

IS THE DRAGON SMART ENOUGH TO COUNTERFEIT THE 1888 MESSAGE?

By Paul Penno Jr.

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- You can buy a counterfeit Rolex watch in Taiwan—looks just like the genuine (almost!).
- You can keep a counterfeit Sabbath—comes six days too soon—millions don't know the difference.
- You can get a counterfeit holy spirit—many Christians do.
- You can get counterfeit love—broken homes prove it.
- You can even “love” a counterfeit “Christ”—he can deceive Seventh-day Adventists.

Is the dragon clever enough, and does he care enough to counterfeit the 18 message?

How can we recognize, the counterfeit and tell the difference?

Yes, the dragon *is* clever enough and he does care enough, to do that!

That sounds like bad news. But there is good news: the dragon cannot deceive God's people with a counterfeit unless first of all they reject the genuine.

History and Ellen White's unimpeachable testimony agree on a salient fact: “in a great measure” a century ago the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church rejected the 1888

message.¹ And the “confessions” of the rejecters did not go deep enough in true repentance. Shocking as the truth may be, in direct consequence “many” of our brethren chose to worship Baal:

Many now, as in ancient times . . . will hold to tradition, and worship they know not what (Testimonies, Vol. 5, p. 707).

The prejudices and opinions that prevailed at Minneapolis are not dead by any means; the seeds sown there in some hearts are ready to spring into life and bear a like harvest. The tops have been cut down, but the roots have never been eradicated, and they still bear their unholy fruit to poison the judgment . . . in regard to the [1888] message and the messengers. . . .

With many the cry of the heart has been, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” Baal, Baal, is the choice. The religion of many among us will be the religion of apostate Israel, because they love their own way, and forsake the way of the Lord. The true religion . . . has been denounced as leading to enthusiasm and fanaticism (Testimonies to Ministers, pp. 467, 468; 1890).

Three years later the author said that “in this age antichrist will appear as the true Christ. . . . The true leader of all this rebellion is Satan clothed as an angel of light” who will “personate, Christ” (*Ibid*, p. 62; Letter 102, 1894). By rejecting the beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry “we” exposed

¹ *Selected Messages*, Book One, pp. 234, 235; note that the rejection was not 100%.

ourselves to monstrous deceptions, for Baal is a very clever counterfeit “christ”:

If men are so easily misled how will they stand when Satan shall personate Christ, and work miracles? Who will be unmoved by his misrepresentations? Professing to be Christ when it is only Satan assuming the person of Christ, and apparently working the works of Christ? What will hold God’s people from giving their allegiance to false Christs? (Letter 1, 1897).

So well will [Satan] counterfeit righteousness [by faith], that if possible he would deceive the very elect (*Review and Herald*, August 17, 1897).

By September 1, 1892 Ellen White was beginning to realize that the precious gift of the latter rain in the 1888 message would be withdrawn from the church unless it was soon accepted:

The sin committed in what took place at Minneapolis remains on the record books of heaven. . . . When the Lord has sufficiently tried them, if they do not yield to Him, He will withdraw His Holy Spirit (Letter 019, 1892).

In great mercy, Heaven’s special latter-rain grace lingered a few months longer. But by 1893 Baal-worship already begun to enter with a counterfeit message of righteousness by faith imported from the Evangelicals. The principle of how this frightful deception could develop is as follows:

False ideas that were largely developed at Minneapolis have not been entirely uprooted from some minds. Those who have not made thorough work of repentance . . . will be ready to

call the messages God sends, a delusion (General Conference Bulletin, 1894, p. 184).

What next? These very ones will accept messages that God has not sent (ibid p. 182).

The source of the counterfeit was the seed of the ecumenical New Age deceptions that have blossomed so alarmingly today. We turn again to the 1893 General Conference Bulletin:

Some of these brethren, since the Minneapolis meeting . . . I have heard say “amen” to statements that were as openly and decidedly papal as the papal church itself can state them. . . . Says one, “I thought [Catholics] believed in justification by works.” They do and they do not believe in anything else: but they pass it off under the head of justification by faith. . . . I want you to see what the Roman Catholic idea of justification by faith is, because I have had to meet it among professed Seventh-day Adventists the past four years. . . . just such expressions as professed Seventh-day Adventists have made to me as to what justification by faith is.

I want to know how you and I can carry a message to this world, warning them against the worship of the beast, when hold in our very profession the doctrine of the beast. . . .

The papal doctrine of justification by faith is Satan's doctrine; it is simply the natural mind depending upon itself, working through itself, exalting itself; and then covering it all up with a profession of belief in this, that, and the other, but having no power of God (A. T. Jones, pp. 261, 262, 266).

But even more subtle was the Protestant counterfeit that was beginning to enter in. Jones told how opposing brethren and sisters were already so confused that they assumed that the 1666 message was the same as that of Hannah Whitall Smith's popular book. He denied it:

There is that book that a great many make a great deal of, "The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life." . . . There is more of the Christian's secret of a happy life in the Bible: than in ten thousand volumes of that book (Jones, pp. 358, 359).

In her 1688 edition Hannah Whitall Smith confesses that she lit her lamp from the mysticism of Fenelon, the Roman Catholic divine at the court of Louis XIV who devoted his life to winning Protestants back to Rome (pp. 60, 61, 67).² Smith yearned for the ecumenical New World Order because her mysticism was essentially that of today's "Christian" New Agers:

The truths I have to tell . . . will fit in with every creed, simply making it possible for those who hold the creed to live up to their own beliefs, and to find in them the experimental realities of a present Saviour and a present salvation.

Most of us acknowledge that there is behind all religions an absolute religion, that holds the vital truth of each; and it is of this absolute religion my book seeks to treat (Preface).

Yet this book which was intended to help Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists "to live up to their own beliefs" was hailed

in 1893 by our blind brethren as the 1888 message. In her book are the roots of present-day ecumenism. Even to the present day the subtlety of the counterfeit has not dawned on many of our people, for this book is still widely regarded as a valid substitute for the 1888 message.

What's Wrong With the Book?

It is a detour around the cross of Christ, an eclipse of *agape*, a thorough-going egocentric motivation; and it is a total failure to grasp the atonement. It anticipates today's "Christian" pop-psychology, and is a fulfillment of a deception Ellen White viewed in a vision. She saw the change of Christ's High Priestly ministry from the first to the second apartment:

Satan appeared to be by the throne [of the first apartment which Jesus had left in 1844], trying to carry on the work of God. I saw them [professed Christians] look up to the throne and pray, "Father, give us Thy Spirit." Satan would then breathe upon them an unholy influence; in it there was much light and power, but no sweet love, joy and peace. Satan's object was to keep them deceived, and to draw back and deceive God's children (Early Writings, pp. 55, 56).

The Second Angel's Message Is True!

"Babylon the great *is* fallen!" One can document a continual program since 1893 of our going to Babylon to learn what is righteousness by faith. Dr. Kellogg's pantheism at the turn of the century was imported from the New Agers of his day and was

² See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1960, Vol. 9, pp. 169, 170.

accepted by many Seventh-day Adventists. It would have sunk the good ship Zion like the iceberg that the Titanic hit if Ellen White had not intervened.³

In 1918 Charles Trumbull and Robert C. McQuilken of *The Sunday School Times* published the *Victorious Life Studies*. Said Trumbull, "It was the new and undiscovered country of the Victorious Life that brought us together, . . . the 'foreign land' of undreamed riches and delights." By 1919 one of our General Conference leaders had absorbed the ideas. The Review and Herald published his *The Doctrine of Christ* which quotes heavily from McQuilken without giving the source. At the 1922 General Conference session, leaders spoke of their enthusiastic acceptance of this "new and undiscovered country" of the Victorious Life, assuming that it was the same as the 1888 message.⁴ Yet the essential elements of the 1888 message were absent, and the revival failed. Few if any of our people sensed the vital omissions.

This teaching came into great prominence in the Evangelical churches beginning in the 1870's. Its foremost promoters were Mr. and Mrs. Pearson (Hannah Whitall) Smith. Great revivals under Pearson Smith's leadership swept through North America, England, and the continent. Included in the general movement were the massive Keswick

³ See chapter 21 of *The Elmshaven Years, 1900-1905*, by Arthur L. White.

⁴ These leaders included A. G. Daniells, O. Montgomery, C. H. Watson, F. M. Wilcox, Carlyle B. Haynes etc. See *Review and Herald*, November 11, 1920; June 8, July 6, 1922, etc.

Conventions and the work of Dwight L. Moody, the Billy Graham of that era.

The fundamental idea was that it is possible to have "victory" now over sinning, through faith. The burden of defeat and the agony of lacking assurance of salvation are unnecessary. Many thousands of Christians rejoiced in discovering what they called "the secret." Their lives were transformed. Dour, cantankerous, fidgety Anglicans such as the foster-mother of Rudyard Kipling (whom he loathed) became radiantly happy exponents of "the secret." Many undeniable wonders of conversion took place.

From generation to generation the "secret" spread through the 1870's on into the 1920's, followed by E. Stanley Jones's *Victorious Living* and his other books of the 1940's and 1950's about "the secret". The most widely published book of the revivals was Hannah Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*. My copy was my dear mother's (she died when I was two); its copyright date is 1888. Many millions have been sold in innumerable editions. It is the Evangelical version of *Steps to Christ*, The book is a beautiful little literary masterpiece of charming clarity, and it is no wonder that it continues to be reprinted. It is understandable that many Seventh-day Adventists have been charmed by it, including many of our General Conference speakers and the editors of *Insight*. If dour, long-faced, insecure, cantankerous Adventists can find spiritual happiness and "renewal" in Hannah Smith's "secret," what's the harm?

The general idea has long been held that legalistic Adventism (which rightly holds to the seventh-day sabbath, health reform, the prophecies, high standards etc.) needs the warmth and genial spiritual sunlight of the “Victorious Life” movement. You get hold of “the truth” through an Adventist evangelist; then you get “conversion” through Dwight Moody or his successors of today, Billy Graham, Chuck Swindoll, Robert Schuller, James Dobson, *et al.*

In the 1920’s when the “Victorious Life” inundation from Evangelicalism was at its height. The Morris Vendens of that day were Meade Macguire (author of *The Life of Victory*), Matilda Erickson Andross (author of *Alone With God. The Life That Wins*), and Carlyle B. Haynes (who wrote 45 books). I well remember the enthusiasm, the bright smiling faces of those who had discovered “the secret of victory.” Leroy Edwin Fromm’s insistence that the Keswick speakers and many other 19th century Evangelicals were teaching the “same” message as was given us in 1888 is quite understandable. The history is impressive.

The earliest influential adoption of “the victorious life” concepts among us is W. W. Prescott’s *The Doctrine of Christ* (1919). He quotes rather heavily from Robert C. McQuilken’s *Victorious Life Studies*, Corresponding Secretary of the Victorious Life Conferences, Princeton and Cedar Lake, 1918. Soon the concepts were pervading our General Conference. Bruno Steinweg says:

About the same time [1920] . . . various denominational leaders were giving thought to

what was termed “the victorious life.” . . . [At] the General Conference session of 1922. . . A. G. Daniells . . . stated that he had come to believe in what was being termed the “victorious life.” . . . O. Montgomery . . . showed that it was the very same experience that Adventists had spoken of as a part of justification and righteousness by faith. . . . C. H. Watson . . . capitalized the “victorious life” idea in a Week of Prayer reading for 1923. (SDA Theological Seminary thesis, 1948, pp. 39-43).

The *Review* said, “The Victorious Life’ is only another expression for ‘righteousness by faith’” (Nov. 11, 1920); “The highest point to be reached by any Conference or by an individual . . . means victory over sin. It means the Victorious Life” (June 8, 1922); “The Victorious Life’ is nothing more nor less than simple Bible Christianity” (July 6, 1922). Ellen White never took her pen to write the magic phrase “the victorious life,” but after her death her editors compelled her to support the movement by entitling the last chapter of her 1922 book, *Testimonies to Ministers* as “The Victorious Life” (cf. p. 516). She certainly taught victory over sin throughout her life; but did she support the Smith-Keswick ideas? Does *Steps to Christ* teach the same basic message as *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*?

These questions are seen to be important when we remember that she said that the true message of righteousness by faith is “the third angel’s message in verity.” If the 19th century Evangelicals were teaching “the third angel’s message in verity,”

the honest truth is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has no reason to exist.

At the very height of his meteoric and phenomenal career while on a triumphal European schedule, Mr. Pearson Smith was forced to resign his ministry and suddenly drop out of sight due to the embarrassed insistence of his supporters. It was a discreet 19th century version of our 20th century Jim Bakker episode. This alone should not prejudice us against his and his wife's teaching, but it is significant that he did not suffer the unchristlike persecution that was heaped upon our Jones and Waggoner. The rest of his life was tragic.

Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield has critically and quite thoroughly examined the "Victorious Life" teachings in his rather heavy volume, *Perfectionism* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1971). While conceding its immense popularity and apparent effectiveness, he severely criticizes its theology as being a distortion of the New Testament gospel. Warfield is Calvinist; we cannot accept all his criticisms. But no one can understand the "Victorious Life" movement without listening to Warfield. Another very recent book examines these 19th century Evangelicals' ministry, *Less Than Conquerors*. It is favorably reviewed in a recent *Christianity Today*.

There is evidence that "the Victorious Life" teachings (hereafter VL), both outside and inside the Seventh-day Adventist Church, do not reproduce the essentials of the 1888 message. Some may feel that it is being too severely critical to consider them in the category of the "Modern

Revivals" that *Great Controversy* speaks of (pp. 461-478) and *Early Writings* (pp. 55, 56, 260, 261); but it is a solemn question whether our brethren of the 1920's were deceived by a "great religious interest" in which it "*appeared* that God was "working marvelously . . . when the work [was] that of another spirit" (GC p. 464). We must note the following:

(a) The VL understanding of justification by faith differed fundamentally from the 1888 view. Generally speaking, the VL proponents viewed it as merely a legal declaration which did not apply until the sinner "accepted Christ."

(b) They held that a person could be justified by faith and yet not have victory over sin. A further work was needed similar to the "second grace" of the Methodists. The 1888 view held that true justification by faith makes the believer obedient to the law of God and thus victorious over sin.

(c) They separated sanctification and justification as two virtually unrelated and disparate works. Sanctification was instantaneous once one got the "secret" of VL.

(d) Smith's (*Christian's Secret* detours completely around the atonement and scarcely even mentions the cross. Her Preface to her 1888 edition says: "Most of us acknowledge that there is behind all religions an absolute religion, that holds the vital truth of each; and it is of this absolute religion my book seeks to treat: (p. vi). In contrast, *Steps to Christ* points the reader to the cross some seven times on one page alone (p. 27).

(e) Because practically all of the VL proponents held to the pagan-papal doctrine of natural immortality, we find no evidence of an understanding of *agape*. The motivation throughout is essentially egocentric. Faith is universally defined as “trust,” based on egocentric concern for “happiness” and “assurance.” This is not to say that there might not have been an occasional proponent who discerned something of a Christocentric motivation, but I cannot now think of one. One 19th century theologian did begin to discern it, Alexander B. Bruce of Glasgow, but he was not part of the VL movement.

(f) I think it can safely be said that no VL proponent discerned the truth of Christ’s having taken our fallen, sinful nature; thus there was no concept of Christ’s righteousness as the heart of righteousness by faith.

(g) None discerned the two covenants motif of the 1888 message.

(h) Needless to say, none had even an inkling of the great truth of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary as integral to last-days justification by faith.

(i) I am charitable when I point out that the VL movement came at just the time Ellen White penned her chapter “Modern Revivals.” Nevertheless, it could have prepared the way among honest hearts for the “third angel’s message in verity.”

Continuing through the 1930’s and 40’s, “our” concepts of righteousness by faith were often

heavily indebted to non-Adventist authors.⁵ In 1950 came a brief love affair with the “righteousness by faith” theology of E. Stanley Jones, the Methodist missionary to India who taught the deity of self and confused telepathic communication with the dead with the reception of the Holy Spirit.⁶

In more recent times our borrowing from Babylon has become even more extensive. Many of our theologians have been trained in non-Adventist universities or seminaries. Concepts totally opposed to the 1888 message have been diligently imparted to our young ministers. Conferences have sent pastors to Campus Crusade for Christ or Pentecostals to learn how to proclaim the gospel. The Celebration movement has obviously been imported from the ecumenical movement, as have some of our “Church Growth” ideas.

But more serious has been the promulgation of concepts which the speakers often claim are the elements of the 1888 message when in reality they are Evangelical in content. These ideas are opposed to the “most precious message” which the Lord sent in 1888 while claiming to reproduce it. Since 1987, “1888” has become a buzz-word so that many have wanted to get on the band-wagon. No one dares now to say he rejects the message.

Messages which in reality are disguised legalism claim to be “1888.” They feature frequent warnings and appeals to “*do something*” about the gospel; we

⁵ See for example *Alone with God* (Pacific Press) by Matilda Erickson Andross, *passim*.

⁶ See Jones, *The Way to Power and Poise*, and *The Ministry*, February, 1950.

must study more, pray more, witness more, etc. We “must” do this or that, all subtly adding up to new works trips for weary Adventists. We need “a relationship with Christ,” yet the basic assumption is always that we will never get anything unless we take the initiative. The *agape* idea with its built-in *divine* initiative and “constraint” is simply absent.

Some are sensitive enough to recognize the disguised legalism, and in reaction veer to an opposite extreme which becomes antinomianism.⁷ A simple litmus test that reveals this lethal heresy is the too-frequent occurrence of adultery and fornication on all levels within the church from ministerial leadership down to teenagers. “Be not deceived,” says the apostle; any transgression of the seventh commandment is due either (a) to absorbing a counterfeit gospel of righteousness by faith, or (b) to disbelief of the true gospel. Faith and disobedience are incompatible.

The false idea prevails that it is possible to *believe* the gospel and yet not *live* it. But Scripture teaches that *righteousness* is by faith. In other words, if one has true faith, the righteousness is sure to be in the life! And genuine righteousness becomes obedience to *all* the commandments of God.⁸

For nearly a hundred years “we” have thought ourselves “rich and increased with goods” in our assumed wealth of understanding the message.

⁷ That is, true and full obedience to the law of God is impossible in this life. This is very widely taught among us now.

⁸ See *Testimonies to Ministers*, pp. 91-93, regarding the total life-changing power of the true 1888 message.

“We” have followed by-path after by-path, only to end up repeatedly in a morass of legalism or antinomianism.

Isn't it time to recover the genuine path?

THE COUNTERFEIT VS. THE GENUINE

(1) The counterfeit conveys a subtle do-it-yourself philosophy. You must take the initiative in order to be saved. The impression comes through that God will do nothing for you unless you do something first. In contrast, the 1888 message emphasizes how God has taken—and continues to take—the initiative in man's salvation. Our part is to appreciate His initiative, to respond to it. In other words, righteousness is by faith, not faith *and* works but faith *which* works.

(2) The fear motivation prevails in the counterfeit. The root idea is self-preservation, “how-can-I-be-sure-I-will-get-to-heaven.” This is so very widespread that many cannot conceive of any other motivation. In contrast, the 1888 message conveys a higher one—appreciation for what Christ has already done for us and concern that He, not we, get a reward.

(3) There is an absence of any concept of the cleansing of the sanctuary as related to righteousness by faith. As termites eat out the structure of a house but leave the outward shell standing, so the non-Adventist view of righteousness by faith is devoid of “the third angel's message in verity.” The gospel can be understood only in the light of the sanctuary truth—that Christ has entered the Most Holy Apartment and closed the first apartment. Most of our people, awed by

pious phrases that sound orthodox, are not aware of the phenomenal absence of this unique and all-important truth the Lord gave us. Confused by popular ideas, their “gospel” is anchored in the first apartment ministry which has been “closed” rather than “within the veil” of the Most Holy Apartment.

(4) Any genuine presentation of the pure gospel is intensely interesting and heart-gripping. Truth demands *and gets* a heart-response, either positive or negative. The hearer cannot sit on the fence. Sermons that are boring, confusing, bland, are suspect. “The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city” (Eccl. 10:15).

(5) Subtle attempts to justify sin are a denial of the gospel. The 1886 message declares the good news that Christ has “condemned sin in the flesh,” outlawed it, made it forever unnecessary. Mistaken views of the nature of Christ inevitably gravitate toward antinomianism.

(6) Neglect of Scripture and wresting massive Spirit of Prophecy quotations are a caution light. They indicate a lack of true 1888 concepts. Ellen White believed in righteousness by faith and the power of *agape*, but by selective maneuvering, one can assemble compilations that give the impression that you must virtually be your own savior. Even the Bible can be wrested in a similar way. “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Moses was inspired, yet his inspiration was clearly superseded by the coming of Christ. Any effort to force Ellen White to teach legalism is a distortion of her genuine message.

(7) Become thoroughly conversant with the essential truths of the 1888 message as “the Lord in His great mercy sent” it. You will easily recognize how ideas borrowed from Babylon can worm their way in either to contradict or to ignore genuine truths.