

PFANDL'S PROBLEMS ON THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY

Knowing the true Pfandl in Apocalyptic matters, after his retirement

Dr. Alberto R. Treiyer

www.adventistdistinctivemessages.com

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It is not the first time for theologians and leaders of our church who have held conservative views while serving in high positions, when nearing and especially after retirement, to dare to say things that they previously shied away from. I am finding this to be the case with Gerhard Pfandl, a man I always appreciated as a theologian and also as a friend from the time we both taught theology in Europe. He is now preparing a commentary on the book of Revelation together with Ekkehardt Mueller, his disciple and colleague at the Biblical Research Institute (BRI). I wonder at what they will say while writing under the imprimatur of the BRI, representing the Magisterium of our church. Will they speak or write there “ex-cathedra”? [Excuse the irony. Only the Roman Catholic Church boasts to have an infallible Magisterium].

Actually, in recent times Pfandl has openly rejected an official interpretation of our church that has been held since the 19th Century. He did so without waiting for an official rejection on the part of the church. I speak of the prophetic significance of the **1840** date. He did so by spiritualizing not only the prophetic dates of the trumpets of Revelation, but the very historical projection of these prophecies. (See historical references in my 2014 book, *The Apocalyptic Times of the Sanctuary*, chapter 8). Now Pfandl is in the process of weakening (if not eventually denying) the pivotal date of **1844** by partially spiritualizing the heavenly sanctuary. He is denying the existence of a sanctuary in heaven comprised of two distinct apartments with attendant furnishings. In doing so, he misrepresents and neglects the testimony of the prophets, as well as the Spirit of Prophecy represented in the writings of E. G. White.

In order to appear to be maintaining a conservative perspective, Gerhard affirms that there is in fact a “real sanctuary” in heaven. We have seen something like this among those who lobby for the ordination of women to the pastoral ministry in the church, and yet contend that they are taking a conservative stance. Even if they themselves do not become more liberal over time, those who follow them are certainly encouraged to take additional steps toward an open fall into complete liberalism.

Let me give you an example. Edward Heppenstal wrote a book in the 1970's entitled *Our Heavenly Priest* in which he rejected the notion of a material sanctuary in heaven divided by two distinct rooms. The next step was taken by his disciple Desmond Ford, who ended up completely rejecting our doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary. How many disciples will be encouraged by Gerhard Pfandl to follow that next step of Desmond Ford, especially since he presents his papers under the imprimatur of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI)? [Excuse me, again, for the irony].

I will enumerate the most important problems that Gerhard presents us with in his spiritualizing trend toward the heavenly sanctuary. I will do so by quoting him literally in most cases.

1. Partial denial of a material heavenly sanctuary. Pfandl wrote: “there is not a tent or a temple of stone in heaven, but a heavenly sanctuary made of heavenly material and in heavenly dimensions.” Why? Because, in his words, to believe in a heavenly temple of stone is simply an “absurdity.” Therefore, he concludes by saying that “we do not know exactly what the heavenly sanctuary looks like” (!!!).

Answer:

What does Pfandl really mean by a presumable distinction between earthly and heavenly materials?

Can we not envision by faith a heavenly golden city like that portrayed by John in the book of Revelation? Does the golden city of God not contain gold and other beautiful stones, but a heavenly material with which we are not familiar?

Why complicate the matters in such a ridiculous way? Excuse me for resorting to a similar word employed by Pfandl: “absurdity.” He doesn’t realize that others will completely reject a real and material sanctuary in heaven for the same reason: “absurdity,” as being something “unthinkable.”

Those who reject a spatial corresponding sanctuary in heaven by arguing that it is absurd, do it because they are impregnated by pagan and philosophical Greek patterns, not by Hebrew thought patterns forged by divine revelation.

Again, I wonder how Pfandl and Mueller will end up interpreting the Book of Revelation within the context of presumable scientific research they claim to be adhering to in this book. Will they do as others did it under the same concerns, mixing what John saw with what in their view is not necessary in heaven and...?

2. Denial of two rooms and furnishings in the heavenly sanctuary. Pfandl agrees with Mervyn Moore not only by denial of the 19th Century official interpretation of our church on the trumpets, but also by rejection of a sanctuary in heaven divided by a curtain or door. In their view, veils or doors were only necessary on earth to separate human beings from the presence of God. Therefore, they conclude that since there is presumably no need of veils or doors in the heavenly sanctuary, the heavenly sanctuary is a one room building.

Answer:

Why then did the apostle John in the last book of the Bible see the door of the Most Holy Place being opened at the end, at the seventh trumpet? (Rev 11:19). If there was just one room in the heavenly sanctuary, there was no need to open the second room of that sanctuary at the end. Are we to be compelled to choose the skeptic speculations of Pfandl instead of the clear testimony of the apostle who was taken by God in vision to see the heavenly temple?

The denial of two rooms in the heavenly sanctuary that Pfandl shares with liberal theologians is the first step toward denial of the real existence of a heavenly sanctuary and therefore the event of 1844 (even if he and others presume to keep that date alive). I insist: Pfandl openly rejected the key date 1840 by spiritualizing the trumpets (even the prophetic dates); now he is weakening, if not implicitly denying, the date 1844, by spiritualizing the heavenly sanctuary (no matter if that spiritualization is partial or complete).

3. An open rejection or neglect of what the prophets, apostles of the Lord, and E. G. White saw and wrote about the heavenly sanctuary.

Arguments. What are the arguments advanced by Pfandl to affirm that the prophets who saw in vision the heavenly sanctuary didn’t want us to believe that they saw real material facts in heaven like doors, rooms and furnishings?

a) Because this is, in his view, “absurd” (already answered above).

b) Pfandl brings for consideration a vision of E. G. White published in *Early Writings*, where she saw Satan appearing to be by the throne of God and the people of God bowing themselves before the throne. She clarified later that she didn’t expect anyone to believe that Satan or the mortal company of God’s people were in the New Jerusalem. Gerhard gives this example in an attempt to prove that she didn’t expect anyone to believe that what she was shown of the heavenly sanctuary was actually there.

Answers: a’) But she never gave such an explanation in relation to the correspondence of the earthly and heavenly sanctuary. On the contrary, she emphasized that there are in heaven two rooms where the Lord was expected to fulfill His ministry, in connection with two different moments or phases of ministration.

“As Christ’s ministration was to consist of *two great divisions, each occupying a period of time and having a distinctive place in the heavenly sanctuary*, so the typical ministration consisted of two divisions, the daily and the yearly service, and to each a department of the tabernacle was devoted” (PP 357). “*The holy places of the sanctuary in heaven* are represented by the two apartments in the sanctuary on earth” (GC 414).

“As the sanctuary on earth had two apartments, the holy and the most holy, so *there are two holy places in the sanctuary in Heaven*. And *the ark* containing the law of God, *the altar of incense, and other instruments of service* found in the sanctuary below, *have also their counterpart in the sanctuary above*” (Spirit of Prophecy, IV, 261). “I was also shown a sanctuary upon the earth containing two apartments. It resembled the one in heaven, and I was told that it was a figure of the heavenly. *The furniture of the first apartment of the earthly sanctuary was like that in the first apartment of the heavenly*. The veil was lifted, and *I looked into the holy of holies and saw that the furniture was the same as in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary*” (EW 252-253).

b’) The explanations given by E. G. White in her aforementioned vision, where she denies the actual physical presence of the devil and of mortal beings in heaven, is equivalent to other biblical visions and to the ritual law. For instance, in chapter 3 of his book Zechariah saw the high priest Joshua before Satan, the angel of the Lord, and the Lord Himself. He also saw angels changing the robes of the high priest. But Joshua knew nothing about that.

In the ritual laws, the people and the priests are depicted as being “before the Lord” who was in the Most Holy Place, even when they were in the Holy Place (Lev 4:6-7: *lipene’ Yahweh*), or in the courtyard (Lev 4:15: *lipene’ Yahweh*), or even out of the sanctuary (Judg 21:2), in the city and even out of the camp (2 Sam 21:9: *lipene’ Yahweh*). Did this fact lead anyone in Israel to deny the existence of veils or doors in the earthly sanctuary? Absolutely not! The same happens with the visions of E. G. White and other prophets of the Old Testament regarding the appearance of the people on earth before the throne of God. These visions that show some interactions of earthly beings with heavenly realities cannot be used to deny actual material rooms and furnishings in the heavenly sanctuary, because those personages are not the heavenly pattern.

“Jesus is our Advocate, our High Priest, our Intercessor. Our present position therefore is like that of the Israelites, *standing in the outer court* [of the temple], waiting and looking for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (in SDABC, VII, 913).

See documentation in my books, more definitely in *The Day of Atonement and the Heavenly Judgment* (chapters 5, 7, and 8); *The Glorious Promises of the Sanctuary* (chapter 1); *The Glorious Fulfillments of the Sanctuary* (chapters 5 and 10); *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary* (chapters 4 to 9); *The Apocalyptic Times of the Sanctuary...*, etc.

c) Pfandl believes that “what Moses saw (Ex 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8) was a tent with two apartments with all its furnishings,” without meaning that “there is a tent in heaven.” He says the same regarding the Solomon temple which God revealed to his father David (1 Chr 28:11,12,19). He states literally: “Does this mean that there is a temple of stone in heaven? I don’t believe so. There is a sanctuary in heaven, but it is made of heavenly material, not earthly stones.”

Pfandl insists later: “What was shown to Moses and David were *earthly models of the heavenly sanctuary—not miniature editions of the heavenly sanctuary* but earthly representations that Moses and David could build at the time and place in which they lived.” And again, he affirms that they didn’t see the geography of the heavenly temple but a symbol to represent the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

Answer: a') Could we say—as we asked above—that the heavenly city depicted by John in Revelation is not a golden city, and that the beautiful stones mentioned by John are not in heaven, because the heavenly city is built with heavenly material?

“A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to *spiritualize* away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father’s house. Those who accept the teachings of God’s word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. And yet..., human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God” (GC 674-675).

b') On the other hand, Pfandl is wrong when he states that Moses and David saw “earthly models of the heavenly sanctuary—not miniature editions of the heavenly sanctuary.” Let us affirm, on the contrary, that Moses had a vision of the heavenly sanctuary, and adapted what he saw, like David, to what they had at hand, with additional prescriptions given by the Lord. But the pattern or model that they saw was the very heavenly sanctuary. The following statements of E. G. White are confirmed by several non-Seventh-day Adventist theologians, who understood that in the mountain, Moses had a vision of the heavenly sanctuary (Exod 25:40). See my book *The Day of Atonement and the Heavenly Sanctuary. From the Pentateuch to Revelation*, chapter 7.

“The sanctuary that Moses was commanded to make was to be *after the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary*” (ST June 11, 1894). “Moses made the earthly sanctuary after a pattern which was shown him. Paul teaches that *that pattern was the true sanctuary which is in heaven*. And John testifies that he saw it in heaven” (GC 415). “The announcement, ‘The temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament,’ *points to the opening of the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary*, at the end of the twenty-three hundred days—in 1844—as Christ entered there to perform the closing work of the atonement” (RH Nov 9, 1905).

This is why I insist that Pfandl is weakening our prophetic understanding of the date 1844. As a matter of fact, Pfandl doesn’t believe what E. G. White wrote here and in other places of an actual opening of the most holy place at the end, because he believes that the heavenly sanctuary has no doors and furnishings.

Did Moses receive a model of another model, or a pattern of another pattern, or a symbol of another symbol? No at all. What is real is the temple in heaven, and the sanctuary on earth is a copy or shadow which keeps the real contour of the heavenly original, both spatial and functional.

d) Pfandl argues that “the heavenly sanctuary is much greater, grander, and more beautiful than any earthly tent or temple ever could be,” and resorts to another statement of E. G. White where she says that “the earthly sanctuary was but a ‘faint reflection of its vastness and glory.’”

Answer: We agree. But let us emphasize that greater doesn’t mean antithetic or opposite. Greater doesn’t deny a spatial and functional correspondence between both sanctuaries.

e) In order to strengthen his views of only one room in the heavenly sanctuary, Pfandl quotes Moore when he says that “Christ has been in the presence of the Father since His ascension (Acts 7:55; Rom. 8:34). If there is a veil or curtain in the heavenly sanctuary, it is not to separate Jesus from the Father.” Again, Pfandl insists with Moore that “there is no need for Jesus, our High Priest, to be shielded from exposure to God’s presence, and, thus, there is no need of a veil... *The heavenly sanctuary Jesus entered following His ascension consists of one ‘room,’ not two.*” In other words, Moore and Pfandl presume

that if there were veils or doors in the heavenly temple, the Son would have been separated from His Father from the year 31 to the year 1844.

Answer: This is a misinterpretation of what the Bible says and what E. G. White also wrote. The Father and the Son were seated on a throne in the Holy Place, and both moved to the Most Holy Place at the end of the “continuous” ministration in the first apartment, once the veil or door of the Most Holy Place was opened in 1844 (Dan 7:9-10,13-14; 8:13-14; Rev 11:19).

See a complete documentation of what E. G. White believed on this matter, and how the Bible confirms her statements in my third seminar on the sanctuary, *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary* (2009), chapters 4 to 9.

Conclusion

If you cannot take seriously what Moses and other prophets wrote regarding the heavenly sanctuary, or what E. G. White wrote about it, what will finally remain of our message? If what the prophets portrayed about the heavenly sanctuary was just another symbol, not a real, corresponding concrete substance, why take seriously the function of the heavenly ministry that Pfandl pretends to keep? If we start to introduce our particular and narrow views on what would be in heaven or not according to what is presumably needed there or not, (in contrast to what is needed here or not), we may go too far or lead many, perhaps unwillingly, to lose their faith in the good news of the sanctuary (Heb 4:2).

“It is Satan’s plan to weaken the faith of God’s people in the Testimonies. Next follows skepticism in regard to the vital points of our faith, the pillars of our position, then doubt as to the Holy Scriptures, and then the downward march to perdition...” (4T 211). “Those who have been preparing the way for the people to pay no heed to the... Testimonies of the Spirit of God will see that a tide of errors of all kinds will spring into life” (3SM 83 [1890]).

This spiritualizing trend that is growing in our church is destined to make void the real content of our message. Even if Gerhard tries to keep a notion of a real sanctuary in heaven, by denying in various places in his work what is so clearly affirmed in the testimony of the prophets, he takes a strong step toward a spiritualization of what is in heaven. It is clear to me that Pfandl didn’t read my third seminar on the sanctuary where I deal with these issues carefully, *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*. I submit these thoughts with the hope that many will be awakened to the real dangers we are facing on these issues, coming now amazingly from those who were called by our church to keep the truth that God entrusted to us especially for this time. Actually, our message of the sanctuary is being openly undermined from within.

Perspective Digest 19.3 (2014)

The Reality of the Heavenly Sanctuary

Gerhard Pfandl

In speaking of the heavenly sanctuary we need to avoid two pitfalls: (1) We must avoid putting the earthly sanctuary into heaven and see a tent or a temple of stone in heaven, and (2) we must avoid spiritualizing heavenly things to the point of meaninglessness, or equate the sanctuary with heaven. God reveals heavenly things through visions and dreams (Num. 12:6), which contain an abundance of imagery and symbols. A literal interpretation of these symbols would reduce these prophecies to absurdity.

Prophets describe in symbolic language what they have seen, without explaining

that they are utilizing imagery. Ellen White, for example, describes Satan trying to carry on the work of God in the presence of God in heaven.¹ Because she was criticized for this, she later wrote: "I will give another sentence from the same page: 'I turned to look at the company who were still bowed before the throne.' Now this praying company was in this mortal state, on the earth, yet represented to me as bowed before the throne. I never had the idea that these individuals were actually in the New Jerusalem. Neither did I ever think that any mortal could suppose that I believed that Satan was actually in the New Jerusalem. But did not John see the great red dragon in heaven? Certainly. 'And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns.' Revelation 12:3. What a monster to be in heaven! Here seems to be as good a chance for ridicule as in the interpretation which some have placed upon my statements."²

In visions prophets frequently see representations of the actual but not the actual itself. Concerning the earthly sanctuary, the biblical record tells us that Moses was told four times to make the sanctuary according to the pattern that was shown to him on the mountain (Ex. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8). What Moses saw was a tent with two apartments with all its furnishings, and this is what he built—the Old Testament sanctuary. But this does not mean that there is a tent in heaven.

The temple of Solomon was built according to the instructions David received from God. "David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; and the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries for the dedicated things; . . . 'All this,' said David, 'the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans'" (1 Chron. 28:11, 12, 19).³

Does this mean that there is a temple of stone in heaven? I don't believe so. There is a sanctuary in heaven, but it is made of heavenly material, not earthly stones. The heavenly sanctuary is much greater, grander, and more beautiful than any earthly tent or temple ever could be. What was shown to Moses and David were earthly models of the heavenly sanctuary—not miniature editions of the heavenly sanctuary but earthly representations that Moses and David could build at the time and place in which they lived.

God adapted what He showed them to the circumstances in which they lived. Therefore, there is not a tent or a temple of stone in heaven, but a heavenly sanctuary made of heavenly material and in heavenly dimensions.

Ellen G. White described the heavenly sanctuary in these words: "The abiding place of the King of kings, . . . that temple, filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration, could find, in the most magnificent structure ever reared by human hands, but a faint reflection of its vastness and glory. Yet important truths concerning the heavenly sanctuary and the great work there carried forward for man's redemption were taught by the earthly sanctuary and its services."⁴

The earthly sanctuary was but a "faint reflection of its vastness and glory." The heavenly throne room, the seat of God's government in the universe, where millions of angels stand before God, could never be adequately represented by an earthly structure. Literal language is sometimes utterly inadequate to express the supernatural realities of heaven. Nevertheless, we must never spiritualize the heavenly sanctuary or equate it with heaven itself.

There are many texts in the Old and New Testament that indicate that heaven is not the sanctuary, but that there is a sanctuary in heaven:

“The Lord is in His holy temple, The Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Ps. 11:4).

“We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:1, 2).

The evidence of the Old and New Testament shows that the biblical authors firmly believed in the reality of the heavenly sanctuary. And nowhere do they equate heaven with the sanctuary. Particularly the Book of Revelation makes a clear distinction between heaven and the sanctuary in heaven. Revelation 5:11 provides a perspective as to its size: “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” Ellen White aptly said, “That temple filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians, veil their faces in adoration—no earthly structure could represent its vastness and its glory.”⁵

Does the heavenly sanctuary have two apartments as did the earthly? Marvin Moore, the editor of the magazine *Signs of the Times*, doesn’t think so: “Without the veil in the earthly sanctuary, there would have been only one apartment. Why the veil? Its purpose was to shield the priest from entering directly into God’s presence on a daily basis (see Lev. 16:3). But there is no need for Jesus, our High Priest, to be shielded from exposure to God’s presence, and, thus, there is no need of a veil The heavenly sanctuary Jesus entered following His ascension consists of one ‘room,’ not two.”⁶

Moore correctly says that the dividing curtain is not necessary in the heavenly temple. Christ has been in the presence of the Father since His ascension (Acts 7:55; Rom. 8:34). If there is a veil or curtain in the heavenly sanctuary, it is not to separate Jesus from the Father. Why then did Ellen White speak about two apartments in the heavenly sanctuary? Because in vision she was shown two apartments, just as Moses was shown a tent with two apartments and David a temple with two apartments.

The importance of the two apartments, however, was not just their geography, but also their symbolic function. The two apartments in the sanctuary represented two phases in Christ’s service. Ellen White explains: “As Christ’s ministration was to consist of two great divisions, each occupying a period of time and having a distinctive place in the heavenly sanctuary, so the typical ministration consisted of two divisions, the daily and the yearly service, and to each a department of the tabernacle was devoted.”⁷

The New Testament church believed that after Jesus’ ascension, He ministered for His followers in the very presence of God in the heavenly sanctuary (Acts 7:55; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 9:24). In the epistle to the Hebrews, in particular, the writer is trying to turn the eyes of the Jewish Christians away from the ministry in the earthly sanctuary/temple to the heavenly sanctuary with a more perfect ministry by their own resurrected and ascended Lord and Savior. Gradually, however, the ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary became obscured. The eyes and attention of Christian believers were largely directed toward the confessional, the sacrifice of the mass, saints, and the Virgin Mary in place of the continuous or daily mediation of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Christ’s continuous ministry in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of humanity was diminished, lost sight of, and largely forgotten.

Even if we do not know exactly what the heavenly sanctuary looks like, we can nevertheless speak and proclaim what goes on there. We know that Jesus ministers in the heavenly sanctuary and that by faith we can come to the throne of God and receive mercy and forgiveness—and this is the important thing.

In our proclamation, therefore, let us focus on the ministry of Christ in two phases in the heavenly sanctuary, rather than lose sleep over its architecture or

geography.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Early Writings*, p. 55.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 93.

3. All Scripture references in this column are quoted from the *New King James Version* of the Bible.

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 414.

5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 357.

6. Marvin Moore, *The Case for the Investigative Judgment: Its Biblical Foundation* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2010), p. 277.

7. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, op. cit.