

# SYMPOSIUM ON THE TRUMPETS OF REVELATION

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The symposium was organized by 3 ABN after the reaction of many viewers to the conference of Pr. Kenneth Cox (a well known retired evangelist who gives seminars on Revelation), based on the trumpets, toward the end of July, 2010. The discomfort of the public had to do with his introduction of a futuristic interpretation of this section of Revelation (he had included Al Qaida in the trumpets). Despite the frank and sometimes passionate confrontations in the meetings of the symposium, there was a friendly and Christian atmosphere in all those who intervened. After the open exchange of views, we could speak together during the breaks and fellowship meals, as brothers who have the same Father in heaven.

## Three positions represented

The confrontation took place in three clear directions. First of all, let us say that the staff of 3 ABN is historicist, excepting Pr. John Lomacang (local pastor) who proposed a **futurist view** on the trumpets. In the discussions of the panel, Pr. John Stanton (another local pastor), sided with Pr. Lomacang in a futurist view. Hugo Leon, a good young physician from Chico, California, invited by Kenneth Cox who was also in the panel, sided likewise with the futurist scope, with an opening to believe in a double fulfillment. A long and strong discussion took place about what is understood by the term "futurism." It was clearly stated that it has to do with a projection of all the seals and all the trumpets to the future.

Pr. Lomacang, for instance, could not see in the Destroyer of the fifth trumpet another person out of the devil Himself, who is expected to appear at the end just prior to the coming of the Lord. We told him that the devil always operates through human entities who oppose the Lord and His people, like the king of Babylon in Isa 14, the Roman empire that is represented by the dragon in Rev 13 (and through different ways, always revealing his character of murder and liar summarized by Jesus in John 8:44).

A **second view** was seen in Ranko Stefanovic (Andrews University) and Jon Paulien (Loma Linda), who despite their claim of being historicists, joined the futurist rejection of the historicist fulfillment of several trumpets, and offered, at the same time, a **spiritualized view** of the trumpets similar to what we may find among the catholic interpreters of the Middle Ages. Instead of armies falling upon Rome, they spiritualized the content of the trumpets to project philosophies. They believe that they are historicists because the different philosophies they bring into consideration may be placed in history. But the outcome of their views is elusive, at the point of admitting that "it is uncertain whether John intended every detail of this description to be interpreted" (R. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 304-5). Both futurists and spiritualists cannot offer a clear projection of the prophetic dates specified in the fifth and sixth trumpets.

Stefanovic and Paulien seem not to realize that the resort to allegory was already represented by the interpreters of Alexandria in the third and fourth centuries of our era, as the easiest way to solve difficult texts of the Bible. This is the reason why if the propositions of these two authors now, are not totally idealist (which means a lack of interest in historical fulfillment), they seem to reflect the same trend. Could we label them spiritualists, by the fact that they spiritualize the content of the apocalyptic prophecies? Or, may we label anyway their view as being idealist, under a wider definition of what idealism is in prophetic matters?

On the rank of **historicism** were Pr. Ty Gibson (*Light Bearers Ministry* with James Rafferty, another panelist in the symposium), and Dr. Alberto R. Treiyer (*Adventist Distinctive Messages*, Ph D in the University of Strasbourg, residing in NC) . The difference between them is that Gibson follows Edwin Thiele and C. M. Maxwell when he connects the first trumpet with the fall of Jerusalem, while Treiyer follows the Protestant and Adventist historicist legacy that has Rome as the target of the judgments of God, from the beginning of our Christian dispensation to the end. Jud Lake (Th. D, D. Min., Professor of Preaching and Adventist Studies, Southern University), took also in the panel a clear stand on the historicist interpretation of the trumpets.

All the speakers had the opportunity to share their views for approximately two hours each, excepting Treiyer (me) who was given the opportunity to speak for four hours because one of the speakers didn't come. The meetings began Friday morning at 8:15 AM. After an introduction of Pr. C. A. Murray as moderator, the order of the speakers was Pr. Lomacang and Pr. Gibson in the morning. In the afternoon the turn was for Dr. Stefanovic and Dr. Treiyer. The next day, Saturday morning, Dr. Paulien and Dr. Treiyer again, occupied the entire morning. The session of the panel, with questions and answers, took place after all the speakers gave their message. Four hours in the afternoon of Saturday were spent in discussions, and three hours and a half Sunday morning. Most of the 3 ABN staff attended the meetings.

I had prepared about 500 slides on the trumpets, but I was able to project only 400. This was such a vast material that, for people not trained in theology it could have been difficult to completely assimilate it at once. I will not deal here what I shared with my slides, excepting some points that became relevant in the discussions of the panel. In order to contextualize the different positions, I will share also most of my first speech on the history of the interpretation of the trumpets. This summary purposes to bring out the problems inherent in the current discussions of the trumpets, and to clarify the matters from a historicist perspective.

### **Historical Contextualization**

In my first speech, I dealt with *A Brief Survey of the Historicist Interpretation of the Trumpets in Christendom and in Adventism*. This was necessary in order to contextualize the new views that are being introduced in our church. I stated that, **during the first three centuries** of our Christian era, the antichrist was expected to come after the fall of Rome and sit there with ten kings upon an apostate church. This view was based on the prophecies of Daniel, Paul and John. Rome was, for Christians in those early centuries, the harlot of Rev 17, a persecuting city. They were premillennialists because, in general terms, they believed in a peaceful reign upon the earth for one thousand literal years after the first resurrection. Even if they could not yet see how Rome would be overthrown, they believed that God would certainly punish that city.

**In the fourth century**, however, Roman persecution ceased with the nominal conversion of emperor Constantine and, therefore, the doors were opened to see a connection of the capital of the empire with the heavenly city. How would God punish the capital of the world if that capital was being converted? Since a literal millennium implied a literal destruction of Rome, the only method found to face pre-millennialism was an allegorical interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies. This new proposition came first, from Christians that lived in the Greek town of Alexandria. Interest in a literal millennialism as coming after the destruction of the city of Rome vanished. In addition, it was harder for many to accept the canonicity of the book of Revelation. Thus, Rome could not be seen anymore as being the target of the punishments of God.

A new problem appeared **in the fifth century**. The sack of Rome by Alaric caused trouble. Was Christian Rome being really punished by God? On the other hand, how could Christians answer the accusation of pagans who said that only the gods of ancient Rome could protect her from foreign invasions? A solution was found by Augustine of Hippo, who replaced pre-millennialism by amillennialism. In his *De Civitate Dei*, 20, 7-9, he stated that the church was reigning on the earth spiritually from Pentecost to the Final Judgment. This fact did not imply that evil was already banished from the earth. Barbarian invasions took place because paganism was still represented in Rome, together with a rampant corruption. But Rome would overcome under the reign of the church. Paulus Orosius visited Augustine, and received the necessary encouragement to write a book, *Historiae Adversus Paganus*, where he presaged a new imperial form under Pontifical authority and Barbarian confederate tribes.

### **During the Middle Ages**

The allegorical or spiritualizing view of Augustine of Hippo was foundational for the Middle Ages, and buried historicism for one thousand years. Some isolated exceptions may be seen in Andreas of Caesarea (**fifth/sixth centuries**) who saw in the first trumpet the barbarian invasions, and in Beatus of Liebana (**eighth century**) who saw in the fifth trumpet the Muslim invasions. But Augustine paved the way for others to

conclude that the reign of the church began with the ascension of the bishop of Rome to power. If we translate this into our time, it means that the world will not be destroyed, but converted. The tremendous effort of the papacy to unite the religions and the nations of the world under his leadership is founded in that view that comes from the Middle Ages.

**Since the tenth century**, however, many started to realize that the antichrist prophesied in 2 Thessalonians 2 and the books of Daniel and Revelation was the bishop of Rome. Rome could be seen again, as in the first centuries of the Christian era, a kingdom that deserved the judgments of God for its apostasy. Therefore the trumpets of Revelation were to be applied directly to Rome. When? Looking for evidences in history, the Protestants realized that Western Rome reached an end in the fifth century, after the four most significant blows she received from the Barbarian armies. In addition, since the seventh century Rome was still being punished by God through the Muslim invasions, first by the Saracens and, then, since the thirteenth century by the Turks, as represented by the fifth and sixth trumpets.

This was the classical view of Protestantism **from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries**. It was abandoned in the twentieth century by preterism and futurism, the first one among Protestants under the influence of the literary criticism of the Scriptures; the second one among conservative Evangelicals under the influence of *The Scofield Reference Bible* (1909 and 1917), which adopted also dispensationalism. Ironically, these two propositions, preterism and futurism, had been proposed by Catholic interpreters in the second half of the Middle Ages, to face the Protestant historicism that targeted Rome as the apocalyptic harlot.

### **Seventh-Day Adventists**

At present, we, **Sevent-Day Adventists**, are practically the only heirs of the Protestant Reformation in the historicist interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies. In 1848, *the Adventist Bible or Sabbath Conferences* summarized what became the official interpretation of our church. We live in the time of the seventh church. The seals predict the progressive declension and apostasy of the Christian Church, and the sixth seal deals with the signs of the time of the end. The first four trumpets foretold the Barbarian invasions of the Western Roman Empire (Visigoths, Vandals, Huns, and Heruli). The fifth and sixth trumpets were regarded as depicting the Saracens and the Turks respectively, reaching to August 11, 1840. The experience of John and the 'little book' anticipated the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844.

This official position of our church was reiterated several times along the years, in the General Conference Sessions of 1883, through a committee named by the GC who gave the report at the end of the congress and declared that the historicist view adopted formerly by our church was foundational for the prophetic faith of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Other sessions of the GC Congresses in 1901, 1903, 1905, and 1941, emphasized some or all the issues considered above. The dates 1833 (the meteor fall), August 11, 1840 (the submission of Turkey to the High Powers of Europe), and October 22, 1844 (the disappointment of Rev 10, and the beginning of the seventh trumpet with the priestly ministry of Jesus in the Most Holy), were considered as "Landmarks in Adventist History."

A Gap in Adventist interpretation started in the second half of the twentieth century with a change in the target of the trumpets that was seen in Edwin Thiele and C. Mervyn Maxwell. Rome was no more considered the target of the first trumpet, but rather the divine agent to punish Jerusalem. This view led them, consequently, to spiritualize the third and fourth trumpets. Something similar happened with William Shea in two papers that were never published, and where God seemed, in addition, insane by punishing indiscriminately different entities, even the primitive church in the first trumpet. Are the trumpets judgments of God against an empire that oppressed and continues to oppress His people? Obviously yes: see Jer 51:27,35-36. What was the last empire that should be destroyed by the Lord? Is it not that of Rome, represented by Babylon in Revelation? (cf. Rev 9:14; 17-18).

Jon Paulien and Ranko Stefanovic went even further and spiritualized practically all the trumpets (excepting the first one like Thiele and Maxwell), completely neglecting the historical fulfillments of the fifth and sixth trumpets and its connection with our existence as a denomination. Let us quote, literally, J. Paulien, who confirmed in the 3 ABN Symposium on the Trumpets, his spiritualizing trend.

"I believe the trumpets are to be interpreted as symbols of spiritual realities" (*Decoding Revelation Trumpets*, 362ff]. "The 'historical' events for which we are looking are not as likely to deal with politics and nations and ethnic groups as with ideas and philosophies and great trans-national movements throughout the NT era" (*Toward an Adventist Consensus on the Seven Trumpets of Revelation*, March 16-21, 1989: unpublished manuscript submitted by Paulien to DARCOM). "The fifth and sixth trumpets may parallel Dan 11:40-45" (*ibid*), as being fulfilled in the time of the end.

The fifth trumpet, in Paulien's view, has to do with secularization from the French revolution (Marxism - Communism - Materialism - Evolution - Rationalism - Ecumenism - Spiritualism). The sixth trumpet would be, always in his scope, a union of secular-capitalism, communism, Islam and the third world with any form of Christianity.

Where is Rome in the interpretation of J. Paulien? It is no more the direct target of the trumpets. What to do with the heavenly sanctuary connections which show us that only the seventh trumpet takes place during the time of the priestly ministry in the Most Holy Place (Rev 11:15-19)? What is aimed with these interpretations? We cannot see clearly the target of the judgments of God in his propositions. Like in the Middle Ages, the projections of the apocalyptic prophecies are becoming more and more elusive and diffuse. Rome may again be easily camouflaged as not to allow us to see her throne as being the devil's throne on earth (Rev 13:2-3). If we fail to see this, how could we see the fulfillment of the trumpets in the punishments of God that Rome deserves for what she did? ["I saw the woman (Rome) drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus"(Rev 17:6)].

In this new race of spiritualization that invaded the Protestant world during the entire twentieth century, and that is destroying now, little by little, all the prophetic foundation of our faith, we find R. Stefanovic following the steps of Paulien in his doctoral dissertation. In the book of Stefanovic, published by Andrews University, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 296-7, he considers the *Age of Enlightenment* to be more darkened than the *Dark Ages*. He places contemporary philosophies in the fourth, fifth, and sixth trumpets that appeared during and after the beginning of the time of the end, something that would correspond to the seventh and last trumpet, when the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary is opened (Rev 11:19; cf. 9:13). Thus, when Stefanovic deals with the fifth trumpet, he does not know how to interpret its symbols, and concludes that "it is uncertain whether John intended every detail of this description to be interpreted" (*ibid*, 304-5). If we follow his proposition, we have to reach the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which open the door to the prophetic "time of the end," already in the fourth trumpet, to return to the Islam which appeared at the beginning of the Middle Ages (*ibid*, 296-7, 306-7). With this proposition we would be unable to know when to place the sixth trumpet which, moreover, he places at the very end of the time of the end. In addition, he seems not to realize that the locusts represent armies that fall upon kingdoms and empires, not philosophies (Jud 6:5; 7:12; Jer 51:14,27, etc.).

We have to keep in mind that the trend of spiritualizing the apocalyptic prophecies does not touch only apocalyptic matters, but also several doctrines of the Christian church. Adventism was, is, and will continue being till the end, a reaction against the spiritualization of the days of creation, of the incarnation and resurrection of the Son of God, of the material reality of heaven and the heavenly sanctuary (against pantheism), of God Himself (as not having a body), of the Apocalyptic prophecies, etc. As warned by E. G. White:

*"Spurious scientific theories are coming in as a thief in the night, stealing away the landmarks and undermining the pillars of our faith... The most specious temptations of the enemy are coming in, and they are coming in on the highest, most elevated plane. These spiritualize the doctrines of present truth until there is no distinction between the substance and the shadow" (MM 87). "Thousands who pride themselves on their knowledge regard it as... a proof of learning to cavil at the Scriptures and to spiritualize and explain away their most important truths" (PK 625).*

What is the outcome of this "blatant free-wheeling" departure of Seventh-day Adventist interpretation on the trumpets, as someone called these new trends? (Not in the symposium). A chaos, a great confusion which

gives free reins to any kind of imaginary interpretation. It was heard again and again during the symposium on the trumpets that this section of Revelation is difficult, the most hard to understand. But this section of Revelation enjoyed the greatest consensus during the Protestant Reformation and along the history of our prophetic movement. Why is it now becoming so intriguing and confusing? Is it not because new concerns and hermeneutical principles are being introduced, that come from modern exegesis which imposes several criteria that are not necessarily backed by biblical principles? Is it not because, instead of searching in history, many prefer the easy allegoric way of the Alexandrian fathers and of the Medieval Ages, which consists in spiritualizing and dreaming with imaginary scopes upon the content of Revelation, to solve what they do not understand?

## **Key issues in the confrontation**

### **1) The historical fulfillment of some trumpets**

The traditional argument against historicism from the futurist perspective was always the presumable lack of historical evidence that could confirm the prophetic fulfillment. This was not an exception in the 3 ABN Symposium. In that point, the futurist brothers that attended the meeting were joined by those who held the spiritualist/idealist views. It was evident that both currents needed such a denial of historicism to replace them by their theories, by philosophies instead of concrete historical facts. In order to deny the historicist interpretation, they ridiculed Uriah Smith as much as they could, and stated, emphatically, that the date of August 11, 1840, was not fulfilled and had nothing to do with the prophecy of the sixth trumpet. Again and again was emphasized that even Josiah Litch abandoned this interpretation sometime later in his life.

Since E. G. White confirmed the fulfillment of the time-period of the sixth trumpet as having taken place on that specific date (which implies her acceptance of the interpretation of the dates of the fifth trumpet), her statement was also dismissed by both the futurist and spiritualist views. Three different arguments were employed to disqualify her statements. On one hand, they affirmed that the presumable fulfillment referred by E. G. White in *GC* 334-5, had to do with the prediction of Josiah Litch, not with the prophecy of Revelation. Secondly, it was argued that E. G. White was not a specialist in history, according to a testimony of her son that Jon Paulien read. Third, nothing important for the Turkish empire would have taken place at that moment.

From the historicist viewpoint, we answered to the first argument that the testimony of E. G. White refers unequivocally to the fulfillment of the fifth and sixth trumpets. She said, literally, "in the year 1840 another remarkable *fulfillment of prophecy* excited widespread interest... The event exactly fulfilled the prediction." She dealt not only with the prediction of Josiah Litch, but also with the "fulfillment of prophecy" (that of the sixth trumpet).

To the second point, we replied that we may agree with her son in the fact that some details in her description of different events in history that she included in her book *The Great Controversy*, were not received directly from heaven, but drawn from secular historians. But the history that she brought to our view, as well as her commentaries, had to do with what God revealed her by "the Spirit of God... to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future..., in such a manner as to trace the unfolding of the great testing truths that at different periods have been given to the world..." (*GC* xi).

Dr. Jud Lake brought out also in the panel that, in the same chapter where E. G. White deals with the fulfillment of the sixth trumpet in 1840, she included the meteor fall of 1833 that endorsed the belief in the imminent coming of the Lord. This was another sign of the time of the end foretold in the sixth seal, that had just taken place. She included this event in that chapter to confirm the well founded date of 1844 for the prophecy of Dan 8:14. [An effort was done to ridicule the importance of the date 1833, as well as the earthquake of 1755 in Lisbon, which revealed a lack of knowledge of historical facts that no one took time to answer in the symposium. See my book, *The Seals and the Trumpets* (2005), 177-188].

In addition, E. G. White as well as the millerites and our pioneers were not searching in history to determine what happened in 1840. They were witnessing at what was taking place before their eyes, and their testimony may be today confirmed by secular modern historians. I brought out to the audience some of the impressive

amount of testimonies that I included in my book *The Seals and the Trumpets* (2005), 285-360. Uriah Smith did not invent anything. He kept the legacy that we received from the Protestant Reformation from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century, including the millerites. We may affirm today the same thing by quoting the testimony of secular historians. Their evaluation of history confirms the fulfillment of all the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, not only that of the trumpets.

When one of the brothers wanted to bring the fact that the Turkish Empire did not fall in 1840, we answered that this is not what we were saying, this was not what the millerites were saying, this is not what E. G. White really said, and this is not what was expected to happen. That date marked a turning point in the Turkish empire that was shown in its submission to the high powers of Europe, which continues today with the submission of the Muslim countries to the legality of the United Nations...

To the additional argument that Josiah Litch abandoned the interpretation of the year 1840 as being fulfilled in the precise date he gave, I replied that he also dropped the date 1844 which we are still keeping because the date was well chosen. We may understand him because he was disappointed that the Lord did not come when He was expected to come. But after realizing what was expected to happen in 1844, according to the Bible, our forefathers in prophecy and mission kept all those dates, as we do today. Because this is the truth.

## **2) A presumable dichotomy between exegesis and historical fulfillment**

Each time we tried to connect a text with a specific point in history, Jon Paulien raised his hand to insist that we have to interpret the alluded text under sounded biblical hermeneutical principles. It was evident that for him, a punctual historical connection with the apocalyptic text, is incompatible with modern principles of exegesis. But according to the principles of modern exegesis, we cannot go to history to find, for instance, the exact title of a future entity which fit the number 666. Why? Supposedly, because the readers of the first century could not know it. Could we accept this as an hermeneutical rule to understand the prophecies of Revelation? For many, a spiritualization of Rev 13:18 is, again, the easiest solution, even if that presumable spiritualized solution cannot be held (see my book *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*, chap 10).

The insistence of Paulien, like modern interpreters of Revelation, that the readers of the first century had to understand the message of John in the book of Revelation, may be applied to the meaning of some terms. But if the horses of the sixth trumpet are represented as spitting fire from their mouth, could it not be applied to the gunpowder of the cannons and firearms of the Turks that was introduced at that time in history, because the gunpowder was not known in the first century? Do we have to try to understand the presumable symbol of the colors of the armor and dress depicted in the fifth and sixth trumpets in order to spiritualize that symbol in its application? Could it not be applied literally to the usual color of the armor and dress of the Turkish horsemen?

I am sorry! But we cannot accept such a skeptical principle. Some portions of Revelation were not and could not be understood by the readers of the end of the first century, neither by John (see 1 Pet 1:10-12). If we have the right scope of the prophecy, history will give us the clue to determine if the description had to be interpreted as being literal or symbolic. Again, were our historicist forefathers wrong when they saw the connection of the hails with an army that fell upon Rome from the northern European lands (first trumpet); the connection of the blazing mountain with an army that fell upon Rome from the hot lands of north Africa (second trumpet); and the star that falls from heaven in the third and fifth trumpets, as armies that came from the east like the stars of heaven, to invade the Roman territory? Not per se. While sometimes these connections are not really necessary, they may be legitimately kept as an additional evidence of its fulfillment.

## **3) Imposition of unnecessary literary structural principles**

In my first speech, I introduced some arguments that are usually brought out for consideration to deny that the target of the trumpets is always Rome. These are the concerns and deductions that have been introduced in our church by some of our interpreters from the second half of the twentieth century.

a) *Both the first church and the first seal began in the first century. Therefore, the first trumpet should likewise start in the first century.*

**Answer:** This assumption is unnecessary, contradictory, and arbitrary. The churches of Asia that received the letter of Jesus were raised by Paul several years after the gospel commission of Matt 28. Jerusalem had been destroyed for more than twenty years before John received the visions of Revelation, and his revelation was given to reveal the future (Rev 1:1). The old Jerusalem was no more the concern of the church, but the New Jerusalem that is in heaven wherein they expected to dwell soon (Rev 3:12; see chapters 21 and 22). Moreover, the old Jerusalem fell in the year 70 AD, that is, 40 years after the beginning offered for both the first church and the first seal, not in the year 31 AD. What, then, can we gain with the choice of the destruction of Jerusalem as being the presumable target of the first trumpet? Do we have to impose an arbitrary literary principle to initiate the trumpets at the same time of the churches and the seals in the year 31? It doesn't fit historically, and it is not required by the book of Revelation.

We have to keep in mind, as I asserted more than once, that the message of Revelation was given to the seven churches which were being persecuted by "*the chief agent in making war against Christ and His people during the first centuries of the Christian era,*" "*the Roman Empire, in which paganism was the prevailing religion*" (GC 438). The ten plagues that punished the Egyptian Empire did not fall upon the Egyptians at the beginning of the outcry of the Israelites, but after a long time of oppression. We may see the same with the martyrs of the first centuries. Why then, would we have to require to place the first trumpet in the first century, if we are unable to place it in the year 31? In the case of the trumpets, we may add that the Barbarians were invading the empire from the time of the apostle John at the end of the first century. But the Revelator chose their four conclusive blows against Rome that took place in the fifth century. The capital of the Western Empire reached an end in the fifth century by those four scourges of God. No other kingdom threatened the Roman empire before, causing its final and definitive downfall.

b) *Since every empire revealed in the visions of Daniel comprehended the same period of time, the visions of Revelation (churches - seals - trumpets) should also comprehend the same span of time.*

**Answer:** We see here again, a shift of concern *from* looking at the entities which would undermine and finally overthrow the Roman Empire, *to* a concern for making fit a literary pattern arbitrarily imposed by the interpreter.

As a matter of fact, the churches and the seals deal with ecclesiastical matters; the trumpets with state issues. Daniel revealed different empires, while John dealt with the last empire, that is, Rome. For Rome, both Daniel and John projected three moments confirmed by history, that are reflected even in the triple structure of the trumpets (chapter 8: four trumpets; chapter 9: two trumpets; chapter 11: one trumpet). The persecuting character of Rome that deserved to be punished by God were Western Pagan Rome (four trumpets), Eastern Rome along with the Sacro-Roman Empire of the Middle Ages (two trumpets); and the final deception of Babylon of the last days (Rome again under papal political recovery).

Let us project these three moments in the words of E. G. White and other prophetic facts.

**I. Pagan Rome.** It was "*the chief agent in making war against Christ and His people during the first centuries of the Christian era,*" "*the Roman Empire, in which paganism was the prevailing religion*" (GC 438). This caused the first tribulation (Rev 1:9; 2:10; see Rom 5:3).

**II. Papal Rome.** "In the sixth century the papacy had become firmly established. Its seat of power was fixed in the imperial city, and the bishop of Rome was declared to be the head over the entire church. *Paganism had given place to the papacy...* (Rev 13:2)" (GC 54). This caused the second tribulation, called the great tribulation (Matt 24:21,29), portrayed in the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-10). "The mangled forms of millions of martyrs cried to God for vengeance upon that apostate power" who imposed the Inquisition in the thirteenth century (GC 59: she is applying here, as in other statements, the fifth seal to the Middle Ages).

**III. Papal Rome raised again in the time of the end to form the great Babylon.** "*The papacy is just what prophecy declared that she would be, the apostasy of the latter times (2 Thess 2:3-4)*" (GC 571). In union with the entire world, it will cause the third and last Roman tribulation (Dan 12:1; Rev 12:17; 13:15-18; 14:12).

In connection with the plagues, we may say (as a member of the 3 ABN staff suggested me in a later exchange), that the seven trumpets were preparatory for the last seven plagues. The nations at the end will not pay attention to the divine warnings that come from history in the way God punished Rome for persecuting His people through the six former trumpets (Rev 9:20-21). Then the Lord is justified before the universe to give her a final and definitive blow through the seventh trumpet which includes the seven last plagues (Rev 11:18; 15:1; 16:1). Let us be careful as not to conceal or elude this target of the judgments of God through the ages, by adopting hermeneutical principles which were overcome by Protestantism. Let us not spiritualize the trumpets in philosophies which do not allow us to see how evil that "*mammoth system of deception*" is in the light of the throne of God and the court of the universe (GC 570).

#### **4) A presumable dichotomy between exegesis and the testimonies of the Spirit of Prophecy**

Another point in the debate had to do with the employment of the writings of E. G. White to deal with biblical matters. May her statements be taken only under a spiritual scope (as suggested in some moments of the discussion), or can they be taken as a heavenly guidance to know how to interpret a vision or text of the book of Revelation? Jon Paulien repeated several times that we may gather all the statements of E. G. White and cause her to say whatever thing we want. He insisted, therefore, in the need of working with the book of Revelation under sound hermeneutical principles based on a careful exegesis of the text. This may sound good, but the problem is that he resorted to this argument not only when the futurists brought into consideration some challenging testimonies of the Spirit of Prophecy, but also when he was confronted with biblical facts that deny his views. In addition, he reiterated a principle that he included formerly in one of his books.

For Jon Paulien, we may only take into account, basically, the statements of E. G. White which were published. I replied in my third speech with the statement of William C. White, son of E. G. White. On May 23, 1899, he wrote a letter saying what the Lord required to his mother, toward the end of her life: "About four years ago the word came to her, 'Gather up the fragments, let nothing be lost,' and this has been repeated many times since" (A. L. White, *Ellen G. White*: IV, 451). This is the reason why the White Center was organized in our church. Concerning the vision of Rev 5, that we will briefly consider below, she wrote in Dec 24, 1902: "I spoke from the fifth chapter of Revelation. This chapter had been impressed on my mind, and I gave to the people what the Lord had given me" (Lt 211, "Elshaven," St. Helena, California).

Even recognizing the need felt in the symposium of an hermeneutical study of the statements of E. G. White that takes into account the context of her statements..., I asserted that my problem with some collections of her statements has often to do not with what she wrote, but rather with a selective compilation that neglects other statements that don't fit the view of the compiler. In addition, the risk of pressing a piece of the apocalyptic puzzle to make it fit in a place where it doesn't fit, may damage the puzzle. When this happens, would it not be an indication that we have to put that piece aside, and choose the right piece? The worst thing we can do is to face a wrong interpretation with another wrong assumption.

#### ***Other related visions***

This leads us to ***the other related visions of the first half of Revelation***. In order to face futurism which places the seals and the trumpets in the future, many have tried to project the vision of the throne in Rev 4 and 5 to an inaugural setting. They bring the fact that the candelabrum (Rev 4:5) is in the Holy Place. But she never said that the throne in that vision was in the Holy Place. On the contrary, she placed it unequivocally in the Most Holy (ST 05-02-95, 7; 10-10-1892, 1; 1 MR 109; A. Treiyer, *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*, 310-311). If the candelabrum may be seen before the throne it is because (as Sarah Peck, secretary of E. G. White explained it), the door between the Holy and Most Holy places was open (Rev 4:1; Ms 27, 1891).



When some futurists bring into consideration the statements of E. G. White which place that vision in the Most Holy Place, in the end of the world, in a context of judgment, some keep silent, and others start to affirm that we cannot take all her writings as being authoritative in biblical interpretation... We will never convince futurist interpreters replying them in this way. In addition, a careful exegesis of these chapters confirm what E. G. White wrote about it. Contrary to what we were told for years by some Adventist interpreters, the vision is full of imagery of judgment. This is generally recognized outside of our church, and this was held by most of our writers during the twentieth century. Neither its connection with the Most Holy Place may be denied, as I demonstrated again and again in my books. See especially the two appendixes of my book *The Final Crisis in Revelation 4 & 5*, where I answer all the arguments brought by J. Paulien and R. Stefanovic to deny a judgment scene in that vision.

The vision of the throne in Rev 4 and 5, as well as the vision of the seals, were considered in the symposium as being crucial for the interpretation of the trumpets, because they form part of the literary structure of the first half of Revelation. Although I asked to leave the consideration of that vision for another occasion because this was not the principal purpose of the symposium, I had to say something about that vision too. According to E. G. White, the sealed book of Rev 5 was not yet taken and opened. This is still expected to happen in the near future. She never connected this event to an inaugural setting, but to the conclusion of the ministration of the Lamb at the end of the world. The same fact we find in the first interpreter of the book of Revelation in the second century, who projected that vision toward the future (see references in A. Treiyer, *The Final Crisis in Rev 4 and 5*, 16).

The very fact that John is crying because the Lamb is not appearing in the vision before his eyes, reveals that he was brought to contemplate a final decision. Why was he crying if that vision had supposedly to do with what had taken place more than 60 years before, in the year 31? He knew that the Lamb had been enthroned at that time (Rev 3:21). It is obvious, therefore, that the vision of the throne of Rev 4 and 5 portrays a new scene. There is emphasized the fact that no one in heaven and on earth is able to take and open the book of inheritance in the final court of judgment, excepting the Lamb of God.

### ***A typological confusion***

The pioneers of the Adventist movement and E. G. White were clear on what was expected to happen at the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary, and what was to happen at the end of the investigative judgment. But for years, Andrews University has been offering an upside down picture by pressing on some pieces of the prophetic and typological puzzle in a place where they do not fit. The right piece indicates that in the first crowning at the inauguration Jesus sat down on a mediatorial priestly kingdom according to the order of Melchisedec (upon the throne of grace: Heb 4:16), not yet upon the throne of the New Jerusalem prefigured by the throne of David. But a second crowning was and is still expected to take place in the end, when the Son is to sit on the throne of His glory (that of David: Matt 25:31), as King of kings and Lord of lords, and as King of the New Jerusalem. This was represented by the Lamb taking and opening the sealed book of Rev 5, at the time of the Lamb's wedding (Rev 19:7-8).

Concerning the two coronations with their two specific moments, inaugural and final, E. G. White wrote, based first on Zech 6:

"He 'shall sit and rule upon His throne; and He shall be a priest upon His throne.' Not now 'upon the throne of His glory;' *the kingdom of glory* has not yet been ushered in. *Not until His work as a mediator shall be ended will God 'give Him the throne of His father David,'* a kingdom of which 'there shall be no end' (Luke 1:32-3)" (GC 416). "*This will not take place until Jesus has finished His priestly office in the heavenly sanctuary, and lays off His priestly attire, and puts on His most kingly robes, and crown, to ride forth on a cloudy chariot, to 'thresh the heathen in anger,' and deliver His people*" like David did when he was crowned (*The Early Years*, I, 125-6).

Concerning the moment to take the sealed book that John saw in the right hand of God (Rev 5:1), she dealt first with the resignation of the Jewish nation to theocracy and, therefore, to the covenant that made them the

people of the Lord. "Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open... This decision will appear before them *in the day when this book is unsealed* by the Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (COL 294). This shows us that at the inauguration, that book was not yet sealed. We are not told when that book was sealed, but that it will be taken and opened by the Lamb at the end. "The time will come when all will praise Him..., saying, 'Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof...'" (RH, 6-4-95, 6). While other songs of Rev 5 were connected by E. G. White to different moments, this one dealing with the occasion expected for taking and opening the sealed book, was never connected to an inaugural setting.

Under this context, the seals and the trumpets are to be seen as a final "grand review" (in RH, July 4, 1893) of the testimony left by those who claimed the inheritance promised in the book (see Rev 6:11, where the definitive white robes are granted to the martyrs after they died, a work expected to happen in the final judgment: Heb 9:27; Rev 3:4-5). The seventh seal includes the seven trumpets and the ministry of Jesus before the golden altar, which aims to show how God fulfilled His part in the covenant. We see there the answers of God to the outcries of His oppressed people through the judgment of the trumpets and the heavenly intercession on the golden altar (Rev 8:2-5). Under this scope, all the statements of E. G. White and of the Bible that may become embarrassing today, to those who cling to a presumable inaugural scope in Rev 4 and 5, fit the puzzle without needing to resort to futurism or a double fulfillment to explain these prophecies. [For a careful consideration of all the statements of E. G. White about these matters, see my books *The Final Crisis in Rev 4 and 5*; *The Seals and the Trumpets*; and more recently, *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*: [www.adventistdistinctivemessages.com](http://www.adventistdistinctivemessages.com)].

### **5) The need to be "spiritual" in the presentation of the trumpets**

J. Paulien announced that some are trying to form a kind of Biblical Research Center in Loma Linda. "What would you do, Alberto, to be practical and spiritual with your historicism?", he asked me in a friendly illustrative joke, stating that this is our challenge today. Thus, he added that this new biblical research center purposes to study the prophecies of Revelation under a spiritual and practical approach. This sounds good, but we have to be cautious. There is a trend in the Western coast to depreciate the millerites and the pioneers of our church for supposedly having introduced historical issues (dates, beasts, harlots, etc.), without a spiritual message. I am not so sure that this was always the case with our pioneers. But I am certain that we have to be careful as not to try to offer a spiritual application of the prophecies disincarnated from their historical fulfillment. The book of Revelation cannot be reduced to an homiletical treatise. The spiritual and practical messages and studies of Revelation are to be drawn from its connection with history. We cannot divorce historicism from homiletics, as if both cannot work together.

I replied to Jon saying that my books and my evangelistic seminars are regularly considered as being highly spiritual. In this context, I read what Dr. Fernando Canale wrote in the preface of my book *The Apocalyptic Expectations of the Sanctuary*. He specified that "the author [me] helps the reader to experience the prophecies from the perspective of the historical experience of the people of God through the centuries." This is what allows us to be highly spiritual in our message. The people of God needed to know, from the perspective of the end of the first century, what would happen to the church and to the Roman Empire that was persecuting the church. They needed a heavenly guidance that would allow them to keep standing in the midst of the trouble, till the end of the world (Matt 28:20). They needed to know that God was in control of their history and their destiny! Nothing will give more faith, peace of mind under tribulations, and deep spirituality than to know these facts, brought only by historicism.

We have to be able to prove how God guided his people and the nations throughout the ages, to know what the place we occupy in the plan of God is. This will cause us to be excited as the disciples of Emmaus, when the Lord opened before them the prophecies that were being fulfilled in their days (Luke 24:32). Who cannot be excited today, after realizing that we are the last part of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, and that the Lord is calling us to enroll under His banner?

## Conclusion

The last question raised in the panel came from one of the members of the 3 ABN staff. He said that he had received a message of a Catholic viewer who asked him if the Seventh-Day Adventist Church had changed in her interpretation of the trumpets. "Before the different positions found here" (in the panel), he asked, "how may I answer him?"

I answered that our church has an official position on the trumpets that comes from 1848, and was corroborated in several sessions of the General Conference. DARCOM [Daniel and Revelation Committee] in the eighties did not reject that official position. Since no paper was then presented which satisfied all the requirements of the biblical text and history, they decided not to publish anything in the matter, expecting that God would guide the church to understand better these prophecies in the future. If the church will move in the future to another direction, we do not know (I don't think so). In the meantime, it is advisable to keep the official position of our church. J. Paulien agreed.

But the challenge for the church remains. Will our church study this subject as to really understand it, and stop saying that this is a problematic text? We may always grow and improve in our understanding of these prophecies. But, please! Let us progress in our understanding and interpretation of the apocalyptic prophecies along the same lines as our forefathers!

PS: I was told by indirect sources that, after the meetings, three of the futurist brothers abandoned their futuristic approach on the trumpets. I want to congratulate especially Pr. Ty Gibson for the great job he did in the open and strong discussions that took place in the panel. Also Pr. C. A. Murray played well his role of moderator, assuming an impartial attitude during the discussions. I likewise want to congratulate 3 ABN for calling us to discuss these important issues for our faith, and especially Shelley Quinn who organized the symposium.