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THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

Basic Questions About the Millennium, Part 2: The Issue of Dispensational Premillennialism

By Ekkehardt Mueller

The first part of this article on the Millennium dealt with various interpretations of the Millennium and argued—based on the text of Revelation—for premillennialism. However, this could still be understood as leaving open two options: historic premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism. This second part of the article will begin with a discussion of dispensational premillennialism and will move on to other important issues: the understanding of the two resurrections in Revelation 20, the nature of the Millennium, and the relevance of a biblical interpretation of the Millennium for believers today.

Since premillennialism comes in two major forms, there still looms the question of whether to opt for historic premillennialism or dispensational premillennialism. This topic is very broad and cannot be sufficiently addressed in this article. Here are only a few points that make the author shy away from dispensationalism.

As has been pointed out in the first part of the article, the major difference between dispensational premillennialism and historical premillennialism is hermeneutics. For a historic premillennialist, it seems that dispensationalism rests on assumptions that are

difficult to verify and biblical texts and concepts that may not directly refer to the Millennium.¹

The gap theory in Daniel 7—according to which the seventieth week is separated by millennia from the preceding sixty-nine weeks that begin in Persian times and lead to the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus—is not convincing. The text does not indicate that such a gap exists. It would also mean that, while the beginning of the sixty-nine weeks can and must be determined to understand when the Messiah would arrive, verifying Jesus as the one who came at the right time—the beginning of the seventieth week—cannot be established. Otherwise, a date for Christ's second coming could be ascertained—seven years before His actual *parousia*—which is prohibited in the New Testament. Thus inconsistencies arise.

A secret rapture and an invisible coming of Christ before His official second coming are difficult to establish with biblical data and force people to resort to difficult maneuvers to prove their point.

Dispensationalism appears to opt for an unjustified literalism, which may look like an easier solution to the understanding of eschatology, while in reality it complicates matters. Typology should be understood and used as presented in Scripture without bringing it close to allegory. It should be allowed to function as a

hermeneutical tool to understand the biblical message because Scripture uses it this way.² The difference between literary genres such as classical prophecy and apocalyptic prophecy should be taken seriously and not be easily discarded. The claim that unfulfilled Old Testament predictions related to Israel need to still be fulfilled literally ignores conditional prophecy as, for instance, presented in the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy, in the prophetic message to Jeremiah (18:5–10), and the experience of Jonah. It also ignores the New Testament reinterpretation of these messages.³

Also, the approach to Israel as belonging to a different dispensation and having a specific role in the last times differs from historic premillennialism.⁴ One scholar correctly stresses that the idea of a restoration of the Old Testament sacrificial system contradicts Hebrews 8:13. The text explicitly mentions that the Old Testament cult is obsolete and done away with.⁵

“He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” (Rev 3:21).

While the biblical texts seem to rule out amillennialism and postmillennialism, they do not support the details of dispensationalist premillennialism either. New representatives of that school seem to move closer to historic premillennialism, which is to be applauded.

The Two Resurrections Mentioned in Revelation 20

Revelation 20:4–6 refers to two resurrections. How should they be understood? Amillennialists and premillennialists differ widely.⁶ To understand the Millennium as the entire Christian era, it is necessary to spiritualize at least one of the two resurrections. Also, the question arises as to who those are seated on the thrones (Rev 20:4).

Obviously being driven by opposition to sensuous chiliasm, “Augustine argues that many Christians misunderstand Revelation 20:1–6 by thinking that the first resurrection is physical.”⁷ He believes it is not. Rather it refers to one’s personal conversion. He “interprets the thrones of Rev. 20 as ‘the seats of the authorities by whom the Church is now governed, and those sitting on them are the authorities themselves.’”⁸ This does not seem to do justice to the biblical text but superimposes on it a theological meaning that is not inherent in it.

The Context

Revelation 19:21 ends with all the supporters of the satanic trinity dead at Jesus’ second coming. One scholar, understanding Revelation 19b as referring

to Christ’s second coming, affirms, “There is but *one* line of information in the chapters leading up to 20:7–10. That information tells the reader in almost the strongest language imaginable that no one survives the parousia except the faithful.”⁹ Revelation 20:1–3 mentions the imprisonment of Satan. According to Revelation 20:4, some people are alive or come back to life at the beginning of the Millennium. They are seated on thrones and involved in the proceedings of the heavenly court. Obviously they are believers. But who precisely are they? Are they only the martyrs mentioned in the same verse a little later, or are they a larger group? This is a question with which Bible translators also wrestle. While the Common English Bible opts for one group in verse 4 by rendering, “Then I saw thrones, and people took their seats on them, and judgment was given in their favor. They were the ones who had been beheaded,” the English Standard Version and others opt for at least two groups: “Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded.”

The reference to thrones on which people sit reminds readers of the twenty-four elders who sit on thrones in heaven (Rev 4:4; 11:16). However, there is also a promise to the overcomers of Laodicea, the last of the seven churches. Jesus tells them, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev 3:21). This promise, indirectly repeated in the hymn of Revelation 5:9–10,¹⁰ seems now to be fulfilled, especially in the light that the one who sits on the great white throne (Rev 20:11) may be Jesus.¹¹ Paul also knew that the saints would judge the world (1 Cor 6:2).

If this is the larger group, then included in this group are the martyrs “who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God.” This may include Old Testament martyrs (“because of the word of God”) and New Testament martyrs (because of the testimony of Jesus).¹² “And those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand” seems to point to God’s end-time believers, whether martyrs or not. Were some of them alive, not having died at the Second Coming? This question does not seem to be the focus here. Rather the emphasis is on those who experienced the first resurrection—in contrast to the second resurrection—which protects them against the second death and entitles them to be priests of God and Jesus and “reign with Him for a thousand years.” (Rev 20:8) Are living saints excluded—that is, those who did not die at the Second Coming? Paul speaks about such a group in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17. But it may even be hinted at in Revelation, as Mealy points out, namely by the “carefully chosen expression ‘they lived’ (ἐζησαν),

which can either mean ‘they came to life’, or simply ‘they lived’¹³ (Rev 20:4) and did not die.

So the context suggests that all ungodly will perish at the Second Coming. They are not alive during the Millennium. But there is a first resurrection at the beginning of the Millennium, which means that it is associated with Christ’s second coming. Those participating in the first resurrection will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 4, 5b, 6).

In the middle of his depiction of the righteous and their fate (Rev 20:5a), John performs a mental leap to the lost before returning to the redeemed at the end of verse 5. The others, namely the lost who died and did not come to life during the Millennium, will be raised at the end of the Millennium. Beginning with verse 7, the focus is on these resurrected people and on Satan. Revelation 20:13 explicitly mentions their resurrection.

In this situation, it is hardly possible to speak about a spiritual resurrection. A spiritual resurrection would imply that people are alive physically but would give their life a new direction spiritually. This is not the case here. The believers had passed away sometime in the past and had been called back to life in the first resurrection. Therefore, their resurrection must be a physical resurrection. The same is true for those who did not accept God’s gift of salvation.

The Term *ezēsan*

Although these deliberations should clarify the issue, two points need to be made. The first is the term “they came to life” (*ezēsan*) in verses 4 and 5. The very same term in the very same form (aorist indicative active third person plural) is being used for both those saved and those raised after the Millennium to encounter the second death: the martyrs *came to life*; the human opponents of God did not *come to life* until after the thousand years. John intends a clear parallelism, contrasting the two groups against each other. This contrast is lost as soon as a spiritual resurrection is compared to a physical resurrection. While the meaning of a word may change, depending on context, “in this case the two usages of ἐζήσαν occur together,” writes Erickson, “and nothing in the context suggests any shift in meaning. Consequently, what we have here are two resurrections of the same type, involving two different groups at an interval of a thousand years.”¹⁴

The Term *anastasis* and Its Usage in the New Testament

The word for “resurrection” employed in Revelation 20:5–6 is the term *anastasis*. In Revelation it is used only twice, although resurrection is also described with other terminology.¹⁵ *Anastasis* occurs forty-two times in the New Testament, mostly in the Gospels, Acts, and 1 Corinthians, where the chapter on resurrection is found. The term is rendered “rise”/“rising” in Luke 2:34 or “resurrection” in the other cases. It is used by Jesus to describe Himself as the Resurrection and Life. In this context the physical

resurrection of Lazarus takes place. *Anastasis* typically describes the physical resurrection of Jesus, believers, and unbelievers. The only text in which *anastasis* might be understood metaphorically is Romans 6:5. But even this is disputed. While Kruse has in mind the believers’ “resurrection life now,”¹⁶ the trend in scholarship seems to opt for a future physical resurrection. Bruce, Dunn, Matera, and Schreiner talk about the future resurrection.¹⁷ Moo states, “But, while the spiritual effects of resurrection are felt now, we must not commit the mistake of some in the early church (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18) and spiritualize the resurrection.”¹⁸

Thus the term “resurrection” (*anastasis*) in Revelation 20:5–6 does not easily lend itself to be spiritualized. In addition, two different physical resurrections appear elsewhere in the Johannine writings and support a literal understanding of the first and second resurrections. According to John 5:38–39, Jesus announced two different future resurrections: “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment.” This is affirmed in Acts 24:15 when Paul states that he has “hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.” Jesus’s resurrection theology is reflected in the Gospel of John, in Paul, and in the Apocalypse, “the Revelation of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:1).¹⁹

Summary

The interpretation of the two usages of “resurrection” in Revelation 20:5–6, though widely discussed and often understood as two different types of resurrections—a spiritual one and a physical one—is being clarified through the immediate context as well as through a study of the terminology in this passage. “Resurrection” in Revelation 20:5–6 should be understood in the same way. Preconceived possibilities to interpret the Millennium should not be allowed to control the text.

The Nature of the Millennium

Reigning and Judging

This brings us to the last question, the nature of the Millennium. We have already touched on this issue. The data point out that the Millennium is a time in which the redeemed will reign with Christ and participate in a judgment process (Rev 20:4–6). Those who have supported the satanic trinity and opposed God are dead (Rev 19:17–21). Satan is bound in the abyss. As one scholar concludes, “Satan has been reduced to a state of complete impotence, and has no power whatever to deceive the nations even *within* the prison, if that were possible.”²⁰

By the time the readers have reached 20.3, they will be in a position to know that Satan

and all the unrepentant are gone from the earth (presumably all demonic spirits as well, although this idea must be supplied by reading Isaiah from Revelation's point of view). They are trapped in the nether world for "many days" (Isa 24:22), together awaiting the divine summons for judgment. That is, all wicked forces have been overcome and banished from the earth.²¹

While during the world's history the boundaries between the righteous and the unrighteous may often have appeared blurred, Revelation makes it very clear that in the last conflict before Christ's second advent only two groups of people exist: those who follow the Lamb and those who worship the dragon, the sea beast, or its image. One group suffers the seven plagues and ends up dead at Christ's second coming; the other group is not affected by the plagues and reigns with Christ.

This scenario eliminates the option for humanity to have a second chance. The righteous are finally saved and the unrighteous are lost. It also makes impossible any mission outreach or evangelization effort during the Millennium. If none of the unrepentant are still alive and therefore able to change sides, mission is redundant.

No Golden Age on Earth

But where are the followers of Christ? Typically, the Millennium is painted as a golden age on earth

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with Christ reigning in peace over its inhabitants. Revelation 20 does not directly address the question of where the believers are during the thousand years, but it mentions the attack of "the camp of the saints and the beloved city" (Rev 20:9) by the resurrected enemies of God and Christ. These are humans who at this time have experienced the second resurrection.

The people of God, on the other hand, are depicted as the camp and city. The conjunction "and" (*kai*) should be understood expegetically—that the camp is or represents the city.²² It is an allusion to "Jerusalem and its special status in the sight of God."²³ Jerusalem/Mount Zion is considered beloved in the Old Testament (Jer 12:7; Pss 78:68; 87:2).

Aune, however, suggests that the beloved city cannot be New Jerusalem because it will come from heaven only in Revelation 21.²⁴ However, such an argument would require a strict chronological

arrangement of Revelation. We have argued that the eschatological part of Revelation is generally chronologically arranged but contains flashbacks (e.g., Rev 17:10), parenthetical statements (Rev 20:5b), and short parallel accounts (Rev 20:7–10; 11–15). In addition, Revelation 19:7 talks about the wedding of the Lamb and the preparation of His bride. Revelation 21:2, 9–10 mentions the bride again but portrays her as a bride-city, the holy city, the new Jerusalem.²⁵ What John has in mind from Revelation 19 onward when he talks about the city is the New Jerusalem and the people of God. The great city, Babylon, the counterpart of the holy city, was destroyed in Revelation 18. The only surviving city is the bride-city. This is also the city of Revelation 20:9.²⁶

So we have a proleptic description of the descent of the New Jerusalem on earth in Revelation 20:9. This would also mean that only after the Millennium are the people of God on earth again. During the Millennium they are in heaven.

A parallel account may be found in Revelation 7, supporting this conclusion. The sixth seal ends with Christ's second coming, the Day of the Lord. Revelation 6:15–16 seems to suggest that the unrighteous will die. The question of who will be able to stand remains (Rev 6:17). This question is answered by the expansion of the sixth seal in Revelation 7. Those who do survive the Second Coming are the 144,000 and the great multitude. The 144,000 are found on earth while the great multitude is found in heaven. We have argued that this is the same group.²⁷ They stand

before the throne of the universe (Rev 7:9, 15) with the angels (Rev 7:11) and serve God in His temple, obviously as priests. This coincides with the priestly role of the people of God in Revelation 20:6. The throne of God is in heaven, as the beginning of the seal vision points out (Rev 4:2). The temple is where God's throne is. It is the heavenly sanctuary. There are the redeemed. The rest of chapter 7—although similar to Revelation 21 and 22b—seems

to describe the time of the Millennium without mentioning it by name. Unmistakably, the saints are in heaven and not on earth. The eighth seal with the silence in heaven (Rev 8:1) may point to the executive judgment at the end of the Millennium and to the new creation.²⁸

Summary

The Millennium is not described in terms of world evangelism or a period of ease and peace for the children of God. It is, however, depicted at a time in which the faithful will serve as priests,²⁹ reign with Christ, and be involved in the millennial judgment process. Satan is bound in the abyss,³⁰ the other evil powers are destroyed, the opponents of God and His people are dead, and the believers are in heaven. Earth is not inhabited at this time. At its end, the final showdown will happen, followed by the execution of

the verdict and the establishment of a new heaven and new earth.

The Relevance of the Understanding of the Millennium Today

Why discuss the Millennium? Why is it relevant for the present generation to understand from a biblical perspective what the Millennium is all about? Here are some thoughts. The teaching of the Millennium is important for us because:

1. It has to do with Jesus³¹ and His reign, in which the redeemed will participate. As King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus is involved in the final judgment, and obviously it is He who is seated on the “great white throne . . . from whose presence earth and heaven fled away” (Rev 20:11). As Creator and Savior He is also the Judge—omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. He is not only “sweet Jesus” but also the Lord of the universe. He loves humankind as a whole as well as each individual person.

2. It has to do with humanity’s deep longing for justice in a world where injustice seems to triumph and actually gains victory so frequently. It also has to do with humanity’s longing for the end of all evil. “Without God, human beings have a virtually limitless capacity for destructiveness and self-deception.”³² But God will intervene for His children and reward people with what they deserve. Therefore, the judgment process will bring about a deeper understanding of the love, holiness, and justice of God and the ugliness of sin. It will also vindicate God’s own character.

3. It is necessary for the completion of the plan of salvation. God will bring about a close to the present evil age in such a way that sin will no longer and never again lift up its head to harm God’s creation. The redeemed will then appreciate to an even greater extent the gifts of salvation and eternal communion with God and will praise Him throughout eternity.

4. It informs people that there is no automatism by which humanity gets better and individuals are saved. There is no universalism in the sense that all will, in the end, find themselves in the kingdom of God. One scholar writes:

We are tempted to imagine that time will cure the problem of human sin in a way that even the preaching of the cross has never promised to do. But time is ultimately nothing but a proof of the human character. What realistic grounds has anyone for the confidence that he or she (or anyone else) will love God in the next life, if they have hated him in this?³³

We need to listen to God, try to understand Him, and make a decision for Him.

5. It tells humans not to postpone their decision for God. There is no second chance beyond this present life. To follow Christ is not something to be

dreaded or postponed for as long as possible; it is a daily blessing that gives meaning to life.

6. It helps the redeemed understand why God cannot save all their loved ones. But God will comfort them over their losses and “will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:17; 21:4).

7. It keeps people from having a distorted understanding of God. First, there is no partiality in God. All humans are equal before Him, are saved in the same way, if they accept God’s grace and live their lives with Him. God is not a tyrant who punishes forever in hell those who have made a decision against Him. God is love, fair and just, and deserves trust, love, and loyalty.

Conclusion

The Millennium, with the imprisonment of Satan, preceded by the death of the unrighteous, and positively filled with the priestly and kingly rule of the saints, clearly follows the Second Coming and does not precede it. Therefore, a premillennial approach best matches the biblical data. There is no need to spiritualize the first, second, or both resurrections mentioned in Revelation 20. They are physical resurrections—the resurrection of the believers at the Second Coming and the second resurrection at the end of the Millennium. There is also a real judgment, and a verdict, taking place in heaven during the Millennium.

The Millennium is not a period of peace on earth but of God’s final judgment—a judgment, however, that does not affect God’s true children directly. It establishes justice and ushers in the kingdom of glory. Those whose names are written in the book of life (Rev 20:12) do not need to be afraid but can rejoice that with the Millennium the eon of this world will come to an end and the new eon will take over completely—eternal and unsurpassable in the presence of God.

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¹ For a critique of classical dispensational premillennialism, see, e.g., Grenz, 94–121.

² See, e.g., Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

³ See George Eldon Ladd in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 26–27. He shows through biblical examples that “the OT is reinterpreted in light of the Christ event” (21), “the ‘literal hermeneutic’ does not work” (23), and “the OT is interpreted by the NT” (27). See also Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983).

⁴ Ibid., 25 states: “Paul avoids calling the church Israel, unless it be in Gal. 6:16, but this is a much disputed verse. It is true however, that he applies prophecies to the church which in their OT setting belong to literal Israel; he calls the church the sons, the seeds of Abraham. He calls believers the true circumcision. It is difficult therefore to avoid the conclusion that Paul sees the church as spiritual Israel.”

⁵ Ibid., 26; Millard J. Erickson, *Contemporary Options in Eschatology: A Study of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 103. Hans Bietenhard, *Das tausendjährige Reich: Eine biblisch-theologische Studien* (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1955), 125–126, suggests that Israel and Gentile Christians form the church. He rejects the idea that Israel will be the missionary to the world during the Millennium. The church consisting of Jewish and Gentile Christians is the light for the nations. Promises given to God’s people in the Old Testament begin to be fulfilled for the entire church of the new covenant. (121–124).

⁶ For Sung Wook Chung, “Toward the Reformed and Covenantal Theology or Premillennialism: A Proposal,” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, eds. C. L. Blomberg and S. W. Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), xix, “amillennialism is a gnostic reading of Revelation 20:1–6.”

⁷ Donald Fairbairn, “Contemporary Millennial/Tribulational Debates: Whose Side was the Early Church On?” in *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to “Left Behind” Eschatology*, eds. C. L. Blomberg and S. W. Chung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 116.

⁸ Ibid., 117. The quote is taken from Augustine’s *City of God* 20.9 (Bettenson, 916; *NPNF*¹ 2:430).

⁹ J. Webb Mealy, *After the Thousand Years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 122.

¹⁰ Ladd, 264, states: “The promise of reigning with Christ as king is repeated in 5:9–10, and it is addressed to all the saints . . .” He also refers to Daniel 7:9 which mentions, in addition to the throne of God, multiple thrones, and verse 27 which talks about the reign of the people of God.

¹¹ See Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 516. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Revelation, New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 544–545, suggests “God judges the human race through his Son.” Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 7:883, states, “Here it is doubtless Christ who leads out . . .” Brian K. Blount, *Revelation, The New Testament Library* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 372, however, speaks about “God Almighty,” and Ladd, 271, mentions that usually in Revelation “it is God who sits on the throne (5:1, 7, 13).” David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary 52C (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1101, thinks about God, but declares that “the absence of any mention of the Lamb in this judgment scene is striking.”

¹² See this dual witness as discussed in Ekkehardt Mueller, “The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 13/2 (2002): 30–45.

¹³ Mealy, 112.

¹⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 1217.

¹⁵ E.g., the self-description of Jesus in Revelation 1:18 as “the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades” or the two witnesses that were killed (Rev 11:7) and into whom “the breath of life from God came” (Rev 11:13).

¹⁶ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 262.

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 130; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary 38A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 318; Frank J. Matera, *Romans*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 160; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 312.

¹⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 371.

¹⁹ John Sweet, *Revelation*, New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press, 1990), 289, notes that “most Jews followed the Pharisees in believing in a general resurrection followed by a second death, the final exclusion of the wicked from the Age to Come . . . and the idea of two resurrections is peculiar to John. The first is a foretaste and guarantee, for the deserving, of the eternal priestly reign (22:4f).”

²⁰ Mealy, 98.

²¹ Ibid., 101.

²² See Smalley, 514. He also states, “Together, the two images of ‘camp’ and ‘city’ speak of God’s people as both on the move and as arriving at their destination . . .” (514). Cf. Osborne, 714; Kistemaker, 543; Beale, 1027.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Aune, 1098–1099. Koester, *Revelation*, 790, holds that “the worshipping community is the harbinger of the holy city, New Jerusalem, where God’s reign will be fully and finally manifested (21:2).”

²⁵ Beale, 1027, states, “Instead of ‘beloved city’ the Bohairic version reads here ‘new city’ and the Ethiopic ‘holy city,’ both early attempts to identify the city here with the ‘holy city’ in the new heavens and earth in 21:2. This is consistent with the above discussion, which implies that the ‘city’ of persecuted saints of 20:9 is the inauguration of the new creation that is composed of the community of faith and that finds its consummation in 21:2ff.”

²⁶ Cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 315–318.

²⁷ See Ekkehardt Mueller, “Who Are the 144,000 and the Great Multitude?” in *Interpreting Scripture: Bible Questions and Answers*, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 2, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 433–437.

²⁸ See Ekkehardt Mueller, *Der Erste und der Letzte: Studien zum Buch der Offenbarung*, Series: Adventistica Forschungen zur Geschichte und Theologie der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten, vol. 11 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2011), 170–172.

²⁹ This may include having access to God (Patterson, 354–355) and worshipping God (Osborne, 709).

³⁰ In Genesis 1:2 the Greek term *abyssos* is associated with the condition of the earth as formless and void. The Hebrew terms describing this emptiness appear again in Jeremiah 4:23. The subsequent verses describe an empty earth in which humans and birds have disappeared.

³¹ Cf. Smalley, 516.

³² Mealy, 247. He points to “such realities as the Third Reich, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, apartheid, Uganda under Idi Amin, the Khmer Rouge, the so-called ‘Falklands War,’ Tiananmen Square and the war with Iraq” (247). In the meantime, he could add many other atrocities humans are capable of.

³³ Ibid.

Open or Closed Communion?

By Clinton Wahlen

From time to time questions have arisen as to why Seventh-day Adventists have an open communion service, meaning that all who have committed their lives to Jesus Christ may participate and that “children learn the significance of the service by observing others participating.”¹ Some who argue that the communion service should be closed, whereby only members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church may participate, appeal primarily to our historical practice and to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. I will address these two issues in turn.

Historical Practice of Seventh-day Adventists

As with our understanding of Daniel and Revelation, healthful living, the Godhead, etc., it appears that the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of this subject has developed over time. In our early years, Seventh-day Adventists did indeed celebrate a closed communion.

In an influential article of 1873, G. I. Butler contended that the communion service should only be open to Seventh-day Adventist members. He based this conclusion on the absence of Judas from the Last Supper and several Bible passages (1 Cor 10:15-21; 11:17-34; 2 Cor 6:14).² He reiterated this position in 1886 and 1908.³ However, it may be that this practice was not universal. According to W. H. Littlejohn, “Generally speaking, Seventh-day Adventists are close communion [sic] in principle. It is customary, therefore, to invite those only to partake of the communion who are members in good and regular standing in Seventh-day Adventist churches.”⁴ This statement suggests that there may have been some variation among Adventists even in this early period.

By the time the first edition of the *Church Manual* was published in 1932, it is possible that the practice of closed communion was no longer maintained. While it indicates that the communion service “should be attended by all church members” and that no church members should remain away from the service,⁵ it then quotes *The Desire of Ages*, p. 656 under the heading “None to Be Excluded”: “There may come into the company persons who are not in heart servants of truth and holiness, but who may wish to take part in the service. They should not be forbidden.” The next paragraph reinforces the first point, under the heading “Every Member Should Attend,” by a further quote from the same page.⁶ However, it is also possible that this quotation of Ellen White was understood at the time as referring only to church members, since they are referred throughout this context, both before and after the quotation.

The edition of the *Church Manual* published

in 1971 is no clearer. On p. 118, under “Who May Participate,” it again quotes *The Desire of Ages*, p. 656, followed by a further quotation from the same page under “Every Member Should Attend.”⁷ Only in 1990 is the point clarified that the Seventh-day Adventist Church practices open communion with children encouraged to observe but not participate until they are baptized: “*Who May Participate*. — *The Seventh-day Adventist Church practices open Communion. All who have committed their lives to the Saviour may participate. Children learn the significance of the service by observing others participate. After receiving formal instruction in baptismal classes and making their commitment to Jesus in baptism, they are thereby prepared to partake in the service themselves.*”⁸

In checking the statements of fundamental beliefs from 1931 to 1979, the communion service is not mentioned at all. However, when the revised statement of fundamental beliefs was voted at the 1980 GC session, No. 15, “The Lord’s Supper,” was added; it includes the affirmation that “the communion service is open to all believing Christians.”⁹ Elder Neal C. Wilson, General Conference President, asked for an expression from the body of delegates to the General Conference Session as to whether the wording as to who may participate in the Lord’s Supper should be “baptized Christians” (the originally-proposed wording) or “believing Christians” (wording suggested from the floor). The minutes show that most of the delegation preferred the wording “believing Christians.”¹⁰ Prior discussions at the General Conference Session a week earlier make clear that the wording “baptized Christians” was suggested in order to exclude unbaptized children of Adventist members from participating, not in order to exclude Christians from other faiths.¹¹ Clearly, by 1980, open communion was the accepted practice of the Seventh-day Adventist Church worldwide.

From my own experience, the discussions at the 1980 General Conference Session and the wording clarification made in the 1990 edition of the *Church Manual* reflect the accepted practice of open communion in the Adventist Church of North America at least as early as the 1970s. My colleague, Gerhard Pfandl, indicated to me that this was also the practice in Europe and Australia.¹² Furthermore, it seems probable that open communion began to be widely practiced already by the early decades of the twentieth century, based on Ellen White’s statements in *The Desire of Ages* first published in 1898. Certainly the book quickly influenced Adventist views on other subjects, such as the eternal deity of Christ, so it would not be surprising if open communion

began to be practiced in Adventist churches very soon after its publication. The earliest confirmation I have found that this Ellen White statement was understood to teach open communion is in the book *Evangelism*, published in 1946:

Not Close Communion—Christ’s example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord’s supper. It is true that open sin excludes the guilty. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches. But beyond this none are to pass judgment. God has not left it with men to say who shall present themselves on these occasions. For who can read the heart? Who can distinguish the tares from the wheat?—*The Desire of Ages*, 656 (1898).

There may come in among you those who are not in heart united with truth and holiness, but who may wish to take part in these services. Forbid them not.—*Manuscript 47*, 1897.¹³

Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Regarding the exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul gives no indication that the church is charged with examining whether participants have made adequate spiritual preparation for partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Rather, each person is to examine himself (or herself—the term *anthrōpos* is inclusive of both genders) before coming to the service (v. 28; see also 2 Cor 13:5). In addition, the ordinance of humility is to assist with the necessary spiritual preparation (John 13:1-17). Just as in the law of Moses in which often the Lord was entrusted with executing judgment when there were no witnesses,¹⁴ so also here (vv. 30, 32). Only the Lord can read the heart (1 Sam 16:7). We are not to judge or condemn in such matters (Luke 6:37). The exception, as indicated by Ellen White, is “open sin.”¹⁵ Children who are not yet baptized should not participate in the Lord’s Supper, because the ordinance of humility or foot washing is predicated on a prior baptism by immersion (John 13:10).¹⁶

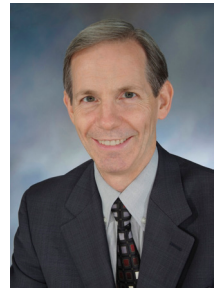
The statement in Fundamental Belief No. 16, that “the communion service is open to all believing Christians,”¹⁷ is in harmony with these passages of Scripture and the statement by Ellen White. The word *believing* clearly means more than simply “professed” or else the word would not be needed because “Christians” by definition profess faith in Christ. It implies an ongoing and active connection with Christ that would exclude open sin. If a person is engaging in open sin, then he or she is not really “believing” in the biblical sense of faith that evidences its genuineness by obedience (John 14:15; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 1 John 5:2-4).

Conclusion

While up to the 1880s the Seventh-day Adventist

Church *generally* practiced closed communion, after Ellen White’s publication in 1898 of *The Desire of Ages* with its clear explanation of the Last Supper as the basis for the practice of communion, Adventists moved to an open communion in which “all believing Christians” may participate. The Bible encourages Christians to examine themselves as to their own preparedness for participating in the communion service. Since we cannot read the heart, the church is only to exclude those who are living in open sin. In view of the fact that the preparatory service of foot washing symbolically represents a renewal of the covenant made at one’s baptism, children should not be invited to participate in the communion service until after they are baptized.

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¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 19th ed. (Secretariat, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, printed in Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2016), 126.
² G. I. Butler, “Open and Close Communion,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 27, 1873, pp. 185, 186 (reprinted: *ibid.*, Dec. 9, 1880, pp. 369-371).
³ See G. I. Butler, “Sundry Questions and Answers,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Feb. 2, 1886, p. 74, col. 1; *idem*, “What Is It to Be a Seventh-day Adventist?” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 1, 1908, pp. 7, 8.
⁴ W. H. Littlejohn, “The Church Manual,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Aug. 28, 1883, p. 554, col. 2.
⁵ *Church Manual*, [1st ed.] (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1932), 159.
⁶ *Ibid.*, 159, 160.
⁷ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, [10th ed.] (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1971), 159. Similar treatments are found in the editions of 1976 (pp. 122, 123), 1981 (pp. 118, 119), and 1986 (pp. 80, 81).
⁸ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, [14th ed.] (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990), 80, 81.
⁹ *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Archives and Statistics, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 6.
¹⁰ General Conference Bulletin No. 9, in *Adventist Review*, May 1, 1980, p. 21.
¹¹ General Conference Bulletin No. 6, in *Adventist Review*, April 24, 1980, p. 29.
¹² Private communication, July 22, 2016.
¹³ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 277 (emphasis original).
¹⁴ See, e.g., the case of something damaged or of suspected theft and the required vow before the Lord (Exod 22:10, 11) and the case of suspected adultery with the required trial by ordeal (Num 5:11-28).
¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 653; cf. 1 Cor 5:11.
¹⁶ Further, see Robert M. Johnston, “Unbaptized children and Communion,” *Ministry* 79/6 (June 2007), 15.
¹⁷ *Church Manual* (2015), 167, 168.

Lessons from Daniel 8

By Ekkehardt Mueller

So far we have encountered two long-term prophecies in the book of Daniel, covering world history from the time of Daniel until the coming of the future kingdom of God (Dan 2, 7). In Daniel 8 an overview of world history is provided again with additional details.

I. Structure of Daniel 8

- *Prologue* (v. 1)
- *Vision* (vs. 2–14)
 - Ram, goat, and little horn (earthly dimension—vs. 3–9)
 - Little horn (heavenly dimension—vs. 10–12)
- *Audition* (vs. 13–14), including a time element
- *Interpretation* (vs. 15–26)
 - Call to interpret the vision (vs. 15–16)
 - Daniel’s reaction (vs. 17–18), including a short interpretation (v. 17b)
 - Second and more extensive interpretation (vs. 19–26)
- *Epilogue* (v. 27)

II. Survey of Daniel 8

1. Time Frame

While Daniel receives his vision during the time of the Babylonian Empire, the vision itself begins with the Medo-Persian Empire, unlike Daniel 2 and 7.

The vision extends to the time of the end (Dan 8:17, 19, 26). Therefore, it parallels Daniel 2 and 7. This is important for its interpretation.

2. Distinctive Features

- Instead of five powers, only three are mentioned.
- However, two are stated by name and at a time when they had not yet played their role as world empires. The Bible is the Word of God. Its predictions are fulfilled.
- In Daniel 8 the sanctuary is stressed, while in Daniel 7 the saints are emphasized.
- The animals of Daniel 8 are sacrificial animals, while those of Daniel 7 are predators. With this feature the sanctuary is emphasized again.

III. The Discussion of Daniel 8

1. Prologue

vs. 1–2 Toward the end of Babylonian rule, Daniel receives another vision. In this vision Babylon is no longer mentioned—obviously because it is about to be defeated.

2. Ram and He-Goat

vs. 3–4, 20 The ram with the two different horns

represents the empire Medo-Persia (see the bear that is raised up on one side in Daniel 7). This empire expands toward the west, north, and south, conquering other powers. Reaching the Aegean Sea it attempts to enter Europe.

vs. 5–8, 21–22 The he-goat represents Greece, and the first horn is Alexander the Great. With tremendous speed (“without touching the ground”) he comes from the west and defeats the Medes and Persians (compare with the leopard with four wings in Daniel 7). However, in 323 BC, at the age of thirty-three and at the peak of his power and success, Alexander died. His generals divided the empire among themselves (see the four heads of the leopard). The four kings were Ptolemy, Cassander, Lysimachus, and Seleucus.

3. The Little Horn

a. Information about the Little Horn

- vs. 9–12, (1) It comes out of one of the winds.
 23–25 (2) In spite of small beginnings, it grows exceedingly great.
 (3) It grows toward the south, the east, and the beautiful land.
 (4) It grows to the host of heaven.
 (5) It throws some of the host of heaven and the stars to the earth and tramples on them.
 (6) It grows up to the Prince of the host.
 (7) It takes the daily from Him.
 (8) It overthrows His sanctuary.
 (9) It casts the truth to the ground.
 (10) It is broken without human hand.

b. Parallels with the Little Horn of Daniel 7

- The enormous growth (v. 2)
- War against the saints (vs. 4–5)
- Blasphemy (vs. 6–8)
- Suppression of truth (v. 9)
- Its destruction (v. 10)

c. Differences between the Two Little Horns

The little horn of Daniel 8 appears after Greece, not after Rome as does the little horn of Daniel 7. Additionally, the little horn of Daniel 8 comes out of one of the winds, not out of a beast.

d. Interpretation

- (1) The Hebrew grammar in Daniel 8:8b–9 supports the coming of the little horn out of one of the points of the compass.
- (2) This little horn power becomes a new world empire. The wording of the little horn in Daniel 7 and 8 is not identical (see also Aramaic versus Hebrew). The “horn from littleness” in Daniel 8 represents both the pagan and the papal Rome. Verse 9 dealing with its earthly dimension points more to the pagan Rome, while the heavenly dimension of verses 10–14 refers to the papal Rome.
- (3) The beautiful land is most likely Palestine. Rome conquered it as well as Egypt in the south and Syria in the east, becoming the new world empire.
- (4) According to the interpretation provided in verse 24, the host of heaven is the true people of God. Stars may point to their leaders and teachers (Dan 12:3).
- (5) The people of God are being persecuted (see the persecutions of Christians through the Roman Empire and later the Inquisition of the Roman Church).
- (6) The Prince of the host of God is Jesus Christ. The little horn rebels against Him. Rome crucified Jesus. In the Roman Church the preeminence and supremacy of Jesus is limited (due to the worship of Mary and the supposed intercession of the saints).
- (7) In the Old Testament sanctuary system there existed a daily ministry and a yearly ministry. This dual ministry is a type and foreshadowing of the daily and “yearly” ministry of Jesus as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. The daily ministry of Jesus is being undermined through additional mediators that the Bible does not know, such as the saints, Mary, priests, and the pope. It is undermined through unbiblical doctrines, such as the confession of sins to a priest and absolution granted by him, the mass as a non-bloody sacrifice, etc.
- (8) The heavenly sanctuary, Christ’s ministry there, and God’s authority are negatively affected through papal Rome.
- (9) False teachings are introduced. Scripture is supplemented and sometimes, if not oftentimes, eclipsed by the authority of tradition.
- (10) In Daniel 2 the stone comes without involvement of human hands and destroys all powers. So also the little horn will be destroyed.

4. The Time Element

vs. 13–14, 26 The entire vision, which begins in Medo-Persian time (vs. 2–3) and lasts till the end, includes 2,300 evenings and mornings. These 2,300 evenings and mornings are 2,300 years. Daniel does not receive further information and therefore does not understand the time element. After the 2,300 years the heavenly sanctuary will be cleansed. From verse 10 onward the chapter deals with the heavenly dimension. Also, after AD 70 the earthly sanctuary no longer existed. The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary corresponds with the Day of Atonement of the earthly sanctuary (verbal and thematic parallels between Daniel 8 and Leviticus 16). The sanctuary and God’s people are finally freed from sin; at the same time the Day of Atonement is a period of judgment (see Lev 16 and Dan 7). After the end of the 2,300 years begins the second phase of Jesus’ ministry as our High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. After its completion He will come again and erect His kingdom of glory. However, based on Daniel 8 we are not able to date the 2300 years. Daniel 9 will furnish more information. In any case: We live in the last time of earth’s history, and Jesus is involved in a special ministry on our behalf. Soon he will come again. We want to be ready.

5. Daniel’s Reaction

V. 27 Although Daniel did not completely understand what was revealed to him, nevertheless he transmitted it faithfully. God again has allowed humans to look behind the scenes. His Word is being fulfilled exactly.

IV. Application

- Among other things, Daniel 8 is dealing with truth. What is truth? In the New Testament it is Scripture and the teaching contained in it (John 17:17). It is also Jesus (John 14:6). To be in the truth means to be in Jesus and agree with His Word and His teachings. This truth is being attacked today. Many people are not interested in God. They fabricate their own theories and religions, but are without orientation because they have become their own yardsticks. But true Christians have a sure foundation and grow in Christ.
- The sanctuary has to do with God’s presence among His people. It is also the place from which judgment and salvation come. God does not allow for His plan of salvation to be destroyed, nor does He permit that His way of obtaining salvation be replaced by another system. It is

still best to follow Him instead of a man-made system.

- While we live in the last period of earth history

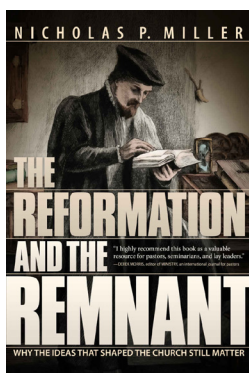
when error increases and various kinds of problems become insurmountable, we look forward to Christ's second coming and prepare for it.

BOOK NOTES

The Reformation and the Remnant: The Reformers Speak to Today's

Church

(Nampa, ID:
Pacific Press, 2016), 142 pp.
Paperback,
US\$15.99



On the eve of five centuries since Martin Luther circulated his *95 Theses* in Wittenberg comes this thoughtful, and at times even provocative, book on the meaning and relevance of the Protestant Reformation for Seventh-day Adventists. While author Nicholas P. Miller certainly draws on many lessons from the magisterial reformers, he essentially makes the case that perhaps the most significant Protestant legacy comes from some rather unexpected sources. In a nutshell, Miller argues that the idea of the moral government of God is at the heart of the Reformation and, for that matter, is what Adventist theology is all about (50).

How does Miller connect the dots? He offers two sources as related to Ellen G. White: her Arminian Methodist roots and her acquaintance with Albert Barnes' commentaries (48). The connection to Methodism makes perfect sense since Arminius, and those like Wesley who followed in his wake, were definitely concerned about God's glory and reputation (37–38). Yet Miller traces the roots back even deeper (especially through Barnes' commentaries) to Hugo Grotius, someone with whom Miller as a lawyer would have been familiar for his significant legal and theological contributions and, most notably, for writing what is considered to be the first modern book of apologetics. Yet it is another work by Grotius, entitled *Concerning the Satisfaction of Christ*, that has profound implications for Adventist theology, which deals with the moral government of God. Such a moral government can only function in a universe made up of moral beings who have the freedom to make responsible choices. God's government is closely intertwined with His character. Since God's character is love, such love is expressed naturally in how He governs the universe. Human beings are free to make and evaluate moral choices. Grotius also moves beyond the traditional satisfaction theory of the atonement (i.e., Anselm's view). Grotius argues that God is not

merely an offended deity, but represents the entire universe. This is "a universe that can have peace and safety only when moral guidelines are respected and followed" (41). Thus God acts for the benefit of the entire universe in order to establish order, stability, and security.

It makes sense then that Miller, a religious historian with a keen legal mind, connects the dots in this way to White's view of the moral government of God. In fact, he argues that White, with only indirect connections to the much earlier Grotius, develops this theory of the moral government of God as one of love (48). White develops this most clearly in her description of the great controversy theme between Christ and Satan—which is, Miller argues, the key to White's thought (35).

The Reformation and the Remnant expands on this thesis in a variety of ways, such that even those who are not specialists can clearly understand the historical background and issues. Right from the beginning he reviews the basics of the Protestant Reformation: the role of Scripture and reason, the later Wesleyan quadrilateral (something with which I wish more Adventists were familiar), and the difference between a norm, norming norm, and formative norm (see the discussion on 24–25).

The book then delves into a wide variety of controversial and relevant topics that I think most Adventists will find incredibly refreshing. Rather than discuss each one in this review, I will offer just a few highlights. Perhaps what I found the most heartfelt and relevant was how the author addresses women's ordination (chapter 7, 89–99). He first discusses the tragedy of the Marburg disputation when Luther and Zwingli sparred over the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Tragically, this divided what was until then a united reform movement. What was meant to cause unity ironically caused division. As Christians, Miller observes, there is a time to stand for non-negotiable principles and truths, but then one also has to distinguish other times when "tolerance and forbearance" are necessary.

Thus “there is a place for religious liberty within the church as well as outside it” (91). For the sake of unity, Miller suggests that Christians must learn to submit to one another even when we disagree. At the same time, he observes that “organizational guidelines have their place, but they should give way when they impede mission” (95). He notes that White was far more flexible and pragmatic about gender, which by implication suggests that this is an issue in which we, as a church, need to exude Christian tolerance and love.

Other tough topics Miller tackles include the importance of marriage in light of the narrative of Revelation 14 (I loved how Miller describes this chapter as our Adventist “Magna Carta”). Similarly, he argues that theistic evolution just doesn’t make sense for Adventist theology because it effectively undermines the great controversy framework, along with its implications for God’s character (59). My person-

al favorites are the sensitive topic of the Adventist proclivity toward conspiracy theories (115–123) and the danger of Last Generation Theology (125–137). In the latter chapter, he argues that part of the problem relates to a misguided understanding of Christian perfection as related to the different streams of the Protestant Reformation (and that White’s view of Christian perfection really aligns most clearly with Wesley’s in light of God’s moral government of love). This last chapter alone is worth the price of the book. Adventist pastors, administrators, and other thought leaders will be richly rewarded by taking the time to spend an evening reading this book.

Michael W. Campbell is a Professor at Adventist International Institute for Advanced Studies (AIAS) in Silang, Cavite, Philippines

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Index to Reflections

The first issue of Reflections was published in January 2003. Since then, we’ve published many articles.

While it’s possible to use Acrobat to simultaneously search all past issues of Reflections for one word or phrase, some readers have asked for a formal index. From now on, you will find a pdf index at the end of each newsletter that you can download.

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Reflections 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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