

**PART ONE:  
HOW TO READ GOD'S  
THREE BOOKS:  
A CHRIST-CENTERED  
INTRODUCTION**

JESUS:

“Have you not read?” (Matt 12:3)

“Did you ever read?” (Matt 21:42)

“When you read, try to understand”  
(Matt 24:15)

“How do you read?” (Lk 10:26)

PHILLIP:

“Do you understand what you are reading?”  
(Acts 8:30)

PAUL:

“There is a veil on their hearts when they read the  
Old Testament” (2 Cor 3:14)

“Give attention to reading” (1 Tim 4:13)

JOHN:

“Blessed is the one who reads” (Rev 1:3)

## 1. HOW TO READ GOD’S THREE BOOKS: A CHRIST-CENTERED INTRODUCTION

*“Blessed is the one who reads”–John (Rev 1:3).*

### A Book about God’s Books

Hi there! Welcome to what I hope will be a delightful reading experience for you. Thank you for picking up my book and I hope you will embark on a journey with me and with *The Cosmic Christ of Scripture*. The fact that you are reading this introduction suggests that you have an interest in the issues indicated in my title: *How to Read God’s Three Books*. The term “God’s three books” identifies **(1) the Book of Incarnation** written in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, **(2) the Book of Inspiration** written in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, and **(3) the Book of Creation** written in the cosmos.<sup>1</sup>

Dear reader, you may be a believer in God who wants to further develop your skills for reading God’s books. Or you may be a skeptic or agnostic who is not sure if there are really such

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<sup>1</sup>It is important to note, first, that the term “book” is used figuratively in reference to Christ and the cosmos. Second, as will be argued in subsequent pages, we need to be critically appreciative of the roles that human tradition, experience, and reason have played in the reading of these three books. See Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1990).

things as divine books.<sup>1</sup> You may be an atheist who is committed to the proposition that there is no God and that all “so-called” divine books are frauds. Whoever you are, the principles presented in this book are worthy of your careful consideration. I am happy that you have begun this journey with me. Let’s stay together and see what the end will be!

### The Cosmic Christ of Scripture

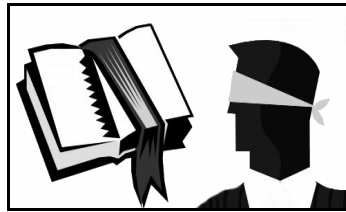
My reference to the Cosmic Christ highlights the Scripture teaching that Christ is not a philosophical principle or an energy diffused throughout the cosmos. Rather, Christ is the Creator of the universe. “All things were made by Him” (Jn 1:3). “In Him all things consist” (Col 1:17).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Later chapters will present biblical data to support the thesis that the book of Christ is divine in terms of an ontological identity of Christ as God as well as an epistemological identity of Christ as the Word of God (Jn 1:1). In contrast, the books of Scripture and Cosmos do not participate in ontological identity with divinity. Thus there is no excuse for bibliolatry and cosmolatry—the worship of the Bible and the Cosmos (Jn 5:39-40; Rom 1:20-25). As divine books, the Bible and the cosmos possess an epistemological identity as words of God. Nevertheless, the Bible has epistemological primacy because of the linguistic cognitive specificity which distinguishes the Bible from the Cosmos. See Fernando Canale, “Revelation and Inspiration: Method for a New Approach,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)* 31, no. 3 (1993): 171-194; “Revelation and Inspiration: The Classical Model,” *AUSS* 32, no. 2 (1994) 7-28; “Revelation and Inspiration: The Liberal Model,” *AUSS* 32, no. 3 (1994): 169-195; “Revelation and Inspiration: The Historical-Cognitive Model,” *AUSS* 33 (1995): 5-38; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *God, Scripture and Hermeneutics: First Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 146-148.

<sup>2</sup>This biblical perspective on the Cosmic Christ stands in sharp contrast to the stoic philosophy which has influenced Christian thought, the humanism of the Renaissance, and the pantheistic philosophy of Spinoza. See Stephen K. Strange, ed. *Stoicism: Traditions and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

The teaching of Scripture is often misunderstood because of a rejection of what it reveals about Christ. The Apostle Paul discusses the removing of the veil of misunderstanding which covers the hearts and minds of people when they read Scripture.



He wrote: **“Their minds** were blinded: for **until this day remains the same veil not taken away in the reading of the Old Testament; that veil is taken away in Christ.** However, even until this day, when Moses

is read, the veil is upon **their heart.** Nevertheless, when they turn to the Lord, the veil will be taken away” (2 Cor 3:14-16).

It seems that the veil of misunderstanding sometimes remains even on the hearts of Christians when they read the New Testament. The Apostle Peter wrote of how “our beloved brother **Paul** also according to the wisdom given to him **has written to you,** as also in all his epistles, . . . **some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable twist, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction**” (2 Pet 3:15-16). That Christ is the means for removing the veil over Paul’s writings is implied in Peter’s exhortations: “beware . . . being led away with the error of the wicked and falling from . . . steadfastness” (3:17); and “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (3:18).

*The Cosmic Christ of Scripture* points to the truth that the veil of misunderstanding of Scripture is taken away in Christ (2 Cor 3:14). However, some students of the Bible neglect to focus fully on Christ—the Living Word—because they fear that this will eclipse the authority of the Written Word. It is important to recognize that looking into the wonderful face of Jesus Christ

does not do away with Scripture, but with the misunderstanding that veils it.

This book presents a brief report of the unveiling of my mind that has resulted from my Christ-centered reading of God's three books. I have found that my reading has expanded my mental faculties and provided inspiration to spend many entrancing hours in searching out "the deep things of God" (1 Cor 2:10). I hope that reading these chapters will facilitate a similar experience as you read God's three books.

### **The Scripture of the Cosmic Christ**

Just as Christ does not eclipse Scripture, so Scripture does not eclipse Christ. Neither does Scripture eclipse the revelation of Christ in the cosmos which He created. This may be clarified by a discussion of: (1) three Scripture principles, (2) three revelations of God, and (3) relations between Theology and Science.

*The Three Scripture Principles.* Traditionally, the key to the correct interpretation of Scripture revelation has been referred to as **the Scripture Principle**.<sup>1</sup> This is the principle that **Scripture interprets itself**. I seek to continue and build on this traditional approach in terms of the Scripture Principles for interpreting all categories of revelation. It is the thesis of my book that **Scripture provides the principles that should guide the Christ-centered reading of God's three books in relation to each other.**

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<sup>1</sup>Clark Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984); G. H. Hospers, Abraham Kuyper, *The Reformed Principle of Authority: The Scripture Principle of the Reformation Set forth in the Light of our Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Reformed Press, 1924).

The Latin words—*sola*, *tota*, and *prima Scriptura*—are technical terms which describe the Scripture principles that guide the proper reading of revelation.<sup>1</sup> The terms indicate that (1) all (*tota*) of Scripture is a divine revelation which (2) stands unique and alone (*sola*) as the standard for rightly reading Scripture, and (3) stands first (*prima*) among all the other revelations. This

<b>TOTA SCRIPTURA – ALL OF SCRIPTURE</b> <b>SOLA SCRIPTURA – SCRIPTURE ALONE</b> <b>PRIMA SCRIPTURA – SCRIPTURE FIRST</b>
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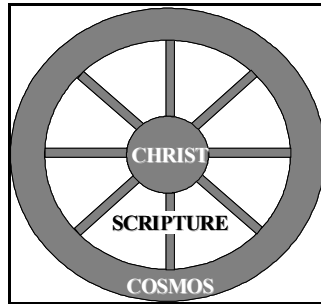
leads to the fascinating question: **How can Scripture be a revelation that is alone while at the same time it is first among other revelations such as Christ and the cosmos?**

*The Three Revelations of God.* The theme of the “three Scripture principles” is closely connected with a second theme—the “three revelations/books of God.” I suggest that the Scripture principles illuminate the relations among God’s revelations and the need for reading them in light of each other. This adds further intricacy to the question introduced above. While Scripture stands alone in its unique primacy, reading Scripture in light of Christ and the cosmos seems to give a certain primacy to these other revelations. **How can there be multiple primacies among the divine revelations of Christ, Scripture, and the cosmos?**

The biblical evidence supporting the concept of reading God’s three books in light of each other is presented in subsequent chapters. At this point I will simply use a bicycle

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<sup>1</sup>No attempt is made in this book to provide a complete discussion of methods for the study of Scripture. For a more comprehensive treatment see Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald, 2000), 61-64.



wheel to illustrate the concept. The spokes of the wheel represent the primacy of Scripture, the central hub represents the primacy of Christ, and the outer circle of the wheel represents the primacy of the cosmos.<sup>1</sup> **The ontological primacy of Christ (as God) and the contextual primacy of**

**the cosmos (as context for incarnation and inspiration) complement the epistemological primacy of Scripture (as the source of the principles that keep theology Christ-centered and relevant to the world in which we live).<sup>2</sup>**

*Relations Between Theology and Science.* The very powerful method of a naturalistic reading of the book of the cosmos leads many to wonder about the idea of a biblical and

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<sup>1</sup>The model proposed here fully accepts the biblical principle that Scripture as a whole (*tota Scriptura*) provides the proper context for interpreting Scripture. In this sense, Scripture has epistemological primacy as its own interpreter and as the interpreter of Christ and cosmos. However, this does not contradict the obvious fact (acknowledged in the Bible) that the Cosmos is the context for God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture. See subsequent chapters for the biblical evidence that Christ, Scripture, and cosmos have ontological status as revelations.

<sup>2</sup>Gijsbert van den Brink suggests that Systematic Theology may be evaluated by three criteria: (1) harmony with a tradition, (2) "comprehensive conceptual coherence", and (3) "adequacy to the demands of life". See *Almighty God: A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence* (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1993), 34-36. The third criteria is explicitly mentioned in my model. More implicit is the fact that my proposal claims to be in harmony with parts of Christian tradition in general and Seventh-day Adventist tradition in particular by being Christ-centered and biblical. In addition, as indicated later in this chapter, it claims harmony with an outstanding thought leader in Adventism: Ellen White. I also aim to fulfill the criteria of comprehensive conceptual coherence.



Christ-centered reading of God's revelation in the cosmos.<sup>1</sup> This issue is addressed through the third theme of this book: how to read the relations between science and theology. This subject is dear to my heart as a member of the faculty at a university. **How does theology fit in with the other disciplines within the university?**<sup>2</sup> How do the three Scripture principles (theme one) and the reading of the three revelations of God (theme two) help us understand the relations between theology and science (theme three)?

Clearly, these issues are characterized by a wonderful intricacy and they call for the exercise of a high level of faith and reason. Many Bible students are puzzled concerning how this intricacy relates to the simplicity of the gospel of Christ. Significantly, while a little child can receive the basic principles of the gospel, authentic theology can be as complex as any science which studies the cosmos. **We can expect the study of the Cosmic Christ of Scripture to be fully as challenging as the study of His creation!**

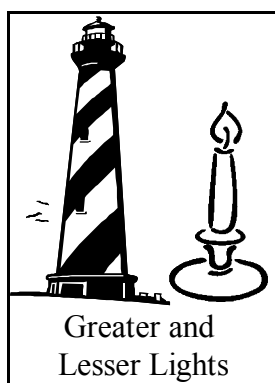
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<sup>1</sup>Plantinga, Alvin, "Methodological Naturalism," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith [PSCF]*, 49, no. 3 (September 01, 1997): 143ff; Robert C. O'Connor, "Science on Trial: Exploring the Rationality of Methodological Naturalism," *PSCF* 49, no. 1 (March 01, 1997): 15ff; Walter E. Wiest, "Methodological Naturalism and Religion: An Examination of a Contemporary Naturalistic Philosophy and Its Significance for Protestant Thought" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>See Martin Hanna, "The Use of Science in Theology: Case Studies of Langdon B. Gilkey and Thomas F. Torrance" (Ph.D. diss. Andrews University, 2004); "The Harmonious Development of Faith and Learning at Northern Caribbean University," 3:1 *Issues in Theology and Spiritual Leadership (ITSL)* (2001): 67-103.

### Biblical Perspectives and Ellen G. White Writings

My primary focus is on unveiling or revealing the Cosmic Christ of Scripture by a study of the **“greater light” of Scripture**. From a biblical perspective, the heart of revelation is “the unveiling of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:1).<sup>1</sup> However, a secondary focus is on the **“lesser light”<sup>2</sup> reflected in the writings of Ellen G. White (1827-1915)**. White was a person of remarkable spiritual gifts who through her writings and ministry has made a revolutionary impact on millions of people. She wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books. More than 60 additional titles



<sup>1</sup>Some preliminary comment seems necessary about revelation, a recurring key word in my book. **The English word “revelation” is derived from the Greek word “apocalypsis” which means “unveiling.”**

<sup>2</sup>The terms “greater light” and “lesser light” are adapted from the biblical reference to the sun and the moon (Gen. 1:16). On the metaphor of light see Ellen G. White, “An Open Letter,” *Review and Herald* (January 20, 1903): 15 in *Colporteur Ministry* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press, 1953), 125; Roger Coon, *A Gift of Light* (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald, 1983); William Clyde Sands, “Nature as a Biblical Hermeneutic Device: The Role and Use of Light in the Experience and Writings of Ellen G. White” (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1989). On revelation, inspiration, and hermeneutics in Ellen White’s writings see P. Gerard Damsteegt, “Ellen White on Theology, Its Methods, and the Use of Scripture,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society (JATS)* 4:2 (Autumn 1993): 115-136; “The Inspiration of Scripture in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” *JATS* 5:1 (Spring 1994): 155-179; Maurice Barnett, *Ellen G. White and Inspiration* (Louisville, KY.: Gospel Anchor, 1983); Frederick E. J. Harder, “Revelation a Source of Knowledge as Conceived by Ellen G. White” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1991).

are available in English compilations from her 50,000 pages of manuscript. She is the most translated woman writer in history and the most translated American author. Her life-changing masterpiece on successful Christian living, *Steps to Christ*, has been published in more than 140 languages.<sup>1</sup>

Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen White was more than a gifted writer; they believe she was appointed by God as a special messenger to draw the world's attention to the Holy Scriptures and help prepare people for Christ's second advent.<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Seventh-day Adventists regard Scripture as the Christ-centered rule of faith and practice by which to evaluate the cosmic relevance of the writings of White and all other writers.<sup>3</sup>

As a result I have made great effort to subject my writing to the standard of God's word in Scripture. I trust that this will be evident in all that you read here. In each major part of my book, biblical evidence is presented first which encourages a Christ-centered and cosmic reading of Scripture. Second, Ellen White's perspective is presented in comparison with the biblical evidence. Thus White's writings are evaluated in the light of Scripture Principles. A large number of Bible texts have been quoted or paraphrased in the chapters that follow. Therefore, you may want to keep your Bible handy so that you can read the

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<sup>1</sup>For more information, see *The Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.*, at its web site. <http://www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp#who>.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>“The writings of Ellen White are not a substitute for Scripture. They cannot be placed on the same level. The Holy Scriptures stand alone, the unique standard by which her and all other writings must be judged and to which they must be subject” (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, [Washington D.C.: Ministerial Assoc., General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988], p. 227).

many texts in their contexts as I have done.

### Overview of Chapters

This book is based on articles which have been previously published in academic theological journals.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, there is some repetition of similar themes in each chapter. Nevertheless, when a theme recurs it is developed beyond its prior treatment. At the risk of prematurely unveiling the mystery of what is to come, the following preliminary survey will help you find your way through the chapters that deal with these recurring themes.<sup>2</sup>

After this introduction (Part One), *The Cosmic Christ of*

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<sup>1</sup>See Martin Hanna, "Science and Theology: Focusing the Complementary Lights of Jesus, Scripture, and Nature," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society (JATS)* 6 (1995): 6-51; Martin Hanna, "The Servant-Master Roles of the Laws of Christ, of Scripture, and of Nature," *JATS* 9/1-2 (1998): 278-309; Martin Hanna, "The Pre-Advent Explosion of Knowledge: Scripture Authority and Plural Revelations," *ITSL* 1/1 (1999): 11-35; Martin Hanna, "The Divine-Human Christ: Unveiling Divinity in Humanity," *ITSL* 2/1 (2000): 19-40.

<sup>2</sup>These themes have been developed in preparation for various presentations. Three studies on dialogical theology in light of Christ, Scripture, and the cosmos were presented for the *K. G. Vaz Lecture Series* in Spring 2000 at Northern Caribbean University (NCU). One presentation on the future of the Church based on the same theological framework was presented as part of the *Theological Symposium 2000* at NCU. These themes were also developed further in three other studies on Ecclesiology which were presented at the Central Jamaica Conference Church Leaders Retreat 2000. These presentations dealt with Christ, the cornerstone of the Church; Scripture, the constitution of the Church; and the cosmos, the context of the Church. In 2001, the same framework was presented in Bible conferences on "Enduring Freedom: The Great War" at the Meadowvale SDA Church in Kingston Jamaica and at the Hillview SDA Church in Nassau, Bahamas. Further developments of the model were presented in Spirit of Prophecy Bible Conferences in Nassau and at the Freeport SDA Church in Grand Bahama in 2003.

*Scripture* is divided into four more parts. Part Two, on the book of Scripture, describes the divine authority of the Bible as the rule of faith, practice, and knowledge. This authority or rule guides my theological model for the progressive illumination of the unique primacies of Christ, Scripture, and cosmos. Part Three, on the book of Christ, deals with the biblical perspective on the social nature of divinity and humanity and the relations between divine and human persons as illuminated by Christ who is fully divine, fully human, and the model of authentic human personhood.

Part Four, on the book of the Cosmos, presents the harmony of God's revelations in terms of the metaphor of three lights: Scripture, Christ, and the cosmos. From this perspective, false science and theology undermine a reasonable faith in Christ. However, true science and theology involve the mind of Christ, a cooperation of faith and reason, and a recognition of the limits of faith and reason. Part Five summarizes the wholistic<sup>1</sup> theological model which I propose—a model which is Christ-centered, biblical, and relevant to the world in which we live.

As you read the various parts of this book, you will notice that there are a large number of footnotes at the bottom of many pages. These are provided to document the sources used in my research and to indicate the extent of the discussion that is going on among theologians, scientists, and philosophers about the Cosmic Christ of Scripture. Reading the footnotes is not necessary for understanding what I have written. Therefore, if you find yourself being distracted by the footnotes, you may

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<sup>1</sup>See John B. Wong, *Christian Wholism: Theological and Ethical Implications in the Postmodern World* (Lanham, NY: University Press of America, 2002).

ignore them during your first reading. Later, you may reexamine the footnotes for further sources of information on the issues raised.

### **Let's Get Ready to Read!**

Well, there you have it! That's what my book is all about. It presents a proposal on "*How to Read God's Three Books*" in a way that unveils "*The Cosmic Christ of Scripture*." **If you are an Adventist**, buckle your seat belt! My book is informed by an Adventist perspective and it pushes, from within, the boundaries of that perspective. Adventism has room for, and needs, new readings of its position on the Cosmic Christ of Scripture. What you will find in the following chapters is my understanding of this issue. I trust that the veil of misunderstanding is being removed from my heart! I also hope that reading my book will help you develop your relation to the Cosmic Christ of Scripture. If your perspective leads you to conclude that any parts of my perspective need revision let's talk about it. I expect that I will learn a lot from such a dialogue.

**If you are not an Adventist** please take note that Seventh-day Adventists believe that "the church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour" (Fundamental SDA Belief 11). We believe: "The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ" (Fundamental Belief 12). So Adventists regard you as a brother or sister in Christ. Also, you should recognize that Adventists believe that "in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Rev 14:12) (Fundamental SDA Belief

12). We invite you to be part of that Christ-centered remnant!<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the model for theology presented here is based on my present understanding of Scripture Principles. It is therefore open to revision and development.<sup>2</sup> You are encouraged to **keep an open mind to the evaluation of theoretical models on the basis of a continuing Christ-centered consideration of the cosmic relevance of Scripture.** This will remove the veil that causes misunderstanding of God's books. Ellen White wrote: "We are standing with the veil removed in the holy place of sacred things. We are not to stand without. We are to enter, not with careless, irreverent thoughts, not with impetuous footsteps, but with reverence and godly fear."<sup>3</sup> So put on your thinking caps! Let's get ready to read God's three books!

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<sup>1</sup>"Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs . . . constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word" (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . An Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* [Silver Spring, MD.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988], iv). These words appear in the introduction to the Fundamental Beliefs which were accepted by the vote of the 1980 General Conference session.

<sup>2</sup>See Winfried Corduan, *Handmaid to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker, 1981), 9-22.

<sup>3</sup>Ellen White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, CA.: Pacific Press, 1962), 113.

## **The Bible on God's Three Books: The Word by the Spirit**

### **The Book of Scripture**

**“The word of God** came, and the Scripture cannot be broken.”  
(John 10:35).

“Holy men of God spoke as they were moved  
**by the Holy Spirit.**”  
(2 Peter 1:21).

### **The Book of Nature**

**“By the word of the Lord** were the heavens made; and all the host of them **by the breath of His mouth.**”  
(Psalm 33:6, 9).

### **The Book of Christ**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.**”  
(John 1:1).

**“The Holy Spirit** will come upon you . . . . Therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you will be called the Son of God.”  
(Luke 1:35).



**PART TWO:  
HOW TO READ THE  
BOOK OF SCRIPTURE:  
THE END-TIME  
EXPLOSION OF CHRIST-  
CENTERED KNOWLEDGE**

## **The Bible: Book Among Books**

**When Gutenberg invented the remarkable printing press, book prices dropped 80% overnight, and learning to read became a fad. About 520,000 titles were published in the 16th century, 1.25 million in the 17th, two million in the 18th, and eight million in the 19th. At the close of the 20th century, we see 500,000 new titles each year.**

**If you wonder how many books published last year will be on the library shelves in one hundred years, you might get a clue from the century-old items still available in 1959. Of all the new books published in 1859, the five still to be found in 1959 were Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Mills' *Essay on Liberty*, and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.**

**According to *The Guinness Book of World Records*, the Bible is still the world's most distributed book. It has been translated into 1,659 languages. And between 1815 and 1975, some 2.5 billion Bibles were printed, of which 1.5 billion were handled by Bible societies. In the year 1978, the United Bible Societies distributed 9.3 million complete Bibles in 150 countries.**

**Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*, (Garland, Texas: Bible Communications, 1996).**