



*"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)

THE "TITHE" INSERT BY COON

In the November 7, 1991, issue of the Adventist Review, there was inserted a pamphlet - Tithe - written by Dr. Roger W. Coon of the Ellen G. White Estate. The sub-title was "Ellen G. White's counsel and practice." In the first issue of WWN for 1992, we noted this pamphlet, and commented briefly on one of the key points of Coon's argument. However, a more thorough analysis of his position on this point needs to be presented.

The pamphlet not only involved the question of tithe, but the doctrine of the incarnation was introduced as an illustration of how some have measured apostasy. Is such a judgment based on this doctrine, justifiable? Then the major premise taken in regard to the Church and apostasy - though a fine line - should provoke careful study.

That a tithe of our increase should be paid to the Lord is beyond question. The Scripture is too plain on this point to be rejected. Only the grasping, selfish heart of man withholds from God that which is His due. But the question arises, where does one place his tithe? Most of the "many voices" on the periphery of Adventism are openly soliciting the tithe. One such voice even brags about the "deep pockets" he gets his hand into. The facts are that these "voices" have been so successful that the Church's income has been materially reduced. They have declared war. The travail within the Church has now degenerated into the pot calling the kettle black.

To keep this warfare in proper balance, it must be kept in mind that inspired counsel given through the Lord's messenger indicated that these "many voices" would come at the time they arose, but that they would be deceptive voices used by the enemy to confuse minds. (R&H, Dec. 13, 1892) The messages coming through these "voices" are a mixture of truth and error

garbed for the most part in the cloak of the Writings of Ellen G. White.

This whole issue has arisen because it is perceived that the Church is in a Laodicean, backsliding condition. There are "voices" sincerely declaring that this situation is due to the fact that the Church has and is still rejecting the 1888 Message of Righteousness by Faith. From the "many voices," other charges are being leveled at the Church's leadership. However, another question must be first addressed and answered before any final decision can be made in regard to the tithe.

Dr. Coon addresses this question in Part 1 of his pamphlet. He asks, "Should I pay my tithe to a church if I believe it is in apostasy?" (p. 3) The answer to this question is obviously, "No." When Luther and the other Reformers concluded that the Roman Catholic Church was in apostasy, Protestantism was born. When the Apostles of Christ spearheaded by Paul, perceived that the Jewish Church was in apostasy, the Christian Community, as a distinct body, came into existence. It ceased to be a sect of Judaism. But in answer to his question, Coon draws a fine line, but a very significant line, and so notes it. He wrote:

There is a fine line - but a significant distinction - between "a church in apostasy" and "apostasy in the church."

This distinction must be addressed in the present crisis in Adventism. There can be no "gray" areas over this question. Either the Church is "in apostasy" or there is only "apostasy in" the Church. One must determine on which side of the word, "apostasy," he places the word, "in." This brings every "independent ministry" to its "moment of truth." For example, every issue of the 1888 Message Newsletter carries this commitment -

We are committed to the support of our beloved Seventh-day Adventist Church. Specifically, all tithe is to be paid to the organized church. We support financially the local church, the Sabbath school, and other denominational programs."

This is stating categorically that this "voice" perceives the continued rejection of the 1888 Message to be merely "apostasy in" the Church. Yet these men arrange for independent meetings, even conducting services at the same time on the same campus as the regular services of the Church. They profess allegiance to the hierarchy. If one has any doubt, all one needs to do is read the letters written by both Wieland and Short to the General Conference as found in A Warning and Its Reception. How are they now going to relate to the call set forth in the Perth Declaration, and be consistent with what they wrote previously in regard to the authority of the General Conference?

Other "voices" on the periphery of Adventism - Hope International and Hartland Institute - make as their main bill of fare at their "minicampmeetings," the apostasy in the Church. These meetings are conducted apart from and without the approval of the leadership of the Church. They have literally set up an organization in opposition to the Church, yet seek to remain under the umbrella of the Church. The fact remains, you are either in it, or you are not. Either the Church is "in" apostasy, or there is only apostasy "in" the church. This is decision time for every Seventh-day Adventist. This is not the time for deception and hypocrisy. The confusion being created by the "many voices" on the periphery of Adventism is totally without justification. Their bottom line, as the Church is charging, is the dollar sign. Here the battle line is being drawn. The pamphlet by Coon is but the first salvo. Articles are appearing in each of the official organs of the Union Conferences which pointedly attack the "independent ministries."

How does Dr. Coon answer the question he raised, and what illustration does he use? Let us follow his argument with comments on what he wrote. He stated:

No person acquainted with the Seventh-day Adventist Church would deny that throughout our history some apostasy has existed in our ranks -- and does even today.

This is a true statement. So also was the experience in the history of the Jewish Church/Nation. But there came a time, when that Church stepped over the unseen line, and

the apostasy in the Jewish Church became instead, the Jewish Church in apostasy.

Coon continued:

What is apostasy? Most religious dictionaries define it as a departure from pure doctrine and practice. But **who** defines that doctrine or practice? (emphasis his)

Again forthright and accurate. Here Coon introduces **the** crucial question, **who** defines it? In the case of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, since 1946, doctrine is defined by the General Conference in session. It is thus suppose to represent the highest authority of God on earth. For the individual member of the Church, his doctrine is now defined in the 27 Fundamental Statements of Belief as voted by the 1980 General Conference in session at Dallas, Texas. But again we ask the question, "What (not who) defines doctrine and practice? The answer is that the Bible, the Word of God, is the basic norm. We have been counseled that ---

God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, **and the Bible only**, as the standard of all doctrine, and the basis of all reforms." (Great Controversy, p. 595)

The question has now become very simple. Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church still that people? If not, then the church is **in** apostasy, not merely apostasy **in** the Church.

Dr. Coon, himself, has chosen the area of doctrine by which the determination is to be made. He declared:

Some critics today contend that "the church is in apostasy" because it does not advocate their particular view of the human nature of Christ, with its resulting brand of theology."

Coon chose with the approval of the White Estate plus the endorsement of the Church's leadership by its insertion in the Adventist Review to make this the key issue to determine whether the church is "in apostasy" or whether there is only "apostasy in the church." This simplification of the issue is to be commended. Now note carefully what he wrote - again a correct analysis of the current concepts in the Church:

There are at least three views on the nature of Christ current in Adventist circles: (1) that at the incarnation Christ took the nature of Adam **before** Adam's fall; (2) that He took the nature of Adam **after** the fall; and (3) that He took a nature that in

certain respects was like Adam's before the fall, but in other respects was like Adam's after the fall."

Then Coon makes two questionable claims: (1) that "both Scripture and Mrs. White's writings" contain "certain ambiguities" on the human nature of Jesus, and (2) "the church has never officially endorsed any of these three views," and concludes that "since the church has never defined this particular theological question, how can it be said that anyone in the church (much less the church itself) is in apostasy due to the positions taken on the human nature of Christ?" (pp. 3-4)

The whole question resolves itself around two facts which can be determined: (1) Has the Church ever taken an official stand on the question of the Incarnation? (2) Are the Scriptures and the Writings ambiguous on this point?

It is true now as Coon wrote - "Doctrinal positions can be established only by the world church in General Conference session." But this has only been since 1946 when such action giving the General Conference that prerogative was taken. What doctrinal position on the Incarnation had the Church taken prior to 1946, and how is its authority to be determined? Also what position did the Church take in 1946?

In 1872, there was published on the "Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, Battle Creek, Mich.," a tract captioned - "A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist." This first statement of beliefs declared that the Church held that the "Lord Jesus Christ ... took on Him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race."

The first issue of the Signs of the Times, June 4, 1874, as an editorial reproduced this same statement of beliefs. (See The Living Witness, p. 2) The November 24, 1874, issue of the Review & Herald printed these same statements in a series of articles on "The Seventh-day Adventists." It is true that no official authority was claimed for these statements because the preamble to the statements read - "we wish to have it distinctly understood that we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline, aside from the Bible." However, it is equally true, the same preamble declared that the statements were "what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them." How much more "official" can a position be? There were not three positions in the beginning!

At the twenty-first session of the General Conference in 1882, the first Yearbook was authorized. An announcement of its issuance stated that it contained, "the statistics of our denomination, the proceedings of our General Conference, T. and M. Society, and other associations, our General and State Conference constitutions..." (SDA Encyclopedia, rev. ed., p. 1336) Such data made the Yearbook an authoritative voice of the Church's position in matters that pertained to the whole body. In 1889, the Yearbook contained a section devoted to "Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists." The statement was prefaced with this paragraph:

Seventh-day Adventists have no creed but the Bible; but they hold certain **well-defined points of faith**, for which they feel prepared to give a reason "to every man that asketh" them. The following propositions may be taken as a summary of the principle features of their religious faith, upon which there is, so far as is known, **entire unanimity throughout the body**. (p. 147, Emphasis supplied)

The "well-defined point of faith" on the Incarnation read the same as the first statement made in the 1872 Tract. There was no change of position, neither was room left for three different positions. The last time this statement appeared in a Yearbook was in 1914. To that date, one year prior to the death of Ellen G. White, the position of the church on the Incarnation remained constant.

In the 1931 Yearbook, a new statement of beliefs appeared. In 1930, the General Conference Minutes for December 29, record an action that the chair, Elder C. H. Watson, then president, appoint a committee to prepare a new statement of beliefs for the Yearbook. This new statement read in regard to the Incarnation - "While retaining His divine nature, He [Christ] took upon Himself the nature of the human family." This 1931 Statement was endorsed by the 1946 General Conference, and continued to be the official statement of beliefs until 1980.

In 1980, a new statement of beliefs was voted at Dallas, Texas, which so modified the position on the Incarnation that three different views may be taken, and one's orthodoxy not be questioned. But how did Coon define, apostasy? - "As a departure from pure doctrine." There has been a departure in regard to the Church's original teaching on the Incarnation. By the very doctrine which Coon chose to illustrate his

point, the conclusion is inescapable, the Church is in apostasy.

QUESTION #2

Are the Scriptures and the Writings ambiguous on the nature Christ assumed in the Incarnation?

Dr. Coon indicated "a large number of Adventist ministers, Bible teachers, and church members, of equal learning and commitment, today take" the position of the Anglican Melvill. (See SDA Believe...., p. 47, Footnote, p. 57) "Why," Coon asked. Here is his answer - "Because of certain acknowledged ambiguities in both Scripture and Mrs. White's writings on the human nature of Jesus." (p. 3) In both categories, this is simply not true.

Consider first the Scriptures: The Bible presents Jesus Christ in two aspects: as having a pre-existence, and as having received a human body formed in the womb of the virgin Mary.

As to the pre-existence of Jesus, there can be no question. He, the Word who became flesh, "was in the beginning with God." (John 1:2) He proclaimed Himself to be the "I AM" - the Self-existent One, the Ever-existent One, the Eternal. (John 8:58)

This pre-Existent Identity, "existing in the form of God...emptied Himself" of that form, and took in its place "the slave-form of man." (Phil. 2:6-7, RV, Gr.) As the children of man "are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same." "In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren." (Heb. 2:14, 17) Paul declares emphatically that "the gospel of God" involves the revelation of "His Son Jesus Christ our Lord ... made of the seed of David according to the flesh." (Rom. 1:1, 3) The slave-form that the pre-Existent Identity took at Bethlehem possessed all the depravity and potential to sin that every child of Adam receives at birth. In Him, in His re-Existent Identity, there was no sin, nor propensity to sin, for from eternity He had "loved righteousness and hated iniquity." (Heb. 1:9) That did not change when "He emptied Himself" and took the slave-form of man with all of its inclinations to sin. The question was simply, could He live in the slave-form of man, and maintain the integrity of His divine character? He did! And upon the completion of that demonstration, "a loud voice" was heard saying "in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ." (Rev. 12:10) There is no ambiguity here.

The Writings are just as clear. In 1900, Ellen G. White wrote:

Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon Himself fallen, suffering humanity, degraded and defiled by sin. He took our sorrows, bearing our grief and shame. He endured all the temptations wherewith man is beset. He united humanity with divinity: a divine spirit dwelt in a temple of flesh. He united Himself with the temple. (YI, Dec. 20, 1900; 4BC:1147)

The next year, 1901, is found this clear statement. It reads:

In Christ were united the divine and the human - the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam, the transgressor, meet in Jesus - the Son of God, and the Son of man. (Ms. 141, 1901; 7BC:926)

In other statements, she wrote that Jesus "knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart." (5T:177) Why? Because "by **experiencing in Himself** the strength of Satan's temptation, and of human sufferings and infirmities, He would know how to succor" those who are tempted. (R&H, March 18, 1875) Clearly she wrote - "Christ took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature." (Medical Ministry, p. 181. Again no ambiguity.

Our problem arises when we do not understand the very basics of the Incarnation. Jesus Christ was pre-existent, and that pre-Existent Spirit took upon Himself, our fallen nature with all of its liabilities after four thousand years of sin. Modern Adventist theology would rather have us believe that He was preserved immaculate from the fallen nature of Adam, taking only what the Anglican Melvill called, "innocent infirmities." Why do we continue to sip the "wine" of fallen Babylon until we are so drunk that we can no longer distinguish between truth and error?

SUMMARY

It was Dr. Coon who chose to make his point that the Church was not "in" apostasy on the doctrine of the Incarnation. It was he who chose to use the standard definition for apostasy - "as departure from pure doctrine." The facts are that the Church has departed from pure doctrine in regards to the doctrine of the Incarnation (as well as other teachings). It follows, therefore, by Coon's own fine line of "significant distinction" that the Church is in apostasy.

A WARNING - YES! ITS RECEPTION? - AN OPEN QUESTION!

DO WE REALLY BELIEVE?

Editor's Note: The numbers in [1], correspond to the same numbers, also in [1], placed in the facsimile reproduction of the paragraphs from the Review & Herald, December 13, 1892 in column 2. This has been done to facilitate comparison of comment with the paragraphs.

While those who hold to "present truth" recognize and accept the primacy of the Scriptures, they also are aware of the value and place which the gifts of the Spirit hold for the people of God in these final times of earth's history. Especially do they appreciate the counsel which God has sent to His professed people through the Writings of Ellen G. White. While they know that the Writings were not given to establish doctrine, they also know that the Writings contain warnings so that they can be aware of the dangers, deceptions, and snares set to entrap God's people in the final conflict.

In paging through Volume 7a of the Commentary series, checking various underscored references on what Ellen G. White had written concerning the Incarnation to see if they were ambiguous, I chanced upon a quotation from Ms. 43, 1907, which I had underlined in part sometime back when first reading through the volume. It struck me as very apropos to the present crisis concerning the integrity of the "independent ministries." It reads:

As we near the end of time, falsehood will be so mingled with truth, that only those who have the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be able to distinguish truth from error... Those who are guided by the Word of the Lord will discern with certainty between falsehood and truth, between sin and righteousness. (Ms. 43, 1907: 7BC:907)

Here is a warning and a promise. There will be a fearful mingling of truth and error, but those guided by the Word of God will "with certainty" discern these deceptions.

There is another warning sounded in the Writings, to which reference has been made

Review & Herald, December 13, 1892

[1] As God called the children of Israel out of Egypt, that they might keep his Sabbath, so he calls his people out of Babylon, that they may not worship the beast or his image. The man of sin, who thought to change times and laws, has exalted himself above God, by presenting a spurious Sabbath to the world; the Christian world has accepted the child of the papacy, and cradled and nourished it, thus defying God by removing his memorial, and setting up a rival Sabbath.

[1] After the truth has been proclaimed as a witness to all nations, every conceivable power of evil will be set in operation, and minds will be confused by many voices crying, [4] Lo, here is Christ, Lo, he is there. [3] This is the truth, I have the message from God, he has sent me with great light. [2] Then there will be a removing of the landmarks, and an attempt to tear down the pillars of our faith. A more decided effort will be made to exalt the false Sabbath, and to cast contempt upon God himself by supplanting the day he has blessed and sanctified. This false Sabbath is to be enforced by an oppressive law. Satan and his angels are wide-awake, and intensely active, working with energy and perseverance through human instrumentalities to bring about his purpose of obliterating from the minds of men the knowledge of God. But while Satan works with his lying wonders, the time will be fulfilled foretold in the Revelation, and the mighty angel that shall lighten the earth with his glory, will proclaim the fall of Babylon, and call upon God's people to forsake her.]

At the time of the loud cry of the third angel those who have been in any measure blinded by the enemy, [5] who have not fully recovered themselves from the snare of Satan, will be in peril, because it will be difficult for them to discern the light from heaven, and they will be inclined to accept falsehood. [6] Their erroneous experience will color their thoughts, their decisions, their propositions, their counsels. The evidences that God has given will be no evidence to those who have blinded their eyes by choosing darkness rather than light. After rejecting light, they will originate theories which they will call "light," but which the Lord calls, "Sparks of their own kindling," by which they will direct their steps.

repeatedly in past issues of WWN. It is found in the R&H, December 13, 1892. We reproduced it facsimile on page 5 for your study in relationship to the comments we shall make concerning these paragraphs.

First let us consider the context. This article, from which these paragraphs are taken, was the concluding part of a message entitled, "Let the Trumpet Give a Certain Sound." The first article closed with an emphasis on the Three Angels' Messages in connection with the Loud Cry of Revelation 18. In fact, the first article closed with Rev. 18:4-5 being quoted. (R&H, Dec. 6, 1892) It is in this context - the context of the giving of the Three Angels' Messages - that we must understand the second paragraph of this second article - "After the truth has been proclaimed as a witness to all nations, every conceivable power of evil will be set in operation..." [1]

We have believed that when the truth of the gospel of the kingdom has been given as a witness to all nations, the end would come. (Matt. 24:14) We have perceived this "end" to be a point in time, rather than a period of time. This reference puts that "end" as a "period of time" rather than "a point of time." It further states, that "after" the truth has been proclaimed as a witness, "then" will come apostasy - "there will be a removing of the landmarks, and an attempt to tear down the pillars of our faith." [2]

Here most of the "independent ministries" are caught on the horns of a dilemma. Without exception, they are crying out against what they perceive as apostasy in the Church. Yet according to this prophetic insight in the Writings, it does not come until "after" the truth has been given as a witness to all "nations." But these same "independent ministries" envision a time when the Church has been turned around, cleansed of its apostasy, and they controlling the reins of power give the Three Angel's Messages to the "nations."

They cannot have it both ways. Either there is apostasy as described in this testimony, and thus truth has been proclaimed as a witness to all nations; or else the truth has not been so proclaimed, and the apostasy is yet future. If the latter is so, there is no reason for their existence, and all that they are proclaiming as apostasy, is in reality, the working of the Holy Spirit within the Church. They are, therefore, fighting against God. If, however, the apostasy is true, then these "ministries" must recognize - if they believe the Writings - that the witness

of the truth to the "nations" as corporate bodies is finished. This should tell them something. [Note, it does not say, "individuals," but "nations" - corporate bodies. It needs to be kept in mind that "corporate" cleansing was the second phase of the services on the typical day of Atonement]

One may want to hedge on the terminology of "landmarks" and "pillars of our faith," holding that these specifics have been defined, and all have not been denied. As true as this may be, the whole setting of the enumeration of the "landmarks" and "pillars" finds its basis in "the cleansing of the sanctuary transpiring in heaven, and having decided relation to God's people upon the earth." (Ms. 13, 1889) This has been denied in the SDA-Evangelical Conferences, and was not reaffirmed in the Perth Declaration.

How then do we get to the bottom line of this prophetic counsel so that we can apply its warning? Jesus plainly stated when the probationary time of the "nations" would end. In Luke 21:24, He declared that when Jerusalem would no longer be under the control of the Gentiles, the times of the "nations" would be "fulfilled." [In the Greek, the same word is used for both, "Gentiles" and "nations."] This prophecy was fulfilled in two events, the taking of the city in 1967, and its annexation in 1980. And it was in 1980 that the Church in General session voted the confirmation of the compromises made at the SDA-Evangelical Conferences.

But more than this is involved in the warning-counsel from the Writings. Ellen White wrote that "after the truth has been proclaimed as a witness to all nations," not only will "every conceivable power of evil be set in motion;" but also "minds will be confused by many voices crying, ... 'This is the truth, I have the message from God, he has sent me with great light.'" [3] Jesus has not only given us a sign by which we can know when the times of the "nations" are fulfilled, but also has given us a warning so that we can distinguish between the true and the false. Check when these "many voices" of the "independent ministries" began, and you will find that 99% began after 1980! [4] The warning is that though they proclaim to be the very "message from God," they will only confuse minds because there is a mingling of truth with falsehood.

If we cannot read the warnings given by God through His messenger, what good is the Spirit of Prophecy to us? Let us not be deceived by

those who front the Writings as a facade to cover their ministry and false teachings.

This is not all there is to this warning given in 1892. It says that at the time of the "loud cry of the third angel" those who have in any measure been blinded by the enemy, and have not "fully recovered", will be in peril because they will have difficulty in discerning light from heaven. [5] Again we need to face some key facts in our history. Prior to this present agitation over the apostasy in the Church, the teachings of Brinsmead made great headway among various groups within the Church. In his first decade of teaching before he flipped into complete apostasy from the truth, he taught a key aspect of the Holy Flesh doctrine. He had many ardent supporters including the late Dr. George Rue, Dr. Lloyd Rosenvold, Vance Ferrell and others. None of these men, to my knowledge, ever rejected the original teachings of Brinsmead. Many still believe it.

This warning clearly states that those who do not "recover" from this or any other snare of Satan will reject genuine light, and will "originate theories which they call 'light,' but which the Lord calls, 'Sparks of their own kindling,' by which they will direct their steps." [6] These theories may be well clothed in quotations from the Writings, or manipulation of the Scriptures. However, to the people of God has been given "a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto [we] do well to take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in [our] hearts." (II Peter 1:19) If we are a people of prophecy, let us walk in the light of prophecy, and be children of the day, and not of the night. (I Thess. 5:5)

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In the twenty-first chapter of Luke, Christ foretold what was to come upon Jerusalem, and with it He connected the scenes which were to take place in the history of this world just prior to the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

Counsels to Writers and Editors, pp. 23-24

1992 ANNUAL FELLOWSHIP - August 2 - 8

Seminar Study - Revelation 12-22

ON CAMPUS

Since October, there have been some additions to the campus family. Coming to us from New York was the Daniel Emerson family. They have joined wholeheartedly into the general operating work of the Foundation. We appreciate their fellowship and faithfulness. February 1, Brother Woody Oliver, Jr., joined the staff as Librarian and Assistant Editor after being twenty years with the Hewlett Packard Company. He will endeavor to make readily available documentation which we have on file in the campus library for the use of the laity in the field who are studying.

To facilitate this service, we have installed an "800" number - 1-800-4-LAYMEN (800-452-9636). So that it can be as serviceable to as many people as possible, we are establishing some guidelines: 1) Calls will be limited to not more than 30 minutes unless extenuating circumstances dictate otherwise. 2) We will reserve the right to terminate any calls which we believe to be unprofitable. We expect some negative criticism and welcome it. We also know there will be some "crank" calls, but none will be accepted without the caller identifying him or herself. There will be no secretarial protective walls before you can talk to either editor. One of us may even be the first person who will answer the telephone.

We thank God for the enlarging of our outreach to meet the needs of God's people who are facing an ever increasing gale of various winds of doctrine blowing through the corridors of Adventism today. Pray for us, and we will be willing to pray for and with you.

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