

## DIE SIEBEN POSAUNEN [THE SEVEN TRUMPETS]

Dr. Ekkehardt Mueller, BRI

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October 2014

I have with me a German copy of a proposition on the trumpets prepared by Dr. E. Mueller, who works in the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) of the General Conference (GC). No date is given for this paper. But it clearly reveals the *liberal trend* taken by him and Gerhard Pfandl in the BRI concerning some key apocalyptic issues like the trumpets. That *liberal trend* was introduced into our church at the beginning of the 20th Century, after the death of E. G. White. We must emphasize that this liberal interpretation has been rejected by our church.

Nevertheless, during the last quarter of the 20th Century, this liberal trend was reassumed by some scholars for several reasons. One of them is that the church did not respond to all of the questions raised on the matter. In several theological centers of the church in the USA, Australia, and Europe, the historicist interpretation of the trumpets was neglected and rejected. Even for me, it was hard to accept some points related to the official view. This happened until I decided to study the matter carefully, not only from a Biblical perspective, but also from a historical one. Now that I have all the documentation needed from a Biblical *and* historical perspective, I am passionate about the subject.

This *liberal trend* is now attempting to overthrow the official interpretation of the trumpets that our church had since its beginning, which in turn was confirmed by one Congress of the GC and reaffirmed by another Congress, as well as by E. G. White on two occasions, in the 19th Century and at the beginning of the 20th Century.<sup>1</sup> We may see again, in the paper of Mueller, a clear trend toward certain modern methodologies that are more interested in literary structural motives and imaginary parallelisms than in theology and history.

Actually, Ekkehardt sees an Egyptian motive in the first four trumpets and a Babylonian motive in the last three. But, surprisingly, he sees secularism already in the fourth and the fifth trumpets, following in this matter J. Paulien and R. Stefanovic. Let us keep in mind that secularism is represented by an Egyptian motive in Rev 11:9, and not before the time of the end, but toward the end of the 1260 days (as the king of the south [Egypt] in Dan 11:40). But Mueller places the fifth trumpet *within* the 1260 days, that is, not beyond 1798 when secularism just began. Furthermore, how is it that he sees secularism already in the fourth trumpet? Do we have to look for secularism before the time corresponding to the 1260 days, that is, before the sixth century? If Ekkehardt finds Egyptian motives in the first four trumpets, why can't secularism be seen within the first trumpet, that is, during the first century?

The main problem with these modern (mainly European) interpretations (except for Jon Paulien who was born in NY), has to do with *their trend to spiritualize the historical fulfillments* of the visions of Revelation. They don't realize that the trumpets are literal wars against the Roman Empire, not just philosophies. For this reason, the proposition of Jon Paulien on the

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<sup>1</sup>For the problems of Mueller (p 33), and others who in recent times are trying to neglect the clear statement of E. G. White on the fifth and sixth trumpets, see JónSteffánson, *From Clear Fulfillment to Complex Prophecy: The History of the Adventist Interpretation of Revelation 9, from 1833 to 1957* (Master Thesis, Andrews University, June 2013); A. R. Treiyer, *The Mystery of the Apocalyptic Trumpets Unraveled* (2012); *The Apocalyptic Times of the Sanctuary. Biblical, Historical and Astronomical Confirmation* (2014).

trumpets was rejected by the BRI in the 80's, but it is amazingly supported now by two Austrian members of the BRI: Pfandl (now retired) and his disciple Mueller.

Several members of the BRI in the 80's correctly envisioned armies in the description of the trumpets, in the context of divine judgments. I attended those meetings. Those scourges of God were to fall upon the last oppressive empire revealed in the book of Daniel, during both of its phases, the imperial one and the papal one. Thus were the trumpets interpreted by Protestants for centuries. But now these newly improvised propositions put aside the history of interpretation of the trumpets in order to offer something different that no one shared in the past, as if centuries later, God would be revealing these matters only to them. They seem not to realize that, to a certain degree, they are returning to the spiritualization style of the Middle Ages.

Let me illustrate some more of the biggest problems Ekkehardt's propositions face. In page 3, he confirms that the trumpets are a response from God for the persecution of His children. Good! But we cannot clearly see in his paper how and whom God restrains in order to protect His people. Did God punish His people with apostasies and philosophies? For instance, he presumes that in the third trumpet Satan is the star which leads to the apostasy of Christianity, with its intolerance and persecution of dissidents. Is God there punishing the dissidents of the Roman antichrist, that is, the faithful remnant? (!!!).

What are the problems that lead Mueller to reject the Protestant and Adventist interpretation of the trumpets as applicable to Rome? Let me summarize them:

**1. Structural.** He introduces rules that are not necessarily biblical or apocalyptic. For instance, he assumes in page 8 that the trumpets must start at the same time as the seals, that is, beginning at the time of Christ. But he then breaks this rule by placing the first trumpet 40 years after Jesus died, with the destruction of Jerusalem (note: at that time, history was not yet divided into centuries after Christ, so nothing is gained by generalizing a presumable fulfillment in the first century).

Does each one of the seven trumpets occupy the same span of time as each one of the seven plagues, each one of the seven seals, each one of the seven churches, and each one of the seven thunders? Of course not! The book of Revelation reveals different purposes for all these prophecies. And certainly, the purpose of the seals is not the same as that of the trumpets. I agree that the septet series of the churches, the seals, and the trumpets all embrace the whole Christian dispensation. But we have to be more concerned with the theological and historical purpose of these visions, rather than delve into formal literary and structural parallelisms presumed by the interpreter.

**2. Historical.** In pages 19-20, Ekkehardt feels uncomfortable with the fact that the first four trumpets that led to the fall of the Old Roman Empire all took place in one century, with a prior and later gap of a few centuries without any trumpet blasts. In his view, this is unusual in Apocalyptic prophecies.

What we must remember is that the Barbarian invasions began during the time of John. The fact that these four decisive blows against the Roman Empire climaxed during the fourth and fifth centuries doesn't mean they were absent prior to that. We should also note that the plagues of Egypt occurred in a relatively short period of time, after four long centuries of oppression (Gen 15:13-14). The seven plagues of Revelation will take place at the end also in a short period of time. What then forbids God from representing the first four trumpets with these critical and decisive invasions that led to the fall of Rome?

**3. Spiritualization of the prophetic dates.** When *idealistic* or *spiritualized trends* are used in Apocalyptic interpretation, rather than realistic and historical ones, prophetic dates are subsequently relativized if not totally dismissed. This is the case with these new propositions, especially in connection with the prophetic dates of the trumpets. Ekkehardt also adopts a denial of a specific prophetic date in Rev 9:15, following in this way the trend of Protestant interpreters after the introduction of the typical skepticism of the Enlightenment and Rationalism which were characteristic of the 19th and 20th centuries. This denial of the prophetic dates within a presumed historicist scheme is the most dangerous introduction of an approach that ended with the destruction of historicism in Protestant and Evangelical milieus, and will likely also end with us forgetting our historicist legacy...

**4. Departure from the parallels of Daniel and Revelation.** In his tentative study on the trumpets, Mueller does not dwell at all on the parallels of Daniel and Revelation. These parallels not only repeat, but also enlarge the older visions with new visions. It is necessary to keep those parallels in the interpretation of the trumpets, in order to see their most obvious connection with the judgments of God as being solely executed against the last imperial “beast”, namely, Rome. This is the reason why Mueller cannot see the clearest literary structure of the first four trumpets as falling upon Western Imperial Rome (Rev 8), with the following two trumpets (Rev 9) falling upon Eastern Orthodox Rome and Papal Rome (or Holy Roman Empire), and the last one upon the Babylon of the last days in the time of the end, more specifically in the time of the heavenly ministration in the Most Holy Place (Rev 11:15-19).

What do we do with Rev 10 and the historicist interpretation that places the Millerite movement between the sixth trumpet (with a heavenly ministry in the holy place: Rev 9:13), and the seventh trumpet with the birth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its mission on earth? Actually, the seventh and final trumpet is not only about the final battle, but also details the preaching of the message of that very seventh trumpet (see Isaiah 58:1), in connection with the heavenly ministration in the Most Holy Place (Rev 11:15,18-19; see 10:7: “in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound the trumpet, *the mystery of God will be completed*, just as he announced to his servants the prophets”; cf. Dan 8:14,17,19; 12:4,9-10).

**5. Wandering.** We are not questioning the sincerity of Mueller who concludes that his own interpretation is just a suggestive contribution to the discussion on the trumpets, and not necessarily the truth (pages 33-34). He deals with his particular interpretation of prophetic matters in terms of probabilities. Therefore, we should bid him return to the old safe paths, to the right and sure scheme which we as Seventh-day Adventists inherited from the Protestant Reformation and the pioneers of our church (in spite of other Protestant churches’ unfortunate deviation from this message given the Rationalistic Protestant Reformation). There is no reason to wander about with empty rationalistic spiritualizations of Revelation when we have a wonderful interpretive legacy that is backed by centuries of history.