

DID WE NOT LEARN OUR LESSON THE LAST TIME?

The Second Evangelical Conferences

ARE ABOUT TO BEGIN

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: Revelation 22:14

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Most of our readers are acquainted with the notorious Evangelical Conferences which occurred from 1954 to 1956. (The most complete narrative on those unfortunate events, and what they led to afterward, will be found in our 146-page *Evangelical Conferences and Their Aftermath*, now in our *Doctrinal History Tractbook* (232 pp., \$17.50 + \$2.00 p&h).

Well, forty-six years later, it appears our leaders may try to finish what they started back then. The objective, in the 1950s, was the attainment of full acceptance by the Protestant denominations; the method used was partial compromise on several of our historic beliefs. What will our objective be during this second series?

The problem is that the only practical way we can buy peace with the Protestants is to push our own distinctive teachings further back into the shadows. It was the only way we could do it back then; it is the only way we will be able to do it now.

It is an astounding fact that the nation of modern Israel is willing to hand over most of its land in order to purchase peace with its neighbors. It is even more incredible that God's last-day people are so willing to give away their beliefs, in trade for acceptance by the other churches.

Seriously, now: *Why do we need acceptance by the other churches?* For over a hundred years, prior to the 1950s, our leaders and workers did not worry about trying to appease the Sundaykeepers! We were heartily disliked back then because we obeyed the law of God and stood in defense of the Bible Sabbath. We still are.

What is this strange infatuation with the fallen churches that is driving our leaders in this direction?

"As the storm approaches a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular side."—*Great Controversy*, 608.

The following information is based on a news release by our General Conference and is accompanied by our comments:

On November 14, 2000, Seventh-day Adventist church leaders in Silver Spring, Maryland, disclosed that they are making arrangements to hold a series of "dialogues" with the World Evangelical Fellowship.

"A proposed series of meetings between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) will aim to break down stereotypes and foster greater understanding between the two groups," said Bert Beverly Beach, director of the General Conference Department of Inter-church Relations.

"The decision was the culmination of extended contacts with the WEF, which reached tentative finalization six days earlier, on November 8, at a meeting of several Adventist leaders and Dr. James Stamoolis, executive director of the WEF's Theological Commission. The meeting, held at our General Conference, was hosted by Bert Beach.

"It's primarily about getting to know each other," Beach said. He admitted that he began working on the idea with Stamoolis about a year earlier. "We want to move beyond false stereotypes, to see where we agree and disagree, and to explore areas where we could mutually benefit by working together, such as on religious liberty initiatives."

Perhaps one of the "religious liberty initiatives" will be to convince the Evangelicals that they should not file *amicus curiae* briefs on behalf of the beleaguered group in Florida who is trying to defend their religious liberty rights,—or any of the other groups which the General Conference later sues in order to deprive them of their religious liberty rights.

But, at the heart of the matter, doctrinal emphasis has always stood between us and the other churches. As Beach said, we want to see where we can agree.

For quite some time, a concerted attempt has been made to make peace with the Sundaykeeping churches. Under the leadership of B.B. Beach, we gave a valuable gold medal to Pope Paul VI on May 18, 1977 (*Gold Medal to the Pope* [MB-54]).

Due to his brinkmanship and remarkable linguistic skills, Beach has, for years, been chairman of an ecumenical council at the World Council of Churches headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. He has served on that committee since 1965,—immediately after Vatican II cleared the way for that joint Vatican-Protestant-Orthodox-Adventist committee to begin holding ongoing discussions.

More recently, accords were signed with the Lutheran Church. In addition, you will recall our discovery a year ago of a series of secret meetings, held at Geneva, between our leaders and several other denominations, at which time we agreed to tone down our public presenta-

tions of the Sabbath.

And now we learn of this latest series of discussions with representatives from the highest levels of the Evangelical churches! This is what we did back in the 1950s. Where we headed? Leaders are powerful. Look what our national leaders have done to America in the past eight years. R.A. Anderson, Leroy E. Froom, and Walter Martin had a powerful impact on our church nearly half a century ago. We are still living with the errors on the nature of Christ, finished atonement at the cross, downgrading of obedience by faith, and other doctrinal errors which they gave us—with the resultant lowering of standards that it brought.

For more information on our ecumenical contacts with Rome, the World Council of Churches, and the National Council of Churches, we refer you to our two-book set on this subject: *Seventh-day Adventist/Vatican Ecumenical Involvement, Book 1 (History—80 pp., \$6.00 + \$1.50 p&h); Book 2 (Documents—146 pp., \$11.00 + \$2.00 p&h).*

Here is additional information on this forthcoming series of meetings by General Conference leaders which, as you might expect, will be led by Beach and Evangelical leaders of their World Evangelical Fellowship:

The first meeting is slated to be held at Glacier View, Colorado, September 9 to 14, 2001. The dialogue-conversation will take the form of a series of papers, produced by both the Adventist Church and the WEF's Theological Commission. The papers are to be presented at a series of annual meetings over a period of four or five years.

Beach says the meetings will help our church work with the other denominations on "religious liberty" issues. —But did you notice that our papers will be presented to their "Theological" Commission. Religious liberty is not theology.

The Theological Commission of the WEF, headed by Stamoolis, facilitates networking between Evangelical theologians and produces scholarly and popular works on Christian theology. Its stated goal, according to Beach, is to "encourage Christians around the world to develop and articulate a Biblical theology which takes into account the needs and opportunities of local contexts within a global perspective."

What is the meaning of that statement? It sounds like the kind of talk which could include additional doctrinal concessions by us, to help "bring us together." The phrase, "Biblical theology," sounds ominous. That was what we were discussing with Walter Martin and Donald Barnhouse back in the 1950s, which resulted in gutting our teachings for the sake of "peace in our time."

Our forefathers preached the truth, unpalatable though it might be. They laid the ax at the root of the tree of modern religious apostasy. Their descendants want to turn and lay the ax at the root of our own tree—and chop the truth into palatable pieces.

In order to alleviate any concerns conservative church members might have, George Reid, director of our General Conference Biblical Research Institute, commented that the forthcoming meetings will not be about forging agreements on theological or doctrinal issues. "There is no interest in ecumenism as such on either side," says Reid.

Instead, he said, the two groups will produce papers aimed at establishing a profile of each group, in order to foster better understanding and to remove stereotypes. But, he added that parties to the dialogue will also review areas of doctrinal agreement and disagreement and discuss hermeneutics, or Biblical interpretation.

If both sides are not interested in "coming together" on theology, why will our papers be presented to their "Theological Commission"?

If both sides are not interested in working through agreements on theological or doctrinal issues, why will "areas of doctrinal agreement and disagreement" be carefully considered?

If all our leaders are concerned about are "religious liberty initiatives," why will we be discussing areas of "Biblical interpretation"?

*Are you aware of the fact that "the presenting of papers" was exactly that which got us into trouble forty-six years ago? Walter Martin would present us with a theological question and Leroy Edwin Froom would spend several weeks writing a subtly worded reply which would compromise our teachings in order to please Martin while trying to retain Adventist words and phrases which would hide the sellout to our members. This process continued for the better part of two years, during an extended series of meetings! The result was our 1947 book, the full title of which was *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. Because of the churches which Martin and Barnhouse represented, these came to be known as the "Evangelical Conferences."*

Now, we are going to present papers once again, at a series of meetings to another group of leaders representing the Evangelical churches. The one in the 1950s was a little under three years in length. We are told that this forthcoming series will extend to "four or five years."

Stamoolis, of the WEF, reportedly said that he hopes the outcome of the talks will be a "clear understanding between the parties in the dialogue regarding each other's position. I would like to see respect and an honest agreement to disagree when, after examination and study, the two sides find themselves on opposite sides of an issue."

Do not underestimate the influence of the World Evangelical Fellowship. With origins that go back to 1846, this organization represents Evangelical Christian denominations and organizations from 111 countries. It claims to serve a constituency of approximately 160 million Christians. Now is a time for prayer. —vf

A SWEET PROMISE FOR EARTHLY PILGRIMS

Revelation 22:14

ENCOURAGEMENT AS WE TRAVEL TO THE CITY OF GOD

A key passage in the Bible is Revelation 22:14.

“Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”—*KJV*.

At the very end of the Bible, we catch a final glimpse of the people of God—and we see that they enter beyond the gates of the Holy City because, through the enabling strength of Christ, they kept the Ten Commandments. Yet this verse need come as no surprise; for, throughout all the pages of Scripture which preceded this final one, God is calling His people to that obedience.

Revelation 22:14 is a landmark passage; for it, along with Isaiah 66:22-23, presents us with a final climactic view of God’s faithful ones, as they enter upon the glories of eternity beyond.

Yet now we are being told that it is not true; it will not happen that way. The new versions tell us the verse says something different.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”—*RSV*.

And, even worse, this concept has found its way into the pages of the *Adventist Review* (see next page)—written by an associate director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute!

Ellen White never, never, never quoted the English Revised or American Revised Version of this verse, even though she had access to them. Instead, she quoted only the King James. That fact provides us with certainty as to the correct translation! She quotes the verse over thirty times in her published books.

“The redeemed saints, who have loved God and kept His commandments here, will enter in through the gates of the city, and have right to the tree of life. They will eat freely of it as our first parents did before their fall.”—*My Life Today*, 355.

“They desire to live for themselves, not for God. He is not in their thoughts; therefore they are classed with unbelievers. Were it possible for them to enter the gates of the city of God, they could have no right to the tree of life, for when God’s commandments were laid before them with all their binding claims they said, No.”—*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 270.

The faithful will enter the city of God because, by the enabling grace of Christ, they were overcomers. They were living clean lives. They were like God. They obeyed God’s commandments. God’s redeeming work enables those willing to submit to become mirrors of His character. This is what it means to be clothed in white robes.

Their characters have been washed in His blood. Here is a passage which is the closest to combining both versions of Revelation 22:14.

“He desires us to seek for a pure, clean soul, a soul washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. It is the white robe of Christ’s righteousness that gives the sinner admittance into the presence of the heavenly angels. Not the color of his hair, but his perfect obedience to all God’s commandments, opens to him the gates of the Holy City.”—7 *Bible Commentary*, 920.

The remainder of this page is an excerpt from a recently completed book manuscript by the present writer.

• **Revelation 22:14.** This very important verse has been changed in the Neutral Text, and therefore in most modern translations.

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.”—*KJV*.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.”—*RSV*; the footnote reads: “Other ancient authorities read do his commandments.”

Ellen White properly quotes this, as it is found in the KJV, many times.

There are interesting aspects to this variant:

First, it is clearly a doctrinal issue, and antinomians would be glad to see the “commandments” taken out of the verse.

Second, the variant is quite Biblical; for there are two other verses in Revelation which says something similar:

“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.”—*Revelation 1:5b, KJV*.

“These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”—*Revelation 7:14b, KJV*.

Third, it is an intriguing fact that both alternatives in Revelation 22:14 rhyme in the Greek!

Blessed are those doing the commandments His.” / Makarioi oi poiountes tas entolas autou.

“Blessed are those washing the robes His.” / Makarioi oi plunontes tas stolas auton.

It is very possible that a copyist became confused, due to the similar sound, and substituted something like the earlier two verses in Revelation. —*vf*