



Social Reform as Sacrament of the Second Advent

There is more to apocalyptic than fire and smoke. There's justice and hope and glory—and a vision of the good and beautiful.

by Roy Branson

OUR MISSIONARY FAMILY, JUST HOME ON FURLough from Egypt, was driving across the United States on Highway 66. We had reached one of the Midwestern states when a thunderstorm suddenly engulfed us. I was six years old. Except for my first few months I had lived all my life in the parched suburbs of Cairo. I was terrified as rain poured down, lightning split the sky, and thunder cracked directly overhead. I was frightened, not because I didn't know what was happening, but because I did: the Lord was returning. I began to wail.

I had already heard countless Adventist sermons. I knew how it all ended. First, a

cloud the size of a man's hand; then lightning, thunder, and the resurrection of the dead; next, in front of the whole world, would come the separating of the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats. And I was a goat. I was naughty, wicked, disobedient, and going to be condemned before thousands and thousands of perfect, heavenly beings.

The storm was so intense that my dad had to pull over to the side of the road. I remember my mother trying to calm me by quoting the Psalms. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." The Lord loved me, she assured me. He wouldn't want anything terrible to happen to me. Without realizing it, my parents were face to face with their youngest child's "apocalyptic consciousness."

Thousands of Seventh-day Adventists have watched clouds the size of a man's hand to see if they grow into the cataclysm of the last day.

Roy Branson is the editor of Spectrum and a senior research fellow at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University. An expanded version of this essay will appear as a chapter in a forthcoming book, Righteous Remnant, edited by Charles W. Teel, Jr., and published by Loma Linda University Press.

Tom Dybdahl chronicles the experience of generations of Adventist youngsters who dream that they are in a large field before a raised platform on which a kingly judge, surrounded by dignitaries, calls the final roll. Those who are saved go to one side; those who are lost go to the other. But just before learning whether or not they're saved, they wake up.¹

Extending the Time

Despite all this concern with the evaluation of our behavior in the final judgment, some people question whether the Second Advent has anything to do with morality. They wonder if the apocalyptic books and passages of the Bible—Daniel, the Apocalypse, Matthew 24 and 25, to name a few—are not inherently escapist. They question whether an apocalyptic consciousness is a moral consciousness.

Of course it is. And if the consciousness is truly apocalyptic, it is a social consciousness, concerned about the moral behavior of not just individuals but also institutions in society. The drama of the ages and the great controversy between Christ and Satan,² in which Adventist youngsters—and adults—place themselves, are cosmic morality plays: good versus evil, the oppressor versus the oppressed, the powerful versus the weak.

Consider what's going on in the minds of youngsters when storms and dreams fill them with awe, dread, and fear. On that Midwestern road I was convinced that every aspect of my life was under constant scrutiny. I dreaded an evaluation, an assessment of whether my mo-

tives and character were good and my actions right or wrong.

I thought a judgment had probably already been rendered on whether or not I would be saved. In moments, I would learn in front of all humans, angels, and unfallen beings what that verdict would be. I was not trembling before an avalanche or an earthquake, but before a judging will. I was not frightened of nature; I was terrified of God.

There are theological problems with this sort of apocalyptic consciousness. At the very least, it is incomplete. Adventists sometimes have a hard time worrying about more than their individual destiny. But whatever its faults, such a consciousness makes some assumptions crucial to any attempt to begin the moral enterprise. Such a consciousness as-

sumes that our destinies are not predetermined; they depend on the actions of free wills.

Not only actions but the persons performing them can be morally evaluated. There will be a day when we as individuals, with our distinctive, unique bodies, will be judged. And to be-

lieve that I, as an individual, am being judged by God before the entire universe is certainly to believe that my actions are important.

On that road in the Midwest I thought it mattered a great deal what I did and what sort of a person I ought to be. Such a consciousness forms individuals who are highly motivated—an entire universe is waiting for them to act. People who live in the shadow of God's great, final act of the great controversy between good and evil are a people anxious to respond with their own dramatic actions on behalf of goodness and against evil.

Some people question whether the Second Advent has anything to do with morality. . . . They question whether an apocalyptic consciousness is a moral consciousness. Of course it is.

Some have said that, while an apocalyptic consciousness may be concerned with personal morality, it robs Christians of the sense that they can do much of anything to affect the world and history. God is so powerful, so active, so immediate for people steeped in the visions of Daniel and Revelation, of the end of the world and the Second Advent, say these critics, that Adventists understandably don't want to take the time to become involved in complex moral decisions about how they ought to live with others in a highly urban, technological society. According to these critics, a vivid apocalyptic consciousness ignores social reform, a concern to change the moral behavior of institutions.

To be fair, that has happened. If the Lord is returning momentarily, there is scarcely time to worry about shaping or reforming social institutions. Many Millerites in the days before October 22, 1844, stopped worrying about some of their long-standing obligations. As early as the spring of 1844, farmers in northern New England left their crops in their fields. In New York City, "Brother Abraham Riker, a well-known shoe dealer in Division Street, who was for many years a class leader in the Methodist Episcopal Church, closed his store and spent considerable time distributing papers, attending meetings, and warning others."³ If one believes the Second Advent of the Lord is to happen momentarily, if it is a part of the present (not the future), then it doesn't make sense to establish an Adventist ethics center—or, for that matter, of course, to establish an Adventist college, hospital, food factory, or church bureaucracy.

For a while, even after the Great Disappointment, some Adventists continued to believe that the Lord would return within days. A year later, in October of 1845, James White, in the pages of *The Day-Star*, condemned an Adventist couple who had announced wedding plans. They had "denied their faith in being published for marriage, and we all look upon this 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."⁴

Of course, a year later, James and Ellen Harmon themselves got married and began confronting all the questions of right and wrong surrounding the family, that fundamental human institution prolonging the existence of life in this world.

By 1859 (15 years after the Great Disappointment), Ellen White made it clear that in her mind the Second Advent was not a present reality, but a future event. "I saw that this message would not accomplish its work in a few short months." Invoking the second epistle of Peter, she underscored her point: "I saw that God would prove his people. Patiently Jesus bears with them and does not spew them out of his mouth in a moment." With the Second Advent clearly in the future, Ellen insisted that Adventists must become involved in organizing institutions. "God is well pleased with the efforts of his people in trying to move with system and order in his work."⁵

Within a year, James and Ellen White had convinced an often reluctant group of Adventists to create a publishing association and adopt the name "Seventh-day Adventist." Ellen wanted them to go further and create a denominational structure. "Unless the churches are so organized that they can carry out and enforce order, they have nothing to hope for in the future."⁶

Ellen White was no longer a Millerite; for the Millerites had had no future, only a present. With Ellen restoring the future, a denomination could come into existence—and in 1863, 19 years after the Great Disappointment, it did.

Avoiding Temptations

Ever since Seventh-day Adventists, under the leadership of Ellen and James White, finally stopped being Millerites and became convinced that there was a period between the

present moment and the Second Advent during which they needed to act in a morally responsible way, they have struggled to know how to relate the Second Advent to moral action. Several temptations have plagued Adventist theology and history. Interestingly, these are not temptations to be passive and inactive. They are the temptations of activists.

One temptation has been to fill the void of Christ's nonappearance with our own presence. The invisibility of divinity in 1844 is answered by the visibility of the Adventist Church. For many Adventists, the answer to the Great Disappointment is the Great Achievement: creating a worldwide Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The anxiety caused by the delay of Christ's Second Advent in time is answered by the assurance of a tangible Seventh-day Adventist Church in space.

In response to a universal event that has not yet happened, Adventists create a ubiquitous church with institutions that are reassuringly concrete and tangible. Both defenders of the status quo and critics of church structure sometimes become more consumed with expanding or improving the church than with anticipating the Second Advent. In the lives of many Adventists—not just denominational employees—the doctrine of the church has actually superseded the doctrine of the Second Advent.

Another temptation has been to expand the strong commitment of Adventists to sanctification of individual Christians to encompass the sanctification of all history. Some of the 19th-century Methodist forebears and contemporaries of Adventism proclaimed the moral re-

sponsibility of believers to reach perfection. Building on this foundation, some Adventists have called, in effect, for their church to perfect history. It is the responsibility of Adventists, they say, to act in such a morally praiseworthy way that the Second Advent can take place. Practically speaking, on this view, the perfection of Adventists causes the Second Advent. Such a commitment to the doctrine of sanctification determines for some the relationship between the Second Advent and morality.⁷

A third temptation has been to allow our commitment to God's created order and laws

to overwhelm our apocalyptic sense of the ongoing struggle between good and evil. Some Adventists are so conscious that God is Creator and Sustainer of the world that they forget the divine judgment of rebellious powers.

Some Adventists seem to read Romans 13 and its ad-

monition to be subject to "the higher powers" to the exclusion of Revelation 13 and its condemnation of the beast to whom "power was given over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations," that "makes wars with the saints." They ignore that in Revelation 13 this political power is warned that "he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword" (KJV). Some Adventists have expanded their concern to observe God's laws and created order in their own living habits—temperance, diet, abstinence from tobacco and alcohol, exercise—to include a commitment and respect for all human institutions. Just as Adventists—indeed all people—should energetically align themselves with God's natural order, they believe Adventists should not just conform to, but

Some Adventists have called, in effect, for their church to perfect history. It is the responsibility of Adventists, they say, to act in such a morally praiseworthy way that the Second Advent can take place.

actively support the established political and social order.⁸

At perhaps the nadir of Adventist social responsibility, German Adventist leaders from 1933 through the end of the war, in official church publications, fulsomely supported Hitler and his policies, including international aggression, anti-Semitism, and sterilization of the mentally weak, schizophrenics, epileptics, crippled alcoholics, drug addicts; even the blind, the deaf, and the chronically ill. Why? Because, as the president of the East German Conference wrote in the German equivalent of the *Adventist Review* after Hitler's ascendancy in 1933, the Christian welcomes Hitler, a "nondrinker, nonsmoker, and vegetarian," for his defense of "morality and order, incorruptibility and justice in the government." Long after Hitler had invaded Austria, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, the Morning Watch Calendar for April 20, 1940, celebrated Hitler's 51st birthday with a long encomium to the Fuhrer as a moral exemplar:

The unshakable faith of Adolf Hitler allowed him to do great deeds. . . . In Christian humility, at important times when he could celebrate with his people, he gave God in Heaven honor and recognized his dependence upon God's blessings. This humility has made him great, and this greatness was the source of blessing, from which he always gave for his people.⁹

How might the Second Advent more appropriately be related to moral action? This question has recently become more acute as Adventists, somewhat to their surprise, have become more prominent and powerful. When Loma Linda University performed unprecedented heart transplants, the world media asked Loma Linda physicians and ethicists, "What is the relationship between these operations and your religion—the fact that you are Adventists?"

As Adventists assume more political power in developing countries, the public wonders if Adventists have a social ethic. "Does your view of the Second Advent affect how you think

institutions in society, including government, ought to relate to one another?" is a relevant question asked of the Adventist who became prime minister of Uganda, the Adventists who entered the ruling cabinets of Barbados and Jamaica, the Adventists elected members of parliaments in various independent countries of the South Pacific, and the Adventists who organized the opposition New People's Party in the country of Vanuatu (formerly the New Hebrides).¹⁰

Can an apocalyptic consciousness possibly be relevant to upwardly mobile Seventh-day Adventists—in both the United States and the third world—who are gaining influence and power? These Adventists, after all, are clearly not Millerites. The Second Advent is, for them, decidedly not in the present, but in the future. These Adventists are not oppressed. Every day they see the providence of God pouring out blessings on their work and lives. What does Patmos have to do with Loma Linda; or Kingston, Jamaica; or Papua New Guinea?

The fact is that many scholars now believe that the congregations to whom the Apocalypse of John was first directed were not enduring physical persecution, but experiencing relative deprivation.

Members were not always able to join Jew-



ish synagogue communities or Roman social and commercial guilds. Early Christians may have felt themselves marginal, but few were actually enduring pain.

Some scholars go further and believe that the Apocalypse was written to arouse wealthy congregations, such as Laodicea, who may have been too ready to accommodate to their immediate social and political environment. Far from inviting his readers into a moral quietism, John saved his most severe scorn for the moral torpor of social-climbers, ready to prostitute themselves with corrupt groups rather than challenge institutional evil.

John, then, wanted not simply to comfort the fragile, but to confront the upwardly mobile, to expand the moral perceptions of the Christians of Asia Minor, to take Christians preoccupied with exclusions from guilds and thrust them into a universal controversy between good and evil.¹¹

An Adventist social ethic can draw on the theological resources available to all Christians. But what would happen if we did not subordinate the importance of the Second Advent to other Christian affirmations, such as the doctrines of the church, sanctification, or Creation? What are the implications of constructing an ethic from the perspective of the Second Advent, specifically a Second Advent experienced within an apocalyptic consciousness?

Judging Institutions

First, it is not an ethic simply for individuals. It is also an ethic concerned about the behavior of institutions—a social ethic. It is true that the picture of last-day events in the apocalyptic portions of Scripture includes a resurrection of persons with their bodies, emphasizing their individuality, as well as the relevance of their actions now, as individuals, to their ultimate destiny. But John's reference to Babylon and the kings who are judged at the

last day suggests that, in the apocalyptic consciousness, corporate powers are held morally responsible for their present actions.

Adela Yarbro Collins is certain that the symbols of the Apocalypse play distinctly moral roles. "Any reader in the Mediterranean world in John's time, when reading the words, 'and authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it' . . . would think of Rome."¹²

The founders of the Seventh-day Adventist movement also believed that the symbols of Revelation referred to oppressive corporate powers, both private and public. Ellen White makes the case for the abolitionist attack on slavery in apocalyptic terms:

God will restrain his anger but a little longer. His anger burns against this nation, and especially against the religious bodies who have sanctioned, and have themselves engaged in this terrible merchandise.

God's anger will not cease until he has caused the land of light to drink the dregs of the cup of his fury, and until he has rewarded unto Babylon double. . . . All the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master.¹³

While Ellen White identified a slave-owning United States with Babylon, James White condemned pre-emancipation America as having the heart and voice of the dragon of Revelation. The nation's

outward appearance and profession is the most pure, peaceful, and harmless, possible. It professes to guarantee to every man liberty and the pursuit of happiness in temporal things, and freedom in matters of religion; yet about four millions of human beings are held by the Southern States of this nation in the most abject and cruel bondage and servitude, and the theological bodies of the land have adopted a creed-power, which is as inexorable and tyrannical as is possible to bring to bear upon the consciences of men. Verily with all its lamblike appearance and profession, it has the heart and voice of a dragon; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.¹⁴

Uriah Smith, James White's successor as editor of the *Review*, kept up the condemnation of corporate powers in apocalyptic terms, pointing to "the pulpits supporting slavery" as "the white-washed villainy of many of the pulpits of our land" as evidence that "the dragonic spirit of this nation has of late years developed itself in accordance with the prophecy" of Revelation 13.¹⁵

Adventist professionals and office-holders today should realize that they are not only responsible for their actions as individuals. If they are faithful to the apocalyptic consciousness of Scripture and their Seventh-day Adventist forebears, they will regard the actions of the institutions of which they are a part as having great moral import.

It is not just a question of whether individuals stop smoking—and thereby stop harming those around them. It is also a question of confronting powerful multinational corporations and friendly governments (such as the United States), institutions working together trying to increase worldwide smoking among women and children, and soaring death rates—10 million a year by 2020. It is important that a person avoid conflicts of interest in managing medical centers in Adventist Health Systems/U.S.; but it is also important that the system itself act responsibly in society to provide health care—a responsibility that includes working to make sure that those who have the least resources can somehow obtain a decent minimum level of care.

Transforming Society

Second, any ethic from the perspective of an apocalyptic consciousness is comfortable with change, radical change, in the institutions of society, including government. The Great Day of the Lord will overturn society. An ethic in anticipation of that event would not be surprised to see institutions transformed. From the standpoint of an apocalyptic con-

sciousness, the creation is in turmoil and God must act dramatically to overturn oppressing, wicked powers disrupting his reign of justice and goodness.

Throughout the history of Christianity, apocalyptic groups have been in the forefront of change. During the Middle Ages, in what is now the Netherlands and Belgium, millenarian visionaries led mass movements for change in society. During the English civil war, apocalyptic sects, such as the Fifth Monarchy Men, made the most radical proposals for transforming politics.

In 19th-century America, those who set out to overthrow slavery, intemperance, and prostitution were often those who lived in expectation of the Second Advent. According to Ernest Sandeen,

when the millenarian argued that the perfect society of the millennium would be created only by the cataclysmic return of Christ, he was suggesting different means, not different ends.¹⁶

Many of the early Seventh-day Adventist leaders had been part of the religiously motivated social reform movements to which Sandeen refers. During the time they were establishing the new denomination, they remained impatient with the slowness of change in the 19th-century American political system, particularly its reluctance to officially outlaw slavery. After Abraham Lincoln declared, in his first inaugural speech, "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists," Uriah Smith, as editor of the *Review*, seemed to threaten the sitting president with death if he did not immediately change the American legal order regarding slavery.

He has to stand up against the "enthusiasm for freedom" which reigns in nearly twenty millions of hearts in the free North, and against the prayers of four millions of oppressed and suffering slaves. If he continues to resist all these, in refusing to take those steps which a sound policy, the principles of humanity, and the salvation of the country, demand, it must be from an infatuation

akin to that which of old brought Pharaoh to an untimely end.¹⁷

As Seventh-day Adventists spread around the world, they, like other Protestant missionary groups, deliberately set out to transform not only religious ritual, but also social practice. For better or worse, Adventists, through their schools, hospitals, and dietary programs, were even more ambitious and successful than other denominations in revolutionizing every aspect of their converts' culture. And for Adventists, the more sweeping and rapid the changes, the better.

If Adventists were to take seriously a social ethic drawn from the apocalyptic consciousness seen in Scripture and in their own heritage, they would have a hard time simply supporting the status quo in their societies. In totalitarian societies of either the left or the right, they would work, however possible, for fundamental transformation.

That is what the True and Free Adventists (Sabbathkeepers unrecognized by the government), did in the Soviet Union. During the regimes of Stalin, Krushchev, and Brezhnev, they were repeatedly imprisoned by Soviet authorities for not bearing arms, for refusing to work or attend school on Saturdays, and for insisting on speaking out in defense of human rights. State power, True and Free Adventists said, should not dictate faith and religion. When state power establishes either a state religion or state atheism, it has become the beast of Revelation.

These Sabbathkeeping Adventists persistently demanded that the Soviets at least live up to their own constitutional provisions protecting some religious liberty. Their underground printing presses published materials for Alexander Solzhenitsyn, as well as publishing their own ringing defenses of such well-known human-rights activists as Alexander Ginzburg, Yuri Orlov, and Anatoly Sharansky. They assisted these activists in establishing the initial Helsinki Watch human-rights committee.¹⁸

In relatively more open countries, Adventists with a social ethic based on an apocalyptic consciousness work for reform, as did the early Adventists in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁹ In no country can Adventists give their ultimate loyalty to any institution.

Confronting the Oppressor

Third, a social ethic drawing on apocalyptic would decide what changes to pursue in society on the basis of what policies served justice and freedom from oppression. Throughout the Apocalypse we read condemnations of unjust and oppressive political, commercial, and military powers. In chapters 13, 17, and 18, not only will the beast/Rome be punished, the whore/Babylon/Rome will be burned and her flesh eaten as punishment for her present, physical oppression. The "kings of the earth" who have been seduced by her power are doomed. So also are "the merchants of the earth"; those "great men of the earth" who have "waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies,"²⁰ and the ship owners, who "were made rich . . . by reason of her costliness."²¹ These doomed merchants and ship owners are so perverse that they weep because "no one buys their cargo any more," including "slaves, that is, human souls."²²

It is no wonder that a recent book by Allan Boesak, who has headed the colored Reform Church in South Africa and the United Democratic Front, is a commentary on the Apocalypse, entitled *Comfort and Protest*. It is no wonder that in it Boesak describes John the Revelator as "this banned pastor of the church," and characterizes the Apocalypse as "protest literature," filled with "explicit political criticism."²³ Boesak sees the New Jerusalem as a city

where our children shall live to bear children and not die untimely, where we shall build homes

and live in them without fear of being driven out by war or influx control or the Group Areas Act, where there shall be peace so that no one will "hurt or destroy."²⁴

When one reads chapter after chapter filled with condemnations of injustice and oppression, one is not surprised to read in Gustavo Gutierrez' landmark *Theology of Liberation* that "eschatology is not just one more element of Christianity, but the very key to understanding the Christian faith."²⁵

Far from providing an escape from moral engagement, John's Apocalypse is a call to arms; not to physical warfare, but to a fundamental revolt, nevertheless. Those immersed in the Apocalypse are drawn into a condemnation of the evil empire, its oppression, its ostentatious wealth, its blasphemous pretension to ultimate authority. The taunts and threats of the Apocalypse carry out surprise attacks, execute frontal assault. Its metaphors strip Rome of its glamor, attraction, and legitimacy, enlisting the reader in a revolution of the imagination against the oppressor.

Some contemporary Adventists, like Dr. Samson Kisekka, the leading Adventist layman who kept the Adventist Church alive in Uganda during the time of Idi Amin, have even understood their religious and moral commitments to demand that they participate in political revolts against oppression. At a time when innocents were being slaughtered, Dr. Kisekka helped lead the successful revolution that put the present government in power. After the revolt, he became Uganda's prime minister.²⁶

Adventists in positions of power, acting ac-

ording to an apocalyptically formed social ethic, would not work to support the economically and politically powerful, but the economically and politically deprived. Sometimes the powerful are executives in multinational corporations, sometimes colonels in the army, sometimes party members in one-party states. Specific policies will vary according to time and place. But whether in East or West, whether in the first- and second-world countries of the North, or third- and fourth-world countries of the South, Adventists faithful to the apocalyptic consciousness will exercise a preference for the weak, the vulnerable, and the destitute.

Entering the City of God

Finally, a social ethic from the perspective of the Second Advent is an ethic of expanding vision and imagination. It is a vision that begins with an ending; not an ending like some black hole of history—after the Second Coming, nothing at all.

The Second Advent inaugurates a time beyond the end. The Second Advent is not an ending like the dropping of the stage curtain; it is like the climax of the play, a commencement, a passage from one era to the next. Just as the special, final day of the week, the Sabbath, is an ending that

does not destroy the week that follows, so the Second Advent is the culmination of history, not its annihilation.

Scripture portrays the risen Christ himself, following the Resurrection, maintaining his human identity in heaven. With the Second

Far from providing an escape from moral engagement, John's Apocalypse is a call to arms. . . [to] a fundamental revolt. . . . Those immersed in the Apocalypse are drawn into a condemnation of the evil empire.

Advent there is not only crisis but continuity.

Adventist views of the body and health have always assumed that there will be some concrete continuity between this time and that which follows the Second Advent. In their earliest days, Adventists abstained from tea, coffee, and especially tobacco, because they expected to step directly from this world into heaven. They could not conceive of polluting bodies on the verge of translation. Today, Adventist young people are taught that they must treat their bodies as the temples of God, and their talents as divine gifts, partly because they must be ready to enter, after the Second Advent, directly into heaven.

Consequently, a social ethic fueled by an apocalyptic consciousness will not simply work to end oppression and injustice. A social ethic expanded by the apocalyptic vision will not just rupture society—condemning injustice and fighting to throw off the shackles of oppression. The most powerful word of the apocalyptic is not denunciation, but annunciation.²⁷ Even more than proclaiming the end of evil, apocalyptic evokes the good. The Apocalypse of John does not simply cast evil into the bottomless pit, into the lake of fire. Its dazzling color and music of goodness allure us, alienating our affections from horrifying images of evil. Apocalyptic not only expands moral perceptions, it ignites the passions. We do not merely identify and evaluate; we love goodness and hate evil.²⁸

The social ethic emerging from an apocalyptic consciousness glimpses a time beyond

the end. Apocalyptic fulfills what Walter Brueggemann calls the “ministry of imagination,” whose vocation is “to keep on conjuring and proposing alternative futures.”²⁹ Here we find the ultimate mission of the remnant.

The work of the remnant is not to be the cause, and the Second Advent obediently to be the effect. The relation of the remnant to the Second Advent is part to whole, microcosm to macrocosm. The remnant is not to bring about the Second Advent, it is to envision it in both words and deeds. The remnant is to embody in present moments of protest and joy the Great Day of the Lord.

When we oppose tyranny, we point to that final liberation. When we act on behalf of the weak and the destitute, we signal the coming of that new, just society. When we create communities of freedom and fellowship, we invite others to experience that City whose coming wipes away all tears. Social reform does not coerce the arrival of the City of God. Moments of social reform are enactments of that future, ideal civilization. They make the invisible visible. Social reform is a sacrament of the Second Advent.

Apocalyptic evokes a vision of a social ideal—a holy city filled with gold and precious jewels, a society of justice and harmony, where “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”³⁰ With an apocalyptic consciousness, we step from the prosaic order of tyranny into surprising, liberating poetry. We enter the City of God.

Notes and References

1. Tom Dybdahl, “How to Wait for the Second Coming,” *Pilgrimage of Hope*, Roy Branson, ed. (Takoma Park, Md.: Association of Adventist Forums, 1986), pp. 19-26.

2. W. H. Branson, *Drama of the Ages* (Washington,

D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950); Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1888).

3. Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944), p. 354.

4. James White, "Letter From Bro. White," *The Day-Star* (Oct. 22, 1845), p. 47, quoted in Ron Graybill, "The Courtship of Ellen Harmon," *Insight* (January 23, 1973), pp. 6, 7.

5. Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945), vol. 2, pp. 224, 225, 231.

6. _____, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 18:13 (Aug. 27, 1861), p. 101.

7. For more discussion of this position in the works of Adventist writers such as Graham Maxwell and Herbert Douglass, see Roy Branson, "Responding to the Delay," *Pilgrimage of Hope*, pp. 8-17.

8. Romans 13 is the most important proof text defending Adventists' courtship of such diverse political leaders as Marcos in the Philippines, Pinochet in Chile, and whoever leads the Soviet Union.

9. Quoted in Erwin Sicher, "Seventh-day Adventist Publications and the Nazi Temptation," *Spectrum*, 8:3 (March 1977), pp. 14, 21.

10. See Raymond L. Coombe, "Adventists Lead South Pacific Governments," *ibid.*, 18:5 (June 1988), pp. 60, 61. See also Dionne E. Phillips and Glen O. Phillips, "Preacher-Politician in the Caribbean," *ibid.*, 16:2 (June 1985), pp. 14-18, for a profile of the former leader of the Barbados Labor Party and a minister of the ruling cabinet.

11. For a more extensive argument in favor of this reading of the Apocalypse, and further references to the scholarly literature on which it is based, see Roy Branson, "The Demand for New Ethical Vision," *Bioethics Today—A New Ethical Vision*, James Walters, ed. (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Press, 1988).

12. Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), p. 124.

13. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 1, pp. 191-193.

14. James White, "Thoughts on the Revelation," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 20:24 (Nov. 11, 1862), p. 188.

15. Uriah Smith, note preceding "The Degeneracy of the United States," *ibid.*, 20:3 (June 17, 1862), p. 22; cf. note preceding "The Cause and Cure of the Present Civil War," *ibid.*, 20:12 (Aug. 19, 1862), p. 89.

16. Ernest R. Sandeen, "Millennialism," *The Rise of*

Adventism, Edwin S. Gaustad, ed. (New York: Harper, 1974), p. 115. On the involvement of apocalyptic groups in revolutionary movements in the history of Christianity in Europe, see Norman R. C. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Harper, 1961).

17. Uriah Smith, editorial comment before "Letter to the President," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 20:17 (Sept. 23, 1862), p. 130.

18. See *Spectrum*, 11:4 (June 1981)—Marite Sapiets, "Shelkov and the True and Free Adventists," pp. 24-28; "Adventists and the Madrid Conference," "Shelkov's Daughter Protests: An Open Letter to Brezhnev," and "Amnesty International and Adventists," pp. 28-36; Tom Dybdahl, "An Interview With Alexander Ginzburg," pp. 37-41. See also the chapter on Adventists in Ludmilla Alexyeva, *Soviet Dissent* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985). The author is an exiled founder of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Committee.

19. See Peter H. Ballis, "Seventh-day Adventists and New Zealand Politics, 1886-1918," *In and Out of the World: Seventh-day Adventists in New Zealand* (Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore, 1985); reprinted in slightly edited form as "Early Adventists Plunged Into New Zealand Politics," *Spectrum*, 18:5 (June 1988), pp. 40-56.

20. Revelation 18:3, 23, KJV.

21. Revelation 18:17-19, KJV.

22. Revelation 18:11, 13, RSV.

23. Allan Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse From a South African Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), p. 122.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

25. Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973), p. 162.

26. D. D. N. Nsereko, "Adventist Revolutionary Leads Uganda," *Spectrum*, 17:4 (May 1987), pp. 5-13.

27. See Gutierrez, p. 233, on utopia's significance as both "a denunciation of existing order," and "also an announcement of what is not yet, but will be."

28. See Branson, "Demand."

29. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 45.

30. Revelation 21:4, KJV.