The Fragmenting of Apocalypticism within a Denominationalizing Sect: The Case of Seventh-day Adventism

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**Introduction**

Research has shown that over time many religious sects reduce the tensions between themselves and surrounding society, and thus move from sect towards denomination. For a millenarian sect to follow this process, its apocalyptic must become less urgent: it must become less rejecting of the present society and put down roots there. However, the dynamics of this process, and especially the strains that emerge within the group as a result of the diversifying of beliefs about its apocalyptic during the long period of change have never before been the focus of detailed investigation. An excellent example of such dynamics is provided by Seventh-day Adventists [Adventists].

Adventists trace their roots to the Millerite Movement, which proclaimed that the Second Coming of Christ would occur on October 22, 1844. That is, their origins were urgently apocalyptic. In spite of the humiliation and heartbreak of what they called the "Great Disappointment," Adventist pioneers continued to expect the imminent return of Jesus, and regarded this belief as so important that they enshrined it in their name.

In October 1994, Adventists celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Great Disappointment – and of a century and a half of believing and preaching that Jesus would soon return. This paper explores the responses of North American Adventists to the tension between their belief in an imminent apocalypse and the delay in its fulfillment. An examination of the eschatology that is taught and believed reveals that considerable tension and fragmentation has emerged among Adventists today concerning this central belief. The paper provides the first analysis of differential responses to the apocalyptic within a sect evolving into a denomination.

**Theoretical Focus**

This question is explored with the help of insights from church-sect theory. This theory, which was developed first by Troeltsch in 1911 (1931), proved especially stimulating once Niebuhr applied it to the religious scene in the U.S. in 1929 (1957). Here the vast religious pluralism and the absence of an established church led researchers to change the theory's nomenclature, as they now compared sects with denominations rather than churches, and tested Niebuhr's contention that all sects were destined to be transformed into denominations (Yinger 1957: 54). Because of confusion caused by differences between researchers in the lists of characteristics used to define sect and denomination, Stark and Bainbridge, building on Johnson's insight (1963: 542) were moved to put forward a single dimension: "the degree to which a religious group is in a state of tension with its surrounding sociocultural environment" (1985: 23). They defined a sect as a religious group having high...
tension with society, and a denomination as having low tension. Tension has three elements: difference, antagonism, and separation (49-51).

Although research has shown that Niebuhr was incorrect in his expectation that all sects become denominations, with time most of those that grow compromise with the world, reducing their tension with society, and move towards denominational status: "The response of the founders towards the outside world becomes difficult to maintain for successive generations.... all organizations are prone to suffer an attenuation in commitment to their original values" (Wilson 1969 (1963): 371,372). This usually occurs as there is increased participation in the wider society and as influential members experience upward mobility and then find that the tension between their religious group and society is inconsistent with their interests (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 134, 99, 103). As a sect begins to move from sect towards denomination, its membership is likely to become more diverse. For example, Niebuhr realized that some members would become uncomfortable with change and compromise, and would hold fast to the traditional teachings, thus creating theological diversity within the ranks and risking, ultimately, a new sectarian schism (1957 (1929): 19-20, 54).

Since an urgent apocalyptic anticipates the sudden destruction of society and, indeed, "the end of the world," a group holding such an expectation is, by definition, in considerable tension with its environment. However, as Bryan Wilson pointed out, intense apocalypticism "is difficult to maintain. The expectation that the world is to overturn through supernatural action is necessarily subject to repeated postponement" (1973: 36). Indeed, this expectation may be maintained most strongly by new converts, "fervent for what is, to them, a new vision" (1973: 37). The prototype of a millenarian sect reducing its tension with society and the urgency of its apocalyptic is the Early Christian Church. Seventh-day Adventism is an excellent contemporary example (Wilson 1970: 236).

The process whereby a denominationalizing sect reduces the urgency of its apocalyptic has received little detailed analysis: Rodney Stark, for example, stated that he omitted a discussion of this important transformation from his recent book focusing on the history of Early Christianity (1996) because there were so few data available. There has also been no analysis of the different responses of strata within a religious movement to such changes. This paper focuses on the Seventh-day Adventist experience in order to explore both these themes: (1) the dynamics of change over time in its apocalyptic, and (2) the impact of these changes in the credibility of this cherished belief on key strata within the religious group, and ultimately on its theological and organizational unity. Finally, the paper weighs the extent to which the Adventist experience has in these respects been typical of apocalyptic sects or relatively unusual.

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1 Yinger coined the term established sect for groups which remain sectarian--the Jehovah's Witnesses are one such example (1946: 22-23). Wilson classified sects, and showed that some sects change from one category of sect to another over time rather than evolving into denominations (1969; 1970).

2 Personal communication.
Research Methods

The research reported here is a product of a large study of international Seventh-day Adventism. Over the past twelve years I have gathered data in 54 countries in all eleven of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s world divisions, completing over 3,000 long, in-depth interviews with church administrators, pastors, teachers, hospital personnel, college students, and leading laypersons. I have also collected lengthy, probing questionnaires from interviewees (who are mostly church employees) and from samples of college students and laity, gathered field notes from observation at church services and key meetings, and culled data systematically from Adventist periodicals, statistical reports, and secondary sources.

This paper focuses on the North American Division of the Adventist Church (the U.S. and Canada). Its data are drawn from North American interviews and questionnaires, and from books and periodicals published by the official Adventist publishing houses, independent organizations of conservative and liberal Adventists, and urgently apocalyptic "independent ministries" on the fringes of Adventism. It also utilizes data from four other relevant surveys of North American Adventists. The analysis of the dynamics of change in earlier periods is based on data drawn from the work of historians of Adventism and oral history interviews by the author.

In order to keep the confidentiality of interviewees, as was promised them, the convention adopted by the study is to refrain from citing the names of interviewees when they are quoted except when they are major figures in the church.

Apocalyptic Urgency Among Early Adventists

William Miller, a Baptist layperson, focused closely on the apocalyptic visions of the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, and especially on prophecies that seemed to cover periods of time, such as 1,260 or 2,300 days. Using a historicist approach to these writings, and the key that a day symbolized a year, he concluded that "the time of the end" had begun in 1798 and that the Second Coming of Christ would occur on Yom Kippur in 1844. Preaching with increasing urgency as the time approached, he gathered a large following in the Northeastern states of the U.S. These people were bitterly disappointed and humiliated when the prophecy failed (Numbers and Butler 1987).

Although Miller withdrew and his movement dispersed following the Great Disappointment, a small group of his followers reinterpreted the prophecy: October 22, 1844 had marked the commencement of the pre-advent judgment in heaven and the final date singled out by time prophecy; the return of Jesus would follow quickly. A young visionary, Ellen White, played an important role in confirming this interpretation. Since they initially believed that the "door of mercy" had been shut with the beginning of judgment, they made no efforts to evangelize. Even after they came to believe that the door was still open and that they were indeed called to share their message with others, they delayed formal organization and foreign evangelism, believing that insufficient time remained for such things.

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3 This saw them as being fulfilled over the centuries rather than during the early Christian era (a preterist approach) or all in the future, just prior to the end of time (futurist).
In Miller's prophecies, governments had been portrayed as wild beasts which hurt God's people. Adventists elaborated on these as they developed their eschatology further. When, following their adoption of the Saturday-Sabbath, some members were arrested for violating state "blue laws" when they plowed their fields on Sundays, this led them to a unique interpretation of one prophecy: beginning in 1851, they denounced the American Republic, identifying it with the second beast of Revelation 13, which "had two horns like a lamb" and spoke "like a dragon." They cherished the foundation of America, with its Constitution and Bill of Rights, seeing this as symbolized by the beast's lamb-like appearance, with the two horns representing the two principles of political and religious freedom. But, pointing to slavery and to the religious intolerance they were experiencing, they held that America had betrayed both principles. It was already, and would increasingly become, a dragon in lamb's clothing, and would play a persecuting role in the world's final events (Morgan 1994: 238).

That is, Adventist eschatology invoked tension with the state: it was highly sectarian at this point.

**Extending the Time**

Adventists finally created a formal organization and chose a name for themselves in the early 1860s. Their belief in the imminence of Christ's return was so central to them that they blazoned this belief in their name: Seventh-day Adventist. Their total membership at that time stood at 3,500. One of their first decisions risked increasing tension with the state and attracting scorn from their fellow citizens: they declared that they were conscientious objectors to military service, and refused conscription during the American Civil War (Lawson 1996b). They also began to build institutions – publishing houses to get their message out, schools and colleges to prepare better preachers and other "workers," and medical facilities, which Ellen White dubbed "the entering wedge." All these were seen as helping them spread their "final warning message," after which the "end" would come. The first foreign missionary was sent to Europe in 1874, and many more followed – and more institutions were built abroad. Adventists engaged in a building spree between 1860 and 1901: 16 colleges and high schools, a medical school, 75 "sanitariums" or hospitals, 13 publishing houses, and 31 miscellaneous institutions (such as health food factories). By 1901 their total membership stood at 78,000 (Yearbook 1901).

Although the institutions were created in order to facilitate Adventists in their goals of broadcasting their message and ushering in the Kingdom, the result was gradual goal displacement: there was inevitable tension between longer-term building and organizing and the urgency of their message. This was starkly illustrated when Dr Harvey Kellogg, director of their famous Battle Creek Sanitarium, sought accreditation for the new medical school. His initial application, in 1897, was rejected on the grounds that the school was sponsored by Adventists and taught vegetarianism. When he reapplied in 1899, he muted his Adventism, claiming that he believed "in the natural, not the supernatural" and that he was opposed to sectarian schools (Knight: 10).

Meanwhile, Ellen White had been elaborating on Adventist eschatology, with special attention to the final events just before the Second Coming. The main players were to be

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4 He was also the inventor of cornflakes and peanut butter.
Satan and his henchmen the Roman Catholic Church, whose "deadly wound," received at the hands of the Protestant Reformation and the French Revolution, would be healed to such an extent that "all the world would wonder after the beast," "Apostate Protestantism," "Spiritualism," and the U.S. government. These would persecute God's "Remnant" – the loyal Adventists – beginning in the U.S.:

"When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when, under the influence of the threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government...then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan and that the end is near" (White 1885: 451).

White's eschatology was published in final form in 1888 in The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. Its details – from "the little time of trouble" to "Jacob's time of trouble," from the "loud cry" to the "shaking time," from the "early rain" to the "latter rain," from the "close of probation" to the "seven last plagues," from the passage of a "national Sunday law" and application of the "mark of the beast" to God's final intervention to save His saints – were to inspire both fear and hope, and countless charts attempting to order the "last-day events," among Adventists.

The details of White's eschatology reflected the times in which she wrote – spiritualism was in vogue, and a Protestant establishment was trying to shore up its position by, among other things, introducing a "national Sunday law" that would protect and codify the state blue laws. Much of the argument of The Great Controversy "was familiar to evangelicals of the time." It "celebrated the achievement of church-state separation in America as a legacy of Protestantism, and displayed a Protestant predisposition for strict Sabbath observance, temperance, law, order and morality. The Adventist prophetess diverged from nineteenth-century evangelicals regarding which Sabbath should be strictly observed... Moreover, she protested the coercive measures to enforce Sunday observance as a departure from religious liberty" (Butler 1986: 65, 68). Although White declared that "the final events" would be "rapid," the effect of all the detail was to create an impression that the end was somewhat more distant – especially when the national Sunday law failed to pass in both 1888 and 1889. Adventists had a part in this outcome – they had chosen to work against the fulfillment of their own sign of the eschaton.

The elaboration of Adventist eschatology had involved some reshaping, especially of their view of the U.S. While they continued to identify America with the two-horned beast, it was no longer portrayed as already in the dragon phase, but as still lamb-like, and its demise was thus seen as less imminent. That is, the time believed to be remaining before the Second Coming of Christ was lengthening, and tension with the state was beginning to relax.

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5 The dragon of Revelation.
6 This interpretation was first made by European Protestant reformers.
7 By this White meant all the Protestant church organizations together with those members who failed to accept the Adventist message.
8 Since Adventists believed that the dead were dead until resurrected, any attempt to contact the dead was, by definition, of the Devil.
Moreover, Ellen White now counseled rapprochement with civil authorities in order to facilitate missionary work, urging Adventists to help prolong the future of America "so the Adventist message could go forth and flourish" (Butler 1974: 193). That is, Adventists found themselves in the anomalous situation where they wished to delay the end of the world in order to have greater opportunity to preach that it was at hand. Consequently, although their rehoned eschatology saw the passage of a national Sunday law as the culmination of the prophecy concerning the two-horned beast, and thus a sure signal that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand, they felt obliged by Ellen White's counsel to "extend the time" to respond boldly to this threat. They established a magazine, the American Sentinel, devoted to religious liberty, in 1883; they participated in the lobby that helped defeat Senator H.W. Blair's Sunday-Rest bill in 1888 and 1889, invoking the First Amendment in their defense; and in 1889 they founded the National Religious Liberty Association to defend the "wall of separation" between church and state. By 1892, when they entered the debate over the Sunday closing of the Chicago World Exposition, their involvement included petitions to both Houses, the reading of papers before congressional committees, and the presentation of legal briefs in court (Butler 1974: 196-98; Morgan 1994: 241-42). The creation of what became the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department [PARL] within the General Conference institutionalized the Adventist Church's role as a watchdog of the First Amendment. Henceforth, there was a tension between the public presentation of the Adventist message that Christ's return was "even at the doors" and the dogged determination of Adventist leaders to foster the separation of church and state, and thus to postpone the prophesied passage of a National Sunday Law. There was also a growing tension between their public preaching that the end of the world was at hand and the extent to which Adventists were prospering and putting down roots in American society.

During the following decades, Adventism continued to accommodate to the state. It pursued accreditation for its colleges, transformed its stance on military service, and accepted government aid for its schools and hospitals. In order to receive accreditation, it exposed its academics to graduate study at major universities, which inevitably impacted the content of their courses, and thus also their students; ultimately it also impacted their pastors, when religion departments, which were not obliged to be accredited, played "catch-up" with the other college departments. Meanwhile, accreditation prepared the way for widespread upward mobility among graduates of Adventist colleges (Lawson 1995a).

Adventists, who had invited scorn by declaring during the American Civil War that they were conscientious objectors, chose to serve in World War I as unarmed medical orderlies, thus allowing members to express their patriotism while refraining from killing. During World War II, the Church reached out to create a close relationship with the American military, and through that, with the federal government. In 1939, as war broke out in Europe, the American church established a program to provide medical training to members who were potential draftees. Called the Medical Cadet Training Program, it was directed and supervised, through cooperation with the armed forces, by regular army officers. The official church paper commented: "Refusing to be called conscientious objectors, Seventh-day Adventists desire to be known as conscientious cooperators" (Editorial 1941: 4). Many Adventists became militant church headquarters.
patriots, scorning conscientious objectors, until ultimately, in 1972, Church leaders removed their insistence that members not bear arms (Lawson 1996b).

After World War II there was an extended debate within American Adventism over whether and to what extent it should accept the government aid, beginning with the G.I. Bill, that became available to private institutions such as schools and hospitals. The ultimate decision to accept aid, both for students and, with some restrictions, then directly to its institutions, compromised the Adventist stand on the separation of church and state (Morgan 1992: 271-284; Syme 1973: 120-143).

Adventism also began to adjust to the religious economy. In the 1950s church leaders participated in a series of meetings with two well-known Evangelical scholars, Walter R. Martin and Donald Grey Barnhouse who, in the process of writing a series of studies on Christian "cults," had begun researching Seventh-day Adventism. When Adventists published their answers to the questions posed to them by the Evangelicals, it was revealed that they had denied three doctrines that had been widely held among them but were offensive to Evangelicals (QOD 1957). All three doctrines were relevant to the specialness of Adventism and its end-time message. Although some expressed a sense of betrayal over the new formulation of belief, there was widespread exhilaration when Martin's book, *The Truth about Seventh-day Adventism* (1960), declared that Adventists were not a cult but were "bretheren" of the Christian Evangelicals.

In spite of their belief that the "end of the world" was "imminent," Adventists were successfully putting down roots in society and, in the process, becoming world-affirming. As a corollary of this process they, in effect, postponed the apocalypse. Sometimes this was recognized explicitly by Adventist spokespersons. For example, when, during World War II, Supreme Court decisions strengthened religious liberty and Roosevelt included freedom of religion as one of his four basic freedoms, the editor of the official church paper, the *Review and Herald*, commented that what Adventists had prophesied clearly lay further in the future (Editorial 1943: 4). Seventh-day Adventism had become a denominationalizing sect.

**Expectancy and Delay**

This does not mean that the Adventist Church had abandoned its eschatology – far from it. Adventists continued to believe that Jesus was returning "soon," and that, in their hearts, usually meant that they did not expect to die or that their children would reach maturity. It also meant that they continued to look expectantly for signs of the fulfillment of Ellen White's whole eschatological scenario. Consequently, they remained prone to excitement whenever they found evidence that the return of the Lord might be near. Although the Adventist Church, as a corporate religious body, learned the lesson of 1844 and has never set or endorsed a date for the Second Coming, groups of Adventists have focused on particular dates for that event more than 20 times in the past 150 years (Paulien 1994: 24). Sometimes these were based on analogies to biblical events: 1884, because the Israelites wandered 40 years in the wilderness, or 1964, because Noah preached 120 years and Jesus said "As it was in the days of Noah, so

10 These doctrines were that Christ was born with a sinful nature (this change disowned the bulwark of last-generation perfectionism), that the writings of Ellen White were free of error and equal to the Scriptures, and that Adventists alone comprised the biblical Remnant.
shall it be at the coming of the Son of Man." More often they were based on world events which seemed likely to fulfill Adventist predictions. Attention was often drawn to these events by Adventist evangelists.

Eschatology remained at the center of Adventist evangelism—it attracted crowds and gained conversions, especially during times of crisis. Adventist evangelists made much of both world wars, the great depression, the election of Kennedy – the first Catholic – as president, the Cuban missile crisis, the first expedition to the moon, the sexual revolution of the 1960s and subsequent rise of the gay movement, and the Cold War. However, these events were often seized upon eagerly amid a general situation where there seemed to be major obstacles to the development of Ellen White's final scenario. For example, the introduction of the five-day working week in the 1930s made Sabbath observance much easier, the U.S. Supreme Court showed a growing commitment to protecting religious liberty after 1940, and later the Cold War, the rising strength of China and the Muslim world, and the weakness of the Papacy in the Communist and Muslim segments of the world, made it difficult to see America imposing papal domination on the world.

The Adventist Church also used the expectation of the return of Jesus – and fear of not being ready – to maintain the commitment of its members and to control their behavior. These teachings made a strong impact on children. Many Adventists recall similar childhood dreams in which Jesus is coming and they are not ready (Brunt 1986: 33; Dybdahl 1986: 19). Some who grew up as Adventists reported that instead of playing "cowboys and Indians," they played "Catholics and Christians." There are many reports of discussions in which Adventist academy and college students expressed hope that the Coming would be delayed until after they had married and experienced sex. The prospect of the judgment closing and one's fate being sealed increased the risk associated with illicit sex. Revivals—camp-meetings and academy and college "weeks of prayer" – were used to maintain a sense of urgency among both adults and youth. I have memories of camp-meeting sermons during the 1950s based on eschatologically-related newspaper clippings culminating in emotional scenes in which women threw their brooches and wedding rings into a blanket to "get sin out of their lives" and to show that their heart was in "finishing the work" rather than "the things of this world."

However, there was considerable burnout on the issue over time as the extended delay made its impact: it proved increasingly difficult to maintain a high level of expectation. Observers from very different vantage points within Adventism have noted that, in general, while members of the baby-boomer generation have "held onto the Sabbath," they pay little attention to the Second Coming: "Many upwardly mobile, urban professionals in the Seventh-day Adventist Church no longer mark their calendars according to Daniel's timeline. They appreciate the Sabbath, but they are frankly embarrassed by those wild, apocalyptic books on which this church was founded" (Fagal 1992: 3). Most Adventists have "settled into a state of chronic fretfulness" about the Second Coming (Branson 1991: 2). Although members still tend to sit up and pay attention when a major event, such as Reagan's establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, seems to jibe with Adventist expectations, there did not seem to be the same level of excitement over this as there would have been in earlier

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11 It was argued that surely God would step in to prevent sinful man landing on a place without sin.
12 While Evangelicals generally saw the creation of the state of Israel as of cosmic significance, this was not part of Adventist eschatology.
decades. In the 1984 presidential elections, for example, "Seventh-day Adventist voters...stuck with the president. Reagan piled up 75 percent of the vote in Loma Linda, California; 78 percent in College Place, Washington; 71 percent in Berrien Springs, Michigan; and 78 percent in Keene, Texas – all strongly Adventist communities surrounding Adventist universities and colleges. In each instance, Reagan improved his showing over 1980" (Menendez 1984). This occurred in spite of outspoken opposition to Reagan's decision from the Adventist Religious Liberty Department and sermons and articles from evangelists that this marked a major step in prophetic fulfillment.

As Adventists have buried generations of forebears who believed that they would live to see the Second Coming, they have tried to find reasons for the delay. Two main explanations have been put forward, each of which is associated with a response:

1. The delay has been caused because members' characters are not yet ready for translation. In its more extreme form, what is argued here is that the church must bring people to a sinless state before the Lord returns. The response is to attain, somehow, fully sanctified lives (Douglass 1975). Interviewees who hold this position have admitted that they experience a lot of stress, for most feel that they have not "arrived", and are therefore responsible for the delay – or in danger of being eternally lost.

2. Since Jesus said that the gospel would be preached in all the world and then the end would come, the problem must be that Adventists have failed to complete this task. This is the explanation espoused most strongly by the administrators who address the issue. Their response has been to pour more energy and resources into evangelism and other forms of spreading the "Advent message." For example, in 1990 they launched "Global Mission." It may be true, they said, that Adventists were active in almost every country in the world; however, when the world's population was viewed as about 5,000 ethnolinguistic or demographic groupings, each of about one million people, a problem emerged, for Adventists had churches in only 3,200 of these. The announced goal of Global Mission was to plant at least one Adventist congregation in each of the 1,800 untouched groups before the year 2000. These groups contained more than two billion people (Wilson 1990: 2-3)! However, such groups proved often to be located in the areas of the world least hospitable to Christian missions, such as much of the Muslim Middle East and North Africa. By 1995, congregations had been established in 186 previously unentered segments, and there was some kind of activity going on or planned for 383 other segments. However, because of population growth, the number of totally untouched segments now stood at 1,723 (Taylor 1995: 8). That is, at the planned halfway point in the program, it had made barely a dent on the basic problem of "an unfinished work."

While the statement that Adventists have, over time, reduced the urgency of their apocalyptic summarizes a general trend, it does not mean that all members have moved together and maintained consensus. Indeed, the process of change has resulted in considerable theological pluralism. Some members continue to grasp at any sign or rumor that can be construed that a national Sunday law is in the offing. In this they are oblivious to the changed religious context in the U.S., which has been so pervasive that it has almost certainly left this category
of Adventists as the only Americans even thinking about the possibility of such a law.\textsuperscript{13} Other Adventists have different religious foci, congruent with their pursuit of their careers. Many of these view Sabbath observance as a good idea, very salient to modern stressful lives, not as a test of who is loyal to God among earth's final generation; they see their congregation as an important source of community rather than as part of the one true church, and find any declaration that other churches are "the beast" or "Babylon" acutely embarrassing. Such diverse views often erupt into conflict in adult Sabbath School classes, on church committees, or in Adventist segments of cyberspace, with accusations from the traditional Adventist that the other is not a "real Adventist" or a "true Christian." However, many members are able to avoid conflict by choosing a different class or driving further to church in order to surround themselves with people holding compatible views.

The Patterning of Apocalyptic Pluralism

To what extent is the doctrine of the Second Advent taught and believed within American Adventism today? To what extent has Adventist eschatology changed? The data suggest a segmented diversity of belief.

Evangelism. Adventist evangelism – whether it adopts the form of blockbuster public meetings making full use of multimedia or beamed by satellite to thousands of Adventist churches in different countries simultaneously, "Revelation Seminars" (one of which played a central role in energizing David Koresh, who went on to lead the Branch Davidians), or magazines, such as the \textit{Signs of the Times}, "soul-winning" books, or television and radio programs – is still focused strongly on "end-time events." Adventist evangelists used, typically, to invoke time-line prophecies to show that the "time of the end" began in 1798 and that 1844 was the last pinpointed date, which left the Second Coming as the next major event; they would then point to certain current events as suggesting that the denouement was very near. However, after the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989, many evangelists and writers eagerly updated their eschatological content, claiming to see a convergence of trends preparing the way for the fulfillment of what Ellen White predicted. A visit to the local Adventist Book Center (ABC) produced a dozen such books. I focus here on the writings of three of the most prominent figures: Mark Finley, the best-known Adventist public evangelist in the U.S. today and speaker of the "It is Written" television program; Marvin Moore, editor of the \textit{Signs of the Times}; and Clifford Goldstein, editor of \textit{Liberty} magazine, the organ of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference, and a prolific and influential writer (Finley 1992a,b; Moore 1992, 1995; Goldstein 1993, 1996). Collectively, they emphasized these "trends":

\textsuperscript{13} Even the Presbyterians, who took Sunday observance most seriously in the nineteenth century and played a leading role in the endeavor to have that day declared a national day of rest during the 1880s and subsequent decades, have reversed their position. They abandoned strict observance of the day during the 1930s and 1940s, and declared in 1963 that they must "not seek, or even appear to seek, the coercive power of the state in order to facilitate Christians' observance of the Lord's Day"; after that pronouncement a silence "descended on that subject that has not been broken until this day" (Johnson 1990). Johnson, noting that the evangelical leaders "have not mounted a movement to stem the steady tide that has led to the loosening or repeal of local and state Sunday laws around the nation over the past thirty years," concludes that such an attempt would not have had the wholehearted support of their constituency: "the decline in vigilance about Sabbath [Sunday] observance was a genuinely popular shift" (Johnson 1997).
1. Papal influence has grown dramatically, coming to the fore in the role played by Pope John Paul II in the collapse of Communism. They cite newsweekly reports of a meeting between the Pope and Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989, of his weekly discussions of world affairs with both George Bush and Gorbachev, and of the "Holy Alliance" between the Vatican and the U.S. which succeeded in overthrowing the Communist regime in Poland and thus dealing a death blow to Soviet Communism; they also use the book, The Keys of This Blood, by former Jesuit Malachi Martin, to prove Pope John Paul II's political ambitions. These are all portrayed as evidence that the papacy's "deadly wound" has been healed, that "the whole world" is beginning to "wonder after the beast," and that the way is opening for it to proceed as predicted by Ellen White.

2. The influence of the U.S. is suddenly without equal: America emerged as "the premier superpower in the world" after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which thus makes possible the predicted alliance between it and the Papacy and their ability to press the whole world into conformity with their attack on God's elect.

3. The New Christian Right has emerged as a political force in the U.S., has built an alliance with the Catholic Church over abortion and other social issues, and both are attacking church-state separation. In this, they have found some co-operation from the Supreme Court. If this attack is successful, as they assume it ultimately will be, it would make the fulfillment of Ellen White's predictions concerning the removal of protections for religious minorities much easier to achieve.

4. A confederation in Europe is being realized. Once this culminates, it "will prepare the way for union with Rome, and thus for the mark of the beast" (Finley 1992b: 13).

5. A resurgence of spiritualism is occurring in several guises – in the New Age movement, the wide interest in "near death experiences," and "appearances" of the Virgin Mary. Finley and Moore are exultant over the new developments: "When these trends are in place...it will be so easy to establish unified world control" (Finley 1992b: 19); "I have a strong conviction that the final events of world history are upon us..." (Moore 1992: 9); "The stage is set. Our Lord is coming!" (Finley 1992a: 61). Goldstein is also confident that these trends are "proof that the Adventist prophetic scenario is unfolding" (1996: 12) – but he then warns that only Adventists are talking about a national Sunday law, and that the ultimate fulfillment of Ellen White's understanding of the mark of the beast is impossible without the destruction of church-state separation, which, even though it is currently being attacked, still seems far-fetched: "A secular Sunday law is one thing; to execute those who keep Sabbath is, radically, another. It's a big—almost incomprehensible – leap from Sunday laws, even on a national scale, to the mark of the beast" (1996: 90). His solution is to point to the treatment of Japanese Americans during World War II as an example of what a supposedly freedom-loving

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14 Although this book was ignored by almost all the major book reviews, it has attracted the excited attention of many Adventists. However, they usually quote paragraphs out of context, misrepresent Martin as a Vatican insider, and fail to grasp his main point. Martin, a former Jesuit and devoted Catholic, is an angry critic of the Vatican because he sees his church in decline. His concern is to urge the Pope to be as decisive internally as he has been successful in his external relations (Anderson 1993).
nation can do to its citizens in time of crisis – and he has no doubt that the predicted "time of trouble" will be an extreme crisis and that somehow Adventists will be falsely blamed for it.

The grim scenario, although seen as soon to burst upon the world, is still future for Adventists – including the evangelists. With their unhindered access to meeting spaces, advertising, publishing, and the airwaves, their utilization of modern conveniences in their lives, and their satisfaction with the image Adventism and its institutions project to society, it is clear that they are personally comfortable in American society today. Adventists emphasize that "the majority of God's people" are still in the other churches, that the Sabbath-Sunday issue has not yet been posed politically in a manner that has forced each citizen to decide for or against God and His true church.

After two massive campaigns beamed by satellite (Net95 and Net96), in which Finley used the new technology to preach the traditional apocalyptically-oriented Adventist message, church leaders decided to use a different preacher who would target members of Generation X for Net98. In the debate over whether this too should highlight the apocalypse, it was argued that Adventists know how to present such topics and that they have a proven track record. Consequently, the preacher chosen was again one known for his urgently apocalyptic message.

Pastors. Because of the eschatological emphasis of Adventist evangelism, converts are usually those attracted by this topic. However, when these join local Adventist congregations, they find that their pastors typically give far less emphasis to eschatological subjects than do the evangelists.

During interviews with 115 North American pastors, I asked them what themes they stressed in their sermons. Only 7% mentioned eschatological subjects as their prime theme. Another 7% preach primarily doctrinal sermons, which would probably include the Second Coming – however, this response indicates that the latter are probably not urgently apocalyptic. The vast majority of pastors – 86% – listed other areas of emphasis, such as congregational needs and practical Christian living (28), relationship with God and the centrality of Christ (26), and righteousness by faith (18); 35% went out of their way to say that they preached little or no doctrine. Thus, only 7% of this sample are classified as apocalyptically urgent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of Pastors</th>
<th>Apocalyptics</th>
<th>Prime Focus of Sermons</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Distribution of the Prime Focus of Sermons by Race/Ethnicity*

To what extent did the themes of sermons differ from one ethic group to another? While 17% of the 23 black pastors interviewed preached primarily eschatological sermons, none said that they focused on doctrine. The Hispanics were the reverse of the blacks: 15% of the 13 stated
that they preached doctrine, but none apocalyptics. However, this meant that the proportion focusing on topics that explicitly exclude eschatology did not vary greatly from one racial group to another: 83% of black pastors, 85% of Hispanics, and 87% of whites. (See Table 1)

Several of the pastors interviewed told me that the pressure of baptismal goals imposed on them by administrators had led them to run Revelation Seminars, even though they personally disbelieved much of the content. They had been able to present the material in rote fashion since it had been laid out for them by those who had prepared the seminars.

A few excerpts illustrate the tone of the pastors' responses:

"I preach practical godliness – doctrines are subsidiary. My people do not see their needs as doctrinal – they would visit elsewhere if I scheduled a doctrinal series. They want practical living." [Black]

"They want traditional Adventist themes – evangelistic sermons. But I won’t bow to them." [Second generation Hispanic]

"I focus on practical living... Little doctrine – I leave that to the evangelists, and assume the congregation knows it." [White]

"I preach the Second Coming – soon – every sermon...The Second Coming is the hope of Blacks – we were never first class citizens here." [Black]

"The Second Coming has been delayed. I preach how to wait – quality of life rather than trying to calculate when He will return." [White]

"What effects daily life. Little doctrine. Illustrative, practical. I haven't mentioned the Catholic Church – ever!" [White]

"Salvation by faith through faith alone; assurance. Very practical—for life this week. Not doctrine. The Second Coming is just another day." [White]

Although relatively few pastors focus their preaching on the Second Coming of Christ, this should not be interpreted as suggesting that the majority of them ignore the topic totally. Two other surveys collected data concerning the frequency of sermons on the Second Coming. Although it will be argued that the data collected are exaggerated, they indicate that while apocalyptic themes may not be the favorite topics for sermons by Adventist pastors, they are not being totally ignored. The first survey asked 500 pastors from five of the 58 conferences in North America how many sermons they had preached over the preceding twelve months "where the Second Coming had been the sole subject," and found that the median response from the 296 responding was three (Rosado 1991). Pastors from minority racial and ethnic groups reported preaching somewhat more such sermons than their white colleagues, and those who had migrated to the U.S. as adults preached the most (Rosado 1992: 20-21). However, this survey was introduced to participants in a manner that was likely
to encourage them to exaggerate their reporting of attention to that topic. Moreover, 58.0% of the pastors responding felt that clergy of their generation were giving "less emphasis" to "the doctrine of the Second Coming" than previous generations and only 11.9% felt that they were giving it "more emphasis." A second survey, of the international membership of the Church, was sponsored by the General Conference. The source of this survey was likely to produce responses that were more conventional. This "World Survey" found that 50.3% of the 1,988 respondents in North America reported having heard a sermon on "the Second Coming or last day events" "more than once" during the preceding year. On the other hand, only 23.8% had heard a sermon dealing with "the 2,300 years or other prophetic events"—topics which were likely to have been more urgent in tone (World Survey). That is, most of the pastors who choose to address the topic of the Second Coming in their sermons approach it as a doctrine, without a great deal of urgency.

However, there are exceptions to this pattern. For example, Dwight Nelson, pastor of the church at Andrews University, which is home to the Adventist Seminary, was moved by the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe to preach a series of sermons in the winter of 1991-92 which focused on many of the same trends discussed above under the recent thrust of evangelists. He warned that "persecution of Sabbath-keepers" was coming, and that "God is ready to wrap up this last chapter of earth's history" (1992: 89, 116).

Such sermons are well received by some members, who long to be aroused by such material. On the other hand, many of the long-term members, tired of the decades of preaching aimed at keeping them on the edge of expectation, are turned off by them. Many pastors are aware of the divided response within their congregations to such topics. In choosing the main thrust of their preaching, they are also heavily influenced by their own interests, which have been shaped in large part by their theological education.

A follow-up questionnaire given by the author to interviewees asked four questions testing to what extent they agreed with statements rooted in Adventist eschatology. The responses of the 88 pastors in the US and Canada who returned the questionnaire suggested that they were more orthodox in their beliefs than the thrust of their preaching indicated. Table 2 presents an index comparing the responses of administrators, pastors, laity, students, and religion faculty in the Adventist Seminary and colleges to those questions. The index was compiled by subtracting “disagree” from “agree” responses, where a response of “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” is weighted as worth 2 points while “agree” and “disagree” is scored 1; the more positive the total score, the more orthodox the responses. The pastors’ responses were notably positive in their affirmation that they expected that Christ would return in their lifetime. There seems to be an incongruity between their affirmations of urgent apocalypticism and the thrust of their sermons. It may well be that when they were asked to write answers their instinct was to be more careful not to appear heretical.

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15 The introduction at the head of the questionnaire began: "The Second Coming is one of the central doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Yet there is a growing sense that this doctrine is losing its central position in the preaching and practice of Adventists. This survey seeks to gather data from pastors for an article to be published in a special issue of the Adventist Review on the Second Coming."

16 Nelson was the preacher chosen as the evangelist for Net98 (see above).
Beliefs | Administrators | Pastors | Laity | Students | Religion Faculty |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church is the Antichrist</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>-42.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Churches are Apostate</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>-8.8</td>
<td>-38.0</td>
<td>-71.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventists will be Persecuted in USA</td>
<td>100.1</td>
<td>102.3</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>-7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ will Return in My Lifetime</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>88.5</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Score</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>-25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Index Scores Summarizing Responses Testing Orthodoxy Concerning Four End-Time Beliefs

When the pastors’ responses were cross-tabulated with their age, a sharp age-break emerged. Those who had entered the ministry before the mid-1960s — when a seminary degree was not the norm and very few of the college religion teachers had doctorates—proved very likely to answer that they "strongly agree" or "agree" with these statements; on the other hand, those who had entered the ministry later were more prone to "disagree" or "strongly disagree" (see Table 3). Since a seminary degree was the norm for the latter, they had been exposed to scholars with advanced degrees from the finest universities there as well as, increasingly, in the Adventist colleges during their baccalaureate programs. This interpretation is confirmed by cross-tabulations between "years of education" and the same block of eschatology-rooted statements: those with only 16 years education tended to agree with the statements, while those with advanced degrees were more likely to disagree (see Table 4).

The Seminary and departments of religion. In order to understand the reason for the relatively low priority accorded to apocalyptic preaching by pastors, we will now explore what is taught in the Adventist Seminary and by the religion departments of Adventist colleges in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Index Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church is the Antichrist</td>
<td>Under 49</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>45.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Churches are Apostate</td>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventists will be Persecuted in USA</td>
<td>Under 49</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Churches are Apostate</td>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church is the Antichrist</td>
<td>Under 49</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Churches are Apostate</td>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>151.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventists will be Persecuted in USA</td>
<td>Under 49</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>82.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>103.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Impact of Age of Pastors on Answers to Apocalyptic Questions

Table 2 shows that the religion faculty are by far the least orthodox group in their answers to the four questions testing bearing on their apocalypticism: their index scores on three of the questions are negative. Consequently, it is not surprising that, in general, the traditional Adventist approach to eschatology is being avoided within these programs.
Table 4: Impact of Education of Pastors on Answers to Apocalyptic Questions

Several teachers mentioned that they would not teach a course on the apocalyptic biblical books, Daniel and Revelation, or that no one was willing to do so. I asked 49 teachers in these departments about both changes in their courses over the years and such changes generally: ten mentioned moving away from eschatology, four mentioned including it with no changes over time, none said they had given it greater emphasis; the other 35 did not mention anything bearing on this area. Excerpts from interviews illustrate the tone of these comments:

"The Second Advent is not now an important part of Adventist faith and life. ... Daniel and Revelation has not been really important in Adventist scholarship during my career. There have always been courses on them, but the area has not been terribly important to the intellectual life of the church. We've had a collective subliminal awareness that traditional interpretations don't make a lot of sense. We have over-interpreted these pictures, which really say that there is a struggle between good and evil which God will win. We've tried to interpret each detail, to do left-brain analysis to what is really a right-brain piece of art."

"I preach the Second Coming, but differently – my emphasis is not on time, but on its influence on ethics... I am having difficulty preaching the signs of the coming in the old way – they are ordinary historical events, so that every generation could see them in their time – so many periods expected His return..."

"I pay more attention to what the text is saying, rather than [as earlier in my career] beginning with a message which my church has espoused as important."

"My course, 'Apocalyptic Studies,' presents apocalyptics as a literary genre, as just another way of writing theology."

"I won’t teach Daniel and Revelation – I don’t feel comfortable exposing students to my questions, especially with the union president always eager to pounce on hearsay."

"The administrators recently decided that they wanted a course on Daniel and Revelation, and then they found that they had to hire someone especially to teach it, because no one here would do so."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Years of Education</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Index Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church is the Antichrist</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>95.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Churches are Apostate</td>
<td>Over 16</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventists will be Persecuted in USA</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 16</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Church is the Antichrist</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>95.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>145.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Churches are Apostate</td>
<td>Over 16</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventists will be Persecuted in USA</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>127.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over 16</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"My Daniel and Revelation [course] is quite traditional – I teach what the body accepts. Occasionally I express my own views as options in non-controversial areas."

I am aware of seven books on apocalyptic themes written in recent years by members of these departments and published by church publishing houses – books authored by theologians. They are very different in tone from the evangelistic books published by the same houses. I focus here on the most recent of these, *What the Bible says about the End-Time* by Jon Paulien, a New Testament scholar at the Seminary, which is a good example (1994):

"My purpose...is to highlight the text of the Bible rather than comment on the continuing swirl of current events. ... The safest course is to understand the Bible's view of the end on its own terms, rather than expecting direct answers to the kinds of questions that only people in our day could have asked. Our Bible is the product of God speaking to people in another time and place. ... The purpose of the Bible's teaching about the end is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future but to teach us how to live as we await the end" (1994: 13, 34, 89).

Finally, asking whether we have "crossed that fine line leading to an irrevocable and rapid conclusion to all things in the next year or two?" Paulien cautions that a "number of major barriers still stand in the way of a full and final fulfillment of the New Testament scenario of the end." These include "the widespread presence of militant Islam," which is "the major and most obvious barrier to worldwide political and spiritual unity"; "the continued secularism of the Western democracies" – so that it is "unlikely that pro-religious legislation would be tolerated by the American people without massive changes in the current secular climate"; the information orientation of the computer age, which "encourages creativity, diversity, individualism, and the highlighting of...differences"; and the "failure of the church to make a meaningful and significant impact on contemporary society," so that "the issues that exercise Christians are almost totally foreign to the experience of the average person on the street" (151-2). "When will the Son of man come? There is nothing in the current scene that gives us the absolute certainty that the end is immediately before us – or a long time in the future. Our task is to be always ready..." (159).

Some of these religion scholars publish in independent journals, *Spectrum* and *Adventists Affirm*, which may be categorized respectively as left- and right-leaning. Those of the left urge that Adventists be much less consumed with urgency – "the wise virgins [in the parable of Jesus] were those prepared for delay...it is a frightful kind of arrogance for us to demand that God follow our time schedule" (Dybdahl 1986: 23) – and that they focus apocalyptic insights on the present. Eschatology should speak to ethics, not merely as a scare factor to motivate proper behavior, but because it is "hopeful, utopian, a vision of the ideal," it should judge events and proclaim warnings (Dybdahl 1986: 23; Brunt 1986: 28; Branson 1991: 2).

The conservative journal has shown less coherence. While evangelist Finley pointed in its pages to recent trends in the religious and political worlds as sure signs that the Second Advent was about to take place, others declared that attempts to find signs in today's headlines were foolishness, for the delay was caused by the need to complete the preaching of the gospel and the development of the characters of the saints – indeed it was allowed by
God in order to sift "the true from the false servants" (Finley 1992b; Maxwell 1995; Batchelor 1995: 6).

*Laypersons.* How urgently apocalyptic are North American Adventist laypersons? Both participant observation and informants confirm that when Adventists gather socially, as for potluck meals following church services, they rarely mention their eschatological hopes to one another: their concern focuses typically on their daily lives. Moreover, they have voted for Republican presidential candidates 3: 1 over Democratic candidates, in spite of the fears of their leaders that the policies embraced by the former would weaken the separation of church and state and thus prepare the way for the coming of the "Time of Trouble" (Dudley and Hernandez 1992: 162).17

In surveys of 785 church members and 1305 students at Adventist colleges, I asked to what extent the respondents agreed with the statement "Christ will return in your lifetime." One-seventh (14.7%) of the members and one-fifth (21.1%) of the students agreed strongly. More than three-fifths of the members and half the students answered "uncertain," which is theologically technically correct since Jesus said "no man knows the hour..." However, data analysis shows that answers to this question are related strongly to age, with older members recognizing that they are less likely to live to see Jesus return. That is, a "strongly agree" to this question does not necessarily imply urgent apocalypticism, but, among the younger respondents, may merely reflect an assent to the doctrine, together with a sense that "surely He will come in the many years ahead in my lifetime." In fact, the members are more likely than the students to affirm the orthodox Adventist position on the other three statements rooted in Adventist eschatology [see Table 2]. As expected, cross-tabulations showed converts to be significantly more urgently apocalyptic than members raised by Adventist parents.

What is known as the Valuegenesis study surveyed over 13,000 students in Adventist high schools (Dudley and Gillespie, 1992). A vast majority (88%) affirmed that they "definitely believe" that "Jesus will come back to earth again and take the righteous to heaven" – a statement of the doctrine with no suggestion of timing. When the time element was introduced – "I anticipate the soon return of Christ" – 52.6% said that this was "always true" for them. Because "soon" was left undefined in this statement, these responses could have been rote assent rather than expressions of urgency. However, 31.3% admitted that they worry "very much" "about not being ready for Christ's return," and 21.3% that they worry "very much" "about not being faithful during the Time of Trouble." (Another 28.4% and 22.5% respectively worry "quite a bit.") Urgency engenders fear among this age group. Girls, members of racial minority groups, and students from low and moderate income families were most likely to worry about these matters.

The AVANCE study, which was targeted at 1,163 Hispanic students, asked many of these same questions. Here the percentages affirming belief and admitting to worry were considerably higher: 96.0% said they believed the doctrinal statement, while those worrying "very much" were 59.5% concerning not being ready for Christ's return and 45.1% concerning possibly proving unfaithful during the Time of Trouble. (Another 17.9% and 20.1% respectively worried

17 However, my interviews and observation show that Black Adventists tend to vote Democrat, like their non-Adventist neighbors.
"quite a bit.") Women and students born abroad were especially prone to worry (Ramirez-Johnson and Hernandez 2003: 213).

Lay affirmations of more orthodox beliefs correlated more strongly with older age, racial minority, lower income, and adult convert. They also correlated with category of church, where rural was highest, followed by suburban, urban, and metropolitan (where a single church serves the whole city), with churches serving Adventist educational and medical institutions (where many members are professionals) lowest; and with region, as represented by the Adventist “union” administrative unit, with Southern and Southwestern highest, followed by “Mid-America” (the Plains and Mountain states), “Lake” (the “rust-belt”), “Columbia” (Mid-Atlantic), “Atlantic” (New York and New England), and the West Coast with Hawaii and Alaska lowest.

That is, while large majorities of laypersons show a belief in the doctrine of the Second Coming, urgent apocalypticism is much less widespread, being concentrated especially among low income members, new converts and racial minorities and, often fearfully, among younger students exposed to indoctrination in Adventist schools, and especially there among immigrants and other racial minorities.

Toward the edges of "Greater Adventism." Since many new converts are attracted to Adventism by the urgently apocalyptic preaching of Adventist evangelists but then find far less of this in the churches they attend after their conversions, this situation helps to explain the heavy turnover rate among Adventists and the declining rate of church attendance by members (Lawson 1996c). It also contributes substantially to the growth of urgently apocalyptic "independent ministries" on the fringes of Adventism. (The best known of these ministries to the media was David Koresh's Branch Davidians.) Like the early Christians, who continued to think of themselves as Jewish and therefore focused their evangelism on Jews – initially in Jerusalem, and then in other cities where they were scattered – the leaders of these groups continue to identify with Adventism, even if they have been disfellowshipped, and therefore focus their efforts on reaching Adventists.

Independent ministries have multiplied so rapidly in recent years and are perceived to be diverting so much income from the denominational tithe conduit that the Annual Council of the church in 1991 voted to condemn them as "producing distrust and division that hinder the work of God." In 1992 the North American Division of the church published a large book, Issues: The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Certain Private Ministries, laying out its grievances with some of the ministries as a warning to members.

The fringe apocalyptic ministries are much more urgent in their apocalypticism than most mainstream Adventists. They generally differ from the latter (who have themselves been shown to be very diverse on this issue) in at least one of two main ways. First, many of them are so impatient with the long delay in the Second Coming since 1844 that merely pointing to recent world events as new evidence that the general Adventist eschatological scenario is on track (as the leading evangelists have) is unsatisfactory to them: they want more direct proof that these are the very last days and Jesus is about to come. To accomplish this they often develop some kind of time-line prophecy which focuses on the current period. Second, they often see the Adventist church leadership as so compromised with the "world" and the
members so "lukewarm" in their spirituality that the church is unready to receive Christ and as such is responsible for his delay. Some of them portray the official church as having shifted positions on beliefs and behavioral standards, so that it has obscured the "last warning message" bequeathed to it through Ellen White, and present their own group as the true "historic Adventists." When their criticisms of church leadership are met, in turn, with charges of heresy and attempts to subject them to church discipline, the rancor escalates.

My analysis divides these urgently apocalyptic groups into five categories.\(^{18}\) Although the attempts to apply time prophecies to the present differ considerably from one category to another, the first four of these have fixed on the 1990s as the time when the return of Christ is expected.

1. *The 6,000 year umbrella time prophecy.* The argument is that, according to Bishop Ussher's biblical chronology, the creation took place about 4004 B.C., so that the sixth millennium is closing. If each millennium is symbolized by one day, the seventh, or Sabbath, millennium – that period, referred to in the book of Revelation, which is known as THE millennium—is about to open. Premillennialists believe that Christ will return before then.

One of the authors who falls into this category, G. Edward Reid, is an unusual case, for he is a lone writer rather than the head of a ministry, and he holds a departmental position at the headquarters of the Adventist North American Division. He submitted his book manuscript, which suggests that Christ will come by the year 2000, to Review and Herald (R&H), an Adventist publishing house, but it was rejected because the editors saw it as too apocalyptic and irresponsible in its biblical interpretation. However, he was able to gain the support of the marketing staff, which is made up of old hands from the Adventist Book Centers, one of the havens of Adventist fundamentalists. When he was able to raise money to self-publish the book, he arranged for the R&H commercial printing division to print the book – which erroneously leaves the impression on many readers that it has the "imprimatur" of the publisher, especially since the latter's marketing division signed up to distribute it through the ABCs and it carries, on its back cover, an endorsement from the chair of the Religion Department at Southern College, the most conservative of the Adventist colleges in the U.S. (Reid 1994). His success with this book prompted him to follow the same publication and distribution route with a second book, which declared on the cover that it contained "eye-opening evidence that these are THE VERY LAST DAYS" (Reid 1996).

A. Jan Marcussen is best known as the author of *National Sunday Law*, a simplified rehash of the position put forward by Ellen White in *Great Controversy*, with no attempt to link it to current events. He has struck a chord among a segment of Adventists, for they have provided him with the funds to print and distribute 7.8 million copies of the booklet in 19 languages since 1983. His newsletters attempt, with poor documentation, to show that the Sunday law is about to be enacted. He also puts forward other evidence that the end is upon us, and in his newsletter of mid-

\(^{18}\) Not all fringe groups are urgently apocalyptic. Some focus on health issues, others on the nature of God, etc. However, such groups are not within the scope of this paper.
November 1995, he used the 6,000 year theory to cement his case, saying that this period would end in 1996.

2. **The Jubilee Cycle.** This takes the Levitical Jubilee year, based on seven "sabbatical years" for a total of 49 years, through 70 cycles—a symbolic number—and hence to our day. However, there is disagreement about the dating of jubilee years in biblical times, even though the dates of some sabbatical years are known. This leads to disagreements about the end of the 70th cycle. An earlier group in the Pacific Northwest settled on the year 1987, and expected the Second Coming that year. The person best known for this time-line, Larry Wilson of Wake Up America Seminars, initially announced that the cycle ended in 1992, but settled ultimately on 1994. For him this is the beginning of the final period, during which the usual time-line prophecies, such as the 1,335 days of the book of Daniel, are applied as literal rather than symbolic (a day for a year) days. He expected the events accompanying the Great Tribulation to begin in 1994 or 1995, and that this would include a large asteroid hitting the earth. These events would culminate in the second coming of Jesus "around 1998" (1994, 1). In a defensive "addendum" inserted in the fifth edition of his most widely circulated book after the close of 1995, he states that he does not regard the delay of what he expects as a failure of his interpretation. He continues to preach and to publish. The number of copies of this book in circulation in the English edition has passed 500,000, and it has been translated into 14 other languages (1994; 1996).

3. **Applications of the time-line prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to the present.** This has been done by several ministries, usually as literal rather than symbolic days. Some of them see this as a second (dual) fulfillment, others as the prime application. They look for clues in current events, and link them to the prophecies—a method which gives them a great deal of scope, and therefore also room for disagreement with one another. The best known of these is Charles Wheeling of Countdown Ministries in Alabama—perhaps because he has been active over a long period. He saw the Iran-Iraq War (beginning in 1980) as the harbinger of the Battle of Armageddon; more recently, he has found the Persian Gulf War in prophecy. He looks for an international crisis in the banking system, and is currently very interested in the actions and sayings of the Pope. Because he rejects the earlier applications of the time-line prophecies, the year 1844 has no special significance for him. Even though this would seem to put him at odds with the writings of Ellen White, he has been extraordinarily active in distributing large numbers of copies of the *Great Controversy*—both in whole and in part—in many countries (Wheeling 1995).

4. **The status of Jerusalem.** William Grothier of the Adventist Laymen's Foundation and Bible Prophecy Seminars, and editor of the monthly paper "Watchman, What of the Night?,” stands apart from the other ministries in his focus on this as a sign of the end of time. He sees the unification of Jerusalem in 1967 as the "beginning of the end of time," and its appointment as capital of Israel in 1980 as the close of national probation—and also, because of its illegitimate changes in its doctrine, of that of the

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19 Indeed, there is no direct evidence that the jubilees were observed at all after their initial explanation.
20 He also stands apart from the Evangelicals, who are concerned with the nation of Israel rather than Jerusalem.
corporate Adventist Church; individuals have a little extra time, but that too is now petering out (1995; 1994). In a switch, he focused his paper during 1995 on the aims of the Papacy as given in recent encyclicals.

5. *Those who sigh and cry over the apostasy of the Adventist Church.* Several prominent ministries – Hope International (the publisher of *Our Firm Foundation*), the Hartland Institute (a college without accreditation and publisher of *The Last Generation*), Cherrystone Press (the personal vehicle of Dr Ralph Larson), and Prophecy Countdown (a television and shortwave radio ministry) fall into this category. Their key complaint is about changes in Adventist doctrine, such as in the nature of Christ (from sinful—like our’s—to sinless—like pre-fall Adam’s) as a result of the Bible conferences with Evangelicals Martin and Barnhouse during the 1950s. Because these changes impact on Adventist eschatology (such as the belief that the final generation must overcome as Jesus overcame and stand perfect at the close of probation) and Ellen White predicted apostasy within the church, the latter is therefore seen as a clear sign that the end is imminent (Larson 1993: 180). However, these ministries are less explicit concerning the expected date of the eschaton than those in the preceding categories.

Although most of the ministries in this category may be counted as doctrinally orthodox, they have drawn much more fire from Adventist leadership than the other categories: the condemning book *Issues* was aimed directly at them – by name – by church leadership, and most of their leaders have been disfellowshipped since its publication in 1992. They have come under attack because their orthodoxy makes them more attractive to unsettled Adventists, because they attract considerable sums from their supporters which might otherwise have gone into denominational coffers, and because their criticism of the official church and its leadership is bitter and unrelenting. Most of their leaders have been disfellowshipped since the publication of the book.

*Church administrators.* Faced by an increasing fragmentation of Adventist apocalyptic beliefs, Church administrators themselves deliver mixed messages. On the one hand, they make strong affirmations of the traditional doctrine. Adventism's credal statement, the 27 "fundamental beliefs," passed at the 1980 General Conference Session with strong administrative backing, continues to emphasize the expectation that the return of Jesus will be soon:

"The Second Coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church, the grand climax of the gospel. The Savior's coming will be literal, personal, visible, and worldwide. ... The almost complete fulfillment of most lines of prophecy, together with the present condition of the world, indicates that Christ's coming is imminent."

The current president of the General Conference, in a book published to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Great Disappointment, noted that some were asking whether "we still have confidence that Jesus is coming 'soon',?,” whether "150 years can be characterized as 'soon,' in any sense of the word?" His reply was that, in spite of the delay, "WE STILL BELIEVE!" (Folkenberg 1994: 9) He has also recently, in a long series of articles, gone out of his way to affirm the "great controversy" understanding of world history.
On the other hand, they administer as if they have put down deep roots in the present society. For example, when an Adventist publishing house was sued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission because of its discrimination against women in salaries and promotions, the defense brief, which must have been written with the input and approval of Church leaders, distanced present day Adventism from its "earlier" anti-Catholicism:

"Although it is true that there was a period in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church when the denomination took a distinctly anti-Roman Catholic viewpoint, and the term 'hierarchy' was used in a pejorative sense to refer to the papal form of church governance, that attitude on the Church's part was nothing more than a manifestation of widespread anti-popery among conservative protestant [sic] denominations in the early part of this century and the latter part of the last, and [sic] which has now been consigned to the historical trash heap so far as the Seventh-day Adventist Church is concerned" (Pacific Press Case 1975: 4).

When questioned later about controversial statements in the brief, Neal Wilson, the leader of the Church in North America, who was the administrator most involved in the case, explained that church administrators had not read the briefs carefully enough so that unfortunate nuances had been missed, and denied that the Church leadership was "trying to dilute the distinctive message that we have and the truth that must be given in these days" (Wilson 1980: 2; Wilson 1978). However, a historian, after surveying the relevant archival materials, concluded that Robert Pearson, the then world president, regarded the attempt by a government agency to regulate the Church as an indication that the final apostasy was under way, and resolved to do everything necessary to defeat it (Haloviak 1992). The question of whether this statement was mere opportunism or a straw in the wind remains.

Adventist leaders preside over a strongly centralized, hierarchical organizational structure. Its institutions are rooted strongly in this world: for example, the finances of its massive U.S. hospital system dwarf the budget of the General Conference, and its hospitals, facing a rapidly changing situation where they have to compete for managed care contracts in order to survive, have recently plunged into mergers with non-Adventist hospitals in order to strengthen their positions. The first of these, in Colorado, merged the Adventist PorterCare system with the Catholic Sisters of Charity system there into Centura Health – an alliance which those Adventists who continue to take Ellen White's eschatological scenario seriously found shocking (Gardner 1996: 19). Both medical and educational systems are tied financially to government, while the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) has become a conduit for the distribution of government funds, mostly from USAID. One observer has suggested that such institutions and programs may be taking Adventism, implicitly if not explicitly, "into a form of postmillennialism in which Adventism's primary focus becomes improving this world rather than the Second Advent" (Knight 1995: 12).

Meanwhile, church leaders keep devising new programs, the most recent of which is Global Mission, which are designed to keep the Adventist growth-rate high. They have been very successful in this in recent years: the official world membership grew from 500,000 in 1940

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21 Wilson was elected president of the General Conference in 1979.
to 1.2 million in 1960 and almost 3.5 million in 1980; it passed 9 million during 1996. These programs are advocated in terms of "finishing the work." However, their emphasis on growth at the expense of nurture suggests that the prime motivation of corporate officers may be a desire to be seen as successful, of having "put the corporation on the map" (Lawson 1996c). Moreover, in private interviews some administrators admit that neither the strong affirmations nor the call to programs are working with many of the laity. When one union president known for his conservatism was asked about changes in his sermon topics, he replied: "[The Second Coming] is being avoided—the delay is an embarrassment. I have pulled back from using ‘finishing the work’ phrases – they have lost their punch with the members."

The follow-up questionnaires given to administrator interviewees were returned mostly by officers and department personnel at the third and fourth levels (union and conference) rather than the leaders of the General Conference and its North American Division. These administrators gave highly orthodox answers, which are summarized in the mean scores in Table 2.

Public controversies highlight the Adventist dilemma.

The media attention to the Branch Davidian crisis showed church leaders how dangerous such fringe groups could be to the reputation of Adventists, for in the first hours after the raid by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms on the Davidian compound there were many news reports that revealed that Koresh’s followers had been drawn from among Adventists and identified the Branch Davidians as Adventists. Since Adventist leaders place high priority on projecting a positive image of their church, they regarded this as a crisis of major proportions. They were successful in having the Branch Davidians’ connection to Adventism removed from later media reports through the help of costly media consultants (Lawson 1995a).

The Branch Davidians were not the only case of a ministry causing public embarrassment for Adventists at that time—and the other example was even more perplexing. In November 1992, 42 billboards appeared in Orlando, Florida. Half of these stated "When Church & State Unite, What Do You Lose?", the others "Just How Secure is Our Constitution?" These "teasers" were followed by 12 huge billboards featuring a facial photograph of Pope John Paul II accompanied by the question, "Why is the Vatican Trying to Change Our Constitution?" They offered the opportunity, via a toll-free number, to buy copies of Ellen White’s Great Controversy, in which she had predicted that the Roman Catholic Church would use the American State to enact laws enforcing Sunday observance, and then persecute those who insisted on worshiping on the Saturday Sabbath. The advertisers spent $80,000 on billboard space, $25,000 on newspaper advertisements, $35,000 on radio spots, and $100,000 on television time—a total of $240,000. Similar billboards were also erected in several west-coast cities. David Mould, an active Adventist originally from the Caribbean and head of Laymen for Religious Liberty, claimed responsibility. He explained that he had been angered because of what he saw as the silence of the Adventist Church on these issues at a time when he felt that it was clear that the prophecies of Ellen White were being fulfilled. (That is, his ministry is another example of category 5, above.) He announced that his organization would

22 Indeed, many were still on church rolls, for they had not withdrawn their membership.
also sponsor a similar protest when the Pope visited Denver in the Fall of 1993, which he hoped would draw international attention (Knittel 1993: 53; Coffin 1993a: 4; 1993b: 8).

The initial billboard campaign presented a problem for the Adventist Church. Adventists are extremely well known in Orlando, which is the location of the church's largest hospital. Both talk shows and the press there covered the campaign extensively. Florida Adventist Hospital was deluged with calls, and Adventist staff there were reported to be angry and embarrassed. Because of the decentralized nature of the campaign, the international headquarters of the church in Maryland chose to leave the local church administrators with responsibility for responding to the media. Yet how to respond posed a perplexing problem. While Laymen for Religious Liberty was a conservative independent ministry, it was not doctrinally at variance with the church. It was promoting a book that Adventists regard as divinely inspired and which is the benchmark of historic Adventist eschatology, and had apparently stimulated thousands of orders for it; the billboards highlighted positions often taught by Adventist evangelists and Revelation Seminars. Nevertheless, these were positions that mainstream Adventists had abandoned to such an extent that they were made highly uncomfortable when they were publicly identified with them. They have become so at ease with society that they found the conflict implied in the billboards threatening and intensely embarrassing.

The leaders of the Florida Conference were no exception. However, "they could not denounce [the billboards] in terms of the message, for doing so would have taken a position relative to Ellen White that would induce tremendous negative fallout from many devout Adventists." Eventually they wrote a letter to the local newspaper dissociating the Conference from Mould's actions but not from the Great Controversy; and they published a special edition of the conference newsletter which praised God for the sales of the book, but which then quoted a number of statements by Ellen White "cautioning church members not to present Adventist beliefs in denunciatory and injudicious manners" (Knittel 1993: 54).

Because of its potential national and international impact, church leaders chose to become involved directly in trying to deflect the negative media impact of the promised campaign during the Pope's planned visit to Denver (Patterson). This was ultimately not arranged by Mould, who had fallen into financial and legal difficulties, but by another independent group based in Montana, which contracted to rent billboards from the Gannett Corporation. Church leaders responded by working with the Adventist hospital in Denver to organize an advance media blitz and a religious liberty rally to present the Adventist Church positively. They also developed contacts with the media: "We told them what might happen, and explained that we were not responsible for it, and that we could not stop those who were responsible from doing it. We explained the same thing to religious leaders, including Catholics" (Patterson 1994).

Gary Patterson, the administrator who had been the media contact during the Branch Davidian crisis, was again placed on call, ready to go with a presentation once the billboards started to appear and the media focused on a press conference. When, shortly before the Pope's visit, it became known that the billboards were imminent, a press conference was called. Patterson explained that the boards did not represent Adventism, and that doing something like this was against the advice of the author of the very book they were trying to distribute. While Adventists were Protestant, and therefore had their disagreements with
Roman Catholics, they did not want to fight, and this was not the right time and place to address the differences. When reporters raised potentially embarrassing questions, Patterson found that he was able to fob them off with limited replies because of their lack of knowledge (Patterson 1994).

To the surprise and relief of the church leaders, the press conference had the unintended consequence of convincing the Gannett Corporation to abandon the billboard contract. That is, the church's media campaign aborted the crisis. However, the issue highlighted the dilemma of Adventism: "[The billboards issue raised] an urgent question: Did Ellen White's nineteenth century knowledge and experience significantly influence her end-time scenario? Fundamentalists say no. Progressives say yes" (Walters 1993: 13). To many progressive Adventists, the crisis was rooted in the contradiction that the church had continued to pay lip-service to the present relevance of all the writings of their prophet three-quarters of a century after her death, but was in fact acting differently. However, to conservatives, the reason why the Great Controversy now seems dated, bigoted, and likely to cause embarrassment to some Adventists is that it is coming true (Goldstein 1993: 5-7).

These experiences led Church leaders to worry whether some of the other independent ministries could prove equally embarrassing with time. In an issue of the official church paper headlined "Are we sitting Ducks for Cults?," published soon after the Davidian compound burned, an Adventist sociologist discussed "Why are some Adventists vulnerable to fatal fanaticism?" (Rosado 1993: 16). There is ample evidence of the relevance of this question in the conspiracy theories that are fostered in some segments of the Adventist membership. Some that have recently received wide currency are that a Sunday law has been secretly drafted and will be sprung upon the nation; that there is a scheme afoot to use computers, social security numbers, and credit card numbers to prevent Sabbath-keepers from being able "to buy or sell" and thus impose "the mark of the beast"; and that Jesuits have infiltrated the General Conference, which has subsequently become part of a conspiracy to keep Adventists in the dark about these threats.

However, a rash of negative press reports in 1996 demonstrated that the danger of embarrassment is not limited to the Adventist fringe, but is rooted also in the inability of the official Adventist Church to update Ellen White's eschatology. An Associated Press story entitled "Book Spurs Denunciations: Seventh-day Adventists Publish an Attack on the Pope," which was published in many U.S. papers, reported that "Roman Catholics and Protestants are denouncing a book...that claims the pope is in league with the devil" and "likens the papacy to the beast in the book of Revelation, an ally of Satan in the world's final days" (Cienski 1996: B-4). The book referred to, God's Answers to your Questions, is a cut-down version of a book of Bible studies published early in the century, with a question and answer format. It has been sold for several years by students wishing to earn money for college while also broadcasting Adventist beliefs. Church spokesmen quoted in the article responded that "the book merely follows the lead of such Protestant reformers as Martin Luther and John Calvin"; "[I]t attacks the papacy, not specific popes...we are criticizing the system and not individual Catholic Christians." Although one of these spokesmen claimed not to know how many copies had been distributed, an interviewee within the administration told me that "They've been selling tens of thousands of these door to door for years, and now someone finally 'discovered' it." He further commented that "The [church] media people and some of
the more progressive people on staff would really like to disavow the whole thing"; however, since the cautious disavowals at the time of the billboard crises had brought accusations from conservative members that the Church was "giving up EGW [Ellen White] and basic doctrines," the president of the Church "does not want that to happen again, so we have to try to snake our way betwixt and between..." (interview).

Responses to the article among Adventists were predictably mixed, as is illustrated by comments on the "Adventists on-Line" forum on the internet. While one praised God that the article had stimulated the people's minds, and a disciple of Larry Wilson took the opportunity to ask whether this was a sign that "we really are on the edge of the tribulation," the wife of a medical practitioner associated with the Kettering Adventist Medical Center in Dayton, Ohio, told how the story had threatened a "Global Village" celebration sponsored by the hospital and co-sponsored by many local organizations, including both the Catholic hospitals and Catholic Social Services: "Now we are left with scrambling around trying to distance ourselves from the official church position... Thank God the board of elders voted to throw out the Net 96 [evangelism via satellite] advertising materials that they sent with the beasts all over them. If we had mailed those we really would be up the creek." One pastor wrote "we must sooner or later redefine this outmoded eschatological view"; another sent me a copy of a letter that he and two other pastors acting in the name of two churches had sent to the Tucson Citizen, with a copy to the Catholic bishop, distancing themselves from anti-Catholic sentiments in Adventist publications (Hadley et al 1996).

The book in question, although very direct because of its format, is mild when compared with the Great Controversy, which is being distributed by the million, mostly these days by independent ministries. There have been several instances, for example, when prison chaplains have complained that this book, when distributed in prisons, creates tensions and causes fights. Consequently, most of the experienced Adventist prison ministry workers "advise against ever distributing that book inside an institution" (interview). Clifford Goldstein, editor of the Adventist magazine which addresses religious liberty issues and eager booster of this book and expositor of its current fulfillment, argues that how individual Adventists regard this book will, in effect, decide their ultimate destiny. He warns Adventists to be prepared:

"The Great Controversy embarrassment is coming. We will look like fools, idiots, and buffoons before the world – especially because of this book, which will incite those who reject the truths in it just as it incites Adventists who reject those truths even now (1993: 127).

The Adventist Experience Compared with That of Other Sects

Church-Sect theory predicts that many sects will reduce their tension with the surrounding culture and move from sect towards denomination over time, and that this process will create internal strains as members respond differently to these changes. We have seen that for an apocalyptic sect to denominationalize its apocalyptic must become less urgent as it accommodates to the present society.
However, Bryan Wilson has argued that relatively few such sects denominationalize because few of them survive long enough to achieve organizational stability. In large part this is because intense apocalypticism is difficult to maintain: "The expectation that the world is to overturn through supernatural action is necessarily subject to repeated postponement" (Wilson 1973: 36). Wilson also contended, based mainly on his knowledge of the Christadelphians, Cooneyites, and Exclusive Bretheren, that many apocalyptic sects attempt to operate without formal leadership and therefore experience schisms when there are differences of opinion in their ranks (Wilson 1970: 108-9, 139-40; Wilson 1996). He further postulated that many of those sects that do survive, and therefore experience a long postponement of their apocalyptic expectations, do not evolve into denominations but mutate into what he defined as introversionist sects – which are more concerned with the sanctity of their community than with the expectation of the advent (Wilson 1970: 239). At the opposite extreme, if a sect has a strong central authority structure, as with the Jehovah's Witnesses, then there is less opportunity for change and especially for differences of opinion (Wilson 1970: 109-117).

Seventh-day Adventism is different from these apocalyptic sects in its steady movement from sect towards denomination. Its pyramidal organizational structure has helped to protect it from major schisms, while the democratic trappings of this structure, the encouragement Adventism has given its members to gain higher education, and the mix of social classes, racial/ethnic groups, and new converts and members who have inherited their Adventist identity have allowed for diversity of opinion to develop (Lawson 1995a, 1995b).

**Conclusion**

Over the past 150 years, Adventism has moved a considerable distance from near the sect pole of the sect-denomination continuum in the direction of the other pole. During this process, as church-sect theory would suggest, it has become increasingly pluralistic. Although the Adventist Church continues to endorse the eschatological vision developed in the nineteenth century by Ellen White and other Adventist pioneers, the diversity within its ranks is highlighted by variations in expectations and, especially, by the urgency with which they await its fulfillment. The urgency of expected apocalyptic fulfillment varies with generation Adventist, age, education, income, race/ethnicity, hermeneutic, region, and size of community.

Differences on such a fundamental belief inevitably engender discomfort and distrust. The endorsement and preaching of Adventist eschatology, which is used as a strategy to control members and strengthen their commitment to Adventism, is proving to be volatile in its impact on a changing church.

As tension between Adventism and its environment has declined, both the Adventist Church and Adventist lives have become increasingly world affirming, and the apocalyptic has become less urgent. Nevertheless, the formal statement of urgency has never been relinquished, and evangelists continue to focus on the traditional Adventist eschatology in order to attract converts. The fragmentation among Adventists concerning their apocalyptic reveals the fault lines where minor schisms are already occurring and major schism is possible,
as the more sectarian Adventists see the majority as having become "lukewarm" and as betraying the urgent responsibility given to them.

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23 And thus as fulfilling the prediction of Revelation 3: 14-22, which Ellen White tied directly to Adventists themselves.


