

RAYMOND F. COTTRELL

57

It should be remembered that my assigned topic at the Second Ecumenical Consultation was the Second Advent, not the First Advent. The eschaton takes place *after* what we refer to as the *close* of probationary time — when the high priestly role that Christ began (subsequent to his First Advent) has ended, and he assumes his role as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. A paper specifically delimited to the eschaton would be wandering afield if it dealt with Christ's sacrificial and mediatorial ministry.

As a matter of fact, the Second Advent can hardly avoid being christocentric, in that all that is said about it focuses on what Christ does to deliver his people from the present evil age. This is as truly Christ-centered as the events clustering about, and his role in relation to, the First Advent. Certainly, to present Christ as Judge and King is no less christocentric than to present him as a Man among men, as the Atonement for man's sins, and as man's representative in the heavenly sanctuary.

Thus, the scope of my assignment may account for — at least in part — the absence of some things Wieland thinks should have been mentioned in order for the paper to be christocentric. He does not specify *which* things.

The consultations between representatives of the World Council of Churches and of the Seventh-day Adventist church explored Adventist theological and ecumenical concepts. At the First Consultation (1969), Adventist beliefs on such matters as the incarnation, the gospel, the means of salvation, the ministry of Christ on the cross and in heaven, and the Sabbath were considered. The World Council representatives concluded that Adventist views on practically every subject are conditioned by Adventist eschatological perspective. Hence, my paper, "The Eschaton: A Seventh-day Adventist Perspective," was presented at the Second Consultation (1970) at their request. I did not consider it necessary to repeat points already explained at the First Consultation; my assignment this time was specifically limited to the Second Advent.

By definition, the eschaton is concerned with man's ultimate destiny and, in Adventist thinking, the transition from this world to the next — all of which lies beyond the close of probation. At the First Advent, Christ pre-

sented himself as the Savior of men; at the Second Advent, he presents himself as their Judge and Lord. At the First Advent, he provided the means of salvation; at the Second Advent, he completes the work of salvation.¹

The paper published in SPECTRUM was approximately one-third shorter than it was when presented at the Second Ecumenical Consultation. Certain passages that were omitted may have provided some of the emphasis Wieland feels is missing. Even in its abbreviated form for SPECTRUM, however, the paper is not without recognition of Christ, the gospel, and the individual Christian's response. Clearly and explicitly, it reflects the struggle between the forces of good and evil in the Christian's heart and life. Those who believe in the full deity of Christ will find him in my very first basic assumption, and in our response to Christ as God, in my second basic assumption.² Those who recognize Christ as Creator will find an affirmation of his infinite, beneficent, ardent concern for man's well-being and happiness and of God's purpose for man and man's appropriate response.³ The effect of the gospel on the Christian's life is also emphasized.⁴

Wieland says that he "must confess deep sympathy for part of Minear's criticisms," some of which, he says, "are all too true." His ardent acceptance of Minear's conclusion that my paper lacks "a christological or christocentric orientation" requires consideration of Minear's reasons for arriving at that conclusion, inasmuch as acceptance of his conclusion implies acceptance of the reasons on which he based that conclusion.⁵ To accept the conclusion without accepting the reasons would be logically inconsistent. Let us examine the reasons Minear gives.

Minear's first group of reasons is related to my emphasis on what he refers to as "the continuing conflict between God and Satan."⁶ He identifies this "continuing conflict" as "the daily battles between right and wrong in the heart of the Christian and in the communal life of the church." To him, eschatology *consists of* this conflict and its outcome in the "daily experience" of the individual Christian. He says: "To objectify and to postpone the crucial struggle with Satan to a future attack by external enemies on the community which loyally observes the Sabbath encourages a fatal separation of the 'great controversy' from the daily battles between right and wrong in the heart of the Christian and in the communal life of the church." By "to objectify" Minear means to project the "great controversy" into history as an event that is literal — which he denies. Minear identifies the Second Coming as a subjective experience in the life of the individual Christian and rejects the idea that it is an objective event in history. He objects, also, because Adventists "postpone the crucial struggle" into the future, something he

likewise denies. To him, this crucial eschatological conflict is now in progress — “in the heart of the Christian.”

When Minear speaks of “the gospel and passion story of Jesus” and “the daily battles between right and wrong in the heart of the Christian,” he is affirming what is known in contemporary parlance as “realized eschatology.” Right here is the crux of the difference between Adventist eschatology and his. To him, “eschatology” consists in the establishment of the kingdom of divine grace at the First Advent (“the gospel and the passion story of Jesus”) and in the struggle between Christ and Satan in the heart of the individual Christian. To Adventists, the eschaton is what happens *in history after* the struggle in the hearts of men has determined each person’s destiny. It is the absence of *his* view of eschatology in my paper to which he takes exception and for which he indicts my paper as lacking “a christological or christocentric orientation.”

We recognize the crucial importance of “the gospel and passion story of Jesus” and “the daily battles between right and wrong in the heart of the Christian” as fully as does Minear. But we do not consider them as coming within the boundaries of what we call eschatology. That is basically why I did not dwell on them in my paper, which was intended to present the *Adventist* concept of eschatology.

Minear’s second group of objections to the Adventist concept of the eschaton grows out of his belief in “the irresistible power of God’s mercy” — by which he means that, ultimately, no man can resist God’s mercy but that, eventually, all men will find salvation.⁷ He brands as “demonic” the concept that anyone will experience literal annihilation because of obdurate impenitence. He rejects the concept that God’s saving grace is limited to “the period before the day of judgment” and that after what we refer to as the close of probation (“a certain fixed date”) God is unwilling to forgive.

For Minear, the time will never come when God calls men to account and when obdurate impenitence removes them forever from the orbit of divine mercy, repentance, and forgiveness. He does not believe that probation, as Adventists understand it, will ever close or that the time will ever come when the opportunity for salvation is withdrawn. To Minear, “the final judgment” is not an objective event in history when some enter their eternal inheritance and others eternally separate themselves from God. He reacts to such concepts with “a sense of shock and deep revulsion.” To him, the idea that the Sabbath ever will become a test of loyalty to God is also “demonic.”

These are the reasons that Minear gives for his indictment of my paper as lacking in “a christological or christocentric orientation.” Therefore, if

Wieland accepts Minear's conclusion he must, perforce, accept the reasons on which Minear bases that conclusion. And if one accepts these, obviously he is no longer an Adventist. If one is unwilling to accept Minear's *reasons*, he logically forfeits the *conclusion* Minear draws from them. Minear is logically consistent; it would seem that Wieland is not. Minear clearly states his reasons, and his conclusion is logically consistent with the reasons he gives. But, as a dedicated Seventh-day Adventist, Wieland would find the reasons that prompted Minear's reaction both implausible and unacceptable. It is certain that when Wieland speaks of a "virtually graceless, and therefore Christless, eschatology" he is thinking of something entirely different from what Minear has in mind. What reasons, then, did Wieland have for arriving at what appears, on the surface at least, to be an identical conclusion — the lack of a christocentric emphasis?

Wieland devotes approximately two-thirds of his critique to a discussion of the question of whether the annihilation of the obdurately unrepentant is an act of God (as my paper affirms) or whether the same result occurs without divine initiative — at the hands of the wicked themselves (as he affirms). He sees the wicked as judging, condemning, and annihilating themselves: "They do the whole job on their own!" Christ is Judge of the righteous but not of the wicked: "This is the only 'judgment' Christ will engage in." Christ said that the words he spoke would judge every man, but Wieland interprets the passage to mean that a man's own conscience will be his judge.⁸

However one may interpret the words of Scripture, it is a fact that the inspired writers do speak, often and emphatically, of the "wrath" of God being poured out upon the wicked.⁹ Christ is pictured as returning to earth with a robe dipped in blood; from his mouth issues a sharp sword with which he smites the nations; he rules them with a rod of iron; he treads out the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.¹⁰ Again and again Ellen White speaks in similar terms.¹¹ Is it inappropriate for an un-inspired writer to quote from inspired writers and to use similar phraseology? It is important to note that Wieland's critique either ignores or explains away these and numerous other passages of Scripture. His explanation of the way in which God's wrath is poured out may be correct, but it remains *his opinion*.

Emphatically I protest that my paper does *not* present Christ as a "merciless judge," "harsh, cruel, gloating over the fate of his enemies." I, too, recoil from such a concept and wish to dissociate myself completely from it.

Wieland objects to the expression "lethal radiation" as being an appro-

priate equivalent to Paul's description of antichrist being destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming.¹² If the expression is offensive, it is expendable. I would not insist on using it. Wieland notes, further: "Their own terrible sense of self-condemnation will be sufficient to kill them." John says, by inspiration, that fire comes down *from God out of heaven* and destroys them.¹³

If the expression "righteousness by faith" means the same thing to Wieland that it did to Paul and to Ellen White, I could not agree more that a right understanding of it is vitally important, both in understanding the eschaton and in preparing for it. I agree that a clearer understanding of the Atonement is likewise important, especially as its principles relate to the eschaton. It would have been well at least to mention these in my paper. However, each is a major subject in its own right, and any extended discussion would be out of place in a paper devoted specifically to the eschaton itself.

REFERENCES

- 1 Hebrews 9:28-29, 2 Timothy 4:1.
- 2 Raymond F. Cottrell, *The eschaton: a Seventh-day Adventist perspective of the Second Coming*, SPECTRUM 5, 1:10 (1973).
- 3 Cottrell, pp. 7, 8.
- 4 Cottrell, pp. 24, 25.
- 5 Cottrell, pp. 37, 38.
- 6 Cottrell, p. 37.
- 7 Cottrell, p. 38.
- 8 John 12:48.
- 9 Revelation 14:9-11, 15:1, 16:1.
- 10 Revelation 19:11-15.
- 11 Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association 1944), pp. 36, 289.
 White, *Testimonies for the Church*, nine volumes (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1948), volume five, p. 208; volume nine, p. 13.
 White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1950), pp. 627, 657.
- 12 2 Thessalonians 2:8.
- 13 Revelation 20:9.