as “the doctrinal and theological ideas which underlie such religious experiences and practices” (p. 3).

Because the author sees Ellen White as the primary agent of Adventist spirituality, the first two chapters trace the early history of Ellen White’s personal religious experience and prophetic self-consciousness. The next two chapters consider the hermeneutical grounds and the theological matrix of apocalyptic spirituality within the Adventist context. Chapter five, the main chapter of the book, studies the institutional triangle of Adventist spirituality: Publishing, health reform, and education. The final chapter provides a summary of the main points identifying the nature of Adventist spirituality.

In his study of the institutional triangle up to 1915, the author concluded that education, publishing and the medical infrastructure were the effective agents in integrating Adventist theology with Adventist spirituality. As a result of this integration, he believes, Adventist spirituality was the pursuit of a fulfilling and integrated life within a world

that was nearing its cataclysmic end (p. 266). Furthermore, he notes that Adventist lifestyle and liturgical practices were the expression of a spirituality that was grounded in a “Thus says the Lord” (p. 277).

While the author’s discussion of Adventist spirituality is interesting and helpful his treatment of Miller’s hermeneutics is less so. He describes Miller’s hermeneutics as a fully-fledged proof-text exegesis which took little or no account of the variety of biblical genres or the literary and historical context (p. 106-7). The same type of treatment is meted out to Adventist exegesis. However, he seems to admit that “Adventism stood in a historical continuity with the Christian tradition as to its historicist hermeneutic of biblical prophecy” (footnote 69, p. 293).

This volume will be of interest to every Adventist historian and those interested in Adventist history and the role of Ellen White in the church.

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