

The Mythos of the Mission Story
Intellectuals and the Church

SPECTRUM

A Quarterly Journal of the Association of Adventist Forums

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ADVENTIST ESCHATOLOGY TODAY

When Prophecy Fails

A Shift in the Adventist View

Interpreting John's Apocalypse

How to Wait for the Second Coming

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About This Issue

This journal serves a community that is defined in terms of religion. The Association of Adventist Forums is made up precisely of persons who share a particular religious commitment and point of view. It is appropriate, therefore, that SPECTRUM should open its columns to serious analysis of this point of view. We believe that theology, or reflection upon God and the meaning of faith, deserves a high priority among us.

This issue begins a new volume in which many theological discussions will appear. After a statement by one of the editors on why criticism of our tradition is important, we are publishing a cluster of articles on the doctrine of eschatology. Although you could find disagreements among the authors, it is certain that they would agree on this: as a central concern of the church, the matter of the End should receive our keenest intellectual attention.

We would like to announce some of the theological subjects that will be taken up in future numbers of Volume Eight. Our next issue will deal at length with the recently published *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, by Ronald L. Numbers. Critical reviews by Adventist and non-Adventist scholars alike, including a critique from the Ellen White Estate,

will be published. Among these contributions will be a theologian's reflection on the meaning of prophetic ministry. The issue will also carry the first of an irregularly appearing series in which younger writers analyze the work of mature theologians in the church.

After the third number of Volume Eight, in which a discussion of church and society will appear, the fourth will be devoted to a kind of festival of the Sabbath. Our readers, particularly those in Europe, may be able to help us in preparing this issue. We would like to publish photographs of works of art, whether from cathedrals or museums, which treat the theme of the Sabbath. Anyone who can take, or somehow procure, such photographs is invited to send them to our editorial office. (SPECTRUM, 1951 Olive St., St. Helena, CA 94574.) The photographs would, of course, have to be of very high quality.

There will be much besides theology in Volume Eight. In this issue the chairman of our Board of Editors writes about the relationship of intellectuals to the church. Another article deals with "the mythos" of the mission story. Future issues will include articles on the crisis in Lebanon, on the church's publishing work, and on the role of Adventist lawyers. And not to forget what has been a main theme of past volumes of this journal, we will publish a number of scientific articles during the next 12 months.

The Editors

The Case for Renewal In Adventist Theology

by Charles Scriven

“You people have a wonderful message. You must learn to communicate it with greater sophistication so that you will be taken seriously.”

—Abraham Joshua Heschel

On a visit to Loma Linda University not long before his death in 1972, Rabbi Heschel, the great Jewish scholar beloved among Adventists for his book, *The Sabbath*, offered the above salute and admonition in a conversation with Dr. Jack Provonsha. Besides indicating a necessity for evangelism, his words evoke a particular emotion familiar to many thoughtful members of our church, a kind of ambivalence toward the very heritage that means so much to us.

On the one side is gladness and gratitude. The Adventist message of rest, obedience and hope, epitomized in our observance of the Sabbath and belief in the Second Coming, has shaped us to the better through the years of growing up and learning how to think and live. In its rudiments, the message is indeed a wonder, a gift from God as welcome as food and as bracing as a song.

Yet, we know, too, that in the way it is communicated the message may cause, even among church members, bewilderment and sadness,

even hostility and religious doubt. If, in defending the doctrine of creation, we make rude caricatures of modern science; if, in explaining the book of Revelation, we criticize other churches instead of corrupt power wherever it occurs; if, in announcing the Sabbath day, we make an appeal based upon fear and religious arrogance; if, in proclaiming the Second Coming, we turn away from the ethical issues of the here and now; then the message becomes, for many, as much a problem as a help. A vessel conceivably clean seems barnacled with hasty and disturbing thoughts. And this may lead—often it does, in fact—to the personal crisis of being bound emotionally to the Adventist Movement while being nagged by doubt as to its basic validity.

We may safely assume that in urging a more sophisticated communication Rabbi Heschel had no thought of slicker salesmanship. A man for whom ideas were like precious stones, he was urging the necessity of *right thinking* for a strong witness outside the church. In this he was surely correct. But a moment's reflection on spiritual crises in our own midst shows another motivation for thinking carefully about our message. It is a *pastoral* necessity, as well as an evangelistic one, to do this. We must communicate better—more thoughtfully, more persuasively—not just for the sake of nonmembers, but for the sake of our own who, in many cases, suffer

deeply from want of adequate intellectual nourishment for their souls.

Of course, it is by no means self-evident to everyone in our fellowship that this is essential; to call for right thinking—in other words, to endorse theological criticism—is to imply that there has been wrong thinking; it is to suggest the need for change and advance in theology. And while some may applaud the cauterizing effect this would have, others cannot share their enthusiasm. The thought of revision in our understanding of doctrine stirs up understandable anxieties. It is somehow unsettling to think that we have further work to do in thinking out, and giving expression to, the presuppositions and implications of the Adventist message. On the other hand, it is comforting to think that the revered authorities of the past—our prophet, our pioneers, our preachers and teachers, our parents—have bequeathed us insights whole and final in themselves.

A commonplace bears witness to the attractiveness and prevalence of this feeling. It is the assertion that “the major doctrines of the church have been well established,” and that theological differences within the fold are unnecessary.¹ Taken at face value, this assertion means that we are bound down forever to unchanging propositions, whose truth is consummate and whose inner consistency has been established once for all. If this view should harden into dogma, it certainly would rule out modification of thought; it would make every theological criticism seem like a needless disturbance of the peace.

Where, then, is the authority for urging change and advance in theology? And if we permit or even encourage such a thing, what is to prevent wholesale alterations in the Adventist message itself? The answers to these two questions are basic in any effort to communicate our beliefs with greater sophistication. For, if there is no authority for change in theology, the venture has doubtful validity. And if there is no criterion by which to work, constructive change may degenerate into merely destructive innovation.

The authority for making theological advance is, quite simply, the Protestant tradition, going back to the Bible and including our own

prophet, Ellen White. Here we find the basis for both intellectual humility (without which growth in understanding seems unnecessary) and intellectual confidence (without which it seems impossible).

For a proper intellectual humility, we need simply remember Paul’s striking statement of the human condition. This is what we call the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, and it teaches us, among other things, a fitting estimation of our own truth. For one of its meanings is that all things human stand under the divine judgment; we may not boast of what we do or what we think; our only boast is Christ, who accepts us despite our unacceptability. Referring to the Gospel, the apostle told the Christians at Corinth: “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,” adding that “the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.”² It is a classic declaration of human finitude, leaving no doubt that even Paul, himself an inspired prophet, knew that God was in heaven and he was on earth. The same self-knowledge allowed him earlier to confess that in this life we can only see in a mirror dimly. “For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect,” he told the Corinthians in his first letter.³

It is just this imperfection of knowledge and prophecy—even in our inspired mentors—that proves our constant need for better understanding. Within our own movement, we may find authority for this view in the writings of Ellen White herself, who echoed Paul when in 1892 she wrote: “We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible.” Three years later she applied this insight directly to herself: “In regard to infallibility,” she said, “I never claimed it; God alone is infallible.”⁴

We may conclude that in moments of soul-searching Ellen White, though especially inspired by the Holy Spirit, considered herself liable to be mistaken or inaccurate; this is the meaning of fallibility. The prophet of Adventism understood the difference between divinity and humanity, passing on to us who follow her the insight of Scripture itself.

To scholars, it has become increasingly clear that this humility, this sense of the difference between us and God, is the key principle of Protestantism. In its essence, the Protestant

spirit is the confession that no human work, whether moral, devotional, or intellectual, can reunite us with our Maker. Grace alone can achieve this goal. In relation to the point at hand, this means that there is always distance between human thought, even the thought of prophets, and the divine reality itself. That group or movement which considers itself the invulnerable possessor of truth is larded with demonic traits; in elevating itself to a place of eternal validity, it destroys intellectual honesty and, in Scripture's phrase, "serves the creature rather than the Creator."⁵

We are not, then, making a child's search for excuses to tread the cliff-edge of the forbidden. The New Testament not only justifies, but also demands that we recognize the fallibility of our language about God, and the necessity, in view of this, to subject it to constant testing. But where, it may be asked, lies the hope of theological success? Why should we imagine that fallible human beings can do anything but multiply the signs of their own fallibility?

Such questions do not, of course, have the poignancy for us that they have for the doubt-ridden denizens of modern culture who, thinking God has died, can have no faith in truth or value, either. Our roots run deep into Wesleyan soil, and this soil is rich in the confidence that God's Spirit is still present with His people. In the gospel of John, when Jesus is about to be arrested, he tells the disciples that the coming Spirit "will guide you into all truth."⁶ It is an assurance that we in the Adventist fellowship have had no trouble taking seriously—at least in one way. We look upon the discoveries of the Adventist pioneers with a respect bordering on veneration; to us their insights are "wonderful truths," and we proclaim them in our churches and evangelistic halls with the audacity of prophets.

At the same time, however, there has arisen this wariness of the new in theology, this feeling that our proper business today is merely to perpetuate tradition and combat the errors of those who disagree with us. In this we have disbelieved the One who, through Isaiah, said: "From this time forth I make you hear new things, hidden things which you have not known."⁷ We have interpreted Jesus' promise to the disciples to have a cut-off point, as though the Spirit of truth lies buried in the cemeteries of New

England and Battle Creek. Perhaps we ourselves are endangered by the doctrine that God is dead; for if we say, or seem to say, that God has no new thing to teach us, then we come perilously close to making Him a fallen hero. Fortunately, a fresh reading of Scripture—as well as of Ellen White, who envisioned the unfolding of "new truth" through all eternity⁸—can give us strength against this temptation to skepticism. Indeed, it can provide us resources upon which to base a positive renaissance of theological creativity in the church.

This, then, is the authority for making advance in our knowledge of God; it is the theological basis for learning to communicate the Adventist message with greater sophistication. But what is to save the message from destructive innovation, from changes that give no sign of appreciation for its genius and integrity?

This question, too, is fundamental. Granting the importance of theological criticism, we must grant also the importance of limits, without which a mere debunking process may bring to ruin the very message we wish to preserve and uphold. But what sort of limits? How can we protect our tradition without choking off creative criticism altogether?

In one way, the answer is easy. We must simply grasp the distinction between working *within* a tradition and coming at it from the *outside*, between criticizing a thing out of love and respect and doing so out of hostility and disrespect. To illustrate how this distinction can help, let us invent Mr. Jones. We will say that he has loved and been well nurtured in the faith; that he has given much serious reflection to the study of the creation story; that he has come to believe that the story has a depth we, in our fascination with numbers, have missed. We will say, finally, that Mr. Jones wishes to suggest ways in which the usual interpretation of the story ought to be revised. How should he be regarded?

If it is clear that he loves and respects both the story and the Adventist message of which it is a part, by the criterion being suggested here, Mr. Jones may be encouraged. He is working from *within*, letting the message itself, especially the Bible, but also the teaching of our pioneers, inspire the changes he propounds. He does not

prey upon the truth we hold dear, but wishes to enrich it, so that those who hear it, inside and outside the church, may take it seriously. Whether his suggestions are worthy of acceptance is not the point just now; the point now is that the person who loves the message should be able, without fear or guilt, to challenge old interpretations and offer new ones.

But now consider a hypothetical Mr. Smith. We will say that he is a teacher at one of our colleges; that his once healthy interest in modern culture has become a consuming fascination; that more and more his utterances on church doctrine reveal a debunking mentality. We will say, finally, that he hints darkly in class

“We may conclude that in moments of soul-searching Ellen White, though especially inspired by the Holy Spirit, considered herself liable to be mistaken or inaccurate: this is the meaning of fallibility.”

that the creation story is demonstrable nonsense, with no more use or meaning for the person of today. How should Mr. Smith be regarded?

Here, of course, the matter is entirely different. Mr. Smith is coming at the tradition from the *outside*; he has found the authority for his ideas from sources fundamentally hostile to the Adventist world-view. He, therefore, threatens the message instead of enriching it; he is not a friend but a vandal, and should (if he persists) receive appropriate discipline from the church.

In the real life of the Adventist community, we will not always encounter such transparent types as Mr. Jones and Mr. Smith. Deciding who is the friend and who is the vandal may sometimes be difficult. But the illustration does show how the distinction between working within a tradition and coming at it from the outside can help us preserve our beliefs without stifling theological advance. We may, in a different metaphor, put the basic principle like this: In

order to protect the rough beauty of the fundamental Adventist message, we must insist upon organic growth in understanding, and resist rude surgery. We may celebrate the appearance of new leaves and prune away the sickly parts; but we may not cut off the main branches or chop away at the trunk.

All this, however, is rudimentary, like the sums in arithmetic. The hard part comes in trying to apply the principle. If there should be doubt, who decides whether someone is working within the tradition, or coming at it from the outside? Who decides what is organic growth and what is rude surgery? Where lies the ultimate authority in deciding such disputes?

On one level, of course, the ultimate authority is the Christ revealed in Scripture. But it is another level that concerns us here: who, among the human beings in the church, will decide what shall be accepted as true? Who will decide whether an outspoken person should go on speaking out or in some way be disciplined because of what he says or writes?

If here we allow ourselves to be shaped by the Protestant heritage, we will answer that these must be decisions of the people as a whole. The entire community of faith, not just elite groups within it, must bear the responsibility of deciding these hard questions. Roman Catholics assign theological authority to the bishops, but we are Protestants, and Protestants, following the Lutheran dictum of the priesthood of all believers, democratize such authority. Theologians and ministers may have, by virtue of their specialized education, a higher persuasive authority than other members of the church, but *they do not have a higher theoretical authority*. Whether we are lawyers, farmers, sales clerks or General Conference officers, we all have equal rights in the resolving of theological disputes.

This has a complex meaning for the church's practical life, which certainly cannot be elucidated in a few paragraphs. Even so, some elemental points can be made here. One is that trusted leaders must not, simply on their own authority, impede the discussion of ideas, even ideas which, at first glance, seem disturbing. Such persons, in fact, have a duty to encourage the free flow of ideas to all the people. Inhibiting their circulation would smack of the

medieval effort to prevent ordinary people from reading the Bible. It would be an elitism unacceptable in a Protestant community.

A second point concerns the necessity of restraint in treating any outspoken person as dangerous or stamping any new idea as false. It is not enough that a person or idea offend the members of powerful boards, committees, publications or teaching faculties. For if it is the consensus of all the people that counts, this consensus must become clear before an action against a person (such as demotion or firing) or against an idea (such as an official declaration of its falsehood) can be justified. In practical terms, this means letting ideas circulate, letting proponents of these ideas explain how they are connected to the fundamental message, letting others evaluate whether the proponents are right. It means, in short, enough restraint by persons entrusted with power to permit a consensus among the priesthood of believers to develop. Under such circumstances, our advance in the knowledge of God can, if not always, at least often, proceed without acrimony and in a refreshingly natural fashion: in due course, bad ideas will die a natural death and good ones be joyously embraced.

If the Protestant belief in the shared authority of all believers means these things for our leaders, it has a clear meaning for the rest of us,

too. We must all participate in the effort to grow in understanding. Unlike Roman Catholics, we cannot pin the blame for our problems on the bishops. The problems we have are *our* problems: the responsibility to advance in knowledge is *our* responsibility. The theologians among us have a special calling, of course, to serve the church by advancing its knowledge, but we all have a duty to be aware of issues and thoughtful about them. It is the consensus of the *people*, after all, that is finally decisive in matters of theological dispute.

Without a thoughtful membership, we will never grow in understanding, never chip away the hasty and disturbing thoughts, never improve upon our witness. But if we have a thoughtful membership, we may confidently expect, through the grace of God, to achieve all of these things. We may expect, in short, to learn how to communicate more truthfully and more persuasively, just what, as we saw at the beginning, is necessary today for both pastoral and evangelistic reasons. By loving the Lord with our minds, as no less an authority than Jesus himself has commanded, we can all help the church polish its message to a fine, hard luster hitherto unexcelled—so that the persons whose lives we touch, whether inside or outside the church, may see the Light of Eternity reflected in the things we say.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Something very like this view appears in the *Review and Herald*, July 1, 1972, p. 2.

2. II Corinthians 4:7 (RSV).

3. I Corinthians 13:9 (RSV). See also verse 12.

4. These statements, taken in the first instance from the *Review and Herald*, July 26, 1892, and in the second from Letter 10, 1895, may be found in *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 37. It has been suggested—for example, by Stanley G. Sturges, in an article, "Ellen White's Authority and the Church," in the Summer 1972 issue of SPECTRUM—that some statements by Ellen White,

such as those found in *Testimonies*, Vol. 5, pp. 66, 67 and pp. 667, 668 and in *Selected Messages*, Vol. 1, p. 48, tend to conflict with her denial of infallibility. Whatever interpretation is put on those passages, she nowhere, so far as I know, directly contradicts the statements I have quoted.

5. From Romans 1:25 (RSV).

6. John 16:13 (RSV).

7. From Isaiah 48:6 (RSV).

8. See, for example, *The Great Controversy*, p. 651.

When Prophecy Fails: The Validity of Apocalypticism

by Jonathan Butler

“Though St. John the evangelist saw many strange creatures in his vision, he saw no creatures so wild as one of his own commentators.”

—G. K. Chesterton

In a contemporary short story, two computer analysts talk about what happens when prophecy fails.

“When I was a kid down in Louisiana,” one recalls, “we had a crackpot preacher who said the world was going to end next Sunday. Hundreds of people believed him—even sold their homes. Yet, when nothing happened, they didn’t turn nasty as you’d expect. They just decided that he’d made a mistake in his calculations and went right on believing. . . .”¹

For believers in Christ’s Second Coming, the millenarian* story seems plagued by continual disappointment and failure. For many generations, the revolution, the expected cataclysm, the Second Coming has failed to materialize. Like the primitive Christians who very early experienced the delayed Parousia, many have since asked, “Where is our Lord’s appearing?” Did Christ not prophesy, “Truly I say to you,

you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes”?²

To believe in the Second Advent is to acknowledge delay and disappointment. How do believers reconcile themselves to this? Does their faith in Christ diminish as His greatest promise—the promise of His return—goes unfulfilled? Or do they find reason to go on believing?

In a study of prophetic disconfirmation, Leon Festinger and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota reported on a cult of flying saucer enthusiasts in the United States that expected a Martian invasion and an accompanying cataclysm by flood on a particular date and was, of course, “disappointed.” The cult, however, did not grow disillusioned nor did it disintegrate as a result of the failed prediction. Instead, it found reasons for the failure (“rationalizations,” these scholars said) which only fortified the believers in their faith and led them to share their faith

*Throughout the course of this study, apocalyptic, millenarian and premillennial are used synonymously over against postmillennial, the distinction being that with premillennialism the Second Coming precedes the thousand-year period of Revelation 20, while in postmillennialism the Second Coming follows the millennial phase. Premillennialists (apocalyptists or millenarians) generally are pessimistic about human efforts to usher in a millennium, and postmillennialists are optimistic about the human capacity to reform society, corresponding secularly to revolutionaries and reformists.

Jonathan Butler has recently moved from Union College to Loma Linda University, where he teaches American church history. His doctorate is from the University of Chicago.

with others. Thus, the thesis of the book: prophetic disconfirmation in a millenarian community results in an increased fervor and proselytizing activity, rather than the opposite.³

The story of the New Testament community tends to corroborate this thesis. Postponement of the Second Advent did not diminish expectation among early Christians. Their eventual departure from belief in an imminent End should be blamed on other factors, not failed predictions. Once the apocalyptic stance has been taken, the believer holds to his faith though Christ does not return in the apostolic generation, though the year 1,000 A.D. passes uneventfully, though October 22, 1844, is followed by the morning after.

A reason for this is that apocalyptic faith is not based on the fulfillment of particular events and obviously not on the main event. Apocalypticism is a perspective on reality, a worldview or

“Does Miller’s error invalidate his entire world-view? He was wrong about one day, but was he wrong about human nature, social, political and ecclesiastical institutions, evil, goodness, history, and the place of Christ in history?”

Weltanschauung (as theologians say), a *Gestalt* (as psychologists say). Apocalypticism is not discouraged by the failure of this or that prediction, this or that timetable of events or expected day. It is a way of looking at all events and all days. Faith precedes understanding, and apocalyptic faith precedes understanding “signs” that the world will end soon.

For the apocalypticist, the world is animated with these signs of the End. The election of a Catholic president, inflation and recession, crime, fashions, corruption in the White House, Sunday blue laws, an energy crisis—all appear as evidence that reinforces *the faith* in an imminent End. Pointing out ironies in the scheme (the Catholic president was rigid about church-state separation while the Protestant he defeated eventually proved to be more lax) does nothing to dismantle the apocalyptic framework itself.

When particular signs pass away without consequence, the believer, and the believer’s children and grandchildren, find new signs to support their faith. It has been said, “Apocalypticism, like Hills Brothers’ Coffee, is unbeatable because it is always reheatable.”

In evaluating the apocalyptic perspective, it is instructive to look at the evangelistic “world-burner” himself. William Miller was the archetypal premillennialist (or millenarian). His world view was essentially pessimistic: man and his institutions were evil, history was in sharp decline, catastrophe was imminent as the world needed a radical transformation, a Second Coming, to enjoy peace and happiness and a new creation.

In recent years, social and religious historians increasingly have shown that Miller’s anxiety should be regarded more as a characterization than a caricature of the early 19th century. Scholars used to emphasize the optimism and confident reformism of the Jacksonian period, but revisionist historians have been unearthing signs of uneasiness and turmoil in the era. The early waves of Catholic immigration and the increased power of the working classes in the cities frightened many with the prospect that a struggling democracy would be submerged by the “foreign” deluge. American republicanism was still regarded as extremely experimental after these few decades of its existence. Moreover, the established churches disappointed many by their wickedness and failure to pursue reforms in society. Natural phenomena alarmed the generation with further omens that something eschatological was about to happen. It was commonplace to expect the world was coming to an End.

Against such a backdrop, the Millerite prophetic charts did not stand out as the hysterical or sensational trappings of crank preachers. Miller shared the opinions of many respected, intelligent and level-headed contemporaries. Millenarian newspapers featured a column entitled “Signs of the Times,” which reported gloomy events and phenomena that portended the End of the world. Ernest Sandeen notes that one of the frequent items in these columns was news of the explosion of a steamboat. “The steamboat harnessed new power and moved with

unprecedented rapidity,” comments Sandeen. “It was exciting, but it was also dangerous. The passengers knew that their voyage might possibly end by their being blown to smithereens. In such a world, millenarianism was not out of place. . . .”⁴ If there was braggadocio in this era over the inventiveness and progress represented in a steamboat, there was also insecurity about whether it would blow up in people’s faces.

Miller’s specific calendar prediction was rather incidental to his message. Miller had preached for 13 years that the Lord would come “about 1843” before conceding, with three weeks to go, that He would come on October 22, 1844. Does such an error invalidate Miller’s entire worldview? He was wrong about one day, but was he wrong about human nature, social and political and ecclesiastical institutions, evil, goodness, history and the place of Christ in history? In other words, Miller was incorrect in predicting when the steamboat would explode, but he may well have been correct about the steamboat itself. Americans shook with the first explosions of an “Armageddon” at the Civil War, just as World War I eventually disturbed the progressive dreams of Walter Rauschenbusch and other Social Gospellers. After World War II, the bomb and Big Brother cast other apocalyptic shadows for such prophets of doom as George Orwell or Aldous Huxley. From this broad perspective, William Miller appears less alone and less wrong.

Nevertheless, that long countertradition of millenarians that preceded and followed William Miller has been a scandal throughout Christian history. William Blake reflected the incipient violence and hostility of the more typical millenarians in his poem “The New Jerusalem,”

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant land.

The usual millenarian has been an unsettling, outrageous figure in establishment eyes. The millenarian Joachim prompted Boniface VIII to remark in the 13th century, “Why are these fools awaiting the end of the world?”

Indeed, why?

First of all, millenarians are not Enlightenment men in their thinking. William Miller abandoned his deism, his watchmaker God, his confidence

in the rationality and perfectibility of man when he unrolled his prophetic chart in New England revival meetings. He was part of the romantic revolt against the Enlightenment.

One obvious example of the anti-Enlightenment flavor in apocalyptic interpretation is the matter of predictions. The Enlightenment viewpoint presupposes that biblical writers cannot actually foretell future events. The book of Daniel is dated late and seen, like the book of Revelation, as merely contemporary cultural comment. Biblical predictions are no more reliable than ordinary projections. In this vein, Albert Schweitzer viewed Christ as a deluded apocalyptic.

Though 19th century millenarians rejected the Enlightenment, they did sustain a marked rationalist strain. Like other evangelicals, millenarians rebelled against the Enlightenment by employing the weapon of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy. A sort of nonaristocratic rationalism, the new “common sense” kept America evangelical but not without substantial changes in the nature of evangelicalism. God was no longer the sovereign, vengeful and inscrutable Calvinist of Jonathan Edwards’ *Treatises*; God was the cooperative Arminian, benevolent and understandable, of Ellen White’s *Steps to Christ*. In Perry Miller’s phrase, He became the “chained God” whose actions were comprehensible and predictable. Based on the evidence in Scripture and in nature and in one’s own heart, it simply “made sense” to believe in the evangelical God.

The history of millenarian studies in the 19th century includes all conservative evangelicals, not simply sectarians like Seventh-day Adventists, Plymouth Brethren or Jehovah’s Witnesses. And these evangelicals viewed the prophetic literature, particularly in Daniel and Revelation, as further evidence of the trustworthiness of the Bible and evangelical theology in general. Prophetic timetables, nations rising and falling, the natural phenomena of earthquakes and falling stars, the upheaval of labor strikes and riots, were presented as empirical evidence in this evangelical rationalism. The upshot was, perhaps, something of a pseudo-Enlightenment methodology that packaged a really anti-Enlightenment message.

However strong the rationalism of 19th-century millenarianism, Adventism is still left with a *faith in Jesus Christ* at the heart of its

message. The 2,300-day prophecy collapses like dominoes if Jesus Christ is not who He claims to be. Adventist faith is not based on archeological evidence that the restoration of the Jerusalem wall began in 457 B.C.; it is based on a belief in the nature of Jesus Christ. If one of the other miracle workers in Palestine prior to or after Jesus, if Bar Kochba in the early second century was, instead, the Messiah, the prophetic chronology becomes unreliable. If Jesus of Nazareth was the ordinary child of poor Palestinians who was immersed in the Hebrew Scriptures and apocalyptic lore and assumed an inflated self-image—that He was the fulfillment of messianic chronologies—then, again, the book of Daniel misled that man Jesus and it has misled the Adventist as well. In short, without a belief that Jesus is the Christ the prophetic charts have no meaning. When one believes in Christ, not only Daniel and Revelation but all Scripture is illumined with meaning.

Furthermore, millenarians are not Protestants in the classical sense. Actually, western millenarianism dates back to Judaism and is usually too countertraditional and counter-cultural to be incorporated by the establishment religion of the moment. The degree of middle-class respectability in the Anglo-American millenarianism of the 19th century is rather atypical. Millenarians are generally “come-outers” who stand over against aspects of contemporary religion and culture and declare judgment and doom upon them. The apocalyptic monk Joachim hurled salvos at the 12th-century Catholic church, and Martin Luther drew upon Joachite literature in his attack on Catholicism in the 16th century. But Luther received some of the same treatment when Anabaptists sought to trigger the millennium in Germany. For reprisals, Luther suggested bloodying their mouths. And when Millerites finally carried the millennial logic a little too far, in the view of even their more sympathetic contemporaries within the New England theocracy, they were banished from mainline churches, burned in effigy and subjected to mob attacks. Thus, in a social and ecclesiastical sense, millenarians have been marked as anti-Protestant as well as anti-Catholic.

There is an ideological sense as well in which millenarians have leaned away from Protestant-

ism, and that is in the area of hermeneutics or in their method of interpreting Scripture. Essential to the Protestant Reformation was its insistence on interpreting Scripture in a *univocal* way. That is, the meaning for Protestants was the one meaning the biblical writer had intended. For millenarians, the Scriptures may take on *equivocal* meaning. The prophet's word or symbol may acquire not only the meaning that the prophet intended for his immediate audience, but also the meaning intended for the apocalyptic group that, generations later, breaks open the seal to the book. This is a typological system in which, as a prime example, the sanctuary service holds one meaning for the ancient Hebrews and a new significance for early Adventists. Millenarians make the rather non-Protestant assumption that not even Daniel and John the Revelator may have known as much as Uriah Smith or Ellen White about the books Daniel and Revelation.⁵

In contrasting Protestant and sectarian methods of interpreting Scripture, there is much to say for the vitality of the sectarian approach. In a sense, univocal Protestantism has fathered biblical criticism, an often bankrupt enterprise in relation to the contemporary faith community. The equivocal sectarian, on the other hand, finds contemporary meaning in the unlikely passages of Scripture. The Levitical sanctuary is a fossil for most of Protestantism, while the sectarian Adventist finds deep existential meaning in the subject.

For the ancient Hebrews and early Christians, the Bible was, above all, a living tradition. It was chanted and sung and spoken and shouted at feasts and funerals and synagogues and house churches long before it was written. Sectarials may tend toward a shallow understanding of the primary, historical meaning of the Scriptures, but they seem to intuitively grasp what the Bible meant to the Jews and early Christians; sectarians experience the Scriptures as a living, contemporary book. While the univocal Protestant interpretation may achieve a deeper comprehension of the historical and original meaning of the Scriptures, Protestants often lose a sense of the Bible as a living book which, of course, is fundamentally what it was for its earliest audiences.

This does not mean that sectarians do not

have some explaining to do. The gospel commission implies making oneself understood. And if sectarians rely on their own private dialect of interpretation, they exclude others from the language of apocalypticism. Millenarianism in America, and elsewhere, has often become a rather esoteric endeavor (though this cannot be blamed on methodology alone). From the outset, Adventists seldom sought to justify their methods of interpretation to the uninitiated. Biblicism and millennialism were such pervasive elements of 19th-century America that it may have seemed unnecessary.

Finally, millenarians are generally among what H. Richard Niebuhr termed the “disinherited.” The apocalypticist John wrote his Revelation on the rock of Patmos, not under a

“While apocalypticism never submerges altogether, in crisis periods it becomes most prominent. During the Civil War, World War I, the depression ’30s, World War II and the upheavals of the ’60s, Seventh-day Adventists have particularly exploited their Adventism.”

Roman arbor sipping sherbet. And it has been people in similar circumstances of deprivation and oppression who have been most responsive to his book. Apocalypticism has been the property of the poor and the persecuted, as other forms of revolutionism have been. Third World countries, seized by poverty, disease and malnutrition, may be convulsed by dramatic cultural upheaval and change. In just such situations, a revolutionary doctrine takes hold, like Communism (a secular millennialism), or a religious apocalypticism. This is so axiomatic of late that one might suggest (with tongue in cheek) a Marxian missiology: start revolutions in order to spread Christianity. Examples of disinherited apocalypticism range from the Black Muslims in America, to Pentecostals in Latin America, to the Cargo Cults of New Guinea (who anticipate the Advent as airplanes bringing

supplies for their people). In each case, it is still the common people who gladly hear of the Advent.

To be sure, the social and economic upward mobility of millenarians is always a possibility. Bryan Wilson, a sociologist of sects, commented in conversation that when you meet a Seventh-day Adventist you never know what sort of person he will be: intellectual or anti-intellectual, lower, middle, or upper-income, professional, craftsman or laborer. Wilson’s comment is probably applicable to the Seventh-day Adventists of North America and Europe; among SDAs, however, over 80 percent reside elsewhere. Adventism enjoys five to eight percent membership increases yearly in the Third World countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia, along with similar increases among the non-whites of North America. White Adventism in the United States experiences only negligible net gains. Where there are conversions, these often come from among the culturally disinherited if not always from among the economically deprived. One need not be poor to be “going without” in a cultural sense.

Historically, moreover, apocalypticism has come in waves within Seventh-day Adventism. While it never submerges altogether, it is in crisis periods that apocalypticism becomes most prominent. During the Civil War, World War I, the depression ’30s, World War II and the recent upheaval of the 1960s, Seventh-day Adventists have particularly exploited their Adventism. Between the Civil War and World War I, it was the salvationism of the “righteousness-by-faith” 1888 conference that eventually emerged, and in the aftermath of World War I, it was the trumpeting of an evangelical gospel that characterized a Carlyle B. Haynes, M. L. Andreason or an H. M. S. Richards.

During the depression, F. D. Nichol commented that Adventism was more relevant in adversity than prosperity. Membership increases were phenomenal during both wars and at the height of the depression (seven to ten percent annually), while membership plummeted immediately after the crises eased. In 1915, the year Ellen White died, the *Christian Advocate* observed that Adventists had enjoyed a ten percent annual increase due to “those evangelists who are reading the morning newspaper with one eye on the book of Daniel!”

Sometimes Adventist “crisis theology” has led to the embarrassment of false predictions. Interpreting the “Rorschach inkblots” of Daniel and Revelation, Adventists have often revealed more about their own dispossessed personalities than the Scriptures. Early Adventists did not expect the Civil War and slavery to end prior to the Second Coming. At the outbreak of World War I, many Seventh-day Adventist evangelists anticipated the conflict to be nothing less than Armageddon. Turkey was identified as the “King of the North” (in Daniel 11:45) that would aggravate the final events of history. By World War II, Adventists were gun-shy of such predictions, though they made one faux pax in saying the Jews would not reestablish themselves in the land of Palestine. All were further examples of prophetic disconfirmation.⁶

The social and cultural orientation of millenarians crystallizes in their view that history is in sharp decline. War, crime, corruption, malnourishment, ecological and energy problems, all indicate to premillennialists that the End time is the worst of times. The persecution and suffering of the minority group of millenarians also accompany these dark circumstances.

Thus, apocalyptists tend to be “come-outers” philosophically, theologically and culturally. We may locate them in provincial villages, as it were, at the rim of the modern world. Their perception of society and God may seem as far removed from modern secularism as a Tibetan monk is different from a New York scientist, or as a Jehovah’s Witness is at odds with a Harvard Unitarian, or a Palestinian guerrilla is removed from an American suburban churchgoer. Apocalyptists generally resist an enlightened, Protestant, middle-class view of the world. (That is why a high churchman like Chesterton snubs them as wilder than the beasts of Revelation.) But for whatever it is worth, this makes millenarians akin to the vast majority of the earth’s population which is neither enlightened, nor Protestant, nor middle-class. Adventist groups grow tremendously all over the world because they appeal to its largest constituency—those hoping for another world: not primarily middle-class women, for example, wanting to “get out of the kitchen,” but women tired of having no kitchen at all.

There is the ever diminishing minority of

bourgeois westerners who still find solace in the more optimistic prophecies of postmillennialism—the belief that man and his institutions are good, history is progressing upward, and peace and prosperity for the world are imminently realizable. In politics, a Franklin Roosevelt or a Lyndon Johnson seek to build a millennium domestically. A Woodrow Wilson or a Richard Nixon endeavor to enter the millennium through foreign relations. All experience their “disappointments.” In science, hard-nosed empiricists of the laboratory look up from their research and, in the spirit of Teilhard de Chardin, dream utopian visions. One is reminded of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.’s satirical quotation in *The Sirens of Titan*: “Every passing hour brings the Solar System forty-three thousand miles closer to Globular Cluster M13 in Hercules [says Ransom K. Ferm]—and still there are some misfits who insist that there is no such thing as progress.” In religion, Harvey Cox, a sometime evangelist of postmillennialism, from his vantage point in the early 1960s expects society to grow at once more secular and more humane, while much of society, instead, turns suddenly religious and rather inhumane. Harvey Cox, too, has to fold up his ascension robes and contemplate failed predictions. The long tradition of

“Harvey Cox, too, has to fold his ascension robes and contemplate failed predictions. The long tradition of American postmillennialism—from Jonathan Edwards to Richard John Neuhaus—has been a history of prophetic disconfirmation.”

American postmillennialism—from Jonathan Edwards to Richard John Neuhaus—has been a history of prophetic disconfirmation. Charles Finney, the famous evangelist of Miller’s day, provides a notable example; at one point he predicted a millennium on earth within three years.

So, pre- and postmillennialists share a history of failed prophecies. Where they differ is the matter of worldview. Seventh-day Adventists

view their times as ripe for apocalypticism. Since the 1840s, Adventists have seen themselves and the world from an *apocalyptic perspective*. They have seen their time as the time of the End. Generations come and go, particular “signs” of the End grow obsolete, but Adventists sustain their apocalyptic faith. Their message does not herald a *chronology* of events so much as it calls for a new *quality of life*: a state of health and well-being, physically, psychically, spiritually, emotionally. If the Civil War does away with slavery and does not destroy the country, Adventist predictions fail but the essential call to an Adventist life continues. If Turkey is not the King of the North, and World War I is not Armageddon, the message still endures. Israel occupies Palestine, John F. Kennedy is not an Antichrist, race riots and student unrest are not the final “anarchy loosed upon the world,” Sunday gas station closings are not the “mark of the beast,” but there is still a distinctive Adventist quality of life.

Since John wrote that this was “the last hour” and the events of Revelation “must soon take place,” there have been *Adventist* Christians who took the apostle quite literally. Since the First Advent of Jesus Christ, according to these Christians, man has lived in “the last days.” This, again, has not been an especially chronological category (as Jesus himself was nervous about timetables). Rather, the “new dispensation” has marked a new kind of time (*kairos* instead of *chronos*). The kingdom of God has already broken into man’s world—since the first sayings and healings of Christ—and the kingdom will one day overwhelm the world. Apocalypticists, then, in the New Testament tradition, should speak more about *what* the kingdom is like than *when* it will come. For this is, finally, the test for the validity of apocalypticism (in the face of alternative worldviews): what sort of kingdom does the apocalypticist anticipate? What sort of kingdom has been already realized in him and the apocalyptic community?

On an individual level, apocalypticism certainly proves a valid way to face existence. Since every hour may be an individual’s “last hour,” every hour is precious and rich with meaning. A homely analogy illustrates the effects of apocalypticism. Generally speaking, grandparents have little time left—fewer minutes to the proverbial

midnight—and yet they live as though they have all the time in the world. They have time for small talk, long walks and grandchildren on the knee. The young parent, with more time, acts as though he has less. Busy, harried, grasping, he may miss the sanctity of the present moment. Here the grandparent understands what the parent may fail to understand. Eschatologically, the present is the only moment there is.

On a cosmic level, also, apocalypticism no longer requires the labored explanations it once did. Eighteenth-century theologians charted the flight of comets near the earth to show that the world would melt in fervent heat. None of these pyrotechnic treatises can come close to the impact of Hiroshima or Nagasaki on the modern consciousness. Man can destroy his own world, and the only language that really does justice to such a predicament is apocalyptic language.

Malcolm Muggeridge, the British journalist lately converted to Christianity, adopted a decidedly apocalyptic view of civilization. He writes, “The way of life of Western man today is the most horrible and degraded that ever existed on earth . . . And what’s more,” adds the septuagenarian, “it’s breaking up so fast that, whereas I used to imagine it would somehow stagger on through my remaining years, I now think that these old eyes will see the crackup.” Identifying the breakdown in social terms, Muggeridge says: “In a way, it’s deliriously funny, of course—going to the moon when you can’t walk with safety through Central Park, or for that matter through Hyde Park nowadays, after dark; fixing up a middle-aged dentist with a new heart in one part of Africa while in another part tens of thousands die of starvation in a squalid tribal war for which we, among others, provide the arms. . . .”⁷

In his latest book (his last?), the dean of American church historians—and another septuagenarian—Sidney Mead concludes on a rather uncharacteristic note of pessimism. The epilogue is worth quoting at length.

I have written these pieces with the chilling realization that we live today under the shadow of man’s power to destroy all life on this planet. In a happier time of more primitive technology, James Russell Lowell could say that when God gave man a matchbox he knew that the framework of the world was fireproof. Today, with Loren Eiseley, I

feel that tomorrow I may be a fleck of carbon in the rubble of that world. This would be to go out with a bang. But it is equally likely that man will end more slowly, with a whimper, in an overcrowded world and an environment so dirtied by his refusal to control the pollution of his own nest that it can no longer sustain life. There are also the terrifying possibilities lurking in chemical and biological "weapons." I agree with Arthur Goldberg that probably man now has less than a 50 percent chance of survival.⁸

Even an apocalyptic faith, of course, can be faulted for obsolescence. For Adventists to feed this vast, hungering earth's population with the message of the Second Coming, they must proclaim the end of the present age, not a past age.

They must lament today's torment, today's tyranny and persecution, not yesterday's. Signs for the 19th century grow obsolete in the 20th century. Natural disorders of the bygone era must yield to the ecological omens of our era. Tennessee chain gangs are superseded by the persecutions of some latter-day "Gulag Archipelago." It is the raging beasts of this present world that the believer needs slain by the Lamb of God. It is this desperate moment that he desires transformed into the brilliant millennium of a new heaven and a new earth.

Finally, then, while prophecies fail, apocalypticism is not a failure. Each generation of millenarians must, in turn, demythologize and re-mythologize its message. Apocalypticism is valid only as a view of the contemporary world, not a past world.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From "The Nine Billion Names of God," by Arthur C. Clarke, in Mayo Mohs, ed., *Other Worlds, Other Gods* (Avon: 1974), pp. 162-70.

2. Matthew 10:23 (RSV).

3. Leon Festinger, Harry W. Riecken and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails*, Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1956. Festinger applies a theory of "cognitive dissonance" to the Millerites as well as the flying saucer cult. In my opinion, the thesis weakens in relation to the saucer cult as the community eventually dissipates and virtually vanishes after their disappointment.

4. Ernest R. Sandeen in Edwin S. Gaustad, ed., *The Rise of Adventism* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1974), pp. 116-17; also Marvin Meyers, *Jacksonian Persuasion*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957.

5. Norman O. Brown, *Love's Body*, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, Inc., 1966), pp. 191-231. Protestants must admit that the Bible itself follows irregular methods of interpretation by Protestant standards. Paul resorts to rabbinic rules of exegesis that the traditional Protestant would not feel at liberty to use. The

book of Hebrews transforms the meaning of the Old Testament sanctuary, again, in a way that Protestants could not abide with their own methodology. Admittedly, Hebrews does not fit comfortably into the Adventist scheme either, as Christ enters immediately into the Holy of Holies at his resurrection rather than waiting until 1844.

6. See Howard B. Weeks, *Adventist Evangelism in the Twentieth Century*, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1969. See also my review of Weeks' book in *Adventist Heritage* (January 1974), 45-48.

7. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered*, Family Library (New York: Pyramid Publications, 1969), p. 153.

8. Sidney E. Mead, *The Nation with the Soul of a Church* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1975), pp. 127-28.

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Adventists Between the Times: The Shift in the Church's Eschatology

by Roy Branson

Quite surprising in view of their [Seventh-day Adventists] firm belief in the imminent end of the world was their heavy investment in publishing houses, hospitals, homes for the aged, and especially educational institutions. Not only did they maintain numerous academies, colleges, graduate schools, and both a theological seminary and a medical and dental school, but they also established a widespread network of elementary schools. Noting their many good works, one observer has commented that seldom while expecting a Kingdom of God from heaven has a group worked so diligently for one on earth.

Winthrop Hudson, *Religion in America*¹

The remarks of the one-time president of the American Society of Church History highlight a paradox that puzzles many Adventists themselves. If the Lord is coming as soon as Adventists preach, how can the church and its members genuinely throw their energies into activities, projects and institutions that demand long-term plans and efforts? How can the church leader-

ship tie up the tithes and donations of members in long-term stocks and bonds? How can academics undertake prolonged graduate programs? How can ministerial students delay their proclamation of the Second Advent by enrolling year after year for seminary study?

The crux of the dilemma is that observers and church members alike identify Seventh-day Adventists with those Christians who are certain when Jesus is coming and that it is within their lifetime, this year, or the next few months. In other words, the present time. Seventh-day Adventists have been equated by others and themselves with the followers of William Miller in the nineteenth century who were absolutely certain that they would see Jesus within the few months they allowed before His return, and with the earliest followers of Jesus who saw Him ascend into heaven and who remained in Jerusalem to welcome Him as He descended to finally establish His kingdom.

If any sense is to be made of a group's expecting a Kingdom of God from heaven while working diligently to represent one on earth, there must be an appreciation of the difference between the eschatology of Seventh-day Adventists and that of both the Millerites and the beginning Christian community. To do so, one must see the eschatology of the initial Christian church as described by the Acts of the Apostles

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developing distinctly different emphases in the New Testament epistles, and the eschatology of the Millerites making a similar shift into the eschatology of Seventh-day Adventists.

In outlining such parallel developments in the New Testament Church and the Christian Adventists of the latter part of the nineteenth century, we will examine whether believers focused on the present or the future as the time for the Second Coming and the ways their attitude affected their actions. The first few pages will look at the New Testament writers before concentrating on our Adventist forebears, and finally on our own present beliefs. We will see that Seventh-day Adventists celebrate God's actions past, present and future; that they have a thoroughly biblical eschatology that justifies their intense and sustained effort here and now to demonstrate the character of the Kingdom of God.

The very earliest Christian community is depicted by Acts as expecting the risen and ascended Lord to return momentarily to Jerusalem. While written much later, Acts no doubt relies on early memories of Christian groups. It is certain that the miraculous wonders of the resurrection, ascension and all the miracles and signs "done through the apostles" (Acts 3:43), were all considered part of what the prophets had foretold as the great day of the Lord. All that remained was His triumphant appearing. His return was a part of the events filling the present, rather than an action coming in some period in the future.

In the light of this expectation, what did the disciples think it was appropriate to do? "All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." (Acts 2:14) And, "Attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts." (Acts 2:46) Prayer, worship and fellowship together appear to have consumed their time. They did not stop to organize evangelistic teams to travel throughout the empire, nor were they convening councils to settle doctrine or establish canons or orthodoxy. They appear not to have been preoccupied with improving their property or vocational skills. Indeed, "all who believed were

together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need." (Acts 2:44, 45)

Of course, the Lord did not return immediately. Acts tells the story of a group that only gradually realized that their Lord was not coming at once, and that their mission was much more extensive than they had initially realized. They began with assumption that they were to witness among Jews in Jerusalem. Persecution drove them out to other parts of Judea, Samaria and Galilee, where they learned that the gospel was to go to the Gentiles, even those in Asia and Greece. Finally, Paul arrived in Rome, the capital of the empire, having preached the gospel to the "uttermost parts of the earth."

Among churches raised up throughout the Mediterranean area, anxiety developed concerning the delay of Christ's coming. Some twenty years after the earliest events in Jerusalem depicted in Acts, Paul wrote to converts in Thessalonica who were wondering what would happen to those friends and relatives who believed in Christ, but who had died while waiting for His appearing. Paul said that "concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope . . . God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep." (I Thess. 4:13, 14) In explaining in more detail why there should be no anxiety about those who have already died, Paul made it clear that the Lord was coming so soon that Paul and those to whom his epistle was written would still be alive at that great day. "We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. . . . We who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord." (I Thess. 4:15, 17)

Some believers became sufficiently concerned about when the Lord would return that they asked for signs and portents. But Paul dismissed their questions. "As to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you . . . the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (I Thess. 5:1, 2) The Lord's return will be both immediate and sudden.

Shortly after sending this letter to the Thessalonians, Paul found it necessary to write another. The Thessalonians' sense of immediacy had

gotten out of hand. Certain believers claimed that Paul had said that Christ was already here. Paul now found it necessary to emphasize that Christ's return was still in the future. He mentioned events that must take place between the present and Christ's appearing. "Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed." (II Thess. 2:3) Christ's coming is imminent, but not tomorrow. It is sudden, but not without warning signs.

Some Thessalonians had been so sure that Christ was coming at any moment they had given up their worldly work and relied on fellow-believers and the Lord to support them. They received a tongue-lashing from Paul. To a community who must endure a period when designated events will take place before the Lord returns, Paul said in no uncertain terms that they were to continue ordinary economic relationships. "We hear that some of you are living in idleness . . . Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living." (II Thess. 3:11, 12) While Acts seems to applaud those in the Jerusalem community who sell possessions so the needy may join them in prayer and worship just prior to Christ's appearing, Paul now forcefully tells the Thessalonians not to disrupt their normal economic patterns. "If any one will not work, let him not eat." (II Thess. 3:10)

Not only to the Thessalonians, but also in his communications to the Corinthian believers, Paul seemed to emphasize both the shortness of time and also the extension of some time, however limited, before the Lord returned. In chapter fifteen of First Corinthians, Paul outlines a sequence of momentous events that appear to stretch the period before Christ's appearing. Beginning with Christ's resurrection, "He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet," a time for his "destroying every rule and every authority and power," including death, after which Christ "delivers the kingdom to God the Father." (I Cor. 15:20-25) On the other hand, Paul also stressed the lack of time, advising "that in view of the impending distress . . . do not seek marriage . . . I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none." (I Cor. 7:26-29)

Much later, the epistles addressed to Timothy reveal an eschatology that unequivocally takes the Second Coming out of the present and puts it in the future. The most striking evidence are references to a future period when apostasies will take place; an era that has come to have its own designations, distinguishing it from the present. "In *later times* some will depart from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." (I Timothy 4:1) "In *the last days* there will come times of stress, for men will be lovers of self, lovers of money," etc. (II Timothy 3:1, 2) (Italics mine in both quotes.) The present has its duties and opportunities. But there will be a future time when things will be different and worse. "The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings." (II Tim. 4:3, 4)

The present is filled with teaching, exhortation, training in godliness, "always being steady." (II Tim. 4:5) Considerable attention must be paid to "how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God," how one is to remember the faith and be a "bulwark of truth." (I Tim. 3:15) In short, prevent heresy and apostasy. By now, a developed church organization, complete with deacons, elders and bishops, has emerged both to persevere order and orthodoxy in the present and to prepare the church to defend itself against the apostasies of the last days.

A church preserving the truth delivered to it, patiently and soberly waiting for a future, not present, return of Christ, emanates a different atmosphere from the earliest Christian community inflamed by tongues of fire and the sudden rush of mighty winds to expect Christ's appearance at any moment. Rather than exhibiting "great power" with testimonies, and "many wonders and signs," (Acts 4:33; 2:43) the church, according to James, is to develop the virtue of patience.

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . As an example of suffering and

patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who are steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job. (James 5:7-11)

The church is being encouraged to endure the long haul.

Second Peter makes the point even more forcefully. Here, too, Christ's return is not described as part of the present, but coming in some future period. As in the epistles to Timothy, Second Peter says that before Christ's coming there is a period still in the future when "there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies . . . many will follow their licentiousness and because of them the way of truth will be reviled." (II Peter 2:1, 2) As in Timothy, this period is called "the last days." For First and Second Timothy and Second Peter there is the present, then the future last days, and finally the Second Coming.

But in a way that the epistles to Timothy do not, Second Peter describes these false teachers as doubters of the Second Coming, scoffers "saying where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." (II Peter 3:3, 4) That these doubts were already being expressed, even within the church, is suggested by the time taken in the epistle to respond to such an argument. There were three answers for both unbelievers and wavering Christians. All the answers allowed for the possibility of an extended period of time before the appearance of Christ.

First, the God whose word created the heavens, the earth and the water, could "store up" the heavens and earth for His future purposes. (II Peter 3:7) The earth and the future—space and time—are His. Neither are out of control; both will respond to His will.

Second, God and man experience time differently. "Do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promises as some count slowness." (II Peter 3:8) What might be an enormous delay for man, stretching his hope to the breaking point, can be a brief pause to God. No matter how long the delay might seem to

man, God will certainly fulfill His promise that Christ will return.

Third, any delay from man's viewpoint is not explained by any capriciousness of God's, or lack of power or love on His part. Rather, precisely because of His love and mercy God has exercised His sovereignty over the earth and the future in man's favor by not returning to judge the quick and the dead. God "is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance." (II Peter 3:9) The delay allows more persons to repent and be saved. "Count the forbearance of our Lord as salvation." (II Peter 3:15)

As in James, there is an admonition to be patient. "According to his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (II Peter 3:13) As in the epistles to Timothy, the believers who wait are to develop character. "What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness." (II Peter 3:11) "Beloved, since you wait for these [new heavens and new earth], be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace." (II Peter 3:14)

What began in the earliest Christian community as a preoccupation with the return of Christ in the present shifts into a teaching of what will happen in the future. What was

"James White thought time would not allow for marriage; that taking such a step was evidence of doubt in the soon return of Christ. In October 1845, he said an Adventist couple who had announced their plan to be married had 'denied their faith.' "

initially considered a problem—the delay of Christ's return, making it impossible for the initial believers to live long enough to see Christ's appearing—becomes interpreted as a boon: God's merciful act in giving the non-believer time to repent and be saved. What starts as an indifference to institutions—not just property and business but even marriage and

church organization—develops into a major concern for how Christians are to represent the Kingdom of God in institutional form.

During the middle of the nineteenth century a group reenacted in the eastern United States the sense of Christ's immediate return felt by the early Jerusalem Christians. As a result of their interpretations of Daniel, they approached the spring (March 21, then April 18), and finally the fall (October 22) of 1844 with the certainty that normal human life was ending its course; that the establishment of the Kingdom of God was a part of the present period.

As in the initial Christian community, property and business seemed superfluous. F. D. Nichol, in his detailed study of the Millerites, says unequivocally, that "most of the believers, however, gave up all their worldly occupations for the last few weeks, before the expected end of the world. The testimony on this is clear."² Devout northern New England farmers expressed their faith by abandoning their fields as early as the spring of 1844. "Some, on going into their fields to cut their grass, found themselves entirely unable to proceed, and conforming to their sense of duty, left their crops standing in the field, to show their faith by their works, and thus to condemn the world. This rapidly extended through the north of New England."³ Part of the faithful sold the goods which they would soon not be needing. "Numbers of the believers turned their possessions into cash, and no small part of this money was used to purchase literature or in some other way to advance the movement."⁴ An example in New York City was "Brother Abraham Riker, a well-known shoe dealer in Division Street, who was for many years a class leader in the M. E. Church, closed his store and spent considerable time in distributing papers, attending meetings, and warning others."⁵ The Adventist press itself reported that other believers had emulated the early Christian church in spending their few days before Christ's appearing, sharing their wealth with the poor. "Many of our brethren and sisters have disposed of their substance and given alms, agreeable to Luke 12:33, in the confident expectation of the speedy coming of the Lord."⁶

When the Lord did not come on October 22, 1844, those who retained a belief that the

prophecy had been fulfilled on that date (primarily through seeing actions of Christ in a heavenly sanctuary fulfilling Daniel's 2300-day prophecy), continued the sense of God's immediate return characteristic of Millerite eschatology. The Second Coming was still so close as to be a part of the present. James White and Ellen Harmon, for example, who had met once before the great disappointment, traveled together afterwards, preaching to Adventist congregations. They believed that the Lord would return in 1845. A few days before the expected date, Ellen Harmon had a vision that they would be disappointed again, "and that the saints must pass through the 'time of Jacob's trouble' which was future."⁷

Even so, James White, like Paul, continued to think that time would not allow for marriage; that taking such a step was evidence of doubt in the soon return of Christ. James wrote a letter during October 1845, in the Adventist journal *Day Star*, saying that an Adventist couple who had announced wedding plans had "denied their faith in being published for marriage," and that "we all look upon it as a wile of the Devil. The firm brethren in Maine who are waiting for Christ to come have no fellowship with such a move."⁸ When James and Ellen finally did get married a year later, partly so they could travel to churches together without others gossiping, James acknowledged four days before the wedding that some firm Adventist believers were concerned about a possible slackening of faith in the immediate return of Christ. "Brother Nichols said that he was tried when he first heard of our marriage, or intended marriage, but he is now satisfied that God was in it."⁹

One of the clearest evidences that Adventists continued to rely on a Millerite eschatology for a few years after the disappointment was their persistence in preaching that God had shut the door on those who had not already accepted the midnight cry. The signs, after all, had been fulfilled; none remained to be enacted before Christ's return. Probation had closed. Those who had heard the midnight cry of the bridegroom's appearing and rejected it had sealed their doom. Those who had accepted it were only to remain faithful until the moment for leaving the earth to meet the returning Lord in the air.

Mrs. White admitted that she had been among those who had preached the shut door after the

October 1844 disappointment. “For a time after the disappointment in 1844, I did hold, in common with the advent body, that the door of mercy was then forever closed to the world.”¹⁰ The White Estate says that her earliest visions of December 1844, and February 1845, by confirming the validity and importance of the “bright light” of the “Midnight Cry,” contributed to the convictions among Adventists that the door of salvation had been closed. Although the term shut door itself is not used in the first published accounts of these visions, when they initially appeared in 1846 editions of the Millerite journal *Day Star*, distributed among Adventists who were certain that all the signs of Christ’s coming had been fulfilled, the visions by “*confirming confidence in the fulfillment of prophecy on October 22 just naturally established in their minds a close of probation on October 22.*”¹¹ (Italics supplied by the White Estate.) Mrs. White insisted later, in 1874, that “I never had a vision that no more sinners would be converted,” but her use of the term “shut door” in letters written as late as 1847 and 1849 could well have contributed to the assumption that Ellen White, even then, continued to share the Millerite eschatology: Probation had closed and the appropriate action of those who had heard and accepted the midnight cry was to gather together and wait in faithfulness and prayer for the Lord’s return.¹² (Italics mine.)

The shut door teaching was pervasive during this period. According to the White Estate, “what might be termed the ‘shut door era’ in our history extended from 1844 to 1851 or 1852.”¹³ James White’s remarks are taken as primary evidence that the era had ended. In 1851 he wrote in the *Review* that “now the door is open almost everywhere to present the truth and many are prepared to read the publications who have formerly had no interest to investigate.”¹⁴ By 1852, he was saying that the embracing of the Sabbath by Adventist brethren was a work “not confined to those who have had an experience in the past advent movement. A large portion of those who are sharing the blessings attending the present truth were not connected with the advent cause in 1844.”¹⁵

As late as May 1856, Mrs. White, in a manner reminiscent of Paul in First Thessalonians, was

certain that Christ would return during the lifetime of her contemporaries. At a conference at Battle Creek, Mrs. White said that while the door was no longer shut to those who had not accepted the 1844 truth, time would not allow the door to remain open very long. “A very solemn vision was given me. I saw that some of those present would be food for worms, some subjects for the seven last plagues, and some would be translated to heaven at the second coming of Christ, without seeing death.”¹⁶

As time continued to extend beyond 1844, and it became clear a decade after the great disappointment that the Lord’s coming had been delayed, the persistent search began for actions beyond prayer, fellowship, study and worship that might allow believers to hasten the Lord’s appearing. A mighty work of reformation within the remnant was an initial alternative. Adventists had accused others of unfaithfulness. Now they turned on themselves. Millerite Adventists before 1844 had come to call not only the Catholic church but the Protestant denominations that rejected their message apostate Babylon. After 1844, those Adventists who continued to believe prophecy had indeed been fulfilled in 1844 by Christ’s work in the heavenly sanctuary and who accepted the Sabbath turned on their fellow-Adventists and accused them of falling into the Laodicean sin of lukewarmness to truth. Now, beginning in 1856, and reaching a peak in 1857, Adventists who had accepted the sanctuary truth and the Sabbath confessed that they themselves were guilty of delaying Christ’s return by slipping into a Laodicean condition. James White sounded the warning October 16, 1856, in a study of the letters to the seven churches, concluding with Laodicea. “It will not do, brethren, to apply this to the nominal churches; they are to all intents and purposes, ‘cold.’ And the nominal Adventists are even lower than the churches.” No, “it will be of no use to try to evade the force of this searching testimony to the Laodicean Church . . . What language could better describe our condition as a people, than this addressed to the Laodiceans?”¹⁷

By November 13, favorable responses had appeared in the *Review* and the editor, James White, could report that “we rejoice to hear from all parts of the field that the testimony to the Laodiceans is being received, and is pro-

ducing good results upon the remnant.”¹⁸ Articles or letters discussing the Laodicean message increased from twenty during the balance of 1856 to 178 in 1857, dying down to 51 in 1858 and only two during the next three years.¹⁹

Looking back on the experience in 1859, Ellen White reported that in the Spring of 1857 she and her husband preached the Laodicean message on a tour of the east, “and the people of God were stirred everywhere. Nearly all believed that this message would end in the loud cry of the third angel. But as they failed to see the powerful work accomplished in a short time, many lost the effect of the message.” Then Ellen White for the first time made clear what had been increasingly implied since the 1844 disappointment: Sabbathkeeping Adventists had a different eschatology than the Millerites. “I saw that this message would not accomplish its work in a few short months.” Just as the eschatology of the initial Christian community expecting Christ in a few days shifted into the eschatology of First and Second Timothy, James and Second Peter that anticipated considerable time might elapse before Christ returned, so the Millerite conviction that Christ’s coming was part of their present experience had developed into a sense that Christ’s return was clearly in the future. Mrs. White, in this same statement, even gave as a reason for the delay one found in second Peter—God’s mercy. “I say that God would prove his people. Patiently Jesus bears with them and does not spue them out of his mouth in a moment . . . If the message had been of as short duration as many of us supposed, there would have been no time for God’s people to develop character.”²⁰

The sense of time lengthening on this earth had concrete implications for how Adventists acted. The Millerites had been preoccupied with immediately entering heaven. Mrs. White, on the other hand, in the same 1859 message, said “God proves his people in this world. This is the fitting up place to appear in his presence.”²¹ That was why concern with organization was appropriate. “God is well pleased with the efforts of his people in trying to move with system and order in his work. I saw that there should be order in the church of God, and

arrangement in regard to carrying forward successfully the last great message of mercy to the world.”²²

A year later, in the fall of 1860, James White convinced a group of believers from various states to come to Battle Creek to create a publishing association. Once together, they also

“The Millerites had been preoccupied with immediately entering heaven. Ellen White, on the other hand, said ‘God proves his people in this world. This is a fitting place to appear in his presence.’ ”

adopted a name—Seventh-day Adventist.²³ But they could not bring themselves to create a denomination. Ellen White’s response revealed how her movement away from the eschatology of a shut-door Millerite had also taken her well past their indifference or hostility to human institutions. “August 3, 1861 [at Roosevelt, New York] I was shown that some have feared that our churches would become Babylon if they should organize . . . unless the churches are so organized that they can carry out and enforce order, they have *nothing to hope for in the future.*”²⁴ Thorough-going Millerites did not worry about the future and its institutions.

Later that year, a plan was devised and printed in the *Review* for organizing local churches, and believers in Michigan went on to organize themselves into the first conference. In 1862, six other conferences organized. Finally, at a general session held in the spring of 1863, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was duly constituted. The report of the meeting in the *Review* did not sound like the Seventh-day Adventist denomination was convinced that the end was now. Its reference to church officers and their duties was reminiscent of the concern for the responsibilities of church leaders found in the epistles to Timothy, though Seventh-day Adventists had gone even further to create a national and legal structure. To “the organization of a General Conference, and the further perfecting of State conferences, defining the authority of each, and the important duties

belonging to their various officers, there was not a dissenting voice, and we may reasonably doubt if there was even a dissenting thought. Such union, on such a point, affords the strongest grounds of hope for the immediate advancement of the cause, and its future glorious prosperity and triumph."²⁵

For a while, the new denomination remained where it had already established itself—the east and midwest. The center continued to be Battle Creek. Six years after establishing The Advent Review Publishing Association and three years after creating the Seventh-day Adventist denominational organization, the new church created its second institution: the Western Health Reform Institute, later Battle Creek Sanitarium. It was not for six more years that a third institution, a school, was organized, also in Battle Creek.

The first dramatic expansion geographically and institutionally was the work on the Pacific coast in the seventies. California was the site of

“Opening the work in California excited the new denomination. It now spanned the continent, and some were ready to fling the organization across the seas. Mrs. White said ‘missionaries are needed to go to other nations. . .’ ”

the first institutions established outside Battle Creek. In a pattern that was to become familiar elsewhere, a publishing house, sanitarium and school were organized: Pacific Press (1875); the Rural Health Retreat (1878), later St. Helena Sanitarium; and Healdsburg College (1882), later Pacific Union College.²⁶

Opening the work in California excited the new denomination. It now spanned the continent, and some were ready to fling the organization across the seas. Already in 1871, Mrs. White insisted that “missionaries are needed to go to other nations to preach the truth . . . Every opportunity should be improved to extend the truth to other nations. This will be attended with considerable expense, but expense should in no case hinder the performance of this work.”²⁷

Others, however, did not find that their theology could develop rapidly enough for them to become enthusiastic about undertaking such a vast task. No faster than the early Jerusalem church could they envision a message for all men throughout the world. Certainly during the period of Millerite eschatology extending through the shut-door period of the early fifties, it had never occurred to believers that there was enough time to accomplish such an immense mission. Besides, probation had closed. What was the need for evangelism?

Even in the late fifties and sixties, the emerging sense that time was being extended, which meant that attention could be devoted to organization, had not led immediately to a redefinition of mission. In 1859, the *Review* received a letter asking “Is the Third Angel’s Message being given, or to be given except in the United States?” Uriah Smith, the editor, explained why overseas missions were unnecessary. “We have no information that the third Message is at present being proclaimed in any country besides our own. Analogy would lead us to expect that the proclamation of this message would be coextensive with the first: though this might not be necessary to fulfill Rev. 10:11, since our own land is composed of people from almost every nation.”²⁸ Just as the followers of Christ initially considered themselves as followers of the Way within Judaism, Seventh-day Adventists thought of themselves as a movement within Christendom which had already taken the gospel to all the world. Indeed, the phenomenal nineteenth-century expansion of particularly Protestant missions from America and Europe to Asia and Africa was cited in the *Review* as late as 1872 as evidence that the signs of Matt. 24:14 had been fulfilled and the Lord was therefore returning very soon.²⁹ When immigrants to America became Seventh-day Adventists, they wanted to go back to Europe to proclaim the three angels’ messages, some opposed them because plunging heavily into such a grand enterprise was evidence that they did not really believe that Christ was coming soon.³⁰

Still, Mrs. White’s urgings, and the appeals for help from Sabbathkeeping Adventists who had heard through unofficial and circuitous routes about an organized Seventh-day Adventist church, finally led the General Conference of 1874 to select J. N. Andrews as the first official

Seventh-day Adventist missionary. He landed in Europe that same year. Even so, he and the other denominational leaders assumed that the mission of Seventh-day Adventists overseas would be limited to what it had been in America: Proclaiming distinctive Adventist truths—the Sabbath and the judgment—to already converted Christians.³¹

During the next three decades, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination preached the gospel and established institutions on every continent of the world except Antarctica. The seventies saw Adventists spreading throughout Europe. In the eighties, they established permanent institutions in Australia, Africa and the West Indies, and during the nineties traveled on to Latin America, India, China and Japan.³²

In the United States, the nineties saw the rapid development of institutions. Academies appeared that would become colleges, and colleges such as Union and Walla Walla emerged from previously established academies.³³ By the end of the century, the beginning of a denomination-wide elementary school system could already be seen.³⁴ Medical institutions also sprang up during this period. While the eighties had been devoted to building up Battle Creek Sanitarium, the nineties gave rise to several other sanitariums that have continued to the present. The ambitious American Medical Missionary College in Battle Creek and Chicago, opened in 1896.³⁵ Publishing houses, schools and sanitariums were also founded in Europe and Australia.

Still, there appears to have been opposition to expansion and institutionalization; and for the same reasons that had been given for opposing organization thirty years before: Time lavished on institutions was time taken from preparing for an immediate return of Christ. Mrs. White, who had been instrumental, with her husband, in establishing the Pacific Press and the opening of the work in California in the seventies, and who had spent two years in Europe during the eighties, settled down for almost the entire decade of the nineties in Australia. She consistently and strongly supported Adventists expanding their work throughout the world, and in every area building up institutions.

Returning from Australia to America for the fateful 1901 General Conference that would

establish a still more elaborate denominational organization (at her strong personal insistence and implemented by A. G. Daniells, a young protégé brought with her from mission work in New Zealand), Mrs. White released for publication a strong response to opponents of institutions.³⁵ The statement appeared just before the General Conference session that would, in response to her forceful demands, crystallize the present denominational structure that has encouraged Adventists to become involved in creating myriad institutions. It articulates a position on the relationship of eschatology to institutions that has continued to be standard for our denomination today. As such, it deserves to be quoted here at length.

Let no one conclude that, because the end is near, there is no need of special effort to build up the various institutions as the cause shall demand. You are not to know the day or the hour of the Lord's appearing, for this has not been revealed, and let none speculate on that which has not been given him to understand. Let everyone work upon that which has been placed in his hands, doing the daily duties that God requires.

When the Lord shall bid us make no further effort to build meetinghouses and establish schools, sanitariums, and publishing institutions, it will be time for us to fold our hands and let the Lord close up the work; but now is our opportunity to show our zeal for God and our love for humanity.

We are to be partners in the work of God throughout the world; wherever there are souls to be saved, we are to lend our help, that many sons and daughters may be brought to God. The end is near, and for this reason we are to make the most of every entrusted ability and every agency that shall offer help to the work.

Schools must be established, that the youth may be educated, that those engaged in the work of the ministry may reach higher attainments in the knowledge of the Bible and the sciences. Institutions for the treatment of the sick must be established in foreign lands, and medical missionaries must be raised up who will be self-denying, who will lift the cross, who will be prepared to fulfill positions of trust and be able to educate others. And besides all this, God calls for home mission-

aries. The workers for God, in the field or at home, are to be self-denying, bearing the cross, restricting their personal wants, that they may be abundant in good fruits.

A faith that comprehends less than this denies the Christian character . . . Use your means to create, rather than your influence to diminish agencies for good. Let no one listen to the suggestion that we can exercise faith and have all our infirmities removed, and that there is therefore no need of institutions for the recovery of health. Faith and works are not severed. Since the Lord is soon to come, act decidedly and determinedly to increase the facilities, that a great work may be done in a short time.

Since the Lord is soon coming, it is time to put out our money to the exchangers, time to put every dollar we can spare into the Lord's treasury, that institutions may be established for the education of workers, who shall be instructed as were those in the schools of the prophets. If the Lord comes and finds you doing this work, He will say: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'³⁷

Mrs. White emphasizes that we do not know the day or the hour of Christ's appearing. There will be a period in the future when God will tell us to cease building institutions that save souls and demonstrate our love for humanity. In the meantime, we must busy ourselves with actions that a returning Lord will applaud whenever he appears. Mrs. White refers to the Lord's soon coming to emphasize the need for proceeding with activities she says the Lord would wish to find a good and faithful church pursuing. Seventh-day Adventist eschatology, as expressed by Mrs. White, does not depend on the Lord's coming in a day or two. It does not reveal the indifference to the character and nature of present, earthly institutions seen in the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem and the Millerites in nineteenth-century America. Seventh-day Adventist eschatology resembles the sensitivity to organization and structure expressed in the epistles of the New Testament. Like Second Peter, Seventh-day Adventists are anxious for the soon-return of their Lord, and would be grateful if He appeared at any moment. But also like Second Peter, Adventists have an eschatology that allows them to sustain

a lively hope and active life for as long as proves necessary.

Given the way Adventists have adjusted to the prolongation of time in the period we have examined, one might conclude that by now, over one hundred years after the establishing of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, the conviction that the Lord will return has waned.

“ ‘Faith and works are not severed. Since the Lord is soon to come, act decidedly and determinedly to increase the facilities, that a great work may be done in a short time.’ ”—Ellen White

But no more for Seventh-day Adventists than for the New Testament church does adjustment to the prolongation of time dictate a waning of certainty that He will return. Even Second Peter, which referred to the fact that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, was written precisely to affirm that the Lord would come again. When Christ did not appear immediately, the New Testament writers still maintained their faith. It did not disappear because it was not dependent on future events. Their faith was founded on certainty about the past death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That event established the sovereignty of Christ over His creation, both temporal and spatial.

Paul's appreciation of Christ's resurrection began with his belief that Christ was the creator. "In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Col. 1:16, 17) Paul's language reflects the fact that in his day many, particularly the gnostics, believed that there was a great chain of being descending from God through ranks of heavenly beings in invisible realms, continuing down imperceptibly through earthly

authorities to ordinary men. Certainly, the Biblical writers saw God's power extending through the entire creation, both seen and unseen.³⁸

When Paul preached the centrality of Christ he assumed that rebellion had brought chaos to the whole creation, affecting both heavenly hosts and earthly authorities. Within such a context, the death and resurrection of Christ was not merely the spectacular miracle of one man's rising from the dead. Paul and the other New Testament writers regarded the resurrection as a cosmic event. It was the decisive, irreversible victory over rebellion; the creator restoring order to His creation. Christ "disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them." (Col. 2:15) "Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to Him." (I Peter 3:22) Ellen White also saw Christ as the decisive event in the great controversy.

Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath, He exclaimed, "It is finished." (John 19:30) The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten him the victory. As a conqueror He planted His banner on the eternal heights . . . Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour's cross; for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured and that the universe was made eternally secure.³⁹

In the conflict of the ages, Christ is victor. His death and resurrection are the center of history. All events are measured by this event.

As one theologian after the second world war put it, with the resurrection D-day has been fought and won; V-day, the Second Coming, still lies ahead.⁴⁰ On a less heroic scale, but in terms more immediate to Americans in an election year, the crucial primary has been fought and won. There is no question about the outcome of the campaign, but official acclamation of the winner still lies ahead.

Contemporary Seventh-day Adventists live between the times; between the decisive battle and the future celebration. But no matter when

the final victory comes, our life now need not be wracked with doubt and anxiety. The decisiveness of Christ's triumph in the past guarantees the certainty of His return in the future. Nothing can alter the significance of what has already been accomplished. No delay can shatter confidence in the triumph already achieved.

To what should that confidence in the future, that buoyancy in the present be based? The New Testament is clear that the period between the times presents the church triumphant with a challenge—dealing with areas of stubborn resistance to the Creator's authority. Christ's victory is not in doubt, but not all parts of the creation yet recognize His rule. That is why Paul says that Christ "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." (I Cor. 15:25) The enemies are those agencies visible or invisible, supernatural or natural that act contrary to God's purposes in the creation. The unique agent of Christ's will in the world during this period is the church. "What is the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great might which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named . . . he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church." (Eph. 1:19-23)

Seventh-day Adventists have always recognized that these rebellious powers can be earthly, visible and corporate. The creatures and beasts of prophecy directed attention to oppressive authorities usurping God's powers. The Seventh-day Adventist church's response has been to announce the good news of Christ's triumph, to exhibit the meaning of that victory in the nature of individual members' lives and the character of the institutions it has ventured to establish, and to fight vigorously those defiant powers violating God's creation and creatures. The church challenged the institution of slavery, calling not only slavery an evil, but also the religious and political institutions that supported it. Adventists opposed parties that did not assist the black man after emancipation.⁴¹ They opposed ineffective medical institutions, and battled liquor interests. In short, Seventh-day Adventists were not a retiring, helpless group, but a vigorous community, active in an expanding society

during that period of social, political and intellectual ferment that has been the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Seventh-day Adventists today rejoice that Christ may return at any moment. But this assurance in Christ's decisive act in the past makes unnecessary nervous preoccupation with

just how immediate the return will be and what new or previously ignored technique can be employed to hasten His appearing. Rather, confidence in God's gracious and decisive act in the past assures us that the future is His. Adventists living between the times are free to demonstrate God's power in the present.

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12. Ellen White to Joseph Bates, July 13, 1874, Letter 2, 1874, in *Selected Messages*, Book 1, p. 74, and Ellen White to Brother and Sister Hastings, March 24-30, 1849, in Arthur White, pp. 25, 26. For discussion of Mrs. White's use of shut door in these letters and elsewhere, see Arthur L. White, "Ellen G. White and the Shut Door Question," Ellen G. White Estate, Washington, D.C.; Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, Harper and Row, New York, 1976, pp. 14, 215 N. 19; Ingemar Linden, *Biblicism, Apokalyptik, Utopi: Adventisemens historiska utveckling i USA samt dess svenska utveckling till 0. 1939* (Uppsala, 1971) pp. 71-84, 449-50 and his unpublished paper in English, "The Significance of the Shut Door Theory in Sabbatarian Adventism, 1845 - ca. 1851."
13. Arthur White, p. 3; cf. Arthur Whitefield Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, vol. 1, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C., 1961, p. 162. "Joseph Bates, James White and Ellen White were at the beginning believers in the shut door, along with Miller, Turner, Snow, Marsh, Jacobs, Crosier, and nearly all other Adventists. These three maintained the doctrine longer than most, until increasing light finally caused them to abandon it." See also, pp. 164, 165.
14. James White, *Review and Herald*, August 19, 1851, p. 13; quoted in Francis D. Nichol, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C., 1951, p. 237.
15. James White, *Review and Herald*, May 6, 1852, p. 5; quoted in *Ibid.*
16. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, Battle Creek, Mich., 1860, p. 208.
17. *Review and Herald*, Oct. 16, 1856, p. 189.
18. *Review and Herald*, November 13, 1856, p. 13.
19. Statistics based on research by Donald E. Mansell, Assistant Secretary, Ellen G. White Estate.
20. *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 2, pp. 224, 225.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
23. Godfrey T. Anderson, "'Make Us A Name'" *Adventist Heritage*, vol. 1, no. 2, (July, 1974) pp. 28-34.
24. Ellen White, *Review and Herald*, August 27, 1861, pp. 101, 102; quoted in A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory, 1888-1901*, Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington, D.C., 1966, p. 154.
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26. Spalding, vol. 2, pp. 158, 165.
27. Ellen White, *Life Sketches*, pp. 204-206; quoted in Spalding, vol. 2, pp. 200, 212 n. 14.
28. Uriah Smith, *Review and Herald*, Feb. 3, 1859, p. 87; quoted in Spalding, vol. 2, p. 194.
29. D. N. Canright, *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1972, p. 138; quoted in Gottfried Oosterwal, *Mission Possible*, Southern Publishing Association, Nashville, Tenn., 1972, p. 26; cf. Spalding, vol. 2, pp. 191-195.
30. Oosterwal, p. 25.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-32.
32. Spalding, vol. 2, pp. 191-225, 305-327.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 127. For example, Colleges: Union (1891) Walla Walla (1892) and Academies: Graysville (1892), later Southern Missionary College; Keene (1894), later Southwestern Union College; Oakwood Industrial School (1895), later Oakwood College.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 353-371.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 335, 338-339. For example, Colorado (1896), Chicago (1876), Portland (1896), New England (1899).
36. Olson, pp. 175-200.
37. Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mt. View, California, 1948, pp. 440-441.
38. Amos Wilder, *Kerygma, Eschatology and Social Ethics*, Facet Books, Philadelphia, 1966, pp. 23-34.
39. Ellen White, *Desire of Ages*, Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mt. View, Calif., pp. 758, 764.
40. Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 3rd ed., The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1964, pp. 81-93; See also W. G. Kummel, *Studies in Biblical Theology*, 23, London, 1957.
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John's Apocalypse: Some Second Thoughts On Interpretation

by Richard W. Coffen

The evangelist buttressed his sermon on the battle of Armageddon with proofs gleaned from the rest of the Revelation. "You notice, friends, that one of the protagonists in Armageddon is the great red dragon. Now what does the red dragon symbolize? Those two words afford our clues. As we all know, the dragon signifies China, and the color indicates that Communist China will play a leading role."

But the evangelist had more interpretations to share. "Furthermore, Revelation 14:20 predicts that the blood will flow for 1,600 furlongs. You sports fans—how long is a furlong at the horse races? Right, 660 feet. Since eight furlongs equal one mile, 1,600 furlongs, then, make 200 miles. Now, I have a friend who served as a missionary in the Middle East. One day he drove the road that encompasses the Valley of Megiddo, and his odometer showed that it was exactly 200 miles."

As the congregation gasped in amazement, the evangelist adjusted his blacklight diorama. "Soon the armies of the world will fight on that Middle East plain because of the oil there, but Jesus will end the atomic holocaust by coming again. The great clock of heaven ticks away.

Soon it will strike midnight, and Jesus will return. Signs are fulfilling all about us, and shortly the last sign will meet its fulfillment."

The evangelist's hermeneutic—if he had a conscious one—typifies traditional Adventist apocalyptic interpretation, which rests on three presuppositions.

His interpretation of the red dragon as Red China presupposes that the symbols of the Revelation correspond with modern imagery. Our usual identification of the beast with lamb-like horns (Revelation 13) with the American bison illustrates the same presupposition.

The evangelist's use of the racing furlong (660 feet) rather than the biblical furlong or stadium (606 feet) presupposes that John's intended audience would live during the time that the era of horse racing and the era of the 5,280-foot mile overlap. Londoners built the first racetrack about 1170, but the mile was not increased from 5,000 to 5,280 feet until about 1500. Thus, according to this presupposition, John wrote primarily for those living during the past four and three quarters centuries. Our habitual identification of current events as the fulfillment of apocalyptic symbolism—such as the Civil War's being Armageddon and Turkey's playing a dominant role in eschatology—also illustrates the presupposition that the Revelator's primary audience would live in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Finally, the illustration of the cosmic clock inexorably ticking off the seconds presupposes that the time of the Second Coming has been predetermined. We merely await the fulfillment of more signs, then Jesus can come. It also appears that current events rather than God's sovereign will have predetermined the Advent. Our constant appeal to newspaper headlines demonstrates our checklist approach to the Second Coming and the widespread Adventist acceptance of this third presupposition.

Unfortunately, these three well-worn presuppositions lack support from the Apocalypse and its immediate context of the New Testament. Indeed, three radically different presuppositions drawn from a careful examination of the Revelation itself, of the entire Scriptures, and the *Weltanschauung* of biblical times must replace them.

Presupposition One. *God in communicating with John—and with all the other Bible writers—and John, in turn, with his communications, used the idioms and thought patterns indigenous to that particular time and culture.*

A cursory glance at the rabbinic writings, other apocalyptic literature, Babylonian and Canaanite mythology, and even the Old Testament itself convinces the candid student that the Revelation embraces a rich, varied and well-known symbolism.

“Only in comparatively recent times have we come to appreciate that John's symbolism was neither arbitrary nor invented by him, but constituted a language drawn from an ancient tradition which yet spoke eloquently to his contemporaries.”¹

Studies in comparative religious thought have shown that such symbols as stars, stones, trees, lightning, rainbows, reptiles, mountains, women, water, cubes and certain numbers such as seven and 12 hold a generally common pattern of meaning in varying cultures around the world. Thus, for centuries—until, perhaps relatively modern times—almost anyone anywhere could have read the Apocalypse and would have easily grasped the larger meaning behind the imagery.

Paradoxically, our *ignorance* of John's symbols stems from our *knowledge*. The Industrial Revolution and our age of a sophisticated *Weltanschauung* have weaned us from the

land and from our feeling for the numinous. Little about our life, our world and our universe remains mystifying or mystical to the average person. Hence, we have grown ignorant of the imagery that spontaneously arose and captivated the imagination of thinkers for millenniums. We have caused our ignorance by “growing up” into the pseudosophistication of the late twentieth century.²

All this leads to the second presupposition.

Presupposition Two. *John, along with the other Bible spokesmen, wrote primarily to a living, contemporary audience.*

John himself addresses the Revelation to the seven churches, and we should not insist that “seven churches” are code words for the entire Christian church from its inception to the Parousia. John specifically identifies the seven churches as those *in Asia* (1:4). Furthermore, Jesus instructs John to write his visions in a book which he must send to the seven churches, and He enumerates them by name (1:11).

If we argue that only the first four chapters relate to John's fellow Christians, we are implying that the largest portion of the book would have held no meaning to its first readers. Why, then, should they read it? We have no trouble admitting that Paul addressed contemporary churches in his epistles. Why treat the message of Revelation differently? John sent his Apocalypse to his compatriots, who were *to read* and *to keep* its prophecies (1:3; 22:7).

The beatitude of 1:3 implies that John expected the Apocalypse to form a part of church liturgy. The hymnic fragments of the book also point to a cultic *Sitz im Leben* for the Revelation. Leonard Thompson suggests that John based his organization of the Apocalypse on the common worship patterns of the early church.³ None of this should surprise us, for Paul includes apocalyptic “revelations” along with psalms, doctrines and tongues as elements in the Christian worship service.⁴ Since apocalyptic does not fit into our modern liturgy but did form a part of early Christian church services, we conclude again that John had a contemporary audience in mind.

This does not mean that the Revelation had no significance for generations future to John's day. It appears that each succeeding generation

of Christians has taken John's apocalyptic message seriously and gathered hope from it. However, because John wrote the Revelation for his friends, the biblical scholar will look to the current events of the early centuries for possible seed fulfillments of John's visions. For example, when John's first readers compared Revelation 13 with the emperor-as-god cult and with the spasmodic outbreaks of religious intolerance their fellow-Christians had already suffered, they knew that the fulfillment of the vision was all too probable.

Having read Revelation 13:17—written only 87 years before — how would *you* have interpreted the vision if you had lived at Lyons and Vienne in 177? “We are not competent to describe the magnitude of the tribulation here, the extent of the rage of the Gentiles against the saints and the sufferings of the blessed martyrs. . . . *Not only were we excluded from public buildings, baths and markets, but even the mere appearance of any one of us was forbidden, in any place whatsoever.*”⁵

Or what if you had lived during Decius' persecution of Christians (249-251), when every citizen had to obtain a *libellus* certificate documenting that he had sacrificed to the gods and to the genius of the emperor? Surely, Revelation 13 must have seemed very real.

And these suggestions lead us to the final presupposition.

Presupposition Three. *John shared the unanimous conviction of the New Testament writers that Jesus would return momentarily.*

In the King James Version, the Apocalypse opens with the clearcut statement: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass.”⁶ And the book closes in the King James Version with similar words. “These sayings are faithful and true: . . . to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.”⁷ The Greek, however, is the same in both verses.

Sandwiched between these two identical statements is a symbolical description of those very things God said would transpire shortly. And peppered throughout these symbolical descriptions further statements reinforce the idea of almost immediate fulfillment. The time

is at hand (1:3); persecution will last only ten days (2:10); Jesus will come quickly (2:16; 3:11); the martyrs will rest for a little season (6:11); the locusts will torture men only five months (9:5, 10); time will be no longer (10:6); the Gentiles will trample Jerusalem for only 42 months (11:2); the two witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days (11:3); the two witnesses remain dead only three and a half days (11:9); the woman flees to the wilderness for 1,260 days (12:6) and three and a half times (12:14); the beast from the sea rules 42 months (13:5); the seventh head/king reigns a short space (17:10); Babylon's plagues come in one day (18:8) and one hour (18:10, 17, 19); Satan will be loosed

“No one can interpret the Bible without utilizing presuppositions of some kind, but when the interpreter imposes on the text presuppositions foreign to the genre in particular and to Scripture in general, interpretive problems arise.”

only for a little season (20:3); Shortness and rapidity characterize the plot and cast of the Revelation.

Following these supportive statements and the last of the two parallel phrases noted previously, Jesus assures John: “I come quickly. . . . The time is at hand. . . . I come quickly. . . . Surely I come quickly.”⁸

God was reemphasizing what every other New Testament writer had insisted—that Jesus would return in their day.

All four Gospels record such statements of Jesus as: “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, there be *some standing here*, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”⁹ “*This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.*”¹⁰

The apostle Paul taught the same thing. “But this I say, brethren, the *time is short.*”¹¹ “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord,

that *we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord* shall not prevent them which are asleep. . . . The dead in Christ shall rise first: then *we which are alive and remain* shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."¹²

The book of Hebrews asserts: "Exhorting one another: and so much the more as ye see *the day approaching*."¹³ "For yet *a little while*, and he that shall come will come, and *will not tarry*."¹⁴

James counseled: "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. . . . Stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord *draweth nigh*."¹⁵ Peter warned: "The end of all things is *at hand*."¹⁶ And Jude wrote: "Now unto him who is able to keep *you* from falling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of his glory."¹⁷

The testimony of every New Testament writer substantiates God's statements in the Revelation that time would end soon and that Jesus would come quickly. The second century writer of the *Epistula Apostolorum* believed that the Second Coming would take place 150 or 120 years (depending on the manuscript) after Jesus was first here—in other words, in the early 150s or 180s.¹⁸

As Don Neufeld has pointed out in one of his *Review* editorials, Christ could have come in New Testament times.¹⁹ If that is true, then He could also have returned any time since His ascension. This implies—and is supported by the Revelation—that God has been patiently waiting for spiritual Israel (just as He did for literal Israel) to develop a quality character that He can safely take to heaven. Jesus has been looking for quality in His corner, and as soon as He can

point to a group sufficiently large to accomplish His purposes on earth, He will say, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."²⁰ Then He will return.²¹

Once Adventists realize 1) that God has not predetermined the time of the Second Advent, 2) that Jesus is not waiting for the world to get worse but for His church to get better, and 3) that the Revelation looks for an obedient people dressed in Christ's righteousness, they will properly understand the message of the Apocalypse. Then the revival and reformation predicated on that proper understanding will follow just as Ellen White predicted.²²

No one can interpret the Bible without utilizing presuppositions of some kind, but when the interpreter imposes on the text presuppositions foreign to the genre in particular and to Scripture in general, interpretive problems arise. Has the time come for Adventists to reevaluate and reformulate the presuppositions they take to the Apocalypse? If so, they would do well to keep in mind this advice from the scholar Isbon T. Beckwith.

"For the understanding of the Revelation of John, it is essential to put one's self, as far as possible, into the world of its author and of those to whom it was first addressed. Its meaning must be sought for in the light thrown upon it by the condition and circumstances of its readers, by the author's inspired purpose, and by those current beliefs and traditions that not only influenced the fashion which his visions themselves took, but also and especially determined the form of this literary composition in which he has given us a record of his visions."²³

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Scottish Journal of Theology*, February 1974, p. 78.

2. More specifically, the careful scholar will not ignore the implications of such imagery as the following. The description of God in Revelation 4 parallels that of a sky/storm god. Eschatological silence is the counterpart of primeval silence. The loosing of the four winds draws significance from the Book of Enoch and is the blowing of the seven trumpets. The four levels of the ancient *Weltanschauung*—sky, earth, sea and underworld—each house villains ultimately overcome by the Lamb. The Leviathan and Behemoth imagery of the Talmud and the Old Testament casts light on Revelation 13. Mystical numbers such as three and a half, seven, and 12 hold qualitative not quantitative significance.

3. Leonard Thompson, *The Journal of Religion*, October 1969.

4. I Corinthians 14:26.

5. *The Epistle of the Gallican Churches*, cited in *Documents of the Christian Church*, second edition, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson.

6. Revelation 1:1.

7. Revelation 22:6.

8. Revelation 22:6, 10, 12, 20.

9. Matthew 16:28.

10. Matthew 24:34.

11. I Corinthians 1:7.

12. I Thessalonians 4:15-17.

13. Hebrews 10:25.

14. Hebrews 10:37.

15. James 5:7, 8.
 16. I Peter 4:7.
 17. Jude 24.
 18. *Epistula Apostolorum* 17.
 19. *Review and Herald*, March 29, 1973, p. 13.
 20. Revelation 14:12.
 21. Other Adventist authors have also stressed the conditionality of prophecy. J. N. Andrews in *The Sanctuary and Twenty-three Hundred Days*, second edition, pp. 5, 9, quotes Bliss' *Commentary on the Apocalypse* pp. 7, 8, which sets forth the principle of conditional prophecy. J. H. Waggoner in *Refutation of the Doctrine Called the Age to Come*, second edition, p. 92, refers to conditional prophecy. E. A. Sutherland in *Living Fountains or Broken Cisterns*, p. 81, suggests that had Israel been faithful, earth's history would have been shortened by at least 2,000 years.
- Martin Buber calls conditionality the "prophetic theologem" of Hebrew prophecy, though Buber refuses to apply the contingency principle to apocalyptic literature (*Pointing the Way*, pp. 197, 198).
- The deterministic element which scholars see in apocalyptic does not necessarily vitiate conditionality in the genre. For example, certain rabbis held both concepts in tension when explaining why Messiah had not come. "Rab said: All the predetermined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds" (Sanhedrin 97b). "R. Samuel b. Nahami said in the name of R. Jonathan: Blasted be the bones of those who calculate

the end [Messiah's advent.] For they would say, since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come. But [even so], wait for him, as it is written, *Though he tarry, wait for him*. . . . What delays [his coming]?—The Attribute of Justice delays it [footnote: because of Israel's unworthiness of it]" (Sanhedrin 97b).

Furthermore, numerous commentators point out that determinism is not as prevalent in the Revelation as in other apocalypses. "The book of Revelation is not a book to satisfy hungry curiosity. The extent to which it reveals *what will happen* is related structurally to the revelation of *how* what will happen will happen to men according to their choices and loyalties in the present" (David W. Cain, *Religious Studies*, March 1972, p. 40).

"There are . . . in the Apc exhortations and threats that do not harmonize perfectly with a purely deterministic or mechanistic conception of human history" (Pierre Prigent, *Theology Digest*, Spring, 1975, p. 56).

"The deterministic element, though present in Revelation, never suggests man's helplessness, nor does it threaten man's freedom or responsibility. The letters to the seven churches show that John thinks that man's decisions and responses in the world do shape history as well as personal destiny" (*The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, p. 245).

22. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 113, 114.
23. Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, p. v.

How to Wait For the Second Coming

by Tom Dybdahl

The sky grew brighter and brighter. The earth seemed to shake, and people were rushing about wildly. I didn't know whether to run or stand still. And then it hit me: This was IT. This was the Second Coming of Jesus.

I wanted to be glad, but instead I was terribly afraid. The light got even brighter, until I could see nothing around me. I heard shouts of joy, but none of them were mine. I tried to speak, but I could make only a croaking sound. Then everything went black. And then I woke up.

This happened several times—with variations—when I was young. Only one aspect of the dreams was constant. I never knew whether I was saved or lost. I knew only uncertainty, fear, and then the waking.

Surprisingly—or perhaps not so surprising—everyone I have talked with who was raised as a Seventh-day Adventist has had dreams about the Second Coming. Some were very elaborate; some very simple. And these dreams had obviously left deep impressions. Nearly everyone could recall even the small details.

Seventh-day Adventists live with the Second Coming. It invades our sleeping as well as our waking. Perhaps you have looked up at a clear

sky and seen a small white cloud—is it the size of a man's hand?—and watched, wondering. What will it be like? Could this be it . . . Or, maybe driving on a day with heavy, dark clouds, you have seen shafts of sunlight stream through and thought: will it look like that? And along with the fascination has there not been at least a twinge of fear?

The one undisputable fact is that it hasn't happened yet. Jesus has not returned. Our grandparents thought they would never grow old, but they have. And now we are growing older. We have talked about it for so long with no results that people are beginning to wonder—and bolder ones are beginning to ask—if Jesus may not come for a long time.

Most of us are somewhere in the middle. We believe God's promise is true. We live in the hope of the Second Coming. We pray that it will be soon. But still we wait, and we cannot continue to simply ignore the questions and doubts.

In years past, several alternative explanations for the delay in Christ's coming have been popularly held by Adventists. Perhaps the weakest of these was that Christ could not come until the investigative judgment had been completed. Maybe it was only as children that we believed this—after all, there were an awful lot of books to get through. But surely God has a system far in advance of our own computer technology, so

bookkeeping difficulties cannot be the reason for the delay.

Then there were the signs. It was always easy to just say that they hadn't been sufficiently fulfilled as yet. But that didn't harmonize with our belief that the primary signs have already been fulfilled—that this was the Time of the End, that Christ's return was "just around the corner."

Others emphasized the necessity of evangelizing the world. The gospel, including the third angel's message, must be preached to "every creature." Every individual must be personally confronted with the need to decide for or against Christ. But as the days pass, that possibility becomes less and less likely. The figures become more discouraging and just suppose we could get a piece of literature into the hand of everyone, or they could tune in the Voice of Prophecy, would that do it? Some of us took years to decide for the Advent message.

But the most common Adventist explanation given today is summed up in one sentence from Ellen White: "When the character of Christ shall

"I didn't know whether to run or stand still. And then it hit me: This was IT. This was the Second Coming of Jesus. I wanted to be glad, but instead I was terribly afraid. The light got brighter, until I could see nothing around me."

be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."¹

This explanation, based on the parable of the blade and the ear, has been called the "harvest principle." Just as the farmer must wait for his crops to mature, so Christ must wait for His people to mature. When will He return? When His people perfectly reproduce His character. Why hasn't He returned yet? Because they haven't reproduced His character.

This harvest theology does not abandon the goal of reaching the world, but it stresses the importance of ripening and maturing the spiritual experience of those already within the

church. What we really need is not to reach more people, but to develop those we already have into a strain of super-Adventists who perfectly reproduce the character of Christ. Then the Latter Rain will be poured out and all those unredeemed millions will be easily reached.

But this view, too, leaves unanswered questions. Surely, the regular appeals to greater holiness and purity are good—who of us is perfect? Who can find fault with the sincere admonitions to "finish the work." But how can we be better Christians—more perfectly reproduce the characters of Christ—than our pioneers? They gave all they had to this work. And if our lives were more like Jesus, if we did have more dedication and commitment, would that bring in the Second Coming? Suppose this program or that project succeeds; will "the work" be finished?

So here we are in 1976. Nearer the end than yesterday, to be sure, but how near? Can our words of urgency convince even our own children, to say nothing of the "world outside?"

What is God waiting for? Just what will it take to complete our work here and claim our place in God's heavenly kingdom?

Perhaps we could begin an answer by going back to this parable of the blade and the ear. It is a straightforward parable:

So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground: and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come. (Mark 4:26-29.)

This is not primarily a parable of the Second Coming. It is primarily a parable of the Christian life. It plainly teaches a maturing process. We are to grow and to produce fruit. But this process is not a one-time event at the close of history, it is for all Christians in all ages.

We need not look to some future time when we may become total Christians. "At every stage of development our life may be perfect," Ellen White comments, "yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement."²

This understanding of the parable does not

abandon the traditional call for the gospel to the world. Indeed, the call to reproduce the character of Christ is a call for fruit-bearing Christians. “The object of the Christian life is fruit-bearing—the reproduction of Christ’s character in the believer, that it may be reproduced in others.”³

What, then, does Mrs. White mean when she speaks about perfectly reproducing the character of Christ? She herself gives a straight-forward explanation:

If you have accepted Christ as a personal Savior, you are to forget yourself, and try to help others. Talk of the love of Christ, tell of His goodness. Do every duty that presents itself. Carry the burden of souls upon your heart, and by every means in your power seek to save the lost. As you receive the Spirit of Christ—the spirit of unselfish love and labor for others—you will grow and bring forth fruit.”⁴

This is not some unattainable ideal. Rather, it is a plain, simple declaration of daily Christian living. Nor does it describe some exalted state which only a few may reach at the end of time. It tells how we may all grow and produce fruit—now.

There is another parable that is particularly appropriate here—the story of the ten virgins. In this parable, Jesus specifically predicted a delay in His return. The ten virgins—representatives of professing Christians—went to meet the bridegroom. But he tarried, and while waiting, they all went to sleep.

Why are some of these called wise and others called foolish? The wise virgins were those who had extra oil—those who were prepared for a delay. They expected the bridegroom to come on time, but when he was late, they were equipped to handle the emergency.

The five foolish virgins were foolish precisely because they thought they *knew* that the bridegroom was coming soon. They thought they would not need any extra oil. They were not prepared for a delay. So they were unready when the bridegroom did come. (The “delay,” of course, is from our perspective. God knows and has always known the day and the hour of Christ’s coming.)

If we would understand the value and mean-

ing of the signs of Christ’s coming, we could continue to maintain their validity without embarrassment. The signs are not given to enable us to construct a chronological timetable of events preceding Christ’s Second Advent. If this were possible, it would only serve to insure that many of us would wait till the last possible minute to prepare. It is precisely because we think we have this kind of timetable already that we can grow apathetic in the face of signs. (After all, the Sunday laws must come first.)

The signs are not given to tell us the quantity of time that remains before Christ will come. They are given to warn us of the quality of the times we are living in. This is the end time. Current events are just the kinds of things Jesus said would be happening at the hour of His coming. It is not like a time bomb set to explode, it is like a tiger ready to spring. The situation is critical every moment.

This does not mean that last-day events will not follow the sequence generally outlined, not that the Sunday laws will not be passed. But it is a frightful kind of arrogance for us to demand

“The five foolish virgins were foolish precisely because they thought they *knew* that the bridegroom was coming soon. They thought they would not need any extra oil. They were not prepared for a delay.”

that God follow our time schedule, or fit precisely into our understanding of things. He has plainly warned us that both His promises and threatenings are alike conditional.

If God, in His long-suffering love for all humanity, should see that after 132 years the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an institution was no longer fulfilling the purpose for which He had established it and should turn from it, could we blame Him? We hope, we pray, that this will not happen. But the Jews were God’s chosen people, and that choice was meant to last forever. Yet, when they failed to fulfil His purpose, God was forced to reject them as His

special messengers. We misunderstand God if we believe He will let the whole world continue on indefinitely with its pain and sadness and death simply because one group of people prove unfaithful to their trust.

Surely, this should be a warning to us. At the last great day, some of us may discover that we have been growing as tares, while all along we thought we were wheat. Just because we are members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in good and regular standing does not mean we have a reserved seat in God's kingdom. Not all those who say, "Lord, Lord" are written in the Lamb's book of life.

But all of this just brings us back to the basic question. We know that we are living in the end time. Yet, reaching every person with the gospel seems impossible. And to assume that we can be better Christians than any people who lived before us, or that God cannot reject the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is unwarranted pride. What does He require? What will it take for us to get things over with and be received into God's kingdom, where we belong?

First and most important—we can trust God. He has given us a "sure word of prophecy" that Jesus will return. His Word does not say: "You must make it happen." It says: "I will come again." The One whose mercy is everlasting, the One who is faithful although all men should prove faithless, will not let us down. God will bring to pass all that He has promised—in His own good time.

Secondly, we can remember that God expects

no more of us than He has expected of His followers in all generations. We are to love Him with all our hearts and minds and souls, and love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to do the duties around us, and carry a burden for the salvation of others. And then we are to leave the worrying to God. He will work in us both to "will and to do of His good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13.) He has made Himself responsible for the results of our honest efforts.

We need not be embarrassed by our insistent proclamation of Christ's soon coming. We are in good company—Paul, John, and Peter preached it almost 2,000 years ago. And for many people, the end will come today, or tomorrow, or next week. For the rest of us, it will come soon enough—at the very time God has planned.

What we do need to remember in our proclamations is that being able to predict just when Jesus will come is not the most important thing. The times and seasons are in God's hands. What is important is that we—like these saints of old—not waver in our trust; that we, like them, continue to look for a city whose builder and maker is God, though we see it only by faith.

The faithful servant is not the one who periodically gears himself up for superhuman efforts, and then lapses into depression when little happens. Nor is he the one who constantly berates himself that if he would just do a little more that would end it all. The faithful servant—and the one who is always prepared—is the one who daily does the work assigned him, trusting in His Lord's promise to return. He is the one who will hasten that day. And whenever it comes, he will be waiting—and ready.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 65

3. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 68.

Can Intellectuals Be at Home In the Church?

by Alvin Kwiram

In 1968, Robert Pierson, president of the General Conference, initiated a study aimed at developing more effective means for reaching the (secular) intellectual. As an outgrowth of that action, Alvin L. Kwiram, now chairman of the Board of Editors of SPECTRUM, was one of those invited to suggest approaches that might be explored in dealing with this issue. Since then, a subcommittee of the General Conference, formed to study this entire question, has asked the Association of Adventist Forums to prepare a written report on this subject. The following article, based on the analysis Kwiram submitted earlier, is an introductory exploration of the problem. We urge our readers to communicate ideas and suggestions to us so that a broad range of views can be represented in the final report.

The Editors

The leaders of the church are asking, "How can the church more effectively reach the intellectual?" If I assume that the key term in the question has an agreed-upon meaning, that might lead quickly to serious misunderstanding.

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Let me begin, therefore, with a brief discussion of the word "intellectual."

The dictionary says that an intellectual is "one whose work requires primarily the use of the intellect." But this definition seems to exclude persons whose daily work is primarily physical, but who, nevertheless, are *confronted* by profound intellectual issues in the spiritual and moral realm. The problem is even worse if we restrict the definition to those who have taken advanced education leading to graduate degrees. Many without advanced or even formal education engage in a quest for meaning just as "intellectual" as that of someone with a Ph.D. Moreover, no one operates in an "intellectual" mode at all times. Thus, one might reasonably rephrase the original question so as to include in the discussion everyone (regardless of work or education) who experiences "intellectual confrontation," especially on issues with spiritual overtones.

Even so, in this article the term "intellectual" will refer to someone with an advanced education who relies primarily on his or her intellect in his daily activities. He tends to be well read. He is at ease in the world of ideas. He is imbued with a certain quality of mind, a willingness to try new approaches and to examine ancient precepts, a certain taste for rigor. Such a person may be considered an exemplar of everyone in the

church who experiences “intellectual confrontation.”¹

The primary question of how the church might attract the intellectual immediately raises a secondary question. How are we treating the intellectual already in our midst? I shall address myself to this question first.

My own experience indicates that our home-grown intellectuals are leaving the church in alarming numbers (especially those not employed by the church). Surprisingly, however, they are not leaving because the church imposes too many restrictions; instead, it is because they feel that the church fails the test of relevancy in many of its practices and, all too often, refuses to speak at all when ethical issues are at stake. Whether this judgment is true, is partly beside the point. For it is the church’s responsibility to reach them at their level of perception.

Too often, when intellectuals do reach out for help, they get their hands slapped. More often than not, the questioning and analytical approach intrinsic to their way of thinking is seen as a threat to the institution. Often, the response of layman and ordained minister alike is to reject and exclude them. This is done, first, by the rejection of the *issues* that trouble the intellectual; in his eyes the church ignores scientific, social and psychological problems; it accepts glib and unreliable formulae for complex problems. It is done, second, by rejection of the *individual* who expresses concern about such topics. We inveigh against his “critical” attitudes, impugn his motives and his dedication to the institution and so on. No intellectual can long survive in such an environment. Everyone needs community, a sense of being accepted, of being worthwhile and respected. Even without acceptance, many struggle to remain members of the community of believers, but the social and intellectual isolation ultimately weakens their commitment to the point of despair.

The church, therefore, must reject the tacit view that the intellectual is either an enemy or a traitor. He must, in fact, be viewed as a child of God who is seeking for a fuller understanding of God and His will. At the same time, we must recognize that the frame of reference in which he pursues his quest may be quite foreign to the typical pastor or church member. He brings different criteria to bear; he even has different perceptions of reality. This means that even the

task of nurturing intellectuals already in the church may be very difficult.

I do not believe that, up to now, we have a well-developed program that speaks to the intellectual. Provonsha’s book² is a fine effort, but the labor pains generated within the institution by the birth of that small volume should be thoughtfully noted. One of the first things we must do, therefore, is to *encourage* capable persons to write and to speak to the intellectual audience in the church, with the assurance that their efforts will not lead to reprisal or ostracism. To meet the issues honestly and effectively will require much more frankness and openness. Clearly, such discussion may not be appropriate for the church at large, since it might deal with issues that some would not appreciate. Nevertheless, we must develop the means to generate such material and to use it effectively. This will require time, commitment, hard work, effective communication and a decisive reversal of present practices.

There is no point, however, in preparing the tools and the soil unless we are also committed to the development of ministers who understand the problems of the intellectual and can deal with them effectively. There are few such ministers in our ranks now. Partly, I believe, this is a reflection of the pressures the young minister feels. Any young man with intellectual tendencies will tend to be somewhat independent on intellectual issues. If that independence is viewed as a lack of loyalty to the organization and appropriately “punished,” then the young minister (whose intelligence and talents open many doors of opportunity) will leave the ministry to pursue advanced degrees in medicine, sociology, psychology or other fields. Here we may note, too, that students in our colleges sometimes opt to avoid a ministerial career for fear of becoming entangled in unproductive conflict. There are numerous examples of both such ministers and such students, and this trend will continue, given the present climate. Concomitantly, we will fail to hold (let alone convert!) very many intellectuals. Young ministers *must* be provided some measure of protection so that they can grow and develop without compromising their intellectual freedom and integrity. Indeed, we need to encourage and sustain centers where diversity is not deliberately destroyed.

Assuming a willingness to care for intellectuals within the church, where and how should we begin our outreach to intellectuals outside of it? Let me say, first, that this is a task which must be approached in the finest missionary tradition. We have labored for years in places like the Middle East, experienced insult upon rebuff, and taken it all in stride with ultimate rejoicing because we have baptized a few souls after ten years of hard work. We try to learn the language, the customs, the idiosyncracies of those we seek to win. No less is necessary or appropriate for the intellectual. Quick results should not be expected, particularly because our very attitudes represent part of the obstacle to his conversion.

“Intellectuals do not leave because the church imposes too many restrictions. They leave because they feel the church fails the test of relevancy and refuses to speak when ethical issues are at stake.”

Indeed, there is an urgent need here for a certain amount of consciousness-raising.

In general, I think it is easier to reach the young intellectual than the seasoned veteran with his entrenched habits and commitments. I believe our best opportunities for success will be among the students at secular universities. (In this mission field, as important as any other in the world, we have no missionaries.) Our conventional evangelistic approach is not appropriate for this group. Although the essence of the gospel is the same for all persons, the means we employ to attract their attention must be different. The issues and the language will change with time; the ultimate message of the gospel will not. Today, for example, we might capture the attention of the secular university student with issues such as vegetariansim, Christian meditation as an alternative to transcendental meditation, the harmful effects of drugs and smoking, the importance of ecology and the need to maintain a balanced harmony with nature. To be successful, however, such an

approach would require a nucleus of strategists and expeditors who *understand the rhetoric of both sides*.

Unfortunately, the church has not encouraged intellectual independence among those who might otherwise be ready to meet this challenge. Thus, it will be necessary to encourage and cultivate persons who might take up the task. It will not be enough merely to appoint one or two “campus ministers” (although many thoughtful persons have urged and pleaded that even that much would be a start). Such an approach will end in failure unless all the other considerations which have been discussed above are carefully thought through and appropriate changes implemented.

Of course, other segments of the “intellectual” society could be attracted to our faith. I have simply chosen the millions of university students as the most obvious prototype. In terms of adding numbers to our ranks, however, I must return to an earlier theme: *the greatest success would attend a serious effort among the home-grown intellectuals*. Even if only 50 percent of those who now leave decided instead to remain in the church, it would greatly add to the strength of the church and save countless heart-aches on the part of parents who see but do not understand the growing disaffection of their children. Moreover, the society at large is not improved by these embittered ex-Adventists.

I have outlined a number of problems, and I would now like to suggest several practical ways of exploring these problems more systematically.

1. A preliminary approach would be to encourage a discussion of these topics in *The Ministry* and in SPECTRUM.

2. A second step would involve setting up conferences in which church leaders meet with selected participants for an amicable consciousness-raising discussion of the problems. I would emphasize that the choice of participants for such a conference is crucial.

3. A very important part of such a program would involve scheduling of regional meetings with General Conference leaders. This, in itself, would bring great encouragement to many frustrated individuals. In fact, the Association of Adventist Forums could serve to coordinate such conferences and could even hold preliminary sessions to develop position papers. The

union and local conference presidents and selected pastors should also be invited for a frank and open discussion. I believe this would provide the leadership a valuable opportunity to see how serious the problem really is, and would give them a broad range of input on the perceptions of this segment of the church.

4. Finally, the Christian Leadership Seminars, a General Conference-sponsored program for the ongoing education of the church's administrators, and the Academy of Adventist Ministers, could be used to expose a greater number of the workers to these issues.

I think that a systematic and broadly based approach such as this could have a tremendous impact on the church and give strength and encouragement to a segment of the membership that too often feels unwelcome. Further, it would give the leadership some basis on which to select laymen, ministers and locales for the most effective introduction of trial programs.

Some will question the wisdom of such an enterprise. They will say the risks are too high, that if the church encourages more openness to contemporary questions and the people who ask them, it will stir up controversies, confuse the people, weaken their commitment to the standards and doctrines and otherwise create a ferment of ideas that militates against stability. But this, after all, is the age-old tension. What we need to do is understand it; we especially need to understand that comfortable ruts are incompatible with reform and progress, and that the vast majority always prefer ruts. The path of

least resistance merely requires that we mechanically mumble the established clichés. (Robert Frost's "good fences make good neighbors" comes to mind; the old man repeats the maxim regardless of whether it is still grounded in meaning or not.) We need to remind ourselves that conceptual advances have been made by minorities, whether in Christ's days, Luther's, or Ellen White's. Such advances are always opposed by those who feel called upon to "prevent heresy."

The problem of balancing institutional stability against creative change must be recognized by responsible leaders and handled with poise. To the extent that leadership is not sensitive to this issue, to that extent the whole enterprise of reaching the intellectual and providing an arena for him within the church is doomed.

I trust that the spirit in which these painfully candid comments have been made will not be dishonored. The comments reflect a deeply felt concern for the vitality of the church—a concern shared by many intellectuals in the church. But I would respectfully suggest that if the leaders fail to recognize the dedication of many intellectuals to the church, or fail to understand the nature or intensity of the debates that they engage in, then the task under discussion in this note will be an extremely difficult one. On the other hand, I am greatly encouraged by the interest the leadership has shown in the matter and hope that a spirit of cooperation and mutual trust can bring a new vitality to the work.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. I would like to suggest that the entire issue of "intellectual confrontation" especially as it relates to conversion and its obverse, apostasy, might be understood much more clearly if one were to invoke a mathematical formalism known as "catastrophe theory" recently invented by the French mathematician, René Thom, [See, for example, *Structural Stability and Morphogenesis*, by René Thom, translated by D. H. Fowler, W. A. Benjamin, Inc., 1975.] This theory is particularly useful for describing and analyzing "...those situations where gradually changing forces or motivations lead to abrupt changes in behaviour." [Taken from an introductory article by E. C. Zeeman, *Scientific American*, 234 (1976) 65.] Consider for example, someone for whom a particular religious tenet is challenged by a series of *convincing* arguments. On the one hand, his loyalty to his institution and his own self-image are

threatened. That is, he experiences a fear—rarely articulated—of losing his belief-system or faith. On the other hand, he has a strong commitment to rational dialogue and the demands of evidence. It is this commitment which *compels* him to seriously pursue the argument to its logical conclusions. These two forces are in conflict—his fear of losing faith, and his compulsive pursuit of intellectual honesty. There can be no neutrality here. Even relatively minor considerations can cause a discontinuous change in his intellectual outlook. If he is a secular person moving from a position of rejection to acceptance of spiritual matters, we talk of conversion. If the reverse is taking place, we speak of apostasy. But the crucial element in this transformation is *confrontation*.

2. *God Is With Us* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1974).

The Mythos Of the Mission Story

by William G. Johnsson

Like so many other returned missionaries, I have dressed up in native costume to give the mission story. The sight of the Churida pajamas, Nehru coat and brilliant Mysori turban never fails to impress the faithful Sabbath School members. The mission offering on such days reflects this interest.

Also like many other returned missionaries, I have had reservations about putting on such “good shows.” In particular, is an accurate picture of mission work fostered by such “performances”? And is it right to expect that the size of the mission offering will depend on the interest (I hesitate to say “entertainment value”) of the mission story?

After giving many mission stories and listening to a great many more, I propose that the mission story functions as mythos in the corporate worship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Secondly, I raise the question whether the time has come for a breaking of this mythos.

The word mythos is one which may immediately cause hackles to rise. For many Adventists, it

suggests “myth”—a pejorative term, signifying that which is false, a fairy-tale.¹

Of course, “myth” is used quite widely in this sense in our culture. But the word is ambiguous and, in fact, is used at times with a meaning exactly the opposite of the common one—that is, to set forth that which is *most* true rather than that which is *untrue*. The fields of anthropology and religion provide examples of such usage.

I may simply refer to the writings of the French anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss. In writings such as *The Raw and the Cooked* and *Structural Anthropology*,² he shows that the myths of primitive peoples point to deeply rooted “structures” in the subconscious. That is, they verbalize unconscious social patterns.

Turning to religion, I confine my remarks to Paul Tillich. Over and over, he holds that religious language proceeds via *symbols*. These symbols express religious experience with a directness and appropriateness that cannot be captured by any other means. For Tillich, “myth” signifies a cluster of symbols.³

I have given these quick examples merely to illustrate the positive valuation which may be assigned to “myth.” The term, however, continues to lead to misunderstanding, and it is probably better to look for a less ambiguous alternative. Here a less common word, but one

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winning more and more acceptance, may be suggested—*mythos*. My concern is with “myth” in terms of *social function* (rather than as used by Lévi-Strauss or Tillich), and *mythos* is an accurate term. A recent definition calls *mythos* “a pattern of beliefs expressing often symbolically the characteristic or prevalent attitudes in a group or culture.”⁴

The place of *mythos* is now widely recognized. It is accepted, for instance, that traditional ideas of the Pilgrim Fathers, the Declaration of Independence, the South, and Manifest Destiny have shaped the history and culture of the United States.⁵ To raise the historical question (Did it *really* happen like that?) is to miss the point: What we have to do with is a *body of ideas* which are accepted and handed down and which mold the thinking and social patterns of subsequent generations.

The characteristics of *mythos* are:

1. traditional material;
2. repetition—although with countless variations, certain features are always present;
3. function—to reinforce existing social structures by providing a “historical” justification

“What, then, are we to do? Shall we try for ‘bigger and better’ mission stories—more excitement, more color and so more ‘success’? This would be the wrong course. We need to question the mission story’s principal features.”

and to give direction to future cultural developments (e.g., “maintaining the *American way of life*!”).

The mission story, I suggest, displays such characteristics. Let us analyze it in terms of *form*, *features* and *functions*.

Form: Like every story, the mission story typically is divided into introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction gives information about the writer (“John Doe, B.A., Walla Walla College, 1948, M.A. Andrews University, 1955, President of X mission”) and the country. The “body” gives the story proper. The conclusion

invariably appeals to the hearers for funds and prayers.

Features: three features are almost always to be observed:

1. The leading figure or “character” of the story is the foreign missionary. This is inevitable since most stories are written by missionaries and each story gives a capsule history of the writer. It is not surprising, then, that missionaries usually play the lead role—traveling, holding meetings, giving medical services, helping people in need, and so on.

2. The negative features of the mission lands figure prominently. “Mission lands” are lands of disease and superstition, degradation and poverty, ignorance and wild beasts; against such a backdrop the leading character (the missionary) proceeds with his acts of mercy.

3. The listeners expect to hear of marvelous occurrences. The Sabbath School member, starved for evidences of the miraculous in his own culture, hears of sick people healed, demons cast out, and providential deliverances. But in the mission story such happenings are not surprising: they are *expected*.

Function: We may distinguish immediate and long-range functions in the mission story. The specific purpose is to motivate the hearers to give a generous offering. However, there are long-range purposes also. The mission story brings home the worldwide scope of Adventist concern with an effectiveness probably unmatched by any other denomination. This can lead to a universalistic outlook (the world our parish, all men our brothers) of unrivaled power. At the same time, it conveys a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment as the Gospel is seen to be going to more and more places.

It seems undeniable that the mission story functions as a social or cultural *mythos*. It is, indeed, an Adventist tradition, a tradition that has made us unique in scope of outlook and generosity in giving.

But a *mythos* may lose its power. It may simply decay away, as new social conditions show it to be inappropriate. It may be shattered by the work of the historians. It may be replaced by a new *mythos*.

Perhaps the turbulence of American society in the past decade is to be explained on this

basis: a mythos that had shaped and reinforced society for generations was broken with awesome effectiveness. Anyone who has read Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*,⁶ for instance, can only be disgusted at traditional versions of "how the West was won." Moreover, the fact that Vietnam shattered American myths may well be the root cause of the national agony over the war in Vietnam. Since Vietnam, for many Americans life has been life among the pieces—disillusionment at the collapse of old values and skepticism over those that seem to have survived.

What, then, of the mission story? Here, too, is a mythos that, though powerful still, is facing hard times. Statistics in terms of hard cash, for example, are convincing: offerings for missions vis-a-vis giving for local causes shows a steady decline.

What, then are we to do? Shall we try for "bigger and better" mission stories—more excitement, more color and so more "success"?

This would be the wrong course. Indeed, apart from the weakening of the mission story mythos noticed above, we need seriously to call into question the veracity of its principal features. I shall place my remarks in the context of that field in which I have some experience—India; it is my contention that all three features of the mission story as noticed above give a distorted picture.

The role of the missionary: the heroes of the work of India today are the Indian worker and layman, but they are unsung heroes. Because of government policy, the number of missionaries has drastically declined, but the accessions to the church have shown tremendous increases. India each year produces a number of "centurion" evangelists—but they are nationals, not foreigners. Indeed, India's neighbor in the Southern Asia Division, Burma, has been without a single foreign missionary for several years, but the church is prospering.

The denigration of mission lands: It is true that India is a land of poverty, superstition and much filth. But India produces its own jet planes, both for commercial and defense purposes; India has the greatest and possibly the most beautiful mountains of the world; India is a land of color and artistry of the perfection of the Taj Mahal.

We tend to forget that the same missions

quarterly that is produced for the churches of North America is used overseas as well, and many of our fellow Adventists there resent the playing up of the worst features of their country. Every land has both beautiful and ugly aspects—the United States included. And pride of race and country is universal.

Exotic happenings: Now it is true that marvelous occurrences are found in the mission lands. They are also found in North America—

"The *functions* served by the mission story are noble. We must break or reshape the old mythos so that a new one—with power to perform these functions more effectively—may be constituted."

perhaps in about the same ratio to nonexotic happenings. The real miracle of the Gospel is the change in the life, and this is a miracle that refuses to be bound geographically. For, just as in the homeland, the pastor's prayer may not save the dying child, and tragic accident and death may snatch away some of the rarest of God's jewels.

If what is true for India holds elsewhere in the mission lands, we must question the basic honesty of perpetuating the missions story in its present form, hallowed by tradition though it is.

The *functions* served by the mission story—the providing of funds for foreign work and the fostering of a world outlook—are noble ones and we must strive to produce a vehicle for them. We must break or reshape the old mythos in order that a new one—one with power to perform these functions more effectively—may be constituted.

The "Mission Spotlight" programs might lend themselves to such a new mythos. Some of these programs have indeed not been bound to the stereotype; many, however, have simply perpetuated the features of the old mythos. Certainly, the challenge to rethink the missions story calls for men and women who will face the situation

frankly and move forward with consecrated imagination.

The release of Gottfried Oosterwal's excellent series of essays on missions⁷ is hopefully the first stone cast into the old waters. The church may be ready for the sort of rethinking which we have called forth.

We are able to see a dim outline of a new mythos of the mission story. It will set forth *one* church—a world church; it will emphasize the *brotherhood* of Adventists everywhere; it will dwell upon the richness and diversity of Adventist culture in the lands of earth; it will be *man*,

or Adventist-centered, rather than Western-centered; it will set out over and over the unchanging power of Jesus Christ to transform human lives.

Then perhaps Sabbath School members will give generous offerings not because of a "good show," but rather because *all* Adventists, in every land, are members of the body of Christ. They will give as did the first Christians—because some of their neighbor Christians were poorer than they were, and so the need was simply greater there. And then the kingdom may at last come.

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1. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (1966) defines "myth" as: "a traditional or legendary story usually concerning some superhuman being or some alleged person or event, with or without a determinable basis of fact or a natural explanation, esp., a traditional or legendary story that is concerned with deities or demigods and the creation of the world and its inhabitants."

2. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jacobsen and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 1963); *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. by John and Doreen Weighting (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

3. See, e.g., the chapter "Symbols of Faith" in Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

4. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1974).

5. The writings of Robert N. Bellah are representative to show the place of mythos in American and other cultures.

6. Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

7. Gottfried Oosterwal, *Mission: Possible; the Challenge of Mission Today* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Ass'n., 1972).

Merikay and the Pacific Press: An Update

by Tom Dybdahl

On May 12, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit issued its decision in the case of *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and Merikay Silver and Lorna Tobler vs. Pacific Press Publishing Association and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*. The Circuit Court reversed an earlier decision by the District Court that had restrained the Press from firing Mrs. Silver and Mrs. Tobler.

This ruling in favor of the Press ends the suit brought by the EEOC on behalf of the women, unless the Commission decides to appeal, which now appears unlikely.

The EEOC suit (see the author's article in *SPECTRUM*, Vol. 7, No. 2) had grown out of an earlier suit brought by Mrs. Silver against PPPA. It centered on the issue of retaliation against the two women in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. Mrs. Silver told the EEOC that after she filed the private civil action, she was harassed by the Press. After investigation, the EEOC filed suit on behalf of Mrs. Silver and Mrs. Tobler.

In ruling on the case, the lower court judge agreed that the Press was a religious publishing house, with the right to hire only "members in good standing of the Seventh-day Adventist

Church." But he found that the Press "sought to terminate the employment of Tobler and Silver because they had opposed practices they believed unlawful . . . and because they made charges, testified, assisted and participated in investigations and proceedings. . . ."

He ruled that since the Press was not exempt from complying with the Title VII provisions of the Civil Rights Act on the basis of the First Amendment, this action constituted "an unlawful employment practice." His order was to remain in force until either the *Silver vs. PPPA* suit was settled, or until either woman was no longer a member "in good standing of the Seventh-day Adventist Church." The Press appealed the decision.

The three-judge panel of the Court of Appeals upheld the Press' appeal, and reversed the decision. The judges said it was "unfortunate" that both parties had concentrated on the constitutional questions, instead of focusing on a discussion and analysis of the statute under which the original injunction had been issued. In their opinion, "the outcome of the appeal turns on the statute. In their haste to confront constitutional issues of the first order," the court said, "the parties have overlooked the basics which we are bound to observe."

Tom Dybdahl's earlier report on the Merikay suit appeared in *SPECTRUM*, Vol. 7, No. 2.

The section of the Civil Rights Act under which the EEOC had sued—42 U.S.C. Sec.

2000e-5(f)(2)—was not unlimited. Specifically, it stated that action could be brought only for relief “pending final disposition of such charge.” And the clear legislative meaning of “final disposition,” the court said, “was the EEOC’s administrative disposition.” This meant that the lower court’s authority to grant relief ended with the conclusion of the administrative phase. And the administrative phase ended, the judges said, when Mrs. Silver initiated her private suit against the Press. This act “signalled the failure of efforts at conciliation and terminated EEOC’s opportunity to bring suit.” The decision, simply put, was that the EEOC had no authority to sue the Press under the Civil Rights Act at the time it sued.

In regard to the charges of discrimination and retaliation filed with the Commission by the women, the Appeals Court said that these allegations might still be theoretically “subject to the administrative process.” But since they were similar to the charges in the Silver suit, the court said that a favorable resolution of the private

suit “will provide plaintiffs/intervenors with the same relief sought here.”

One of the three judges issued a dissenting opinion in which he suggested that the issue was more “complicated” than the majority had made it appear, although he found their decision “appealing.” He argued that the administrative phase “may have been merely ‘suspended,’ not concluded.” If this were true, the EEOC would still have had the right to sue. He said he would have reversed the decision but remanded it for further proceedings to determine whether the administrative part was “suspended” or “concluded.”

The decision leaves the original *Merikay Silver vs. PPPA* suit, regarding sex discrimination and alleged retaliation, yet to be settled. But it is an unsatisfying decision. The judges did not deal with the charges of retaliation, leaving them to the lower court to decide. And they did not address themselves to the most intriguing question of all: does a church’s freedom of religion make it exempt from other laws, specifically the employment provisions of the Civil Rights Act?

Another Look At the Problem Of Origins

Review by Molleurus Couperus

The Two-Tailed Dinosaur

by Gerald W. Wheeler

Southern Publishing Association, 224 pp., \$7.95

One striking aspect of this book is its cover. The title makes one stop for a moment, but it is the photograph on the cover that causes astonishment. It shows a human footprint within that of a three-toed dinosaur. Anyone acquainted with fossil footprints knows that such an association of superimposed human and dinosaur tracks has never been found, but a layman might easily be deceived in believing that such a fossil imprint actually exists. Without an explanation that this is a photograph of a man-made mud preparation, the picture is deceptive for many.

This is a book on the relation of science and religion, or rather theology. The author limits his subject to "one aspect of science and its history—the problem of origins," and he expresses the hope that it "will help both evolutionists and special creationists understand some of the factors which have led to the present situation in the controversy between the two concepts."

Molleurus Couperus, a practicing dermatologist, is a long-time student of creationism. Now on the Board of Editors of SPECTRUM, he was its founding editor.

Wheeler first mentions briefly the various extant evolutionary theories, and then does the same for several theories of special creationism. He follows with a historical overview of scientific theories relating to the origin of life and the earth, moving rapidly from the early Greek philosophers to modern times, and relating these theories to the Christian views of creation. The author has selected his material well, and discusses the problems with considerable insight. He finds himself here in the midst of the dilemma that is really the central issue of the book, namely the relation of the words and interpretation of scripture to the facts and theories of science and history. Writes Wheeler:

Such biblical evidence, especially the first few chapters of Genesis, provided the basis for the Christian doctrine of special creation. But the human mind is not content with just accepting basic statements or principles. It wants to interpret them, to determine their implications, to explore further. Without such a trait, man could not advance intellectually, materially, or spiritually. Unfortunately, others may later find an interpretation to be misleading or mistaken when tested against subsequent discovery. Certain pre-Darwinian interpretations of the Bible turned out to be one such case. . . . Since special revelation claims a higher authority than the usual chan-

nels of information and since it often ventures into areas beyond the scope of known historical and scientific methods of study, we have a smaller body of evidence to guide us to its correct meaning. Ordinarily, we have historical or physical data as clues to how we should interpret and understand a phenomenon, an event, or a message. Such evidence points out many erroneous interpretations and conclusions. But special revelation lacks such guides. Most of the time, we cannot test it through the senses or compare it against known reality.

Here perhaps the author has limited the student of scripture too much in his search for meaning. Certainly, modern philology and linguistics are able to shed a great deal of light on the meaning of scripture, as does the study of its contemporary culture, history and literature. Wheeler seems, however, to agree that new scientific facts and insights may cause a change in faulty interpretations of scripture.

The author then suggests that in a world created with the appearance of an age far greater than its real age no laboratory tests, or field or historical research, could be used to find an answer as to its correct age. He then states:

Trapped as we are within our limited experience, we can judge special revelation only within its own framework. We look at it for internal logic by checking to see if its various parts harmonize with or contradict each other. To evaluate an interpretation of a statement of special revelation, we test the interpretation for internal consistency and logic. Also we can await further revelation to clarify parts we don't understand or have misinterpreted.

We must ask a question here. What if this theory of a deceptive age of the earth is all wrong, and the earth is really as old as laboratory tests and historical research indicate? Would it be God who keeps us from learning this, or are our own preconceived opinions or misinterpretations doing it? Wheeler at least mentions such a possibility. The struggle is often not so much between science and revelation as between presuppositions and science. The author recognized this problem when, apparently referring to the pre-Darwinian period, he states: "Special creation lost its influence because it refused to reexamine some of its beliefs in the light of new data."

After discussing the failure of the doctrine of the fixity of species to survive, Wheeler concludes: "Time proved the rigid, pre-Darwinian concept of special creationism to be incorrect." In the next chapter dealing with the history of conceptual frameworks, he adds the following observation:

Before Darwin, creationism had been long nurturing the seeds of its own destruction. Their sprouting went comparatively unnoticed, and it was slow at first. An example of the development of one seed appears in how pre-Darwinian special creationism handled the problem of evil in a world supposedly created by a good God.

Most of one chapter in the book is devoted to the weaknesses in the theory of evolution as acknowledged by Darwin and Huxley, and as reemphasized and elaborated later by others. Two chapters deal with "the mighty power of science textbooks" and "the California creation controversy." The last chapter, entitled "Science Is No Greater Than the Scientist," precedes two long appendices, one dealing with the Genesis creation account, the other presenting a "flood theory paradigm."

One might wish that the author had given more space to a discussion of the current views of creationists which differ from those of Wheeler, and that he had presented and discussed the difficulties which face the particular flood theory which he favors. Wheeler does briefly review in the early part of the book some of the flood theories that were developed and later rejected, but he might have discussed more adequately the reasons for their rejection. Although the book is not devoted primarily to a discussion of the biblical deluge, the author makes it clear that his views regarding it are crucial to his concepts of creation, and thus they become exceedingly important.

This book, dealing historically with the conflict between scientific observations and theories, and theological persuasions, suggests also an ongoing struggle within the author himself for ever better insights in this area. As he writes in the preface: "This book is offered only as a beginning. . . . Glancing over the galleys, I see topics and areas I now wish I had explored or developed further. Additional research has slightly modified some of my views. . . . If I started over again I am sure that I would revise

some of my historical conclusions even further.”

This is a stimulating, well-written book, and well documented. If there should be a second edition, this reviewer would look forward to it with deep interest.

Adventist History

Review by Gary Land

Windows: Selected Readings in Seventh-day Adventist Church History, 1844-1922
Compiled by Emmett K. Vande Vere
Southern Publishing Association, 319 pp.,
\$10.00

As Ron Graybill wrote in a recent SPECTRUM issue, a new Adventist history is in the making. Whereas most previous histories have been either memoirs or apologetics, now the professional historians are getting into the act, casting a critical eye at the sources as they attempt to reconstruct the Adventist past. Such an evolution, it should be noted, is a common occurrence in the development of historical writing.

One of the historians who has played a role in creating this new Adventist history is Emmett K. Vande Vere, whose *Wisdom Seekers*, published in 1972, told the story of Andrews University. Having taught denominational history for many years, Dr. Vande Vere has become familiar with the primary sources. Out of these materials, he put together a collection of readings for use in his teaching. Although the manuscript was not originally intended for publication, when Southern Publishing Association learned of it they expressed an interest in putting it before the Adventist public. Titled *Windows*, a not very informative name apparently implying “windows on the past,” the resulting book should have wide use in denominational history classes; it should be of interest to the general reader.

Organized topically within a generally chronological framework, *Windows* addresses the prin-

cipal movers and developments that shaped Adventism. While many of the subjects—the Disappointment and doctrinal positions such as the Sabbath and Conditional Immortality—have traditionally appeared in Adventist histories, others—geographical expansion and organizational growth—reflect the broader interests of the professional historian. In other words, Adventist historical writing is moving toward a greater appreciation of Adventism’s development as a social institution, although much remains to be done. The readings have been drawn from a wide variety of sources, both published and unpublished. As one would expect, the majority are from the *Review and Herald* and Ellen White writings, but letters, diaries, and even the Pitcairn Logbooks make frequent appearance.

Although the author has not organized his work within a general interpretive framework, his selections indicate that he is primarily interested in Adventist history as it was acted out by and as it influenced individual people. Rather than only printing official statements on tithing, for instance, he focuses on Rufus A. Underwood, president of the Ohio Conference, giving several selections that reveal Underwood’s growing understanding and acceptance of the tithing principle which led to his active support. This approach has the advantage of attracting the reader’s interest and reflects history’s traditional humanistic orientation. But it has limitations as well; much could be told about tithing’s impact, in this case, by the inclusion of statistical tables. One of the challenges to future writers of Adventist history will be to take advantage of the social science techniques that will deepen our understanding of Adventist history while writing our history humanistically so that it will attract readers.

Windows illustrates one other challenge to Adventist historical writing: it ends in 1922. Although Dr. Vande Vere goes beyond the usual stopping point of the move to Washington, D.C., the twentieth century remains virtually untouched. Admittedly, the denomination becomes more complex in the present century but that very complexity necessitates our search for understanding. The largely completed first volume of *Studies in Adventist History* and Richard Schwarz’s forthcoming textbook will sketch the broad outlines of this century’s

Gary Land is an editor of *Adventist Heritage* as well as being a member of the Board of Editors of SPECTRUM. He teaches history at Andrews University.

developments, but these will only establish a beginning.

Teachers of denominational history will be grateful that the publishers produced this book. Adventist historians will find in it useful material of which they may not be aware. The general reader will discover that *Windows* whets his interest for more Adventist history. But how much more will there be and to what extent will it contribute to a growing scholarship? Schwarz's *John Harvey Kellogg, M.D.* did not include footnotes and *Windows*, according to the author, has space limitations which kept editorial comment to a minimum. These restrictions are understandable, for denominational publishing houses do not exist for the academic community alone. But I wonder if it would be possible for one publishing house, or perhaps all three American houses acting together, to put aside a sum of money each year to support the publication of works in Adventist history with full scholarly apparatus. Perhaps one such work could appear every three or five years. Major publishing houses such as Knopf and Harper & Row do this all the time, taking some of the profits from ephemeral best sellers to publish prestigious scholarly works of little commercial value. Such a program would encourage Adventist scholars to fulfill the promise that Dr. Vande Vere, among others, has so nobly begun.

William Miller

Review by Brian E. Strayer

The Urgent Voice: The Story of William Miller.

by Robert Gale

Review and Herald, 158 pp., \$3.50.

William Miller was "God's man, with God's message, on God's schedule." This triple circumstance, states Gale, provides the foremost reason for his success as the main propo-

nent of premillennialism in the Burned-over District from 1831 to 1849.

Gale, a history and English teacher in southern California, employs the techniques of the amateur narrative historian to achieve a fascinating and superbly readable biography of one of Adventism's "founding fathers." Through character-revealing vignettes, spliced with cryptic analysis, he makes Miller come alive as a real, rustic farmer-preacher.

From his opening narrative hook of young William reading by the glow of a pine knot, to the pitiful spectacle of the "grand old man of the Second Advent movement" straining to read through a telescopic lens, Gale portrays Miller as a man with an insatiable desire to know truth in all its facets. Wherever this search led, Miller followed—from disillusioning deism to patriotic army service, Baptist Christianity and, finally, to Advent premillennialism. Although largely self-educated, Miller's scholarly diligence in searching out Bible prophecies from 1816 to 1831 forged a chain of such compelling logic that upwards of 200,000 "Millerites" saw its truth and "came out of Babylon." By 1833, one convert stated that Miller was "a household word throughout the world." Possibly one out of 85 Americans were Millerite sympathizers, Gale believes.

With the effective aid of Joshua V. Himes, his public relations agent after 1839, Miller's ministry multiplied magnificently. While he preached in the large cities, Himes projected his message through pamphlets and Advent newspapers such as the *Signs of the Times* and *Advent Herald*. Soon Miller's voice became so urgent that he was charged with being a monomaniac! The doctor who examined him, however, soon became as convicted with the "Millerite bug" as Miller himself.

The facts concerning the Millerite zenith in 1843, followed by the shattering nadir of October 22, 1844, are familiar to most students of Adventist history. Gale adds touches of local color and human interest details to make a smooth-flowing, often gripping, narrative. Certainly, his literary style is one of the book's best features.

The Adventist scholar seeking new Millerite disclosures, however, will be disappointed. Because Gale depends solely on secondary sources—standard works such as *A Brief History of William Miller* (1915), James White's

Brian Strayer recently served as a research assistant for the forthcoming Seventh-day Adventist history textbook. He is now teaching at Jackson Junior Academy in Michigan.

Sketches . . . of William Miller (1875), Francis D. Nichol's *Midnight Cry* (1944), Ellen G. White's *The Great Controversy* (1950), Arthur W. Spalding's *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists* (1961), and Jerome L. Clark's *1844* (1968)—he adds few insights not already contained in these works. While the Review and Herald blurb states that he engaged in “an extended study” of Miller’s life, the historian will search in vain for any footnote citing Miller’s letters, diaries, or other contemporary Advent sources. Gale seems content to derive his “raw data” second-hand, and, in the case of Clark (who employed no primary sources either), third-hand. Even Bliss, whom Gale admits was Miller’s “friend and biographer,” occupies not one footnote.

If he had conducted such intense primary research, Gale might better have explained such matters as how the term Millerite first came into use; that the term for Millerite “stickers,” as he calls them, was “monitory wafers”; when and how James White became a personal friend of Miller; and when and under what circumstances James White coined the term “investigative judgment.” It is also unfortunate that Gale makes no attempt to fit Millerism into the sociocultural context of its time. He never once refers to Whitney Cross’ *The Burned-over District* (1950), nor Alice Tylor’s *Freedom’s Ferment* (1944), to mention only two significant books on the movements and reforms of Jacksonian America.

Yet, his chapter on 1844, “New Light,” does offer fresh theological insights on why God permitted the disappointment of October 22. First, Gale suggests, He desired worldwide attention be focused on His Second Advent. Second, this message could not have gone forth as urgently had its adherents understood the true nature of the Investigative Judgment. Third, their message of the first and second angels was a testing point to separate God’s people from the world. Last, the disappointment sent Adventists to their Bibles with fresh vigor, to double-check all their major doctrines and purify them of traditional interpretations. Perhaps most importantly, Gale concludes, “the disappointment of October 22, 1844, was the birth pang of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” In this respect, from Millerite despair arose the “blessed hope” of Adventism.

Church Doctrines

Review by Bruce Ronk

Into the Arena: Insight Essays on the Christian Life

Compiled by Chuck Scriven

Review and Herald, 157 pp., \$3.75.

If doctrines make up one of those spiritual skeletons we hide in the closet, and view only with a sense of fear, suspicion and doubt; if doctrines are something we studied in school and then discarded as dull or even useless, then *Into the Arena* provides a helpful look at that old collection of bones. *Arena* may not succeed in getting the doctrines entirely out of the dark, but at least if it adds some light to our beliefs, we may not be so embarrassed or even frightened by them.

A devotee of *Insight* may read this volume with a disturbing sense of *dèjà vu*, but if the demand for newness is not overpowering, he may profit from a second experience with these articles, compiled from the first three and one-half years of *Insight*. The additional benefit will come from a concentration of thought not possible in the brief individual articles week by week. This is a book you can sit down with for a Sabbath afternoon. There are 25 essays by ten authors (none female, unfortunately) who, I believe, stimulate us to rethink some of our attitudes towards the conventions of Adventism. We become aware of a depth of commitment to God and society implicit in our doctrines, something rarely spelled out so clearly in traditional denominational literature.

One problem remains in these reprints: the articles are just as short as they first were. This brevity can be unsatisfying and perhaps even confusing. Scriven’s article, “Knowing That God Is Our Maker,” is barely two pages long. He raises a useful question about creationism and takes a remarkable posture in suggesting that no one has yet shown “conclusively . . . that the earth is roughly 6,000 years old.” But after tell-

Bruce Ronk took a doctorate in English at the University of Nebraska and now teaches at Andrews University.

ing the reader that he cannot have absolute faith in science, he emphatically says that he need not doubt the existence and creatorship of God. This is his conclusion: "*We can know that God is our Creator because of what He has done for us.*" (Scriven's italics.) Then in somewhat vague language he attempts to illustrate what we have seen God do for us. Given another two pages instead of two paragraphs, Scriven might have been able to help us see God's efforts in our behalf; but brevity does not permit it, and the reader closes the chapter unsatisfied. A few other articles have this problem also, but it is a small price to pay for the privilege of having one's thoughts stimulated by so many useful questions about a Christian's relationship to God, to society and to himself.

This book certainly represents a significant step in the maturity of the Adventist church. It seems quite clear (to me, at least) that such a volume could not have been published ten or 15 years ago. Any attempt to unveil the clichés and platitudes of our religious thought would never have seen the light of day in the fifties or even the sixties. One still gets a sense, however, that several *Arena* contributors stopped a little short of what they really wanted to say in order not to offend beyond publishability. Even so, the result is a book of Christian probing with more than a slight tone of iconoclasm.

Many readers will feel as though they are less of a religious anachronism after reading the frank questions and doubts raised in the book by some of the church's best thinkers, questions which many of us have felt but never expressed. Edward W. H. Vick, for example, admits that "to some questions there simply is no intellectually satisfying answer." He goes on, "I have yet to read an intellectually satisfying answer to the problem of suffering. . . . There will always be room to doubt the goodness of God."

Jonathan Butler takes an apparently lifeless doctrine, the state of the dead, and shows its vital relationship to the Christian experience. Dave Larson says that the hope of Adventists "must reach us where we are." While he does

not actually demonstrate how it does this, he does give the reader a new perspective from which to judge religious ideas.

Concerning the communion, another article, also by Butler, states, "Seventh-day Adventists who labor through Communion as though there had been no resurrection, need to treat the meal less like a funeral supper and more like a picnic on the beach with their resurrected Lord." There is a freshness of language here, and, in fact, much vigorous writing like it throughout the book. Scriven shows the need for such freshness in his own article on the Holy Spirit: "We are not contented like cows, but are capable of getting sick of things—sick of boredom, tragedy, guilt. We are capable of wanting some kind of clear and unmistakable fulfillment in life."

Perhaps the major contribution of *Arena* is its focus on the Christian's social consciousness. A true Christian conversion, Scriven feels, involves a "shattering of self-centeredness." Butler's essay, "Baptism, Ralph Nader, and the Church," is an excellent investigation into Christian ethics. He compares the true believer's entrance into the church with membership in Nader's Raiders. Nader's people serve unselfishly to secure improvement in the quality of American life. Nader himself accepts voluntary poverty (he lives in an \$80-a-month apartment and owns no car) in order to preach his gospel without the cluttering materialism that afflicts so many of us. (Butler does cop out slightly, recommending Nader social activism for the church, but not his austerity.) Joseph Battistone says, "prayer will include more than mental inventory of the blessings that have come our way; that prayer is completed by manifesting our gratitude through service to those who need help."

If your Christian life is untroubled by skeletons, this book might trouble it. But if your life is perplexed, filled with anomalies, both religious and personal, the book will be valuable. Even if you just wish to quietly meditate on the meaning of your Christianity, it belongs in your library.

Letters From Readers

To the editors: This letter responds to a reference in the article "Abstract Art to the Glory of God," in Vol. 7, No. 4, of SPECTRUM. On page 38 Henriksen is quoted as saying, "*The Ministry* had an article that talked of contemporary painting as a 'crude portrayal of disorganized oblivion,' and 'of human disorientation,' a 'product of man's apostasy.'" On page 39, under notes and references, my name appears in bold type.

Now, gentlemen, a casual reading of the brief article that was referred to would clearly indicate that the artist Henriksen either misread the article or exhibits what is a common failing of us all, "A memory dulled by the passage of time," not to mention the carelessness of the editors of SPECTRUM in their handling of the same.

A careful reading of my article in *The Ministry* magazine, page 64, May 1971, indicates: (1) that I did not refer to contemporary painting as a "crude portrayal of disorganized oblivion." My article says, "It is not unusual at an art gallery to see art lovers staring in puzzlement at a piece of contemporary painting, *as if it were but a crude portrayal of disorganized oblivion.*"

(2) I am accused of referring to contemporary painting as being "of human disorientation." My article actually says, "*And I have learned to live with the fact of human disorientation, so prophetically portrayed on canvass with paint and brush.*" Now this statement clearly does not classify modern art as being "human disorientation." It says that modern art prophetically portrays this, and there is the difference.

One would be tempted at this point to categorize the gentleman being interviewed or the editors of SPECTRUM as being rather careless

with their facts. I will, however, stop short of this accusation and simply suggest that "we all make mistakes," and this clearly is one of the mistakes of the editors of SPECTRUM in general, and Mr. Henriksen in particular!

(3) On the third point I plead guilty as charged! I do refer in my article to modern art "as a product of man's apostasy." The full statement is this. "So in a curious sense, a product of man's apostasy became a reflection of his dwindling image." Incidentally, nothing has happened in modern art since 1971 to change my opinion.

E. E. Cleveland
Washington, D.C.

Jorgen Henriksen responds:

If the readers are concerned about minor semantical differences between Elder Cleveland and myself, I would encourage them to refer to the original and judge for themselves. (*The Ministry*, May 7, 1971, p. 64.) The reference to modern art as "a product of man's apostasy," which Cleveland concedes is accurate, seems sufficient by itself to justify my interpretation that Elder Cleveland identifies abstract painting with evil.

To the Editors: In his article, "The Trashy Novel Revisited: Popular Fiction in the Age of Ellen White," (Vol. 7, No. 4), John Wood says: "The author's study of every statement about fiction penned by Mrs. White suggests a basis on which to proceed, but that is outside the scope of the present article." I hope that future articles by Mr. Wood will appear in SPECTRUM, as I think they will be interesting and valuable.

Miriam Tripp
Berrien Springs, Michigan

To the Editors: May I congratulate you on your five-part presentation in Vol. 7, No. 3: "China and Vietnam: Mission and Revolution"! This is a great service to the church and long overdue.

In your explanation of the issue you state in reference to the Lee and Lin Reports that they "are now published for the first time." This is practically, but not quite technically, true. In the 1961 April and May issues of the *Church Triumphant* magazine we published facsimiles of the Lin Report. In the April 1960, issue we republished sections of Edward Hunter's very fine book entitled, *The Story of Mary Liu*, and made the book available to our readers. In the September 1960 issue we published an "Exposition of the Reactionary and Secret Gang Hidden in the Shanghai Seventh-day Adventist Church," which was an article by Tan Yingmin, better known in Adventist circles as Shan Ying-min, and was taken from the Communist Christian Church magazine named *T'ien-feng (Heavenly Wind)* under date of Aug. 25, 1958, published in Shanghai, China.

A. L. Hudson
Baker, Oregon

The writer, a Seventh-day Adventist, is connected with the lay publication referred to in his letter. It has appeared irregularly during the past few years.

The Editors

To the Editors: I want to say I feel words are not adequately coined in the English language to express my appreciation for Vol. 7, No. 3 of SPECTRUM. I will simply say thank you very much.

"Lawsuits and the Church," "Years of Heart-break: Lessons for Mission by a China Insider," and "How Many Tragedies—A Commentary," are just a few of the excellent articles that are good for mental health. It appears that the same type of "mis-approach" or "transplanting" instead of "planting" that took place in China might have taken place in other areas like South America and Africa. Will we have opportunity to read of such cases in SPECTRUM in the future from those areas?

What about a rebuttal or a point of view on

D. Lin's article from medical missionary, Harry W. Miller, M.D., a veteran of 70 years in the Orient?

Is it possible that the Seventh-day Adventist church is transporting more Westernism to mission areas of the world than Christianity or Adventism?

J. M. Hammond
Columbia Union College
Takoma Park, Maryland

To the Editors: The articles by S. J. Lee and David Lin on the communist takeover in China (SPECTRUM, Vol. 7, No. 3) emphasized that the reason leaders, workers, members and students lacked courage during the crisis was that they did not have Mrs. White's writings. Elder Lee states:

Had [these writings] been available before the liberation, they no doubt would have given our workers the courage to go through the testing time and would have provided them with much-needed sermon material, which they were forced to obtain from the literature of other denominations.

This is a tacit admission that Seventh-day Adventist ministers without the writings of Mrs. White are incapable of writing material that is equal to the work of non-Adventists who depend solely upon the Bible and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Lee's statement suggests that Mrs. White's writings are superior to the Bible as a faithbuilder. Yet with the Bible as their only source of inspiration in times past, millions died for their faith. That at least the leaders in China possessed copies of Mrs. White's writings, is admitted by Elder Lee when he states that "our leading ministers gave up their copies of Mrs. White's books" to be burned.

David Lin concluded that the reason "those who have made shipwreck of faith in the past five years . . . is because the lambs of God's flock were denied the strengthening, and quickening influence of the *Testimonies*." Yet some of the Chinese leaders in the publishing house, who had been educated in Adventist schools where surely they had been made thoroughly familiar with Mrs. White's writings, were among the first to cave under pressure.

On the other hand, David Lin writes that "The South Chekiang (usually called Wenchow)

Mission is a working miracle. Unlike the West China Union [that was “in the process of disintegration” when he wrote in 1952] which had the privilege of entertaining a large number of foreign missionaries during the war years, the Wenchow Mission saw comparatively few missionaries. But to this day it is the only local mission which has a working organization with regular income, regular reports, regular conferences, centralized control of finances and an active ministry.” He reports that during the period 1949 to the time he wrote “this mission has baptized hundreds of new converts, kept their meeting places in repair, and acquired two new church buildings, while in the process of building another one this year. And this was all in the tense atmosphere of land reform and rural organization.”

These faithful members had not the access to the writings of Mrs. White that those missions had where foreign “Spirit of Prophecy” trained missionaries had visited in “a large number,” and where the members largely apostatized. Those in the Wenchow Mission had apparently built a faith that would stand on the Bible only.

Here in America Seventh-day Adventists have been flooded with the writings of Mrs. White for well over a century and a quarter, yet the church has suffered the very same experiences as those pointed out by David Lin, especially a shocking number of apostasies. It has been frankly admitted by the leaders that for every three members added one will be lost through apostasy. And that is not caused by civil pressure.

Plainly, if the Word of God is not sufficient to sustain and guide Christ’s professed followers in time of peace, those who rely upon the writings of Mrs. White will utterly fail in time of stress.

Neil W. Northey
Mariposa, California

To the Editors: Roberta J. Moore’s article “Fact and Fiction About Women and Work” (Vol. 7, No. 2) eloquently describes the sexual stereotypes prevalent in our society in general, and within the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular. It appears that she has also created some new fiction about women and marriage.

Dr. Moore’s major conclusion is expressed in the question, “When 23 percent of women do

not marry, when 21 percent find their marriages ending with divorce or a premature death, why can we not bring ourselves to look squarely at the subject of working women?” (p. 38)

Everyone knows that some women do not marry, but I was very surprised to read that “23 percent of women do not marry” so I looked for the source of this surprising information. No reference was cited for this statement, but a reference was cited for the earlier statement that “23 percent of the women *now working* in the United States are single and another 21 percent widowed, divorced or separated.”¹

I don’t know what fraction of women do not marry, but in view of the fact that only 46 percent of (the noninstitutional population of) women 16 years of age and over work (compared with 78 percent of the men) and that of the women who work, 26.8 percent are under 25 years of age,² it seems extremely unlikely that single women in the working population are an accurate measure of women who do not marry. It certainly isn’t necessary to resort to shoddy journalism to demonstrate that the situation of working women needs to be considered and improved.

David Claridge
Washington, D.C.

1. *Expanding Opportunities for Girls: Their Special Counseling Needs*. U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1967.

2. “Employment and Earnings,” U.S. Dept. of Labor, Vol. 21, No. 8 (Feb. 1975), pp. 28, 29.

Roberta Moore replies:

I object to Mr. Claridge’s reading as my “major conclusion” the question he cites, but perhaps I should let that pass since he is right about my use of the figures in it. Not 23 percent, but 21.8 percent of women in the United States did not marry in the late 60s, according to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Figures near the beginning of my article, from the U.S. Department of Labor publication (1967), were used correctly: that is, 23 percent of *working women* are single.

To the Editors: A well-illustrated and thought-provoking paper on the fossil forests of the Yellowstone region has recently been presented by R. M. and S. L. Ritland (SPECTRUM,

Vol. 6, No. 1 and 2). Evidence was presented indicating that past attempts at explaining the 12 to 45 forest levels as the result of transport of stumps do not fit the physical evidence. Although I have not visited these sites, descriptions provided by the Ritlands' article and my experience as a forest ecologist lead me to propose the following model which fits a relatively short time scale.

1. Ancient forests developed on slopes formed by erosion through horizontal layers of volcanic strata.

2. Those forests displayed an altitudinal zonation of species and sizes as is characteristic of present-day forests in the western United States.¹

3. Volcanic activity deposited ash over this area to a depth sufficient to cause death of the trees by asphyxiation, as so commonly occurs in housing developments when fill dirt is placed around trees.²

4. The portions of tree stems above the volcanic ash decayed away and the stumps below were fossilized.

5. Erosion of much of this ash reveals the fossilized stumps seen today.

Not only does this model fit a relatively short time scale, it also appears much more probable than alternating favorable and unfavorable conditions which would allow up to 45 different forests to follow one another over long periods of time.

The Ritlands note that the cross-sections of stumps show asymmetric growth in somewhat parallel directions. They indicate this may have been due to the effect of prevailing winds on crown development. On the other hand, this may reflect the fact that the trees grew on a steep slope. Trees on steep hillsides usually exhibit greater radial growth on the downhill side; the pitch is nearer the bark on the uphill side.³

Among findings which would prove this model inadequate would be excavations showing stumps extending far into the mountain at given levels. Such a test would be extremely costly and is not likely. If fossilized stumps are found vertically above other stumps and logs, but not near enough to have been growing on top of dead stumps or logs as often occurs in the forest,⁴ this model is again questionable. It is

hoped that field tests of the model presented here can be conducted.

Harry W. Wiant, Jr.
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1. T. W. Daniel, "The Middle and Southern Rocky Mountain Region," *Regional Silviculture of the United States*, ed. by J. W. Barrett. (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1962), pp. 351-55.

2. J. W. Toumey, and C. F. Korstian, *Foundations of Silviculture* (2nd ed.: New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1947), p. 115.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 269.

4. J. H. G. Smith, *Some Factors Affecting Reproduction of Engelmann Spruce and Alpine Fir* (British Columbia Forest Service Technical Publications, T43, 1955).

R. M. and S. L. Ritland reply:

The hill slope hypothesis outlined by Dr. Wiant is a reasonable suggestion that has been considered by nearly everyone who has studied the forests in the field. Most investigators have had to reject it because of tests like those suggested in Dr. Wiant's letter. There is, in fact, more than adequate exposure to make tests similar to those he suggests. We present below some evidence which appears inconsistent with the hill slope hypothesis.

1. Roots on living trees growing on steep slopes tend to follow the slope contours, that is, up slope and down slope rather than at approximately right angles [to the trunk] as when trees grow on areas of low relief. This is essential because roots must be in the aerated zone near the surface to breathe. By contrast the roots, the fossil leaves and detrital of the fossil trees [in Yellowstone] conform to horizontal bedding planes which go back into the mountains rather than conforming to present-day hill slopes. Hundreds of exposures where canyons cut near-vertical cliffs into mountains, seem clearly to indicate a cross section of volcanic strata on which the trees are formed.

2. From time to time fossil trees are observed in natural caves where soft strata have eroded out, forming a natural overhang. If the treetop continued, it would go into the rock on the roof of the cave.

3. In at least two instances, we have seen preserved trees (in vertical cuts) rooting in strata directly above trees on a lower level.

4. If one observes deposits laid down on steep slopes such as in talus accumulations, the bed-

ding plane is on a high angle. No remnants of high angle bedding plane strata are found around stumps that are only partly uncovered.

5. In addition to having the roots going up

slope and down slope, the trunks of living trees on slopes often naturally correct for movement down slope of the topsoil. Such basal irregularity is never seen on the fossil trees.

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The Editors.

