

THE 1888 MESSAGE FOR THE 1990'S: A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

By Paul Penno Jr.

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The Evangelical churches are being severely bombarded by the charismatic movements, and the temptation to succumb is enormous. Did not Jesus say, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"? And did He not promise that "great works shall he do" who believes on Him? Did He not say that "signs and wonders" would attest the faith of His servants?

The Pentecostals promise ecstatic worship, healings, exorcisms, speaking in tongues, prophecies, and "words of knowledge" that are presumably miraculous. They pressure non-charismatic Christians to exchange their apparently do-nothing God for the miracle-working deity they have discovered.

It is not only withered hands and cancer that the charismatics claim to heal by the immediacy of their spiritual power. They claim that cocaine and heroin addicts are delivered and that homosexuals find complete sexual reorientation accomplished for them as the result of the charismatics' prayers. No wonder that thousands of people are flocking to these healing ministries of many forms.

It makes sense to them that the miracles described in the four Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles are being re-enacted. Those who worship in "power-less" church communions are considered naïve or stupid, and certainly deprived. Charismatics say that ordinary Christian churches are blind "to the occult, to witchcraft, to the infiltration of Eastern religions, to what drugs are doing to a whole generation. They are living in a world that isn't even our world. Since the sixties there has been a decisive shift not only in world view but in the experience of people. People on

the street are in contact with personal evil every day." To deal with such chaos on a strictly cognitive level is "just stupid." (Don Williams, *Christianity Today*, Aug. 8, 1986).

If we try to project ourselves back into the 1888 era, it would be difficult to imagine the confusion and perplexity that confront us a century later. The charismatic waves of Pentecostalism have barely lapped on Seventh-day Adventist shores as yet, but we sense the challenge keenly. All too often we are impotent as we face the tragic demonism of drug addiction, infatuation with sensuality or infidelity, homosexuality, and a host of modern plagues. Where is the Lord God of Elijah who can part the waters?

For Seventh-day Adventists, it would be a total denial of our faith to yield to the charismatic temptation. This is because our unique faith is rooted in the spiritual significance of the 1844 change of Christ's High Priestly ministry from the first apartment to the second apartment in the heavenly sanctuary. The specter of Christ's enemy attempting to entrench himself in the first apartment ministry deeply concerns us (EW 55, 56).

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This does not mean that the true High Priest in the second apartment is impotent! He breathes genuine power upon those who follow Him by faith, including the primary gift of genuine love [*agape*]. If our faith is healthy and true, we need suffer no lack of power in our war with sin.

Non-charismatic Evangelicals view Pentecostalism with alarm because it tends to supersede faith in the written word of God and to discount the practical ministry of Christianity in regeneration and sanctification. They point to Joni Eareckson as one who was not miraculously healed but who demonstrates practical religion in her patient and positive submission to suffering.

Can the hundred-year old 1888 message of Christ's righteousness be helpful to the Seventh-day Adventist church in the traumatic years ahead (if time should last)? The answer is yes, because there is power inherent in the message itself. The gospel, not miracle working wonders, is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). We dare not discount the power inherent in the gospel of the apostles and concentrate instead on miracles. Strictly speaking, miracles could never convert a single soul in apostolic days; they could only gain attention. The conversions always came through the proclamation of the content of the gospel.

The work divinely committed to Seventh-day Adventist church is not to try to duplicate the miracles performed by those who [*sic.*] "who have no knowledge of the way into the Most Holy Place," but to proclaim to the world the true "everlasting gospel" concerning the work Christ performed on His cross and which He is performing in the heavenly sanctuary in some instances, the Lord will see fit to work miracles in response to the prayer of faith of His servants; some miracles of healing and of knowledge were evident in the 1888 era. But the prophetic picture of Revelation 18 is not that of a vast miracle-working movement, but the lighting of the earth with the glory of a *message* that carries built-in within it a "great power" that will be effective in preparing a people for the return of the Saviour.

The essential truths of the 1888 message constitute "the beginning" of the work of that great fourth angel. They have not been clearly comprehended or appreciated for the greater part of a century; seen in their true light, they will work revival and reformation within the church and begin to prepare the way for the greater light that will lighten the earth with glory.

God dares not grant His people the power He longs to bestow on them so long as there is in the church a root of pride and self-sufficiency that would bear fruit in self-

glorying, either as individuals or as a corporate body of the church. Rightly understood, the 1888 message and history lay the glory of man in the dust. The truth of the message delivers the believing soul from self-love. An appropriate repentance for "our" rejection of the latter rain and "our" insult to the Holy Spirit is the most healthful experience that **{3}** can pervade our denominational conscience. Unnumbered souls, including youth, will be truly converted when they see a demonstration of contrition in the leadership and ministry of this church.

The so-called Reformationist "new theology" of recent years has proven itself a tragic failure. From the beginning, it was an overt rejection of the essentials of the 1888 message and a turning to Calvinist concepts instead. The motivation was understandable in that it was intended to effect within the church a deliverance from the pervasive legalism of the past.

But it has produced an unhealthy reaction. Rejecting the true New Testament justification by faith that produces obedience to "all the commandments of God," it has produced in hundreds of ministers and lay members an abandonment of confidence in the Seventh-day Adventist mission, leaving a wake of doubt, cynicism, apathy, and lowered standards that virtually constitute an Adventist antinomianism. Implicit in both "historicist" legalism and the new theology is a recurring antipathy for the distinctive "good news" truths of the 1888 message. Is it not time to accept that "most precious message" that the Lord Himself sent us?

Re "the man of Romans 7," Calvin quotes the heathen writer Ovidius, who said: "Video meliora proboque; deteriora sequor" (I see what is better and accept it, but I follow what is worse). (LaRondelle, RbyF p 92).

"THE WORLD IS NOW WAITING FOR A NEW DEFINITION OF THE GOSPEL AND A NEW DEMONSTRATION OF ITS power. The decisive impact of

the 3rd angel's message will be made by the content of its doctrine as well as by the consecration of its disciples. With personal holiness and a passionate love for souls let us link a strong, scriptural, and scholarly theology" (Ministry, Apr 1957, Clifford Reeves).

One Source of the Acceptance Myth

The widely popular view that the 1888 message was accepted by the leadership of this church derives from earnest, sincere, well-meaning men. Nevertheless, it is in direct conflict with numerous Ellen White statements.

An example of how the myth gained official credence is found in a statement made by W. C. White in a sermon given in Lincoln, Nebraska, November 25, 1905. He is describing to his audience an incident that took place in Avondale, Australia, in 1895 when W. W. Prescott was visiting there. The mail had come in from America, and he and Prescott were reading to Ellen White letters from the leading brethren of the General Conference in faraway Battle Creek. The letters told of alleged great progress in the cause in America and of wonderful spiritual victories in Battle Creek in respect of the 1888 issues. W. C. White recalls the incident:

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For years I have felt that it was my privilege to do all I could to draw Mother's attention to the most cheerful features of our work. . . . I reasoned that as the Lord has chosen Mother to be His messenger for the correcting of wrongs in the church, . . . and as these revelations burden her heart almost to death, therefore it can not be wrong for me to gather up all the words of cheer, and all the good news that will comfort her heart, and every incident that will show the power of Christ working in the church, and that will make manifest the best side of the workings of men

who are bearing heavy burdens in the work of the Lord; therefore I will endeavor to bring to her attention the bright side of things.

Well, one day while we were living at Corranbong, New South Wales, we received letters from the President of the General Conference, filled with cheering reports, telling us about the good camp meetings, and how that some of these businessmen who had been reproved by the Testimonies [Harmon Lindsay and A. R. Henry, "opposed to the work of God ever since the Minneapolis meeting," EGW Letter August 27, 1896] were going out to various states and speaking in the camp meetings, and that they were getting a new spiritual experience, and were a real help in the meetings. . . .

We [he and Prescott] were made very happy by the read of these letters. We were fairly overjoyed about it, and we united in praising the Lord for the good report. Imagine my surprise when in the afternoon of the next day Mother told me that she had been writing to these men of whom we had receive the good report, and she then read me the most far-reaching criticism, the most searching reproof for bringing in wrong plans and principles in their work, that were ever written to that group of men. This was a great lesson to me. (Spalding-Magan Collection, p. 470).

Ellen White's version throws further light on the situation. It is in no way disrespectful of their memory to note that neither W. C. White nor W. W. Prescott enjoyed the larger discernment that is divinely imparted by the gift of prophecy. Writing to a friend, she describes how she felt when Willie and Prescott assumed that the glowing reports from Battle Creek were true:

Dear Brother Olsen:

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Last October I wrote you a long letter. . . . The burden upon me was very great, in regard to yourself and the work in Battle Creek. I felt that you were being bound hand and foot, and were tamely submitting to it. I was so troubled, that in conversation with Brother Prescott, I told him of my feelings. Both he and W.C.W. tried to dissipate my fears; they presented everything in as favorable a light as possible. But instead of encouraging me, their words alarmed me. If these men cannot see the outcome of affairs, I thought, how hopeless the task of making them see at Battle Creek. The thought struck to my heart like a knife. I said, I will not send the communication written to Eld. Olsen.

. . . for about two weeks I remained in utter hopelessness. I was like a broken reed. I could not leave my room, could not converse with Brother and Sister Prescott. I did not expect to recover. . . . But . . . my strength gradually returned to me. (Letter, May 25, 1896).

For the better part of a century we have been prone to repeat [this easily prevalent false optimism]. The tragic consequence of is a complementary distrust of the counsel of the True Witness who says that in reality we are “miserable poor, blind, and naked.” Rightly understood, our denominational history is one continual commentary on His words, and a call to repentance.

He who controls the past controls the future.
Lukewarmness and spiritual weakness are a consequence of misinterpreting history.