

"Watchman, what of the night?"

XXXVI - 9(03)

"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)

The Bible

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Har-Magedon

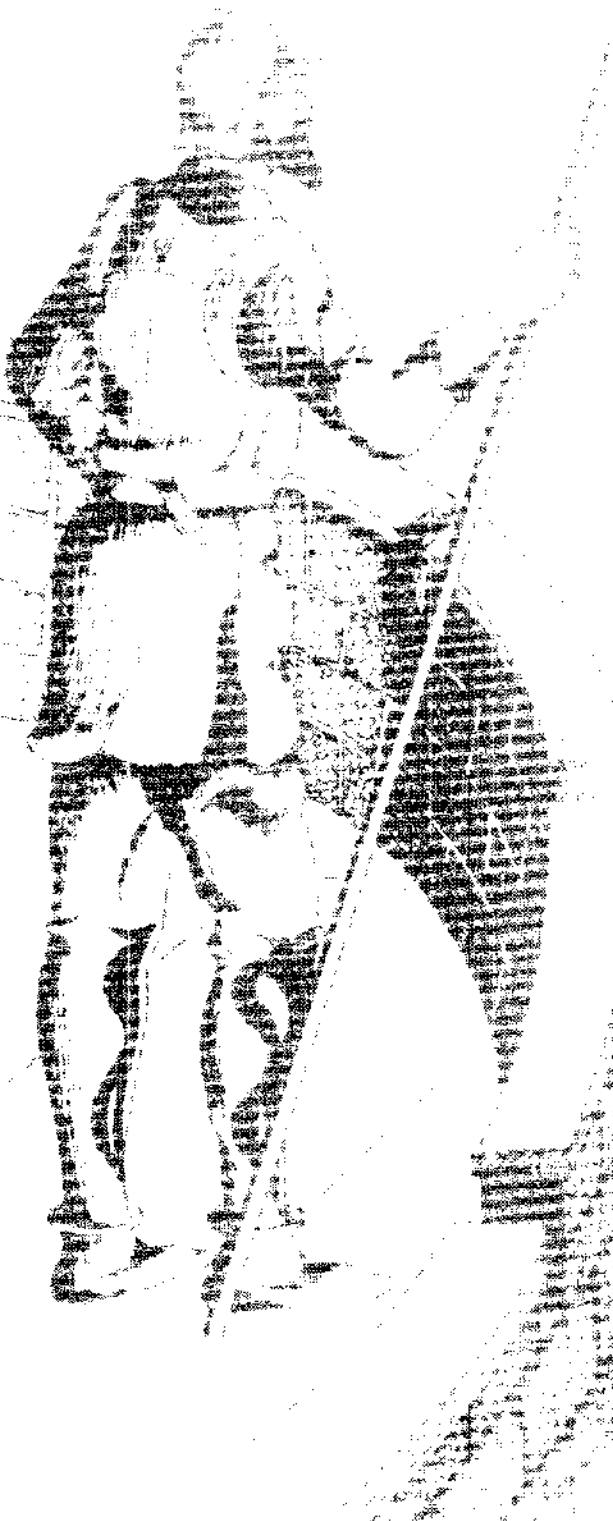
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Editor's Preface

As this issue of WVN was being contemplated, I received a call from a friend who is a careful Bible student. He asked the question as to how one is to classify the answers which the "miserable comforters" gave Job. There was Eliphaz who confessed to a séance (4:12-16), and whom God singled out for a severe rebuke (42:7). How are his words to be considered? By the inspiration of God? Or is there a wider meaning to the concept of inspiration when each canon of the Old and New Testaments is considered as a whole? Did God only direct in the writing of the revelation of truth through "holy men," or did He also direct in the selection of the books which comprise the two canons of Scripture? If so, then what is the message which God intended by including certain books which give us questions, such as Job, Judges, and others in the Old Testament.

The preface for these observations on the Bible was motivated by a thought provoking article by Kenneth Richards, retired associate speaker for the Voice of Prophecy. The stated position of the Church on the Bible was different during the lifetime of Ellen G. White than the current position held by the Church. Even the president of the General Conference who openly denied any change in the major doctrines of the Church, has himself become party to such a change.

Adventists Affirm claims to be a publication of articles and studies by writers which affirm "Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs." For the most part this is true, but in the Spring 2003 issue an article slipped into its pages which "spiritualizes" away the force of an important prophecy in Revelation which speaks to the present.



The Bible

In the 2003 March-April issue of *Adventist Today*, Kenneth Richards, retired associate speaker for the Voice of Prophecy, and son of H. M. S. Richards, Sr., tells of his convictions at the time he was baptized and united with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He wrote:

One of the things about the Seventh-day Adventist Church that had impressed me was its claim that all its doctrines could be proved from the Scripture alone (p. 10).

He cites the *Church Manual* as the basis for his impression. True, the *Church Manual* so states. In the Foundation Library, we have a copy of the 1938 edition. In it my mother had written her name. It was the first copy she had procured after becoming an Adventist. The final section (XI) begins by stating:

Seventh-day Adventists hold certain fundamental beliefs, the principle features of which, together with a portion of the Scriptural references upon which they are based, may be summarized as follows;

1. That the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by the inspiration of God, contain an all sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice (p. 180).

I found also that my mother had placed in the *Church Manual* a tract entitled, "What Do Seventh-Day Adventists Believe?" It had been printed for the Iowa Book and Bible House when located in Nevada, Iowa. On the front page was a quotation from Chillingworth which read - "There is no sufficient certainty but of Scripture only for any considering man to build upon." On the second page, the statement of what Adventists believe was prefaced by the commitment - "Their only creed is the Bible from which they feel prepared to give a reason 'to every man that asketh.' - 1 Peter 3:15:"

Richards indicated that he heard people challenge this concept indicating that there were other sources apart from the Bible. He went more than once to discuss this matter with his father because in his radio ministry as the Voice of Prophecy, his father used the Bible and the

Bible only. He likewise adopted this approach in his ministry. Then he commented:

So, when I first read, after being an Adventist minister for more than twenty years, of a particular official change in my denomination's view of Scripture, I was disappointed. (*ibid.*)

Elder Richards cites, as evidence of the official change, the 1980 Statement of Fundamental Beliefs voted at the General Conference Session in Dallas, Texas. Follow closely his analysis of of Statement #1 and the comparison with #17:

The belief spelled out in item No. 1 had to do with the "Holy Scriptures." It upheld the Bible as the "written Word of God, given by divine inspiration." I liked that part. But it went on to call the Bible "the authoritative revealer of doctrines...." That was certainly true. But why didn't it say that the Bible was the only rule of faith and practice?

As I read more of the affirmations of belief, I came to item No. 17. Here, it seemed, I found why the word, "only" was missing from item No. 1. The new statement on the "Gift of Prophecy (No. 17) read: "One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifest in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested." I had no problem with the writings of Ellen White being considered an "authoritative source of truth." But when I read the phrase declaring that "the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested," the absence of the word, "only" before the word, "standard" simply glared at me. Had someone decided that since the writings of Ellen G. White were an "authoritative source of truth," we could no longer with logical consistency, affirm that the Bible was the "only" rule of faith and practice? Could it be that now the denomination had decided to accept a two-tiered authority of faith and doctrine? I was not at all comfortable with the idea.

Elder Richard's discomfort is the very heart of the problem in Adventism today. Tragically, there are those in the community of Adventism, especially among the "independent voices" who reverse the Divine arrangement, and place the Writings as the means by which the Scriptures are to be understood and tested. They deny the primacy of the Bible and adopt the "two-tiered" basis of faith as Elder Richards suggests is to be found in the 1980 Statement of Beliefs. Not

only does Richards suggest such a basis was written into the Fundamental Statement of Beliefs, but cites current usage of this two-tiered concept.

In the Spring of 2002, Adventist church leaders gathered together first in Greece and then in Turkey to consider the topic, "Theological Unity in a Growing World Church." The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Jan Paulsen, the president of the General Conference. It received such acclaim by the administrators and theologians present, that request was made for the address to be published in the *Adventist Review*, and that it be printed "as a stand alone publication." Elder Richards quoted a portion of the closing remarks made by Dr. Paulsen which evidenced this two-tiered concept. We will quote in full context these final remarks:

A further word needs to be said about our "being loyal to our heritage and to our identity." Some would have us believe that there have been significant shifts in recent times in regard to doctrines that historically have been at the heart of Seventh-day Adventism.

Take especially our understanding of judgment and Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and the prophetic messages in which these teachings are contained. Some are suggesting that since the 1980 (Glacier View) meetings, the very teachings that the church affirmed that year at those meetings have been abandoned, and the church has essentially moved to accept the very positions it rejected then. Such a claim is a distortion of reality, and nothing could be farther from the truth. The historic sanctuary message, based on Scripture and supported by the writings of Ellen White continues to be held to unequivocally. And the inspired authorities on which these and other doctrines are based, namely the Bible supported by the writings of Ellen White, continue to be the hermeneutical foundation on which we as a church place all matters of faith and conduct. Let no one think that there has been a change of position in regard to this. (*Adventist Review*, October 2002, p. 37)

To borrow the words of Christ, one must say that the position set forth by Paulsen "was not so from the beginning" as noted above. Further, Ellen White herself wrote, in one of the books attributed to her, that "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines, and the basis of all reforms." (*Great Controversy*, p. 595). Paulsen has effectively by his pronouncement of what the Adventist hermeneutic is in

regard to doctrine, removed the Adventist Church from being the people of God's choosing. It made his comments on "the remnant" (#4), to borrow again the words of Scripture, "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."

Dr. Paulsen's denial that there have been "shifts" in the doctrine of the church in recent times is difficult to comprehend inasmuch as the very position he enunciated was such a "shift." One is also left to ask, where he has been during the last half of the 20th Century. Has he not heard of *Questions on Doctrine*? Has he not read, Froom's *Movement of Destiny*? Has he not taken time to compare the Statement of Beliefs voted at Dallas in 1980, with the previous Statements issued in the name of the Church?

There is much that needs to be written in regard to the primacy of the Scriptures, and to which we will devote this issue of WWN. Questions arising from the Scriptures themselves need to be addressed. But that the reader might know where we stand, we shall first quote from "A Statement of Beliefs" to which we and other "independent" ministries subscribed a decade ago. The preface stated:

We have no creed, articles of faith, or discipline apart from the Bible. There are certain beliefs which we do hold in common. Since there are many today who call themselves Adventists but who hold views with which we have no sympathy, and some of which, we believe to be subversive of the plainest teachings of the Word of God, we desire to set forth our beliefs in a concise and systematic way so that all may know where we stand. This statement of beliefs will reflect our spiritual heritage. It will express the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we have sought to walk in the advancing light which He has cast on our spiritual pathway. It is open to reformulation should any belief be shown to be at variance with the Word of God, or additional truth be revealed to us from that Word through the guidance of the Spirit of truth.

The first statement read:

We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, were given by the inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of His will to man, and are the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

[if you should wish a copy of the full statement, send your request to the Ozone address with \$1.00 to cover postage expenses]

It should be observed that this first statement is identical with the statement on the Holy Scriptures as found in the first formulation in 1872, and which remained unchanged till the 1931 Statement which appeared in the *Yearbook* of that year. In other words, this concept of the primacy of the Bible, as "the only infallible rule of faith and practice" remained in place during the lifetime of Ellen G. White. Even then, the 1931 Statement retained the declaration "that the Holy Scriptures . . . are the only unerring rule of faith and practice." It was not until the 1980 Statement of Beliefs that the "two tiered" hermeneutic, as the means to arrive at truth, was adopted: first, by declaring the Bible to be "the authoritative revealer of doctrines;" and secondly, setting the Writings forth as "a continuing and authoritative source of truth."

"Given by inspiration of God"

Paul in writing to Timothy declared that "all scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Tim. 3:16). What does this mean? Paul used the word, θεοπνευστος, a combination of two words, "God" (θεος), and "breathe" (πνεω) to express what he meant by "inspiration." Does this concept of God-breathed writings mean that the authors were "pens" or "penmen," or at times both? We will discuss this in noting the New Testament in particular.

When Paul defined the origin of Scripture, in context, he was referring to the Old Testament. He had written (verse. 15) that Timothy "from a child had known the holy scriptures" – the Old Testament. This should cause us to pause, and ask some questions. Is all the Old Testament, equally God-inspired in the same sense that we consider the writings of Isaiah or Jeremiah? Or does "God-inspired" cover a wider concept? How do we relate to Judges, Job (the words of his "miserable comforters"), Esther, and the Song of Solomon? We need to recognize that the Spirit of God not only used prophet and priest as penmen, but also men as they preserved the records (Schools of the Prophets) and others as they assembled the "writings" into what became the Old Testament canon.

Consider the book of Judges with its record of the wanton ravishing of the concubine of a renegade Levite (Judges 19). God-inspired? Yet, in Hebrews, where Paul lists individuals of faith, stating that time would fail him should he detail their experiences exhibiting that faith, four of the six named are from the book of Judges. (Heb. 11:32). How then are we to consider the book? What makes it profitable "for instruction in righteousness"?

Careful consideration of the narrative links it with the final comments in Joshua. (Compare Judges 2:6-8 with Joshua 24:29-31.) This becomes the point of departure for the history which follows in the book of Judges until Samuel, who was the last of the judges. This "dark age" in Israel's history began with the demise of those who knew and respected the significance of the leading of the Lord in the past history of Israel. A new generation arose "which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10).

In the darkness which settled on Israel, lights appear in the narrative. The exploits of these "men of faith" are recorded, even those of Samson were preserved with all his failings. Besides the judges whom God raised up, there were individuals who maintained their integrity during this period as evidenced in the book of Ruth. Was the editor of the Book of Judges inspired? We do not even know who he might have been; but by Divine guidance Judges is a part of the canon of the Old Testament. Is this guidance an aspect of the meaning that "all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God"?

There are concepts to be avoided recorded in the Book of Judges. One is the verse which closes the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (21:25; 17:6). This attitude was the cause of the darkness which marked the period of the Judges. While this verse permits one to date the time when the unknown editor brought together the incidents recorded in the book, it also stood as an unheeded warning against the "no organization" concepts, which became a curse to the pre-1980 voices raised up against the apostasy in the community of Adventism. It

was actually twisted out of its context and made to look like a God-given directive.

Consider the book of Job. How are we to receive this book? Are the statements of the three comforters to be given the status of pure unadulterated truth? The eldest, Eliphaz, spoke first. Observe closely the source of his counsel:

Now a thing was secretly brought to me. ... In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me. ... Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before my eyes, ... and I heard a voice saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his Maker? Behold He put no trust in His servants; and His angels He charged with folly." (4:12-18).

Observe how God singled out Eliphaz and rebuked him declaring that he "had not spoken of Me the thing that is right" (42:7). What purpose then serves the book of Job? Is all that "the miserable comforters" said to be discarded, or are we given illustration of the mixture of truth and error used by the chief angel whom God charged with folly? Are we not also given insight into an aspect of the great controversy prior to the wresting of the "first dominion" from the control of Satan by "the power of His Christ" (Rev. 12:10)?

The New Testament Canon

The four gospels compose the first section of the New Testament canon. Two, Matthew and Luke, begin with the birth of Jesus albeit from two different perspectives. Mark begins his gospel with the message of John the Baptist, while John prefaces his gospel with the eternity of the Word who became flesh. The first three gospels are called the Synoptics as they relate incidents in the life of Jesus, while John is noted as Didactic, focusing on the teachings of Jesus.

Mark, often referred to as Peter's gospel, appears to have one distinctive comment. He reveals Christ's reaction to the unbelief of the 12 who did not accept the report of the witnesses who had seen Him following the resurrection (Mark 16:14). Matthew is unique in his recording of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Kingdom parables. The structure of his gospel

reflects a skill his occupation as a tax collector required – balancing books. He sets forth the life of Christ as the balance sheet between Messianic prophecy and its fulfillment. (1:22; 2:15; 3:14; 21:4). Luke's gospel is clearly a summary of research which Luke did on the life of Christ, no doubt during the time he was with Paul when Paul was detained in Ceasarea. (Acts. 24:27). He relates incidents from the birth of Jesus and His early childhood not found in the other gospels as well as unique parables – the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31), the Pharisee and the Publican (18:9-14). Then in Luke alone is found the story of Zacchaeus (19:1-10).

These synoptic gospels clearly support the concept of "thought inspiration." In other words, the authors were God's "penmen" not his "pen." When we consider John's gospel, we have a different picture. Written near the close of the first century, among the last books to be written, if not the last, it is removed from the events and discourses of Jesus by over fifty years; yet it gives a verbatim report of what Jesus said and taught. No human mind can make such a recall. Only the Comforter could bring to John's remembrance the exact words which Jesus spoke decades previously (14:26). It was by direct inspiration that John wrote. He fills in various "gaps" which the Synoptic writers omit such as the Service of Humility performed in the upper room (Chapter 13). He tells of the night conversation of Jesus with Nicodemus (Chapter 3). He places the Word which came to be flesh in eternity with God (Chapter 1).

Then we must ask ourselves the question as to how we are to consider the book of James. While speaking of Jesus as "Lord" (1:1), there is nothing stated in regard to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, nor of the blood of the everlasting covenant. Luther looked upon the epistle of James as *epistola straminea* or an epistle of straw. (*Clark's Commentary*, Vol. VI, p. 795). There can be no question but that James took the text which Paul used in correct context (Romans 4:3) and misused it out of context (James 2:23). How then can the concept of "God breathed" be understood in reference to the Epistle of James? The answer involves the concept that "God breathed"

encompasses more than merely the writing of a single book, but also includes the formation of the canon itself. What does the Epistle of James tell us? From the very beginning of the Apostolic Church, there was a controversy over the doctrine of righteousness by faith. For if it is correctly understood, the power of Satan is broken (Rev. 12:10).

We can safely rest our faith in the position taken by the pioneers of this Movement "that the Holy Scriptures, of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration of God, contain a full revelation of His will to man, and are the *only* infallible rule of faith and practice."

HAR-MAGEDON

With the attention of the world being focused on the Euphrates River Valley, the Biblical connection based in Bible prophecy is being emphasized. With the drying up of the river Euphrates (Rev. 16:12), is associated "a place called in the Hebrew tongue, Armageddon" (16:16). In the Spring 2003 issue of *Adventists Affirm*, a publication affirming Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, was an article by Steve Wohlberg, "Israel and Armageddon." He was commenting on, and taking issue with, Book 11 of the best-selling Left Behind Series, *Armageddon: The Cosmic Battle of the Ages*.

Being of Jewish descent, Wohlberg seems, however, unable to distinguish between Israel and Jerusalem as used in the New Testament. His take-off in the article is in regard to Israel. He writes:

First of all – and this has seismic implications – the New Testament actually describes *two* Israels, not just one. (p. 15; emphasis his).

This is true. There is Israel of the flesh, and Israel of the Spirit. Both are peoples on earth; however when we come to Jerusalem, it is a different picture. There was and is a Jerusalem on earth, the city of David, now the capital of the modern State of Israel. The second Jerusalem is the heavenly, the New Jerusalem which will come "down from God out of heaven" (Rev. 21:2). To fail to recognize this difference between the use of "Jerusalem" and "Israel" in the New Testament leads to a failure to properly understand Jesus' own prophecy concerning the earthly Jerusalem.

In discussing the book of Revelation as he leads up to his answer to the question, "What is Armageddon?" is the emphasis of the fact that John was "in the spirit" and comments, "don't forget this." He accepts this statement of John's condition in vision as a justification to spiritualize the meaning of the prophetic revelation given. So he concludes:

In essence, "Armageddon" in Revelation depicts the final battle between King Jesus with His heavenly armies (19:11-19) fighting against the world-wide forces of Satan with "Mystery Babylon." (p. 21).

In analyzing the deception which Wohlberg is setting forth in this journal dedicated to the affirmation of what Seventh-day Adventists believe, let us note first a very simple fact as given in Revelation. *Armageddon is not a battle but a place* – a place where "the battle of that great day of God Almighty" focuses. (Rev. 16:14). The Greek word for "place" (τοπος) is a part of our English word, topography. It was used by Jesus (John 14:2) when He promised the reality of the future - "I go to prepare a place for you." Jesus was not spiritualizing away Heaven when He declared, "In my Father's house are many mansions."

The word, τοπος, is also used in Heb. 12:17, where it defines the experience of Esau who, in selling his birthright, passed the point of no return. This is equally true of those whom the "spirits of devils" gather to the "place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." They have passed the point of no return in their rebellion against God.

A second factor which Wohlberg ignored whether in ignorance or intentionally is the fact that the plague is one thing in Revelation 16, and the cause is another thing. For example, the first plague, "noisome and grievous sores" fell on those who had received "the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image" (verse. 2). The "mark" and the "image" took place in probationary time, the plague comes after the close of probation. The same is true of the sixth plague: The gathering together into "the place" by the "spirit of devils" is prior to the close of probation, the drying of the water of the great river, Euphrates, is after the close of probation.

A third factor is that this specific place has a name, and that name is given in the Hebrew tongue. Wohlberg, claiming to be of Jewish descent, evidently did not receive a knowledge of the Hebrew language through that descent. Actually the word, "Armageddon" is better translated in the ARV – Har-

Magedon. The first part of the compound word - *Har* - means "mountain." It is the second part of the name that is more difficult of translation. Written in Greek in Revelation, transliterated into English in our Bibles, it nevertheless is a Hebrew designation of a specific place. What "place"? The Hebrew language has no vowels, as such. The three consonants from Magedon which we need to consider are "m (μ)," g (γ)," and "d (δ). In the Hebrew language the Ayin when translated into the Greek is often translated by a gamma (γ). One example is the name, Gomorrah, sister city to Sodom. The Hebrew spelling is *Ayin*, (not Gimel) *Mem, Res, He*. In the LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the city is spelled, Γ(gamma) ομορρας. Gesenius, recognized Hebrew linguist, wrote:

While the Hebrew was a living language, this letter [Ayin] which is peculiar to the Semetic tongue, and extremely difficult for our organs to pronounce, seems to have had ... a two fold pronunciation [a soft and a hard sound]. The harder Ayin which the Arabs called Ghain, was a harsh sound uttered from the bottom of the throat, accompanied by a certain whirring or whizzing, so as resemble the letter "R" when uttered abruptly with a strong rolling. This the Seventy have actually represented by the letter [gamma] in the LXX. (*Hebrew and English of the Old Testament*, p. 737)

(For a diagram of this use of the Greek, *gamma*, and the Hebrew, *ayin*, see Appendix D in the booklet, "The SIGN of the End of Time").

The Hebrew word which meets most closely the textual as well as the linguistic demands and is called a mountain in the Old Testament, is *Mo'ed*, "Mount of the Congregation, in the sides of the north." Isaiah tells us that it is the design of Lucifer to be enthroned there (14:13), and John in Revelation indicates that the "spirits of devils" gather "the kings of the earth" to this place for "the battle of the great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:14, 16). The enthronement of Lucifer at a place in the Hebrew tongue called *Har-Mo'ed* is the signal for the Lord God Almighty to take unto Himself His great power and reign. (See Rev. 11:15-19) How much more meaningful is the prophetic intent when carefully studied than the "spiritualizing" away of the Word of God as Wohlberg has done? Lo, another false prophet has arisen in "Israel."

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

In the *Ecumenical News International* (ENI) for June 2003 was a section captioned, "Ecumenical Kirchentag in Berlin." This "Church Congress" was attended by senior politicians of Germany including the Chancellor, church leaders, writers, musicians, artists and journalists, as well as religious leaders from outside Germany. It was addressed by the Dalai Lama, by the Roman Catholic Patriarch of Jerusalem and by Rabbi Michael Melchior, an Israeli politician.

One thing marred the event. When the plans for this congress had been formulated back in 1996, it had been hoped that the event would have culminated in a shared Eucharist. This was dashed by the Papal Encyclical on the Eucharist issued in April. This Encyclical we plan to discuss in the next issue.

At the conclusion of this congress 16 German denominations signed the Charta Oecumenica, a set of guidelines for "promoting cooperation towards the 'visible unity' of the church."

During the five day congress, a group gathered in a Protestant Church in East Berlin, for a service presided over by a Roman Catholic priest, who was a professor of systematic theology. The 2500 worshipers were invited by the professor to take the bread and wine. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the Vatican's chief doctrinal watchdog condemned the event, and Cardinal Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said, "A general invitation to communion is for us Catholics simply not possible." We shall note, why, in the next WWN.

"Watchman, What of the Night?" is published monthly by the Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Mississippi, Inc., P. O. Box 69, Ozone, AR 72854, USA.

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