



"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

SCHOOLS OF PROPHETIC INTERPRETATION

Our understanding of prophecy reaches back through the Great Second Advent Movement led by William Miller to the very beginnings of Protestantism. The Reformers were "historicists"; and so was William Miller. "Historicism" is the teaching that the events portrayed in prophecy "have been fulfilling all through history, with some having been fulfilled, others being fulfilled, and still others yet to be fulfilled in the future."¹

Based on this understanding of prophecy, the Reformers with telling effect pointed to the papal system as the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the antichrist. The Jesuits launched a counter attack and through two of its scholars developed two other schools of prophetic interpretation. Alcasar invented what has come to be known as "Preterism" which seeks to show that all prophecy has been fulfilled in the past, thus the antichrist had to be Nero or some other infamous person of history who persecuted the Christians. The Jesuit Ribera invented what is called "Futurism" which points forward to an antichrist to come thus taking the stigma off the pope and the papal system of the Dark Ages. This latter system of interpretation has taken root among certain segments of Protestantism, mainly the Evangelicals. Much of that which is being published today on the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation reflects the Futuristic concepts of Ribera.

As we reach the final scenes of this world's history the line of distinction between the futuristic and the historicist systems will become very fine. Events which have been indicated as taking place in the future will become fulfilled events of the present. The event itself will need to be evaluated in the light of the context of the prophecy, and the whole of the historicist system of prophetic interpretation.

Because the futuristic scheme includes certain concepts relative to the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, we should not seek to use the smear technique to mitigate against a fulfilled prophecy which can be understood in the light of the historicist method. In other words, the city of Jerusalem, the same city that was surrounded by Roman armies, was under Gentile control till 1967. This is a matter of history. The prophecy of Jesus said that the Gentiles would control this city till their time was up. By using the principles of interpretation that have prevailed since the advent of the Reformation, we can say that again prophecy has been fulfilled in an event of history.

In the series of articles on the "Role of Israel in Bible Prophecy" as found in the Review, Professor Frank B. Holbrook of Southern Missionary College indulged the smear technique, and sought to associate the fulfillment of Luke 21:24 with Futurism's timetable of last day events.² Then Elder Don Nuefeld actually brought into play the Preteristic method, by seeking to have the last half of Luke 21:24 as fulfilled in the past at the close of the 1260 day prophecy.³ Thus a two-pronged

attack was launched by the Church against a prophecy the hierarchy does not wish to face up to in its meaning and implication. First the smear by association with a Jesuitical method of interpretation, and then the adoption of the other Jesuit method to remove the force of the prophecy from the present. What church needs Jesuitical infiltration when it can get its learned scholars to use Jesuitical methods and techniques.

If the leadership of the Church will not have any part of the historic method of interpretation of prophecy as it applies to Luke 21:24, and would wish to spiritualize all away, then let them take heed to the *spiritual* comparison between Jerusalem of old and the Church today. It reads:

Jerusalem is a representation of what the church will be if it refuses to receive and walk in the light that God had given. Jerusalem was favored of God as the depository of sacred trusts. But her people perverted the truth, and despised all entreaties and warnings. They would not respect His counsels. The temple courts were perverted with merchandise and robbery. Selfishness and love of mammon, envy and strife, were cherished. Everyone sought for gain from his quarter. Christ turned from them saying, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how can I give thee up? "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." So Christ sorrows and weeps over our churches, over our institutions of learning, that have failed to meet the demand of God.⁴

¹Don F. Neufeld, "Biblical Interpretation in the Advent Movement", A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics, p. 111

²Frank B. Holbrook, "Futurism - Fact on Fantasy", Review, November 18, 1976, p. 10, col. 2

³Don F. Neufeld, "The 'Times of the Gentiles'", Review, November 25, 1976, p. 9

⁴Ellen G. White, Letter 31, 1898 Notebook Leaflets, "Christian Experience", No. 6, p. 2

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PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

Because we do not understand what Papal Infallibility means from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic apologist, we do not perceive its force when such techniques are used within our own church. The dogma may be defined that when the Pope "speaks from the Chair (ex Cathedra), that is, when performing the function of pastor and teacher, . . . he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals. . . possesses that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer wished His church to be equipped."¹

The Church Historian Newman, commenting on what this means, writes:

*It can be interpreted to mean much or little, according to the purpose to be subserved. Its chief aim was to place the pope entirely above councils and to give him the undisputed right to decide all doctrinal questions that arise without the consent of the church assembled representatively in general councils.*²

Cardinal Gibbons in his apology for Rome has gone to great lengths to show what this doctrine is not as it pertains to the Pope. We do well to consider a point or two which he makes. He writes - "Infallibility does not mean that the Pope is impeccable or specially exempt from liability to sin."³ In other words the Popes can make mistakes, both in administration, and in their personal conduct. Neither is a pope above open criticism. Gibbons points out that should a Pope write "a treatise on Canon Law his book would be as much open to criticism as that of any Doctor of the Church."⁴ Rather than making a person infallible within himself, this doctrine provides for a procedure whereby doctrine and morals can be promulgated without subjecting the pronouncements to discussion and question. The devout Catholic as a member of the "team" is expected to play along with the captain when he speaks from "the Chair."

Now let us consider some recent church history from our own viewpoint. Take for example the book - Questions on Doctrine. In the "Introduction" it is clearly stated - "No statement of Seventh-day Adventist belief can be considered official unless it is adopted by the General Conference in quadrennial session, when accredited delegates from the whole world field are present." Yet this book claimed to be "an expansion of doctrinal positions contained in [the] official statement of Fundamental Beliefs. Hence this volume can be viewed as truly representative of the faith and beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."⁵ However, this book which not only expanded but altered basic Adventist doctrine was not approved by the General Conference in quadrennial session but was rather "Prepared by a Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors."⁶ Gibbons tells us that before the Pope speaks on doctrine he may gather "around him his venerable colleagues, the Cardinals of the Church", or he may call "a council of his associate judges of faith, the Bishops of Christendom." "Then, after mature and prayerful deliberation, he pronounces judgment and his sentence is final, irrevocable and infallible."⁷ The finality and infallible attitude with which the book - Questions on Doctrine - was pressed upon the ministry of the church was most marked in the persecution - and this is the proper word - of Elder M. L. Andreasen. His big crime was that he did not think of himself as a player on the "team" but considered his honor, responsibility, and integrity above misplaced loyalty.

Consider a second example - the book, Movement of Destiny. For the most part this book merely affirmed the basic deviations from the historic faith of the Church which had been set forth in the book, Questions on Doctrine. This book like its predecessor was not discussed nor approved by any General Session of the Church in regard to what it taught. But it did bear the imprimatur of the self styled "first minister" of the Church,⁸ and the chairman of "the Secretariat" formed to guide in its preparation.

Now at the beginning of 1977, we are told through the editorial pages of the Review that one of the norms by which we can test a genuine Seventh-day Adventist is by his loyalty, "in spirit and in conduct, to the church and its leaders, as they speak and act [ex cathedra] for Christ." But we will go even further than the Catholic Church will go. If the leaders err, "even under such circumstances" the genuine Seventh-day Adventist "will continue to work in a positive way with the team and cooperate with its leaders"⁹ and not subject their leaders to open "criticism" as the Catholics can do the Pope!

The whole sorry mess that has marked the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

since its first noticeable doctrinal deviation in 1949,¹⁰ and its refusal to heed the warnings that have been coming to it since then, could have been avoided by accepting the first commandment just as it was spoken - "Thou shalt have no other 11 gods before Me" - understanding simply that - "God and heaven alone are infallible." Then as a second step of a real spiritual policy would have been to understand what Jesus meant when He said - "All ye are brethren."¹² And finally: -

*Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister.*¹³

¹Albert Henry Newman, A Manual of Church History, Vol. 2, p. 512

²Ibid., pp. 512-513

³James Cardinal Gibbons, The Faith of Our Fathers, 88th Edition, p. 121

⁴Ibid., p. 123

⁵Questions on Doctrine, p. 9

⁶Ibid., Cover page

⁷Gibbons, op. cit., p. 125

⁸Spectrum, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 49

⁹R. F. Cottrell, "In Diversity, Unity", Review, January 6, 1977, p. 13, col. 2

¹⁰L. E. Froom, Movement of Destiny, pp. 427-428. See also, An Interpretive History of the Doctrine of the Incarnation as Taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, pp. 64-66

¹¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies to Ministers, p. 30

¹²Matthew 23:b

¹³Matthew 20:25-26

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FROM AUSTRALIA

A news item appearing in The Western Australian, December 13, 1976 reported that at the "two-yearly" session of the Conference, the president, Elder H. G. Moe told the assembled delegates that "belonging to a trade union is not a sin in the Seventh-day Adventist church." The president indicated that he had no quarrel with people who joined unions voluntarily, but that the Church "does object to compulsory membership in any organization."

When questioned about his stand by telephone, the president told the inquirer that he had been misrepresented by the press. However, a letter received a few days later by this person from the Director of the Communication Department, W. G. Dowling read as follows:

In response to your request, I am happy to send you the enclosed copy of a statement made by Pastor Moe at our recent session with regard to unionism. This statement has come to us through our Communications Department from the General Conference. You will probably recognize that it was quoted in full in the Western Australian newspaper, however, I think we can say it was a correct report of the statement.

This is an interesting incident in the light of what the servant of the Lord wrote in 1902. She said:

These unions are one of the signs of the last days. Men are binding up in bundles ready to be burned. They may be church members, but while they belong to these unions they cannot possibly keep the commandments of God; for to belong to these unions means to disregard the entire decalogue. (Letter 26, 1903)

Some questions come to mind. How can a church organization which countenances membership in the unions help prepare a people to keep the commandments of God, when to belong to these unions means disregarding the entire Ten Commandments? Can there be any doubt as to the verdict which has been rendered in the heavenly sanctuary relative to the Church? See Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, p. 247

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Inasmuch as there is agitation in two areas of thought at the present time - the meaning and significance of the Times of the Gentiles as noted in Luke 21:24, and the matter of loyalty to human leadership, we do offer two publications available at a special price, March, April, and May.

Individuality in Religion - A. T. Jones (\$3.50)

The Times of the Gentiles Fulfilled (Monograph - \$1.50)

Both for \$3.50. Write to Adventist Laymen's Foundation, P. O. Box 178, Lamar, Ark. 72846.

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Next Month - In the December, 1976 thought paper we began what we had hoped would have been a series of studies on Righteousness by Faith. You will recall that the December issue was entitled - "Justification by Faith." We had planned to follow with the subject - "Sanctification - Tailor Made." This we plan to do in the April issue. Since sanctification is "imparted righteousness" in contrast to "imputed righteousness", we would like to suggest several questions for you to be thinking about prior to your receiving the thought paper:

- 1) To what is this righteousness imparted? Would you say the flesh?
- 2) Since it fits us for heaven, what do we take to heaven?
- 3) What is your "real" self, and how is it expressed?

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Monthly Meeting - The first Sabbath of each month, we have an all-day meeting on the campus. Sabbath School at 9:30 a. m., followed by the presentation of the Word at 11 a. m. In the afternoon, we plan either or both a discussion period and a nature hike. We are limiting "the dinner on the grounds" to sandwiches and fruit so as keep the minds alert for the afternoon period. While our facilities are incomplete, we welcome you to share with us this day of worship and fellowship if you are travelling through the area. To those who might be camping during their travel, the U. S. Forestry Service has a fine camping site just a few miles North of the campus. For information as how to find us, please write.