

## The BRI Family Welcomes the New BRI Associate Director

We would like to welcome and introduce to the readers of the BRI newsletter "Reflections" our new BRI Associate Director, Dr. Elias Brasil de Souza. As most readers have read in the last issue, Dr. Gerhard Pfandl retired as of February 1, 2012. We are blessed not only by having Dr. de Souza join our staff, but also that Dr. Pfandl will continue working at BRI part-time.

Dr. Elias Brasil de Souza was born into an Adventist family in Brazil. He is married to Magela who holds a Master's Degree in Religious Education. They have two children: Guilherme (18) currently studying Theology at Southern Adventist University, and Gustavo (13) living with his parents in Silver Spring.

Dr. de Souza earned a Ph.D. in Old Testament theology and exegesis. His dissertation: "The Heavenly Sanctuary in the Old Testament: Function and Relationship to the Earthly Counterparts" was successfully defended at Andrews University, in 2005. Dr. de Souza has authored and edited articles and books in both scholarly and denominational publications. He has been involved in research groups and academic meetings in South America. Dr. de Souza is currently writing on 1 Kings for the SDA International Bible Commentary.



Dr. de Souza speaks several languages and is a very friendly and outgoing person.

His professional experience includes service to the Church as a colporteur, district pastor, professor of theology, and dean of the Theological Seminary at Northeast Brazil College in Bahia, Brazil. His main interests are Old Testament, Sanctuary, and Hermeneutics.

Dr. de Souza speaks several languages and is a very friendly and outgoing person.

His work in the BRI as an associate Director will include functioning as an advisor to Biblical Research Committees in the Inter-American Division, South American Division, and East-Central Africa Division. We welcome Elias to our family and wish him God's richest blessings!

Artur Stele, BRI



## Change of Editorship



When Dr. Clinton Wahlen joined the staff of the Biblical Research Institute, he was immediately asked to take on the BRI newsletter as editor. The BRI newsletter was first published in January 2003, and Dr. Wahlen became its second editor.

To put together a newsletter with relevant articles for pastors and scholars is a lot of work, especially because it is not the only assignment a BRI associate director carries. In addition to the newsletter he is involved in many other responsibilities and has to wear multiple hats.

Dr. Wahlen has put much time, effort, and dedication into the publication of the newsletter.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

The BRI Family Welcomes the New BRI Associate Director.....	1
Change of Editorship .....	1
Special Feature	
"It Does Not Affect Me" and Other Myths About Religious Persecution.....	2
Theological Focus	
Revelation's Perspective on Persecution .....	3
Theology Ethics, and Church Growth.....	7
Scriptures Applied	
Scripture and Food .....	9
Book Notes	
<i>Feast-Keeping and the Faithful: Should Christians Observe the Annual Feast Days?</i> .....	10
<i>Sehnsucht nach Gott: Ein Bibel-Gebetstagebuch</i> .....	10
News	
Sola Scriptura Research Group .....	11
The Ethics Committee.....	11
The Art and Craft of Preaching Conference .....	11

Although it is the BRI newsletter, representing the entire Institute, he took a special interest in it. You could say it was his “baby.” He updated the design, helped the newsletter would reach a wider audience, and spoke about it during Bible conferences and at other meetings. BRI is very grateful for his well-done assignment. Thank you very much, Clinton.

Now that Elias Brasil de Souza has joined BRI, there will be another shift of responsibilities. Dr. Wahlen is coordinating the Third International Bible Conference, which will take place in June of this year in Israel, and will also be involved as editor of a book on biblical anthropology and other projects. So our new associate

director will become the new editor of the Newsletter. As we thank Dr. Wahlen again for his great contribution as editor, we welcome Dr. de Souza as the new man in charge. May the Lord richly bless both of our brothers as they serve the church in their new responsibilities, and may God bless the church through their ministry.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI



## SPECIAL FEATURE

### “It Does Not Affect Me” and Other Myths about Religious Persecution

Jesus said to His disciples: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me” (Matt 5:11). What is the antithesis of religious freedom? The answer is, “religious persecution.” While religious freedom is

***Persecution is part of the whole Christian “package,” in much the same way that illness and death are a part of our human heritage.***

a gift of God, a mark of His great love for humanity, persecution bears the signature of the Devil.

Persecution is also part of the whole Christian “package,” in much the same way

that illness and death are a part of our human heritage. It is a reality we cannot avoid—it is an inevitable by-product of the great cosmic conflict between God and the enemy of truth. The apostle Paul wrote that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12).

For Christians, though, the inevitability of persecution does not mean we should actively court mistreatment or abuse. A disciple of Jesus, wrote Peter, “...must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it” (1 Pet 3:11).

I often sense a certain level of apathy about the issue of religious persecution when I speak to audiences in North America, Europe, and other countries that have long-standing traditions of protecting human rights. The unspoken thought seems to be, “Why is this relevant to me? Persecution belongs to a time and place far removed from where I live today.”

“Perhaps persecution lies somewhere in the future,” we tell ourselves. “For now, everything is

***For Christians, though, the inevitability of persecution does not mean we should actively court mistreatment or abuse.***

OK.” But is it? Is everything OK for the 200 million Christians who live in countries where the state either fails to protect



## Reflections

*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.

**Editor for this issue** Ekkehardt Mueller  
**Production Manager** Marlene Bacchus  
**Images** Brenda Flemmer

#### Editorial Committee

Artur Stele • Elias Brasil de Souza  
 Kwabena Donkor • Clinton Wahlen  
 Gerhard Pfandl • Ángel M. Rodríguez

**Manuscript Policy** Articles important for Adventist theology are written at the invitation of BRI and should be sent by email attachment to the editor at [brnewsletter@gc.adventist.org](mailto:brnewsletter@gc.adventist.org).

**Permissions** Material may be used for preaching and public presentations and may be reprinted by official entities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church if the Biblical Research Institute is indicated as the source. Translated articles should be reviewed by the appropriate Biblical Research Committee prior to publication.

Copyright © 2012

Biblical Research Institute  
 General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists®  
 12501 Old Columbia Pike  
 Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA  
 Phone: 301.680.6790 • Fax: 301.680.6788

[www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org](http://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org)

them from social harassment or actively engages in discrimination or persecution? And let us not forget that perhaps two million of these men, women, and children are our fellow Adventist Church members.

Can we continue to believe that everything is OK when churches are being attacked and burned in East Indonesia, Nigeria, Iraq, Egypt, and India? When believers are killed, pastors assassinated, and people live in fear—simply because of their commitment to be true to God? Yet for those of us who worship in freedom, our unconscious attitude is often, “That’s too bad. But I’m OK. It’s not *my* problem.”

It should come as no surprise to us that those who are persecuted often feel abandoned by their brothers and sisters in Christ. A few years ago, I visited the city of Ambon in Eastern Indonesia where several churches had been burned and thousands of Adventists had fled their home. A local church elder said to me, “When persecution began, our leaders left. We stayed alone.”

I think of another country which I will not name, where religious fanatics had assassinated several church members and had destroyed their churches and houses. When one of my associates visited them three years later, they were still living under tents and meeting each Sabbath under a tree to worship God. What did they say to my associate? “We are alone. We have been forgotten.” Are they alone? Have we forgotten them?

Leira is a young mother and teacher living in a country where religious liberty is limited. One day she

watched an Adventist television program and began to read the Bible. Ultimately, she embraced the Adventist faith, knowing that her life would never be the same. Her husband, a university professor, beat her, demanded a divorce, and sued for sole custody of their children. He won. An eyewitness says that the children were taken from her, crying and screaming for their mother.

As I am writing these words I have no news about Leira. But I know that her life is in danger because, in her country, the penalty for abandoning the dominant religion is death. There are

hundreds, perhaps thousands, of brothers and sisters around the world like Leira for whom persecution is a present reality. It is not a story from the past or a prediction for the future. It is a tragedy they must endure *today*.

I want them to know that they’re not alone. They have not been forgotten. Our God, who stands with the oppressed, is on their side. And today, we can also choose to stand in solidarity with them. This is both a responsibility and a privilege. Is everything really OK when so many of our brothers and sisters around the world are suffering for their faith? Can we blithely continue to act as if persecution belongs either to the distant past or the distant future? The answer is, “No!” Can we—should we—do something? The answer is, “Yes!”

John Graz, PARL and IRLA



***Is everything really OK when so many of our brothers and sisters around the world are suffering for their faith? Can we blithely continue to act as if persecution belongs either to the distant past or the distant future?***

## THEOLOGICAL FOCUS

# Revelation’s Perspective on Persecution

Normally, people fear, hate, and try to avoid suffering. One form of suffering is religious persecution which in some cases may even lead to martyrdom. However, believers that live in countries with strong legal protection and religious liberty tend to forget that suffering for Jesus’ sake is part of the Christians’ present destiny. Jesus predicted it (John 15:18-21; 16:2-3). All apostles suffered persecution and did not regard it “a strange thing” (1 Pet 4:12-13). Those of us who do not experience persecution by non-Christians or other Christians may overlook the pervasive theme of persecution in

John’s Apocalypse or reserve it for the last segment of earth’s history only. Yet such shortsightedness may also prevent us from understanding and supporting suffering brothers and sisters today.

## I. Persecution Language Permeating the Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation contains many references to persecution and suffering. The theme permeates the book. Although the word “to persecute” (*diōkō*) is found just once in Revelation—the dragon persecutes the pure woman, the church (Rev 12:13)<sup>1</sup>—the persecution motif is not limited to this term only. Specific words, phrases, and passages describe persecution and fierce opposition. The persecution of the woman by the dragon is graphically and symbolically described in Revelation 12. The dragon attempts to drown the

woman and sweep her away (Rev 12:15).

The term “blood” (*haima*) is oftentimes found in contexts that highlight violent death. (Rev 1:5; 6:10; 17:6). In several places the words “dead” (*nekros*)

***The Book of Revelation contains many references to persecution and suffering. The theme permeates the book.***

and “death” (*thanatos*) point to martyrdom (Rev 1:5, 18; 14:13). John participates in the “tribulation” (*thlipsis*) that other Christians suffer (Rev 1:9).

The church in Smyrna has a good share of it (Rev 2:9-10). The great multitude will come out of the great tribulation (Rev 7:14). The term “patience”/“perseverance” (*hupomonē*) is found in persecution contexts (Rev 1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 13:10; 14:12). In Rev 2:10, a future persecution is described with the term “to suffer” (*paschō*).

“Killing” (*apokteinō*) points to persecution in some places (Rev 2:13; 13:15) as may the terms “murder” (*phonos*—Rev 9:21) and “murderer” (*phoneus*—Rev 21:8; 22:15) in others. In the church of Pergamum Antipas was killed as a “faithful witness” (Rev 2:13). Jesus is the supreme faithful witness (*martus*, Rev 1:5).

Jesus was slaughtered (*sphazō*; Rev 5:6, 9, 12) like a sacrificial animal. Some of his followers would also be slain/slaughtered (Rev 6:9). Believers are also beheaded (*pelekizō*, Rev 20:4). The holy city, representing the church,<sup>2</sup> is trampled underfoot (*pateō*, Rev 11:2).

Apart from being threatened with death, believers are exposed to economic boycott (Rev 13:17). While they have the seal of God (Rev 7:2-4), they do not possess the mark of the beast (Rev 13:16). This singles them out for persecution. They live in the vicinity of Satan’s throne (Rev 2:13) and are harassed by Satan’s synagogue (Rev 2:9; 3:9). They are confronted with and tempted by “the deep things of Satan.” The dragon makes war (*poieō polemon*) against the remnant (Rev 12:17) through the sea beast (*poieō polemon*; Rev 13:7) and the beast from the earth (Rev 13:11-17) and overcomes them (Rev 13:7), at least temporarily. The battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:14, 16) will be the final showdown in historic time. The last threat of Satan and his resurrected army of earth dwellers against the New Jerusalem and the people of God, described in Rev 20:7-10, will prove ineffective and futile. So persecution occurs in all parts of the Apocalypse.

## **II. Further Information about Persecution in Revelation**

Information on the issue of persecution in John’s Apocalypse may be grouped under the following headings.

- (1) *Persecution Is Not Limited to One Period in History.* The Apocalypse mentions persecutions in the messages to the seven churches. Rev 12-14 present a view of the conflict between Satan and Jesus and Satan and the church beginning with the birth of the Messiah and ending with the second coming of Jesus. Persecution of the church through long periods of history, symbolically described as 1260 days, 42 months, or three and a half times,<sup>3</sup> is clearly expressed. Rev 13 contains an extended prophecy of yet future universal worship of the dragon, the sea beast, and the image of the beast.
  - (2) *Persecution Is Both Local and Universal.* There is some scholarly discussion as to what extent Christians in the first century suffered persecution. Normally it is admitted that local conflicts and persecutions occurred in early church history.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the end time the apostle sees an apostate religious alliance, Babylon (Rev 17:1-7; see also Rev 12-14), supported by a political alliance (Rev 17:2, 12-13), making war against the people of God on a universal level.
  - (3) *Persecution May Come from Different Sources.* The martyrdom of Jesus, the suffering of John, the persecution of the Christians in Smyrna, and the death of Antipas are not directly attributed to a specific power. However, the historic situation of the first centuries A.D. indicates that at times the Roman Empire had been instrumental in persecuting and killing Christians.
- Martus (witness) refers to Jesus and his followers (Rev 2:13; 17:6). Jesus is the role model for the church to follow.***
- The letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia mention people who call themselves Jews but are not (Rev 2:9; 3:9). “. . . these two churches were in some way in conflict with the Jewish communities in Smyrna and Philadelphia.”<sup>5</sup>
- Rev 12 describes the persecution of the true people of God by the dragon in the medieval and post-medieval periods. However, he uses as human power the sea beast, the great and powerful medieval church.<sup>6</sup> The remnant of the woman (Rev 12:17) will be attacked by the sea beast and the beast that comes out of the earth, Protestant America.<sup>7</sup>
- Thus Revelation sees Satan, the opponent of the Lamb, as the major player behind all persecutions. He uses various political powers such as the Roman Empire and political powers of the last days as well as religious entities such as Jews, non-Christian religions, and even Christian churches to persecute God’s people.
- (4) *Persecution May Come in Different Forms.* Revelation mentions blasphemy (Rev 2:9; 13:6), persecution (Rev

12:13), tribulation and suffering (Rev 1:9; 2:9-10), economical boycott (Rev 13:17), and martyrdom (Rev 1:18; 2:10; 6:9, 10; 20:4). One wonders if the conflict with false teachers and deceptive doctrines, the exploration of the deep things of Satan (Rev 2:24), may also border on persecution.

- (5) *Persecution May Be Triggered by the Witness of God's People.* John uses the word family *martu-* “to bear witness,” “testimony,” and “witness” (as a person) quite frequently. A martyr is one who testifies to the truth with his life. *Martus* (witness) refers to Jesus and his followers (Rev 2:13; 17:6). Jesus is the role model for the church to follow.

“The ‘witness’ of the believers is first a lifestyle of faithfulness to Christ and second a verbal witness during the period of their suffering.”<sup>8</sup> Persecution and testifying are oftentimes related in the sense that faithful witnesses have to suffer.

- (6) *Persecution and Following Jesus Go Together.* Rev 14:4 mentions that the 144,000 follow (akolouthēō) the Lamb “wherever he goes.” The context refers to an extremely difficult situation of persecution. In John’s Gospel Jesus is portrayed as the good shepherd. His sheep follow him (John 10:4, 27). But the Gospel of John places following also in the context of suffering and even martyrdom (John 12:23-26; 13:36-37; 21:9). Persecution is a normal and not a “strange thing” (1 Pet 4:12) for Christians that follow the Lamb and must be expected. So should Christians avoid persecution, if they can? Yes. Should they avoid it at all cost? No.

- (7) *Persecution Will Be Triggered by the Rejection of Loyalty to Human Institutions.* Revelation predicts a conflict between those who have the seal of God on their foreheads (Rev 7:2-4) and those who accept the mark of the beast on their forehead or right hand (Rev 13:16), leading to persecution of loyal followers of Christ at the end of time. These events are still future and will surpass whatever has happened before in church history.

- (8) *Persecution Is Oftentimes Portrayed in Connection with the War Motif.* For instance, the 144,000 under the sixth seal who obviously have to go through the time when the winds will be released (Rev 7:1-4) are depicted as the Mes-

***Should Christians avoid persecution, if they can? Yes. Should they avoid it at all cost? No.***

sianic army.<sup>9</sup> Their counterpart is the demonic army of 200 million beings under the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:16). The conflict between Michael and the dragon is pictured as war in heaven (Rev 12:7). The persecution of the remnant/saints by the dragon/sea beast is described as a war waged against them (Rev 12:17; 13:7). The last battle in conjunction with Christ’s second coming is the battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:16; 17:14; 19:11-21).

However, these battles are spiritual in nature, rather than military.

The war motif is part of the Great Controversy theme which in Scripture is probably most clearly developed in John’s Apocalypse. Conflict and war happen on the personal level, the group level, and also the cosmic level. In other words, conflict and war are not limited to planet Earth but are also found in the universe. God’s plan of salvation deals with all these levels of conflict. The turning point in the Great Controversy is the death of Jesus on the cross, portrayed in Revelation as the slaughtering of the Lamb. The death of the Messiah emphasizes how the victory is won. As the Lamb triumphs through suffering, so do his followers. They are not involved in acts of violence.

- (9) *Revelation Points to the Christians’ Reaction to Persecution.* When persecution and distress happen the question is: How can and how do Christians cope with such a situation? There may be two interrelated forms of reaction.

One is an intrapersonal reaction. The other is an external reaction which has to do with observable actions. Typically, the exterior action is fight or flight. Physical fight on the part of the people of God is not an option in the Apocalypse. This

leaves them with the other possibility, namely flight. Flight may be understood as moving to another geographical area or going underground.

Revelation does not dwell much on communal support of persecuted fellow believers; and yet care for fellow Christians may be reflected in various places. The church in Ephesus is challenged to recover its first love which includes brotherly love (Rev 2:2; see also 2:19). The term “service” (*diakonia*; Rev 2:19) includes service to fellow believers. Church members

***Revelation does not dwell much on communal support of persecuted fellow believers; and yet care for fellow Christians may be reflected in various places.***

***The death of the Messiah emphasizes how the victory is won. As the Lamb triumphs through suffering, so do his followers.***

carry responsibility for each other (Rev 3:2). They are also called to assist each other in times of distress.

This brings us to the intrapersonal reaction to persecution. Some of those that are suffering persecution undoubtedly have asked the question why God would allow for such cruelty. However, the question, Why? is not directly raised in Revelation. Therefore, it is more profitable to ask: How can followers of the Lamb react to persecution? Revelation shows:

- (a) They turn to God in prayer (Rev 6:10).
- (b) They realize and acknowledge that God's thoughts are not their thoughts and that God's plan of salvation surpasses their understanding. While they rest and other martyrs will be added to their number (Rev 6:11), time is provided for "God's people" that is still in end-time Babylon to leave this counterfeit system (Rev 18:4).
- (c) They hold on to what they have and do not allow for their crowns to slip away (Rev 2:25; 3:11). This attitude is also described as perseverance, patience, endurance (*hupomonē*), an important concept in Revelation.<sup>10</sup>
- (d) They accept suffering as a natural ingredient of discipleship (Rev 14:4).
- (e) They seek the good of their enemies by being faithful witnesses through life and word and serving as priests (Rev 12:11; 1:6).
- (f) They rely on the loving care of Jesus (Rev 1:5-7) and the many divine promises contained in Revelation. Jesus has the keys to death and Hades (Rev 1:18). He helps his people to persevere (Rev 2:10) and does not allow them to be touched by the second death (Rev 2:11). He limits burdens so that they become bearable (Rev 2:24; 3:10). He even influences their enemies to acknowledge that these Christians are loved by God (Rev 3:9).

(10) *Persecution and Death Are Not Considered to Be Defeat.* In the Gospel of John Jesus' death is not

understood as his defeat but as his glorification (John *doxazō*; 7:39; 12:16, 23; 13:31) and exaltation (*hupsoō*; John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32-34). The Book of Revelation takes the same approach. As Jesus' apparent defeat was in reality his victory, so the

faithful suffering of his followers, even if it includes martyrdom, is not to be understood as defeat. Revela-

tion turns the common understanding upside down and makes the apparent winners losers and the apparent losers winners. This reversal alerts people to the fact that God evaluates situations differently and that they are indeed other than what they appear to be. Ironically, it was the satanic victory of killing Jesus that defeated Satan.

### III. Persecution Is Not the End

The pervasiveness of the persecution theme in Revelation could be very discouraging, especially for Christians that are actually suffering persecution. But the Apocalypse is not a gloomy book. It is a very positive book dealing with Jesus' love for his disciples, salvation, a new status of Christians as a kingdom, and priests, constant support, and a wonderful hope.

In light of persecution we should keep in mind that about half of the book is dedicated to divine judgment, that is, vindication of God's people and God himself. Christians are also encouraged through the constantly repeated promise of the imminence of Jesus' second coming. Resurrection is the realization of the hope of eternal life for suffering believers. At the same time, it is God's terror for their enemies, because they recognize that their only power, the power of death, is gone. Thus Revelation is not so much a book about death; it is a book about life through Christ and with Christ. Persecution is not the last word. God speaks the last word. In the meantime, we love, care for, and support those that are suffering.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

***Revelation makes the apparent winners losers and the apparent losers winners. Ironically, it was the satanic victory of killing Jesus that defeated Satan.***

<sup>1</sup>See Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, revised edition. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 231-232.

<sup>2</sup>See Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation of John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 274.

<sup>3</sup>The 1260 days must be symbolic days since the entire vision is symbolic. Three and a half literal years in the sweep of the history of the Christian Church cannot be located and make no sense. 1260 years do. Adventists have placed them in the period from A.D. 538 to A.D. 1798. See Nichol, 4:833-834 and 7:809.

<sup>4</sup>See J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids:

Brazos Press, 2010), 131, and Maier, 34.

<sup>5</sup>Mayo, 51, and Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Monographs, 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010), 65.

<sup>6</sup>See Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 2001), 377.

<sup>7</sup>Angel M. Rodríguez, *Future Glory: The 8 Great End-Time Prophecies in the Bible* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2002), 117-118.

<sup>8</sup>See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 476; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 153.

<sup>9</sup>See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 216.

<sup>10</sup>The term is found in Rev 1:9; 2:2-3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; and 14:12 and is characteristic of the remnant.

## Theology, Ethics, and Church Growth

At the beginning of the twenty-first century we face two equally important challenges in the area of church growth. The first one is very slow growth in some parts of the world and the second is its opposite, fast growth. Both situations bring with it specific problems that need to be addressed in a productive and yet aggressive way. Here I will share some thoughts about the theological and ethical challenges that we are facing and will face in areas of the world of intensive growth. I raise them hoping that this will be helpful to church leaders as they plan for the future of the church in order to avoid dangerous pitfalls, some of which may not look dangerous at all.

### I. Quality and Numerical Growth

Let me state at the very beginning that numerical growth and the mission of the church are inseparable and that they are both indispensable in order for the church to be the church. Growth indicates that the church is still alive and that it is being sustained by the Spirit of the Lord. But the question we need to explore, and to explore with an open mind, has to do with the purpose of church growth: Why do we want to grow? What is the fundamental purpose of baptizing more and more people? Obviously growth brings with it recognition, power, and influence, and we will talk about these. But I seriously doubt, in fact I do not believe that this is what church growth is about. The power of the church is not located in the high number of members that constitute it but in the commitment of the members to Christ as Savior and Lord.

Church growth is a phenomenon that should be theologically defined as the actualization of the power of the Spirit in the life of sinners that, through the grace of God and faith in Christ, transforms sinners into children of God and, through baptism, incorporates them into the body of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, church growth occurs through the proclamation of the word of salvation through Christ and the work of the Spirit in the human heart leading the person to experience a genuine *conversion*. Church growth without conversion is only numerical and, theologically speaking, artificial. The solution is not to stop church growth in order to make sure that those who are “in” have experienced conversion. A significant part of the spiritual vitality of church members is precisely located in their involvement in church growth—in the proclamation of the redeeming power of the cross.

However, the proper balance between church growth and conversion is achieved through Bible study and intense prayers on behalf of those with whom we are sharing the gospel. Conversion takes place through the convicting power of the Spirit in the human heart in conjunction with the hearing of the Word of God. Those who show evidence, through a life of commitment to the Lord based on Scripture, that they have surrendered themselves to the convicting power of the Spirit should be baptized. Such individuals should continue to be spiritually and doctrinally nurtured after baptism and trained for mission.

### II. Ethics of Motivation

Church growth takes place through the involvement of church leaders and church members in the mission of the church. Since there is such a thing as spiritual inertia, proper motivation occupies the center of the missiological stage. The power of the Spirit is interested in using human voices and actions to move others to engage in mission. Motivational approaches should be grounded in biblical theology in order to be spiritually enriching to the individual. A proper motivational focus has to be informed and determined by the biblical concept of the grace of God toward all of us. Motivation based on the fear of losing our salvation is theologically unsound and dangerous. Joy and gratitude, and not fear, should be at the heart of the involvement of church members in mission. Only the unbounded love of God manifested on the cross of Calvary is powerful enough to move believers to serve Him in church growth.

Motivating pastors to continue to be involved in church growth is perhaps as challenging as motivating church members. Some pastors may need more motivation than others because we do not all have a strong self-motivating personality. Assuming that a pastor does not need to be motivated in order to be engaged in

church growth would be a mistake. We all need encouragement and motivation to fulfill the task assigned to each of us. Perhaps one of the reasons for having small or no growth at all in some regions of the world would have something to do with the possibility that church leaders may be leaving pastors alone, providing little or no motivation for them to engage in church growth. If this were the case, then they would need to be properly encouraged and motivated in order to have a church that is vibrant for the Lord.

But the truth is that an ethics of motivation for pastors is particularly needed in areas where the church is rapidly growing. Allow me to be explicit in my comments on this issue. The fact that we pay pastors to do their work could easily lend itself to improper motivational practices. Threatening pastors with losing their jobs if they would not increase their baptismal numbers is certainly inappropriate. Dismissing a pastor from the ministry should be preceded by a careful evaluation of his/her performance as a minister and not exclusively on a numerical issue. Any verbal or psychological threat of abuse of pastors that aims at motivating them to engage in church growth is not ethically acceptable. Church leaders should develop biblical ways of motivating pastors that corresponds to the teachings of our Lord and that contributes to the spiritual growth of the minister. Obviously pastors should clearly understand that it is their responsibility to go, like Jesus, and seek souls for the kingdom of heaven while at the same time training church members for mission.

### III. Visibility of the Church

In places where the church is growing, it is becoming highly visible. This is good but it also brings with it challenges that perhaps we have not anticipated but that we should start thinking about. Here I will mention two main ones.

- (1) *Adventists and the Press*: There are some places in the world, and the number is growing, where what happens within the church is a matter of public interest; it is news. The church is so well known and influential that the non-Adventist population is kept informed by the press about events taking place in the church. Ecclesiastical transparency, which is always important, becomes extremely important in such cultural settings. How we do business is going to be scrutinized by the general public in the open arena of society and we should be always ready for this. This means that church leaders should make decisions based on sound principles and on the policies of the church. Due process should be followed and occasionally revised to debug it from elements that could be misused by the press or that may not be based on the best ethical values.

A couple of examples may be useful to illustrate

the point. The election of leaders at the Mission, Conference, and Union levels should be done in a way that follows due process as stated in the policies of the church. Internal politics that could allow for preferential treatment would have to be screened out of the process in order to make it as objective as possible. The same would apply in cases where a worker is dismissed. Proper protocol should be followed in order to make sure that the decision is objectively defensible. Another example could be the use of money and its administration. This is an area in which the General Conference has been promoting transparency within the church. My suggestion would be to make sure that if we have to justify in the public arena the distribution and use of money at the local administrative level we should be able to do it in a way that reveals our integrity as a church. Bad press based on things over which we do have some control should be considered unacceptable by church leaders. Our high visibility in many places around the world should continue to be a blessing for those societies and for the church itself.

- (2) *Visibility and Power*: Having a large number of church members in a particular country or city does not only make the church visible, it makes it influential and powerful. In the western world we have traditionally been a minority church and consequently we do not know how to handle the power that comes with a church that is not necessarily a minority. The risks are many but the blessings are many more. The proper use of that power should be explored by church leaders and proper parameters should be put in place in order not to violate our integrity as God's end-time people. In societies where we are highly visible we would have to address the social issues confronted by the people at large and provide guidance based on clear principle that would not be considered to be an imposition of our doctrines on a society in which we are quite influential. These are matters that need careful attention before we are confronted with the issues.

We should also be careful concerning how we relate to the political system of the country or the city. Many persons in national political positions would like to give preferential treatment to the leaders of a church that is influential in society. This is understandable if we keep in mind that their interest is of a political nature and that at the appropriate time they will request from us special favors. Special treatment from political figures could make us feel important but those favors should be carefully scrutinized to make sure that they do not place us in a situation that could be damaging to the message and mission of the church. As leaders we should keep in mind that our leadership is not about us but about the church that entrusted to us the privilege of serving it for a period

of time in a particular place. The use of the influence of the church by leaders should be determined by its impact on the church and not on the individual leader.

The question of power is an important one and we should not leave it up to local leaders only to define it. Seminars should be developed in which the issues arising from the power and influence that come as a result of church growth are discussed and guidelines are formulated that will help us avoid some of the risks intrinsic to such situations.

Church growth will force us to deal with the theological and ethical issues that perhaps we have not thought about. What I offer here is the beginning of what would probably be a profitable agenda.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI (retired)



## SCRIPTURE APPLIED

# Scripture and Food

There are two extremes with regard to the human body. One is neglect and abuse of the body. The other is an overemphasis on the body. Two examples may be enough: There are people who ruin their bodies and therefore themselves by the use of narcotic drugs and alcohol, while others pay excessive attention to their looks and feel they need one cosmetic surgery after the other. As stewards of the body that God has given us and that has been called “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19) we have to be careful not to fall into the trap of these extremes. We will now take a look at what the Bible has to say about the consumption of food.

## I. God’s Original Plan of Nutrition

Gen 1:29; 3:18 The diet of the first human beings consisted of grain, nuts, and fruit. This continued even after the Fall, when vegetables were added. These first human beings lived with a vegetarian diet. The Lord knows what is good for humanity.

## II. The Changed Plan

### 1. The Noahic Law

Gen 9:3-4 Eating meat was permitted after the flood. Eating blood and carcasses (see “everything that lives and moves”) was forbidden.

Gen 7:2-3 However, Noah already knew the distinction between clean and unclean animals.

Gen 8:20

He only sacrificed clean animals. Obviously, it was not necessary to repeat the distinction between clean and unclean animals in Gen 9:3.

Gen 1:29

The terms “every” and “all” in Gen 9:3 should not be understood in an all-encompassing sense. The “all” in Gen 1:29 would not include poisonous plants today.

Why did God allow for this change? Most likely due to the lack of vegetation after the Flood meat was allowed to be consumed. Possibly, a meat diet would reduce the lifespan of humans and prevent the worst consequences of evil (see Gen 6:5 and the long life spans mentioned in Gen 5)

Noah was not an Israelite but the father of all humans that are living today. Therefore, these regulations are given to all humanity and not just to Israel. Old Testament scholars acknowledge that the differentiation between clean and unclean animals goes further back than Moses (e.g., C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983; I:144). Only clean animals were supposed to be eaten.

## 2. The Mosaic Law

The distinction between clean and unclean animals is found during the time of Moses again. A list of animals which may be eaten is found in Lev 11:

- Land animals: Animals that have split hoofs and chew the cud are clean and can be eaten. Animals walking on paws are unclean and should not be eaten (Lev 11:3, 27).
- Water animals: Animals that have fins and scales are clean (Lev 11:9).
- Flying animals: Some animals that are unclean are mentioned by name (Lev 11:13-19).
- Animals move around on the ground: They are unclean (Lev 11:29-30, 41).
- In addition, no carcass (Deut 14:21), no blood (Lev 17:10, 12, 14), and no animal fat (Lev 3:16-17) was to be eaten.

## III. The Validity of this Plan in NT Times

### 1. Jesus

Jesus observed the food laws of the OT (John 8:46). While he allowed demons to enter pigs which were consequently killed (Matt 8:28-34), he did not allow for the leftovers of the feeding of the multitude to be thrown away (John 6:1-13). Through his permission he may have indirectly confirmed the validity of the flood laws.

### 2. The Apostles

The apostles observed God’s commandments even after Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. Peter refused to

eat the unclean animals seen in a vision (Acts 10:13-17). A little later he understood the vision. He should no longer consider gentiles unclean (Acts 10:28, 34-35).

### 3. Other Reasons for Observing Biblical Food Regulations

- Because the health laws are not part of the sacrificial system, they are not abolished with the sacrificial system.
- They are different from other laws on uncleanness, because typically uncleanness is acquired and can be done away with (e.g., Lev 12). However, unclean animals are intrinsically and innately unclean.
- Eating blood is also forbidden in the New Testament (Acts 15:29). The Christian church observed this regulation for centuries (Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* V, 1, 26). It is still valid today.
- Health facts: While meat eating has certain disadvantages as compared to a vegetarian diet, some research on unclean food, especially pork, indicates that this food is even more disadvantageous than clean meat. God means well (Exod 15:26). 1 Cor 6:19-20 reminds us that we are stewards of our bodies.

### IV. Texts That Have Been Understood Differently

Matt 15:11      The issue is washing of hands (verses

1 Cor 10:25

Col 2:16

1 Tim 4:1-4

2, 20) not unclean food.

Paul talks about food offered to idols not about unclean food (1 Cor 8:4; 10:27-28). Similarly Rom 14:2, 14, 20. Food laws are not a “shadow” (verse 17) that pointed to Jesus’ life and ministry as the sacrificial laws were. However, food and drink sacrifices came to an end with Jesus’ death. Paul talks about false doctrines, e.g., the rejection of marriage and an ascetic lifestyle. The passage has nothing to do with biblical dietary laws.

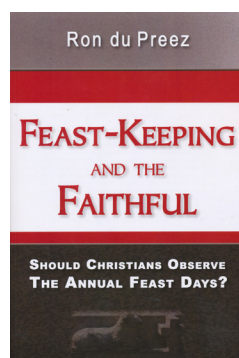
All these texts are not in opposition to the biblical teaching on clean and unclean animals

### Conclusion

Christians take seriously God’s health recommendations—1 Cor 10:31. They honor God and observe his commandments, knowing that God loves them, has saved them, and wants them to have a rich and satisfying life (John 10:10). The biblical health laws are still valid, as is the moral law of the Ten Commandments, and are an expression of God’s love and grace. We benefit by doing God’s will.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

### BOOK NOTES



Ron du Preez. *Feast-Keeping and the Faithful: Should Christians Observe the Annual Feast Days?*, second edition, Lansing, MI: Omega Media, 2011, 267 pp. US\$27.00.

Ron du Preez has produced an excellent exegetical and theological study related to the question of the relevance of the Israelite festivals for Christians. Apart from preface,

introduction, and conclusion the book consists of three major parts and two appendices. The first part deals with Old Testament issues and raises nineteen questions, among them “‘Yahweh’s feasts’ or ‘Jewish festivals’?”, “Are feasts unchangeable moral laws?”, and “The seventh-day Sabbath, a ‘fast day’?”

Part two addresses New Testament concerns and covers another six questions. These questions include the following “Didn’t the apostles keep the feasts?”, “Weren’t some feasts fulfilled after Christ?”, and “Shouldn’t we keep Passover until heaven?” Part three

contains a study of E. G. White materials on the issue of the festivals. This time, thirteen questions are raised and answered, for example, “Was Ellen White herself a feast-keeper?”, “Is ‘every divine institution’ ‘to be restored’?”, and “Are feast days predicted ‘new light’?” Appendix A discusses “Messiah’s method for searching Scripture.” Appendix B deals with Easter.

Every argument typically used to support the observance of the festivals has been carefully evaluated and a biblical answer provided. However, this book is not just a study of the facts, simply aiming at the human mind, but throughout it there is a genuine pastoral concern about the unity of the church and its message. May this volume contribute to intensify that unity.

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI (retired)

Frank M. Hasel. *Sehnsucht nach Gott: Ein Bibel-Gebetstagebuch*, St. Peter am Hart, Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2012, 316 pp. Hardcover, €14.90.

Frank Hasel is dean of the theological department of Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, Austria. After the untimely death of his wife—she passed away at age 44—he started working on this book “Longing for God: A Journal for Bible Study and Prayer.” It helped him cope

with the tremendous loss. This is a very practical work, written in remembrance of his wife and dedicated to his three sons. It attempts to strengthen Christians' spiritual lives, protect them against spiritual forgetfulness, and lead people to study Scripture daily and have a meaningful prayer life.

After an introduction and a chapter on how to read Scripture with personal gain the main part follows. It contains many pages that can be filled with personal notes. The book functions as a journal for personal Bible study as well as a prayer journal. At the end of each month a short essay dealing mostly with prayer follows. These sections deal, for instance, with prayers that God likes, thanking God, praising God, reasons to pray for others, prayer and fasting, waiting for an answer to prayer, getting rid of bitterness,

etc. The book ends with a weekly prayer emphasis. Here the author suggests to pray on certain days of the week for certain persons, e.g., Mondays for one's family.

Tuesdays for neighbors and the city, etc. The respective pages contain columns for dates, prayer requests, and answers to these prayers with empty space to be filled with personal requests. Throughout the book many interesting quotations, including some by E. G. White, serve as encouragement to the reader.

This book can be a reminder of how God helps the readers to grow spiritually and experience Him in a practical way. Translations of the book into various languages are on their way. This is a very helpful tool that supports the renewal of one's prayer life and the study

of Scripture.

Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

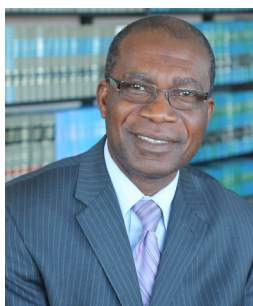


## News

### Sola Scriptura Research Group

Recently, an Adventist Sola Scriptura Research Group has been established. This project will operate under the guidance and oversight of the Theology and Christian Philosophy Department at Andrews University, the administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference. It will consist of a group of international theologians and scholars and, according to its constitution, will “assist the world wide Seventh-day Adventist Church in the development of a methodology for its theological task that is biblically grounded and philosophically sound in order to establish and develop its ministerial and missiological dimensions.”

The group understands the sola scriptura principle as including the whole Scripture and as providing the basic hermeneutical principle for all sciences. It will investigate and develop the areas of Christian philosophy, hermeneutics, methodology, systematic theology, and ethics and their relation to ministry and mission. It will attempt to provide continuing education services on Adventist Methodology to the Church throughout the world in the form of lectures, workshops, seminars and other forums and offer resources and practical experience to graduate and doctoral students pursuing studies and research in Adventist Methodology. Dr. Fernando Canale will serve as director and Dr. Kwabena Donkor as secretary.



### The Ethics Committee

Due to constantly growing challenges and requests from the world field, and working with a limited staff, an Ethics Committee was established that will assist the Biblical Research Institute regarding ethical issues and questions. The committee has a status similar to that of BRICOM (the Biblical Research Institute Committee). It takes on an advisory role but is much smaller in membership than BRICOM.

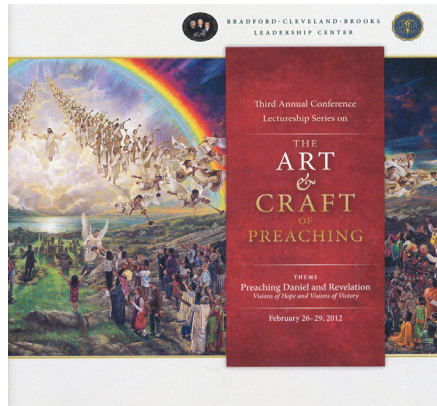
It will identify ethical issues of importance to the world church in the areas of pastoral experience and leadership, and ecclesiastical administration, discuss ethical issues referred to it by BRI and make recommendations, prepare documents that will provide ethical guidance to church leaders and pastors, and work with BRI in initiating and organizing seminars, and participate in Bible Conferences, with the purpose of promoting biblically grounded moral values and raising awareness of their implications. The committee will be chaired by Ekkehardt Mueller.

### The Art and Craft of Preaching Conference

Under the leadership of Dr. Harold Lee, the Bradford-Cleveland-Brooks Leadership Center at Oakwood University invited pastors and students to a conference called “The Art & Craft of Preaching” with

the subtitle: “Preaching Daniel and Revelation: Visions of Hope and Visions of Victory.”

The meetings took place February 26–29, 2012. The BRI was also invited. The conference was organized because it was felt that at present in many places Daniel and Revelation are hardly preached and thereby important topics are left out and Adventist identity suffers. By avoiding the discussion on the interpretation and proclamation of biblical apocalyptic literature differences in interpretation will become more pronounced and theological unity more and more difficult to uphold.



The meetings wanted to encourage the audience to explore studying and preaching Daniel and Revelation from an Adventist perspective. It was acknowledged that in some cases the last word in interpreting difficult passages has not yet been spoken. Nevertheless it was clear that the church has a pretty clear picture of the interpretation of these books as a whole. The organizers must be lauded for putting together an exceptional conference with outstanding and well-known speakers, including the President of the General Conference.