

'The Greatest Sorrow' of Ellen White's Life

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January 25, 2012

Our “poverty” is evident in a general erosion of one unique Seventh-day Adventist idea—the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary that began in 1844.

It established our existence as a people. If it's not biblical, we have no reason to exist.

The virtual eclipse of the 1888 message has been the factor largely responsible for an erosion of grass-roots confidence in the 1844 sanctuary idea. In 1889 Ellen White foresaw how the opposition to the heart-humbling 1888 message would “cause apostasy” (CWE 31).¹ Those who fail to see Biblical

¹ “Now at the present time God designs a new and fresh impetus shall be given to His work. Satan sees this, and he is determined it shall be hindered. He knows that if he can deceive the people who claim to believe present truth, [and make them believe that] the work the Lord designs to do for His people is a removing of the old landmarks, something which they should, with most determined zeal, resist, then he exults over the deception he has led them to believe. The work for this time has certainly been a surprising work of various hindrances, owing to the false setting of matters before the minds of many of our people. That which is food to the churches is regarded as dangerous, and should not be given them. And this slight difference of ideas is allowed to unsettle the faith, to *cause apostasy*, to *break up unity*, to *sow discord*, all because they do not know what they are striving about themselves. Brethren, is it not best to be sensible? Heaven is looking upon us all, and what can they think of recent developments? While in this condition of things, building up barriers, we not only deprive ourselves of great light and precious advantages, but just now, when we

support for 1844 likewise can't appreciate 1888; and the reverse seems true also. The 1888 message focused the sanctuary truth and logically tended to restore “its presiding power [in] the hearts of believers” (Ev. 225).² The loss of that message would as logically weaken its heart-effectiveness. Love for the truth of Christ's vindication is more powerful than theological attempts to defend a supposedly “cold” doctrine.

The Surprising Story of ‘The Greatest Sorrow’ of
Ellen White's ‘Life’

What Happens When History Gets Written Upside Down?

The great 1901 General Conference Session of reorganization was our denominational debut, our growing-up ceremony, our “Confirmation” into a mature world-church structure.

Ellen White was ecstatic in thanking God for what happened. “Who has walked up and down the

so much need it, we place ourselves where light cannot be communicated from heaven that we ought to communicate to others.”—Manuscript 13, 1889.

² “Satan is striving continually to bring in fanciful suppositions in regard to the sanctuary, degrading the wonderful representations of God and the ministry of Christ for our salvation into something that suits the carnal mind. He removes its presiding power from the hearts of believers, and supplies its place with fantastic theories invented to make void the truths of the atonement, and destroy our confidence in the doctrines which we have held sacred since the third angel's message was first given. Thus he would rob us of our faith in the very message that has made us a separate people, and has given character and power to our work.”—Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, p. 17. (1905)

aisles of this [Battle Creek] Tabernacle?—The God of heaven and His angels. . . . They have been among us to work the works of God, to keep back the powers of darkness, that the work God designed should be done should not be hindered. The angels of God have been working among us” (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, p. 463).

The resultant reorganization has been a life-saver. Had it not been, it is doubtful that “we” could have survived. Numerical, financial, and institutional growth has been cause for great rejoicing.

Contemporary Adventist wisdom has seen the 1901 Session as the catharsis for the tragic 1888 unbelief and “rebellion.” Since then, “all is well” and the gospel has been triumphant among us.

A little digging has unearthed an Ellen White retroactive view of the “result” of that famous 1901 Session.

And in the story there is good news for us in this year 2001.

Ellen White was forced to experience something painful shared with the weeping prophet Jeremiah—both lamented the constant tendency of their respective constituencies to think “all is well!”

An awkward translation in the King James Verse obscures what Jeremiah lamented—“the pen of the scribes is in vain” (8:8). But the New International Version is clearer. He is talking about how the court historians in the declining years of the kingdom of Judah falsified their own national history, thus contributing to the kingdom’s ultimate disaster: “The lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely.” Peterson’s recent version (*The Message*) traces the

beginning of what led to the crucifixion of their Messiah: “How can you say, ‘We know the score. We’re the proud owners of God’s revelation’? . . . Your religion experts have taken you for a ride!”

The story of the 1901 General Conference Session has been heralded as a great triumph that reversed the unfortunate result of what happened 13 years earlier. *Through Crisis to Victory: 1888-1901* was the title of a volume that told us the “crisis” was 1888 and the “victory” was “1901.

There were two issues in 1901.

In Ellen White’s view, the reorganization problem was intertwined with “our” need for reconciliation with Christ and the Holy Spirit. She hoped that the “many who have been more or less out of line since the Minneapolis meeting will be brought into line” (*General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, p. 205).³ Repentance for the heart-alienation of 1888 was her hope.

Her retroactive comment on “the result” of that 1901 Session is startling. She wrote to a personal friend in 1903: “The result of the last General Conference has been the greatest, the most terrible sorrow of my life. No change was made” (Letter to Judge Jesse Arthur, January 14, 1903).

This seems to be an astounding reversal of contemporary wisdom. Did she mean only Dr. John Harvey Kellogg’s refusal to repent? Her immediate

³ Scripture is from the King James Version. The context of “into line” mentions “the medical missionary work” and preaching “the story of Christ’s love which will touch a chord in . . . hearts.” While resisting the 1888 message, it was difficult for ministers to proclaim that “love.”

context seems more serious. She speaks “of the men in our institutions and conferences”: “I know that matters in Battle Creek are in a most precarious condition. . . . His [the Lord’s] power was with me all the way through the last General Conference, and had the men in responsibility felt one quarter of the burden that rested on me, there would have been heartfelt confession and repentance. A work would have been done by the Holy Spirit such as has never yet been seen in Battle Creek.”

Writing to Kellogg she had said: “The leaders of our work . . . closed and bolted the door against the Spirit’s entrance. . . . Hearts that might have been purified from all error were strengthened in wrong doing” (Aug. 5, 1902). Could the spiritual failure of ordained church leaders have emboldened Dr. Kellogg to harden his own heart? If so, the story will humble all of us today! By nature we are no better than they.

“What might have been.”

She was forced to speak thus of “a Pentecostal season” of repentance: “I thought of where we might have been had thorough {4} work been done at the last General Conference [1901]; and an agony of disappointment came over me as I realized that what I had witnessed [in her dream] was not a reality” (8T 104-106; chapter entitled “What Might Have Been”).⁴

⁴ Unless otherwise designated, emphasis in quotations has been supplied by the author. At the request of the General Conference at the time, the book “*An Explicit Confession . . . Due the Church*” was written in 1972; it details Ellen White’s

Our Lord’s words “unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans” came into focus:

“These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness . . . I know thy works . . . Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art [the one] wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:14-17).

Jesus says that our own history (or “works”) is, of all the seven churches, preeminently “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” (the Greek article *ho* says “*the* one”). Is the “they” of the following a small minority? To whom did the message apply? Who is the angel of the church of the Laodiceans? Read on!

“All the universe of heaven witnessed *the disgraceful treatment of Jesus Christ, represented by the Holy Spirit*. Had Christ been before them [the 1888 delegates], they would have treated Him in a manner similar to that in which the Jews treat Christ” (*Special Testimonies*, Series A, No. 6, p. 20; the context was Minneapolis).

Can this really be true? If “the heavenly universe witnessed” it, does God want us to see it too? Is He trying to say something in our history?

According to 5BC 1085, the books of heaven “record the sins that would have been committed had there been opportunity.” How would our brethren have treated Him had He “been before them”? Answer: as “the Jews treated Christ.” In

numerous statements about the “results” of the 1901 Conference. The book is available from the 1888 Message Study Committee.

plain English, the Lord says we “pierced” Him (see Zechariah’s phrase, 12:10). That’s what Peter told the people of his day (Acts 2:36; 3:14; 15; 5:20). The result? Pentecost! If we can realize our corporate involvement in the same sin, could there be a “latter” rain as Pentecost was the “former”?

Was it only a few who did so?

One highly respected account describes them as “not even a *fourth* of the total number of participants” in 1888. And “*most* of those who first took issue made confessions within the decade following 1888, and largely within the first five years, and thenceforth ceased their opposition.” (See Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, pp. 367, 368; 1971, emphasis original.)

Could the blessings of the latter rain be denied to the whole church because of only a handful of opposers?

Above and beyond all debate looms an overwhelming fact: whatever happened and whatever was the “result” of the 1901 Session, good or ill, the finishing of the gospel commission has been long delayed. Again, Jeremiah could ask, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” (Lam. 1:12). A serious problem of alienation from Christ faced the 1901 Session. It appears that the problem persisted through the decade:

“Satan succeeded in shutting away from our people, in a great measure, the special power of the Holy Spirit that God longed to impart to them. . . . The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own

[leading] brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world” (1SM 234, 235; 1896).

“If you reject Christ’s delegated messengers, you *reject Christ*” (TM 97; 1896).

“Men professing godliness *have despised Christ* in the person of His messengers. Like the Jews, they reject God’s message” (FE 472; 1897).

“Christ has registered all the hard, proud, sneering speeches spoken against His servants *as against Himself*” (RH, May 27, 1890).

“Men among us can become just as were the Pharisees—wide-awake to condemn the greatest teacher that the world ever knew” (RM 294; 1896).

Had our brethren realized what was happening, they would have been horrified, for they were faithful, sincere people. *They simply didn’t know!* We look again:

“I can never forget the experience which we had in Minneapolis, or the things which were then revealed to me in regard to the spirit that controlled men, the words spoken, the actions done in obedience to the powers of evil . . . They were moved at the meeting by another spirit, and *they knew not* that God had sent these young men to bear a special message to them which they treated with ridicule and contempt. . . . *I know that at that time the Spirit of God was insulted*” (MS 24, 1892).

God can forgive and restore, praise His name! But what “the heavenly universe” understands, we must also understand.

The problem of history upside down.

The actual words of Christ in His Laodicean message pinpoint a self-deception that is basically

historical in nature: “I am rich, and I have been enriched.” The Savior’s Greek expression is unusual in that He repeats the word “rich” in a different verb tense and voice, putting in our lips the inner heart boast, “I am rich [in understanding righteousness by faith] because in my history I have been blessed by accepting an enrichment” (*plousios eimi, kai peplouteka*). The import was historically over the heads of our 16th century translators. “Here is represented a people who pride themselves in their possession of spiritual knowledge and advantages” (Ellen White, RH, July 23, 1889).

Jesus saw “rich” buried in our hearts, deeper than our self-awareness of it:

[1888 was] “a notable landmark in Seventh-day Adventist history, . . . a glorious victory, . . . a great spiritual awakening among Adventists, . . . the dawn of a glorious day for the Adventist church, . . . the blessed consequences of a great awakening . . . are with us yet, . . . rich in both holiness and mission fruitage” (L. H. Christian, *Fruitage of Spiritual Gifts*, pp. 219-245).

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“The concept that the General Conference, and thus the denomination, rejected the message of righteousness by faith⁵ in 1888 is without foundation and was not projected until forty years after the Minneapolis meeting. . . . There is no E. G. White

⁵ The issue is not whether the historic Protestant idea of “righteousness by faith” was accepted or rejected; the issue is, Was the beginning of the latter rain and the loud cry of Revelation 18 accepted?

statement anywhere that says this was so” (Arthur L. White, *The Lonely Years*, 1984; p. 396).

“Several key leaders throughout the 1890’s continued to reject the 1888 message even though the 1888 messengers and Ellen White were quite convinced that the church had largely accepted it. . . . *There was no such thing as corporate and denominational rejection* (George R. Knight, *A User-friendly Guide to the 1888 Message*, 1998; pp. 148, 150; emphasis original).

At the beginning of the 1901 Session she had said “*many . . . have been more or less out of line since the Minneapolis meeting.*”

These historians have all been dedicated, faithful people who tried to reflect a wholesome pride in the “progress” of the church. But what is not recognized is the import of the Laodicean message: it is precisely in our assumed “enrichment” of acceptance of the latter rain message that we are honestly self-deceived. The supposed “victory” of the latter rain at the 1901 Session did not change reality. We have unwittingly adopted Evangelical views of the gospel in place of the latter rain message. It appears that the deficiency has gone largely unrecognized.

This is the true remnant church, and its future is indeed bright.

God’s work *will* triumph. And the Lord *has* blessed. And He *will* bless. Our great “victory” still lies on the other side of the divine remedy for our present spiritual hunger—repentance. Is what Jesus says still valid?

“I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:18, 19).

The 1901 Session did not retire that “counsel” into our collective attic of ancient history. A number of Ellen G. White statements explain how her “terrible sorrow” embraced more than pain limited to Kellogg’s failure:

“What a wonderful work could have been done for the vast company gathered in Battle Creek at the General Conference of 1901, if the leaders of our work had taken themselves in hand. But the work that all heaven was waiting to do as soon as men prepared the way, was not done, for the leaders closed, and bolted the door against the Spirit’s entrance. There was a stopping short of entire surrender to God. And hearts that might have been purified from all error were strengthened in wrong doing. The doors were barred against the heavenly current that would have swept away all evil” (Letter to Dr. J. H. Kellogg, Aug. 5, 1902).

“If the men who heard the message given at the time of the Conference—the most solemn message that could be given—had not been so unimpressionable, if in sincerity they had asked, ‘Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?’ the experience of the past year would have been very different from what it is. But they have not made the track clean behind them. They have not confessed

their mistakes, and now they are going over the same ground in many things, following the same wrong course of action, because they have destroyed their spiritual eyesight. . .

“If the work begun at the [1901] General Conference had been carried forward to perfection, I should not be called upon to write these words. There was opportunity to confess or deny wrong, and in many cases the denial came to avoid the consequences of confession.

“Unless there is a reformation, calamity will overtake the publishing house, and the world will know the reason. I have been shown that there has not been a turning to God with full purpose of heart. . . . God has been mocked by your hardness of heart, which is continually increasing” (8T 93-96, “read to the Review and Herald Board in November, 1901;” the next testimony on page 97 is entitled, “The Review and Herald Fire”).

The “hardened heart”! Could that be our problem too? What does that “heavenly universe” see that we don’t see?

What is said here is with deep respect for our historians, whose sincerity is unquestioned. We are repeating the history of Jeremiah’s era. The problem is beyond us, yet so simple that even a child can grasp it. Once the latter rain and the loud cry are not longer resisted, we are told, the work will go “like fire in the stubble.” Something doused the fire.

Righteousness by faith is a vital, throbbing, explosive truth. You have it or you don’t; and if you have it, you turn the world upside down. Nothing

less. *In whatever generation that “has” it, Revelation 18 becomes fulfilled.*

Thank God, there is Good News.

Scripture prophesies a worldwide proclamation of pure gospel truth. “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). “Living waters shall go out from Jerusalem” (Zech. 14:8). “Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and . . . Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa. 60:1-3). “In the last days, saith God, . . . on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit” (Acts 2:17, 18). “I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power: and the earth was lightened with His glory” (Rev. 18:1).

Great Good News!

The Soon Coming of Christ: Has “Soon” Lost its Meaning?”

Has the “blessed hope” become naive?

Can we go on forever excusing the “delay”?

If our forefathers hadn't built the soon coming of Jesus into our very denominational name, we wouldn't be embarrassed by this century and a half of delay. As far back as 1850 Ellen White wrote that “time . . . is nearly finished, and that time can last but a very little longer.” “Time is almost finished.”⁶ Again, in 1904 she said, “The Lord is coming very

⁶ *Early Writings*, pp. 58, 64.

soon.”⁷ Ever since, we have been nurtured on constant assurances that “the end is near.”

“Christ is coming soon.”

Adventist college students are perplexed: “We have mixed thoughts and feelings from hearing predictions that the Second Coming might happen in the next 10 years or that it might not happen in our lifetime at all?” “We are a generation of non-conviction when it comes to Jesus’ second coming.” “I can’t imagine it happening in my lifetime.”⁸

If such comments had been published in the *Review* a century ago, they would have evoked a storm of protest from readers. To them such non-conviction would destroy the church like termites burrowing from within.

Nor can we today get off the hook by comfortably redefining “Adventism” as a nebulous belief in some “far-off divine event.” Webster’s New World Dictionary tells the world that Adventism means “the belief that Christ’s Second Coming to earth and the Last Judgment will soon occur” (emphasis added).

As the decades roll by it is only natural that thoughtful Adventists should explore ways to apologize for the long-extended “Great Disappointment?” In recent memory, a Sabbath School quarterly suggested that the Second Coming began at Pentecost and has been going on ever since. Voices within the church have that “the last days” began with Christ’s resurrection, casting doubt on the entire schema of the 1260 years followed by the “time of the end” in 1798. “Soon”

⁷ *Evangelism*, p. 624.

⁸ *Adventist Review*, Jan. 2, 1992.

has become so flexible that it might even mean centuries after the Lord's messenger said that time is "nearly finished." A Union College student admitted in the *Review* article, "I really don't think we can have any idea of when He'll come."⁹

There is a logic of realism that forces itself on the thinking of youth. They know that parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents fully expected that "soon" meant soon, and that Christ would return in their lifetime. They saw all the "signs" that said so. In fact, the "signs" they saw made it seem nearer to them then than it does to us now. Is there a solid basis for a genuine "Adventist" belief today that can make sense of this long delay? Can today's youth genuinely recapture the "blessed hope" of our youthful pioneers? Or was it naive?

There are several grand truths about Christ's Second Coming that we need to consider

1. His character has not changed from what it was 2000 years ago. "This same Jesus . . . will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). But Paul says that "in flaming fire" He will "take vengeance" on His enemies (2 Thess. 1:8). Will He be a bloodthirsty tyrant with a celestial machine gun to mow down His enemies in hateful revenge? If "God is love" (1 John 4:8), no. Christ must still be love when He returns. James and John wanted to call down that same "fire . . . from

⁹ A prominent Seventh-day Adventist editor published (with obvious approval) a letter from a reader suggesting that Ellen White's oft-repeated "6000" years might be 6,400 years (which would be A. D. 2400; *Perspective Digest*, vol. 5, No. 2, 2000).

heaven" to wipe out the unbelieving Samaritans, but Jesus said, No, "the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:54, 56).

2. Why the apparent change at the Second Coming? The reason is that God's personal presence has to be a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). Have you ever put a dish with a plastic spoon in a microwave oven? No problem. But if you leave in a metal spoon, the microwaves attack it and the sparks fly. The personal presence of God is not destruction to His people who have eschewed sin; but it has to be destruction to sin itself. Those who have made a final choice to cling to it are like the spoon in the microwave—the personal presence of *agape* has to destroy them because they have clung to sin like a vine to a tree until both are one. They simply cannot endure to look into the face of Christ.¹⁰ The point: doesn't it make sense to get rid of the sin now?

But someone may say, "Yes, I'd like to, but it is too deep within me, I don't see how I can ever overcome it." That problem is the reason why Jesus Christ is now serving as great High Priest in His final work in the heavenly sanctuary (see Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16; 7:25). Heaven's total resources are ours for overcoming sin in this final Day of

¹⁰ The lost "tormented . . . in the presence of the . . . Lamb" (Rev. 14:10) does not mean that Christ enjoys the spectacle like medieval Inquisitors at an *auto-da fe*. The Greek word is *enopion*, literally, "before the eye or their torture is entirely self-inflicted, because in their unrepentant state they cannot endure to look into the eyes of the One they have crucified.

Atonement. Sin can be removed from the heart, from the character, no matter how deeply it is engrained within us. A mere forgiveness that excuses or pardons sin but leaves it intact is not good enough. When the Lord truly forgives a sin, He takes it away (that's the meaning of the Greek word). The essence of Adventism insists that there is a difference between the personal forgiveness of sin and the final corporate blotting out of sin, and the Good News is that He will blot it out if we let Him do so.

3. Therefore the only reason why the Second Coming has been delayed is because God's people are not ready to face His personal presence. Sin still in the heart would result in their destruction. The Lord loves them too much to subject them to such a test unless they are ready. Thus as Peter says, Christ delays, "not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

4. Jesus Christ is a disappointed Bridegroom. Rightly understood, the entire Bible becomes a love story, with the climax near the end in Revelation 19. A wedding takes place because at last the bride "has made herself ready" (vs. 7). Christ has long desired that day to come, because His love for His church is likened to that of a bridegroom for his bride (Eph. 5:22-32). He placed the Song of Solomon in the Bible for a purpose—to arouse our hearts to sense the full meaning of His love for His church. The Second Coming will be to take His bride to Himself.

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5. The Father therefore has not predetermined the time for Christ's Second Coming. In His infinite foreknowledge He knows the time, but for Him to know is not the same as to predetermine. For example, He knows who will eventually be saved and who will be lost, but He does not predetermine salvation or damnation for anyone. And Jesus expressly says He Himself does not know the time of His coming (Mark 13:32).

The timing of the Second Coming is different than for the first. To confuse the two is to repeat the mistake of the ancient Jews who assumed that the prophecies of the two advents were the same. Daniel indeed foretold exactly when Christ should first appear as Messiah, and "like the stars in the vast circuit of their appointed path, God's purposes know no haste and no delay" (see Daniel 9:24-27; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 32). But the love of God requires that the timing for the Second Coming is different; it must be dependent on a people getting ready.

Jesus explained this in His parable of the farmer who plants seed. When the crop is ripe, "immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:29). An angel finally tells Christ when that time has come: "thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for thee to reap" Why? Because the time-clock of heaven has triggered its predetermined alarm peg? No, "for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Rev. 14:14, 15).

God's people are not like ants on a log floating down the river, with no involvement in where they are going or when. They "sit with [Christ] on [His]

throne,” sharing with Him the administration of the denouement of world history. He has left in their care the “ministry of reconciliation;” because in the time of the end they share His throne with Him (see Rev. 3:21; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19). They are intimately involved in His final work in the Most Holy Apartment.

More than this, “the ministry of reconciliation” assigned to them has a deep influence on world events. If they will faithfully proclaim the sealing message of Revelation 7:1-4, He promises to say “Hold!” to the “four angels . . . holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow.”¹¹ It must follow that it was not necessary that World Wars I and II should wreak their havoc and agony. But our failure for many decades to proclaim the sealing message made it impossible for the “four angels” to “hold” the winds. (See sidebar, “Could the ‘Four Winds’ Blow Again?”)

6. The Second Coming of Christ becomes a rescue mission. Led by the two-horned “beast” of Revelation 13, the people of the world will demonstrate a final rebellion against the Lamb by trying to rid the earth of His people (13:11-17; 14:9, 10). This will be a planned re-crucifixion of Christ, this time in the person of His saints. “The wrath of the Lamb” is a natural outcome. What bridegroom in his right mind would stand idly by while thugs seek to kill his bride?

7. In fact, the Second Coming of Christ is as “soon” as we truly want it to be. That doesn’t mean

¹¹ *Early Writings*, p. 38.

that a few individuals’ selfish desire to “go home to glory” will bring it. The heavenly Bridegroom will marry no “child-bride.” She must grow up “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” into maturity (Eph. 4:13). This means a concern for Him that transcends our natural-born concern for our own personal security.

Such maturity is intelligently, empathetically, entering into, identifying with, Christ’s yearnings, as a bride enters into her husband’s. This is Bible

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“perfection.” But we have a Bridegroom whose ‘disappointment . . . [at the delay] is beyond description,’¹² and a bride-to-be who so far seems content to remain a child at the wedding.

No individual or group of individuals can be the “bride” in this wedding. As the soon-to-be population of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, “the church is the bride” says Ellen White.¹³ The church is a corporate body intricately fashioned cohesively of its many “members,” as the cells and organs of one’s body constitute a person. No one cell of the human body, or even organ or limb, matures on its own, apart from its corporate oneness with the body as a whole. “So also is Christ,” says Paul, “for the body is not one member but many” (1 Cor. 12:12, 14).

An individual preparation for the Second Coming is proper; but there has to be also a corporate preparation, or each individual will have to go into

¹² *Review and Herald*, Dec. 15, 1904.

¹³ See *SDA Bible Commentary*, Vol. 7, p. 986.

the grave as have countless others throughout the ages. If a body is sick, the whole must be healed. God's people do not go to heaven individually at death, as other churches teach; they await a corporate resurrection, which in turn must await a corporate repentance on the part of the living saints.

The 1888 truth is forever linked with the "doctrine" of the Second Coming.

It is impossible otherwise to understand the "delay." Said Ellen White almost a century ago: "The great outpouring of the Spirit of God, which lightens the whole earth with his glory, will not come until we have an enlightened people."¹⁴ It was in the 1888 message that our Lord sent the "enlightenment," and appealed to

His bride-to-be to "grow up." This message was divinely intended to assuage forever the pain of our Great Disappointment of 1844. The message was specifically sent of heaven to prepare a people for the Second Coming. As Dwight Nelson once so aptly said, "1844 was our Great Disappointment, but 1888 was His."

But there is Good News. Christ's grand sacrifice on His cross and His high priestly ministry will not in the end prove fruitless, because "an enlightened people" will surely understand how and why they have delayed His return, and will respond to His appeal for repentance.

Is it not vanity to talk about the Second Coming and not give heed to the message that was intended to prepare us for it?

¹⁴ *Review and Herald*, July 21, 1896.