

## Objection 56

The Seventh day Adventist Church sprang from the religious movement of the 1840's, known as Millerism, which set a time for the coming of Christ. Such a historical background reveals how irrational and unworthy of serious consideration that church is.

The charge is not that we set a time but that our spiritual ancestors did. Let that fact be clear in introduction. Seventh day Adventists throughout the entire history of this body have not only not set a time for the Advent, but have emphatically declared, in the words of Christ: "Of that day and hour knows no man." Any critic who has read our literature knows this fact. Hence the charge against us is framed in terms of our predecessors, our spiritual background. This is said, not in any attempt to avoid the fact that the Millerites set time in 1844, but simply to place the whole matter in proper historical perspective.

Note these facts: The Millerite movement of the early 1840's was essentially an interchurch movement; ministers and members of various churches were known as Millerites. Further, the movement was the expression of a quickened interest in those various portions of Scripture, especially the prophecies, which present the subject of the Second Advent. Finally, any religious body that might have arisen as a result of that quickening of Scripture study on the Advent should rightly be judged by the creed that govern that body rather than by the views of the loosely knit Millerite movement, which focused on one great doctrine.

However, this does not mean that we prefer to forget about the events of the 1840's. Far from it. Because we here emphasize the fact that Seventh day Adventist doctrines should not be confused with the views of Millerism, we do not mean that there was something so sadly embarrassing, even fanatical, about the Millerite time-setting incident in 1844 that we wish to stand completely apart from all who joined in that movement. Not at all. The following six facts will put Millerite time setting in a wholly different light from that long thrown upon it by those who have framed the objection before us:

### Fact Number 1

Though time setting is a theological mistake, it is a mistake no more grave than that committed by eminent theologians on other questions of Christian doctrine or practice. For example, the Scriptures declare that God is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Yet Calvin, and all who have followed him, have shut their eyes to this most explicit statement, and declared that some are predestined to salvation and some to reprobation. After attending the Synod of Dort, which dogmatized on predestination and its evil corollary, reprobation, the Anglican bishops declared that it was unwise to discuss reprobation, because it tended to desperation rather than edification!

No worse indictment could ever have been made against time setting. But here is the difference, Theologians have lost their tempers discussing predestination, but they have not lost their reputations. Their mistaken conclusions have been too mysterious, dealing, as they have, with the divine decrees concerning the end of man. But those who mistakenly concluded they had solved the mystery of the divine time decree concerning the end of the world have been held up to ridicule. And this despite the fact that they may have discussed their subject with sweet harmony and brought edification rather than desperation to those who accepted their theology. Strange, indeed.

### Fact Number 2

It is far better for a follower of Christ to seek to learn as much as he can regarding the coming of his Lord than to be found with that company whom Christ rebukes for saying, "My Lord delays his coming." Of all the mistakes that a Christ-loving student of the Scriptures could make, time setting might reasonably be described as the most pardonable.

### Fact Number 3

But much more weighty than the question of the relative gravity of the mistake of time setting is the fact that time setting was not of the essence of the Advent message preached by Miller and his associates. The proof of this statement is unequivocal. When the first advent conference was held (Boston, October 13, 14, 1840) there was published a statement addressed "to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." This statement declared that the purpose of the meeting was to "revive and restore" the "ancient faith" held by the "first Christians, the primitive ages of the church, and the profoundly learned and intelligent Reformers," regarding the personal coming of Christ. Then follows this paragraph:

"Though in some of the less important views of this momentous subject we are not ourselves agreed, particularly in regard to fixing the year of Christ's second advent, yet we are unanimously agreed and established in this all-absorbing point, that the coming of the Lord to judge the world is now specially 'nigh at hand.' "-The First Report of the General Conference of Christians Expecting the Advent of Our Lord Jesus Christ, sec. "Proceedings of the Conference," p. 12.

The chairman of that first conference, Henry Dana Ward, and the secretary, Henry Jones, both went on record as opposed to setting a time.

At a conference that opened on May 24, 1842, in Boston, a resolution was passed to the effect that there were weighty reasons for expecting the end in 1843. But the proceedings go on to declare that a person need not subscribe to this time element, he need only subscribe to the belief that the personal Advent of Christ is the next great event of prophetic history in order to be a member of the conference and in good standing. (See Signs of the Times, June 1, 1842, p. 69)

In the spring of 1844 the editor of The Advent Herald, leading Millerite weekly, argued for the adoption of the name Adventist as a title for the movement because "it marks the real ground of difference between us and the great body of our opponents." He clarifies his statement thus:

"We are fully aware that they [the opponents] have endeavored to keep the question of time before the public as the obnoxious and heretical point, (and we fully believe the time to be as distinctly revealed as any other part of the subject. On that account we have defended it, and thus it has become so prominent,) still that is not, nor has it ever been, the only, or the main question in dispute. In fact, there is a greater difference between us and our opposers on the nature of the events predicted, than upon the interpretation of the prophetic periods [of time], or their termination." - The Advent Herald, March 20, 1844, p. 53.

So far as the setting of a definite day for the Advent is concerned, namely, October 22, 1844, the record is clear that Miller, Himes, and other principal leaders did not accept this definite date until in October. This did not make them any the less parties to the time-setting error, but it provides clear proof in support of the proposition that a definite date for the Advent was not of the essence of the Millerite movement. Even to the last some prominent Millerite preachers held to the Scripture that the day and hour could not be known. Miller himself, who on October 6 finally accepted the definite date, veered from it on October 21, as his letter to Dr. I. O. Orr, shortly afterward, reveals. This letter, in Miller's handwriting, gives, among other things, details of the days just preceding the expected Advent on the tenth day of the seventh Jewish month, that is, October 22. We quote:

"The ninth day [of the seventh month, that is October 21] was very remarkable. We held a meeting all day, and our place of worship was crowded to overflowing with anxious souls apparently. In the evening I told some of my brethren Christ would not come on the morrow. Why not? Said they. Because He can not come in an hour they think not, nor as a snare. " - Manuscript Letter, Dec. 13, 1844.

In other words, Miller evidently wished to say that if Christ came on a day known in advance, He would not truly be coming, as the Scriptures declare He will, in an hour when men think not, and as a snare. This revelation of Miller's thinking on the eve of the expected Advent may be viewed by cynical critics merely as proof that he did not know what he thought on the matter. To all others, we believe, this letter to Dr. Orr shows that Miller, the leader of the Advent movement in 1844, could calmly doubt the possibility of knowing the day of Christ's coming without in any way questioning the spiritual, prophetic significance of the movement of which he was the leader.

#### **Fact Number 4**

Time setting did not vitiate the basic principles of prophetic interpretation on which Millerism rested, and on which interpretation they built their message. This conclusion follows almost certainly from the fact that time setting was not of the essence of Millerism and that some prominent leaders were not believers in a definite date for the Advent. The Millerites based all their interpretation of the great time prophecies on the principle that a day stands for a year. They therefore saw in those prophecies great measuring rods to span the centuries and to give a clue to God's final plans for this earth. They saw in certain great prophecies the work of the Papacy described. In all this the Millerites were but following in the steps of most eminent theologians of former centuries. It was on the strength of these views of prophecy and related Bible statements regarding the Second Advent that the Millerites based their belief that the Advent of Christ might soon be expected, and that His coming was to be literal and personal. The time-setting feature simply brought into sharper focus the "when" of the

Advent, but did not invalidate the basic Millerite preaching concerning this climactic event.

### **Fact Number 5**

Some of the very theologians who joined in the ridicule of Millerism in the early 1840's were themselves time setters. The proof of this is undebatable. One minister, in the closing chapter of his book which sought to expose Miller's views, declared:

"If any reliance can be placed on the inference, that the historical events to which we have adverted, are subjects of prophecy, then the Millennium will commence at the close of the nineteenth or the early part of the twentieth century."-W. H. COFFIN, *The Millennium of the Church*, pp. 81, 82.

Wrote another widely quoted theological opponent in the closing chapter of his work on Millerism:

"If therefore, we could ascertain the precise date of the commencement of the 1260 years, during which the Papal Antichrist is to continue, there would be no difficulty in fixing the year of his downfall. Which is either to be contemporaneous with the commencement of the Millennium, or else to precede this glorious era by a very few years. [Then follows a discussion of possible dates.] . . . My own opinion is in favor of the last, VIZ.: AD. 2015." - JOHN DOWLING, *An Exposition of the Prophecies*, pp. 190, 191.

These opponents drew from Bible prophecies their conclusions as to time. If they were less certain as to the date of the grand climax, it was due, not to any hesitancy to believe that such a date might be discovered, but simply that they had not been able to fix upon it with finality. Yet these men were nowhere the objects of derision. No one accused them of fanaticism. Why? We think there is but one answer to this question: They did not predict that on a certain date the world would come to a fiery end by the supernatural appearing of Christ in judgment, but that the world would enter a millennial era in which all would know the Lord from the least to the greatest. It was not the time but the event that was really at issue. We do not truly understand the real issue between the 1844 Adventists and their opponents until we understand that the controversy centered on the event to take place. Not time setting but the event predicted by the Millerites seemed ridiculous to the world.

### **Fact Number 6**

We can truthfully declare that Seventh day Adventists have never set a time for the Lord to come, although we admit freely, and without the slightest embarrassment, that we grew out of the soil of Millerism. This is the natural conclusion from the evidence here presented. All Protestants boast that they are spiritual descendants of the sixteenth-century Reformers without thereby meaning that they are to be held accountable for every view or teaching that may have been promulgated by the Reformers, particularly if such a teaching is clearly not of the essence of the Reformation message. Furthermore, the Reformation, at the outset, was a loose knit movement. Afterward came the clearly defined Lutheran and Calvinistic bodies. Each grew directly out of the soil of the Reformation, but each may rightly contend that it is to be held strictly accountable only for those doctrines and practices that have been believed and practiced since its church organization and authority was established. Even so with Seventh day Adventists in relation to Millerism and time setting.

## Objection 57

The Millerite, or Second Advent movement, out of which Seventh day Adventists sprang, was tainted with weird fanatical actions such as the wearing of ascension robes by the deluded followers of Miller who sat on housetops and haystacks to await the coming of Christ. Multitudes were made insane by the fanatical preaching. The fanaticism was rampant both before and after 1844. This proves that God was not in the movement that brought forth Seventh day Adventism.

For practical purposes let us divide the answer into two parts.

1. What are the facts regarding the Millerite movement up to the date when the second coming of Christ was expected on October 22, 1844?

We deny, in whole, the two most commonly framed charges, that ascension robes were worn and that multitudes were made insane by the Millerite preaching. Further, we deny virtually in whole a wide array of other charges of fanaticism. It has never been possible for any religious movement to escape wholly from the charge of fanatical acts, for no movement can prevent at least a few unstable persons from entering its ranks and taking its name.

The proof in support of this sweeping denial is found in the book *The Midnight Cry*.<sup>\*</sup> There the original sources are quoted on every important point of Millerite history, including the question of fanaticism, up to the end of the Millerite movement proper.

2. What are the facts regarding the Millerite movement after 1844?

So long as the movement had united leadership, more or less official publications, and frequent general conferences, the spirit and temper of the movement could be quite accurately determined. An erratic or fanatical individual or group stood out in sharp contrast to the main body, and the spokesmen for the movement

***\* Published in 1944 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Washington D.C. For book reviews which contain the admission of scholarly reviewers that the charges against the Millerites have been clearly refuted, see Appendix F, page 36.***

could record their disapproval of anything irrational in conduct. Such declarations of disapproval were sometimes necessary, for there are always unstable and fanatical spirits that seek to attach themselves to any new religious movement.

After 1844, when the movement broke up, there was no longer a well-defined and unified company called Millerites, who could unitedly denounce and expel any fanatical spirits who might seek to parade under the name of Millerite or Adventist.

All the while a hostile world was ready to accept and broadcast any story, no matter how fanciful, regarding anyone who had espoused the Advent teachings. The marvel is, not that charges of fanaticism have come down to us regarding the Millerites in the period immediately following 1844, but that there are not more such stories.

However, if the following six facts are kept in mind, an unprejudiced person will have no difficulty in deciding that Seventh day Adventists, and for that matter, Adventists in general -should not be blackened by such stories.

1. The most plausible stories so widely circulated about the Millerites up to October 22, 1844, have been proved wholly groundless in most instances and grossly exaggerated in the few remaining instances. Why give any more weight to stories told about these people after 1844? Did the storytellers suddenly become more veracious in 1845 and in the years following?

2. The great body of Millerites stand revealed, from a scrutiny of their writings and their conduct up to the end of 1844, as quiet, circumspect people, earnest Christians drawn from many churches. Is it reasonable to believe that they suddenly changed their essential nature and broke forth on every side in fanatical excesses?

3. Such isolated instances of fanaticism as actually occurred after 1844 received only vigorous condemnation from such leadership as did exist, whether among the first-day Adventists or among those who later took the name Seventh day Adventists.

4. In this twilight period from 1845 to the early 1850's there was no real organization known as Seventh day Adventists. There was literally only a handful of the former Millerite thousands who added to their doctrine of the imminence of the Advent, the doctrine of the Sabbath and the sanctuary. Sometimes a small church group of Adventists would consist only in part of those who had added these two doctrines to their beliefs. Among the troubled and bewildered Millerites traveled prominently three persons who were the pioneers of the Seventh day Adventist Church: Joseph Bates, James White, and Ellen G. White. They encouraged steadfastness in the faith of the Advent and presented the further

truths of the Sabbath and the sanctuary. Slowly there began to emerge the form of what is now known as the Seventh day Adventist Church.

That these three pioneers met fanaticism at times is clearly recorded in their writings. That they denounced it unsparingly is also recorded. Undoubtedly some who were fanatically inclined were turned from their folly and became stable members of the then-developing Sabbath keeping Advent movement. But that proves only the power of the movement to subdue turbulent spirits. In other words, it proves that Seventh day Adventism is an antidote for fanaticism.

5. The three who pioneered in the Seventh day Adventist movement were with it for many years. They continued to preach the same basic views on religious living throughout all their public life. Hence it is proper to conclude that the more or less well-defined Seventh day Adventist Church in the 1860's and 1870's, when these three pioneers were still the dominant figures, was constituted of people with essentially the same beliefs and the same ideas of propriety in religious life as were held by those who accepted and followed the teachings and counsel of these pioneers in earlier days. And when we examine the bona fide church records of the 1860's and 1870's what do we find? Anything that warrants the conclusion that Seventh day Adventists were given to fanatical religious excesses at that time? The answer is emphatically, No! Indeed, the Seventh day Adventist Church through the hundred years of its history has been singularly free of fanaticism and has ever denounced any variety of it that might rear its head. That is a simple, undebatable fact. It would be strange, indeed, if a movement that has had such a record consistently throughout all its history should have flowed forth from the springs of fanatical excess! Is it possible that we have here the reversal of a hitherto unchallenged dictum that a river cannot rise higher than its source?

6. Quite uniformly the charges of fanaticism on the part of Seventh day Adventists in the years immediately following 1844 have been both vague and general. Obviously it is impossible to answer conclusively an indictment that fails to state names, places, and dates.

However, in 1944, a full century after the alleged fanaticism, an avowed critic published a specific charge of rank fanaticism on the part of "the S.D.A." pioneers in the post-1844 days. In *The Gathering Call*, edited and published by E. S. Ballenger, appeared this charge:

"We affirm without fear of successful contradiction that the S.D.A. pioneers crossed bridges on their hands and knees, to show their humility, and that they also crawled under tables, and under old fashioned stoves to exhibit their humility. It is also a fact that the pioneers used to kiss each other's feet. In their general gatherings, they used to crowd all the men into one room, and each man would put his foot out from under his covers while the man at the head of the line would go down the line and kiss the foot of each one of his brethren. Then the next one would follow until everybody had kissed all the others' feet. These things were practiced, not by ignorant laymen but by such men as J. N. Andrews." (Emphasis his.)

Here was an opportunity finally to run to earth the vague stories about fanaticism among "S.D.A. pioneers," for here specific instances of fanaticism were mentioned. The charges were unequivocally presented as "a fact" and prefaced with the impressive declaration: "We affirm without fear of successful contradiction." Here, indeed, was a chance to make a test case of stories of fanaticism on the part of Seventh day Adventists.

Dr. J. N. Andrews, the grandson of J. N. Andrews, engaged in correspondence with Ballenger regarding these charges. The correspondence was placed in my hands. In that correspondence Ballenger admitted that he based his charge wholly on a statement allegedly made to him by Oswald Stowell somewhere between the years 1905 and 1912, when Stowell was "not far from 80 years of age." In this correspondence Ballenger admitted that Stowell did not say that Andrews kissed the feet of the brethren, but that others, whom Ballenger was unable to name, did so. Ballenger stated that there was no one else living who heard Stowell tell this story!

This correspondence was published in an article entitled "Dead Men Tell No Tales," in *The Ministry*, May, 1944. This article noted that Oswald Stowell, the alleged source of the story, was a very old man at the time he was said to have told this story, and that the one now retelling it was also very old. Further, that the story had to do with something supposed to have happened a hundred years ago. A story so good as this surely would not have been kept quiet by Stowell—a long-time Seventh day Adventist who had lived in Adventist communities all his life—until his last days. Yet no one had heard this story before, not even the grandson of J. N. Andrews. A daughter of Stowell's, Mrs. Parker Smith, who had heard from her father's lips many times the narrative of the early days, had never heard it! Her letter, so stating, was also published.

In his reply in *The Gathering Call*, July-August, 1944, Ballenger discussed for eight vehement, adjective-packed pages everything from Adventist preachers' morals to their theology. All

this filled space, but was transparently irrelevant in answer to the demand for better evidence for his charge of fanaticism. In fact, Ballenger affected surprise that anyone should take seriously one of the "trivial things" he had brought against Adventists.

Now, men who wish to be taken seriously are not in the habit of prefacing "trivial" charges with the impressive words, "We affirm without fear of successful contradiction." Perhaps he, in common with other critics who hurl the charge of fanaticism, considers it a "trivial" thing to make long dead good men look ridiculous. It appears now that the only thing "trivial" about his charge was the evidence he submitted in support of it.

Thus ended the attempt to pin down what is probably the most specific story ever set forth by an Adventist critic regarding alleged fanatical excesses on the part of "S.D.A. leaders" in that twilight period immediately following 1844.

In view of the facts here presented, honest objectors who have voiced this charge of fanaticism, thinking it could be historically proved, will, of course, no longer do so!

## Objection 58

Seventh day Adventists say that they constitute a prophetic movement raised up by God to preach His last message to the world. At the same time they admit that their movement sprang from the soil of Millerism, whose leaders taught that Christ would come in 1844. Is God the leader of a movement that preached error at the outset and suffered great disappointment and confusion as a result of that error?

If we had no record of God's dealings with man other than in 1844 we might be embarrassed by this question. But we have the Scriptural record, which was written aforetime for our learning. When the disciples went over Palestine to announce that the kingdom of God was at hand, both they and their hearers understood that Christ was about to set up His kingdom. How fervently the multitudes believed this is revealed by their exultant shouts as He rode into Jerusalem: "Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord." Matt. 21:9.

What is more significant in the present connection is that the Bible records no rebuke from our Lord, no word to correct their mistaken ideas. The only comment is that of the apostle who chronicled the story. He declared that this triumphal march fulfilled the prophecy: "Tell you the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King comes unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." Matt. 21:5. But neither the multitude, who doubtless had this prophecy in mind, nor the apostles, who were debating as to who should have the highest place in the kingdom, realized that the King riding in apparent triumph was soon to suffer the ignominy of the cross.

It is true that Christ spoke to His disciples of His coming death, but it is equally true that the disciples did not really grasp what He meant. There can be no possible doubt of this. The two disciples on the way to Emmaus confided to their incognito Lord:

"We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Luke 24:21. And Christ responded: "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke 24:25-27.

How completely those disciples were disappointed! How completely disillusioned! Their distress was heightened by the fact that they would stand exposed before the world as the disciples and promoters of a deceiver. Those were their feelings when He was lifted up on a cross instead of a throne. The Adventists who in October 22, 1844, had expected Christ to come to rule the world could not possibly have suffered greater disappointment.

If the reasoning of Seventh day Adventist critics is correct, God was not in the movement represented by the apostles, the seventy, and all who claimed, The kingdom of God is at hand. But it would be sacrilege to say that God was not with the apostles and all who proclaimed the glad news of the kingdom. We are amazed at their spiritual dullness, their failure to see the approaching cross, their inability to understand "all that the prophets" had written. But we do not doubt for a moment the divine call of the apostles, nor the divine character of the message they preached. When they preached that the kingdom of God was at hand, they preached the Word of God, but they did not properly understand what they preached. Religious history presents no more striking case of misunderstanding of the message on the part of the messengers, and no more appalling disappointment as a climax, than that of the apostles and all who joined with them. But what is more impressive in this connection is that history provides no other instance of a religious movement so definitely and directly led of God.

In view of all this how pointless is the question in the objection before us?

## Objection 59

The Millerites thought they found in Daniel 8:13,14 the proof that Christ would come on October 22, 1844. After their disappointment some of them, the founders of Seventh day Adventism, sought to maintain their claim that God was leading them by inventing a new interpretation to Daniel 8:13,14. Which enabled them to maintain that the prophecy was indeed fulfilled in 1844, but by an event that took place in heaven. Hence Seventh day Adventism was born of a dilemma.

We need not here turn aside to discuss the validity of the Seventh day Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:13, 14. That is presented at length in our denominational literature. We confine ourselves to the dilemma feature.

Even if we desired, we could not make an exclusive claim to a dilemma origin. The Catholic Church might plausibly describe Protestantism in similar fashion. Luther had to admit the awful fact of sin and the imperative need of redemption. But he refused to admit that the penances and good works set down by the church were effective as redemptive agencies. So he solved the dilemma by "inventing" a new formula for salvation; he declared that it was effected wholly through a work done by Christ in heaven above and that we accept it by faith.

Infidels often declare that the Christian church is the result of a dilemma. Their reasoning runs like this: The disciples had to admit they were mistaken, for Christ did not establish His kingdom on earth as they had anticipated. They refused to admit that they had been deceived as to their Lord. So they revised their preaching and invented the story that He had arisen and ascended and was ministering for us in heaven above, from which He would return to set up His kingdom.

Other illustrations might be given from the religious world, but these suffice to show that the charge of a dilemma origin does not necessarily prove anything. The strict logic of such a charge demands that a person or a movement at the outset must have either the whole truth or none of it, that it is not possible to have part of the truth at the outset and to gain the remainder in the school of disappointing experience. When the matter is stated in this form the unreasonableness of the charge becomes evident. Our critics, along with the rest of us, will have to admit that they have learned new truths at times as a result of disappointing experiences, even dilemmas, that have confronted them. And if these critics believe that God is guiding their lives, they will also have to admit, along with the rest of us, that some of the dilemmas have clearly been permitted by God, if not ordained of Him, for their spiritual good.

## Objection 60

For several years after the 1844 disappointment Seventh day Adventists believed that probation had closed for the world. Was God leading a movement that believed so un-Scriptural a teaching as that?

The answer to objection 58 is almost a sufficient answer to this. The parallel there drawn between Christ's disciples and the Adventists can be extended to cover the question before us. The Bible states explicitly that the disciples, particularly Peter, thought at first that their message of salvation was only for the Jews. So, far from including the Gentiles in their preaching, they did not think it proper even to sit down and eat with them. Peter had to be given a vision on the housetop in order to prepare him to go down to the house of the centurion. When he returned from that visit he told the brethren at Jerusalem how the Holy Spirit had been poured upon those gathered at the centurion's home, and added, -Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" Acts 11: 17. "When they [the apostles and Jewish believers at Jerusalem] heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Verse 18.

Only slowly did the Jewish believers in Christ come to sense fully the sublime truth that the gospel was to be preached to all men, even to the uttermost parts of the earth. We marvel at their original, exclusive ideas on salvation, and particularly at the fact that the apostles themselves were as exclusive as any. But it never occurs to any of us, even to the critics of Adventism, to question the leadership of God in the apostolic church. Their idea of exclusive salvation for the Jews was un-Scriptural we declare, but God was leading them, nevertheless. Why should it be considered a thing incredible that God also was leading the Advent movement at the beginning, even though they held for a little time that probation for the world had closed? Is it any worse to believe that the door of mercy has closed on men than to believe that it never was opened to them?

If the apostolic church had failed to enlarge its vision and correct its narrow view, then might a real indictment be brought against the Christian church as the stronghold of un-Christian exclusivism. Likewise, if our spiritual ancestors of the 1840's had continued to hold that probation had closed for the world, then might a real indictment be brought against Seventh day Adventists. But in neither case was the erroneous doctrine retained. In both instances the Divine Spirit, whose task it is to lead God's children into all truth, soon led them to see the truth regarding the worldwide scope of the plan of salvation.

It is not really relevant to the present argument to show just how our Adventist forebears quickly began to enlarge their view so that by the early 1850's-a decade before the formal organization of the Seventh day Adventist Church-the erroneous doctrine was fully corrected.\* We need only establish the fact that they did speedily correct it under the illumination of the Divine Spirit.

*\*For extended discussion of this matter see the author's Ellen G. White and Her Critics, pp. 161-252, and 598-615.*

## Objection 61

Christ's second coming is not literal but spiritual. He comes to the Christian at conversion or at death.

There is a sense in which Christ comes to us at conversion. When we accept Him He comes into our hearts by His Spirit and guides our lives. The spiritual experience of the Spirit's coming into the lives of the apostles was dependent on Christ's going away. Said the Master, "If I go not away, the Comforter [which is the Holy Ghost] will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." John 16:7; 14:26. Therefore this experience of spiritual fellowship with Christ through His Spirit is so far from being the second coming of Christ that the fellowship is dependent on Christ's going "away."

When Christ spoke of His going away, He told His disciples that it was for the purpose of preparing a place for them. Then He added, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (See John 14:1-3) Now certainly Christ did not come to take the disciples away to the heavenly land on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon them. Yet when Christ comes again, an outstanding feature will be the receiving of believers unto Himself.

Said Paul to the Philippians, who were converted and had begun to walk the Christian way: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Phil. 1:6. He spoke to the Thessalonians in similar vein when he declared to them, -You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven." 1 Thess. 1:9,10. In both instances the people addressed by Paul were converted, and in both instances they were instructed to look forward, "to wait" for the coming of Christ "from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus." Paul certainly did not believe that the coming of Christ was at conversion, but rather that conversion prepared us for the glorious future event of the coming of a personal Being who had been raised from the dead.

When Christ came the first time, His advent was literal. He was a real being among men. Even after His resurrection He said to His disciples, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see." Luke 24:39. What ground is there for concluding that His Second Advent will be less real? If He came literally the first time, are we not naturally to conclude, unless there is clear evidence to the contrary, that -He will come literally at the Second Advent?

Not only is there no Bible evidence to the contrary; there is specific evidence in support of this conclusion that His Second Advent will be literal. When Christ ascended, two heavenly messengers said to the disciples, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. Couple with this the statement of Paul: "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven." 1 Thess. 4:16. Not simply a spiritual influence will come again, but "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven." Not even a heavenly representative, literal and real as such a representative might be, but "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven." Thus reads the scripture.

We read also that when Christ comes, the brilliance of that coming lights the whole heavens, and its blinding glory causes the wicked to flee in terror. Further, we read that when Christ comes, the dead are raised to life, and these, accompanied by the living righteous, are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. (See Matt. 24:27; Rev. 6:14-17; John 5:28, 29; 1 Thess. 4:15-18)

Only when a person is ready to spiritualize away the most literal and obvious value of words can he support the idea that the second coming of Christ is spiritual not literal. But when words are deprived of their most natural meaning, then there is removed the whole basis of discussion as to what the Bible teaches.

The very evidence that establishes the fact that the coming of Christ is literal, and that it is not to be confused with conversion, establishes also the fact that the coming cannot be at death. The wicked do not flee in terror at the death of a righteous man, nor are the righteous raised from the dead at death; yet the fleeing of the wicked and the raising of the righteous will characterize the Second Advent.

The Advent of Christ will be so real that every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him." Rev. 1:7.

## Objection 62

It is revolting to the Christian idea of love to believe that Christ will come as a destroyer and wreak vengeance on the world.

It seems strange that this objection should be presented, because almost without exception it comes from those who hold the quite widely accepted doctrine that the wicked go at death into hell-fire, there to stay through the ceaseless ages of eternity. If it seems to the objector more in harmony with the Christian idea of love to believe in never-ending torment as the portion of the wicked, rather than speedy destruction in connection with the Second Advent of Christ, then we must simply confess our inability to follow such reasoning, and close the discussion. But with the matter set forth in this definite way, we doubt very much whether the objector, or anyone else, would think of affirming that greater love is indicated by the ceaseless tortures of hell than by the consuming of the wicked in connection with the Second Advent.

Everyone who holds to the primary doctrine that there is a difference between right and wrong, and that there is a judgment day when God will reward men according to their deeds, must believe that there is a punishment for the wicked as well as a reward for the righteous. This is too evident for dispute by any believer in the Bible.

The believers in the literal Second Advent of Christ certainly are not unique in holding that the wicked will suffer. Surely the consuming fires of the Second Advent could burn no more fiercely than those pictured in the hell-fire of the creeds of many denominations. How can it conceivably be argued that it is in harmony with the Christian idea of love to take the wicked to some distant place for punishment by eternal torment. While it is revolting to the Christian idea of love to punish them by death right here on the earth, where their sins have been committed?

God does not take any pleasure in the death of the wicked. (See Eze. 18:32) It is not because God hates men that He finally destroys the wicked. There is simply no other alternative left if He is to blot out sin from the universe. Sin is something found only in connection with moral beings, possessed of free will. The germs of sin can thrive only as they burrow deep into the very mind and heart. Thus the destruction of sin necessitates the destruction of those who are determined to hold on to their sins.

God has ever been of too pure eyes to behold iniquity. It has never been possible for sinful man to gaze upon the face of God. It is the pure in heart who will finally see God. When Moses in the mount sought to see God's face his plea was denied. The Lord placed him in a "cleft of the rock," that he might be hid from the divine glory as God passed by. (See Exodus 33 and 34)

From this we may learn a spiritual lesson. We as poor sinners may also be hid in the cleft of the rock, the rock Christ Jesus. The opportunity is offered to all to avail themselves of this protection. When hid in Christ our sins are forgiven; His holy life covers us. We thus stand unafraid in the day when the glory of God is revealed from heaven at the Second Advent. The same awful brilliance envelops all, the righteous as well as the wicked. The difference is that the righteous are protected by the covering of Christ's righteousness, while the wicked stand spiritually naked. They must cry for the literal rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the face of Him that sits on the throne. They have brought death upon themselves by the course they have willfully taken throughout their lives.

## Objection 63

We should spend more time helping people to make this a better world rather than stir them up about another world, as is the case when the Second Advent doctrine is preached.

All will agree that this world would be a much better place if sickness could be removed; and that our earth would be almost ideal if we could banish from men's hearts selfishness, jealousy, hatred, and lust.

But does the preaching to men to make ready for another world prevent us in any way from dealing with the first of these two basic troubles, that of sickness? No, assuredly not. Christ spent much of His time ministering to the sick, and yet He preached to the people. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven: . . . for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matt. 6:19-21.

Christ commissioned His disciples to go out and heal the sick. This they did, but they also made the doctrine of the Second Advent, the preparing of men for heaven, the central feature of their preaching. And it is a simple matter of record that Seventh day Adventists, who make the Second Advent so distinctive a feature of their preaching, are at the same time ministering to the sick through a chain of sanitariums and dispensaries in every continent.

In view of the objection before us, this is really a remarkable fact. Yet it is not remarkable, but rather the natural result of belief in the Advent doctrine. The love of Christ that comes into the hearts of those who believe that He will come again, causes them to spend their time and means in aiding the sick.

In preaching that Christ, who had ascended, would come again, the disciples made this present world a better one in which to live, not only by healing the sick, but also by helping the poor. Those who accepted the preaching and who had money, willingly gave it into a general fund, so that those who were poor might not suffer. (See Acts 4:32-37) What untold hunger and want might he relieved if that same spirit controlled the Christian church at large today!

And what of the relation of the vices of men's hearts to the doctrine of the Second Advent? Certainly all the schemes that the wise of this world have devised, have failed to provide any solution for the steadily growing problem of crime and moral corruption. Does the objector wish us to spend our time on some crime commission or social research committee rather than on the preaching of the Advent? If so, which committee would he suggest and what proof would he offer that our time would be well spent?

Men can devise ways of chaining the body but not of changing the heart, and the prisoner goes forth from the jail ready to repeat his offense, or to commit a worse one. The fear of the law may hold back a wicked man from the outward act of violence, but he is nevertheless a criminal at heart, and awaits only the favorable opportunity to carry out his evil desires.

But when the mighty doctrine of the personal and literal return of Christ is preached to men, there is brought home to their sin-dulled senses with a vividness not otherwise possible the tremendous fact that they must someday meet God face to face and give an account for their deeds. And that mighty truth may prove the means, under God, of arousing them to cry out for spiritual help, that they may be ready for that day. If the objector is willing to grant that religion has any message for man, then he must grant that the message of accountability to God, as set forth in the doctrine of the Advent, is one of the most powerful that can ever be brought to the human heart.

Every man who accepts the Advent doctrine and lives in the hope of meeting Christ face to face has ever within his heart the mightiest incentive to holy living. "Every man that hath this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure." 1 John 3:3. And the man whose heart is purified is a good citizen. The more such people there are in the world, the better place it is to live in.

## Objection 64

Christ Himself said that He would come as a thief in the night. The apostle Paul made a similar statement. Seventh day Adventists are therefore unwarranted in claiming that they can know something definite as to the time of Christ's coming.

We agree that it is not possible for us to know exactly when Christ will come. Throughout our whole history as a distinct religious body we have accepted literally the words of Christ concerning the time of His coming: "Of that day and hour knows no man." "Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come." Matt. 24:36,42. Christ immediately follows with an allusion to a thief's unexpected coming.

But we do not confine our belief regarding the Advent to these two statements by Christ. We believe all that He said. We accept all the Bible. Christ did not confine His statements about the Advent to the two texts quoted. Those texts are part of a long discourse on the subject. That discourse was prompted by the question asked by His disciples, who knew He would soon leave them and who naturally wondered when He would return: "What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Matt. 24:3. The first and perhaps most significant fact to be noted in Christ's reply is this: He did not even suggest that their question was out of order.

Christ most evidently thought the question so much in order that He proceeded at length to answer it. He described various signs that were to occur both in the heavens and in the earth, and then added: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When his branch is yet tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is nigh: so likewise you, when you shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." Verses 32, 33.

The tender leaves on the trees in early spring provide us clear proof that summer is near, but do not enable us to say precisely when summer will arrive. By this simple illustration Christ harmonized His two statements, the one which declares that we may know when the Advent is near, with the statement that "of that day and hour knows no man."

It is true that Paul says Christ's coming will be wholly unexpected-even like a thief's coming-to a class who will be mistakenly forecasting "peace and safety." (1 Thess. 5:3) Thus killed to sleep with a false sense of security they will be overtaken by "sudden destruction," Paul adds. But what of those to whom Paul is writing, who know "the times and the seasons"? Listen to his words: "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober." Verses 4-6.

And how may we know "the times and the seasons"? By studying the prophecies of the Book of God. When the prophet Daniel stood before the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, who had been troubled over the question of "what should come to pass hereafter," he said to the monarch, "There is a God in heaven that reveals secrets, and makes known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." Dan. 2:28, 29. The whole book of Daniel is filled with prophecies regarding Christ's coming in glory.

When Christ answered the disciples' question regarding the time of the end of the world, He referred to a prediction made "by Daniel the prophet," and added, "who so reads, let him understand." Matt. 24:15.

The opening chapter of the Revelation contains this blessing: 'Blessed is he that reads, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.' Rev. 1:3.

To say that nothing can be known about the time of Christ's coming is to fly in the face of these and similar texts and to affirm that the God of the prophets has concealed from them any information concerning the climactic event of earth's history.

## Objection 65

One of the best proofs that no one can tell whether Christ will come tomorrow or a thousand years from now is the fact that the apostles thought He would come in their day. But they were all mistaken. So will Seventh day Adventists be.

It is true that the apostles set before the believers as the one important event of the future the Second Advent of Christ. He was the center and circumference of their preaching. Looking back, they saw Christ crucified and then raised from the dead. Looking upward, they saw Christ ministering as the great High Priest for men. Looking forward, they saw Christ coming in the clouds of heaven. Earthly events did not enter into their reckoning. All was in terms of the relation of Christ to them-what He had done for them, what He was doing for them, and how He would finally come to receive them unto Himself. The very fact that they fixed their thoughts so completely on this one future event might easily cause the superficial reader of the Bible to conclude that the apostles all believed and taught that Christ would return in their day. But this would be unwarranted.

There are a few specific statements that, considered alone, might lead to that conclusion. Let us take the most typical one as an example.

Paul, in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, speaks of the dead who are raised and of those who "are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord." 1 Thess. 4:15. Not only do objectors today conclude from this that the apostles expected the coming of the Lord in their day, but apparently some of the Thessalonians thought that Paul intended for them to understand that the day of Christ was right upon them.

But such an interpretation of Paul's words is unwarranted, for in his second epistle to them he took occasion to correct such an impression, declaring, "Be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." 2 Thess. 2:2. Then he proceeds to assure them that that day would not come until after a certain great prophecy was fulfilled, and that this prophecy could not be fulfilled "except there come a falling away first." Verse 3. Paul told the elders of Ephesus that this falling away would come after his "departing," that is, after his death. (See Acts 20:28-30; 1 Tim. 4:7, 8.)

To his spiritual son, Timothy, he wrote from his death cell at Rome: "The things that thou has heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." 2 Tim. 2:2. How evident it is that Paul looked forward to events quite beyond the span of his life.

If we always remember that the inspired writings of the Bible were not simply for those who first read them but also for us, Paul's statement in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, and similar statements by other apostles, will not prove perplexing.

To some of the apostles God may not have seen fit to give so explicit an understanding of the events that must precede the Second Advent as He did to Paul, for example, in which case they might most properly urge the believers to be always in a state of readiness for Christ's return.

In Old Testament times the prophets frequently did not understand the prophecies they uttered. It was left for those who lived near the time of their fulfillment to obtain the real understanding of them. Thus Peter explained to the New Testament church. (See 1 Peter 1:9-12.) And he reminded them, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn." 2 Peter 1:19.

The apostle John himself may have understood little of the prophecies contained in the Revelation, yet by inspiration he declared, "Blessed is he that reads, and they that bear the words of this prophecy." Rev. 1:3.

As already stated, we freely agree that God may not have given to all the apostles a knowledge of the future. But this admission does not require us to conclude that nothing can be known about the Second Advent. We, looking back to the first century of the Christian Era, wonder why all the Jews were not ready to receive Christ, so plain were the prophecies concerning the manner and time of His advent. There were a few back there who did study the prophecies, and when the time drew near, God graciously revealed more fully their meaning to these searchers for truth. If we today are in an attitude of searching the prophecies rather than of scoffing at them, is it not possible that God may open their meaning to us more fully? And thus we may learn something very definite regarding the Second Advent.

We agree no man "can tell whether Christ will come tomorrow or a thousand years from now." But prophecy can and does. We would ask the objector: Have you studied these inspired writings? Have you obeyed the injunction of Christ Himself to read and to understand the prophecies of Daniel? (See Matt. 24: 15.) Have you studied Christ's own prophecy of His return? (See Matthew 24

and Luke 21.) Are you one of those who can claim the blessing because you have read, prayerfully and diligently, the book of Revelation? (See Rev. 1:3.) Until then, why declare that nothing can be known about the Second Advent? The Bible reveals plainly that in all past ages God has always told men when a great event was near at hand. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he reveals his secret unto his servants the prophets." Amos 3:7. Are you ready to contend that God has changed His plan toward men, and will not give us any knowledge of the coming of an event that surpasses in grandeur all events that have ever occurred?

The Bible contains whole books devoted to a prophetic discussion of the Second Advent of Christ in relation to great prophetic periods and historical incidents. Shall we ignore these portions of Holy Writ? Shall we say they are meaningless? If not, then should we not study them, and will they not give us light on this great subject of the nearness of the Second Advent?

## Objection 66

By preaching the soon coming of Christ, Seventh day Adventists are falsely creating hope and excitement. Misguided people through the centuries have repeatedly thought His coming was at hand. That fact is best illustrated by the excitement that spread throughout Europe in AD. 1000, when multitudes waited in fanatical fervor for Christ's coming.

One of the most common substitutes for logic and evidence is ridicule and scorn. There are many persons calling themselves Christians who think it a mark of superior religious understanding to heap ridicule on the whole doctrine of the literal soon coming of Christ. Such persons are sure not only that those who preach this doctrine are misguided visionaries but also that those who give ear to the preaching most certainly become ludicrous fanatic. To prove their point beyond any debate, they make the sweeping Statement, found in this objection, that the centuries, most notably the year AD. 1000, have witnessed deplorable incidents of fanatical excitement regarding this doctrine.

The facts are that during the long, and generally dark, centuries the great masses of the people were grossly ignorant of the Scriptures and thus unaware, even, of what its inspired pages say on the Second Advent. True, there were at times scholars who, from their study of the Bible, expressed certain views as to the nearness of the Advent. But such views were generally expressed in language not too exact. Nor did these views, except in rare instances, have any currency beyond the walls of a monastery, the usual abode of theological scholars in medieval times.

The story that Europe witnessed wild excitement in anticipation of the Advent as the year 1000 drew near is a groundless legend. How critics of the doctrine of Christ's coming have loved to believe it. Their love for it has been as strong as their love for the story that the Millerites in the year 1844 draped themselves in ascension robes in fanatical Advent expectancy. In fact these two stories have been the chief "proofs" that the preaching of Christ's soon coming can result only in false hope and fanatical excitement. The wild stories about what allegedly happened in AD. 1844 have been disposed of. (See Objection 57.) The stories about the year AD. 1000 can as certainly be exploded. For those who wish to examine a summary of the evidence that exposes these stories, we suggest that they read the article "The Year 1000 and the Antecedents of the Crusades," by George Lincoln Burr, in the American Historical Review, April, 1901, pages 429-439. (This journal is the official organ of the American Historical Society.) After summarizing some of the investigations of eminent nineteenth-century historians who have examined the events of the year AD. 1000 Burr observes:

"In fine, then, the sole contemporary evidence for a panic of terror at the year 1000 proved to be a statement that forty years earlier one Paris preacher named it as the date of the end of the world. A preacher whose prophecy was at once refuted, and, for ought we can learn, at once forgotten." - Page 434.

Still further on in his article Burr quotes approvingly these words of one of the historians who has investigated the legend:

" 'The terrors of the year 1000 are only a legend and a myth.' -Page 435.

It would be far more accurate to say that all through the centuries the vast majority of Christians have had little interest in the doctrine of the personal second coming of Christ. The reasons are two:

1. All through the Dark Ages and virtually up to Reformation times only the clergy and a few intellectuals had copies of the Scriptures. Hence Christians at large could hardly become particularly concerned about the doctrine. That was the long period of papal dominance in religious thought.
2. In the eighteenth century certain Protestant leaders began to teach, and their view has been increasingly accepted, that the coming of Christ will be spiritual, invisible, the coming of the Divine Spirit into human hearts, gradually to turn all men to righteousness. Hence there would be no occasion for anyone to look forward with intense feeling to a certain moment ahead. (See Objection 61 for a discussion of the claim that Christ's coming is a spiritual one.)

It would also be equally accurate to say that the long centuries fail to support any general charge that those who have believed in the doctrine of Christ's personal appearing have deported themselves in an irrational, fanatical fashion.

## Objection 67

**Seventh day Adventists declare that the great meteoric shower of November 13, 1833, was a fulfillment of the prophecy that the stars shall fall from heaven as one of the signs of the nearness of Christ's coming. But we need not seek some supernatural, miraculous explanation of this starry event. Astronomers inform us that whirling in space is a great swarm of meteorites, known as the Leonids, which are probably the shattered remains of a comet. These Leonids come within the orbit of our earth about every thirty-three years. There were showers in 1866 and 1899, though very small, because, as the astronomers explain, the planet Jupiter deflected the meteoritic group from the direct path of the earth. Probably this or a similar reason explains the absence of a star shower in 1933.**

The prime fallacy underlying this reasoning is the assumption that because a phenomenon has been explained, it has been explained away. Is a stupendous act of God in the operation of His universe any the less so because poor finite men have been able to discover something of the plan that the Infinite has employed?

A devout astronomer once exclaimed, as he charted the course of the stars, that he was thinking God's thoughts after Him. But did that make those thoughts any the less divine?

We describe as egotistical the man who, after examining the product of some inventive wizard, declares that he could have invented such a device, and that there is really nothing to it. But what shall we say of the man who, after discovering a little of the plan that God has used in the performance of some marvelous act, scoffingly declares that there is nothing remarkable about it, that it is merely a "natural phenomenon"! We do not discount an inventor's production because he has called to his aid some simple, natural law, as has been the case in most inventions. On the contrary, we consider it a mark of the superior mind to be able to see the possibilities of such a simple law and to harness it to such wonderful ends. And shall we not as reasonably conclude that a phenomenon in the heavens, in which "natural" laws have been called into service, proves eloquently the superiority of the Mind that produced it?

If God has seen fit to permit His divinely appointed laws of motion to operate so that a comet should be shattered and some of its parts scattered like flaming stars over our earth, what is man that he should impiously contend that some other method should have been employed. Or that inasmuch as he can explain something of the laws that operated in producing the starry sign, he will reject it as being no sign? And if God, once having produced that phenomenon should allow the wreckage of the comet to remain in our path, so that at recurring intervals until the final end we should be reminded of the great sign that earlier occurred, why should a man perversely declare he will therefore see in it no sign at all?

But let us look at the matter from another angle. When Christ gave that wonderful prophecy marking out the high points along the centuries between His first and second advents, He foreknew just what would take place in the earth and in the heavens. He foresaw, for example, that as the centuries wore along, the world would be filled with war, but that at the same time there would be great plans for peace. Foreknowing that this would be the state just before His return, He declared that when we see such conditions we may know that the end is near. The contention that this paradoxical war-and-peace condition is the "natural" result of forces that have played upon human nature in recent times does riot in any way invalidate the paradox as a sign. Only God could foreknow that these particular forces would be working upon men's hearts in a certain particular way two thousand years later. And the taking place of such war-and-peace scenes at the very time when other prophecies declare that the "time of the end" is at hand, provides the proof that He who foretold it was divine and that His promise to return will be fulfilled.

Likewise, Christ foresaw that in the time shortly before His return a great cluster of meteoric fragments would cross the earth's path, thus producing what would be described as a shower of falling stars. Foreknowing this, why should He not declare that when we see this sight we may know the end is near? What could be more easily understood by mankind than such a sight as this?

If a foreknowledge of conditions upon the earth is a proof of Christ's divinity, how much more so a foreknowledge of events in the heavens? The fact is that after counseling His followers to "understand" the book of Daniel, which made specific predictions as to the time of the end, Christ declared calmly that when that "time" arrived there would be a great falling of stars. Almost exactly eighteen hundred years before its occurrence the Son of man foretold an event that the wisest of the sons of men could not foretell by a single day.

And He foretold this striking heavenly event in relation to a great group of signs that would take place in the earth and in the heavens, for when we read His prophecy in connection with those He

inspired Daniel and John to give, we discover a whole galaxy of signs that were to take place within a very limited and clearly marked period. The spectacular star shower of November 13, 1833, stands securely as a sign, for only the God who orders the courses of the stars could have caused that mighty shower to descend at exactly the right hour to blend with the other parts of a multicolored divinely predicted picture.

## Objection 68

The whole idea that Christ will appear in flaming glory in the heavens, suddenly to change the present order of nature, destroying the wicked, and taking the righteous to heaven, belongs to the age of superstition. We who live in this modern era know that all this is incredible and contrary to the laws of nature.

It is perhaps profitless to attempt to answer this, because those who make such declarations are so confident they know just what is credible and just how the laws of nature must always operate, that it is hard for them to consider any line of reasoning that might challenge their viewpoint. But for the benefit of those who are willing to believe the Advent doctrine, but who are awed or confused by declarations like the above, we offer some observations in reply.

First, we would ask: What solution to the long tragedy of a disordered and dying world does the objector offer? Until recent years he would probably respond with easy assurance that the world is gradually getting better, because there is operating throughout the universe a great law of progress, and thus ultimately all will be well. If he were a religious man, he would add that this improvement was taking place as a result of the slow but steady work of the Spirit of God on the hearts of men.

But this theory that the world is gradually getting better has suffered a mortal blow. The guns of two world wars, capped with the atomic bomb, have quite shattered it. Even that great host of ministers who formerly declared most confidently that we were headed for the millennium have quite completely lost their confidence. Ask them what solution they now have for the world's tragedy, what way through to a new earth wherein dwells righteousness, and they almost invariably begin to speak in vague and shadowy language of a divine solution of the tragedy of our world beyond history. But they do not explain what they mean by that phrase; it is rather new and strange to them.

If you ask non-religious men what their present solution of the world problem is, they will probably look at you in astonishment. Their expression reveals that they are amazed you should expect them to have an answer. They forget how recently they were sure they had the answer—because they were sure they knew just how the laws of nature must operate!

To the objector we would say: You admit, as we all must do, that you don't know how nature's laws operate in relation to the betterment of the world. Then how can you any longer assert confidently that the coming of Christ is contrary to nature's laws? Why confess ignorance on the former and claim sure knowledge on the latter?

But perhaps you fall back on the general statement that the whole idea of the supernatural appearing of Christ to bring an end to the present world is unreasonable, incredible. Then let us ask you another question: If you believe in a God—as most men do, does it seem reasonable to you that God would permit this tragic world of ours, where the innocent so often suffer at the hands of the guilty, and where tragedy and death stalk the steps of all men, to continue on in this state forever? We think you will naturally answer no.

That no gives us a point in common. If we both believe in God, and thus both agree that it is reasonable to believe that He will bring this present tragic world to an end, we come right around again to the question: How do you believe He will do this? You have admitted that you do not know, that your former idea that the world was steadily moving upward by some vast law of progress, must now be abandoned, or at best, viewed with deep suspicion. In other words, for all you are able to say or to know of the mysteries of nature's laws or of the ways of God to man, this world of ours might roll on in blood and tears forever. You have nothing to protect you from despair save your belief that a good God will surely not permit a bad world to go on forever.

But if you rest your hope, even if vaguely and uncertainly, on God, are you not thereby injecting the supernatural into the affairs of this world which, according to your objection, is fully in the control of natural laws? Most obviously so. And if the supernatural is admitted, are you going to presume to say just how God may be permitted to bring on the closing act in the drama of the world's tragedy? Is the divine Lawgiver the slave of the laws He has made?

Again, if we all think it reasonable for God to bring an end to injustice and cruelty, is it not also most reasonable that He, as the divine judge, should call all men to His judgment bar and openly mete out penalties and rewards? Should not those who stand before the eternal bar be permitted, in fairness, to meet their judge face to face?

But all this simply leads us to the doctrine of the personal second coming of Christ.

Again: Does not a belief in God, who will bring righteous judgment at last to all men, carry with it the belief that this God, in fairness to all, would provide men with some revelation of His will that they might know how to order their steps aright against the great day of judgment? The answer surely must be yes.

But to answer yes is really to admit that the Bible is the Book of God, for that is the book that believers in the true God have ever understood to be the revelation of His will. And when we open its pages we find clearly taught the great doctrine of an end to this wicked world and the creation of a better one. There we find explicit declarations that at the climax of earth's history, when God will mete out judgment, Christ will come in flaming glory, bringing joy and translation to the righteous, and terror and death to the wicked. (See, for example, 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 1:7) In that awful and climactic moment it will not occur to any of the children of men to protest the event because it is contrary to the laws of nature! They will be standing before the God of nature!

(For an extended discussion of related questions, see pages 449-489)