

Apologetics as History

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MOVEMENT OF DESTINY

By LeRoy Edwin Froom

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LeRoy E. Froom has acquired international recognition as Adventism's best known and most assiduous researcher. His large works include the four-volume "Adventist encyclopedia," *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, which has become a classic in the field of prophetic interpretation, and the impressive two-volume *Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*. He has now written *Movement of Destiny*, a heavy book dealing with doctrinal development within the Seventh-day Adventist church. Church historians are indebted to Froom for the vast amount of source material he has put together.

Froom's monumental works could not have been produced without the tremendous financial backing of a strong institution and a small army of helpers. Obviously the reason the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference leaders have supported Froom in this expensive enterprise is that he stands as the foremost current apologist of his beloved church. Upon his shoulders has been laid the task of "putting the record straight" and countering all "charges" against Adventism's founding fathers and succeeding leaders.

This commission puts a considerable limitation on all his works. In writing as an apologist, Froom has given a biased and one-sided treatment of what has often been very rich source material. Consequently, the reader must always be on the alert when studying Froom, asking himself whether he has been given a full account, or whether important aspects have been neglected or misrepresented. Only those who know historical development of Adventist doctrine, independent of Froom's presentation, are in a position to evaluate his defensive writings.

In the introduction to *Movement of Destiny*, the present leaders of the General Conference unhesitatingly recommend the book as the authoritative history of Adventism and urge all pastors and theologians in Adventist circles to study it carefully. Froom himself emphasizes that several General Conference presidents, going back to the strong world leader Arthur G. Daniells, have spurred him to write this much-needed work. Thus it seems to be designed to take care of criticism against the Adventist church, whether that criticism be from outside or inside.

Froom sets forth the Seventh-day Adventist church as heaven's prophetically predicted movement. But he does not adequately depict Adventism's American, ante-

bellum cultural beginning. Instead, he states simply that his church is a direct continuation of the pure apostolic church.

Nor does Froom give a satisfactory description of the Adventist crisis after October 1844, which is of fundamental importance. Apart from intriguing allusions to the "shut-door" doctrine, Froom does not discuss the fate of Miller's radical left-wing group after the "great disappointment." Furthermore, he leaves the reader in the air concerning the relation of Ellen G. White and other Adventist leaders to the important "shut-door" doctrine.

The author discusses Arianism, or more accurately Unitarianism, and its inroads among Adventists, but he does not show from where these rationalist ideas were derived. In one instance, Froom avers that Henry Grew, a "conditionalist" Seventh-day Adventist church father who did not believe in endless hellfire, also was an Arian. It seems likely, therefore, that conditionalism and Arianism could go hand in hand as a current rationalism in deistic and revivalistic America. Further research can bring more light on this problem.

A large part of the book is devoted to explaining how it was possible for so many Adventist pioneers to entertain "faulty" ideas on Christology, Trinitarianism, and the Atonement. Many of the leading men were of the opinion that the real atonement did not begin until 1844, when Christ as high priest entered into the second compartment of the heavenly sanctuary. Although Froom extensively analyzes the doctrine of the Atonement, he does not see that the real reason for the "faulty" view was related to the Adventist dilemma of the "great disappointment." According to Crosier's *Day-Star Extra* article, dated February 6, 1846, Miller's protesting left-wing, in contrast to the majority at the Albany Conference, did hold that the final atonement began on October 22, 1844. It is surprising that Froom has not made such elementary facts clear in his voluminous work. Could the reason be that he does not want to see any connection between the "faulty" atonement concept and the Adventist understanding of the sanctuary?

Problems regarding Christology and the Atonement are further illustrated when Froom refers to Uriah Smith, the well-known editor of the *Review and Herald*, as representative of the church when, in his *Fundamental Principles* of 1872, he made a public statement of faith, defending "the Bible only" as the rule of faith. When in the same work, however, Smith defended Arian views and limited the orthodox Christian view on the Atonement, Froom finds his opinions to have been only his "personal" ideas and not representative of the church.

The fact is that Unitarian concepts, although never supported by Ellen G. White, were prevalent within Adventism at least until the end of the last century. Froom is right in claiming that the authoritative position of Mrs. White led to a final victory for the doctrines of the Trinity and the completion of the Atonement on the cross.

Another example of the misleading apologetical approach is Froom's discussion of the denominational background of Adventism's fathers. He lists the denominational affiliation of Miller's preachers at large, which is not very relevant, instead of giving the background of the few pioneers among the post-disappointment men: Hiram Edson, Joseph Bates, James White, and others.

Froom does not use the critical historical method with adequate energy and con-

sistency. Letters from 1930 and interviews from the same period are accepted as valid source material for what took place in Minneapolis in 1888. Moreover, virtually no space is allotted to the opposing party. In like manner, Adventism's most famous physician, John Harvey Kellogg, receives biased treatment. Froom states that the real issue between Kellogg and the Adventist leaders was his "hoary" pantheistic ideas. Richard W. Schwarz has given a more balanced view in his book, *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.*

Stylistically, *Movement of Destiny* makes heavy reading even for experts. The author endlessly chops the text into small sections with titles and numbers. Furthermore, the work is not well planned and often is repetitious. There are too many chapters styled like "The Lesson of the Faltering Messenger — No. 1" and "The Lesson of the Faltering Messenger — No. 2."

But in spite of its limitations, the work has some indisputably good points. The thorough treatment of the doctrinal struggle within the Adventist church over Unitarianism, Christology, Trinitarianism, and the Atonement are valuable chapters, as is the delineation of the epochal 1888 Minneapolis General Conference. Of general interest is the chapter dealing with the move of Adventism to achieve full fellowship with the evangelical and fundamentalist camps in the United States — which includes the many conferences in 1955-1956 that led to the publication of *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. It is regrettable, however, that Froom completely ignores the considerable opposition the book raised among some older Adventist leaders, such as M. L. Andreasen.

Although *Movement of Destiny* is written primarily for use within the Adventist church, it claims to be an authoritative, scholarly work on the development of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Therefore it is remarkable that there is no real critical apparatus, not even a bibliography. Froom mentions in passing that he commands an unsurpassed array of historical source material, but he does not give the titles of the items. And the mass of information he has accrued may not be accessible to scholars in general but reserved for a "trusted" few. Thus more valuable material, like the wealth of sources in the vaults of the Ellen G. White Estate, is closed to the world. It is high time that these vaults be fully opened to serious research workers, in order to make possible a thorough and fair treatment of the development of the worldwide Adventist movement.

Movement of Destiny seems to be the work of the General Conference "defense committee to put things straight," with Froom serving as an untiring preacher and organizer of the material. An objective history of the Adventist church remains to be written. One can only wonder what influence the illustrious group of Adventist scholars, whose names Froom gives, have had on this work. The fact is that the number of defensive, apologetical works issued by Adventists is now very adequate. It is time for fully-established Adventists who are at the same time unbiased scholars to step forward and try to answer the many questions concerning Ellen G. White and Adventist history that are still unanswered.