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Deceptive Views on the Second Coming

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The dragon of the Apocalypse can no more prevent Christ's second coming than he could prevent Christ's rising from the dead. But while Satan cannot prevent His return, he does attempt to deceive Christ's followers, to confuse them about the manner, time, place, purpose and setting of the Lord's return. With these terms of reference in mind, we turn to review the subject of our study.

Why is it important for Christians to believe in the second coming of Christ, and how important it is to understand the biblical teachings about His coming? The answer to the first part of the question is rather simple, for the Scriptures abound with the promises of His coming. Those Christians who believe in the reliability of the Word of God will certainly believe in the second coming of Christ. Both Testaments speak of His coming. In the OT we find two prophetic foci, the first and second Advents; while in the NT the prophetic focus is on the second Advent.¹ The answer to the second part of the question concerning the importance of the events surrounding Christ's second coming is altogether a different issue and is the concern of this paper.

As Jude reminds us, the first person in the OT to have a vision of the second coming of Christ was Enoch, the seventh from Adam, only six generations after creation.² "Now Enoch prophesied saying, 'Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints'" (Jude 14). In the Gospels we find Jesus saying to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare

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a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:1-3). And in the book of Revelation, John says, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:1, 2, 4). From these few texts alone there ought to be no question about the certainty of Christ’s second coming and the centrality of this belief in the life of the Christian.

The Apostolic Church

The teaching of the second coming of Christ in the NT was misunderstood as early as the times of Paul. Although the subject of eschatology—the theological category for “the last things”—has been the playground of theologians throughout the centuries, particularly during the last one hundred and fifty years, the Thessalonian believers were the first to misunderstand Paul’s teachings concerning the second Advent. They thought the events immediately preceding the Second Coming were already taking place, and Christ would return in their day.

While among them, Paul had so forcefully preached the certainty of Christ’s return and the sequence of events that would precede it, that he did not think it necessary to repeat what he had said when writing to them about the resurrection in his first epistle. Not, that is, until he received word of how they had misconstrued what he had told them about the sequence of events.

Their confusion led Paul to clarify in his second epistle what he had previously taught them. He wrote, “Let no one deceive you by any means, for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition; who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped; so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things?” (2 Thess 2:3-5). Paul made very

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clear, in his second epistle to the Thessalonian believers, the events that needed to take place before the return of Christ.³

Unfortunately, some Adventists have picked up the arguments from scholars using the higher-critical method who say Paul expected Christ to come in his day, and when He did not, he changed his mind. For evidence, they cite what he said to his converts in his first epistle to the Thessalonians: Christ would descend from heaven with a shout and the voice of the archangel; their dead loved ones would rise; and “we,” the living would be caught up with them (1 Thess 4:13-18). Then they point to his second epistle where Paul said Christ would not come until a falling away first occurred (2 Thess 2:1-4). This shows, they say, that when Christ did not come as soon as Paul expected Him, he changed his mind.⁴

Ellen White clarifies the situation that existed in Thessalonica and gives us insight into what Paul believed and taught concerning the Second Coming:

In this First Epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul’s teachings concerning the second coming of Christ were in perfect harmony with his former instructions to the church. Yet his words were misapprehended by some of the Thessalonian brethren. They understood him to express the hope that he himself would live to witness the Saviour’s advent. This belief served to increase their enthusiasm and excitement. . . . In his second letter to this church, Paul seeks to correct their misapprehensions, and to set before them his true position. . . . He then showed that great events were to transpire in the future, as foretold in prophecy, before Christ should come. . . . The papal power, so clearly described by the prophet Daniel, was yet to rise, and wage war against God’s people, and trample upon his law. . . . Thus Paul put to naught the arguments of those who represented him as teaching that the day of Christ was at hand.⁵

This misapprehended belief regarding the second coming of Christ had dramatic consequences in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica. Some inferred that, if indeed, the present world were so soon to come to an end, it was useless to pursue their common employment or carry on their business any longer. They gave themselves up to dreamy expectations of the future, to the point that the whole framework of fellowship in the Thessalonian church was in danger of dissolution.

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Those who encouraged this false expectation supported it by imagined revelations from the Holy Spirit, even forging and circulating a letter supposedly written by Paul to confirm their views.⁶ Satan even succeeded in leading some in Thessalonica to reject the gift of prophecy and to exalt other spiritual gifts in its place.⁷

It was to check this evil that Paul felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to write his second epistle. This time he corrected their erroneous expectations about the immediacy of Christ's return by reminding them of certain signs which must precede His coming, about which he had told them when he was with them.

The Post-Apostolic Church

Origen: Spiritualizing Scripture. This was not the end of Satan's attempt to lead believers to misunderstand the Scriptures regarding the second Advent. In the third century, a theologian named Origen spiritualized the second coming. He taught that the return of Christ takes place when He comes into the soul, uniting the believer with Himself. The enlightenment of the believer through the writings of the prophets and apostles is Christ's second coming, and it is in this sense that the believer enters into the kingdom of God. Thus it is that the second Advent of the Word made flesh takes place.⁸

Origen's understanding of Christ's return was consistent with his overall understanding of Scripture. For him the Word of God had three parts: body, soul, and spirit. Each part represented a legitimate level of biblical interpretation: from the literal (body) to the moral (soul) to the spiritual (spirit). By using this approach for the understanding of Scripture, he was able to read into it whatever he wished.⁹

Origen did not deny the literalness of Scripture, the actuality of biblical history *per se*. For him the spiritualization of the Bible did not deny its historicity, but believed the Bible to be primarily a spiritual book, and that a person could find its true meaning only by spiritualizing it. The literal meaning of Scripture he compared to the body. This meant that the "simple" have to be satisfied with faith in the crucified Christ. The soul of Scripture he compared to its moral teachings. But only the "perfect" could ascend beyond this and contemplate the spiritual teachings of the Bible.¹⁰ This is what

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led him to speak of the coming of Christ in the “prophetic clouds” rather than the literal clouds of heaven, and of the end of the age as being the crucifixion of the world in the hearts of believers, meaning that for them the world had become dead.¹¹ From such views we can see that it does matter what we believe about Christ’s coming and how Scripture should be interpreted.

Augustine: Millennial Reign Now. A third example of misinterpreting the doctrine of the second Advent comes from the fifth century. Augustine, one of the Latin Church Fathers, influenced Christian understanding of the second coming of Christ for centuries. While he believed that Christ’s second Advent does occur when He comes into the hearts of the believers, he did not preclude, as Origen did, the literal, glorious return of Christ from heaven. Rather, he taught that Christ’s millennial reign began when He was here and would continue for 1,000 years before He would return in the clouds of heaven. He believed that the second coming of Christ occurs little by little and piece by piece in His church, and when the whole church is filled with His spiritual presence, then He will come in person.¹²

Just prior to Augustine’s time, the Roman Empire under Constantine had become nominally Christian. Thus, according to Augustine, the Empire was no longer the seat of evil. Evil reigned in the hearts of the pagans, and they were also the millennial abyss—according to the book of Revelation—to which Satan had been assigned. In this sense, the great controversy between good and evil is between the “City of God” and the “City of the Devil.”¹³

Those persons who make up the “City of God” are the elect. The Church is the Kingdom of Heaven, inhabited by the saints. Therefore, the “City of God”—the visible, hierarchically-organized church—must rule more and more of the world. This is to be done by a close relationship with the Christian state, which must promote the true worship of God by punishing and suppressing heresy and in this sense help the City of God to overcome the “City of the Devil.”¹⁴ With certain modifications this view is still the understanding of many in the Roman Catholic Church today, as we will point out later.

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The Reformation

Revival of Second Advent Truth. It was not until a thousand years after Augustine that his concept of equating the millennium and the second coming of Christ with the triumph of the Roman Church began to be challenged. The Reformation not only brought about a shift in the doctrine of salvation by its emphasis on justification by faith, but also an eschatological shift by reviving the true teachings of Scripture concerning the second coming of Christ. Luther and Calvin emphasized that believers should look forward to and prepare for the second Advent, which they believed was imminent.

While Luther tended to focus on time by saying that the “end” was not far off, Calvin did not; he simply admonished believers to watch and be ready. However, both rejected Augustine’s concept of equating the Roman Church with the seminal Kingdom of God on earth. Both believed that the pope was the Antichrist. And both held that the final struggle between the true church and the false that had now begun would culminate in the second coming of Christ.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that while Luther saw many of the happenings in Europe as signs of the end, he also spoke at various times of the second coming as being a hundred, two hundred, or three hundred years away.¹⁶ The latter figure brings us to the Great Awakening of the nineteenth century.

Daniel Whitby: Postmillennialism. Prior to the Great Awakening, Daniel Whitby, an English commentator in Britain, popularized his theory that before the second Advent the whole world would be converted, and there would be a thousand years of peace culminating in the return of Christ. This meant that Christ would first come in mighty power through the Holy Spirit to convert the world, and then at the end of this glorious millennial period He would come in Person.¹⁷ But Christ did not say that all the world would be converted, only that the gospel of the kingdom should be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; then the end would come. There would be no temporal millennium as Whitby and others envisioned.¹⁸

By the nineteenth century and the rise of the Adventist movement the concept of a temporal millennium had been adopted by

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the majority of evangelical ministers,¹⁹ who believed that during these one thousand years Protestants, Catholics, Jews and Moslems would renounce sin and be thoroughly converted, then Christ would come to set up His Kingdom. This concept so dominated Protestant theology that when Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University, gave his 1798 Fourth of July sermon, he enthusiastically spoke of Christ's coming as being at the door. What he had in mind was the Whitbyan "spiritual" Advent of Christ, not His literal Advent as some have been led to think.²⁰

This "spiritualizing" of the second coming of Christ had a profound impact on the Protestant church. As men and women thought about a thousand years of peace and righteousness, they no longer looked forward to seeing Christ's coming in the clouds of heaven.²¹

Manuel de Lacunza: Revival of Premillennialism. About the same time that the Whitbyan emphasis was becoming popular, Manuel de Lacunza, a Jesuit missionary priest, wrote a book entitled, *The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty*, in which he showed his belief that, that according to Scripture, Christ would come in Person at the beginning of the millennium before the conversion of the world. This placed him in direct opposition to Whitby's popular concept. Lacunza's writings once again awakened many to the imminent, literal return of Christ.²² His writings were one of the greatest single factors to motivate men and women to restudy the prophecies,²³ which in turn led to the preaching of the 2300-day prophecy.²⁴

The Millerites, like all other premillennialists, thought Christ's millennial kingdom would be established on earth. They differed with them, however, in believing that probation would first close and that only the redeemed would inhabit the earth during those one thousand years as part of their eternal state. While Seventh-day Adventists are also premillennialists, they believe that the millennial reign of Christ and the saints will be in heaven, with the two general resurrections marking the beginning and the close of those one thousand years. The first resurrection would be that of the righteous at Christ's second coming. The resurrection of the wicked would occur at the end of the millennium when they would

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be confronted with the consequences of their sins prior to the Lord's creation of a new heaven and a new earth.²⁵

The Twentieth Century

By the dawn of the twentieth century the misapplication of Scripture regarding the second coming of Christ had become more sophisticated, largely due to the higher-critical approach to the Bible which began to sweep the theological world in the mid-1800s.²⁶ The higher-critical method, with its presuppositions, had a devastating effect on theological interpretation of Scripture. That is one reason why, through the Methods of Bible Study Committee, Seventh-day Adventists as a church have taken such a decided stand against this method of interpreting Scripture.²⁷

Consistent Eschatology. One example of the destructive impact of the higher-critical method on Scripture comes from the writings of Albert Schweitzer—well-known musician, theologian, and later missionary-physician—in his influential work, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. First published in German in 1906, it confined the message of the coming Kingdom to the time of Christ. He saw Jesus attempting to bring about the Kingdom of God in His day, first by His preaching, then by sending out the disciples two by two, and finally by the desperate attempt of sacrificing His own life, hoping in this manner to take hold of the wheel of time, as it were, to bring about the Kingdom of God. Since none of these attempts succeeded, Jesus died a disillusioned man. And although His mission was consistent throughout His life, His teaching about the end time has no relevance to us today, unless just before the parousia. This interpretation of the Gospels is called Consistent Eschatology and places the focus of the second coming of Christ on the past.²⁸

Realized Eschatology. A second example comes from the writings of C. H. Dodd. He reacted to Schweitzer's interpretation and introduced what is called, Realized Eschatology. Dodd placed his emphasis on those texts of Scripture which say, The kingdom of God has come among you. For him this meant that the decisive eschatological moment came to us in the ministry of Jesus. It was not something that did not materialize, as Schweitzer taught. Jesus did not die a disappointed man. The Kingdom of God has been realized, it is already present. It has broken into history. The "day of Jesus,"

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that is, His ministry here, is a timeless fact which Jesus brought about and to which all men must relate.²⁹ This interpretation places the focus of Christ's coming on the present. The Kingdom has been actuated. It is here. We must decide to accept it.

Inaugurated Eschatology. A third example of Scripture misapplication is Inaugurated Eschatology. J. A. T. Robinson, Dodd's pupil, sees Christ's parousia as something that happens whenever Christ comes in love and power displaying the signs of His presence. This was inaugurated by Jesus' death and resurrection which began a new phase of God's kingdom, the fullness of which is yet to be achieved. Therefore, we live in anticipation of what is yet to be.³⁰ This places the focus of the Second Coming on the future, on anticipatory living, but not on Christ's imminent, literal coming.

Secret Rapture. Then there is the more popular concept of the second Advent, found generally among Evangelicals, called the Rapture, which is largely based on a misunderstanding of Matthew 24:40-44 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. The expression in Matthew "one shall be taken and the other left" and the expression in Thessalonians "we shall be caught up in the clouds" are thought to mean that the saints will be secretly snatched from this earth. Consequently, the rapture could occur any moment since we are living in the end time. This will deliver the saints from the agony of the great tribulation. Seven years later the Lord will return, bringing the saints with Him in a great triumphal arrival to set up His millennial kingdom. There are variations of this view, such as posttribulationism and others, which are beyond the scope of this study.³¹ Suffice it to say, that the secret rapture is not a correct understanding of Scripture as the context of these texts will bear out.

It is significant to observe that the core belief of the theories of the second Advent which we have mentioned are, in one form or another, still in vogue today. In the New Age movement's emphasis on the "Christ" within us,³² we recognize some of the elements of Origen's spiritual enlightenment theory; the Roman Catholic Church has not altogether shed the concept of the world becoming Catholic prior to the coming of Christ,³³ there continue to be abuses of Scripture by higher critics who mold the Word of God into what they want it to say and in the process make the biblical teaching of

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the second coming of Christ of non-effect;³⁴ and in the Evangelical community the principles of the Whitbyan concept of a coming golden age with a thousand years of peace are still very much alive.³⁵ As one prominent Evangelical says, “A new social order will emerge when Christ comes back to set up His Kingdom. Swords will be turned into pruning hooks, and the lion will lie down with the lamb. A fabulous future is on the way.”³⁶

Adventists’ Unique Position

In contrast, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has taken a stand against such concepts and is more in harmony with the 16th century Reformers’ understanding of the second coming of Christ. Seventh-day Adventists believe that “the Saviour’s coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. . . . The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ’s coming is imminent. . . . The millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven . . . During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, . . . At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth.”³⁷

In this sense, Adventists are unique in their interpretation of Scripture and in their understanding of the second coming of Christ and the events that will follow. For them the second Advent is not the spiritual enlightenment taught by Origen; the presence of Christ in the Roman Church believed by Augustine, the spiritual return of Christ preached by Whitby, the concepts of Consistent, Realized, and Inaugurated Eschatology by Schweitzer, Dodd, and Robinson, and certainly not the rapture theory as taught by some Evangelicals. Adventists believe that the church will not escape the difficult times of the end and that everything on the earth will be destroyed in a series of events called the Seven Last Plagues and by the appearance of Christ in the clouds of heaven.³⁸

As Jeremiah says, “I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form and void; and the heavens, they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled. I beheld, and the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities thereof were broken down at the

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presence of the Lord, by His fierce anger. For thus says the Lord: The whole land shall be desolate; yet I will not make a full end. For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black, because I have spoken, I have purposed, and will not relent, nor will I turn back from it" (Jer 4:24-28).

In the NT Paul says, "You who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess 1:7-9).

In the book of Revelation John says, "I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. . . . And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev 19:11-16).

Following the Christ's victorious return, John speaks of the Millennium during which the saints are with Christ in heaven (Rev 20). This passage is one of the most controversial apocalyptic chapters of the whole Bible.³⁹ After the one thousand years or the Millennium the Lord and the saints descend, and after the executive phase of final judgment is completed, God will create a new heaven and a new earth as a home for all the redeemed (Rev 20-22).

In the biblical sequence of things the doctrine of the Millennium becomes extremely important, because it clearly separates the events surrounding the second coming of Christ from what some call His "third coming" at the end of the thousand years. Scripture teaches that at the beginning of the Millennium the earth will be desolated and become an unpopulated wilderness; it is only after the one thousand years are finished that the Lord will make a new heavens and a new earth.

What is happening, however, is that among Protestants and

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Catholics—in spite of their eschatological differences—the notion exists that Christ will return the second time to make all things new. Generally, this concept is based on humanity’s great need and the belief that Christ’s coming is the answer to all our problems. As true as that statement is, in and of itself, it is incorrect when Christ-being-the-answer-to-this-earth’s-problems is applied to mean that His second coming will simply improve and cure under His direct reign society’s numerous ills.

For instance, in the turbulent sixties one Evangelical author expressed his conviction that the solution to our problems is the second Advent. He said, as he understood it, the Bible teaches that when Christ comes He will bring peace to the earth, for He is called the Prince of Peace; He will reconstruct our social institutions; He will restore nature to its original state; He will make righteousness international; and He will reproduce the will of God on earth.⁴⁰

Apparently the author has not changed his view on the Second Coming, for in one of his recent televised sermons he said, “The climax of history is going to be judgment. The Bible warns that the world is in for a gigantic judgment. The only bright spot is the promised return of Jesus Christ, because the Scripture teaches from one end to the other that Christ is going to come back some day. He’s going to set up His kingdom and evil and the devil are going to be eliminated. And this is going to be heaven on earth when Jesus comes back!”⁴¹ We appreciate the concern of such men, for all sensible people are concerned about the rise in crime and violence and the lowering of morality.

Adventist believe that according to Revelation chapters 20-22 God will set up His kingdom at Christ’s “third coming,” which takes place at the close of the millennium.⁴² This difference is crucial because the Millennium separates events associated with the Second Coming, at which time the wicked die from its impact, the righteous are taken to heaven, and the earth is left desolated, from events associated with the third coming, when the earth will be made new and God’s Kingdom of righteousness and peace will be set up. To expect God’s Kingdom of righteousness and peace to be set up at Christ’s second coming is to create a false hope, a false expectation. It was this deception among others that Jesus warned His disciples against when in answer to their question, “When will

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these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming?" He said, "Take heed that no one deceive s you" (Matt 24:1-4).

The destruction of the wicked and, to a degree, of the earth that the Bible presents as occurring at the second coming of Christ will be real and not merely symbolic of the cleansing of this world of its "earthly" elements as some would believe. When a prominent evangelical was asked what the fires of the last days were, he said,

Many times in the Bible the word 'fire' is not the fire of combustion as we commonly know it. The Bible teaches that God uses fire as a cleansing and purifying agent. When we read that the Holy Spirit came as 'tongues of fire,' we do not suppose these were literal fires but rather a representation of the character of the Holy Spirit as a cleansing agent. Fire can be considered also an agent of purification. When the prophets speak of fire in the world's judgment, or when Peter mentions fire at the end of the age, it is not likely that they refer to the fire of destruction. It could be the fire of fission, the release of nuclear power by the splitting of the atom. This is only speculation, of course, but it could be the elemental and creative form of fire used in the beginning and to be used again in the 'new beginning' to bring into being a new earth.⁴³

Then speaking of the change that will occur at the second coming of Christ he continues,

Whatever is not suited for the new life of the new world will be destroyed. This is what some call the end of the world, but the world will never end. It will only be changed into a better world. . . . And when the things of nature 'shall be dissolved,' they shall be loosed from their grave clothes of disease, death, and poverty. All nature will be let go into a new and glorious state of existence. . . . Great moral and spiritual changes will occur because it will be a new world 'wherein dwelleth righteousness.'⁴⁴

If we say that when the Bible speaks of destruction, it means simply dissolving the present order of things and substituting for it a righteous and peaceful order, that the atmosphere surrounding the earth will be replaced with a new atmosphere, that the earth will be reconstructed for the habitation of the new man who will have a new body, and that even the climate will be changed to accommodate this new man, and then tie these concepts to the

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second coming, we have created a false hope that will lead to disappointment and deception.⁴⁵

The false expectation of the creation of a great new society that will include all persons presently living (righteous and unrighteous) at the coming of Christ creates a most suitable climate for deception. Adventists believe that Satan will take advantage of this mind-set among believers and will deceive many. Ellen White describes the deception created by this false expectation when she says,

The churches of our time are seeking worldly aggrandizement, and are as unwilling to see the light of the prophecies, and receive the evidences of their fulfillment which show that Christ is soon to come, as were the Jews in reference to his first appearing. They were looking for the temporal and triumphant reign of [the] Messiah in Jerusalem. Professed Christians of our time are expecting the temporal prosperity of the church, in the conversion of the world, and the enjoyment of the temporal millennium.⁴⁶

Although Ellen G. White cautioned early Adventists against the then popular Whitbyan concept of a temporal millennium, in principle the warning is still valid today. For instance, the Jews of Christ's day expected Him to come as King of kings and free them from the poverty of cruelty brought about by the over-taxation and occupation of the Romans. But Christ came as the King of Peace to free them from sin. In our day the scenario is reversed, but is rooted in the same false expectation of what is to take place as His second coming. Today, many Christians expect Christ to come as the King of Peace to free them from the temporal restrictions of poverty, disease, and inequality, but in reality He will come as King of kings, to bring the reign of sin on this earth to an end.

The final deception will be heightened by the appearance of Satan as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). Ellen White describes the scene as follows:

As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. In different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of

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God given by John in the Revelation. The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air, 'Christ has come! Christ has come!'⁴⁷

Disguised as Christ, Satan will promise a new order of things, a reconstructed society in which there will be no more injustice, poverty, disease, and death. If as the false "Christ" he were to promise only the riches of God's grace and Christ's sustaining power for our everyday lives, would that cause the shout of triumph that Christ has come? Is it not the promise of a new order of things falsely associated with Christ's second coming that will bring about this shout of joy? The personation of Christ by Satan will be an overmastering delusion based on a false expectation created by a misinterpretation of the plain reading of Scripture. Only those who are diligent students of the Word of God and have received the truth for this time will be able to see the difference and be shielded by the power of God during this time of deception.⁴⁸

Do we still need to ask the question, Why is it important for us to believe, not only in the certainty of the second coming of Christ, but to be knowledgeable about the events connected with His coming? The answer is surely obvious. What our Adventist pioneers hammered out by diligent Bible study was confirmed by the Holy Spirit through the prophetic office. And it yet remains to be seen who really believes the Word of God and the testimony of His Spirit. Those who do, can rightfully claim God's promise of protection. They will say, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust. Surely He shall deliver you. . . . A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked" (Ps 91:2-8).

The Christian's Hope

Not only is it important for Christians to believe in the return of Christ because it is biblical, but also more importantly, because it brings hope and buoyancy into our present lives. "For when God made a promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself . . . [and] confirmed it by an oath. That by two, immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie,

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we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast” (Heb 6:13, 18-19).

The Christian’s salvation is rooted in Jesus Christ: in who He is, in what He did, and in what He said. But if He only came to live a sinless life and to die for us, and then rose from the dead just to return to His heavenly Father and nothing more, what ultimate benefit would derive from such a terrible excursion from heaven to earth for either God or man? It would demonstrate God’s love for His creation to the universe, and it would provide forgiveness and acceptance. But when life on earth was over, whether it was a few short years because of sickness, war, or accident, or whether “three-score and ten,” the body parts would finally wear out, and that would be the end of our existence. There would be no assured schedule for the resurrection nor an earth made new. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable” (1 Cor 15:19). “If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. . . . [and] your faith is futile, you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. . . . But now Christ is risen from the dead, . . . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor 15:13, 17-22).

This is our hope! The promise of Christ’s second coming assures the implementation of His promise of a future life for those He loves! “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:13-18).

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Endnotes

Note: All scripture citations are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

1 Norskov V. Olsen, Editor, *The Advent Hope In Scripture and History* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), p. 15. Neils-Erik Andreasen in Chapter 1 entitled, "The Advent Hope in the Old Testament," says, "This hope has been a firm conviction and constant companion of many Christians since New Testament times. But also God's people in Old Testament times shared the advent hope, and we find it expressed in the pages of the Bible from Genesis to Malachi. The Old Testament advent hope was based upon the promises of a coming Redeemer—the same promises that the early Christians applied to Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament. But whereas the New Testament hope focuses exclusively upon the return of Christ, the Old Testament hope has two foci—the nearer first advent and the more distant second advent. Frequently, both foci come to expression in a single picture." Ibid.

2 *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 7:708.

3 Olsen, p. 61.

4 The Interpreter's Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), 11:311. "This instruction concerning the coming of the day of the Lord is set out in part as something not yet understood by the Thessalonians and in part as something well known by them. The conception that the day of the Lord was not only to be expected, but to be expected soon, was a part of the gospel from the beginning. Paul and his fellow writers share that general view. Comparison of the two letters to the Thessalonians with the earliest materials in the book of Acts reveals both a common tradition and in general a common understanding of that tradition." Ibid. (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 11:234. "Hence they [the Thessalonians] have every reason to persevere because they anticipate a deliverer who at any moment may summon them to meet him in the air." Ibid. (See also, Guthrie, Donald, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), p. 570. "A change of approach is alleged in the second Epistle as compared with the first in respect of the *parousia*. Here it is less imminent, for certain events must take place first." Ibid.

5 Ellen G. White, *Sketches from the Life of Paul* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1883), pp. 116-117.

6 W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), p. 315.

7 White, p. 110.

8 Olsen, p. 78.

9 Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, rev. ed. 1959), p. 75.

10 Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Boston, MA: W. A. Wilde Company, rev. ed. 1956), pp. 32-33. (See also, "Origen," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 991-993.

11 Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1950), 1:315-318.

12 Olsen, p. 87.

13 Ibid., p. 86.

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14 Williston, p. 167. (See also, Froom, *Ibid.*, pp. 479-491; and “Augustine,” in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, pp. 106-108).

15 Olsen, pp. 115-117.

16 Don F. Neufeld and Julia Neuffer, editors, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Student's Source Book* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962), pp. 919-920. (See also, Froom, 2:278).

17 Froom, 2:651.

18 White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1898), p. 633.

19 Olsen, p. 153.

20 R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1979), p. 25. (See also, “Millennium, Views of,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 714-718.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 654.

22 Schwarz, p. 26.

23 Froom, 3:307.

24 Schwarz, pp. 26-27.

25 Froom, 4:416, Footnote #12; also pp. 1146-1147.

26 For a brief history of Higher Criticism of both the Old Testament and the New Testament see *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956), 5:147-189.

27 Appendix, “Methods of Bible Study.” (See also, White, Ellen G., *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 474. “The warnings of the word of God regarding the perils surrounding the Christian church belong to us to-day. As in the days of the apostles men tried by tradition and philosophy to destroy faith in the Scriptures, so to-day, by the pleasing sentiments of ‘higher criticism,’ evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism, the enemy of righteousness is seeking to lead souls into forbidden paths. To many, the Bible is as a lamp without oil, because they have turned their minds into channels of speculative belief that bring misunderstanding and confusion. The work of ‘higher criticism,’ in dissecting, conjecturing, reconstructing, is destroying faith in the Bible as a divine revelation. It is robbing God’s word of power to control, uplift, and inspire human lives.” *Ibid.*

28 Olsen, pp. 48-49. (See also, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, “Eschatology” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 364.

29 Olsen, p. 49. (See also, *EDT*, p. 364).

30 Elwell, pp. 364-365.

31 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 3:1190-1192; 1217-1224. (See also, *SDABSS*, pp. 924-932.)

32 Jack J. Blanco, “Mysticism’s New Challenge to Adventist Christians,” *Adventist Perspectives* (A Journal of Topics in Religion Published by Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Vol. Two, Num. Three, 1988), pp. 27-34.

33 White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), pp. 563-581. (See also: Malachi Martin, *The Keys of This Blood* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), pp. 15-54. As he says, “Willing or not, ready or not, we are all involved in an all-out, no-holds-barred, three way global competition. Most of us are not competitors, however. We are the stakes. For the competition is about who will establish the first one-world system of government that has ever existed in the society of nations. It is about who will

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hold and wield the dual power of authority and control over each of us as individuals and over all of us together as a community; over the entire six billion people expected by the demographers to inhabit the earth by early in the third millennium. The competition is all-out because, now that it has started, there is no way it can be reversed or called off.

No holds are barred because, once the competition has been decided, the world and all that's in it—our way of life as individuals and as citizens of the nations; our families and our jobs; our trade and commerce and money; our educational systems and our religions and our cultures; even the badges of our national identity, which most of us have always taken for granted—all will have been powerfully and radically altered forever. No one can be exempted from its effects. No sector of our lives will remain untouched.” p. 15.

“As to the time factor involved, those of us who are under seventy will see at least the basic structures of the new world government installed. Those of us under forty will surely live under its legislative, executive and judiciary authority and control. Indeed, the three rivals themselves—and many more besides as time goes on—speak about this new world order not as something around a distant corner of time, but as something that is imminent. As a system that will be introduced and installed in our midst by the end of this final decade of the second millennium.” pp. 15-16.

There are two extremes to be avoided in quoting from *The Keys of this Blood*. On the one hand, its contents ought not to be used to create a state of panic. Martin, a former Jesuit, only seems to be expressing his impatience with the heretics and rebels in the Catholic Church, particularly blaming the Jesuit order for its secularism and moral compromise and in that sense betraying the Church. (Anderson, Eric, “More Catholic Than the Pope?” *Adventist Review*, Vol. 170, No. 42, October 21, 1993). On the other hand, while Martin is not an official spokesman for the Catholic Church, neither is he ignorant of expressed sentiments within its ranks that something needs to be done to save the human race from moral collapse, and the institution to bring the world back to moral sanity is the Catholic Church.

34 Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publishers, 1979), 4:385-404.

35 Billy Graham, *World Aflame* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1965), pp. 189-201.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 201.

37 *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Issued by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), p. 31.

38 *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . .* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), pp. 333-346.

39 Hans LaRondelle, “The One Thousand Years of Revelation 20,” *Ministry*, September, 1982), pp. 12-14. In this article LaRondelle how Christians have divided themselves into premillennialists, postmillennialists, and amillennialists. Some Christians even believe in the restoration of the Temple and its sacrifices in Jerusalem as part of the millennial kingdom.

40 Graham, pp. 208-213.

41 Three River Stadium, Pittsburgh, Friday 11, 1994.

42 *Seventh-day Adventist Believe. . .* pp. 363-383. (See also, *SDABC*, 7:877-899; and White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 662-678.

43 Graham, pp. 246-247.

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44 Ibid., pp. 250-251.

45 Ibid., p. 249.

46 White, "The First Advent of Christ" (*Advent Review and Herald of the Sabbath*, Dec. 24, 1872).

47 White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 624.

48 Ibid., p. 625.