

# "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)

## THE ATONEMENT - 1

Page 2

## Some Assessments - 2

Page 4

### Editor's Preface

The article on the Atonement is the first of two on the final "Eternal Verity" which we have been discussing in this series of studies. This study deals with the theological aspects of the Atonement emphasizing in sanctuary context that Jesus was announced as the Savior of "His people from their sins." The second study will discuss the historical background of the concept of "Atonement" in Adventist thinking.

In the March issue of *WWN*, we noted that events had occurred in the community of Adventism both within and without the regular Church which need to be discussed. Since that first article, we have obtained documented material which focuses on the split-away churches both in the Potomac and Rocky Mountain Conferences. While the "independent" ministries of the past decade, which have at least theoretically drawn a line between themselves and the regular Church, have been of the conservative orientation, this new split-off represents the liberal elements in Adventism. In this second article on Assessment, we give factual data of a general nature, and critique the "Special Report" by the editor of the *Adventist Review* on the break-a-way in the Potomac Conference. In the report, we noted that the core of this liberal activity in Adventism is connected to a philosophy of ministry, known as "the seeker-church movement" promoted by Bill Hybels, an independent Evangelical pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church located in one of Chicago's most affluent suburbs. In the course of these assessments we plan to give space to discuss the write up on Bill Hybels which dominated the July 18, 1994 issue of *Christianity Today*.

The one troublesome aspect of the picture both in Maryland and Colorado is that the conferences did not take direct action until the tithe allocation was affected. These break-a-way churches could believe doctrines more apostate than even what the 1980 Statement set forth, and no direct action was taken, but let the tithe be touched, and it became a grave matter of concern. Read carefully - "Let's Talk It Over."



# The Atonement - I

Reduced to its simplest terms, the Atonement was stated by the Angel Gabriel in his announcement to Joseph regarding the name by which the son of Mary was to be called - "Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). Sin had separated man from God (Isa. 59:1-2). Separation from sin restores at-one-ment with God. In a sense, "sin" is a compound word involving not only the acts, but the cause for the acts. Full at-one-ment cannot be realized until both of these two aspects of sin are abrogated.

The atonement is God's initiative. The Gospel of Matthew indicates that the coming of Jesus was in fulfillment of the prophetic promise to Isaiah, that a virgin would conceive and bear a son whose name would be called "Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (1:23). God became us so that in Him by becoming us could be restored the lost oneness caused by sin. This means that Jesus is the sole source by which the atonement was and is to be accomplished. He restored in Himself the lost oneness with God, and by His mediation, He will return "His people" to their lost oneness with God.

In Hebrews, Jesus is declared to be a "surety of a better covenant" (7:22). The word translated "surety," εγγυος, is used only this one time in the New Testament. However, in legal and other documents of the period the word appears frequently. Moultou & Milligan in their reference work, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament*, cite various incidents of its use. For example - "The father consents to the marriage and is surety for the payment of the aforesaid dowry." Again - "I hold your surety until you pay me the value of the claims" (p. 179). The surety of Jesus under this better covenant, "established upon better promises" (Heb 8:6), is His own word and accomplishment both as priest and sacrifice.

This unique word usage in Hebrews suggests another covenant and another surety. At Mount Sinai a covenant was confirmed with Israel on the promises of the people to perform it. At the command of God, Moses read to the whole congregation "the judgments" which God gave to him (Exodus 21:1 - 23:33). In this covenant, there was no provision for mercy. It was obey:live; disobey:die (23:20-21). After hearing read to them this book of the covenant, "All the people answered with one voice and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do" (24:3). It lasted less than forty days.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving from God the Ten Commandments engraved in stone, as well as instructions for the building of the sanctuary, the congregation of Israel pressed Aaron to make the golden calf god of the Egyptians, and worship it as the one who had brought them forth from Egypt (Ex. 32:1-7). Coming down from the

mount and seeing the naked revelry of the people before the golden calf, Moses sensed the enormity and significance of the rebellion. Israel was a lost cause. Into the breach, Moses stepped. Admitting the magnitude of their sin, he pled with God - "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin--; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written" (Ex. 32:31-32). To the pleadings of Moses, God responded - "Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel" (Ex. 34:27). Moses became the "surety," a mediator of this covenant which could be called a "type" covenant. Under it the sanctuary was erected and functioned. It prefigured Jesus, the "surety" of a better covenant.

It is this understanding of the covenant with Israel, which makes more meaningful the appearance of Moses on the Mount of Transfiguration. The record in Luke reads that as Jesus prayed in a mountain, even as Moses had so prayed, "behold there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias (Elijah)." These "spake" to Him "of His decease (εξοδος) which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (9:28-31). Jesus provided the "way out" - the meaning of the word, "exodos" - beginning in Jerusalem, thus He became the surety, a mediator of a better covenant. The "exodos" from Egypt was not complete until Israel was secured in the Land of Promise. Our "exodos" will not be complete until we stand on the Sea of Glass before the Throne of God. Before that Throne now stands the Lamb as it had been slain, the "Surety" of the better covenant (Rev. 5:6). The entire at-one-ment is in Him and through Him.

All of this leads to another important concept in regard to the atonement. In the Old Testament the word, "atonement" is used for both the objective achieved in the daily ritual as well as the special service on the Day of Atonement. There is a dual atonement. In Leviticus 4, in each instance where the KJV uses the word, "atonement" (verses 20, 26, 31, 35), the Hebrew verb, *kipher*, is used. Likewise, the same word is found in Leviticus 16 (verses 16,17,18,24,32,33). In Leviticus 16, the infinitive form, *kapher*, is also used (verses 17,20,30,33,34). In Leviticus 23, the noun form in the plural, *kiphurim*, is used as well as the infinitive. This data is cited so as to relate the use of the word to the New Testament as well as to consider how it is translated in the Septuagint (LXX), the Bible of the Apostolic Church.

The word, atonement, as found in Leviticus 4 & 16 (KJV), is translated in the LXX by the Greek word, εξιλασμοι or εξιλασκομαι, and in Leviticus 23 by εξιλασμος, a noun in the singular for the Hebrew plural. These words do not appear in the Greek New Testament. However, a similar word is used. Two times the word ιλασκομαι (*hilaskomai*), a verb, is used. In Luke 18:13 it is translated, "merciful," and in Heb. 2:17 as "reconciliation." The noun form, ιλασμος (*hilasmos*) is used twice in John 2:2; 4:10, and is

translated, "propitiation." Another word from the same root is used two times - ἱλαστήριον (hilasteron). In Romans 3:25 without the article it is translated, "propitiation," and with the article in Hebrews 9:5 as "the mercy seat." ✓

You may ask why these words from the same root are given different translations; why, not always as "atonement"? The Greek word in the OT for atonement has the prepositional prefix, εκ (εξ before vowels) which effects its meaning. For example, the Greek word, βαλλω, means, "I throw," but εκβαλλω means, "I cast out."

What is all of this telling us? Consider the following factors carefully:

1) As noted above, the LXX was the "Bible" of the Apostolic Church. It was the Apostles who contributed to the Church, the New Testament.

2) Every scripture quoted in the book of Hebrews was from the LXX, not the Hebrew text.

3) No where in the New Testament are the words used which are used in the LXX for the "atonement" in either describing the daily services as outlined in Leviticus 4, or in the outline of the yearly service as found in Leviticus 16.

This permits but a simple conclusion. The concept of "atonement" as emphasized in Adventism was not spelled out in the New Testament. Does this nullify the position of Adventism? No! This fact has both an upside and downside.

First the upside: This means that in the book of Hebrews, which quotes solely from the LXX, the use of the words used for "atonement" in the LXX were purposely avoided, thus telling the reader, the material presented was not to be understood as speaking of the antitypical Day of Atonement. That "day" was approaching (Heb. 10:25). Jesus had not entered upon His ascension into the ministry depicted by the typical Day of Atonement. Rather, He is presented as a "surety of a better covenant," "as a Son over His own house," and as a priest-king sitting on "the throne of grace" (Heb. 3:5-6; 4:14-16).

Now the downside: The New Testament does not give the basis for the final atonement which is one of the fundamental pillars of Adventism.

Where does that leave us? To put it very plainly; it leaves us with a theology based on the typology of the wilderness sanctuary services and related to the book of Daniel as it focuses on the closing events of time. This gives significance to the fact that the book of Daniel was set aside - sealed - for the time of the end. Does this diminish in any way the centrality of the Sacrifice of the cross? No, it merely relates the sacrifice of Christ to the dual aspect of the Atonement, the daily service - forgiveness - and the

yearly service - cleansing.

Even in the New Testament where the word "atonement" is used once in the KJV (Rom. 5:11), the Greek word is καταλλαγη, meaning "reconciliation," and so translated where the word is used elsewhere in the NT. While it is true that a concept of at-one-ment is embodied in the word reconciliation, it is a reconciliation of "enemies" to God (Rom. 5:10), not the coming to God of an errant child confessing his sin seeking to be again at-one-ment with his Father. Reconciliation is outside the covenant relationship. It brings us into that accord. The atonements were for those already in a covenant relationship with God. It must ever be recognized that the sanctuary type was set up and functioned under the covenant which God made with Moses and with Israel, with Moses as the mediator.

Paul in Romans 5:10-11, is emphasizing who the Reconciler is - "Christ by whom we have received the atonement" (KJV) - "the reconciliation." He also blends two concepts - the death and resurrection of Jesus. We are "reconciled to God by the death of His Son," but having been reconciled, "we shall be saved by His life" who "is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). This "saving work" is stated in the context of Christ as "a surety of a better covenant" and as having "an unchangeable priesthood." (See Heb. 7:22, 24)

The covenant concept is an essential concept for us to understand in relationship to the atonement. In the Old Testament, those who accepted the God of Israel as their God are described as taking "hold of My covenant" (Isa. 56:4, 6). The promise to them was that their "sacrifices shall be accepted upon My altar" (ver. 7). In the New Testament there is a "new" Israel. Paul describes the Ephesians as at one time being "Gentiles" and "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, and having no hope, and without God in the world" (2:11,12). But a "naturalisation" took place. He wrote - "Now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (ver. 13).

Observe - "in Christ Jesus" there is a new Israel. All that come unto God by Him - for no man cometh to the Father except by Him - are extended hope and the promises of the new covenant. He is the Surety, having accomplished a new εξοδος at Jerusalem by the cross. To the foot of the cross - "the highest place to which man can attain" - all must come to receive "the blood of sprinkling" (See Ex. 24:8), and thus come under the covenant of which Christ is both the surety and mediator. These are members of "the general assembly and church of the firstborn" whose names are written in the Lamb's "book of life." To these belong the "atonements" under the covenant (Heb. 12:22-24).

In the Old Testament references describing the services of the sanctuary, the word, "atonement" is used to describe

the work done solely by the officiating priest. In Leviticus 4, outlining the sin offerings, the emphasis is that after the offering of the sacrifice brought by the confessor, "the priest shall make an atonement for him" (Lev. 4:26). Again, in the outline of the services on the Day of Atonement, the statement is made - "For on that day shall the [high] priest make an atonement for you" (Lev. 16:30). Further, it is emphasized that "there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when [the high priest] goeth in to make an atonement in the [most] holy" (16:17). The high priest alone accomplished the final atonement. In both instances it was accomplished for a people under the covenant God made with Moses and with Israel. Keep in mind that Jesus was to *save His people from their sins*.

Perhaps at this point of study, we should recapitulate the salient factors revealed in the typical services of atonement:

1) The Old Testament sanctuary services prefigured two atonements; one that occurred daily at the Altar in the court, and one yearly that involved the whole of the sanctuary and court, starting in the Most Holy place, and concluded at the Altar in the court (Leviticus 4 & 16).

2) The plural form is used to describe the yearly atonement. Twice in Leviticus 23:27-28, the plural form, *kiphurim*, is used - "it is a day of atonements." However, the LXX uses the singular, *εξιλασμοσ*, to translate the Hebrew plural, indicating that in the judgment of the translators, they perceived the Hebrew use of the plural to indicate the majestic plural. In other words, the yearly day of atonement was primary in importance, the objective to which the daily atonements focused.

3) Salvation history in the New Testament was not the time of the Atonement of Atonements; thus in the New Testament, the words used in the LXX referring to the Day of Atonement, as well as the daily service, were avoided.

4) The Gospel message was the gathering of a New Israel into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the Surety and Mediator of such a covenant.

While the daily sacrifices in the court at the Brazen Altar prefigured the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, yet Christ was offered without the gate as the Saviour of all who would accept Him. The inscription placed on the Cross was written in three languages; the language of the professed people of God, and in the two world languages of the day, Greek and Latin (John 19:20). It is at the Cross that two objectives meet: 1) the atonement of forgiveness; and 2) the ministry of reconciliation. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, speaks of the ministry of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18-20), while John is speaking to those who have been reconciled that they sin not, but "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (I John 2:1).

This later factor - the continual (daily) atonement - is too often overlooked in the study of the typical sin offerings. All - the high priest, the whole congregation, the ruler, and the common people, the four categories covered in Leviticus 4 - were in covenant relationship with God via the mediator, Moses (Ex. 34:27). When in that covenant relationship, they became conscious of a separating sin, they came with the offering prescribed; confessed, and the officiating priest made atonement for them, and it was forgiven them. Christ, as the Surety of a better covenant, "ever liveth to make intercession for" us (Heb. 7:23,25), who have been reconciled to God, when we stumble and fall.

The gospel message of the New Testament seeks to bring all to the foot of the cross, to the brazen altar of the court. The New Testament message is: "Be ye reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20), and "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father" (I John 2:1). The New Testament does not go far beyond this point. Only hints of the coming Atonement of Atonements are given.

To the believer is given the "earnest (*αρραβωνα*) of the Spirit" (II Cor. 1:22; 5:5), in other words, the pledge of what is to come. "We through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. 5:5). [Is it not of significance, that the message of 1888 has come during the time of the final atonement?] Although "as many as are led by the Spirit of God ... are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14), yet "the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God" (ver. 19, NKJV). To those of New Testament times this expectation was perceived as "the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). [For significance of "the day," see M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*, p. 170]

To be Concluded

## Some Assessments - 2

In the March issue of WWN we wrote that "as 1997 closed, events were taking place in the Community of Adventism both within and without the regular Church which need to be carefully considered by every concerned Adventist." Because of the incompleteness of our factual data at the time of writing, concerning what was transpiring within the structure, we noted a specific agitation without the regular Church. We now return to the events within the Church. In doing the further research required, we have discovered that basic concepts are involved which will require a more detailed discussion than can be adequately presented in the space available in this issue of WWN.

We were made aware of problems involving the Damascus, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Potomac Conference, by a minister in the Columbia Union. At a Union-wide gathering of ministers, the pastor of the church, Richard Fredericks, spoke. His message alarmed

the minister who called me, and from his information, an officer present from the General Conference level of administration was also disturbed.

The next information to become available was the North American Division issue of the *Adventist Review* (November 1997), with its "Special Report" by the editor; "When the Family Splits." While the central emphasis of what the editor wrote concerned the Church pastored by Richard Fredericks, whom he described as its "charismatic leader," Johnsson also informed his readers that another split had occurred six months previously involving "the large Sunnyside church in Portland, Oregon."

Soon after the *Adventist Review* had been received, we were sent by a reader in Colorado a *Rocky Mountain Conference Update* which detailed a similar problem involving a church pastored by Clay Peck. By exploring further contacts available to us, we obtained a copy of the break-away church's "Statement of Faith." This will require in itself an article, so that the readers of *WWN* can be aware of the issues involved. There is no question but that the two churches involved - in Maryland and Colorado - are in close communication with similar objectives as well as beliefs.

Both the write-up in the *Adventist Review* and *Conference Update* reveal a similar response on the part of the two conferences where the churches are located. No overt action was taken against these two churches and their pastors until these churches decided to go congregational in organization, and withhold from the conference the tithe received. These were the two bottom line issues, the heretical doctrinal teachings were of secondary emphasis. It is our judgment that the doctrinal issues should have been primary. However, with the pluralism evident in the church itself in regard to truth, administrators who might want to hold to the line of what was basic Adventist teaching face a difficult situation. In fact, a statement released by the leadership of the Rocky Mountain Conference - "Understanding Our Theology," reveals that whoever formulated it does not truly know what makes Adventism "unique." This statement, too, needs careful analysis.

Johnsson, in his article, indicated a common denominator behind one of these break-a-way churches' objectives. He wrote:

*The influence of Willow Creek: Bill Hybels' church has become a mecca for Adventist pastors and elders. This congregation, free of any denominational ties, has grown rapidly to more than 13,000 members. Adventist pastors, concerned with slow growth and lack of vitality in their congregations, journey to Willow Creek in a search for answers. And Willow Creek has given them much of value to take and adapt to their situations. Hybels apparently makes no effort to win Adventists to his model, but we must raise a question: Have Adventists seeing the success of Willow Creek, consciously or unconsciously been*

*Influenced toward congregationalism? (p. 17)*

Hybels, an evangelical, has a basic motivation to his program. He has come under severe criticism from other evangelicals because of this philosophy. This concept and its impact on Adventist thinking also needs analysis.

Dr. Johnsson's article can be critiqued as a prelude for the various analyses which will follow from time to time. It needs to be kept in mind that while his official capacity as "Executive Publisher and Editor" is evident, Johnsson is writing as one emotionally involved in the Damascus Church break-a-way. He and his wife "have dear friends who are caught up in the conflict." Further, he indicates that his choice to join the staff of the *Adventist Review* came at the time "the Glacier View Conference, called to discuss the views of Desmond Ford, had just concluded." He confesses that the "next few years [were] the most difficult of my ministry." Everywhere he travelled to speak, he encountered "anger, bitterness, bewilderment, and pain. Ministers resigned or were fired, churches split." He speaks of his homeland, Australia, noting that in his home conference, "South Australian - an old but a small conference - was declaimed: at one point in the capital city of Adelaide, there were more former Adventist ministers than employed ones."

He suggests that the split should be kept in perspective. It involves only a few hundred members against a worldwide membership "about 10 million. But whether few or many, any loss of members from the body hurts." The perspective needs to be broadened. Add to this group at Damascus, the hundreds involved in Colorado, plus the number who seceded from the Oregon church. Beyond this are the hundreds, perhaps even thousands involved in home churches across America. The Community of Adventism is splintered and is splintering; let there be no doubt about that.

Johnsson says there is "hurt" and indicates the hearts of many at the General Conference complex are heavy. He seems not to sense the reason why for all of this splintering, and looks at it from merely the viewpoint of the present crisis, which involves Adventists of a view more liberal than the Church itself. Where were the "heavy hearts" when concerned Adventists were being roughly dealt with because they objected to the compromises of the faith by the General Conference leadership in the complex? Why the appearance of pained agony now when Adventists on the left go congregational, and no apparent grief was expressed when conservative Adventists on the right chose to meet and study in small groups on Sabbath? Was it because the small groups lacked numerical strength and their tithe was far smaller than the "3 million" reported by some churches alluded to by Johnsson within the organizational framework?

In the "Special Report," Johnsson quotes the oft repeated cliché - "The church may appear about to fall, but it does

not fall" - from *Selected Messages*, bk. ii, p. 380. He places it in connection with the Kellogg split of the early 1900s, while the sentence is actually from a letter written in 1886 to George I. Butler and S. N. Haskell. It is printed out of context in *Selected Messages* and Johnsson places it farther out of context in his report.

There are several observations of current trends in the religious world which Johnsson has succinctly stated, yet his conclusions are open to serious question. He pinpointed "Theological distinctives" as being downplayed. This is accurate. He wrote:

*Ours is an age with scant interest in theology. Spiritually - usually a mushy amalgam of feel-goods and scattered thinking - is in; theology is out. If we let it, the spirit of the age will hammer at the distinctives that make us a people - the sanctuary teaching, the judgment, the three angels' messages, the Sabbath, the state of the dead, the Second Coming, Ellen White - until we look, think, and act like any other church."*

This is a strange list of "distinctives" for Johnsson to bring together, especially the first two. To read his doctoral dissertation at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, one would wonder if Johnsson ever knew about the sanctuary teaching and the judgment as truly distinctives in Adventism. His position as presented in the dissertation is as far afield as Desmond Ford's has ever been. The tragedy in the theology of Adventism today has been the reluctance to bring the church's doctrinal positions into line with Scripture, perhaps fearing that in so doing they would play into the hands of Ford's meanderings or would have to come to terms with certain statements of Ellen White. Unity is based in truth, and unless we are willing to come in line with truth, we will not have unity. It is just that simple, though difficult as it may be to achieve.

Johnsson's observations on the "unique identity" of Seventh-day Adventists "both individually and corporately" are interesting. After discussing Adventists as individuals, he makes application to the Church. He writes that "Adventist churches have a strongly individualistic streak." By this he means that the local church alone can accept into fellowship and disfellowship members - the conferences or unions, or general conference cannot. This is why Dr. Desmond Ford, who denies basic Adventist teaching, is still a member in good and regular standing, while many who have held to and fought for the truth upon which the church once stood, have been disfellowshipped. This is quite a track record for such "a strongly individualistic streak."

In the final paragraphs of this "Special Report," Johnsson perceives himself as getting "tough." After citing his perceptions of the turmoil in Adventism over the Desmond Ford declension, he writes:

*I urge every pastor who may contemplate leading his or*

*her church out of Adventism into an independent congregation to consider this history. I tremble at the thought of becoming such a leader. The Adventist Church has no martyrs.*

*I urge every member who may feel inclined to join such a split-off group to consider this history. This fellowship may seem impossible to give up. I say: Enjoy it while it lasts, because it may turn to ashes in your mouth, and sooner than you can imagine.*

*Tough words? But, I hope tough love. If I hadn't been so close to this history of the past 17 years, I wouldn't feel so ready to speak bluntly. The Adventist Church has no offshoots.*

Johnsson is drawing conclusions and giving counsel from a very limited perspective - the history of 17 years, which takes one back to 1980. (He wrote the article in 1997) It was at that time that the Church itself became an offshoot from truth in the adoption of the Dallas Statement of Beliefs. What about the history from 1955 to 1980 - the compromises with the Evangelicals? Fordism is merely the "chickens" come home to roost. Dr Desmond Ford merely carried the compromises of 1955-56 to their ultimate conclusions.

## Let's Talk It Over

What is an offshoot? This question is suggested by Dr. William G. Johnsson, Editor of the *Adventist Review*, in the article we have critiqued above. He wrote - "The Adventist Church has no offshoots." We suggest that the Church is itself an offshoot, that is, if truth can have offshoots. Actually, such is impossible. Literally by dictionary definition, an offshoot is "a branch of a main stem." There is no question but that God planted the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (See 9T:19) He "watered" it by the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of His "messengers." But as Israel of old, also a planting of the Lord (Ps. 80:8-9), this last Remnant of the "new" Israel has deviated from the truth committed to its trust.

The Statement of Beliefs drawn up by the founding fathers of the Movement in 1872 was published regularly in various publications of the Church till 1914. No statement appeared again for sixteen years, until a new statement was placed in the 1931 Yearbook, which has become designated as the 1930 Statement of Belief. This statement altered Belief #5, modified Belief #2, and introduced the concept of the Trinity "the central doctrine of the Catholic Faith" "upon [which] are based all the other teachings of the Church." (*Handbook of Today's Catholic*, p. 11) The 1980 Statement voted at Dallas, defined the Trinity in the language of the Constitution of the World Council of Churches, and introduced a new statement on what constitutes the Church which had been in no previ-

ous statement of beliefs, wording it also according to the WCC Constitution. (So Much in Common, p. 40)

This 1980 Statement of Beliefs gives no clear cut statement regarding the nature Christ took upon Himself in the Incarnation. It confirmed a major compromise made with the Evangelicals concerning the atonement in language borrowed from the book, *Questions on Doctrine*, and defined there. Thus to questions proposed by Walter Martin after the adoption of the new statement as to whether the Church still held to the commitments made to him and Barnhouse in 1955-1956, the leadership of the Church could reply in the affirmative. (*The Kingdom of the Cults*, p. 410)

Actually, the more one studies the changes in belief made by the Church in 1980, the more one is inclined to question that the present church is even an offshoot of the original planting, but has in reality become a new plant, a "new organization" when defined by doctrinal affirmation. The warning given by the Lord's messenger at the time of the Battle Creek secession should startle us in the light of what has happened in the altering of the statements of belief. She wrote:

*One thing it is certain is soon to be realized, - the great apostasy, which is developing and increasing and waxing stronger, and will continue to do so until the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout. We are to hold fast the first principles of our denominated faith, and go forward from strength to increased faith. (Special Testimonies, Series B, #7, p. 57)*

If I read this correctly, it is saying that "the great apostasy" involves the "first principles of our denominated faith." "First principles" were altered in 1980 with the adoption of the Dallas Statement of Beliefs. Is this the height of "the great apostasy" or is there more to come? Do the words of Jesus concerning the religious leaders of Israel apply with equal force today - "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13)?  
whg

## The Thinking of Others

(From time to time we receive small concise essays of the thinking of others as they meditate on the Word. While we may not agree with what is written in its entirety, if it challenges our thinking, perhaps even our perceptions, we will share it with the readers of WWN as space permits. The identification of the one writing will be by initial and Zip Code, as Dr. Rue used in his publication, *The Layworker*.)

### "Thoughts on Begotten Son"

If it is true that we have life at conception, and I believe it is true, Jesus had life at conception. We did not have life before conception. Jesus did. He did not give up His life to become a fetus in the womb of

Mary.

Jesus died once. Therefore, there was only one time in the history of time and eternity that Jesus was dead - without life. It was at the resurrection that He became the begotten of the Father. Acts 13:39 proclaims "this day have I begotten thee." Any reference, and there are many, to God as the Father and Jesus as the Son prior to and during His sojourn on earth is in the same sense that Jesus was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

When God says something will happen, it can be considered as done, only waiting the time of fulfillment.

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## 1998 Seminar August 3 - 8

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