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Varieties of Adventists after 1844: Emerging from “fanaticism of every kind” into “the order of heaven”*

**The Adventist Archives Lecture
Washington Adventist University
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D. J. B. Trim

In the first half of the 1840s, to an extent not true probably for centuries before (and not true since), many thousands of people in Christendom believed that Jesus Christ was just about to return to earth, to “judge the quick and the dead” and inaugurate “His kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:1).¹ The majority of believers in Christ’s “Second Advent” were in North America, and became associated with the name of William Miller, the New England exegete whose teaching and preaching that the *Parousia* would take place in 1843 or 1844 had put a metaphorical match to a powder-keg of eschatological expectation.² Yet “Millerites” was the label

* This was the first annual Adventist Archives Lecture, hosted by the Honors College at Washington Adventist University and co-sponsored by the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research. I am grateful to Bradford Haas, director of the Honors College for proposing the Lectureship, for his work with his team to host a successful event, and for inviting me to be the inaugural lecturer.

¹ Scriptural quotations are taken from the Authorized (King James) Version.

² Major studies include Everett N. Dick, “The Advent Crisis of 1843–1844”, Ph.D. diss. (University of Wisconsin, 1930), publ. as *William Miller and the Advent Crisis 1831–1844*, ed. Gary Land (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1994); Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1944); Edwin S. Gaustad (ed.) *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in mid-Nineteenth-century America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975);

mainstream American Protestants had put on these believers in a premillennial, imminent, and corporeal Second Coming of Christ. Their term for themselves was “Adventist”.³

Miller had not designated a precise date for the Second Advent; as a result, a number of dates in 1843 and 1844 were proposed by other Adventists, favored by some and contested by others, but each passed. Eventually, however, in the summer of 1844, consensus emerged: Jesus Christ would return to earth on Tuesday, October 22, 1844. This date was then proclaimed by some 50,000 American Adventists,⁴ maybe 2,500 more in

Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (eds.), *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987) and 2nd edn. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993) [all page references hereafter are to the 2nd edn.]; George Knight, *Millennial Fever and the End of the World: A Study of Millerite Adventism* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1993) and rev. edn., *William Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, rev. edn. (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2010) [all references hereafter are to this edn.]; David L. Rowe, *God's Strange Work: William Miller and the End of the World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008). Regionally focused works include Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800–1850* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985); with which cf. the classic work by Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1950); and, on Canada, see Denis Fortin, *Adventism in Quebec: The Dynamics of Rural Church Growth 1830–1910* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2004), chaps. 2–4.

³ The first use I have found of “Millerite” in an Adventist publication is from 1861, where it is attributed to a non-Adventist: U. Smith, “Phenomena in 1860”, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* [hereafter *R&H*], 18 (July 2, 1861), 45. The earliest use of “Millerite” in the Google Books corpus is from 1838; usage was rare through 1841, but rose dramatically in 1842 and further still in 1843. Although “Adventist” follows roughly the same trend as “Millerite”, the first recorded use is a year later, 1839, after which it occurs much less frequently. This is suggestive of “Millerite” as a term used by society at large, with “Adventist” an insider term, and thus more uncommon. See <https://books.google.com/ngrams/>.

⁴ David Rowe observes: “We will never know the exact number” (“Millerites: A Shadow Portrait”, in Numbers and Butler, *The Disappointed*, p. 2). However, historians seem to have settled on an approximate total of 50,000 active Millerites (Miller’s own estimate); well-informed contemporaries were ready to accept a total as high as 200,000, but this is perhaps best understood as reflecting the wider body of support for an imminent and premillennial Second

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Britain,⁵ and perhaps a hundred or so in Europe.⁶ Enthusiasm turned to excitement as the biblically foretold end of days approached. The historian Everett Dick writes evocatively and elegiacally of men and women who “had left workshop and

Coming, yet not for a specific date. See Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*, p. 167; Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, pp. 216–17; Cross, *Burned-Over District*, pp. 287–88; Rowe, “Millerites”, p. 7; Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 181. One reason for the estimate of 50,000 active adherents is that Millerites were geographically widespread (which is highlighted by Dick, Cross and Rowe) and might be suggestive of a higher figure.

⁵ On British Adventists see Louis Billington, “The Millerite Adventists in Great Britain, 1840–1850,” *Journal of American Studies*, 1 (1967), 191–212, repr. with this title and minor revisions in Numbers and Butler, *The Disappointed*, pp. 59–77; H. I. B. Dunton, “The Millerite Adventists and other Millenarian Groups in Great Britain 1830–1860”, Ph.D. thesis (University of London, 1984); cf. the short accounts in Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*, pp. 72–74; Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, 114–15. Some, perhaps many, British Millerites demurred about October, 1844, and “staked their hopes on a Second Advent in October 1845” (Billington 1967: 197, 1993: 63). It is impossible to be precise about how many British Adventists expected the Second Coming in October 1844 because their overall numbers are uncertain, as well as the proportion that accepted the date in the autumn of 1844. Billington argued in 1967 that “no more than 2,000 or 3,000 converts joined the British Millerites . . . between 1842 and 1846, although thousands more heard the Advent message and may have believed for a time” (1967: 208). Dunton’s subsequent research arguably indicates a slightly (or even somewhat) higher figure; Billington thought not, and stood by his estimate two decades later: see Dunton, “Millerite Adventists in Britain”, pp. 167–68; Billington 1993: 68, 76 n. 52. Given Dunton’s stronger evidential basis, I prefer his estimate of upwards of 3,000 British Millerites. But in light of the lack of consensus among them, it is unlikely that the number expecting Christ’s return on October 22, 1844, exceeded 2,500, and it might well have been less.

⁶ Although Millerites then, and Seventh-day Adventists since, claimed Advent believers in Europe (and beyond), there is limited evidence of followers of Miller or his associates, as opposed to believers in a literal, premillennial, and impending (but not firmly dated) Second Advent. Even L. E. Froom, assiduous discoverer of Adventist antecedents and analogues, admits that “in the period from 1843 to 1847 . . . relatively few in the Old World look[ed] for the advent or the establishment of the millennium in those years”: Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1946–54), III, 704; and see, e.g., *ibid.*, IV, 712–13, 718, 720; Emma E. Howell, *The Great Advent Movement*, rev. edn. (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1941), pp. 19–23; Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, pp. 167–68; Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 114.

household, laid down their tools and domestic cares”, and, as they believed, “stood on the brink of eternity”, eager and ready to join in the “rejoicing of the glorified”.⁷

But the day that was to have been earth’s last passed without “the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). October 23 dawned and all who had been sure that they would be in heaven found themselves on earth instead. It is surely impossible today to have any real sense of their distress, disenchantment, and disappointment—the latter being the term those who had experienced that day rapidly adopted to describe it.⁸ As one wrote: “Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before . . . we wept, and wept, till the day dawn.”⁹

Yet in “this time of deep trial and affliction of soul,” as another participant recalled it,¹⁰ lie the origins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is with the roots of Seventh-day Adventism and the way it emerged out of Millerism that I am concerned in this article. The story told is a familiar one, in terms of the events rehearsed, but it is intended *not* to be another iteration of the well-

⁷ Everett Dick, “The Great Disappointment”, *R&H*, 109 (Jan. 7, 1932), 6. Large sections of his doctoral dissertation, “Advent Crisis”, were first published in the church’s flagship paper, *R&H*; the article cited here was the first to recycle “Advent Crisis”, which was eventually published with minor revisions, thanks to Gary Land, who edited it as *William Miller and the Advent Crisis* (see Land, “Foreword”, *ibid.*, pp. viii-ix); the quotation above is at p. 155 in *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*. I am currently preparing a study of Dick and his place in Adventist historiography, which I hope will be forthcoming in 2022.

⁸ See below, pp. 12-14.

⁹ Hiram Edson, undated MS fragment, Advent Source Collection, Center for Adventist Research, Andrews University. I have not seen this oft-quoted MS, but it is printed *in extenso* in Numbers and Butler, *The Disappointed*, App. 1, pp. 213–16 (at p. 215). The quotation above is also quoted in, e.g., Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, pp. 264–65 (Nichol was perhaps the first to use this MS); and Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 185.

¹⁰ [James] W[hite], “Our Present Position”, *R&H*, 1 (Dec. 1850), 15.

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worn triumphalist narrative of “rise and progress”.¹¹ Yet, at the same time, neither is it self-consciously revisionist, as influential Adventist historiography of the 1980s and ’90s was.¹² I introduce a few new pieces of evidence and bring, I hope, a fresh perspective to the question of how a subset of “Second Adventists”, a term they both used for themselves and had applied to them by their antagonists, eventually became Seventh-day Adventists.¹³ Different varieties of Adventists emerged out of what they came to call “the Great Disappointment” and I briefly explore the varying cultural, theological, and practical reactions of different Adventists to the shattering events of 1844; I suggest reasons why, of all the different successors, those that enjoyed by far the greatest long-term success are those who founded the Seventh-day Adventist

¹¹ Cf. John N. Loughborough, *Rise and Progress of the Seventh-day Adventists: With Tokens of God's Hand in the Movement and a Brief Sketch of the Advent Cause from 1831 to 1844* (Battle Creek, Mich.: General Conference Association of the Seventh-Day Adventists, 1892); id., *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publ., 1905); M. Ellsworth Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2nd edn (Washington, D.C., South Bend, Ind. & Peekskill, N.Y.: Review & Herald, 1926); A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory 1888–1901* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1966); Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*. This approach, typical of Adventist history-writing, has been effectively problematized by Ashlee Chism, “[E]xcept as we shall forget’: Collective Memory and Adventist History”, Society of Adventist Philosophers ninth annual conference, Denver, Nov. 15, 2018.

¹² Examples include Numbers and Butler, *The Disappointed*; Gary Land, “The Historians and the Millerites: An Historiographical Essay”, in *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*, pp. xiii–xxviii.

¹³ In the 1840s, opponents often used “Millerite” and “Second Adventist” interchangeably: e.g., “Millerites”, *Christian Messenger and Reformer*, 9 (1845), 205. Examples of its use by Adventists themselves include [Uriah Smith], “Where art Thou?”, *R&H*, 26 (Sept. 26, 1865), 129, who endorses the published views of “a Second Adventist [from] England”; and “Uncle Harvey” [probably J. H. Waggoner], “Signs of the Coming of Christ”, *The Youth's Instructor*, 16 (Feb. 1868), 9, who tells his young readers that “the name ‘Second Adventist’ is as much a term of reproach in the churches now as the name Christian was among the Jews in the time of the apostles.” In light of Waggoner’s comment, it is noteworthy that, in the *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1860* entry for Burlington (20 miles from Battle Creek), its directory of “Professions, Trades, Etc.”, includes “Waggoner Eld. J. H., Second Adventist”, the term he presumably chose to describe himself (p. 55).

Church in 1863. I argue that it was the pragmatism of the Seventh-day Adventists and their theological view of “the order of heaven” that enabled them to prosper and endure, in contrast to most Millerite successor groups.

I

William Miller had been born into a devout Baptist family, but, as an adult, became a staunch deist. An emotional conversion experience drew him to Jesus Christ, but left him still with some reservations about Christian doctrine. Miller devoted himself for two years to a comprehensive study of the Holy Scriptures. While he explored the whole of the Bible, it appears that he found apocalyptic prophecies particularly compelling.¹⁴ At the end of his study, he was convinced that the Scriptures formed a harmonious whole and taught that there would be a Second Coming of Christ to the earth—but he also, to his surprise, found (as he thought) that they indicated *when* Jesus would return to earth: the day that “the earth ... and the works that are therein shall be burned up” as foretold in 2 Peter 3:10. This text was important to Miller: inasmuch as “the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness, is located by Peter after the conflagration”, it meant that “there can be no conversion of the world before the advent”. Thus, it “necessarily follow[ed] that the various portions of scripture that

¹⁴ More research is needed on intellectual influences on Miller’s investigation of the scriptures, but see Everett N. Dick, “The Millerite Movement 1830-1845”, in Gary Land (ed.), *Adventism in America: A History* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 2–5; and see now Jeff Crocombe, “‘A Feast of Reason’: The Roots of William Miller’s Biblical Interpretation and its Influence on the Seventh-day Adventist Church”, Ph.D. thesis (University of Queensland, 2011).

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refer to the millennial state have their fulfilment *after* the resurrection”, which would take place at “Christ’s coming”.¹⁵

Miller thus rejected an important Christian commonplace of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries about the millennium. Rather than being a thousand-year era in which Christ reigned on earth, it was understood figuratively; the millennium, it was thought, would be “a period when sin would be practically wiped out . . . and universal happiness would prevail as a result of the great enlightenment of mankind and the conversion of those in the remote corners of the earth.”¹⁶ Or, as a leading theologian of the 1840s put it, when chiding Miller:

The great event before the world is not its physical conflagration, but its moral regeneration. Although there is doubtless a sense in which Christ may be said to come in connection with the passing away of the fourth empire . . . and his kingdom to be illustriously established, yet that will be found to be a spiritual coming in the power of his gospel, in the ample outpouring of his Spirit, and the glorious administration of his providence.¹⁷

The millennium would usher in the Second Coming rather than the other way around; and it would be largely the fruit of human effort rather than divine intervention.

Miller rejected this postmillennialist interpretation of the Book of Revelation. He was only too aware of humanity’s sinful

¹⁵ Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller, Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), p. 73.

¹⁶ Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*, p. 7.

¹⁷ Quoted in James White, *Sketches of the Christian Life and Public Labors of William Miller* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publ. Assoc., 1875), 9-10; cf. [E. Jacobs], “To Advent believers”, *Western Midnight Cry!*, 4:5 (Nov. 29, 1844), 18. While White’s account is largely a repr. of Bliss, *Memoirs*, this quotation is from James White’s lengthy prefatory chapter, rather than Bliss’s text.

condition. He believed in a personal and premillennial Second Coming, but this meant he was open to the possibility that Christ's return might be imminent, whereas the tendency of prophetic exegesis since the Enlightenment had been to locate it in the distant future. This was a natural concomitant of a postmillennial interpretative scheme, because the Second Advent was to come *after* the millennium—and humanity clearly was not on the verge of universal peace, harmony, and happiness. More time was needed for the triumph of Christian society and its values. For premillennialists, however, Jesus might come again soon—even suddenly.

In his enthusiasm for the event he longed to see, Miller paid little heed to Christ's own words about the Second Coming and Last Judgment—that the “day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matt. 24:36; cf. Mark 13:32). Miller was intrigued by Daniel 8:14: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed”. Accepting that Daniel and Revelation were densely symbolic, he adopted a widely held view that, in the age of Christendom, with the Jewish temple and associated Levitical code abolished, the *sanctuary* signified the *world*. With that assumption, Miller then interpreted the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8 as meaning the purification of the earth by fire (foretold in 2 Peter), as it had been cleansed by water during the days of Noah. He concluded from intensive study that a day in apocalyptic prophecy stood for a year and that the 2,300-day period began with the decree of the Persian king Artaxerxes, in 457 B.C., for the rebuilding of Jerusalem. By September 1822 Miller had worked out, by simple arithmetic, that the 2,300 days would end and “Christ come again in his glory and person to our earthy” *soon*, “even within twenty-one years,—on or before 1843”.¹⁸

¹⁸ Bliss, *Memoirs*, p. 79.

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The history of how this idea became something Miller publicly taught, and how it spread is not our concern us here. Suffice to say that after a slow start it began to spread, rapidly. Millerites, as Miller’s followers were dubbed, exploited the power of the printing press. In an era when the great majority of adult Americans read newspapers and journals,¹⁹ Millerite periodicals went far and wide. This was thanks in large part to Joshua Himes, a Christian Church pastor, social reformer, and press entrepreneur, who was already experienced in promoting another fringe movement, abolitionism, as a close ally of William Lloyd Garrison.²⁰ Dubbed by one hostile contemporary the ‘Napoleon of the press’ and by a historian a “media genius”, Himes had a massive impact.²¹

In addition to be promoted via the press, the Second Advent was proclaimed by a variety of preachers. They included another pastor of the Christian Connection (as the Christian Church was also called), James White; a middle-aged social reformer, Joseph Bates (also a Christian Connectionist); and a Congregationalist

¹⁹ This emerges strongly from, e.g., James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, Oxford History of the United States (1988; New York: Ballantine Books, 1989); and Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, paperback edn., 2005).

²⁰ Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*, pp. 60, 70; Arthur, “Joshua Himes”, p. 38; Ronald D. Graybill, “The Abolitionist–Millerite Connection”, in Numbers and Butler, *The Disappointed*, pp. 139–52 (at p. 141). We look forward to Kevin Burton’s forthcoming Ph.D. diss. (Florida State University): it will shed light on this aspect and on the wider role of Adventists in Abolitionism, which, he will show, was more substantial than appreciated in scholarship to date.

²¹ Quotation in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 64; Ruth Alden Doan, “Neither Cult nor Charisma’: William Miller and Leadership of New Religious Movements”, in Regina D. Sullivan and Monte Harrell Hampton (eds.), *Varieties of Southern Religious History: Essays in Honor of Donald G. Mathews* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), p. 95. See David T. Arthur, “Joshua V. Himes and the Cause of Adventism”, in Numbers and Butler, *The Disappointed*, pp. 36–58; and Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, chap. 4, “Enter Joshua V. Himes: Mission Organizer”, pp. 56–77. Himes’s role had first been highlighted by Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*, pp. 59–64, 66–68.

minister, Charles Fitch, to whom we will return for his distinctive theology, but who was also significant for his methodology. Fitch, with Apollos Hale, who was the editor of the Millerite journal, the *Advent Shield*, pioneered a new teaching tool that was widely adopted by Adventist preachers: Fitch and Hale developed a chart, in the form of a timeline that linked historical events with Biblical prophecies, but which was illustrated with images from prophecy. Many of these were printed and used as striking visual aids; those who could not afford to buy one might well make their own. One Millerite preacher wrote at the time of how “I preach about the streets with my chart hoisted on a pole.”²²

The emergence of the Millerite press, in which Himes, was instrumental; the widespread adoption of autonomously produced visual aids; and the proliferation of Adventist preachers: all these help to explain how the Millerite message spread, but they also indicate the degree to which its diffusion owed much to individual initiative and enterprise. Despite being known by William Miller’s name, Millerites were not really his followers; irrespective of how instrumental Himes’s role was, he was not some Millerite *éminence gris*. Many of those preaching the soon return of Christ had no academic biblical or theological training and had never met William Miller or his chief associates. By 1842, “the Millerite movement [had] snowballed to the point where it could no longer be controlled by any group of leaders, let alone by Miller himself.”²³

Miller originally set no precise date for Christ’s return, only stating that it would be around 1843; but because Millerism was a

²² Quoted in Billington, “Millerite Adventists” (1967): 197. See Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis*, p. 65; Arthur, “Joshua Himes”, pp. 43–45; Jonathan M. Butler, “The Making of a New Order: Millerism and the Origins of Seventh-day Adventism”, in id. and Numbers, *The Disappointed*, pp. 194–95.

²³ Stephen D. O’Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 104; cf. Doan, “Neither Cult nor Charisma”, pp. 95, 103.

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movement, rather than an organized church, there was no way to compel doctrinal uniformity. In 1842 prominent Millerite preachers affirmed 1843 as *the* year. Miller himself declared that Christ would return between March 21, 1843 and the same day in 1844. Yet later in 1843 he suggested that, as the Jewish Day of Atonement was on the tenth day of the seventh month, Christ might come in the autumn of either 1843 or 1844. Meanwhile, as modern Adventist author George Knight writes, “the less stable elements among the Millerites began to set specific dates in 1843.” February 10 and 15, April 3 and 14, “the Day of Pentecost in May, [and] the autumnal equinox in September” all had their advocates.²⁴ All passed.

By the summer of 1844, Samuel Snow, an atheist convert to Millerism, had a new thesis. By closer comparison of the Jewish and modern calendars, he fixed the end of the 2,300-day prophecy in Daniel 8:14 as occurring in 1844 not 1843. Snow proclaimed that Christ would definitely come again on “the tenth day of the seven months of the present year 1844”—which in the modern calendar was October 22nd. The “seven-month movement”, as it became known, spread among Millerites like wild fire. This, they believed, was the true “Midnight Cry” (Matt. 25:6). The definite date; the apparently clear, rational basis for it, which also explained why the other dates had been wrong; and the deeply felt desire of Adventists to see Jesus in the clouds: all led to a remarkable response.²⁵ With even greater enthusiasm than before, since time was now so short, American Millerites proclaimed the Second Advent, sounding the “seven month cry”.²⁶ And now almost all specified the same exact date: October 22, 1844. But

²⁴ Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 109; and see below, p. 24.

²⁵ Quoted in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 162. See Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, pp. 226-29

²⁶ [James] W[hite], “The Parable, Matthew XXV, 1–12”, *R&H*, 1 (1851), 100.

their confident calculations were to be confounded; their hopes, dashed; their heartfelt beliefs, ridiculed.

II

The “Great Disappointment” is a familiar designation. Yet it surely is an inapt one.

Now, it was, to be sure, the term that those who went through the experience rapidly adopted to describe it. Within twelve months one wrote of how he had been “sick with disappointment”.²⁷ Before the end of the decade, the Adventists who had by then embraced the seventh-day Sabbath were writing of October 22, 1844, as “the great disappointment” or “the great Advent disappointment”,²⁸ or, in one of the earliest and most revealing examples I have found in print, “*our* great disappointment”.²⁹ At least once, they, themselves, are dubbed “the disappointed”.³⁰

²⁷ H. Emmons letter of Oct. 10, 1845, quoted in Nichol, *Midnight Cry*, p. 265n. and Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, pp. 184–85 at 185.

²⁸ Early examples include White, “Our Present Position”, p. 14; James White, *The Signs of the Times: Showing that the Second Coming of Christ is at the Doors* (Rochester, N.Y.: Review Office, 1853), p. 114 (he also calls it “a disappointment, at p. 111); Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 4 vols. (1858–64), vol. 1 (Battle Creek, Mich.: James White, 1858), p. 166. J. N. Andrews uses “the great Advent disappointment” (and “a great disappointment”) in his pamphlet “The Sanctuary of the Bible”, *Bible Tracts*, no. 5 (Battle Creek, Mich.: Review & Herald, n.d. [1860s]), p. 6. Note: these terms also appear in J. N. A[ndrews], “The Sanctuary”, *Signs of the Times*, 5 (Nov. 20, 1879): 348, but this is part of a serialized reprint of the earlier pamphlet and so does not represent a distinct usage.

²⁹ Joseph Bates, *A Vindication of the Seventh-Day Sabbath, and the Commandments of God: With a Further History of God’s Peculiar People, from 1847 to 1848* (New Bedford, Mass.: Benjamin Lindsey, 1848), p. 74; anon. [James White], “Our Tour to this State”, *R&H*, 2:1, “Extra” (July 21, 1851), unpaginated—third page (this article is from an “Extra” issue, numbered vol. 2, no. 1; it should

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Yet their experience plainly had been more than *disappointing*, at least as that word is probably generally understood now. It was *devastating* to most Adventists, not least because their attitude to the predicted advent of Christ on October 22 is best characterized not by a term used by some Adventists, “the blessed hope”, but rather by the title of Charles Dickens’s near-contemporary novel, *Great Expectations* (1861): they had fully *expected*, not *hoped*, that the Second Advent would take place on that fourth Tuesday of October. Thus, Christ’s non-appearance was more than a non-event; it was itself an event, one that evoked a range of different responses, which gave rise, in turn, to several different varieties of Adventists. What they were, their beliefs and practices, and some long-term outcomes, will be the subject of the rest of this article.

First, we will review some of the responses to the Disappointment, both the inevitable theological reassessments and personal practices generated thereby. In section IV we will go back to the early 1840s to examine the reasons *why* responses took the forms they did, paying particular attention to possible roots *within* Adventism before 1844, in addition to the trauma of October 22, but concluding that the latter is the primary reason for the emergence of certain novel theological theories in the late 1840s. Section V addresses how Millerite leaders tried to hold the Advent movement together and the emergence of seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Adventists. Section VI explores some of the organizational manifestations consequent on different doctrinal reactions; then,

be noted that there is also a later vol. 2, no. 1, dated Aug. 5, 1851, and it is with this that the pagination for vol. 2 starts).

³⁰ J. White, “The Parable”, p. 100 (emphasis supplied). Numbers and Butler used *The Disappointed* as the title of their path-breaking edited collection, yet, curiously, they neither explain why, nor explore contemporary use of that term; indeed, they seem unaware of its use by James White—the title presumably is their modern designation, rather than reflecting the actual contemporary rhetoric, but research into the latter might well be illuminating.

in section VII, we consider the implications for interpreting Seventh-day Adventist history.

III

When the Second Advent did not occur, many Millerites were, inevitably, disillusioned with the interpretative framework that had occasioned their disappointment. Some admitted their mistakes; one of the more influential Adventist leaders, Nathaniel Whiting, even wrote on October 24 to Miller, telling him it was a “duty” for leaders of the movement to make “public acknowledgement of their error”.³¹ But exactly where had the error lain? Adventists could not agree.

Some, like George Storrs, a Millerite from Philadelphia who had been known for particularly radical pronouncements, including against slavery, publicly renounced setting dates for Christ’s Second Coming, yet still urged that it was an actual and imminent event.³² Many Millerites, however, were ready to reject the whole Adventist package. An unknown but undoubtedly large number abandoned belief in a literal Second Advent altogether. “The premillennialist doctrine that Christ might suddenly return at any time has never fully recovered from this scandal.” Some came to question the credibility of the Bible—thus, the devoutly Biblicist Millerites ironically ended up reinforcing trends to “infidelity” and atheism, already present and potent (and warned against, by Ellen G. White) well before Darwin published *On the*

³¹ Quoted in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, 190; see p. 111 and cf. p. 305 n.8.

³² See *ibid.*, pp. 132, 164, 179, 191.

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Origin of the Species in 1859.³³ There were others, though, like Hiram Edson, a farmer from the northwest of New York state who later wrote of how he felt on October 23, 1844: “I mused in my own heart, saying, My Advent experience had been the richest and brightest of all my christian experience. If this had proved a failure, what was the rest of my christian experience worth?” Recognizing that they must have misunderstood something, but eager to know what it was, these Adventists, disappointed, but not in despair, went back to the Bible with renewed determination to plumb its depths.³⁴

It was from the ranks of such dogged students of the Scriptures that Seventh-day Adventists eventually emerged—but only some twenty years after the devastating experience of October 1844. The process was so prolonged partly because the men and women who finally founded the Seventh-day Adventist Church were, for various reasons, very suspicious of formal organization—a point to which we will return later. However, in large part it was because new theological ideas proliferated dramatically in the aftermath of the Great Disappointment. The psychological trauma of that event made those still believing in Biblical truth inclined to question every verity or orthodoxy of past generations, rather than only those relating to eschatology. Radical, even fanatical, theological views appeared, multiplied and spread. Indeed, during the 15 years following the Great Disappointment, the centrifugal force of radical theological pluralism tore Millerism apart.

³³ See Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: The Faith that Made the Modern World* (New York: Viking, 2017), pp. 216-17, 250-52 (quotation at p. 216); Dick, *Miller and the Advent Crisis*, p. 159. Ellen White writes on “the infidel and the atheist” in *Spiritual Gifts*, 1, 116, 176. The terms “infidelity” and “infidel” appear in other of her writings in the 1850s, but are used more in her writings from the 1860s onwards.

³⁴ Edson undated MS fragment, in Numbers and Butler, *The disappointed*, p. 215 (capitalization as in original). This iconic passage is used widely in literature on Adventism: e.g., quoted at length in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 185; and also mined in wider histories of religion, e.g., Ryrie, *Protestants*, p. 221.

Inevitably, there were a number of interpretations of what had actually happened on October 22 in 1844. The majority of Millerites held that they had been right about the event, even though they had been wrong about the date. Perhaps they had simply been mistaken in their sacred mathematics and the Second Advent was still close at hand; or Jesus had purposely tested His followers and, having winnowed out the half-hearted, He would return suddenly.

A sharply diverging viewpoint was that the Millerites *had* been right about the date, but mistaken about the event. What if the sanctuary in Daniel 8 was *not* a figure for the earth? What if it referred to an actual sanctuary in heaven, on which the ancient Israelite sanctuary had been modeled? This idea suddenly struck Hiram Edson on October 23, as did the inference that, if so, the anti-typical Day of Atonement would surely not entail (as he later wrote) “our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month”; instead, would he not have “entered on that day the second apartment [i.e. the Most Holy Place] of that sanctuary”? But this implied “that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth.”³⁵ What that “work” was, however, needed further consideration. Edson studied the matter with two other Millerites, Franklin B. Hahn and Owen R. L. Crosier. In early 1845 they began to share their conclusions, but they did not gain any wider acceptance until in January 1846 Crosier summarized them in a lengthy treatise which was published, at his expense, along with a brief endorsement by Edson and Hahn, as a special issue of the Millerite periodical the *Day–Star* in February 1846.³⁶

³⁵ Quoted in Knight, *Miller and Rise of Adventism*, 260.

³⁶ O. R. L. Crosier, “The Law of Moses”, *Day–Star*, vol. 9, no. 9 “Extra” (Feb. 7, 1846), 37-44; Hiram Edson and F. B. Hahn, “To the Brethren and Sisters Scattered Abroad”, p. 44. For the circumstances of publication, see the note by the editor [E. Jacobs], “Correspondents”, *Day–Star*, 9 (Jan. 31, 1846), 36.

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There were other, competing interpretations of the “right date, wrong event” kind. They included belief that the millennium *had* begun and the heavenly kingdom had been inaugurated—but that Christ had, for unknown reasons, delayed his actual physical arrival on earth, which could be expected imminently. Perhaps Christ had some other new “work or office . . . in the invisible world” to perform, as Apollos Hale wrote in an article in another Millerite paper, the *Advent Mirror*, in January 1845. However, Hale argued, while “some time must elapse” until Christ’s work “within the veil” was completed and He descended in glory, the work of salvation was *already* accomplished: “the judgment is here”.³⁷ The Bridegroom had already come spiritually and while the wise virgins would be united with Him, the foolish virgins would find that “the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10). Thus, only those who had accepted the Millerite message before October 22, 1844 would be saved when He came to earth—a belief that became known as the “shut door”.³⁸ However, Hale’s article promoted it and many Adventists, including William Miller, accepted it in the late 1840s.³⁹

Developing this line of thinking, moreover, others embraced readings of scripture much more allegorical and symbolic. This led them to adopt spiritualizing interpretations, teaching that Jesus *had* returned to this world—but not in literal physical form. Some even expressly denied that “there is . . . such thing as a literal body of Jesus, in the universe of God.”⁴⁰ Such interpretations,

³⁷ Quoted in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 259.

³⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 200.

³⁹ The *Sabbatarian* Adventists’ position is often misunderstood: see D. J. B. Trim, “‘Illuminating the Whole Earth’: Adventism and Foreign Mission in the Battle Creek Years (1859 to c.1912)”, in Alberto R. Timm and James R. Nix (eds.), *Lessons from Battle Creek: Reflections after 150 Years of Church Organization* (Silver Spring, Md.: Review & Herald, 2018), pp. 135–36, 156 nn. 9-10 and sources cited there.

⁴⁰ Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 212.

expounded by former Millerites, were to influence Charles Taze Russell and, as a result, be accepted by the “Bible Students”, the forerunners of today’s Jehovah’s Witnesses. They are thus, in a sense, an Adventist successor movement.⁴¹ In contrast to metaphorical and figurative interpretations of apocalyptic prophecies, other former Millerites embraced extremely literal reading of the Bible. Some taught, for example, that true believers should act like children (cf. Mark 10:15, Matt. 18:3), sitting on the floor rather than a seat, or crawling around their houses, or even sometimes in the streets. Ellen G. White wrote of her encounter with such “fanatical ones [who] seemed to think that religion consisted in making a noise”.⁴² Others refused to see doctors for treatment—ironically, in the light of much later developments, these included some of the first self-styled Seventh-day Adventists.⁴³

Among the former Millerites who held that October 22 *had* marked the beginning of the millennium in Christ’s physical absence, a number seized on Christ’s words: “they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (Matt 22:30); yet those who did so reached opposite conclusions. One group argued that this statement of Christ meant true believers should abstain from sexual relations; but another took it to mean they could indulge in free sexual relations, since marriage had been abolished. There were others who also declared adultery or fornication acceptable, but did so on different grounds. Some for instance insisted that all who had believed as of October 22, 1844, were “perfected [and] purified”—and so none of their actions could possibly be sinful, regardless of what they were!⁴⁴ Others

⁴¹ As Ryrie argues: *Protestants*, pp. 226-28.

⁴² E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. II (Battle Creek, Mich.: James White, 1860), p. 50.

⁴³ *R&H*, 3 (April 14, 1853), 191.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, 212.

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justified abandoning their spouses on the grounds that Christ had said that His true followers would give up their families (Matt. 8:21-22, 10:35-36, 12:48, Mark 3:31; Luke 9:60). Another group decided that the millennium had in fact begun, that it was the world's Sabbath-rest, and that they should therefore do no work; as a variant, others still maintained that Christ was testing His followers, and that, since He would come again soon, His true followers (again) ought not do any work. This refusal to labor was not as shameful a concept as free love but almost as indecent in the industrious society of the mid-nineteenth-century northern United States.

Also shocking to contemporary sensibilities was another fruit of Biblical literalism: willingness, for the first time in centuries, to take seriously Christ's words to his disciples, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14). Increasingly iconoclastic, Adventists began to look anew at fundamentals that had previously been a given among American Protestants, such as there being only two ordinances, in contrast to the Roman Catholics' seven: Baptism and the Lord's Supper (or Communion). There seems not to have been a huge amount of heterodox practice of these ordinances among Adventists.⁴⁵ Some *did* propose, though, *adding* a third ordinance, which was very radical at the time. A prominent Millerite evangelist, J. B. Cook, became the chief proponent of foot washing, which had preceded the Lord's Supper and which, he argued, Christ had made an obligation as enduring as the communal taking of bread and wine. Cook explicitly likened foot-washing to the ordinances of Baptism and Communion, arguing: "The Saviour's example and command . . . employed to enforce

⁴⁵ On Communion, see Michael W. Campbell, "Martin Luther, Seventh-day Adventism, and the Lord's Supper", in Rolf J. Pöhler, ed., *Perceptions of the Protestant Reformation in Seventh-day Adventism*, Adventistica, new series, 1 (Möckern–Friedensau, Germany: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2018), pp. 148-53.

these ordinances, enjoins another ordinance”, which similarly embodies Christ’s teaching “of mutual affection and submission, [and] is no less binding than others”.⁴⁶ Contemporaries were enormously scandalized by a minority of ex-Millerites who practiced mixed-gender foot washing,⁴⁷ which must have seemed like another expression of free love. However, *separate* foot washing by men and by women began to gather some support, including from Owen Crosier.⁴⁸

There were, then, a multitude of weird and wonderful ideas out there, as well as serious ones. Miller himself wrote with sadness “of so many of my once dearly beloved brethren, who have since our disappointment gone into fanaticism of every kind”.⁴⁹ Two questions present themselves: First, Why was this? Second, to what extent did the nature of the Millerite movement *before* October 22, 1844, shape reactions and responses *afterwards*?

IV

In looking for explanations for the extraordinary variegation of post-“seven month movement” Adventism, it must first be

⁴⁶ J. B. Cook, “To be Christians, We Must do the Works of Christ”, *Day-Star*, 6 (July 1, 1845), 31.

⁴⁷ Cf. [Uriah Smith], “A New Sect”, *R&H*, 16 (July 17, 1860), 72.

⁴⁸ Letter, Crosier to E. Jacobs, Aug. 8, 1845, publ. in *Day-Star*, 7 (Aug. 25, 1845), 10 (this was before publication of his new interpretation of “the cleansing of the sanctuary”). On the history of foot washing see Ron Graybill, “Foot Washing in Early Adventism”, *R&H*, 152: 21 (May 22, 1975), 4-5; id., “Foot Washing Becomes an Established Practice”, *R&H*, 152: 22 (May 29, 1975, 6-7); Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 2nd ed, rev. Floyd Greenleaf (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000), p. 57; Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, pp. 111, 212-13.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, 225.

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stressed again that Adventists suffered a horrible psychic wound on October 22. Every certitude was cast into doubt, all convictions overturned, and to those who did not simply abandon belief in a literal Second Advent, everything in the scriptures seemed up for grabs, open to re-interpretation. Only thus could there be even a prospect of turning Great Disappointment into great contentment, even if far in the future. Having acknowledged this, though, it is nevertheless the cases that the Millerite movement had drawn from the excitable, extreme fringes of American Christianity. This is something early Seventh-day Adventist chroniclers of the Advent movement of the 1840s were keen to dismiss; but in their understandable desire to vindicate their forebears, I suggest they went too far in downplaying the radical (or as some put it, the “scandalous”) character of the movement that bore Miller’s name.⁵⁰ In this section I argue that the outpouring of theological creativity and heterodoxy that followed the autumnal events of 1844 arose from doctrinal diversity and lack of organization among the Millerites before 1844, *as well as* from the terrible mental trauma arising from the failure, as it seemed, of Christ to fulfil prophecy and thus the failure of all they had said, done, and believed.

Some of our evidence for this view comes from Miller himself and from the Millerite press; a number of Adventist leaders became concerned about what they, themselves, called fanaticism. Of course, in the eyes of mainline Protestant churches, not to mention Roman Catholics, the irreligious and skeptical, Millerism was *itself* fanatical; even some like William Lloyd Garrison, on the same side as Millerites of the slavery question and close to some Millerites, articulated this concern.⁵¹ It was one Adventist leaders

⁵⁰ Eric Anderson, “The Millerite Use of Prophecy: A Case Study of a ‘Striking Fulfilment’,” in Numbers and Butler, *The Disappointed*, pp. 78-93 (at p. 89); cf. Ryrie, *Protestants*, p. 216.

⁵¹ Anon. [Garrison], “The Second Advent”, *The Liberator*, 13 (Feb. 10, 1843), 23. I am indebted to Kevin Burton for a scanned copy of this article.

made efforts to address. For example, the first general meeting of Second Advent believers in Boston in the autumn of 1840 adopted a resolution which declared, *inter alia*, that “We do not . . . join with those who mock at sin, or . . . lightly esteem the offices and ordinances of the church, or who empty of their power the threatenings of the holy law, or who count the blood of atonement a useless thing, or who refuse to worship and honor the Son of God, even as they honor the Father”.⁵² This was offering assurance that Millerites were orthodox in all the fundamentals of Christianity, and were not antinomians, anti-Trinitarians, or other kinds of heretics. In May 1843, another conference in Boston declared: “We repudiate all fanaticism, and everything which may tend to . . . excess”.⁵³ I read this not as an authentic acknowledgement of a Millerite tendency to excess, one the group at Boston renounced, but rather as another reassurance regarding doctrinal orthodoxy—as an attempt to reassure respectable society that Millerites in general *were* respectable in their *mores* and public behaviors. The same could be said of general denunciations, in the Adventist press of fanaticism, sometimes in reaction to second-hand accounts in mainstream newspapers.

We can discount, then, a fair amount of contemporary reportage of extremism. Yet it is still clear that Millerism in 1843 and 1844 *was* characterized by more than its fair share of radical beliefs and behaviors. Although the prejudice against Millerites means that accusations in the wider press must be treated with a degree of skepticism, there are a number of first-hand reports in Millerite papers, about unquestionably heretical beliefs and frankly wild behaviors in their own ranks, which Miller and other well-known Second Adventists deplored in print. There are sufficient of these stories, including ones reported by Millerite

⁵² “The Address of the Conference on the Second Coming of the Lord”, Oct. 14, 1840, in *Signs of the Times of the Second Coming of Christ*, 1 (Nov. 1, 1840), 117.

⁵³ Quoted in Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 145.

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leaders (and then denounced by them), to suggest that Millerism attracted people who were drawn to the fringe of orthodox religion. Adventists themselves acknowledged that many in their ranks were inclined to be excitable and over-zealous.⁵⁴ Indeed, while most prominent Millerite preachers quickly repudiated both *doctrinal* heterodoxy and *immoral* conduct, some were drawn to emotion, “ecstasy and enthusiasm” in *worship* and *spirituality* hard to resist, and worship practices could be taken to an extent many found extreme.⁵⁵

Furthermore, eyewitness reactions, not written for the press and thus not easily dismissed, tell a similar story. That Second Adventist enthusiasm could manifest itself in extremism is evident, for example, from the journal of John M. Emerson, a farmer in Bradford, Massachusetts. On January 30, 1843, a series of Millerite meetings started in Bradford. Emerson writes in his journal that the “Miller or Second Advent meeting began quite an excitement.” Emerson’s tone is neutral. But by the end of February his view is rather different, writing of the Millerites: “Excitement has turned into a delusion. . . . Many of the converts loose [*sic*] their strength and shout Glory to God I’m happy, and others will respond. They are more like children than persons of commonsense. It must be all Delusions.”⁵⁶ Not long after, on May 1st, 1843, Ruth Mason, a Vermont woman, living near the Canadian border, wrote to an uncle describing how “the Advent

⁵⁴ See Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, pp. 146-50.

⁵⁵ Butler, “New Order”, p. 196. Still, in claiming that “*all* Adventists shared” an “enthusiastic religious experience” including “trance-like visions”, Dr. Graybill seems himself carried away with enthusiasm: Ronald D. Graybill, *The Power of Prophecy: Ellen G. White and the Women Religious Founders of the Nineteenth Century*, Ph.D. diss. (Johns Hopkins University, 1983); publ. under same title: s.l.: Eastvale Press, 2019) pp. xiii-xiv (emphasis supplied).

⁵⁶ Emerson MS journal, 1843, now in private hands; sold by Read ‘Em Again Books, extracts on the Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America website (www.abaa.org/book/767511318, accessed Dec. 21, 2014).

believers” had kept vigil on April 14 (one of the dates set for the Second Coming) and how “there is some very strange conduct”.⁵⁷

Inherent within Millerism, then, was a potential for exuberance and extremism. It is important to acknowledge this tendency, not least because of its consequences. If Millerism had been a biblically restorationist and Christian revivalist movement preaching a literal and premillennial, but undated Second Advent, as other sects did in the first half of the nineteenth century, then, from the evidence we have, it seems unlikely that, even after the Great Disappointment, the radicals on the fringes of the movement would ever have been anything more than marginal. Of course, had the Millerites been more conventional even the shattering of their movement might not have prompted irrational thinking and radical conduct. However, their apocalyptic and socially disapproved message was attractive not only to earnest seekers after scriptural truth, but also to people from outside the mainstream, drawn to novel ideas and spiritual sensation.

Having acknowledged this, it is important not to overstate it; we ought not lose sight of the rationalist approach of the leaders and probably of most rank-and-file Millerites. To skeptics, of course, their willingness to find in ancient prophecy evidence for an actual (and imminent) Second Advent was, in and of itself, indicative of irrationality. Yet, in reality, the painstaking exposition of the Bible, based on close reading of texts (often in ancient languages) and careful analysis of calendars and mathematics, was very much the fruit of the Enlightenment. It is striking that despite Ruth Mason’s comment about “strange conduct”, her letter is not negative about Adventists; on the contrary, she explicitly warns her uncle: “Do not credit every thing [*sic*] you hear for . . . there are many falsehoods circulated

⁵⁷ Letter of May 1, 1843, Rebok Memorial Library, Special Collections, MS 7. Adventism flourished in this Vermont-Quebec borderland: see Fortin, *Adventism in Quebec*.

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respecting them.”⁵⁸ William Lloyd Garrison, writing in early 1843, calls Miller and his followers “victim[s] of an absurd theory” and characterizes them as “laboring under [a] delusion”—but he makes it plain he does not think them delusional; he argues that they have made a serious mistake, but an honest one, and not the result of some kind of madness. He also undermines the idea of extremism by emphasizing that, in many respects, Miller’s teaching was in accord with common Christian doctrine. Garrison’s attack on the Millerites is full on, yet he never accuses them of fanaticism (except in their belief in a physical, personal return of Jesus Christ!), and he explicitly exculpates them of immoral behavior.⁵⁹

When we consider how the latent (or even active) tendency to extreme beliefs and behaviors metamorphosed into some of the unconstrained doctrines and actions that arose in the late autumn of 1844, the catalyzing effect of the Great Disappointment appears obvious. The problem facing the “Second Adventists” after 1844 was that the ordeal of October 22 served to enable and empower the extremist exegetes who might otherwise have remained on the margins. Up to that point, the leaders of the Advent movement had tried to restrain the wilder impulses. Now, however, who was to say who should exercise authority? The reasoned approach to scripture had resulted in shattering Disappointment; so why *not* explore the margins of theological orthodoxy? Why not try the lunatic fringe (as some saw it) when rationality itself had spectacularly failed? This is why, to some former Millerites, no idea seemed off the table.

The destabilization engendered by this Great Disappointment mindset is evident in the fact that heterodox theological ideas with no obvious connection to eschatology, and that were not association also proliferated. For example, what we would now call

⁵⁸ Rebok Memorial Library, MS 7.

⁵⁹ Garrison, “Second Advent”, p. 23 [quotations at col. 3].

Pentecostal ideas spread, as did interest in Utopian communalism. Anti-Trinitarianism experienced efflorescence among the Adventists. And two other powerful ideas circulated: conditional immortality and the seventh-day Sabbath.

The ancient belief that the soul did not go to heaven or hell on death, but rather “slept” until the Last Judgment when the wicked would suffer instant definitive death (rather than eternal torment), while those saved by Christ would begin everlasting life, had been revived during the Reformation, but had never caught on.⁶⁰ George Storrs, who later helped to publicize Snow’s “seventh-month” interpretation had rediscovered it in the late 1830s. In January 1843 Storrs launched a new periodical, the *Bible Examiner*, which proclaimed his belief in “annihilationism” (from the annihilation of the wicked at the end of time) and “conditional immortality”. By January 1844, he had won Charles Fitch (who had converted Storrs to Adventism) to his view of the state of the dead; he and Fitch had begun preaching and writing in support of the view of death as unconscious sleep. Both Storrs and Fitch encountered vehement hostility; among those who condemned their views were William Miller and his two most prominent lieutenants, Joshua Himes and Josiah Litch.⁶¹ Following the Great Disappointment, though, some Adventists were willing to look at the fate of the dead with fresh eyes.⁶²

As for belief in the seventh-day Sabbath, starting in 1842 the Seventh Day Baptists (a small Baptist sect) had tried to promote this among the Millerites, but met with an almost universally negative response. One exception was in the small village of Washington, New Hampshire, where by early 1844, a local

⁶⁰ The classic long-term history is Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1965-66); but see now Bryan W. Ball, *The Soul Sleepers: Christian Mortalism from Wycliffe to Priestley* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2008).

⁶¹ See Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, pp. 165-69.

⁶² Dick, “Millerite Movement”, p. 32.

Seventh Day Baptist, called Rachel Oakes, had persuaded a few members of a local Second Adventist congregation, notably two farmers, William and Cyrus Farnsworth, as well as Frederick Wheeler, the Methodist minister of a neighboring village, that the Fourth Commandment had never been abrogated, and thus still was binding on Christians. That summer, either Oakes or Wheeler won over T. M. Preble, a former Baptist minister of another small New Hampshire village who had gone on preaching tours with Miller and Himes. However, since all expected the world to end in a few weeks, none of the new converts to seventh-day Sabbatarianism seem to have felt a need to proselytize. That changed after October 22. In February 1845, Preble published a pamphlet urging that Christians should keep the seventh day of the week, Saturday, holy, rather than the first day of the week, Sunday. The advocate of foot-washing, J. B. Cook, avowed his support for Preble and though both soon abandoned seventh-day Sabbatarianism, it was taken up by others: Hiram Edson, who advocated for the existence and prophetic significance of a heavenly sanctuary; Joseph Bates, who had been one of Miller's prominent associates; James White, a Millerite evangelist; and Ellen Harmon, a young visionary from Maine. However, they were decidedly in a minority.⁶³

In the second half of the 1840s, none of these views were mutually exclusive. Many ex-Millerites flirted with a whole range of beliefs over a period, not holding them all at one time, but adding this one and dropping that, depending on what sermon they heard, what tract they read, how they felt the Spirit moved.

⁶³ This is a familiar story for Seventh-day Adventists. See Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, pp. 254-55, 262-65; see also M. E. Olsen, *A History of the Origin and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists* (Washington, D.C., South Bend, Ind. & Peekskill, N.Y.: Review & Herald, 1926 [2nd edn.]), pp. 182-87, the first scholarly study; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell it to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists* (Mountain View, Calif., Omaha, Nebr. & Oshawa, Ont.: Pacific Press, 1976), pp. 67-69, 74-76, a populist account that is still of value; cf. Dick, "Millerite Movement", pp. 32-33, a concise overview.

V

In sum, within a few months of the Great Disappointment, many unusual, even extreme, theological ideas and practices were widely circulating among former Millerites. Fervent advocacy and fierce opposition were commonplace. If the Adventists were to hold together, so that they could continue to warn humanity of Christ's soon return, then something had to be done.

Who, though, would take the lead? Miller was disillusioned, not with Jesus, in whose literal return Miller continued to believe, but rather with what he saw as fanaticism among Adventists. He was in poor health, advanced in age, weary from nearly fourteen years of traveling and preaching, and inevitably disheartened. And so Miller stepped back from the spotlight. Joshua Himes, his chief lieutenant, took up his mentor's mantle and vigorously worked to bring ex-Millerites together. In April 1845 the "Mutual Conference of Adventists" met in Albany, New York. While Miller attended, Himes was instrumental in "bringing together" various prominent Adventist leaders in Albany; but he plainly had Miller's support in what was, as one historian writes, "clearly a move in the direction of establishing a separate sect on Millerite grounds". The Albany conference reaffirmed the imminence of the Second Advent; took the first steps towards creating a new denomination, tentatively embracing a congregational form of church government; and rejected a range of positions perceived as extreme.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Doan, "Neither Cult nor Charisma", p. 96. On the Albany Conference, see Dick, "Millerite Movement", p. 33; Andrew G. Mustard, "James White and the development of Seventh-day Adventist organization, 1844-1881", Ph.D. diss. (Andrews University, 1987), publ. as *James White and SDA Organization: Historical Development, 1844-1881*, Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, 12 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1987), pp. 83-87; Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, pp. 228-34.

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This was a key moment in Adventist history, but no coherent movement emerged from the conference, even though those perceived as fanatics had deliberately been excluded. Instead, contrary to Himes's hopes, Albany proved to be the point of origin for several sects which became rivals of each other (and of the young Seventh-day Adventist Church), but which have since diminished or disappeared: the Evangelical Adventist Conference, the Advent Christian Association, the Life and Advent Union, the so-called Age to Come Adventists, the Church of God in Christ Jesus, and others. (Seventh-day Adventists later sometimes referred to these Sunday-keeping groups as "First-day Adventists", but this was not a term they used themselves.) Miller himself passed away on December 20, 1849, removing a moderating influence and obstacle to factionalism and fragmentation. The Albany Adventists differed sharply about models of church organization and about conditional immortality, but also disagreed about other aspects of the state of the dead, about the place of Jews in end-time prophecy and other eschatological matters, and, in some cases, about the Trinity. They split in two in the mid-1850s, then the successor movements split, and some of those new sects split again. In the end, they proved only moderately less volatile than the "lunatic fringe" they loathed.⁶⁵

One group was to forge a distinct identity and establish a stable organization: the future Seventh-day Adventists. But it is important to note that, at the time of the Albany Conference, while there were a handful of seventh-day Sabbatarians, and believers in a heavenly sanctuary, and many adherents of conditional immortality, they were yet to cohere into a group sharing all these beliefs. And not everyone who held one of those views was to accept the other two (or even to persist with one!). Furthermore,

⁶⁵ See Godfrey T. Anderson, "Sectarianism and Organization 1846–1864", in Gary Land (ed.), *Adventism in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 36–38; Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, pp. 233–39, 241–48, 270, 277.

in the mid-1840s, some future Seventh-day Adventists held indubitably extreme beliefs. For example, John N. Andrews, a future General Conference president, was the son of one of the no-work zealots, while a second cousin, Jesse Stevens, was a “crawler”, as was Andrews’s future father-in-law, Cyprian Stevens.⁶⁶

In this time of theological ferment, in which an extraordinary multiplicity of ideas in circulation, it was not easy to identify the truly extreme positions—much less the out-and-out extremists. The seventh-day Sabbath seemed a radical doctrine to the mainstream ex-Millerites and the Albany Conference specifically condemned “Jewish fables and commandments of men”, which was a not-so-subtle jab at the Sabbatarians.⁶⁷ During 1844–45, the real fanatics inevitably ended up rubbing shoulders with orthodox Christians.⁶⁸

Yet Sabbatarian Adventists as they gradually emerged were characterized by their decidedly rational approach to theology.⁶⁹ Starting in 1848 they met in a series of “Bible Conferences” during which they studied and debated the scriptures. One result of the protracted process of collective bible study was, James White wrote, that “the subject of the Sabbath began to attract considerable notice from Advent believers”.⁷⁰ In addition,

⁶⁶ Ron Graybill, “The Family Man”, in Harry Leonard (ed.), *J. N. Andrews: The Man and the Mission* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1985), pp. 16–17; Merlin D. Burt, *Adventist Pioneer Places: New York and New England* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald, 2011), p. 19; Gilbert M. Valentine, *J. N. Andrews: Mission Pioneer, Evangelist, and Thought Leader* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2019), pp. 74, 92.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Dick, “Millerite Movement”, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Cf. Knight, *Miller and the Rise of Adventism*, p. 252.

⁶⁹ As Doan observes: “Neither Cult nor Charisma”, p. 105.

⁷⁰ James White, *Life Incidents in Connection with the Great Advent Movement as Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation XIV* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Seventh-day Adventist Publ. Assoc., 1868), pp. 270-1, 274–75.

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however, a number of other common beliefs were also identified and agreed.⁷¹

- Christ’s Second Coming will be an actual event and is imminent, will be witnessed by all the world, and it will initiate the millennium described in Revelation 20
- The seventh day of the week, Saturday, not Sunday, is God’s Sabbath, the obligation to keep it is eternal
- Christ ministers in the heavenly sanctuary, mediating to us the benefits of His death on the cross
- Immortality is conditional: the dead “sleep” until the Second Coming, when the righteous are given eternal life; the unrighteous, rather than being eternally tormented, will be instantly annihilated at the Last Judgment that follows the end of the millennium.
- Christians are being called back to divine truth—the “third angel’s message” of Revelation 14—by a small “remnant” of faithful believers, who at the end of time will be the sole group that stands for true religion, especially the seventh-day Sabbath
- This remnant church will be marked by the gift of the “spirit of prophecy” (or renewal of the prophetic gifts in the Bible)

In arriving at these beliefs, they were guided by Ellen Harmon who, they believed, manifested a prophetic gift starting in late 1844. She had opposed fanaticism and in August 1846 she married James White. The Sabbatharians believed that she was inspired by God and recognized the “spirit of prophecy” as being present in her.⁷² This was a seventh core belief, but was not, of course, a

⁷¹ On the gradual emergence and development of Sabbatarian Adventist and Seventh-day Adventist theology, see P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist message and mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1977; repr., Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1988).

⁷² For a detailed narrative of these years see Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. 1, *The Early Years: 1827–1862* (Washington, D.C. & Hagerstown, Md.: Review &

biblical doctrine—something Ellen White herself always emphasized.

The Sabbatarian Adventists maintained Miller's historicist approach to Biblical prophecy and belief in a literal, premillennial Second Coming; they endorsed the conditional immortality that divided the Albany Adventists. But with the Sanctuary, the seventh-day Sabbath, and the Spirit of Prophecy, they had adopted beliefs that all the other Adventists anathematized.⁷³ In the end, however, the Sabbatarian Adventists' rationalism and commitment to a holistic approach to Bible study helped safeguard them against extremism and fanaticism. It also was a factor in their move towards organization.

VI

The beliefs of the Sabbatarian Adventists emerged only gradually and among widely scattered groups of former Millerites. For more than fifteen years after the Great Disappointment, there were no Seventh-day Adventists; there were scattered groups who eventually held all these beliefs in common. There were other groups who held several of these beliefs but not all. Seventh-day sabbath-keeping Adventists did not even have a common name for themselves.

What complicated the situation was that many were deeply suspicious of any church organization. Many Millerites had been formally disfellowshipped by their denominations for adherence to

Herald, 1985), pp. 145–78. For her efforts to counter ex-Millerite extremists, once she had encountered them, see, e.g. *Spiritual Gifts*, II, 49-50.

⁷³ Butler, "New Order", p. 202, particularly stresses the place of the seventh-day Sabbath as a dividing line.

Second Adventism, while others had been informally blackballed by their local church. They were hostile to ecclesiastical structures. In an article published in February 1844 in *The Midnight Cry*, a widely read Millerite periodical, George Storrs bluntly declared: “Take care that you do not seek to manufacture another church. No church can be organized by man’s invention but what it becomes Babylon the moment it is organized.”⁷⁴ Those Millerites who gradually adopted Sabbatarian Adventist theology shared with the other Second Adventists a deep-seated suspicion of creeds, of any sanctions against believers, indeed often of any formal organization at all; this was Babylon, out of which true Christians were called by apocalyptic prophecy (Rev. 18:4). Many maintained that each congregation was sovereign unto itself; they were actively opposed to any more over-arching form of organisation other than periodic regional meetings to study the Bible.

A significant number of Sabbatarians were so suspicious of ecclesiastical structure that they did not even want to choose a name. The prominent early minister Roswell F. Cottrell declared in the spring of 1860, about the scattered Sabbatarian groups, in terms that raised the specter of Revelation 13:11 and apostasy: “I think it would be wrong to ‘make us a name,’ since that lies at the foundation of Babylon. . . . We want no name with the two-horned beast.”⁷⁵ Others, disagreeing at least in part, described themselves in other ways: as part of “the scattered flock” or similar terms, but

⁷⁴ Quoted in George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald, 1999), p. 51.

⁷⁵ R. F. C[ottrell], “Making a Name”, *R&H*, 15 (Mar. 22, 1860), 140; this was a letter from Cottrell to *Review* editor Uriah Smith, which, having appeared in issue no. 18, was repr. in no. 23 (Apr. 26, 1860), p. 180. Thus, Cottrell’s views were certainly not censored. On Cottrell, see Michael W. Campbell, “Cottrell, Roswell Fenner”, in Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (eds.), *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald, 2013), pp. 351–52.

these were vague and not helpful in forming a common identity.⁷⁶ Some Sabbatarians surely emulated James White and self-identified as members of “the great second Advent Movement” begun by Miller.⁷⁷ Yet that movement included other groups of Adventists who did not share their seven distinctive beliefs; indeed, White’s use of the term may indicate an enduring hope for eventual unity among William Miller’s former followers. But that did not serve the current need, to protect Sabbatarians from the “apostate Adventists”, doing “all in their power to overthrow them”.⁷⁸ For that, something more precise, was needed, something that could demarcate the seventh-day Sabbatarians from other Adventists. But what?

Joseph B. Frisbie, another influential early Adventist minister, though unlike Cottrell, one who advocated for greater organization, maintained throughout the mid and late 1850s that “the Church of God” was “the only name that God has seen fit to give His church”.⁷⁹ This was a term that was associated with the

⁷⁶ George R. Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald, 2006), p. 36.

⁷⁷ James White, “Saving Faith”, *R&H*, 33 (Feb. 16, 1869), 57–59 at 59 (at p. 57, White also refers twice to “the great Advent movement”, doing so in the context of both the historical-theological terms of art discussed earlier in this article, for he links the “Advent movement” to “Millerism” [a term he evidently accepted by this point], and relates both to “our disappointment”); id., “Our Faith and Hope; Or, Reasons Why We Believe as We Do. Number Five—Time of the End” and “Number Ten—The Kingdom”, *R&H*, 34 (Dec. 21, 1869), 201, and 35 (Feb. 1, 1870), 42 (White writes here of “the great second-advent [*sic*] movement of 1840-1844”). Cf. George Butler, “The Spirit of Sacrifice”, *R&H*, 34 (Dec. 21, 1869), 206, connecting “the great gospel movement started” to “the first advent”, i.e., similar terminology.

⁷⁸ [James White], “Our tour east”, *Advent Review*, 1 (August 1850): 14.

⁷⁹ J. B. Frisbie, “Church Order”, *R&H*, 6 (Dec. 26, 1854), 147; cf. id., *Order of the Church of God* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press of the Review & Herald Office, 1859). See Theodore N. Levterov, “Frisbie, Joseph Birchard (1816–1882)”, *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*: <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=89BU>.

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Sabbatarians into 1860;⁸⁰ it was one that some of the movement's leaders seemed to endorse;⁸¹ and it was seriously proposed, in 1860, as an alternative to the designation of SDA.⁸² To other Sabbatarians, however, "Church of God" seemed unduly presumptuous, even arrogant.⁸³ In any case, another name had emerged—"Seventh-day Adventist". Like other terms for reformist minorities (Lollard, Huguenot, Puritan and probably Waldense), it originated among the group's enemies, but was embraced by those at whom to whom it had been applied, perhaps as an insult. It seems to have first been used in Michigan and by the end of the 1850s at least some Sabbatarians in the state (including James White) were applying it to themselves.⁸⁴

In October 1860, at Battle Creek, Michigan, at a "general conference" of Sabbatarian Adventist leaders, there was considerable debate about a name, and eventually it was agreed to do so, without opposition but apparently far from unanimously.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Smith, "A New Sect", 72; Letter, L. Martin to Smith, publ. in *R&H*, 16 (June 26, 1860), 46; "Business Proceedings of B[attle] C[reek] Conference", *R&H*, 16 (Oct. 9, 1860), 161.

⁸¹ Anon. [Uriah Smith?], "Secret Prayer Successfully Manged", *R&H*, 16 (July 24, 1860), 73.

⁸² "Business Proceedings of B[attle] C[reek] Conference (Continued)", *R&H*, 16 (Oct. 16, 1860), 169.

⁸³ See Schwarz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, p. 91.

⁸⁴ It was used in Jackson, Mich., in 1853, seemingly by others as a descriptive label; at least this appears to be the implication of S. T. Cranson to James White, Mar. 20, 1853, publ. in *R&H*, 3 (Apr. 14, 1853), 191. The well-known comment of Ellen White, "The name, Seventh-day Adventist, is a standing rebuke to the Protestant world", seems to me suggestive of a turning around of what had been an insult, especially since "seventh day" was an imputation of Judaizing: Ellen G. White, *Testimony for the Church*, no. 6 (Battle Creek, Mich.: Steam Press of the Review & Herald Office, 1861), in *Testimonies for the Church*, 6 vols. (Mountain View, Calif. & Omaha, Nebr.: Pacific Press, 1948), 1, 223. For James White's self-designation, see *Michigan State Gazetteer and Business Directory for 1860*, p. 39: the professional directory for Battle Creek, includes "White Eld. James, Seventh Day Adventist".

⁸⁵ "Business Proceedings of B[attle] C[reek] Conference (Concluded)", *R&H*, 16 (Oct. 23, 1860), 178-79.

However, “Having voted to adopt a name, the discussion now turned on what that name should be. The name Church of God was proposed and zealously advocated by some”, but strongly opposed by others since it “was already in use by some denominations, and on this account, was indefinite, besides having to the world an appearance of presumption.” Eventually, “The name Seventh-day Adventists, was proposed as a simple name and one expressive of our faith and position.” Following further discussion David Hewitt, from Battle Creek, then “offered the following resolution: *Resolved*, That we take the name of Seventh-day Adventists.” But there was no consensus, but opposition apparently focused on the wording of the motion (“That we take the name...”) rather than the proposed name as such. Ezra A. Poole, from New York, at this point offered an alternative proposal, as the minutes record: “*Resolved*, That we call ourselves Seventh-day Adventists. After a somewhat lengthy discussion, the question was called for, and the resolution adopted.”⁸⁶ By this rhetorical device, they dodged Cottrell’s concern about “making a name” for themselves; diehard opponents were not mollified, but enough support was won to move forward.

A common name did not yet mean a common organization. Hostile voices were vociferous in opposing organizing the loose groups into a denomination. Senior figures including Andrews and Cottrell were among those who still did not accept the principle of organization beyond the local congregation, or did so reluctantly and opposed anything other than minimal supra-local structure.

However, Adventists faced the same problem as the early church and indeed the problem that faces all Christian believers—how to define oneself against the world and against Christians who believe differently to oneself. In particular, how were faithful believers to be safeguarded from the emerging “first-day”

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

Adventist denominations, or the extreme, lunatic fringes of the Great Second Advent Movement? One way was to write to the *Review* for confirmation of a minister's *bona fides*, but the disavowals it periodically published highlighted that there were wolves ready to prey upon the scattered flock!⁸⁷ How were Sabbatarian believers to be safeguarded from from “imposters”—those who had other beliefs but dissembled in order to get at foot in the door to convert seventh-day Sabbath-keepers?⁸⁸ Or swindlers, claiming to be Sabbatarian ministers in order to defraud believers? This was to happen in Iowa around 1862, where local Adventists, in James White's words, “got badly fleeced”.⁸⁹ How were the Sabbatarians to retain control of the property of the local church buildings they had constructed without legal associations in which ownership could be vested? In particular, what would happen to the *Advent Review & Sabbath Herald*, the journal that bound the inchoate movement together, if James White died or went bankrupt? What if it were taken over by an editor who did not support the key Sabbatarian Adventist doctrines? This had happened in one of the other Adventist denominations, as the Sabbatarians undoubtedly would have been aware.⁹⁰

James White had been skeptical about organization in the late 1840s. But by the early 1850s he had come to believe passionately that the Sabbatarian Adventists *needed* to organize for practical reasons; further, doing so would be conforming to God's will and the gospel pattern, rather than defying it. He expressed this

⁸⁷ E.g., anon. [James White], “Note to Sister Eliza Burbee”, *R&H*, 22 (June 2, 1863): 8.

⁸⁸ See, e.g., [James White], “Church Order”, *R&H*, 6 (Jan. 23, 1855), 164.

⁸⁹ White, “God's free-men”, in *R&H*, 22, 1 (June 2, 1863): 8.

⁹⁰ See Knight, *Miller and Rise of Adventism*, p. 247, cf. p. 243; David L. Rowe, “A New Perspective on the Burned-Over District: The Millerites in Upstate New York”, *Church History*, 47 (Dec. 1978), 414.

position eloquently in editorials and leading articles in the *Review & Herald* throughout the 1850s, shrewdly referring to his ideal of order and organization by the terms “gospel order” and “bible order”.⁹¹ In 1850, Ellen White saw a vision on church order. She was shown, she wrote, “that everything in heaven was in perfect order” and had underscored, by an angel, “how perfect, how beautiful [is] the order of heaven”, before being told “follow it.” God’s people had to be united if they were to make any headway in the world; and too much plurality in matters of belief and praxis undermined unity. Other visions followed. Looking back, more than forty years later, Ellen White recalled of these early years:

As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work could not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable.⁹²

The tide turned, gradually, but decisively, against the localists and minimalists.

The history of how this happened, from 1844 to the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863, would take too long to rehearse here. It has in any case been surveyed by a number of scholars, though the 1840s and 1850s have often been

⁹¹ See Mustard, *James White and SDA Organization*, p. 116n.; Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, pp. 33–35, 37–39, 45; D. J. B. Trim, “Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist History”, *Theology of Ordination Study Committee* (Jan. 15–17, 2013), available at www.adventistarchives.org/ordination-in-sda-history.pdf, pp. 6–7, 10–11. Other early leaders supported White in his push for “the order of the gospel” as Joseph Bates put it in 1854 (Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, p. 41).

⁹² White to “Brethren of the General Conference,” Dec. 19, 1892, Letter 32, 1892, publ. in *Daily Bulletin of the General Conference (Review and Herald Extra)*, 5:2 (Jan. 29–30, 1893), p. 22.

studied as part of broader studies of organization or doctrinal formation, rather than considered in their own right. The main contours have, however, been clearly delineated.⁹³ The process owed much to James and Ellen White. The weight of the prophet’s visions and the influence of her testimonies—the force of her husband’s rhetoric and the power of the biblical arguments he adduced—gradually, these won the Sabbatarians over. By the late 1850s, local churches were starting to organize on the lines advocated by James and Ellen White; there was still suspicion and opposition, but they could now be overcome. This was true not only of the celebrated Sabbatarian evangelists and editors, who came together in the autumn of 1860 to adopt the name “Seventh-day Adventist” and incorporate the press; who from late 1861 to early 1863 organized “Conferences” of local churches in different states; and who, in May 1863, founded the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. It was also true at the local level.

The move of rank-and-file seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Second Adventists to approve or at least accept a common name and supra-congregational organizational structures has received little attention, yet surely was the foundation of the grander actions taken by prominent leaders on a wider stage. It is a process perhaps encapsulated in the experience of a Sabbatarian Adventist company in Dorchester, Massachusetts, in summer 1860. The group’s elder, Otis Nichols, wrote to the *Review & Herald*, reporting that they had organized themselves into a church, and that “many are startled, and say ‘this is making the church with

⁹³ See Anderson, “Sectarianism and Organization”, pp. 36–65; Mustard, *James White and SDA organization*, pp. 116–62; Knight, *Organizing for Mission and Growth*, pp. 29–61; Douglas Morgan, “Toward Oneness and Freedom: The Road from ‘Babylon’ to General Conference Organization”, *Spectrum* 41:2 (Spring 2013), 16–26; Stanley D. Hickerson, “Moving toward Organization: 1854–59”, *Adventist World*, 9:5 (May 2013), 19–20; D. J. B. Trim, “‘Something More in the Way of Organization’: Seventh-day Adventist Ecclesiastical Polity in Historical Perspective”, *Ministry*, 89:9 (Sept. 2017), 16–19.

Babylon, and partakers of her fornication.” Nichols offered a simple but definitive rejoinder: “We think not.”⁹⁴

VII

Why does this matter for Seventh-day Adventist history? Without the move from disorganization to organization, the Great Second Advent Movement would today have barely any representation in the world.

The Advent Christians still exist, but number only in the tens of thousands and have a limited geographical presence. The other offshoot sects and denominations, mentioned earlier, long ago disappeared or merged into churches that do not proclaim the Second Coming of Christ. Writing in the 1890s, Ellen White recalls the need for organization and the move towards it, then observes:

Yet there was strong feeling against it among our people. The first-day Adventists were opposed to organization, and most of the Seventh-day Adventists entertained the same ideas. We sought the Lord . . . and light was given . . . that there must be order and thorough discipline in the church—that organization was essential. System and order are manifest in all the works of God throughout the universe. Order is the law of heaven, and it should be the law of God’s people on the earth. We had a hard struggle in establishing organization. . . . But . . . prosperity attended this advance movement.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ O. Nichols, “Organization”, *R&H*, 16 (Aug. 28, 1860): 116. See “Nichols, Otis and Mary,” in Fortin and Moon, *Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, pp. 476–77.

⁹⁵ White to “Brethren of the General Conference,” Dec. 19, 1892, cited above, n. 92.

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As she recognized, organizing had helped the seventh-day Sabbath-keeping Second Adventists to emerge from all the other varieties of Adventists that existed after 1844.

In a testimony written in the mid to late 1880s (first published in 1889), White states an important principle: “One point will have to be guarded, and that is individual independence.”⁹⁶ Having done so, however, she then qualifies it, and makes it clear that this insight comes both from inspiration and from the experience of other ex-Millerites. She writes:

No one has the right to start out on his own responsibility and advance ideas . . . on Bible doctrines when it is known that others among us hold different opinions on the subject and that it will create controversy. The first-day Adventists have done this. Each has followed his own independent judgment and sought to present original ideas, until there is no concerted action among them, except, perhaps, in opposing Seventh-day Adventists. We should not follow their example. . . . Followers of Jesus Christ will not act independently one of another.⁹⁷

The determination to hang together and the willingness to create structures that promoted united action in the interest of “present truth”: these distinguished the Adventists who in 1863 established the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

What of the other varieties? Among the real radicals, there was no interest in organizing formally; even the various kinds of “Albany Adventists”, the ex-Millerite mainstream, were mostly marked by entrenched hostility to anything other than the most rudimentary organizational structures. This was, indeed, one of the many things the first-day Adventist denominations split over. And this is not surprising. As we have seen, a significant number

⁹⁶ White to “Brethren and Sisters [. . .] at Oakland,” March 1, 1887, Letter 53, 1887, publ. in *Testimonies for the Church*, v, 534.

⁹⁷ *Testimonies*, v, 535.

of Millerites were people who, by nature or instinct, were drawn *to* new or extreme ideas, and *away* from the conventional, which may well have been part of what attracted them to Millerism in the first place. After October 22, 1844, any predispositions were only reinforced. When a new theological idea circulated, many Second Adventists were drawn to it like a moth to the flame, making it difficult for them to coalesce into organized churches. Constantly drawn after new ideas, highly individualistic, and instinctively suspicious of formal structures, they were less likely to organize and, if they did, naturally tended to fragment. Collectively, they were inherently dynamic yet also innately incoherent.

Both the ultra-radical ex-Millerites and the moderate Albany Adventists failed to make a significant lasting impact on the world. Their fate could have befallen Seventh-day Adventists.

* * *

In conclusion: what, then, can we say about Seventh-day Adventism and Millerism? Ultimately, the two are distinct.

Almost every movement has its roots, of course, and Seventh-day Adventist roots lie in Millerism, out of which it unquestionably developed. By the early 1850s the leaders of what would become the Seventh-day Adventists identified the first and second angel's message of Revelation 14 with Millerism, lending it a prophetic luster. By then, William Miller had passed away, but those first leaders held (and probably the majority of church-members still hold) Miller in high esteem. Indeed, it has been argued recently that, thanks to their admiration, Adventist collective memory was molded to make Miller crucial in the Seventh-day Adventist origins story.⁹⁸ Into the twentieth century, long-lived survivors

⁹⁸ Doan, "Neither Cult nor Charisma", p. 104; she goes so far as to suggest that Miller's role in "Millerism" can be "understood . . . as a construction of his

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continued nostalgically to situate Seventh-day Adventism in the ranks of the “great Second Advent Movement”.⁹⁹

Still, just as the Reformed Protestantism of Calvin, Bullinger, and other Swiss reformers owed much to Martin Luther, yet was organizationally and theologically distinct from Lutheranism, so the Seventh-day Adventist Church broke decisively with Millerism. The Millerite mainstream was perpetuated instead in the various Advent denominations (the “first day” Adventists) which briefly flourished in the mid to late nineteenth century, before falling into sustained decline in the twentieth.

Seventh-day Adventism is unquestionably part of the wider “Second Advent Movement”. It is the most potent and enduring expression of mid-nineteenth-century premillennialism. But that is so, largely because the denomination’s founders rejected the chaos that ensued after “the great Advent disappointment” and turned instead to “gospel order”, as understood and promoted by James and Ellen White and their close associates, yet rejected by the “first-day Adventists”. One result is that, even though some Seventh-day Adventists self-identify with Miller and his followers, they are not really best thought of as Millerites; SDAs, despite common DNA, represent a decided disjuncture with mainstream Adventism of the mid-nineteenth century. The fault lines which have attracted the most attention in the existing literature are doctrinal distinctives (the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, the Spirit of Prophecy, etc.) of Seventh-day Adventists. Yet, crucially, the different kinds of Adventist *also* had very dissimilar ecclesiological understandings and divergent organizational practices. Thanks

followers” and especially of those followers who became Seventh-day Adventists. This would be bracing, at the least, to many present members of the SDA Church, but it is a concept that may well reward further exploration, especially since the twenty years *after* 1844 continue to be under-explored by historians, in contrast to the decade and a half preceding it.

⁹⁹ J. N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement: Its Rise and Progress* [Nashville, Tenn.]: Southern Publ., 1905.

not least to the move away from “fanaticism of every kind” and into “the order of heaven”, Seventh-day Adventists are a very distinct variety of Second Adventist.

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