

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.

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NEWS AND COMMENTS

NEW ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF BRI

The growth of the church has directly contributed to a significant increase in the demands that the world church is placing on the services of the staff of BRI. This matter was discussed over two



years ago with the officers of the General Conference and it was decided to add a new Associate Director to BRI. After a careful search and evaluation of potential candidates it was decided to invite Clinton Wahlen to join us. He was born in Portland, Oregon. Clinton holds a B.A. in theology from Pacific Union College (1984), an M.Div. from Andrews University (1989), and a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, in New Testament (2004). He is the husband of a dynamic and gracious wife, Gina Renee, and the father of two

children, Heather 11 and Daniel 16. Heather will be in 5th grade next year and Daniel will be a junior in Academy.

Clinton's professional career includes seven years of pastoral ministry in Northern California and six years as professor of theology at Zaosky Theological Seminary, Russia (1992-1998). He also served most recently at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines (2003-2008). His doctoral dissertation has been published under the title, *Jesus and the Impurity of Spirits in the Gospels*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/185 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

I welcome him and his family to the BRI family, persuaded that the Lord will continue to use him in nurturing His remnant people. We ask for your prayers on his behalf as he begins this new aspect of his ministry.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

CHANGES IN THE EDITORSHIP OF THE BRI NEWSLETTER

The BRI Newsletter has been produced for six years under the able leadership of my distinguished colleague Ekkehardt Mueller. As its editor, he has performed an excellent job in making sure that its intended goals were achieved through articles that addressed important theological and doctrinal issues within our community of faith. The arrival of Clinton Wahlen allows us to use the skills of Ekkehardt Mueller in other areas by placing the editorial responsibility of the Newsletter into the hands of Clinton. I take this opportunity not only to inform you about this change,

but particularly to express my deepest appreciation to Ekkehardt for a job well done. Marlene Bacchus will continue to be the Production Manager. Her skills are indispensable to us in the preparation of the Newsletter.

I am sure that the new editor will continue to produce a product that will be useful to church leaders, professors, and pastors. If you have any suggestions on how we can best serve you, please, feel free to write to us to share your ideas. I encourage church leaders to make sure that the Newsletter reaches the pastors by appointing someone in the administrative structure to forward it to them.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

COMMENTS ON SPEAKING IN TONGUES

Some time ago, the Biblical Research Institute was asked to comment on speaking in tongues. A response was needed to address questions posed by the press. Here is the answer given at that time. We are aware of the fact that the issue should be addressed in a more comprehensive way in the future. For now, we just want to share with you our brief response, hoping that it may be useful to you.

“The phenomenon of speaking in tongues is announced in Mark 16:17 and realized in the Book of Acts, where it is found several times and always is the gift of a foreign language. The foundational passage is Acts 2. At Pentecost, the phenomenon of speaking in tongues occurred for the first time. It clearly refers to the gift of speaking a foreign language without having studied it and communicating clearly and effectively the gospel. Adventists agree that the original use of speaking in tongues was the gift of proclaiming in a foreign language the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul uses the same expression in 1 Corinthians 12-14 when he discusses spiritual gifts in the church. These gifts are given to all believers, i.e., each individual believer has received at least one spiritual gift. However, the Holy Spirit is sovereign in distributing these gifts, and not a single gift is mentioned as being given to all believers alike. Adventists are divided on how to understand the gift of speaking in tongues in 1 Corinthians. Some suggest that it is a language not spoken by humans which benefits primarily the one who practices it. Others understand it as an abuse of the gift of speaking a foreign language. They argue that it would be strange to use the very same term for different phenomena in the New Testament, especially since the apostle Paul is connected to it in Acts 19:6 and employs it in his own writings. Also the term *heteroglossoi* (1 Cor. 14:21) may help to define the word “tongue” pointing in the direction of a real foreign language.

In general, Adventists have been careful not to interpret and practice the gift of tongues in the way Pentecostal churches and the charismatic movement are practicing it. In other words, Adventists do not believe that what they see

in the Pentecostal and charismatic movements corresponds to the biblical gift.”

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

INFORMATION ABOUT SUNDAY LAWS

Whenever the Office of Public Affairs & Religious Liberty of the General Conference receives information relating to Sunday laws, we examine the information diligently and extensively. In addition to reacting to information sent to us, we proactively monitor legislative developments on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. and attend many meetings with a wide variety of entities at which prospective legislation is discussed. Further, we undertake extensive research. For example, in 2003 our team performed an extensive review of Sunday laws in every U.S. state and the District of Columbia, culminating in a 421-page report detailing every existing state Sunday law.

When we receive information about Sunday laws from individual sources, our team of dedicated Seventh-day Adventist professionals follows four steps to evaluate it:

1. If the information contains claims that can be independently verified, we perform the detailed research necessary to determine whether the claims are factual.
2. We contact the source of the information directly to invite him or her to speak and/or meet with us in order to gain perspective on the information.
3. If the source will not speak and/or meet with us, we contact people who are in contact with the source—for example, his or her church pastor—to ascertain why the individual refuses to communicate directly with our Church’s religious liberty team and whether there are any indications as to the credibility of the source.
4. We review our first-hand observation of the process on Capitol Hill, we speak with personal contacts, and we access a variety of printed sources to ascertain whether there are associated movements.

In short, we take information on Sunday laws very seriously and we follow a rigorous path to evaluate it. Currently, there are two Sunday law rumors circulating in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We have run both of these through our four-step process and, after this serious review, find both to be unreliable at this point.

The first rumor claims that there was a secret meeting in Washington, D.C. last November to plan for the passage of a Sunday law. We checked every specific claim that accompanied this rumor and every one of them proved false. The meeting did not occur at the site claimed, and the high-profile individuals who allegedly attended the meeting

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were documented to be in other locations at that time. After we made our investigation public, the rumor morphed. The new rumor contained no claims that could be independently verified. Our invitation to the source of the rumor to meet with us has not been accepted. There has been no Sunday law bill introduced in the subsequent four months and our research has turned up no evidence that would tend to corroborate the rumor. Rather, the closer we have looked at the situation surrounding the rumor, the more it appears to be false.

The person who is the source of the current claim also circulated another Sunday law claim approximately seven years ago. Once again, we vigorously researched the elements that could be verified and found each one to be inaccurate. In the seven years since that claim, no Sunday law has been introduced in Congress.

The second rumor circulating was that the Pope would urge the passage of a Sunday law during his visit in Washington, D.C. The source of this rumor is the same as above. We have once again followed our four-step process and to date have found nothing to corroborate the claim.

The Seventh-day Adventist religious liberty team is dedicated to advancing the cause of religious liberty and the gospel, including the Three Angels Messages. We take Sunday laws very seriously, diligently research any information we receive, and proactively search for information on Sunday laws. When we receive credible information on religious liberty matters, whether it is on Sunday laws or other religious liberty matters, we use every avenue available to us to share it promptly with our church family as a whole.

James Standish, Public Affairs &
Religious Liberty, General Conference

THE POPE WORE PRADA

Once upon a time, Protestant America held a deep suspicion of the papacy and the Church of Rome. It was not altogether unfounded. As the history sections of *The Great Controversy* recount so well, the Roman Catholic Church slipped ever further from the simple truths and lifestyle of the early Christian church. It became preoccupied with power and prestige. At times it showed a most unchristlike zeal in persecuting those who worshiped differently.

There is a curious series of letters between former presidents Adams and Jefferson, carried on till they died on the same day—July 4, 1826—exactly fifty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Among other topics they discussed Christianity in the new republic. Jefferson saw its decline, but Adams thought not. However, Adams wrote on July 16, 1814, “Cabalistical Christianity, which is Catholic Christianity, and which has prevailed for fifteen hundred years, has received a mortal wound, of which the monster must finally die. Yet so strong is his

constitution, that he may endure for centuries before he expires.”

Prophecy does indeed speak of a “mortal wound,” for an apostate beast form of religion. But it also predicts the healing of that wound, and a rapprochement with its “errant” flock in the New World. There can be no doubt that recent events surrounding the April visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States underscore this renewed vitality.

There can be no doubt that recent events surrounding the April visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States underscore the papacy's renewed vitality.

The timing for the visit was curious. It interrupted one of the more engaging political contests in a generation—no, it eclipsed the primary battle in many ways. British Prime Minister Gordon Brown came to Washington the same week and seemed content to bask in the reflected papal glory. Something very political was on view: the power of a little principality named Vatican City, magnified by millions of supporters and its own claims. President Bush met the Pontiff’s plane at Andrews Air Force Base—a first for any head of state. And in speaking at the United Nations later in the week the pope said that “the Holy See has always had a place at the assemblies of the Nations” and “according to the dispositions of international law, helps to define that law.” Surely this is springtime for the papacy!

The six-day visit to the United States revealed a settled comfort with the ever-enhancing role of the papacy. Benedict of course conducted masses for the Catholic

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faithful—one for the religious orders at St. Patrick’s Cathedral, New York, another

at the Nationals Park in Washington and to as many as 60,000 at Yankee Stadium in New York. He met with the 350 Catholic bishops at the National Shrine and spoke to Catholic educators at the Catholic University in Washington, D.C. He also made a point of speaking to a rally of young Catholics.

All of these occasions confirmed the modern appeal of the papacy. Benedict has not the telegenic personality of John Paul II but he has inherited the good will, and is even able to induce swooning at masses. Amazingly, while his predecessor sometimes couched his conservatism in Public Relations, Ratzinger makes no effort to undo his doctrinal toughness, and seems to need only to pass the test of appearing “human” for approval. At the Yankee Stadium Mass he was able to urge Catholics to submit to the authority of the church, and still come off as grandfatherly.

Where the visit broke new ground was:

1. Meeting with other faith leaders at the John Paul Cultural Center. To the Protestants he rapidly seems to

become chairman of the board. To the Moslems he is signaling that they must enter into dialog and come to some modus operandi or risk being cast aside by a global faith coalition.

2. His visit to Ground Zero in New York, and his reception of some of the survivors/heroes of that day was a clear bid to appropriate the secular sanctity of the event.

3. In meeting with victims of abuse and their families he reached out as never before on this issue. “No words of mine could describe the pain and harm inflicted by such abuse,” he said in a curious truism that avoided culpability. Some were not impressed and it remains to be seen how the Vatican will deal with an issue that involves criminal sexual abuse and cover-ups by bishops. Many do hold the pope responsible for not dealing with it structurally.

A telling end piece to the visit came several weeks later in the amazing retraction of anti-Catholic statements by

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media evangelist John Hagee. He had been prone to identify Rome

as the apostate figure of the church in Revelation—in other words, a historic standard Protestant interpretation. When he received the apology letter from Hagee, William Donahue, President of the Catholic League for Civil and Religious Rights said, “Well, miracles do happen. If I wasn’t a believer before, I sure am now.” Indeed that was the prevailing Catholic response in various publications to the papal visit. There was amazement at how Benedict was lauded and feted. Apparently, even the sex abuse scandal is not enough to prevent a once deadly wound from healing.

Overall it was an amazing visit. Benedict has the sympathy of most. Pew Forum statistics show a clear uptick in papal approval as a result. The pope’s doctrinaire ways are neatly obscured by his calls for a crusade against moral relativism and secularism. In a sense this visit was his investiture as the senior religious figure for the free world. We will see where he takes it.

Lincoln E. Steed, Liberty Magazine

TRINITY CONGRESS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC DIVISION

From May 1-4 more than 65 theologians and biblical scholars, administrators, teachers, and pastors from all over the South Pacific Division, met in Wahroonga/Sydney to study and discuss the doctrine of the Trinity. The meetings were graced with the presence of guests like Brian Edgar, professor of systematic theology at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, Ekkehardt Mueller from the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, and Kai Arasola from Mission College in Thailand. The delegates had prepared for the congress by reading significant recent articles on the issue.

Australia has been severely challenged over the last couple of years by well organized anti-Trinitarian groups who continue to spread their propaganda and strategically target churches and ministers. Yet, as expressed in the opening address by Paul Petersen, Field Secretary of the Division and organizer of the congress, though discussing issues in light of these threats, we study the Trinity not just for polemical or apologetic reasons. As Adventists we pursue a deeper understanding of who God is, and that quest for a deeper knowledge of the God we worship motivates us to reflect on His nature as the triune God who has revealed Himself to us as a person in Jesus Christ and through the workings of the Holy Spirit.

The congress was framed by presentations looking at the Trinity from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

Paul Petersen broadly presented the challenges, and Kai Arasola in the final paper of the congress discussed how we

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as Adventists are to view the Trinitarian development in the early Church in light of our prophetic identity and beliefs. Throughout the congress the presentations and the discussions progressed from the practical reflection on the significance of the doctrine by Ray Roennfeldt, professor of systematic theology at Avondale, to issues in systematic theology by Brian Edgar. Other studies included lectures on “Father and Son in John” by Robert McIver, also from Avondale, “The Firstborn (*prōtotokos*) in Colossians” by Ekkehardt Mueller, and a fresh study of the views of Kellogg by John Skrzypaszek, Director of Ellen G. White Research Center at Avondale, who showed that Kellogg, in contrast to anti-Trinitarian claims, in no way shared views compatible with the traditional concept of the Trinity.

The South Pacific Division had invited Adventist scholars from around the world to contribute, and though not being able to be present in Australia during the congress, a number of scholars have sent in proposals for papers and worked on articles. The editing process of the presentations and articles is now under way, and hopefully the congress volume on the Trinity will be published by

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Avondale Academic Press this year.

The congress was for invitees only and limited to a certain academic level. Yet, the intention of the South Pacific

Division is to reach out to church members as well. Sabbath afternoon was set aside for a public meeting with a presentation and subsequent panel discussion where

Ekkehardt Mueller from the Biblical Research Institute and lecturers from Avondale provided answers to tough questions. During the last day of the congress delegates worked on and finalized a statement intended for the wider church community, unanimously voted by the delegates. The South Pacific Division has also recently produced a DVD with six popular presentations on the Trinity, three by Merlin Burt, Director of the Ellen G. White Research Center at Andrews University, and three by Paul Petersen, Field Secretary of the South Pacific Division. This DVD covers topics in Bible, Church history, Ellen G. White, and Adventist history.

Consensus Statement

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has expressed its position on the Godhead in its fundamental beliefs. Paragraph 2 speaks about the Godhead, and paragraphs 3-5 describe each of the three persons of the Trinity.

We, a group of Seventh-day Adventist Christians, theologians, pastors, and administrators, convening in Wahroonga, have been invited by the South Pacific Division to study biblical, theological, and historical aspects of this doctrine.

- On the basis of our study of Scripture we affirm our belief in “one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three co-eternal persons” (Fundamental Belief # 2).
- We understand the eternal pre-existence and full divinity of Jesus and the distinct divine personality of the Holy Spirit to be essential to our belief in the full redemption and atonement in Jesus Christ.
- We approach this subject with awe, and we acknowledge that human words cannot fully describe and human minds not fully grasp the mystery of the nature of God. These limitations in understanding and language arise out of God’s greatness and majesty and the depth of the divine plan of salvation, particularly of the incarnation of Jesus Christ.
- As we seek to grow in our understanding of God, we recognize the need continually to base our theology on His self revelation in Jesus Christ, as conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit through the Bible.
- We are grateful that the Holy Spirit has led us in our past history, as the Adventist community has developed a deeper understanding of God through the study of Holy Scripture.
- We pray that God’s people will reflect the love and unity of the Godhead as they seek to understand Scripture better and share the good news that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ.
- May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all (2 Corinthians 13:14).

Paul Petersen,
South Pacific Division

CHRIST’S DEATH AND OUR SALVATION

With the end of the first century of the Christian Era and the death of John, the last intimate eyewitness of Christ’s ministry, questions began to surface: Who was Jesus? Why did He come? Why did He die? Responses to such queries came through a host of metaphors found in the Scriptures: the sacrificial Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world; the conquering King of kings; the Light of the world. Jesus was seen as the Son of God—a cosmic deliverer, an emissary from heaven, but also as the Son of man, identifying with us.

While the Bible speaks about reconciliation, atonement, adoption, and redemption, one of the most telling pictures lies in the idea of ransom. Jesus says, “The Son of

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man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (*lutron*) for many” (Matt.

20:28). And echoing Him, Peter says, “You know that you were ransomed (*elutrōthēte*) from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

The idea of ransom was common in the ancient world. The word indicated something of value to be reclaimed from a pawnshop. It also referred to the purchase of freedom by a slave and the practice of paying ransom for release of a captured hostage or prisoner of war. Hence Paul’s comment, “You were bought (*ēgorasthēte*) with a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Cor. 7:23).

I. The Ransom Price

However, the question was raised, If ransomed, who collected the ransom price? Interestingly, the Bible never says. Over the centuries a dramatic scenario took shape—part fact, part fiction. According to the tale, a deal was struck between the Father and Satan. Adam had sold his rights—indeed, his soul—to the devil. Knowing the Father’s earnest desire to have Adam returned, Satan demanded the ultimate price: the life of the Son of God, the final object of Lucifer’s hatred.

So Jesus came—so goes the scenario—and lived under the duress of Satan’s torment, and finally forfeited His life. But according to the story, Lucifer himself was fooled, for the Father raised His Son from the grave, leaving Lucifer with nothing but an empty tomb.

II. The Important Truth

Despite these imaginations, we discover here a nugget of truth. Christ did indeed give His life as a ransom for us sinners. There is a far more important truth than an answer to the question who received the payment, namely, that in Christ’s atonement a monumental price was paid to accom-

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while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:10).

Before a watching universe God demonstrated once and for all how far He would go to make possible redemption of lost sinners. In this extension of His love is revealed the manner in which Christ’s sacrifice partakes of ransom qualities.

We must never forget that it was our God who initiated our rescue, who reached out to us. “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself” (2 Cor. 5:18). And He continues to reach out to us today. When we accept His merciful invitation, we walk in the certainty of salvation guaranteed by Christ’s death and resurrection.

In one brief sentence Paul probes the depths of what it means for God to love: “But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Three truths leap out at us. First, God demonstrates His kind of love. Second, we grasp our helpless condition as sinners. And third, we watch Him initiate the whole plan of salvation.

In God’s plan Christ fulfills the everlasting covenant, meeting a commitment crafted before the world was. He would volunteer to lay down His life for us. As Adventists understand especially well, He was fulfilling concurrently a purpose of cosmic proportions.

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III. But what about His love?

Unfortunately, love has become an almost shapeless word. Often it is tied to sentiment, and even confused with a religious feeling. But as used in the Bible, love is a power word. Love is aggressive: God at work tracking us down to help us. Love is a principle. God’s love is an unshakable commitment, inviolable, a predisposition in our favor that cannot be discouraged. Divine love—there is no way to shake it or deter it. It is a relentless pursuit by a God eager to help, one who never gives up. In this sense God is love.

IV. More Than an Example

In the high Middle Ages a French monk, Peter Abelard, constructed what he felt described what love really means. It has come to be called the moral influence theory. Reacting against the coarse ransom idea of his time, he argued that in no sense was Jesus a ransom, rather someone elevated.

plish reconciliation between us, as fallen sinners, and our righteous God. “For if

If only we could grasp the nobility of God’s character, he reasoned, our self-ridden hearts would melt and be moved to repentance, and sin would be abandoned.

For Abelard, Christ’s death really was the ultimate demonstration of God’s love, hence a description of His character. So Jesus suffered with us to set the example. He identified Himself fully with humanity and tasted all of life. He suffered with the sinner rather than directly for the sinner. This theory reinterpreted the meaning of those texts that tell us Christ died for us.

Despite its core truth, Abelard’s doctrine fell far short of the full biblical picture. Its soft view of sin suggests that difficulty arises not so much from the sinner’s violation of God’s perfect character and His will as from his failure to understand God’s affection for him. It leaves little or no room for the biblical teaching that Christ came not only to demonstrate God’s love but to manifest His justice as well. With the atonement described principally in terms of enlightening us about His purpose, Christ’s work as a sacrifice dying for guilty sinners is muted. The focus falls especially on inward moral enlightenment, not so much on a plain and open

While all this has merit, it carries the subtle suggestion that, after all, sin is not really that serious and we should take final comfort in the knowledge that God never ceases caring.

outward death that resolved the major conflict sin had introduced in God’s universe. So Abelard brought us a partial truth—Jesus as the demonstration beyond all question of God’s unfailing concern for us.

Today, this view is widely held in Christian circles and also affects the Adventist Church. Some suggest that Christ came primarily to show His concern for us in our common human fate, to share our sorrows, to assure us God understands and cares. While all this has merit, it carries the subtle suggestion that, after all, sin is not really that serious and we should take final comfort in the knowledge that God never ceases caring. L. Morris writes: “The thrust in all this is on personal experience. The atonement, seen in this way, has no effect outside the believer. It is real in the person’s experience and nowhere else. . . What it [this theory] says is both true and important. It is when it is claimed that this is all that the atonement means that we must reject it. . . If Christ was not actually doing something by his death, then we are confronted with a piece of showmanship, nothing more. . . Unless the death of Christ really does something, it is not in fact a demonstration of love.”¹

But salvation means more than a good feeling between us and God. It means a grueling confrontation between God’s righteousness and human revolt that entangles us all. It means a love that carried Jesus to the ultimate sacrifice to obtain for us reconciliation with our Creator. The scene at Golgotha, in fact, means taking up the guilt of every sin and bearing its consequence: total alienation from God on

Jesus' part. Only here surfaces the depths of God's self-sacrificing, persistent love.

Paul stated: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Literally the text says Christ became our place of sacrifice (Greek, *hilasterion*),

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an unclouded reference to the ancient Hebrew sacrificial system. Both on the surface and at bedrock, the principle is substitution.

Typical of pagan religions, the ancient Greeks worked to appease their gods, quiet-

ing the gods' anger and seeking favor with gifts and a regimen of specified deeds. Unfortunately, this concept persists among some Christians today, at times surfacing in arguments over faith and works. Because of associating the death of Jesus with appeasement of God—a pagan idea—it seems that substitutionary atonement is being rejected hastily.

V. A Case Study

According to 1 John 2:2 our forgiveness is secured because Jesus is our propitiation, expiation, or atoning sacrifice (*hilasmos*).² In the NT this term is found in 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 only. In the OT it occurs five times with various but related meanings. In Lev. 25:9 it qualifies the word "day" thereby referring to the Day of Atonement. In Num. 5:8 it describes the ram of atonement and in Ezek. 44:27 the sin offering. In Amos 8:14 it is translated with the term "guilt" and in Ps. 129:4 with the word "forgiveness." In 1 John *hilasmos* is translated "propitiation" by the King James Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the English Standard Version to name some translations. The Revised Standard Version has rendered it with the term "expiation." The New Revised Standard Version as well as the New International Version use "atoning sacrifice" for *hilasmos*.

What is the difference between the terms? Propitiation normally has to do with appeasing an angry God. God's wrath against sin must be placated. Ben Witherington explains: "Propitiation is an act that appeases the wrath of God against sin or some offense,

Propitiation should not be understood in terms of the pagan background that occurs in non-biblical literature.

offered by a human being. Expiation, by contrast, is not something of which God is the recipient or object, but rather the subject, referring to the divine act of removing the defilement of or cleansing someone from sin, or covering or protecting someone from the consequences of sin."³ This term sounds better today, because the biblical God is not associated with capricious pagan deities. However, by

choosing the term "expiation" instead of "propitiation" the concept of divine wrath against sin referred to frequently in Scripture may be downplayed.

Therefore, a number of scholars favor "propitiation." In this case, however, propitiation should not be understood in terms of the pagan background that occurs in non-biblical literature. J. Stott states: "The Christian propitiation is quite different, not only in the character of the divine anger but in the means by which it is propitiated. It is an appeasement of the wrath of God by the love of God through the gift of God. The initiative is not taken by us, nor even by Christ, but by God himself in sheer unmerited love. His wrath is averted not by any external gift, but by his own self-giving to die the death of sinners. This is the means he has himself contrived by which to turn his own wrath away . . ."⁴

The term *hilasmos* seems to include both the concepts of propitiation and expiation which may be reflected in the translation atoning sacrifice. John takes a stand against a false concept of sin and possibly against a false understanding of Jesus and his work. He portrays Jesus as our atoning sacrifice and intercessor.

VI. The Father's Favor

In Christ's death is no hint of the Savior's effort to win the favor of the Father. With that favor already in hand, His confidence carried Him to Calvary, despite the shuddering of His human frame. Only on the cross, confronted by the withdrawal of His Father's presence in revulsion against sin, did the stark break become clear. As our guilt fell on Him, there was expressed from His lips the agonizing cry, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

With His final words, He surrendered His life into His father's hands and suffered the second death, carrying the burden of rejection for rebellion against God. Here He stands in our place. His is the despair of lost sinners staring into a black hole of oblivion, devoid of hope: "The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb."⁵ Death overtook Him as the abandoned sinner, alone, in the place where each of us really belongs.

Jesus came, not to appease, but to cancel guilt and cleanse sinners. In no sense is this bribery of God. Instead, it was a calculated divine plan of which Paul said, "This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25, 26). Rather than responding to God's demand, it was done at God's initiative.

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Jesus paid our ransom and freed us, the captives of sin, showing us how God loves. But there is much more. Real understanding comes when we come to grips with the desperate nature of our sin problem and how God must deal with rebellion running loose in His universe.

At question is God's righteousness, His justice. God undertakes to bridge the gulf. He substitutes Himself to demonstrate the changeless nature of His law, and performs all that is needed. Christ becomes the divine sacrifice, His cross an altar (see 1 Cor. 5:7). In amazement we stand aside, watching as He takes it up in our behalf. He "gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2) and "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:12). God "sent his Son to be the propitiation / expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

VII. Conclusion

Jesus demonstrated how God loves. He came to bear the inevitable punishment for revolt against the infinitely righteous character of God. In Christ our sin was judged and condemned. God's righteous nature remains intact and its violation dispatched. While we stood like wide-eyed children, He reconciled us, now to shower the benefits of the cross upon us who accept Him in faith. With the universe as witness to it all, what more could He do?

¹L. Morris, "Atonement, Theories of," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 101.

²Related terms are *hilastērion* (propitiation, expiation, etc.—e.g., Rom. 3:24) and *hilaskomai* (to bring about forgiveness, to make propitiation, etc.—Heb. 2:17).

³Ben Witherington III., *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians, Volume I: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 460.

⁴John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 93.

⁵Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 753.

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SCRIPTURE APPLIED—A BIBLE STUDY

OUR GOD

Once upon a time there was a little village in the desert. All inhabitants of this village were blind. One day a great king with his army passed by. He was riding a huge elephant. The blind had heard many stories about elephants and desired to approach the king and touch and investigate his elephant in order to get an idea of what elephants are like. Some of them stepped forward, bowed before the king and asked for permission to touch his elephant. The

first blind man grasped his trunk, another one his leg and foot, and a third his flank. One man seized his ear, and still another was allowed to ride on the back of the elephant. Delighted with their discoveries the blind men returned to their village. The people encircled them and asked eagerly what kind of being the monstrous animal elephant was. The first one said: "It is an immense hose, and woe to him who will be grabbed by it." The second one responded: "It is a pillar clothed with skin and hair." The third said: "It is like a rampart having also skin and hair." The man, who had seized the ear, replied: "It is not a wall at all but a very thick carpet which moves as soon as one touches it." And the last one declared: "This is all nonsense. It is a huge mountain which moves."

Similarly, we are like these blind men in our efforts to describe God. He surpasses us so much, He is so highly exalted and lives in a sphere significantly different from ours that He is not totally accessible to us. What we know about Him is what He has revealed to us. Therefore, we have only parts of all that can be known about God. However, these parts are true and allow us to relate to God and be saved.

I. God's Nature

God is light	1 John 1:5
God is spirit	John 4:24
God is love	1 John 4:16

II. God's Characteristics

Everlasting existence	Ps. 90:2
Omnipotence	Ps. 115:3
Omniscience	Ps. 139:4
Omnipresence	Ps. 139:5-8
Compassion, grace, patience, truth	Exod. 34:6
Goodness and righteousness	Ps. 145:7
Holiness	Lev. 19:2

III. The Trinity

1. One God and Three Persons

There is only *one* God (Deut. 6:4), however, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all called God (Matt. 27:46; John 20:28; Acts 5:3-4). Consequently, we do not worship three Gods, but one God who reveals Himself in and consists of three "persons." The three persons share one nature. Each person of the Godhead is by nature and essence God, and the fullness of the deity dwells in each of them. On the other hand, each person of the Godhead is inseparably connected to the other two. This concept of God surpasses our experiences and our intellect.

2. Hints for the Existence of a Triune God in the Old Testament

Gen. 1:26 "Let us make man . . ."

Exod. 3:2-4 The angel of the Lord is a person of the deity.
 Ps. 45:7-8 God is anointed by God.

3. Trinitarian Formulas in the NT

1 Cor. 12:4-6
 Jude 20-21
 1 Pet. 1:2
 2 Cor. 13:14

4. The Baptismal Formula

Mt. 28:19 Baptism does not take place in the names but in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Calvin comments: "Therefore it is evident that in God's substance there are three persons, in which the one God is recognized."

5. Attributes of the Persons of the Godhead

	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Eternal	Ps. 90:2	Rev. 1:18	Heb. 9:14
Creator	Isa. 45:18	Col. 1:16	Gen. 1:2
Almighty	Rev. 1:8	Matt. 28:18	Rom. 8:11
Omniscient	Ps. 139:4	John 2:24-25	1 Cor. 2:10
Omnipresent	Jer 23:24	Matt. 28:20	Ps. 139:7-8
Love	1 John 4:8	John 15:9	Gal. 5:22
To be worshiped	Rev. 14:7	1 Cor. 1:1-2	John 4:24

Various images have been used to help explain and understand the Trinity. None of them does complete justice to the nature of God:

(1) The family

Problem: The persons are too separate from each other and do not share one nature.

(2) The roles a person plays such as spouse, parent, child

Problem: There is just one person instead of three.

(3) A triangle (musical instrument)

Problem: Striking one side causes the other two sides to sound as well. Again the distinctiveness of the three persons is not well expressed.

IV. Results

We do not believe in three Gods but one God in three persons. In other words, God has revealed his nature as Trinity, that is, three coeternal persons, who, though distinct, constitute the one divine Trinitarian being. This doctrine of God is a biblical doctrine. However, it surpasses our understanding. We accept it, because it is taught by God's Word and because we have to expect that God is not just a superman. He is and remains God and surpasses our feelings, our will, and our intellectual capacities.

The doctrine of the Trinity allows us to understand the plan of salvation and other biblical doctrines. We worship this almighty and holy God of love. We seek Him, meet Him, and love Him.

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BOOK NOTES

Keith Phillips and Karl Tsatalbasidis, *I Pledge Allegiance: The Role of Seventh-day Adventists in the Military* (n.p.: self publication, 2007), 176 pp. US\$12.95.

The book *I Pledge Allegiance: The Role of Seventh-day Adventists in the Military* deals with a challenging issue that is of growing concern to many within the Seventh-day Adventist



Church: the role of Seventh-day Adventists in the military. How can Seventh-day Adventists with good conscience voluntarily serve in the armed forces? Being in the military means the conscious submission to an organization whose mission is characterized by force and the use of arms to solve conflicts. How does the unconditional military pledge of allegiance square with the biblical ethics of peace as exemplified by the prince of peace, Jesus Christ?

In dealing with these and other related issues the book briefly covers some aspects such as the church's historic position on noncombatancy and provides a revealing account of how military chaplaincy began in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and what the role of military medics in the (US-) army is. In a second section various hermeneutical and ethical issues are dealt with such as the issue of war and theocracy in the OT, the command not to kill, the Sabbath issue, and the challenge of patriotism. Other chapters reprint testimonies from Adventists who have been faithful in keeping the Sabbath even while serving in the military during the First World War (WWI). There are five appendices with primary sources about the work of the Church's National Service Organization, vital facts about service in the military and Sabbath observance, the General Conference Report on Chaplaincy, the official statement of the General Conference Committee on Seventh-day Adventists and non-combatancy, and pledges, oaths, codes, creeds and vows.

The personal testimony of Keith Phillips, who has served seven years in the U.S. military before he became a Seventh-day Adventist, provides helpful insights into the dynamics of why many young people join the military. The book succeeds in pointing out some inconsistencies in the thinking of some Adventists on this issue. The authors point out implications that arise from inconsistent thinking. The sensitive issue of patriotism is dealt with fairly. Who deserves to receive the highest loyalty and devotion? Is it a human state or God? As Mark Twain has aptly stated: "To be a patriot, one had to say, and keep on saying, 'Our country, right or wrong. . . .' Have you not perceived that that phrase is an insult to the nation?" Furthermore, are the responsibilities that are assumed and expected when individuals pledge allegiance to the military compatible with allegiance to Jesus Christ? The book rightly points out that from a biblical perspective they are not. Since there is voluntary enlistment in the armed forces of the United States of America this conflict is sharpened. The book focuses on the issue of voluntary military service without denying that similar problems arise when there is a draft.

The discussion about the role of the military chaplain (pp. 39-66) and the military medic (pp. 67-71) demystifies this line of work in the army and points out the difficulty of serving in the armed forces even in such a capacity.

On the other hand, it would have been helpful to deal with the topic from a more international point of view because Adventists face similar questions in other parts of the world as well. Some of the arguments set forth seem to be too narrowly reasoned. While it is certainly true that, from a biblical-prophetic perspective, America's role in the future raises a question about "the purpose of the military in light of Revelation 13" (p. 15, cf. pp. 50-51, 54, 57), there are other more profound ethical and moral reasons that challenge the bearing of weapons and the joining of armed forces that need to be considered. Occasionally, arguments need to be differentiated more carefully. While it may be

true that Luther firmly maintained "that there should be no resort to secular power in support of the Reformation, and no appeal to arms for its defense" (p. 126) historically the Lutheran church has made use of secular powers and used arms to defend its cause.

The book also suffers from the fact that it is not written by one person. While Keith Phillips and Karl Tsatalbasidis, two Adventist pastors, seem to be the principal writers of the book, at least one chapter ("Thou Shalt Not Kill") is written by Ron du Preez, who also helped in gathering key source documents. Several chapters are completely taken over from other books and journals. Often the transition from one section to another is rather abrupt. The logic of the arrangement of some of the chapters is not entirely clear (i.e., why is chapter 5, which contains a testimony taken from another book, not included in section three that is entitled "Testimonies"?). In addition, the book is not always carefully edited and several sources are missing or incomplete.

Furthermore the book would have benefitted from the biblical insights of other authors. There is much to be learned from Christians within a tradition of peaceful conflict resolution. Books like John Howard Yoder, *What Would You Do? A Serious Answer to a Standard Question* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992) or his classic *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), are missing in the bibliography as well as the classic book on early Christian attitudes toward war, violence, and the state by Jean-Michel Hornus, *It Is Not Lawful for Me to Fight* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980). Beyond accounts from WWI, other powerful and faith-inspiring true stories of people who have resisted violence to solve conflicts would have helped to gain a more comprehensive perspective on peaceful conflict resolution (cf. Elisabeth Hershberger Bauman, *Coals of Fire* [Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994]). Similarly other relevant Adventist literature on this issue has not been considered adequately. There is no mention of the problem that serving in the military caused within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, leading to the Adventist Reform Movement (cf. Helmut H. Kramer, *The Seventh-day Adventist Reform Movement* [Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1988]). If there is a deficiency with this book it is not so much in what it states and affirms but in what it leaves out and how the arguments at times are developed and presented.

Despite these deficiencies, the book deserves to be read widely. It is available through www.AdventistsConnect.org. The general principles it sets forth deserve to be taken seriously by any Seventh-day Adventist. It provides a welcome challenge to some distorted perspectives on this issue and may help redirect some Adventist practices to be more in harmony with the supreme example of Jesus Christ.

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