

- ⁴⁹ In *A Brief History of William Miller*, p. 180.
⁵⁰ "Synopsis of Miller's Views" (Boston, 1843).
⁵¹ Letter, Miller to Himes, *Signs of the Times*, May 3, 1843.
⁵² Cross, *The Burned-over District*, p. 80.
⁵³ D. S. Porter, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Britain" (unpublished manuscript).
⁵⁴ Luther Boutelle, *Sketch of the Life and Religious Experience of Elder Luther Boutelle* (Boston, 1891), p. 59.
⁵⁵ Cross, *The Burned-over District*, pp. 297, 298.
⁵⁶ Arthur, "Joshua V. Himes," pp. 90, 91.
⁵⁷ Banks, "Rise and Growth of the Advent Christian Denomination," pp. 57, 58.
⁵⁸ Rojas, "Origins of Millennial Speculation," p. 172.
⁵⁹ *A Brief History of William Miller*, p. 151; Banks, "Rise and Growth of the Advent Christian Denomination," p. 52.
⁶⁰ In Isaac C. Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* (Yarmouth, Maine, 1874), p. 293.
⁶¹ *Ibid.*
⁶² Weniger, "A Critical Analysis," p. 381.
⁶³ In White, *William Miller*, pp. 229, 230.
⁶⁴ *Signs of the Times*, May 15, 1840.
⁶⁵ In White, *William Miller*, p. 218.
⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269.
⁶⁷ M. E. Marty, *The Infidel: Free Thought in American Religion* (Cleveland, 1961), pp. 218, 219.
⁶⁸ In *Advent Herald*, April 10, 1844.
⁶⁹ In Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, p. 253.
⁷⁰ *Midnight Cry*, March 14, 1844.
⁷¹ Banks, "Rise and Growth of the Advent Christian Denomination," pp. 55, 56.
⁷² *SDA Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., Commentary Reference Series (Washington, D.C., 1976), vol. 10, p. 894.
⁷³ In White, *William Miller*, p. 361.
⁷⁴ Dick, "The Adventist Crisis of 1843-1844," p. 269.
⁷⁵ Johnson, *Advent Christian History*, p. 89.
⁷⁶ Dick, "The Adventist Crisis of 1843-1844," p. 267.
⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif., 1950), pp. 395, 396.
⁷⁸ James White and Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Battle Creek, Mich., 1888), pp. 94-97.
⁷⁹ Sylvester Bliss, quoted in Wellcome, *History of the Second Advent Message*, p. 365.
⁸⁰ In Nichol, *The Midnight Cry*, pp. 247, 248.
⁸¹ In Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller*, p. 280.
⁸² Letter, William Miller to T. Wrightson, Albany, N.Y., March 25, 1845. Original letter is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania Library, Philadelphia.
⁸³ From *Proceedings of the Mutual Conference of Adventists* (New York, 1845), p. 16.
⁸⁴ Banks, "Rise and Growth of the Advent Christian Denomination," p. 59.
⁸⁵ In White, *William Miller*, p. 339.
⁸⁶ Arthur, "Joshua V. Himes," pp. 150, 151.
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The Second Advent in Seventh-day Adventist History and Theology

Norval F. Pease

THE most definitive statement of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine is found in the *Church Manual*. In the summary of fundamental beliefs are the following statements referring either directly or indirectly to the second advent:

The nature of the advent: "The second coming of Christ is the hope of the church, the climax of the gospel, and the goal of the plan of redemption, when Jesus will come literally, personally, and visibly, with all His holy angels. Many signs of the times testify that His coming is at hand."¹

The time of the advent: "the almost complete fulfillment of all the various lines of prophecy indicates that 'he is near, even at the doors.'"²

The effect of the advent on people: "The righteous dead will be raised to life at Christ's second advent. Together with the righteous living, they will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and will go with Him to heaven, there to spend the one thousand years known as the millennium. . . . The wicked who are living at the time of Christ's second advent will be slain by the brightness of His coming. These, with the wicked dead of all ages, will await the second resurrection, at the close of the one thousand years."³

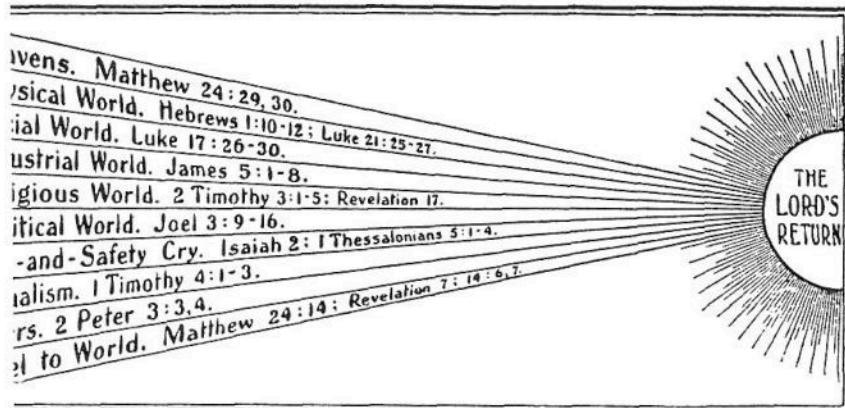
The end of the controversy between good and evil: "At the end of the one thousand years, the following events will take place. (a) Christ and the righteous will descend from heaven, with the Holy City, the New Jerusalem; (b) the wicked dead will be resurrected for final judgment (c) the wicked will receive the final wages of sin when fire comes down from God out of heaven to consume them; and (d) this fire, which destroys the works of sin, will purify the earth. . . . The earth, cleansed by fire and renewed by the power of God, will become the eternal home of the redeemed."⁴

This, in condensed form, is the Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of the Biblical doctrine of the second advent.

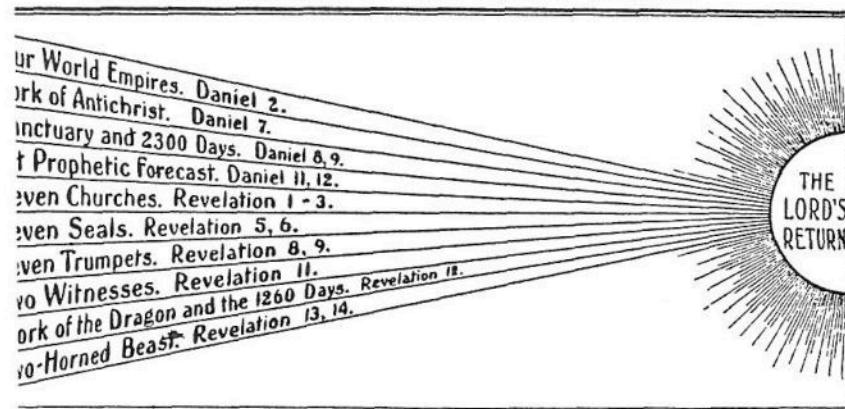
A study of Seventh-day Adventist literature indicates that there has been no basic change in the concept of the second advent. For example, the editor of the

na Herald published the following summary of this doctrine as he
 od it in 1925:⁵

SIGN PROPHECIES OF THE LORD'S RETURN



TIME PROPHECIES OF THE LORD'S RETURN



back another thirty-six years, the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* of 1889
 the second advent as follows: "Seventh-day Adventists believe: . . .
 the doctrine of the world's conversion and a temporal millennium is a
 these last days, calculated to lull men into a state of carnal security, and
 a to be overtaken by the great day of the Lord as by a thief in the night (1
 3); that the second coming of Christ is to precede, not follow, the
 n; for until the Lord appears, the papal power, with all its abominations,
 ue (2 Thess. 2:8), the wheat and tares grow together (Matt. 13:29, 30,
 vil men and seducers wax worse and worse, as the Word of God declares
 1, 13)."⁶

the mistake of Adventists in 1844 pertained to the nature of the event
 nspire, not to the time; that no prophetic period is given to reach to the
 vent, but the longest one, the two thousand and three hundred days of

Daniel 8:14, terminated in 1844, and brought us to an event called the cleansing of
 the sanctuary."⁷

"That God, in accordance with His uniform dealings with the race, sends forth
 a proclamation of the approach of the second advent of Christ; and that this work
 is symbolized by the three messages of Revelation 14."⁸

"That out of this prison-house of the grave, mankind are to be brought by a
 bodily resurrection; the righteous having part in the first resurrection, which
 takes place at the second coming of Christ."⁹

"That at the last trump, the living righteous are to be changed in a moment, in
 the twinkling of an eye, and with the risen righteous are to be caught up to meet
 the Lord in the air, so forever to be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 1 Cor. 15:51,
 52)."¹⁰

Going back to the beginning of Seventh-day Adventist history, James White
 stressed the doctrine of the second advent in terms that are still very familiar to
 Adventists: "He will *appear* the second time. . . ."

"The second advent of Christ will be personal and visible. . . . Jesus, as He was
 addressing His disciples upon the subject of His second advent, pointed forward
 to the generation who would witness the signs of that event in the sun, moon, and
 stars, and said: 'They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with
 power and great glory' " (Matt. 24:30). . . .

"When the Lord shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, sinners then
 living will be destroyed, and the earth will be desolated. . . ."

"When Christ appears the second time, the righteous dead will be raised, and
 the living righteous will be changed to immortality. . . ."

"The church will then be no more separated from her adorable Redeemer; but
 with all the endowments of immortality, will 'ever be with the Lord.' "¹¹

The foregoing samples of Seventh-day Adventist belief regarding the second
 advent extend over a period of a century and a quarter. If everything written and
 preached by Seventh-day Adventists regarding the second advent were to be
 analyzed and organized, a central core of doctrinal propositions might be stated
 somewhat as follows:

1. The second advent will be the climax of the plan of redemption.
2. The second advent is a prominent Biblical doctrine.
3. Bible prophecy indicates the "time of the end," but does not reveal the "day
 nor the hour" of the second advent.
4. The Bible foretells a series of signs in the physical, social, industrial, and
 religious worlds that indicate the imminence of the second advent.
5. The second advent will involve the resurrection of the dead who have been
 certified for eternal life in the pre-advent judgment.
6. The second advent will involve the destruction of those who have rejected
 the offer of salvation.
7. The second advent will be literal and visible.
8. The second advent will precede the millennium.
9. Preparation for the second advent involves a full acceptance of Christ as
 Saviour and Lord.
10. The church is directed to proclaim the message of the second advent to the
 world.

This list of propositions may not be complete. The order is not necessarily

it, and the wording is subject to revision. The basic ideas, however, are to Adventist theology.

Variety in Interpretation

existence of a relatively constant theological position in regard to the advent does not mean that the theme has had no variations. These variations have resulted from the basic fact of the passing of time, from changing conditions in the world and the church, and from continued reflection and discussion on the part of the church's preachers, teachers, writers, and laymen. Examples in chronological order from church literature will illustrate the variety and the nature of variety in interpretation.

For example, the *Review and Herald* of December 9, 1852, had the following to say about the beginning date of the "generation" of Matthew 24:34: "'This generation' is clearly defined by our Lord. None other can reasonably apply, but 'this generation' that are *eye-witnesses* to the fulfillment of 'all these things,' that is, the signs of the end of the world, and second coming of Christ, commencing with the darkening of the sun and the moon in 1780."¹²

Years later the same contributor repeated his insistence on this point in another issue of the *Review*. The editor, Uriah Smith, disagreed: "We are . . . inclined to believe that the generation of which the Saviour declares that it shall not pass until the Son of Man comes, embraces all those in a situation to understand the proclamation of the First Advent who were taught to look upon the signs in the sun, moon, and stars as signs of the great and notable day of the Lord."¹³

In 1871 James White, *Review* editor, wrote even more specifically: "It is our conviction that the Lord designed to teach that the people who should live at the time of the fulfillment of the last sign (the falling of the stars in 1833), and should hear the proclamation of the coming of Christ, based partly upon the fulfilled signs, witness the scenes connected with His coming."¹⁴

In 1891 Uriah Smith was again editor of the *Review*, and his comment reflected the passage of time: "The generation living in 1844, when the great Advent message was set before the world in such power, was the first generation that had all the things presented to them in this manner. Many of them are still living, and have not passed off the stage of action, before the angels are sent to gather them into the everlasting kingdom."¹⁵

The continued passing of time caused a contributor to the *Review* to make the following comment in 1905: "It is evident without argument that the end of this generation is now almost reached. 'This generation' to which the words of Christ are now represented only by hoary heads and feeble frames. They have reached the place in life's journey where death gathers his harvest from their hands rapidly. A few more years at most must terminate the natural span of life of those who yet remain. There remains only a brief part of the brief period which substitutes 'this generation.'"¹⁶

It is interesting to note in passing that in 1901 the scriptural statement "There shall be a delay no longer" was adopted as a denominational slogan. The fact that it was taken seriously is attested to by a reference to it made in 1905 in a *Review* editorial.¹⁷

As late as 1925 the phraseology that had become so popular over a period of several years appeared in a *Review* article: "History records in detail the

fulfillment of our Lord's great prophecy regarding these signs and world conditions, and we are now unmistakably standing on the border of the eternal world, in the very closing days of the last generation."¹⁸

More than a half century has passed since the writing of this statement. The present generation has been faced with the absolute necessity of finding a viable explanation for the delay. This could have involved spiritualizing the second advent into some sort of "realized eschatology." It could have involved a complete rejection of the idea of imminence. But the belief in the second advent was too precious to the Adventist heart for these directions to be taken. A moving expression of the Adventist predicament and the Adventist faith is found in a 1968 statement by William A. Fagal, who was director of the Faith for Today telecast. This statement is included in this chapter because it is so representative of the virility of the advent hope, even in today's generation:

"For almost half a century now I have attended the Adventist Church and been exposed to its teachings. But important though this has been, the main religious influence on my life has not been church services but my parents' consistent, dedicated lives. . . .

"One thing they believed with all their hearts: Soon Jesus, keeping a centuries-old divine promise, will return to earth. And they taught me to believe this also. As I grew older and listened to sermons at church, camp meetings, . . . and occasional evangelistic services, I developed for myself the firm conviction that someday soon our Lord will return. I even felt concerned that He might come before I had a chance to complete my education and enter His service as a minister.

"But you see, it was evident back there—40 years ago—that the signs were taking place that Jesus had given in His Word to signal the approach of His advent. He must indeed come *soon*.

"Now I have been in the ministry more than 25 years, and my son looks forward to a place of service in God's cause. How do I feel now? With the passing of time have I concluded that "my Lord delayeth his coming" (Matt. 24:48)? Have I given up my faith and gone out to live a life full of worldly satisfactions but empty of that which really counts? No, I could not do that, because I believe more than ever that He is coming back to earth, and *soon*."¹⁹

Some may ask, How can a faith like that be maintained in view of the passing of the years? What theological rationale can enable the Adventist to continue his belief in the imminence of the Lord's return, despite the delay?

One answer to this question has been a growing emphasis in Seventh-day Adventist ranks on the hermeneutical principle of *conditional prophecy*. Probably the most complete treatment of this concept is found in L. E. Froom's *Movement of Destiny*, published in 1971. Froom phrases the issue thus: "Just what is it that has delayed the promised return of our Lord? Can we know precisely why and wherein? And who and what are responsible? Has this been revealed, so that we are not left to stumbling guesswork? Or—have we been mistaken or misled in our basic expectation of the imminence of the Advent?"²⁰

Froom finds his answers to these questions in the writings of Ellen G. White. He recalls that in 1883 Ellen White was challenged to defend her 1851 statement that "time can last but a very little longer."²¹ Her response, as Froom points out, was as follows: "The angels of God in their messages to men represent time as very short.

It has always been presented to me. It is true that time has continued longer than we expected in the early days of this message. Our Saviour did not appear as we hoped. But has the word of the Lord failed? Never! It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional."²² It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years."²³

The answer to the question of the delayed advent raises other questions: How does the sovereignty of God, whose purposes "know no haste and no delay"?²⁴ Can man's unfaithfulness postpone the advent indefinitely? Froom answers: "There are two sides to this crucial problem—God's side and ours. The times and controls are in His hands. But the retardation or the speed-up largely rests with us—up to a point. They comprise our responsibility. It is chiefly a matter of response and His enabling. God alone can bring the consummation to pass. He is sovereign. It is imperative that we understand these two sides, and rightly ourselves thereto."²⁵

There is in God's purpose and provision a moment, a time, a point, a place—known only to Himself—beyond which our Lord will not tarry. His promises and commitment will definitely and positively be carried out. A requisite condition of His people *will* at last respond."²⁶

Froom quotes another relevant Ellen G. White statement, made in 1868: "Our unwillingness to have His people perish has been the reason for so long a delay."²⁷ He comments: "God is obviously more interested in the saving of souls, and in their being ready to meet the Lord, than in the precipitate fulfillment of His warnings."²⁸

Froom traces the statements of Ellen White in regard to the delayed advent throughout her entire ministry. She always believed the advent to be imminent, but in 1901 she did say, "We may have to remain here in this world because of the condition many more years."²⁹ The delaying factors were pointed out as the sin of the church and the unfinished work of the gospel. But Ellen White declared clearly that "there is a limit beyond which the judgments of Jehovah can no longer be delayed."³⁰

Froom's theology of the delayed advent is summarized in the following paragraphs: "God has made an irrevocable commitment—that sin and defiance will not go beyond the line He has drawn, the point He has fixed, the time He has predetermined *definitive outline* of the *redemptive provisions* will be fulfilled according to His covenanted commitment. There will and can be no failure here. The honor and integrity of God and His government—and of His declared purposes—are at stake. The leeway ended, the extension concluded, then comes the day of finality, the avowed consummation—as surely as God is in His heaven. There is no unfaithfulness, no inconsistency or unawareness, no vacillation or weakness, no weakness or failure, on the part of God. Instead, there is infinite wisdom and understanding, mercy and justice, yearning love and inflexible steadfastness. He has not abdicated His throne, nor relinquished His sovereignty. He is still at the controls of the universe. He is soon to bring His chosen people to the port of eternity. Despite any seeming appearances to the contrary, His timing is finite, indefeasible, all-wise timing—as mankind will find. We would not

have wished this deferment to have been otherwise, in the light of all the circumstances and contingencies—when viewed in the retrospective light of eternity. God knows best, and does what is best. He never errs. We can trust His wisdom and omnipotence."³¹

Herbert E. Douglass is one of the most recent proponents of the "conditional prophecy" theme. In an address given at a series of Bible conferences in 1974, Douglass developed his rationale for the delayed advent. He states his objective as follows: "We should renew our eschatological sense of urgency through the exposition of an adequate theology for the delay in the fulfillment of the Second Advent and thus to motivate to an accelerated completion of the task."³²

The background of Adventist eschatology he summarizes as follows: "For over a century they [Seventh-day Adventists] have preached that Jesus could have returned within the lifetime of any generation living since 1844—long before there was a population explosion, ecological imbalances, nuclear weapons, an energy crisis, Adolf Hitler, World War II, or the modern nation of Israel. Adventist reasons for expecting the return of Jesus anytime within the last century have rested on sound principles of interpreting the Bible and not on sensational headlines in the morning newspapers."³³

The principle of conditional prophecy Douglass introduces in the following statement, which he has underlined in his presentation: "*Only by employing a consistent hermeneutic, . . . that includes the Biblical principle of conditional prophecy, have Adventists been able to interpret Biblical promises and prophecies and yet avoid the mistakes and non sequiturs of other sincere Bible students.*"³⁴

He proceeds to defend the conditional principle and to establish boundaries for its application: "The principle of conditionality is not a hermeneutical gimmick contrived by Seventh-day Adventists to explain the delay in the Advent. Besides being a Biblical concept, this principle beautifully reflects the character of God. It tells us much about His way of dealing with men. He forces no one to do things His way; He waits for His people to 'catch on.' He is very patient and longsuffering; but eventually *what He promises does materialize*. What He says *will* be done *gets* done. However He often must wait until what He has purposed is indeed accomplished by men and women who have freedom of choice—for that is what the cosmic controversy is all about."³⁵

Some would feel that Douglass overemphasizes the behavior of the church as a factor in determining the time of the advent and underemphasizes the ultimate sovereignty of God. It is true that Douglass does not stress the authority of God as much as does Froom; yet the above quotation indicates that he does not ignore it entirely.

Douglass stresses what he terms the "harvest principle"—namely, that "Jesus will return only when the harvest is ripe."³⁶ He argues that "the harvest principle in no way limits God's sovereignty."³⁷ His emphasis is on the development of a church that will be ready to meet its Lord. His position raises questions about the meaning of Christian perfection that are outside the boundaries of this study (Douglass's contribution was published in 1979 under the title *The End* [Pacific Press]).

Jack W. Provonsha, professor of religion and Christian ethics at Loma Linda University, has made a contemporary contribution to the theology of the second advent. Perhaps the keynote statement in his chapter "The God Who Comes to

s: "Until Christians have learned what the second coming of Christ means, not as something that happens may continue to be delayed."³⁸ Provonsha's or "meaning" leads him to declare: "The Second Coming is about the One who comes in history at a point of time as Jesus promised, but also One who ever returns. And make no mistake about it. That event in history is as certain as Jesus is worthy. That great event of the future points to an eternal truth about God's nature. It is God's nature to come to man."³⁹

Further developing further some of the "meanings" he sees in the doctrine of the second advent, Provonsha observes: "Unfortunately, out of concern for the time of the event, Adventists have often largely neglected these and other meanings. We have so little to do with time. What they wanted to know is not What does it mean? but How? and When will it happen? The former of these they probably cannot understand, anyway, and the latter it was not for them to know, except possibly."⁴⁰

Provonsha does not neglect the importance of signs. He says: "Signs of the times, of course, useful as expressions of and reinforcement of this essential doctrine of expectancy. While we are referring to signs, it might be well to observe that the first time in history one of the major preconditions suggested by the doctrine of the Second Coming now exists—the whole world. Never before has it been possible for issues to be really universal in their scope. There are no longer any isolated pockets of humanity. It is now technically possible for virtually every man, woman, and child on earth to experience any event or issue simultaneously. Communication technology has placed every man in everybody else's backyard. No important happens anywhere but what can be known almost instantly everywhere. And this is what is most different about our day."⁴¹

Provonsha makes a unique contribution by discussing two reasons why many men have difficulty in accepting the Biblical teaching of the second advent: (1) the seemingly interminable delay; and (2) the problem of harmonizing the doctrine of the second advent with modern scientific concepts. In answer to the question the author states, "The Scriptures portray Him [God] as being patient and compassionate. . . . He is in no hurry! . . . It is rather we who are impatient."⁴² In answer to the second question, he declares, "The Scriptures speak of realities and qualities that must of necessity transcend the limits of time and space—we know them. . . . A skepticism that derives from human limitations may be the relationship to what is ultimately real."⁴³

There are places in the chapter where the reader has to read carefully to understand what the author means by "symbol," "objective reality," and "meaning." This comes through clearly in his insistence on the reality of the second advent and the necessity of a deeper understanding of its significance.

Meets Man, by Sakae Kubo, was published in 1978. Kubo was formerly a professor of New Testament at Andrews University and subsequently president of the Bible College, England. His book is divided into two sections, "The Meaning of the Sabbath" and "The Meaning of the Second Advent."

The first section on the second advent is also divided into two sections, "The Second Advent and the Present Life" and "The Advent and Future Events." In the latter section under these headings are numerous paragraphs that give insights into the deeper significance of the second advent. The following selected quotations comprise some of the major concerns of the author:

"When we consider that the earth can support only 6 to 8 billion inhabitants, time is short for the human race before great catastrophies overtake us. Because of the population explosion and the insatiable needs of such increasing numbers, an insoluble dilemma presents itself. Men must decide either to choke to death from the pollutants they pour into the atmosphere or curtail their needs, be less comfortable, and eat less. If nuclear war does not wipe us out, we will eliminate ourselves by overpopulation and pollution. Such prospects lead only to despair."⁴⁴

"The doctrine of last things is as important as that of first things. In Christian circles a crucial conflict took place over the understanding of the latter in the nineteenth century in the form of evolution versus Creation. At the same time the battle decided how one would interpret last things. If one considered Creation as unscientific and incongruous with science, it follows naturally that he would regard the return of Christ in the same way. Consequently, not as much open conflict rages over the doctrine of last things.

"Eschatology became a neglected area in Christian theology. For modern man it did not make sense. But with the neglect there arose a sense of futility. With no climax and objective to history, what sense did it make to live, to love others, to do good, to sacrifice, to discipline oneself? It is like sowing while knowing there would be no harvest, or practicing for a game that you know you would never play."⁴⁵

"The resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell constitute eschatology, but the central matter is the parousia, the appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The ideas of the resurrection, judgment, heaven, and hell are not uniquely Christian. Other religions have some type of end-time events that seek to bring justice in an ultimate way. It is the parousia of Jesus Christ which is distinctive, the same Jesus Christ who is our Creator, who was incarnated, who lived among us, who was crucified, who was raised from the dead, and who ascended on high."⁴⁶

"Redemption remains incomplete without the parousia; the righteous dead stay in their graves, and the righteous living stumble about in their sinful bodies in the midst of a sinful world, doomed to death."⁴⁷

"The cross, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus make the coming of Christ an absolute certainty."⁴⁸

"God is sovereign, and when His time comes, so will the day of the Lord. Besides, all that we do God has taken into consideration in His determination of the date, but the final decision is God's, not men's. It is well to keep this in mind so that we do not blasphemously think we can somehow by our own merely human efforts bring Christ down."⁴⁹

"The man with an eschatological vision feels convinced of the validity of love, justice, right, and truth, which compels him to live all the more responsibly."⁵⁰

"Thus God brings to fruition His desire for man. Sin and death have temporarily delayed its fulfillment, but ultimately God will accomplish His plan. The glorious appearing of Christ is a necessity if life is to have any meaning at all. Only with His coming will judgment and reward and final fruition take place. Then will all creatures say, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13, R.S.V.)."⁵¹

The quotations have been recorded without comment. They speak for themselves as examples of mature theological observations on the doctrine of the second advent.

A more recent contribution to the dialogue regarding conditional prophecy is a paper by William G. Johnsson, editor of the *Adventist Review*, entitled "Conditionality in Biblical Prophecy, With Particular Reference to Apocalyptic."

Dr. Johnsson's conclusions are as follows:

"1. Conditionality is a valid principle of Biblical interpretation. It arises from a due regard for the concern with human freedom that undergirds the Biblical accounts of God's dealings with the human race.

"2. Conditionality, however, may not be used indiscriminately in prophetic interpretation. Just as human freedom stands in tension with divine sovereignty in the Scriptures, so conditionality must give way to the fixed predictions of God in many prophetic passages. All Biblical predictions are not conditional.

"3. The prophecies made to Israel in a covenant setting are conditional. They are applications of the law of the covenant rather than predictive prophecies per se. They are the usual occurrence of conditional predictions in the Bible.

"4. Since conditionality is found most frequently in the covenant setting, the term 'conditional prophecy' itself is misleading.

"5. In prophecies of the first and second advents, conditionality is not a major factor. These predictions are predicated on the divine intervention in history as God asserts His sovereignty to effect His will in working out the plan of salvation.

"6. Apocalyptic predictions are usually unconditional. Only where the covenant setting with Israel predominates is conditionality present; and then it indeed is present. Elsewhere the divine sovereignty and foreknowledge portray history on a grand scale.

"7. It is therefore vital that any Biblical prophecy be carefully studied in interpretation. We by no means rule out conditionality; we merely suggest that we may not without due consideration employ conditionality as the key to interpretation. We must first study carefully the original context, noting the type of literature. (Is it general prophecy or apocalyptic? Does it fall within the covenant promises and threatenings?) Finally, we should see what application, if any, another inspired writer makes of the prophecy."⁵²

Dr. Johnsson's insights provide a corrective to the tendency to believe that man can thwart the fulfillment of God's purposes.

The theme of variety in interpretation could be extended ad infinitum. Much could be written on the particular signs of the advent as they have been stressed at different times. In the earliest days much was said about the Dark Day and the falling of the stars, and some mention was even made of the aurora borealis. World conditions have always claimed their share of attention, with each new crisis being singled out as a harbinger of the advent. Every war has been the subject of serious concern. Natural disasters have been catalogued as they occurred. Strife between capital and labor could always be documented by fresh evidence. From the 1850s through the 1920s the "Eastern question" was a source of much speculation. The fate of the Turk was heralded as the trigger for earth's final conflict. "Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (Dan. 12:4) was interpreted as applying to improvements in modes of transportation and new and greater scientific discoveries. Decline in moral standards was not difficult to document. While there was superficial variety in the preaching of the signs, a unified basic theme has remained surprisingly constant.

This unity can be observed by a perusal of the many "message" books and

pamphlets that have been published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as part of its evangelistic thrust. An analysis of these publications is beyond the limits of this chapter. A. O. Tait's *Heralds of the Morning* has been selected as a sample of this type of literature. It was published about "midstream" in Seventh-day Adventist history, appearing in five editions dated 1899, 1905, 1906, 1912, and 1915. An analysis of the 1915 edition reveals twenty-two chapters covering very thoroughly the Seventh-day Adventist teaching on the second advent. Both the prophecies and the signs are developed in detail. Tait, however, places less emphasis than some other authors on the signs in the heavens and the Eastern question.

Toward the close of his book Tait reveals his theological stance in regard to the second advent in the following statement: "The One who has inspired all the foregoing promises is no less a personage than He who created the universe. He possesses in Himself all the power that holds in place the vast world on which we live, guiding it in harmony with the countless number of vaster worlds which He is also sustaining and directing in space. In considering a statement or a promise, it is also proper to consider the power and ability of the one who makes it. Surely the One who has made this wealth of promises that Jesus the Lord will come again has ample power to sustain Him in making good His word. We may be sure that very part of it will be definitely and accurately fulfilled."⁵³

Some arguments for the imminence of the second advent become less convincing with the passing time—for example, the Lisbon earthquake, the Dark Day, and the falling of the stars. These signs may be characterized as indications of the beginning of "the time of the end."

Other arguments become more compelling with the passing of time. One of these is the concept that the only alternative to the second advent is the self-destruction of the human race, as stressed by Kubo. This idea was proposed more than fifty years ago by Alonzo L. Baker, then an editor of *The Signs of the Times*. Baker wrote: "If the world should continue for long without some superhuman intervention, it would become one vast hospital, one great insane asylum, a charnel house whose walls are the four corners of the earth."⁵⁴

Many frightening developments have taken place since Baker's book was written. The harnessing of nuclear energy has resulted in destructive weapons that threaten the survival of civilization on this planet. Pollution endangers human life by poisoning water and air, without which man cannot live. The population of the world threatens to grow larger than the world's known resources can support.

Modern believers in the second advent see in the declining quality of life on this planet a convincing sign that this is the end time described in the Bible. The rationale of their argument is that God will not permit the human race to self-destruct. The promised consummation of the plan of redemption must be sufficiently imminent to win the race with impending global disaster.

Theodore Carcich, formerly vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, declares: "For the first time in modern history men, religious or not, are envisaging the actual ending of man's adventure on earth." He quotes Toynbee's well-known statement: "If we have a nuclear war, too few people will be left alive to maintain civilization. If we do not, too many people will make life on this planet intolerable."⁵⁵ In a later article in the same series Carcich concludes: "The goal of history is the second coming of Christ and that the age-old

warfare between good and evil will not drag on indefinitely and inconclusively."⁵⁶

Robert H. Parr, then editor of the Australian *Signs of the Times* called attention to the problems of pollution and overpopulation, and reached the following conclusion: "These reasons are sufficient for me to believe that unless there is divine intervention man will either destroy the earth with his weapons of warfare or his pollutants, or he will starve himself because he cannot produce sufficient to feed the human family. Whether one of these horrors erupts first, or whether they all arrive together, this earth faces an insoluble crisis.

"I believe in the imminence of divine intervention. God has intervened in human affairs before—in Noah's day, for example. And such an intervention is the only thing that enables me to contemplate the future with equanimity. That, too, puts fervor into my prayer, 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.'"⁵⁷

Among other Seventh-day Adventist writers who have echoed these sentiments are H.M.S. Richards,⁵⁸ Earl E. Cleveland,⁵⁹ Horace E. Walsh,⁶⁰ and, more recently, Roy Allan Anderson.⁶¹

Current pessimism regarding the future of the world gives this argument an unprecedented cogency.

To the Adventist, whether in 1850 or later, "the doctrine of the second advent is the very keynote of the Sacred Scriptures."⁶² Emphases might differ, vocabularies might change, but the basic theological principle remains constant. The long delay has necessitated some reflection on the Seventh-day Adventist position, but this reflection has resulted in clarification, not retrenchment.

The durability of this Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is attested to by a survey done in 1967 by C. Mervyn Maxwell, professor of church history at Andrews University, entitled "Trends in Second Coming Emphases and Interpretation Among Seventh-day Adventists." This research was reported to the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. In his conclusions Maxwell stated: "This study has also attested a strong basic homogeneity among the kinds of people who responded. When the 1052 respondees were separated into 28 separate occupational, educational, and age groups, their responses on most issues were found to be remarkably similar. This observation, it may be stated, lends credence to the study as a valid sample of the type of people surveyed. All groups overwhelmingly acknowledged the second coming as a literal, personal, glorious appearance of Christ in the clouds. All groups overwhelmingly professed use of the phrase 'if time lasts' when announcing at least some of their plans. All groups accepted many if not all the same signs—and all agreed that 'mortal degradation' is the most impressive sign of all."⁶³

Ellen G. White and the Second Advent

The second advent was one of Ellen White's most prominent themes. In her first vision she saw Jesus come, she saw the resurrection, and she was part of the group that was caught up to meet the Lord in the air.⁶⁴ According to her son, W. C. White, during her final illness she said, "Do not worry. I go only a little before the others."⁶⁵

But to Ellen White, the second advent was more than a sentimental dream. She saw it as an integral part of the gospel: "The gospel message proclaimed by Christ's disciples was the announcement of His first advent to the world. It bore to men the

good tidings of salvation through faith in Him. It pointed forward to His second coming in glory to redeem His people, and it set before men the hope, through faith and obedience, of sharing the inheritance of the saints in light. This message is given to men today, and at this time there is coupled with it the announcement of Christ's second coming as at hand. The signs which He Himself gave of His coming have been fulfilled, and by the teaching of God's Word we may know that the Lord is at the door.

"John in the Revelation foretells the proclamation of the gospel message just before Christ's second coming. He beholds an angel flying 'in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come' (Rev. 14:6, 7).

"In the prophecy this warning of the judgment, with its connected messages, is followed by the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven. The proclamation of the judgment is an announcement of Christ's second coming as at hand. And this proclamation is called the everlasting gospel. Thus the preaching of Christ's second coming, the announcement of its nearness, is shown to be an essential part of the gospel message."⁶⁶

Ellen White's doctrine of the second advent is well summarized in chapter 17 of *The Great Controversy*, entitled "Heralds of the Morning." The author reviews the Biblical evidence of the second advent. Her list follows the classical Seventh-day Adventist pattern, except for the absence of any mention of the "Eastern question." She quotes from the Protestant Reformers to support her statement that "the coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers."⁶⁷ She reviews the well-known signs of the advent, beginning with the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. She explains the prophetic messages of Revelation 14, applying these messages to the nineteenth-century advent movement. She compares the failure of mankind to be ready for the first advent with the indifference of the world toward the second advent. This chapter is, in a sense, an introduction to the chapters that follow, tracing the advent movement from William Miller to the final events.

At this point Ellen White reveals the uniqueness of her testimony concerning the second advent. She alone could have written the chapter in *The Great Controversy* entitled "God's People Delivered," because she writes not only as an interpreter of Scripture, not only as a theologian, but as one who had witnessed a preview of the events. This chapter is a prime example of her claim, "Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages."⁶⁸

The eyewitness nature of the material is illustrated in the following quotations: "The firmament appears to open and shut. The glory from the throne of God seems flashing through. The mountains shake like a reed in the wind, and ragged rocks are scattered on every side. There is a roar as of a coming tempest. The sea is lashed into fury. There is heard the shriek of the hurricane, like the voice of demons upon a mission of destruction. The whole earth heaves and swells like the waves of the sea. Its surface is breaking up. Its very foundations seem to be giving way. Mountain chains are sinking. Inhabited islands disappear. The seaports that have become like Sodom for wickedness, are swallowed up by the angry waters."⁶⁹

"Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a

man's hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour, and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. . . . The firmament seems filled with radiant forms—'ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.' No human pen can portray the scene; no mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor."⁷⁰

How the Holy Spirit revealed to the author the scenes of the second advent, we cannot and need not know. Also we need not assume that the picture she paints is complete in every detail. As a television serial gives a few glimpses of the next installment, so believers in the second advent are given a glimpse of that which is to come.

Previously in this chapter, the theme of conditional prophecy has been discussed. A summary of the teaching of Ellen White regarding the second advent would not be complete without reference to a doctoral dissertation by Ralph E. Neall, professor of religion at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska. This dissertation, completed in 1982, is entitled, *The Nearness and the Delay of the Parousia in the Writings of Ellen G. White*.⁷¹ In the abstract of his research, Neall states:

"While White consistently wrote of the nearness of the end throughout her ministry, she added the concept of contingency and delay in 1883, in reply to a critic's charge that she was a false prophet because Christ had not come. She said He had been delayed by the past and present sins of His people. Delay then became a new motive behind the same exhortations seen in the nearness stream of her thought.

"The tension between nearness and delay cannot be completely harmonized in Ellen White's writings, except perhaps by suggesting that the time of the end is fixed from God's viewpoint but delayed from man's."⁷²

Neall summarizes the tension between "nearness" and "delay" in Seventh-day Adventist concepts of the second advent as follows:

"Alongside the belief that Christ is coming soon, there has developed in the church a belief that His coming has been delayed by the failure of church members to live holy lives and preach the message to the world. Taylor Grant Bunch, administrator and college Bible teacher, preached a widely distributed series of vesper sermons in 1937 which suggested that modern Seventh-day Adventists were repeating the experiences of the ancient Israelites who wandered in the wilderness for forty years because of their unbelief and disobedience. In the 1930s this interest was renewed by a spate of articles in popular Adventist magazines. In 1974 C. Mervyn Maxwell, chairman of the Department of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, and Herbert E. Douglass, book editor for Pacific Press, wrote that Christ will come when the image of Christ is perfectly reflected in His children or, as Douglass put it, when the harvest is ripe. In this they were following the lead of M. L. Andreasen, administrator, teacher, and college president, who maintained that before He can come, the Lord needs a generation of holy people to demonstrate that the plan of salvation has been effective. . . . In other words, Christ's coming was seen as contingent on the state of the church and would materialize just as soon as the church 'swings into line' in cooperation with Christ, to use the words of Leroy Edwin Froom, seminary professor and for many years head of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference.

"On the other hand, works by Adventist scholars have appeared which

deemphasize or ignore the element of contingency and delay in the coming of Christ. They say that the important thing is not the time when Christ will come, but the obligation to live in a constant state of readiness."⁷³

The theme of readiness for the second advent raises the question of perfectionism. Neall quotes Ellen White as follows:

"No one is perfect. If one were perfect, he would be prepared for heaven. As long as we are not perfect, we have a work to do to get ready to be perfect. We have a mighty Saviour."⁷⁴

Commenting on this quotation, Neall says:

"Ellen White consistently held up spotlessness as the goal for last-day saints and insisted that it could be reached but never claimed to have reached it herself. In this she was like Wesley, who preached the possibility of complete sanctification, but never claimed to have reached it himself. It is significant that in the statement above, after admitting that she was not perfect, White said, 'We have a mighty Saviour,' and 'I have that faith that takes hold of the promises of God.' It appears, therefore, that White's view of being ready to meet Christ at the parousia was to hold up perfection as the goal and justification as the assurance. The church ought to be and is called to be perfect yet it cannot claim it. Perfection is found only in Christ."⁷⁵

Neall points out that Ellen White challenges the church not only to be *prepared* for the second advent, but also to *proclaim* the eschaton:

"White's thought that the Lord is *waiting* for the church to finish proclaiming three angels' messages must be seen in union with her parallel thought that the church must proclaim the message *because* the Lord is coming soon."⁷⁶

Neall summarizes his concerns as follows:

"We see a profound paradox in White's eschatology. Nearness and delay stand in tension with each other. How can White speak of an appointed time for the return of Christ and yet say it is delayed by the failures of the church? How can she write of the first advent that 'God's purposes know no haste nor delay,' but of the second that 'the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional'?

"The poles of the paradox can have wide-ranging effects in Christian faith and life. If the time of Christ's coming is in God's hand, the activities of man have no effect on it; if it depends on the deeds of men, it is not in God's hand. The first alternative can lead to passivity. Why should men be concerned if their activities have no effect on God's plans? But the second can lead to despair. If the generation of the apostles were not holy enough to meet the standard (for Christ did not come in their time), then what hope is there that any later generation will meet it?

"White's thought retains both poles. Is there any way of reconciling them? White suggested that the time of the end is certain from God's viewpoint but delayed from men's. While man has delayed the time, God still knows when the final date will be, just as He must have known the time when Israel would cross the Jordan and begin their conquest of Canaan. In 1883 White spoke of delay, but in 1888 she wrote that the seeming tarrying time was not in reality. Under this construction God retains His sovereignty in foreknowledge, but it is not completely satisfactory because the biblical view of God's sovereignty extends beyond mere foreknowledge. It does not really reconcile these two poles of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

"In this final synthesis, we confess that we feel uncomfortable with the whole enterprise of harmonizing. If White herself did not really reconcile the two, why should we? Her writings were based on biblical, that is, Hebrew, modes of thought. It may be that our desire for logical harmony is more akin to Athens than to Jerusalem. In asking for logical harmony from White, we may be asking an illegitimate question. Like the Hebrew prophets, she was an evangelist, not a theologian."⁷⁷

Synthesis

While this chapter is not intended to be apologetic, the author is taking the liberty of presenting a synthesis of the historic Seventh-day Adventist teachings regarding the second advent. It is hoped that this summary will stimulate further investigation and reflection.

1. The second advent is an act of God, a vital part of God's plan of salvation, and an important step in His solution of the sin problem.

2. The second advent is related to conditions in this world. Just as Christ came the first time when "the deception of sin had reached its height,"⁷⁸ so He will come the second time before man succeeds in destroying himself by his pollution, his overpopulation, his bombs, or his sin. Through prophecy God revealed the "time of the end" in relative terms, with world conditions as one means of identifying the end-time.

3. The second advent is related to conditions in the church. God is holding the door of mercy open as long as His divine providence sees best. He is using every available means to persuade His church to be what He wants it to be and to do what He wants it to do.

4. There will come a time when God will decide that His plan for salvation demands that the world of wickedness be terminated and the door of mercy closed. *When nothing good can result from further delay, Jesus will come.* But the final issues are in the hands of God. It is true that prophecy is conditional. Man may *delay* the outworking of God's plans, but he cannot cancel it. The timing of His decision will reflect His love and His justice.

5. The second advent is more than a doctrine; it is the basis of a message. "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). This is what Seventh-day Adventism is all about. The "gospel of the kingdom," "the everlasting gospel" (Rev. 14:6) is incomplete without the second advent. The message of the second advent is a part of the gospel, but it is not the whole gospel. The doctrine of the second advent would be meaningless apart from the incarnation, the life, the death, the resurrection, and the present ministry of our Lord. But the second advent is especially relevant now because it is the next major item on God's agenda, so far as this world is concerned.

The affirmation of a contemporary Seventh-day Adventist theologian aptly summarizes the doctrine of the second advent as currently understood by the Adventist Church:

"Salvation covers more than forgiveness, justification, and sanctification in this life. Salvation is more than the acceptance of those who believe in Him here. Complete salvation includes Christ's second advent. The plan of redemption

cannot be finished without this. Complete redemption comes only by a new order from above."⁷⁹

NOTES

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- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- ⁵ F. M. Wilcox, "Be Strong and of Good Courage," *Review and Herald*, Dec. 17, 1925.
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- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.
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- ²¹ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Battle Creek, Mich., 1900), p. 58.
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- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- ²⁴ *Idem*, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif., 1898), p. 32.
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- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 568.
- ²⁷ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to the Church* (Mountain View, Calif., 1928), vol. 2, p. 194.
- ²⁸ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 578.
- ²⁹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, (Washington, D.C., 1946), p. 696.
- ³⁰ *Idem*, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif., 1917), p. 417.
- ³¹ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 602.
- ³² Herbert E. Douglass, "The Unique Contribution of Adventist Eschatology," *North American Bible Conference—1974*, p. 1.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Jack W. Provonsa, *God Is With Us* (Washington, D.C., 1968), pp. 146, 147.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 140, 141.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 141, 142.
- ⁴⁴ Sakae Kubo, *God Meets Man* (Nashville, Tenn., 1978), p. 76.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.
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- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 156.
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