



*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

*"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"* Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)

"CAN THE CHURCH FAIL?"

This question was asked and an answer was attempted by Dr. Robert W. Olson in a recent Adventist Review (Oct. 3, 1991, pp. 11-13). The whole thrust of the article was to assure the readers of the church paper that the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a corporate, visible structure would not fail. That there be no misunderstanding that he was talking about a corporate, visible Church, Olson plainly stated in his first footnote - "It therefore must be a visible organization" - referring to the "remnant" of Revelation 12:17; and that "visible organization" will go "safely into the heavenly port" was his final conclusion.

The body of this article consisted of "an analysis of Ellen White's statements about the church and its leaders." Before noting Olson's distortions and misuse of the Writings - and he should have known better having served as secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate - let us take a good look at the message found in the Scriptures.

Nowhere in the Bible is it taught that once saved, always saved. Neither is it taught, once called, always called. If ever a people were called of God, the children of Israel were. For centuries, God bore long with the rebellion and apostasy of His chosen people. Finally after sending prophets and wise men, He sent His only begotten Son. This Son came unto His "own things" - so close was the attachment perceived - but His "own people" (John 1:11, Greek) by their deliberate decision and choice received Him not. To that people, Jesus had to finally say - "Your house is left unto you desolate." (Matt. 23:38) The temple was the centerpiece of the "visible organization" of the Jewish Church. The Lord of glory could not save the temple, nor turn the Jewish Church around.

In the prophetic picture of Laodicea, Jesus is ever pictured as standing outside the door,

knocking. He never gains entrance. Only to the individual (tis, Greek: "anyone") who opens the door does Jesus come in to "sup with him." (Rev. 3:20) Corporate Laodicea never opens the door.

Ellen G. White in a letter to Elders Butler and Haskell, dated December 8, 1886, wrote very pointedly concerning the relationship between the Jewish Church of Christ's day, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The letter read:

I think of His great sorrow as He wept over Jerusalem, exclaiming, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" God forbid that these words shall apply to those who have had great light and blessings. In the rejecting of Jerusalem, it was because great privileges were abused which brought the denunciation upon all who lightly regarded the great opportunities and precious light that were entrusted to their keeping. Privileges do not commend us to God, but they commend God to us. No people are saved because they have great light and special advantages, for these high and heavenly favors only increase their responsibility.

The more and increased light God has given make the receiver more responsible. It does not place the receiver in any safer position unless the privileges are wisely improved, prized and used to advance God's glory. Christ said, "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes."

When Jerusalem was divorced from God, it was

because of her sins. She fell from an exalted height that Tyre and Sidon had never reached. And when an angel falls he becomes a fiend. The depths of our ruin is measured by the exalted light to which God has raised us in His great goodness and unspeakable mercy. Oh, what privileges are granted to us as a people! And if God spared not His people that He loved because they refused to walk in the light, how can He spare the people whom He has blessed with the light of heaven in having opened to them the most exalted truth ever entrusted to mortal man to give to the world? (Letter 55, 1886)

The first thing one needs to note concerning the above quotation from this Letter 55, 1886, is that the essential parts of the letter are **supposedly** reproduced in Selected Messages, bk ii, pp. 376-383. But the above, which we have quoted is the section of the letter omitted after the first deletion marks on page 377. Here is a prime example of the manipulated compilations produced by the Trustees of the Ellen G. White Estate since the death of Ellen White.

Secondly, it is from this letter that the oft-used quotation is to be found - "The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out - the chaff separated from the precious wheat." But the context in which this statement is made in the letter is ignored. Olson also ignores it in his article. It is talking about the Church when "Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme." It is stated in the setting when "the decree of national councils" and "the national laws" shall seek to enforce the observance of the false Sabbath. (*ibid.*, p. 380) That time is not now. When it does come, we will then be able better "to measure the strength of Israel." It will come as a shock to many to see how few really "concerned" Adventists there are, and how the "many voices" are merely the voices of individuals on "ego-trips," let alone the rank and file of the unconcerned Laodiceans.

Olson in his article alludes to a comment of Ellen G. White written soon after the 1888 debacle which expressed her hope "that there would not be the necessity for another coming out." Then he comments - "This is the only known statement from the pen of Ellen White indicating she might have lost confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church." Is he totally unaware of the above quoted omission from Letter 55, 1886? Re-read for yourself this section of the letter. What is the last sentence

saying concerning the Church? Note further in the first sentence of this last paragraph - "When Jerusalem was divorced from God, it was because of her sins." Observe another reference to "the Jewish people ... divorced from God." It reads:

When Christ saw in the Jewish people a nation divorced from God, He saw also a professed Christian church united to the world and the Papacy. And as He stood upon Mount Olivet, weeping over Jerusalem till the sun sank behind the western hills, so He is watching over and pleading with sinners in these last moments of time. Soon He will say to the angels who are holding the four winds, "Let the plagues loose; let darkness, destruction, and death come upon the transgressors of My law." Will He be obliged to say to those who have had great light and great knowledge, as He said to the Jews, "O that thou hadst known, even thou in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace. But now they are hid from thine eyes"? (The Kress Collection, p. 153)

We need to ask ourselves, when "the plagues" are loosed, where will they fall first? The answer is plainly stated - "the church - the Lord's sanctuary - was the first to feel the stroke of the wrath of God." And in this pouring out of God's wrath - "Men, maidens, and little children all perish together." (5T:211) How does this answer the question - "Can the Church Fail?"

When in 1889, Ellen White hoped that there would not be a necessity for another coming out, she did not say there would not be. In fact, Jesus Christ Himself indicated there would be! In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, there are two "coming outs": 1) The assembling of the "ten virgins" in a unit. They (all ten) "went forth (exēlthon)¹ to meet the bridegroom." (Matt. 25:1) 2) The cry at midnight - "Behold the bridegroom cometh; go ye out (exerchesthe) to meet him." (25:6) In this second "coming out," only five go out to meet the Bridegroom and go with Him "to the marriage." (25:10)

According to Olson, in his misapplication of the Writings, the wise virgins are "the chaff", and the foolish virgins, "the wheat," for according to him, those who separate are "chaff." This merely illustrates to what extent "blind zeal" will color the thinking of a Laodicean bent on taking the church which God has spued out through to the Kingdom. (Rev. 3:16) This blindness is not merely limited to one man, or the present corporate leadership of the Church,

but some of the major voices on the periphery of Adventism give evidence that they, too, are afflicted with this same blindness.

Olson emphasizes heavily the one statement, he uses out of context from Letter 55, 1886, about the "chaff" being separate from the "wheat" and indicates that the "wheat" remains in the "visible organization." He should know, having served as secretary of the White Estate, that there are other statements where the reverse is stated under the same figure of speech, as well as another figure. One reads - one of the earliest testimonies -

I then saw the third angel. Said my accompanying angel, "Fearful is his work. Awful is his mission. He is the angel that is to select the wheat from the tares, and seal, or bind, the wheat for the heavenly garner. These things should engross the whole mind, the whole attention." (Early Writings, p. 118)

Here it clearly states - "the wheat from the tares" and not "the tares from the wheat." It also indicates this to be the "work" of the "third angel." By using an interpretive key which Ellen G. White indicated should be applied in studying her writings, namely, "the testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages, as scripture is explained by scripture" (Selected Messages, bk i, p. 42), we discover more fully the work of the third angel. This indicates that -

The first, second, and third angels' messages are to be repeated. The call is to be given to [not, "by"] the church [singular]:... "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities." (R&H, October 31, 1899)

Interestingly, this statement is found in an article on "The Parable of the Ten Virgins," and harmonizes with the two "coming outs" as indicated by the Greek in Matthew 25. (See p. 2, col. 2)¹

Another testimony using a different figure of speech in describing the separation, but in the same contextual setting as the statement in Letter 55, 1886, reads:

The time is not far distant when the test will come to every soul. The mark of the beast will be urged upon us... In this time, the gold will be separated from the dross in the church. (5T:81)

While some may wish to quibble over the "time"

indicated in this reference, a careful reading of the rest of the testimony is very apropos to the point we are considering. One challenge reads:

God's watchmen will not cry, "Peace, peace," when God has not spoken peace. The voice of the faithful watchman will be heard: "Go ye out from hence, touch not the unclean. Go ye out of the midst of her. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord." (ibid., p.83)

Olson's article, and the description of the message which God indicates His "watchmen" will be sounding just do not coincide.

There is another amazing paragraph in the Adventist Review article by Olson. It reads:

Already, before leaving Battle Creek for Australia, she [Ellen White] had written: "That these men should stand in a sacred place, to be the voice of God to the people, as we once believed the General Conference to be - that is past." (p. 12)

This statement was not written by Ellen White, but spoken by her when she addressed the 1901 General Conference session. Further, she had just returned from Australia a few months before. These historical errors are too obvious for one, who has served as Secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, to make. [The editors of the Adventist Review didn't even catch it.] We might ask, "Does this indicate the confusion of mind that God permits one to have who seeks to mitigate truth and support falsehood through manipulation of the Writings?" Is this not a warning flag that God permitted to be placed in the article so that the sincere and knowledgeable could be alerted that there was danger ahead?

Should we not pray the words of the hymn, but slightly modified -

"Gracious Father guard Thy children
From the foe's deceptive power;
Save, O save them, Lord from falling
In this dark and trying hour.

¹The two Greek verbs used come from exerchomai (εξερχομαι) compounded from εκ a preposition meaning, "out of," and ερχομαι, "I come" or "I go." The first verb, εξηλθον, is a 2nd aorist, or past tense, while the second verb, εξερχεσθε, is in the present tense, "be going out" to meet the Bridegroom.

"My people are cut off for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6, Margin, Heb.)

LET'S TALK IT OVER

The question - "Can the Church Fail?" - answered in the light of Scripture, is a resounding - "No!" Why? It has been built "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone." (Eph. 2:20) But when we seek to define the Church at any one period in human history in the terms of "a visible organization" charged with a God-given responsibility, the answer to the question changes. It can fail.

Three questions only need to be asked and answered to put the present spiritually deteriorated condition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church into proper focus, so that any sincere seeker of truth can find the answer to the present status of the Church before God. 1) Was the Seventh-day Adventist Church given a sacred trust, a God-given responsibility? 2) Will the Church have to give an accounting before God as to its stewardship of that trust? 3) If, so, what is the judgment to be rendered?

The answer to the first question is simple, and has been clearly stated by the messenger whom God sent to the Church. The answer reads:

In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light-bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the word of God...

The most solemn truths ever entrusted to mortals have been given us to proclaim to the world. The proclamation of these truths is to be our work. The world is to be warned, and God's people are to be true to the trust committed to them. (9T:19)

The second question has also been plainly answered by the same messenger. In two similar statements, one written prior to 1888 and the other just after the Oakland meeting of the 1903 General Conference session, Ellen White declared:

The church will be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. (5T:83; 1882)

In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. (8T:247; 1903)

The criteria which will be used by God in this judgment to determine the fate of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is likewise spelled out. It reads:

If her moral character and spiritual state do not correspond with the benefits and blessings God has conferred upon her, she will be found wanting. (5T:83-84)

She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence, "Found wanting." By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged. (8T:247)

Based on this criteria, the Church will either pass the scrutiny of the judgment, or will be declared, "wanting," and thus a failure to experience in turn the same fate the Jewish church experienced.

Further it should be perfectly clear that the judgment of the living cannot commence until the fate of the Church as a corporate body is decided. On the typical Day of Atonement, the cleansing of the first apartment, wherein was recorded the confession of corporate guilt, took place prior to the cleansing of the altar whereon was marked the confessions of the individuals.

Now some questions must be honestly confronted. When has there been a confession made by the Church of its failure to preserve and maintain its God-given trust? Have we confessed the compromises made with the Evangelicals? Have we mourned over our fraternization with "Babylon"? In 1903, after the God-inspired 1901 Constitution was jettisoned, Ellen White wrote:

I saw our Instructor pointing to the garments of so-called righteousness. Stripping them off, He laid bare the defilement beneath. Then He said to me: "Can you not see how they have pretentiously covered up their defilement and rottenness of character? 'How is the faithful city become an harlot?'" (8T:250)

And by "the faithful city," the divine Instructor meant the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a "visible organization." Can one find in any official record of the Church from 1903 to the present hour where the Church has ever repented of her harlotry, and brought forth fruits answerable to repentance of what she did in 1903, and since? It means more than merely passing resolutions. It means concrete changes resultant from a contrite and sincerely repentant corporate heart.

The third question involves more than a mere appraisal of the judgment to be rendered; it involves also the question - "Has the judgment already been rendered? In reality, the whole thrust of the article in the Adventist Review was to smother any consideration of this

factor, for if the visible and organized Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot fail, this question becomes mute. The fact however, remains that God has permitted to be fulfilled a prophecy of Jesus which clearly tells when corporate judgment has been completed. We either take heed to the sure word of prophecy, or as the Jewish church/nation did when its probation closed, continue to defy earth and heaven to dispossess us of our supposed unalterable standing before God. (See COL, p. 294)

Let us face the fact, an harlot, who continues to play the harlot, cannot be the bride of Christ.

‡

A Q U I Z

1. The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC) recognizes those church agencies which lift up Christ as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world and holds in high esteem fellow Christians in other communions who are engaged in winning souls for Christ.

T or F

2. The SDAC is regularly represented through observers and advisors at World Council of Churches (WCC) and other church meetings.

T or F

3. For many years a SDA has been a member of the WCC Faith and Order Commission in a personal capacity.

T or F

4. The SDAC has participated in dialogues with the WCC and various religious bodies, and since 1968 has been represented at the conference of Christian World Communions.

T or F

5. More recently, the SDAC has been represented at the annual conference of U.S. church leaders.

T or F

6. Christian World Communions and various churches have responded to the SDA invitation and sent observers to the general conference sessions.

T or F

7. The SDAC holds that no selfish or traditionaltie should hold any church member to one's communion except the belief that in this way he or she finds true connection with Christ.

T or F

A BEREAN ATTITUDE

A reader wrote - "Now you've gone and done it! I've read so many of your statements about how Wieland and Short dropped the 'ball' after the 60's that I am going to have to have the document, A Warning and Its Reception, so I can read for my self what all the fuss is about. I am glad you have so many of the documents available. We need to have access to these things so we can make intelligent decisions." If you had questions after reading the articles, "Two New Books," you, too, can check the facts by obtaining the document, A Warning and Its Reception. See the enclosed Order Form for cost and postage.

DICTIONARY OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT is a recent World Council of Churches publication. In it are two articles on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, one on the church itself, and the other on the General Conference (pp. 918-919). Both were written by Bert B. Beach. The quiz in the first column are sentences taken from the first article on the church. Thus each statement would be "True" according to this newly published dictionary and B. B. Beach.

Quiz Statement #1 is taken directly from the General Conference Working Policy, 1970, p. 185. This was first voted by the General Conference Executive Committee in 1926. The entire statement of seven guidelines may be found on pp. 73-74 of So Much in Common. See the enclosed Order Form for details on this publication.

"Watchman, What of the Night?" is published monthly by the Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Mississippi, Inc., P. O. Box 69, Ozona, AR 72854-0069, USA.

In Canada, write - The Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Canada, P. O. Box 117, Thorne, ON POH 2J0.

Editor Elder Wm. H. Grotheer

Any portion of this Thought Paper may be reproduced without further permission by adding the credit line - "Reprinted from WWN, Ozona, Arkansas, USA."

First copy free upon request; duplicate copies --- 50¢.
