

"Watchman, what of the night?"

"The hour has come, the hour is striking and striking at you,
the hour and the end!" Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)

Why the Easter Emphasis?

For a number of years, Adventist ministers in different places have united in Easter sunrise services in the communities in which they lived. This was especially true if the minister had joined the local ministerial alliance. This year the Adventist involvement in Easter has been more pronounced than previously.

In the January 12, 1998, issue of *Christianity Today (CT)*, was a full page (p.17) advertisement announcing a special Easter presentation, March 31, 1998, via satellite on "Resurrecting the Resurrection," as a "professional growth seminar sponsored by the *Ministry* magazine. Four ministers were scheduled to present their perceptions of the resurrection, two Adventists and two non-Adventists, a Presbyterian and a Baptist. The March 2 issue of *CT* carried a half page (p.12) announcement of the same program. The Andrews University Church was the "staging area" for the four hour presentation.

Representing the Adventists were Charles E. Bradford, and Dwight K. Nelson, senior pastor of the Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University. The non-Adventist speakers were W. Frank Harrington, minister of the Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia and Gardner C. Taylor, retired pastor of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, New York.

Both non-Adventist speakers introduced the concept of life immediately after death into their messages. After each presentation, questions received by E-mail, or over the telephone from listeners were presented to each speaker to answer. Questions on the state of man in death were called in, following the presentations of both Nelson and Harrington. Each speaker "danced" around the intent of the question. It should be said, however, that the presentations of the two non-Adventists, apart from the heresy, were the most substantive of the four messages. The last speaker's presentation, though a Baptist, indicated that he was well read in the *Desire of Ages*.

The question still remains, why are Adventists sponsoring Easter? It should be well known that the celebration of Easter on Sunday was a prelude to worship on each Sunday. One Church historian, Latourette, states that the "first certain notice of Easter is from the middle of the second century," suggesting that, "the festival, commemorating the resurrection of Christ, was *presumably* observed by at least some Christians from much earlier times." (*A History of Christianity*, Vol. I, p.137; emphasis supplied) The earliest celebration of Easter, especially in the East, timed to the Jewish celebration of

the Passover, rotated through the week. In the West, the Roman Church set the day as Sunday, since Christ arose on that day, and determined which Sunday by astronomical data.

The first commemoration services of Christ's resurrection were not called, Easter, but rather Pasch. Actually, the one place in the KJV where the word Easter is found (Acts 12:4), the Greek word is *παζχα*, a transliteration out of the Hebrew for the Passover. The name, Easter, along with other things connected with it today, such as Lent, is pagan in origin. It stands for Astarte, the queen of heaven. On Assyrian monuments the name is Ishtar.

The correct day on which to celebrate the resurrection of Christ became a basis for ecclesiastical strife, known as the Quartodeciman controversy. The Jewish Passover came on the 14th day of the Jewish month Nisan. Those who commemorated the resurrection timed to that date were called "Quartodecimans," the 14th day observers. The matter was finally settled by the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D., in favor of the practice advocated by Rome. Laturette, cited above, suggests that because the final decision for the time of the celebration of Easter on Sunday prevailed, "the prestige of Rome was thereby enhanced. (*ibid.*)

Further, we need to ask, is the Second Angel's Message no longer relevant in the decisions made by the leadership of the Church? Has "Babylon" changed its "skin" or lost its "spots"? Do we no longer believe that "in a special sense Seventh-day Adventists" were given "a work of the most solemn import, -- the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages"? (9T:19) The second angel proclaimed - "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (Rev. 14:8). Here is double emphatic emphasis. Now the Church proclaims to the world via satellite that it questions this message, and joins in with "Babylonians" to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus Christ. What is this saying to God? "God, you made a mistake when you gave this Revelation to Jesus; these of Babylon are our brothers in Christ." One thing is certain, the ministerial leadership of the Church, with the blessing of the administration, have gone into captivity to Babylon. Following the type and antitype principle of interpretation, the message of Revelation 18 takes on new significance. The people to whom God gave "a work of the most solemn import" have gone of their own free choice into captivity to Babylon. The call is to "my people" to come out of that captivity, and return and rebuild the temple [of truth] for the Lord. For and to that temple, "the Desire of all nations" will come (Haggai 2:7).

The message of the resurrection needs to be resurrected every day, not just a yearly remembrance of the event. Paul counted the loss of all things as "but dung, that [he] might win Christ ... that he might know Him and the power of His resurrection" (Phil 3:8,10). Daily, he would die (I Cor. 15:31); daily he would need to be resurrected. Paul realized that to be planted together in the likeness of His death meant also to experience His resurrection. He could confess - "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). The daily personal experience of the resurrection brings "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).