

February 1971

"WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?"

The watchman said, The morning cometh, and also the night:
if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come. Isaiah 21:11-12

THE ANATOMY OF APOSTASY

The most concise definition of apostasy is the judgment of Christ upon him who was the first apostate. Jesus stated - "He . . . abode not in the truth."¹ From that first apostasy in heaven to the present hour, all apostasy has been marked by varying degrees from truth. The closer the deviation appeared to the truth, the greater its deceptive power! Inasmuch as "the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils",² we need to understand the workings of apostasy so as to detect the very first drift from the truth. Furthermore, since this very Scripture is used in connection with the warning concerning the omega of apostasy, we need to give earnest and sincere study to the lessons of history in regard to the anatomy of apostasy so that we may be prepared to discern this final deception which will engulf the church.

Observe once again what was written:

Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.³

In the Garden of Eden, the foundation was laid that has since produced every species of falsehood and error. "It was the distrust of God's goodness, disbelief of His word, and the rejection of His authority, that made our first parents" apostates.⁴ But to Eve, the suggestion that she eat of the forbidden tree had merit. The fruit was good for food - it was not poisonous - and being

pleasant to the eye, was very desirable in her judgment.⁵ But what resulted? - a confusion of mind, with benumbed mental and spiritual powers.⁴ Thus man outside of Eden is now totally dependent upon the revealed word of God for discernment in regard to deviation from truth. "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."⁶

The story of the Old Testament is the history of how God sought to organize a people - a nation - who would correctly represent His character and government to the world. The sad record of Israel's apostasy speaks to us in trumpet-like tones. It is a warning to us, and "was recorded by way of admonition to us who live in the last days of the world."⁷ Repeatedly we have been told that Modern Israel - the Seventh-day Adventist church - is "in greater danger of forgetting God and being led into idolatry than were His ancient people."⁸ Observe this thrice repeated warning -

[We] are following the same path as did ancient Israel.⁹
Modern Israel are fast following in their footsteps.¹⁰
We are repeating the history of that people.¹¹

What was the cause of the apostasy in ancient Israel? It is summarized in one experience. When the *elders* of Israel asked Samuel to make them a king to judge them "like all the nations", God stated, "They have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."¹² The first apostasy was merely being repeated - the rejection of God's authority.

Now these elders were not necessarily evil men. They believed that they had the best interest of the nation at heart. But they were men who lacked faith in the word of God, and were not able to discern the purpose that God had for Israel as a nation. The request of the elders of Israel opened the door for the development of an apostasy so deep and so dark that captivity was the only solution. While it is true that some of Israel's kings sought to lead the nation in periodic revival and reformation, others only hastened the day when the wrath of

the Lord was kindled against His people, because there was no remedy.¹³

The advent of Christ into humanity inaugurated a new means whereby God has sought to reveal Himself to man. In His church under the guidance of men filled with the Holy Spirit, a simple God-centered organization was perfected. But not for long was the direct voice of the Spirit to be heard in the councils of the Church.¹⁴ Paul warned the *elders* of the church at Ephesus - and we are so prone to use his words in an evangelistic setting that we fail to catch their import to us - that "of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things."¹⁵ If there is one segment of the anatomy of apostasy that projects itself significantly before the inspection of the dissector, it is the fact that apostasy comes from within, and not from without. It was in heaven that the first apostasy developed. It was in the Garden of Eden that man's deviation from God began. The elders of Israel suggested that Israel become like all the other nations. It was from the leadership of the Christian church that the first perverse things were spoken that formed the basis for the mystery of iniquity.

Another dissection of the anatomy of apostasy reveals that the deception is not readily perceived by those within the organization through which it grows and develops. The early church expected the appearance of the anti-Christ. Prophecies given through Paul and John clearly signaled such an apostate. Many in the church of that period actually were expecting the coming of the anti-Christ at the time he came, but they were unable to recognize his arrival when he assumed authority in the church of God.¹⁶ Furthermore, the success of the apostasy became so great that it was able to clothe itself in the robe of orthodoxy. Such is the lesson from the Papal apostasy. It attempts to trace its origins back to the very apostolic beginnings of the Christian church. Its popes envision their succession from Peter himself. They assert orthodoxy, and catholicity; and assume infallibility. For over one thousand years they controlled

the *visible* organization which purported to be the church of Jesus Christ. Such is the anatomy of apostasy.

We come to the final times of earth's history. We profess to be the true church of the living God. Are we, therefore, exempt from the dangers of apostasy? Can we show that the great omega of apostasy - that which the servant of the Lord warned would come - will not operate true to form, but will be different in our case from all apostasy that has gone before? Where is the evidence that it will not be deceptive, that it will not originate in our own ranks, that it will ^{not} involve the elders of the church, and that it will not take over the visible organizational structure of the church?

Divine Providence has given His people today a warning that tells us - if we have ears to hear - that we will not be exempt, that the anatomy of apostasy has not changed, and will not change. Out of the sorrows of China has come to the leadership of this church documents which make up what has been termed the China Report.¹⁷ We need to ask ourselves some questions. When the apostasy in China was complete, who had control of the schools, the publishing house, and the official office buildings - in other words, the whole operational structure of the church? Was not the official leadership of the government-recognized Seventh-day Adventist church in China still in the hands of the one who had been elected president of the China Division by the General Conference in session?¹⁸ On the other hand, who was with the little band who mimeographed the Spirit of Prophecy for the faithful remnant? Were they in control of the church? No, they were "apostates" in the eyes of the "orthodox" church. Two Seventh-day Adventist churches existed side by side in China. One controlled the physical assets of the church; the other possessed the truth which God had deposited with the church.

At the last Passover, our Lord stated that one of the Twelve would betray Him. Surely not! Somebody did not understand correctly. No one in the inner

circle would stoop so low as to do such a deed! And they began to ask, "Lord is it I?" Should not the leadership of God's church today, also search their hearts in the light of what has been written in regard to the omega apostasy and pray - "Lord is it I?" Good men may not be agents of apostasy, but they can be instruments through which apostates work their work under the inspiration of him who abode not in the truth.

What mean these words? -

When God shall work His strange work on the earth, when holy hands bear the ark no longer, woe will be upon the people. Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! Oh, that our people may, as did Nineveh, repent with all their might and believe with all their heart, that God may turn away His fierce anger from them!¹⁹

-
- ¹John 8:44 ²I Tim. 4:1
³Ellen G. White, Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 2, p. 16
⁴Ellen G. White, Education, p. 25
⁵Gen. 3:6 ⁶Jer. 10:23
⁷I Cor. 10:11 Weymouth
⁸Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I, p. 609
⁹Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 75 ¹⁰Ibid., p. 94 ¹¹Ibid., p. 160
¹²I Sam. 8:4-7 ¹³II Chron 36:16
¹⁴Acts 13:2; 15:28 ¹⁵Acts 20:30
¹⁶Joseph Mede, Mede's Works, p. 647, Source Book, 1940 Edition, p. 31
¹⁷David Lin, An Appraisal of Administrative Policy and Practice in S. D. A. Missions, 17 pp, Dated Dec. 12, 1956 & S. J. Lee, Reminiscences of Post-Liberation Days in China, 1951-1957.
¹⁸Review & Herald, "General Conference Report - No 4", July 16, 1950, p. 1.
¹⁹Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 5, pp. 77-78.

+++++

Elder Wm. H. Grotheer
P. O. Box 237
Florence, Miss., 39073

IV - 2 (Feb-71)