

ESCHATOLOGY AND MANNERS *in Seventh-day Adventism*

BY MALCOLM BULL

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I. Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide organization with about five million adherents. Eighty-five percent of the membership is now found in the Third World, notably in Black Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. Despite such wide geographical dispersion there is little diversity in belief or practice. Adventists are united on the central core of their faith: the expectation of Christ’s imminent second coming, the observance of the seventh day of the week as a Sabbath, and a commitment to health marked by total abstinence from tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and various types of meat. Other doctrines and attitudes are held in common with many conservative Protestants from whom, however, Adventists are both ideologically distinct and culturally distanced.

Despite its size, the Seventh-day Adventist church remains peculiarly obscure. Unlike the Mormons or the Witnesses, Adventists play no part in the popular mythology of the western world. Diffident in evangelism, and preferring to avoid conflict with secular authority, Adventists have never achieved notoriety and, perhaps as a consequence, have not enjoyed familiarity either. On

an academic level too, Adventism has excited relatively little interest; no major study has yet been published. Existing work has attempted to place Adventism within established sociological categories. Wilson first described the group as a revolutionist sect, but later published a more nuanced discussion in the context of denominationalization.¹ Schwartz discovered a “version of the Protestant ethic”;² most recently, Theobald has concentrated on modernization.³ Valuable as this work has been, it has done little to delineate the distinctive character of the sect. Adventism is a complex phenomenon, which fits uneasily with any one designation.⁴ Similarities with other millenarian movements and Protestant groups are sometimes superficial. Basic questions have still to be answered. For example, what is the significance of the pre-occupation with the Second Advent? How is the social orientation of the sect most accurately described? And how is the genesis of the movement to be interpreted?

Obviously, I do not hope to give full answers to all, or any, of these questions in the course of this paper. But I want to hint at tentative answers to some of them by looking at the formative years of the movement, and in particular at the teaching of the Adventist prophet Ellen White.

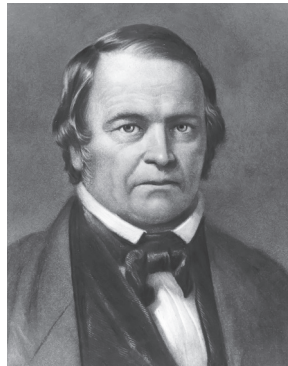
II. Historical Background

The denomination has its origins in the Millerite Movement of the 1830s and 40s. William Miller, a New England farmer, had concluded that the end of the world would take place in 1843. When this did not happen, his followers revised his intricate calculations in order to show that the Bible predicted the second Advent for October 22, 1844. The 50,000 people who waited in vain on this second occasion came to refer to it as the Great Disappointment. Afterwards, most drifted back to the churches from which they had been drawn by Miller's preaching and publications.⁵ But a small minority, probably about 2,000, refused to accept that Miller's chronology had been in error. They argued that the date had been correct but the nature of the event mistaken. Some considered that Christ had come to earth in spirit, others that he had moved from one part of heaven to another.

Those of the latter persuasion were known as Shut Door Adventists because they thought the door of mercy had been closed on October 22. Salvation, they believed, was now possible only for those who had been Millerites and assured only for those who passed certain tests. The future leaders of Seventh-day Adventism considered it necessary to observe a seventh-day Sabbath, and an associated group deemed it vital to practice sacramental foot-washing and kissing. The worship of both groups was ecstatic. They praised God by shouting aloud until overcome by the power of the Spirit. They would then fall to the floor, sometimes still shouting, groaning, and singing, but more often stricken as though dead.⁶

It would be wrong to presume from this that the early Adventists were drawn from the lowest stratum of

society. On the contrary, most were relatively affluent and respectable. A study of the accounts of the Adventist periodical, the *Review and Herald*, shows that in 1860, 78% of the subscribers in Michigan were farmers or farm operators, compared with 38% of the state's population as a whole. By contrast, only 5% were unskilled laborers, compared to 31% of the general population. Unsurprisingly, 58% of subscribers were found to be more affluent than the local average. As the sect had no real organization at this stage, the list of subscribers probably gives the best available indication of the movement's constituency.⁷



William Miller

In the 1840s too, most believers appeared to have a respectable background, even if their faith brought them occasional hardship. It was within this setting that a teenage girl, Ellen White, rose to prominence. She fell into trances in which all normal body functions appeared to cease, and during which she claimed to receive visions. In the 1840s, about one hundred Sabbath-keeping Adventists accepted her as God's messenger. In 1851, they abandoned belief in the Shut Door and began evangelistic work. In 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist church was formally organized. James White, Ellen's husband, played a leading role in the newly formed denomination, and he was also responsible for publishing her writings, which were distributed to the rapidly increasing membership. Understood to be direct communications from God, Ellen White's counsel guided the church until her death in 1915. Even today, all converts are expected to acknowledge the significance of her prophetic ministry.⁸

Although she was never elevated to a status comparable to that of Joseph Smith in Mormonism, her role bears comparison to that of Mary Baker Eddy in Christian Science, and her writings have done much to define the

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character of the sect. More than the statements of faith, which the church periodically publishes, the thought of Ellen White provides an ideological framework for the church's mission, binding together an eclectic array of doctrines into a coherent world view. I will thus examine the relationship between White's cosmology, eschatology, and ethics, in an effort to define the character of the Adventist ideology.

III. The Heavenly Court

In her first vision, in December 1844, Ellen White saw the Second Advent and traveled with the saved to the heavenly city. The journey—by cloud—took seven days. On arrival, Jesus distributed crowns, golden harps, palms of victory, and long white mantles. The saints, 144,000 in number, stood in a perfect square on the sea of glass from where they marched to the gate of the city. Then, in White's words, "Jesus raised His mighty, glorious arm, laid hold of the pearly gate, swung it back on its glittering hinges, and said to us, 'You have washed your robes in My blood, stood stiffly for My truth, enter in.'"⁹

This moment, the arrival of the saved within the citadel of God, represented the final realization of the Adventist hope, but it did not mark the limit of the Adventist imagination. White gives a detailed account of heaven itself. In outline, this picture differs little from that of other millenarians. There is a shared emphasis upon the opulence of the New Jerusalem, and a common use of traditional Christian symbols. But even in this, her first vision, White's description has the hallmarks of what became a characteristically Adventist understanding of the divine realm.

There is a marked, almost military concentration upon order. The 144,000 stand in formation; they march rather than walk. Jesus welcomes those who have "stood stiffly," like soldiers, for truth. The saints are differentiated by their uniforms—martyrs wear red as border on their garments¹⁰—and by their insignia of achievement: "Some of them had very bright crowns, others not so bright. Some crowns appeared heavy with stars, while others had but a few."¹¹

In the New Jerusalem nothing has been left to chance. Every home is provided with a golden shelf upon which the saints can rest their crowns, and all the crowns are labeled with their owners' names.¹² Heaven is not, then,

a place of unrestrained luxury; there is no scope for self-indulgence. All are satisfied with their allotted status; order and decorum prevail.

This conception of heaven is brought into sharper relief in White's account of the fall of Satan. Here the origin of sin is explained as a dispute over the question of precedence in the heavenly hierarchy. "Satan in heaven, before his rebellion, was a high and exalted angel, next in honor to God's dear son."¹³ He had been content with his position, until:

The great Creator assembled the heavenly host, that he might in the presence of all the angels confer special honor upon his Son. The Son was seated on the throne with the Father, and the heavenly throng of holy angels was gathered around them. The Father then made known that it was ordained by himself that Christ, his Son, should be equal with himself; so that wherever was the presence of his Son, it was as his own presence.¹⁴



Very rare, illustrated antique engraving of the almighty power flaming from the eternal sky. Victorian Engraving, 1885

In White's account, Satan's crime was specific. His revolt against the law had been occasioned by an unwillingness to accept an hierarchical social order. He argued for the rights of the individual over and against the duties imposed by heavenly society and protested against a divine government which took action without consultation.

The scene White describes is reminiscent of a royal court. God, the King, confirms that Christ, the Crown Prince, is to be his co-ruler. The court is assembled to witness the proclamation, and the angels, as good courtiers, bow to Jesus "to acknowledge his supremacy, and high authority and rightful rule."¹⁵

In contrast to the stately ceremony of the heavenly court, Satan is presented as a populist, a demagogue. Jealous of the status given to Jesus, he assembled the angels and addressed them.

He told them that henceforth all the sweet liberty the angels had enjoyed was at an end. For had not a ruler been appointed over them, to whom they from henceforth must yield servile honor? He stated to them that he had called them together to assure them that he no longer would submit to this invasion of his rights and theirs.¹⁶

Satan advocated reform. "He claimed that angels needed no law, but should be left free to follow their own will, which would ever guide them right. He promised them a new and better government than they then had, in which all would be freedom."¹⁷ Eventually he proposed open rebellion, telling the angels that "they must assert their liberty and gain by force the position and authority which was not willingly accorded them."¹⁸

In the ensuing battle between angels loyal to God and Satan's followers, Satan was defeated and expelled from heaven. In White's account, Satan's crime was specific. His revolt against the law had been occasioned by an

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Heaven was, in the thought of Ellen White, not only a literal place, but an actual society: its structure that of a court. God the Father is, as king, given a multitude of royal appellations. His Son shares these but is also referred to as "a prince in the royal courts of heaven." His role in government is more active than that of the Father. He is frequently described as the commander of the angels, the "mighty commander of the hosts of heaven."¹⁹ It is in this capacity that Christ is identified, contrary to Christian tradition, with Michael the archangel, who leads the heavenly army in the battle against the devil.²⁰

With the departure of Satan, the angel Gabriel now stands "next in honor to the Son of God."²¹ He is responsible for conveying messages of particular importance to mankind. Information coming in the other direction is processed by another rank in the heavenly bureaucracy. According to White:

The very highest angels in the heavenly courts are appointed to work out the prayers which ascend to God for the advancement of the cause of God. Each angel has his particular post of duty which he is not permitted to leave for any other place.²²

Angels are not only involved in communication. Some sing in the heavenly choir, others record the deeds

of mankind in books, and the cherubim and seraphim minister in the heavenly sanctuary. But when not actively engaged in such work, the angels simply observe events on earth. White describes how when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, “Many companies of holy angels, each with a tall commanding angel at their head were sent to witness the scene.”²³

Playing no part in the work of heaven, and enjoying only observer status, are the inhabitants of unfallen worlds. White believed that God had created and populated other planets whose inhabitants had, unlike Adam and Eve, not succumbed to temptation. These beings, whom White described as “of all sizes . . . noble, majestic and lovely,”²⁴ act as a kind of chorus, watching and being edified by the dramatic struggle between good and evil that is taking place on earth.

The divine realm thus appears as a highly developed society. There is unity of purpose but division of labor, a centralized administration but a dispersed population. Despite this complexity, Ellen White does not describe heaven as self-contained. It is neither discrete from, nor complete without, the inhabitants of earth.

On this planet the angels are God’s representatives. White described how each person has a guardian angel, who keeps him from harm and promotes godliness in his heart. Angels also participate in direct evangelistic work, drive devils away from religious meetings, and attend every aspect of human life.²⁵

But this is not the only connection between heaven and earth. At the Second Coming the saved are destined to fill the vacancies created in the heavenly court by the fall of Satan and his angels.²⁶ Interaction between heaven and earth is thus conceived as taking place in two ways. Prior to the Second Advent, angels play an important but largely invisible part in human society. After the Second Advent, the saved will take up new roles in angelic society.

IV. The Cultivation of Manners

This expectation was frequently invoked in White’s ethical teaching. The moral and personal qualities she valued were those which would best equip the redeemed to move easily in heavenly society. Believing that “the happiness of heaven will consist in the pure communion of holy beings, the harmonious social life with the blessed angels,” White advocated, “the proper cultivation of the social elements of our nature.”²⁷ “There should,” she wrote, “be a continual effort to imitate the society we expect soon to join; namely angels of God who have never fallen from sin.”²⁸

As befitted her understanding of the nature of heavenly society, White singled out restraint and decorum as the defining characteristics of social interaction in the divine realm. Even Satan, she noted, “has not forgotten his manners in the heavenly courts.”²⁹ As for members of the Adventist group, they, as followers of Jesus should, she said, “be constantly improving in manners.”³⁰

Not all Adventists found it easy to follow her advice. White addressed the problem with characteristic vigor. In 1862 she wrote:

There is an evil among some of the poor which will certainly prove their ruin unless they overcome it. They have embraced the truth with their coarse, rough uncultivated habits. . . . They look upon others who are more orderly and refined as being proud, and you may hear them say: “The truth brings us down upon a level.” But it is an entire mistake to think that the truth brings the receiver down. It brings him up, refines his taste, sanctifies his judgment, and, if lived out, is continually fitting him for the society of holy angels in the City of God.³¹

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It was not only the impoverished who lacked self-control and social finesse. Children too were prone to be unrestrained. If they did not receive proper discipline at home, White recommended that “they should be removed from their injudicious parents and placed under as severe regulations and drilling as soldiers in an army.” Drastic measures but necessary, for

Those who have had no respect for order or discipline in this life would have no respect for the order which is observed in heaven. They can never be admitted into heaven, for all worthy of an entrance there will love order and respect discipline.³²

The heavenly court was, however, not the only place where men could expect to rub shoulders with angels. White did not advocate a simple policy of restraint for which later rewards would compensate. Angels were already present on earth and were likely to be offended by any departure from decorous behavior. As White commented, “If the Lord abides with us . . . we shall realize that angels are watching us and our manners will be gentle and forbearing.”³³

The process of socializing the saints thus began on earth. Angels could be attracted by good manners, repelled by bad. As guests in the home, angels imparted “peace and a fragrant influence.” Accordingly White wrote that parents were to “work most earnestly to have an orderly, correct household, that the heavenly angels may be attracted to it.”³⁴

Any uncontrolled display of emotion would, however, cause the angels acute embarrassment. Writing to a family in mourning, White described their feelings as “little less than rebellion against God.” For she continued, “I saw you all dwelling upon your bereavement, and giving way to your excitable feelings, until your noisy demonstrations of grief caused angels to hide their faces and withdraw from the scene.”³⁵

In similar vein, White wrote of some Adventist preachers who made angels in the audience ashamed through “common cheap talk, grotesque attitudes and workings of the features.”³⁶ Ministers, Ellen White believed, “should not feel that they can make no improvement in voice or manners,” for “much can be done.”³⁷ “No man,”

she argued, “can properly fill a position in connection with the work of God who is controlled by feelings and moves from impulse.”³⁸

The refinement which White considered the prerequisite of acceptance in angelic society could, she believed, be acquired on earth. Indeed, there was no option: “The heavenly character must be acquired on earth, or it can never be acquired at all.”³⁹ White thought that “The work of educating the mind and manners may be carried forward to perfection.”⁴⁰ Her prescription was simple. “The character should be holy, the manners comely, the words without guile, and thus should we follow on step by step until we are fitted for translation.”⁴¹ “The world,” White wrote, “is God’s workshop, where he fashions us for the courts of heaven. He uses the planing knife upon our quivering hearts until the roughness and irregularities are removed, and we are fitted for our proper places in the heavenly building.”⁴²

The interpenetration of White’s cosmology, eschatology, and ethics is thus made clear. Heaven is a monarchy; its organization is like that of any royal court. With the fall of Satan and the departure of angels of libertarian inclination, vacancies have arisen in the heavenly bureaucracy. These will be filled by those members of the human race who demonstrate loyalty to the divine government. Angels thus encourage and reprove men until some have developed enough refinement and self-restraint to participate in a divine economy based on hierarchy and ceremonial.

V. The Development of Organization

The connection between this system of beliefs and the practices of those who upheld it is interesting. White’s ideas developed from her visions, which usually occurred during the enthusiastic worship of her fellow believers, who would sing and shout while the prophetess fell into trance. Their activities were far from restrained. (On one occasion a visiting doctor, unnerved by the rumpus audible outside, refused to enter an Adventist home.⁴³) But this was the setting in which White learnt of the structure of heaven, its hierarchy, and customs. What she saw was quite obviously not a projection of her own religious environment. The early Adventists spurned all forms of organization prior to 1863, and, even then, looked upon it as a necessary evil. Thus in 1860, when White

began publicly to advocate the emulation of the heavenly court, Adventists lacked any formal structure, and had no apparent inclination to create one. They still practiced enthusiastic worship. In a letter to his wife, James White describes how, in 1860, he and two friends, while in prayer, had been thrown, groaning, to the floor.⁴⁴

But in time, the organization of heaven came to be used as an example for organization in the church. Rather than resisting church order, ministers “should,” White wrote, “discipline the church of God and teach them to work harmoniously like a well-drilled company of soldiers.”⁴⁵ Similarly, those who persisted in ecstatic worship were branded as fanatics. White castigated one such group for bringing the name Seventh-day Adventist into disrepute by their “coarse and uncultivated” behavior, their “boisterous manners,” and their failure to “discriminate and render honor to whom honor is due.”⁴⁶ By the beginning of the twentieth century, enthusiasm had been so long absent from the church’s worship, that its attempted re-introduction in Indiana was widely regarded as Satanic.⁴⁷ At around the same time, the increasingly bureaucratic system of church government took on the centralized character that it has since retained.

What may be observed in nineteenth-century Seventh-day Adventism is an example of the much-discussed pattern of rationalization in which a movement is institutionalized.⁴⁸ The interesting aspect of the Adventist experience is that it highlights the interrelationship between a prophet, an ideology, and a set of practices in effecting this familiar transformation. The 1840s were a period of general enthusiasm from which a charismatic leader arose. The authority accorded to her enshrined her revelations as normative even though their content was implicitly at odds with the practices of the group. In time, the prophet worked the material from her visions into a coherent system of beliefs with which the group’s existing practices were inconsistent. The prophet then used her authority to iron out these discrepancies, and thus obliterated the very practices which had fostered her own emergence. The charismatic leader thus appears as the agent of rationalization, invoking ideology to change patterns of behavior.⁴⁹

This process is of particular significance, for it suggests one reason why the Adventists have acknowledged none of White’s would-be successors. With the suppression of

ecstatic worship, White’s prophetic status became the only justification for her visionary experiences—the very experiences which had originally legitimated her prophetic claims. Having drawn up the ladder of charisma behind her, but having accepted no official position in the church’s hierarchy, White made it difficult for her authority to be transmitted. She held no office to which others might succeed, and those who claimed similar psychic powers disqualified themselves, not only from recognition, but probably from church membership as well.⁵⁰

VI. The Adventist Ethic

The cultivation of manners was just one of many aspects of life upon which White advised the early Adventist community. Her thought ranged across a host of topics. The development of restraint, with which, in White’s mind, the possession of good manners was synonymous, does, as a general principle, provide a key to the understanding of the Adventist ethical position as a whole. More than specific injunctions or taboos, the call for restraint provided guidance in the innumerable areas of life in which propriety can only be a matter of degree. As such, it constitutes the core of what might loosely be termed the Adventist ethic.

The precise nature of this ethic is worth close scrutiny. It is possible to observe in the Adventist approach to social interaction attitudes typical of a certain class. Being respectable and prosperous, Adventists naturally wished to differentiate themselves from the spontaneity and vulgarity of lower classes. On the other hand, they had no time for what White termed “worldly etiquette.” The Adventist ethic required the control of affectation as well as the control of the affects. In this indifference to artificiality, it is easy to see the sturdy independence of a rural elite, unwilling to concede the advantages of urban polish.⁵¹

What is more unusual is the ideological context in which these attitudes find expression. The Adventist ethic is part of, and historically a development from, a complex of ideas about cosmology and eschatology. This in itself is unsurprising; one looks automatically for some connection between the ethics and the eschatology of a chiliastic group. But the Adventist ethic is not provisional upon the imminent end of the world. It is not an interim ethic that functions as a guide to morality for some brief

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and exceptional period prior to the final cataclysm. The call for restraint is not contingent upon the end of this world, but upon the nature of the next. Indeed, it is, at times, implied that the end of the world is contingent upon the perfect realization of the ethic. In other words, time and more especially the end of time, although important in Adventist thought, is neither the source nor the focus of White's call for restraint. In this, Adventism appears atypical amongst millenarian groups, about which it is often asserted that, "the most important thing . . . is [their] *attitude towards time*."⁵² If, as appears to be the case, Adventist morality quickly became independent of specifically temporal considerations, time can hardly be said to constitute the dominant element in Adventist ideology.

The timing of the transition from earth to heaven may not be of importance, but what of the juxtaposition of the New Earth and the Old? Does the Adventist system offer rewards in heaven as a compensation for restraint on earth?⁵³ Superficially there is some evidence to support this; in her first vision, White dwells lovingly upon the profusion of gold which the saints will encounter. But her true emphasis lies elsewhere; hers is not a consumer paradise in which the individual is offered limitless gratification. According to White, the saints will enter a highly developed society not in order to be freed from responsibility but in order to take it up. They cannot, as according to Burridge millenarians usually do, look forward to redemption as "a complete release from obligation."⁵⁴ The saints have not deposited their merits in some spiritual bank; they cannot

expect to spend the accumulated capital on their arrival in heaven. The restraint enjoined on earth is compulsory in heaven. There is no radical dislocation between earth and heaven; the former is simply a training ground for the latter. The discipline advocated by White does not presuppose compensation.

Here again, Adventism fails to fit the millenarian stereotype in which "the transition from the present in the final future is not a gradual process of progressive approximations to the final goal . . . but a sudden and revolutionary leap onto a totally different level of existence."⁵⁵ On the contrary, the Second Advent will take place when the saints have perfected their social roles, and for them at least there will be no "revolutionary leap." The angels who have been their invisible companions will, at last, become visible as, in typically post-millennial fashion, the Second Advent makes manifest that which was previously hidden.

This of course applies only to the saints. For the damned there is no millennium. Adventists believe that the imperfect will be annihilated at the Second Coming, only to be revived one thousand years later, in order to learn the verdict of the Last Judgment. Thus, it could be argued that Adventist eschatology is not premillennialist as has long been assumed, but at least partially post-millennialist,⁵⁶ for the saved experience no reversal of their position and the damned experience nothing at all.⁵⁷

What then is the nature of the Adventist ethic if it does not hinge either upon the imminence of the *eschaton* or upon the polarization of values between the new earth



Engraving from 1882 showing rioters attacking the Royal Palace during the French Revolution. “Adventists were horrified by the French Revolution, and although they valued the American Revolution as having guaranteed religious liberty, they feared the radicalism associated with it.”

and the old? How is it related to the rest of the Adventist belief system? The value of the restraint is, in the thought of Ellen White, not related to the structural changes in the history of the universe, but to its social formation. Adventists were exhorted to restrain the affects because of the precise social constitution of the heavenly court. The Adventist ethic is one of preparation in a very literal sense. The practice of restraint is designed to result in both its perfection and internalization. A process which in turn effects the socialization of the saints into the company of angels. Restraint is thus its own reward in the form of upward social mobility in the spiritual sphere.

The latent functions of this belief seem clear. Self-discipline and a little social polish are also conducive to material improvement, and the socio-economic benefits of an ordered life are as evident in Adventism as they are in other Protestant sects.⁵⁸ There are, however, two significant ways in which the Adventist ethic differs from the Weberian Protestant ethic.⁵⁹ The first is that unlike Weber’s Calvinists, Adventists sought not to prove, but to perfect their spiritual status. For the Calvinist, the unlimited accumulation of wealth could only augment the certainty of divine election, whereas for the Adventist, a rise in socio-economic status might threaten rather than enhance his spiritual position. The reason for this apparent paradox is that while the Adventist ethic could provide an incentive to social refinement, it could also function as a disincentive to assertive social or economic behavior. The acquisition of good manners was necessary

for acceptance in angelic society, but the exercise of independent judgment was not. Quite the opposite, it was the desire to advance beyond his allotted position that had precipitated Satan’s fall. The saints are thus being trained to serve, and not to rule.⁶⁰ Accordingly, it is possible to see how the Adventist ethic, which so strongly promotes upward mobility, also sets a ceiling upon it. For at some point, perhaps when a shift is likely from self-government to the government of others, there emerges a tension between the believer’s social and spiritual obligations.

This ideological peculiarity may suggest one explanation for Adventism’s unchanging socio-economic constituency. Just as a century ago, Adventists are today marginally better off than the rest of the population. The rapid upward mobility of individuals has not effected a corresponding change in the composition of the group. External factors are obviously important in this, the social prestige of American denominations is quite clearly defined, and a rise in an individual’s status is often accompanied by a corresponding change in religious affiliation or behavior.⁶¹ However, the nature of the Adventist ethic also points to internal pressures, which may both discourage certain types of social advancement and prompt the apostasy of those who wish to play a significant role in wider society.

The second way in which the Adventist ethic diverges from the Protestant ethic is related to the first. In Adventism, membership of a spiritual elite is the object rather than the presupposition of action. Consequently,

while the Protestant ethic enshrines competition and individualism, the Adventist ethic, like the Catholic, emphasizes cooperation, collectivism, and specifically social values;⁶² good manners cannot, by definition, be acquired or practiced in social isolation.

The early Adventists were separated from one another by geography, and from their neighbors by religion. Camp meetings were the first means of bringing believers together, but, by the 1870s, medical and educational institutions provided a more permanent focus for social interaction.⁶³ In the development of denominational institutions and agencies, it is thus possible to discern not only an aversion to contact with the world, but a belief in the positive spiritual benefit of contact with other church members. The Adventist ethic required social interaction, but the seventh-day Sabbath and other taboos reduced the possibility of socializing with non-believers. There was thus a strong ideological element in the creation of an Adventist sub-culture, which minimized contact with outsiders while at the same time maximizing social interaction between believers.⁶⁴

The Adventist ethic of restraint does not then slot neatly into the standard categories used either for Protestant or millenarian ethics. Ironically, what the Adventist ethic most closely resembles is the practice of restraint adopted in the court societies of seventeenth-century Europe. There, as Norbert Elias has argued, the control of the affects was the prerequisite of social acceptance.⁶⁵ In Adventist thought, it was the absolute monarchy of God rather than of the Ancien Regime which was the context and justification for a code of self-control. In one case, the royal court was an actual habitation of the aristocracy; in the other, it was a supraempirical reality described for the Adventists by their prophet. But in both cases the function of the hierarchical social formation is the same; it constitutes the basis and the end of an ethic of restraint.

VII. Adventism in Social and Political Context

This similarity may not be entirely fortuitous. Although it is hazardous to interpret millenarian ideologies in the light of contemporary political and economic events, it may be possible to do so in the Adventist case without being too reductive. Christian eschatology has long been preoccupied with the Kingdom of God. In the American revolution, the repudiation of the King of England was accompanied by the millennial expectation of the inauguration of the Kingdom of God in the New World.⁶⁶ For at least some American Christians, however, the overthrow of the French monarchy cast suspicion onto the principles of the American revolution and the practice of republicanism. Amongst those with apocalyptic interests, the French Revolution served as an urgent reminder of the burgeoning powers of evil and the imminence of the final conflict. Prominent in this respect were the progenitors of the Seventh-day Adventists, the Millerites, who mistrusted the millennial optimism fostered by the populism of the Jacksonian era, and anxiously awaited the coming of their divine king. Adventists were equally horrified by the French Revolution,⁶⁷ and although they valued the American Revolution as having guaranteed religious liberty, they feared the radicalism associated with it. The writings of Thomas Paine had, White confidently asserted, been dictated by Satan himself.⁶⁸

The inverse of this supposed literary collaboration can perhaps be seen in White's description of Satan's speeches to the heavenly court. The source of her account appears to have been Book V of *Paradise Lost*,⁶⁹ for she follows Milton's narrative in several places, including her description of Satan's speech. But White goes beyond Milton in emphasizing the political basis of the dispute. In terms which recall the rhetoric of the American Revolution, she writes of an "invasion of rights," of Satan's plans for "new and better government." She also introduces the

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idea that one of Satan's grievances was the lack of proper consultation prior to God's actions.⁷⁰ Thus, Satan makes what it is tempting to read as a diabolical "Declaration of Independence."

It would be wrong to overstate the similarities. But it is evident that while the early Adventists associated social disorder with republican France and experienced it in republican America, they anticipated its removal by the monarchical government of heaven. Surely it is then unsurprising to find in White's account of the heavenly kingdom a society which is the antithesis of radical individualism. In affirming the need for divine order in a world of chaos, Adventists may also be seen as reaffirming the values of colonial America against those of the republic: the certain ethic of a hierarchical social order against the ambiguous morality of egalitarianism.

On a theoretical level, this picture of Adventist eschatology as reflecting political sentiments of a reactionary nature accords well with Burridge's analysis of millenarian activities.⁷¹ Arguing that millenarianism arises where two conflicting prestige systems are juxtaposed, Burridge suggests that millenarian activities involve an attempt by the denizens of one prestige system to become the beneficiaries of the alternative system without becoming part of it. Accordingly, cargo cults are viewed as striving to acquire the material benefits of European civilization without undergoing the normally prerequisite social transformation.⁷² Using this model, Adventism could be understood with reference to two alternative prestige systems: the monarchical, hierarchical formation of Europe, and the republican, egalitarian formation of post-revolutionary America. Adventist eschatology could then be understood as an attempt to describe how the social benefits of a more highly developed and ordered society might accrue to the self-reliant citizens of an immature nation.

Without further historical research, such a formulation can only be speculative. That said, the disorientation of mid-nineteenth-century America does suggest a plausible context for the Adventist concern with social order, just as the existence of contemporary monarchies in Europe, combined with the memories of a colonial past, provides an appropriate source for the vision of an hierarchical society.

VIII. Conclusion

Whatever the value of such analysis, an examination of the precise relationship of White's eschatology and ethics does, on a purely descriptive level, help to clarify the character of early Adventism. It emerges as a movement whose eschatology was postmillennialist rather than premillennialist, reactionary rather than revolutionary, and whose call for restraint is better understood as a social ethic than as a work ethic.

Such tentative attempts at classification may perhaps be of some use in defining the nature of nineteenth-century Adventism both as a millenarian movement and as a Protestant sect.

Endnotes

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2. Gary Schwartz, *Sect Ideologies and Social Status* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 71.
3. Robin Theobald, "From Rural Populism to Practical Christianity: The Modernization of the Seventh-day Adventist Movement," *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 60, no. 1 (1985): 109–30.
4. Wilson, *Religious Sects*, 39.
5. See David T. Arthur, "Millerism," in *The Rise of Adventism*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 154–71. On the historical context see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950).
6. See Ingemar Linden, *The Last Trump: An Historico-genetical Study of Some Important Chapters in the Making and Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978), chapters one and two; and Ronald Graybill, "The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century," (PhD thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1983), 83–92.
7. Ronald Graybill, "Millenarians and Money: Adventist Wealth and Adventist Beliefs," *Spectrum* 10, no. 2 (1979): 31–41.
8. On Ellen White see Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).
9. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Battle Creek, 1882; Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1945), 16. 17.
10. White, *Early Writings*, 18.
11. White, *Early Writings*, 16.
12. White, *Early Writings*, 18.
13. Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols. (Battle Creek, 1870; Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1944), 1:12.
14. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 1:12.
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16. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 1:19.
17. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 1:20.
18. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 1:21.
19. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 9 vols. (1855; Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 1:296.

20. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), 99.
21. White, *Desire of Ages*, 99.
22. Ellen G. White, quoted in Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954), 4:1173.
23. White, *Early Writings*, 168.
24. White, *Early Writings*, 40.
25. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 660.
26. Ellen G. White, quoted in Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:949.
27. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 4:72, 73.
28. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 1:216.
29. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1923), 333.
30. Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1915), 283.
31. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 1, 274.
32. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 4, 429.
33. Ellen G. White, *My Life Today* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 98.
34. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, Southern Publishing Association, 1952), 17.
35. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 5:313.
36. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 339.
37. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 1:649.
38. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 4:218.
39. White *Testimonies to the Church*, 2:267.
40. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 4:358–59.
41. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 1:216.
42. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 4:143.
43. Graybill, “The Power of Prophecy,” 89.
44. Graybill, “The Power of Prophecy,” 90.
45. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 1:649.
46. White, *Testimonies to the Church*, 2:554–55.
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48. For a recent discussion see Roy Wallis, “Charisma, Commitment and Control in a New Religious Movement,” in *Millennialism and Charisma*, ed. Roy Wallis (Belfast: The Queen’s University, 1982), 117.
49. See Graybill, “The Power of Prophecy,” 133–59; and Robin Theobald, “The Role of Charisma in the Development of Social Movements: Ellen G. White and the Emergence of Seventh Day Adventism,” *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 49, no. 1 (1980): 83–100.
50. See Lowell Tarling, *The Edges of Seventh-day Adventism* (Barragga Bay, NSW: Galilee, 1981), 84–99.
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52. Yonina Talmon, “Pursuit of the Millennium: The Relation Between Religious and Social Change,” *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 3 (1962): 130.
53. This is suggested by Robin Theobald, “Seventh-day Adventists and the Millennium” in *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 7, ed. Michael Hill (London: SCM Press, 1974), 126.
54. Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969), 6.
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57. See Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1888), 653–61.
58. See Graybill, “Millenarians and Money.”
59. Schwartz, in *Sect Ideologies*, is particularly keen to equate Adventist morality with the Protestant ethic. See also Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (London: George Allen and Unwin), 1930.
60. Schwartz found Adventists reticent to engage in entrepreneurial activities. Schwartz, *Sect Ideologies*, 198–99.
61. See N. J. Demerath III, *Social Class in American Protestantism* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965). See also Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 149–67.
62. See the wide-ranging discussion in G. H. Mueller, “The Protestant Ethic and the Catholic Ethic,” *The Annual Review of the Social Sciences of Religion*, vol. 2 (1978): 143–66.
63. See R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View: CA Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), 104–33.
64. The effects of this are discussed by Maren Lockwood Carden and Ronald Lawson in “Ghettoization and the Erosion of a Distinct Way of Life: The Seventh-day Adventist Experience” (unpublished manuscript, Andrews University, MI, 1983).
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67. White, *Great Controversy*, 265–88.
68. White, *Early Writings*, 90.
69. John Milton, *Poetical Works*, vol. 2, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).
70. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, 22.
71. Burridge, *New Heaven*, 6.
72. Burridge, *New Heaven*, 47–61.

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