

## NINETEENTH-CENTURY EVANGELICALISM AND EARLY ADVENTIST STATEMENTS OF BELIEFS<sup>1</sup>

DENIS FORTIN  
Andrews University

In the early 1840s most of eastern North America was shaken by the fervor and excitement of an apocalyptic movement founded by the Baptist preacher William Miller. Believing in a literal understanding of the Bible, Miller and his associates concluded that Jesus would return to earth and judge the world around 1843-1844. A few months after the movement experienced the failure to see Jesus returning to earth on October 22, 1844, Millerite groups took, unconsciously at first, various steps toward the institutionalization of Adventist denominations.

During this period, as ex-Millerites searched for a new identity, questions were raised about the similarities between Millerism and other denominations. In April 1845, Richard Hutchinson, an Adventist pastor and leader in Canada, asked the editor of the *Advent Herald*, Joshua V. Himes, to explain to him the essential difference between Adventism and other groups. Answering his own rhetorical question, Hutchinson believed that the essential difference is found in two different conceptions of the Millennium. He contended that other denominations were postmillennialists, expecting the millennial kingdom of Christ through "the preaching of the gospel, the restoration of the Jews, and the conversion of the world." On the other hand, he continued, Adventism believes that the Millennium "will be introduced by the Second Advent of Christ, and the resurrection of the just."<sup>2</sup> Apart from this, Hutchinson believed there were no major differences.

Hutchinson's opinion expresses the general belief that Millerism, and thereafter Adventism, were not substantially different from other nineteenth-century Protestant denominations. In fact, as demonstrated by

<sup>1</sup>This article is adapted from my doctoral thesis: "L'adventisme dans les Cantons de l'Est du Québec: implantation et institutionnalisation au XIXe siècle" (Québec: Université Laval, 1995).

<sup>2</sup>Richard Hutchinson, "The Time Not the Essential Difference Between Us and Our Opponents," *Advent Herald*, April 2, 1845, 59.

many studies in the last decades,<sup>3</sup> it was Millerism's resemblance to other denominations that had been a cause of tensions with them. The common denominator to these studies is that Millerism was the product of nineteenth-century American evangelical Protestantism and revivalism. As Ruth Doan has pointed out, the "Millerites were and were believed to be different from other groups that stood outside the bounds of orthodoxy in antebellum America. Millerites were, in their origins, good evangelical Protestant Americans."<sup>4</sup> This evangelicalism formed the ethos and theological basis of many denominations, in particular those from which came William Miller and his associates.<sup>5</sup>

Although these studies, particularly Cross's and Doan's, have clearly shown how Millerism (from 1831 to 1844) had the same religious characteristics and ethos as antebellum evangelicalism, Adventism (after 1844) was much more than just a religious movement with a basic worldview similar to that of evangelical denominations within popular American culture. The theological parallel between early Adventism and its evangelical heritage has not been clearly demonstrated. In fact, some segments of Adventism clearly stood on the fringes of evangelicalism and thought of themselves as nonevangelical. Therefore, I believe, it is not enough to simply categorize early Adventism as a religious movement within antebellum evangelicalism. A theological comparison with evangelicalism is needed to get a fuller picture of Adventism's position within this heritage. In this article, I would like to address this point and present a more balanced comparison between nineteenth-century evangelicalism and early Adventism. First, and in agreement with Doan's studies on Millerism, I shall briefly describe how Adventism, as a religious movement, also continued to reflect the general ethos and religious characteristics of antebellum evangelicalism; and, second, I shall define the evangelical theological foundation of early Adventism while noting that

<sup>3</sup>See in particular Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1950); J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1950* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985); Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987). Gary Land did a survey of Millerite studies in "The Historians and the Millerites: An Historiographical Essay," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 32 (1994): 227-246.

<sup>4</sup>*The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1987), 215. Doan also commented on the relationship between Millerism and nineteenth-century evangelicalism in "Millerism and Evangelical Culture," in Numbers and Butler, 118-138.

<sup>5</sup>See Doan, "Millerism and Evangelical Culture," in Numbers and Butler, 118-119.

some segments of Adventism dissented from evangelicalism.

To facilitate this comparison between Adventism and evangelicalism I will refer to three Adventist statements of beliefs written between 1845 and 1872. These statements provide valuable information about the official beliefs and practices of different Adventist denominations. This study will allow us to better locate Adventism within its Protestant heritage and will give us a better appreciation and understanding of the similarities and differences between Adventist denominations that rose out of the Millerite movement.

### 1. *Adventist Statements of Beliefs*

The first official Adventist statement of beliefs was adopted at the Albany (New York) Conference on May 1, 1845. This statement's aim was to clarify the doctrinal position of the main body of Adventists in the months following the Millerite disappointment. "In view of the many conflicting opinions, unscriptural views leading to unseemly practices, and the sad divisions which have been thereby caused by some professing to be Adventists," the Albany Adventists, with Miller, Himes, Litch, and others as their leaders, deemed it necessary to clarify what they believed.<sup>6</sup> This statement was an important step in the institutionalization of Adventism at a moment when no one felt the need of starting a new church.<sup>7</sup> This same statement was reaffirmed at the Boston Conference of 1850 and, with a minor modification in its introduction, at the Providence, Rhode Island, Conference of 1856.<sup>8</sup> It was for many years the only doctrinal statement for the majority of Adventists. Even after the Evangelical Adventists of the *Advent Herald* and the Advent Christians associated with the *World's Crisis* parted ways in 1860, this statement remained for many years an essential affirmation of Adventist beliefs for these two denominations, but in particular for Advent Christians. For this reason I will refer to the 1845 Albany statement as describing Advent

<sup>6</sup>Elon Galusha, S. Bliss and O. R. Fassett, "Mutual Conference of Adventists at Albany," *Advent Herald*, May 14, 1845, 106-107.

<sup>7</sup>See David T. Arthur's analysis of this conference in "After the Great Disappointment: To Albany and Beyond," *Adventist Heritage* 3 (1974), 1:3-10, and in his thesis: "Come Out of Babylon: A Study of Millerite Separatism and Denominationalism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1970).

<sup>8</sup>C. B. Turner, O. R. Fassett, S. Bliss, "General Conference of Adventists in Boston," *Advent Herald*, June 1, 1850, 141; "Convention at Providence," *Advent Herald*, December 13, 1856, 398. Through most of the 1850s, a condensation of this statement of beliefs was printed every week in the *Advent Herald* in the statement of purpose of the paper.

Christian beliefs.<sup>9</sup>

A second important Adventist statement of beliefs is the one adopted by the Evangelical Adventists at their *American Evangelical Advent Conference* in 1869. We have only an indirect knowledge of this statement, since the original has not been preserved. J. N. Andrews, the Seventh-day Adventist editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, gave an analysis of it in his July 6, 1869, article. Andrews was generally positive toward this statement; he quoted, summarized, or commented on each of its 15 articles.<sup>10</sup>

A third statement of beliefs was produced by a Seventh-day Adventist editor (believed to be Uriah Smith) in 1872. This statement is the longest of the three, with 25 articles, and shows a more thorough articulation of Adventist beliefs nearly 30 years after the Millerite disappointment.<sup>11</sup>

Although these statements reflect different Adventist denominational viewpoints, they nonetheless reveal a common evangelical heritage in their broad religious perspectives and specific theological categories, as I will demonstrate in the following sections of this article.

## 2. Broad Religious Perspectives

Our first attempt at understanding the evangelical roots of Adventism will use the broad religious perspectives proposed by Ruth Doan. She describes antebellum evangelicalism with the help of four foci: the new-birth experience, the centrality of the Bible to shape its message, mission, and the millennium. Doan summarizes the paradigm this way: "The

<sup>9</sup>Furthermore, in his 1918 history of the Advent Christian Church, Albert C. Johnson presented eight "principal points of doctrine" of the Advent Christian Church in the nineteenth century. This presentation of doctrines closely parallels the content of the ten important truths of the 1845 Albany statement he referred to in a prior chapter (see *Advent Christian History* [Mendota, IL: Western Advent Christian Publication Society, 1918], 125-126, 139-206).

<sup>10</sup>J. N. Andrews, "The Creed of the Evangelical Adventist," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 6, 1869, 12-13.

<sup>11</sup>Although this statement is anonymous, some believe it was written by Uriah Smith, an editor of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (see L. E. Froom, *Movement of Destiny* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971], 160). This document was not adopted by an administrative session of the church when it was originally produced, but was used and promoted by the church as a document to clarify Seventh-day Adventist beliefs among the general population. Apart from being printed in a pamphlet format in 1872 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association, it was also published in the pages of the *Signs of the Times* in Oakland, CA, in its first issue, June 4, 1874, 3, under the title "Fundamental Principles." It was published again in the *Signs of the Times* a few months later, "Fundamental Principles of Seventh-Day [sic] Adventists," January 28, 1875, 108-109. It was revised in 1875 and 1881. In 1883 it was incorporated into the proposed first edition of the Church Manual; see [Uriah Smith,] "The S.D.A. Church Manual," *Review and Herald*, June 5, 1883, 361.

individual needed conversion, and the message of the gospel had to be spread. The end result would be a glorious age of peace and harmony under the rule—spiritual or physical—of Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup> The use of broad religious perspectives for the study of nineteenth-century evangelicalism is helpful when comparing Adventist practices and beliefs to those of other denominations. In this approach, evangelicalism in the nineteenth century is viewed more as a religious temperament than as a theological system.<sup>13</sup>

### *The New-birth Experience*

The first religious focus of antebellum evangelicalism is the new-birth experience. This experience was a vivid reality in the life of William Miller. After the War of 1812 and extensive study of the Bible, he came to experience the love of God in his heart and saw Jesus as his friend. From despair he turned to God in full faith.<sup>14</sup> Miller’s conversion experience was repeated in his followers and became an integral part of his movement as multitudes prepared to meet their Savior.

Building upon the Millerite experience, early Adventist soteriology was wrapped in Arminianism and Pietism, as reflected in their statements of beliefs. The Arminian conditionality of salvation, based on one’s acceptance of God’s grace, appears in all three statements. The Albany statement exemplifies this in article 4, stating that “the condition of salvation is repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Evident is also the Pietist emphasis on the obligation of living a true Christian life before the coming of the Lord: “that those who have repentance and faith, will live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope” (Albany, article 4). Evangelical Adventists, in article 6, also affirmed that “it is essential that our affections be radically changed, and a new principle of love to our Creator be implanted in the heart. This transformation is, in the Scriptures, termed regeneration, and is the special work of the Holy Spirit, and follows repentance and faith.”

### *The Centrality of the Bible*

Doan’s second religious focus of nineteenth-century evangelicalism is the centrality of Scripture in its message. Miller’s study of the Bible

<sup>12</sup>Doan, “Millerism . . .,” 118-119.

<sup>13</sup>See Leonard Sweet, ed., *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1984), 6.

<sup>14</sup>William Miller, *Apology and Defence* (Boston: J. V. Himes, 1845), 4-5.

“constrained [him] to admit that the Scriptures must be a revelation from God.”<sup>15</sup> His determination to understand the Bible led him to discover, using historicist hermeneutical principles, that certain prophecies pointed specifically to the time of Christ’s Second Coming. To come to this conclusion, he had compared Scripture with Scripture (using his concordance) and then compared Scripture with history. He “was thus satisfied that the Bible is a system of revealed truth.”<sup>16</sup> In late 1842, Miller published his *Rules of Bible Interpretation*.<sup>17</sup> In agreement with the Protestant understanding of the perspicuity of Scripture, these rules helped numerous men and women study the Bible for themselves and come to conclusions similar to Miller’s. In these rules he affirmed that Scripture is self-interpreted and to be taken literally except for the obviously symbolic writings. One of these rules, number 12, affirms the historicist hermeneutical principle, saying that “God takes care that history and prophecy doth agree, so that the true believing children of God may never be ashamed.” If a part of a prophecy lacks fulfillment, Miller added that one should look somewhere else for fulfillment, or wait for future development.

Although historicism is evident in the first two Adventist statements of beliefs, the Seventh-day Adventist statement is the only one to refer directly to this hermeneutical principle. Its article 7 says, “That the world’s history from specified dates in the past, the rise and fall of empires, and chronological succession of events down to the setting up of God’s everlasting kingdom, are outlined in numerous great chains of prophecy; and that these prophecies are now all fulfilled except the closing scenes.”

As it had been with Miller’s message, Adventism continued to be a movement based on the Bible. The Adventist statements of beliefs make ample references to the Bible to support each of their articles. This biblicism is also evident in the direct quotations of Scripture integrated into the text of many statements.

<sup>15</sup>Miller, 5.

<sup>16</sup>Miller, 5-7. Doan comments that “Miller’s careful and literal reading of the Bible as the primary spiritual and historical authority carried over and became central to the movement that grew around him.” Far from being idiosyncratic, the Millerite emphasis on the Bible corresponded to the evangelicalism of the time (“Millerism . . .,” 121). In fact, Whitney Cross goes so far as to affirm that no other mid-nineteenth-century movement “stuck so closely and exclusively to the Bible as did the Millerites” (297).

<sup>17</sup>See *Midnight Cry*, November 17, 1842. *Miller’s Rules of Bible Interpretation* were reprinted by Apollon Hale in *The Second Advent Manual* . . . (Boston: J. V. Himes, 1843), 103-106.

### *Mission*

A third religious focus of antebellum evangelicalism was its sense of mission, its strong determination to spread its biblical message. Miller had felt the call of God to "Go and tell to the world" the message he had found in Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Millerism was a missionary movement just as much as it was an apocalyptic movement.

This missionary aspect of evangelicalism is the direct outcome of its Arminian soteriology, in which the individual person must make a willful decision to accept the offer of God's grace. Moreover, once converted and submitted to God's will, the individual becomes instrumental in bringing other people to this same response. Adventist statements of beliefs reflect this soteriological basis to mission, but also add to it an eschatological dimension.

The Albany statement invites Adventist ministers to preach to all people the imminent return of Christ. For this reason, people are called to repentance and salvation in preparation for the establishment of God's kingdom (articles 3 and 9). Both the Evangelical Adventists (article 15) and the Seventh-day Adventists (article 17) stated that they had a mission from God to sound the warning far and near of Christ's soon coming.

### *The Millennium*

The last religious focus of antebellum evangelicalism is the millennium. Miller's careful study of the Bible gave him "conclusive evidence to prove the advent personal and pre-millennial, that all the events for which the church [i.e. postmillennialism] look to be fulfilled before the advent, must be subsequent to it."<sup>19</sup>

Contrary to the widespread postmillennialist belief that society was progressing through moral and social reforms which would soon usher in the millennium and the ultimate conversion of the world, Adventists held

<sup>18</sup>Miller, 17-18.

<sup>19</sup>Miller, 9. Doan makes the comment that millennialism, "without too much concern about the distinction between pre- and post-millennialism, formed an integral part of the evangelical, and political, ethos of the early republic" ("Millerism . . .", 120-121). Other historians and theologians have also described how millennialism and millenarianism were part of early nineteenth-century North American Protestantism. See J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1989); Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970) and "Millennialism," in Edwin Scott Gaustad, ed., *The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 104-118.

the premillennial belief that society was evil and that no lasting social reform could be expected before the coming of Jesus. Christ alone could ultimately reform society. The Albany and Seventh-day Adventist statements go so far as to explicitly deny the major tenets of postmillennialism in stating that the conversion of the world is not to be expected and that the Second Advent of Christ is to precede the millennium (article 8 in both statements). Millerites and some Adventists were not the only ones to preach a premillennialist message. But what branded them as "heretics" within this millenarian culture was their assertion that the year 1843, or 1844, would witness the Second Coming of Christ. Yet, nonetheless, it is clear that Adventists reflected this evangelical religious perspective.

The categories used by Doan to describe antebellum evangelicalism and Millerism apply also to early Adventism. Adventism reflected the broad religious perspectives, ethos, and temperament of evangelicalism.

### 3. *Specific Theological Categories*

A second paradigmatic approach to understanding the evangelical roots of early Adventism is a comparison of Adventist beliefs with known evangelical statements of beliefs. This is a more restrictive approach, which compares the theological foundation of Adventism, as presented in statements of beliefs, with that of other nineteenth-century evangelical denominations. This approach tries to define what is theologically evangelical in early Adventism.

#### *The Basis of the Evangelical Alliance (1846)*

To facilitate this theological comparison, I have chosen one evangelical statement of beliefs that I believe generally reflects nineteenth-century evangelicalism. In August 1846, some 800 delegates from 52 different denominations met in London to establish the Evangelical Alliance.<sup>20</sup> During this assembly a statement of beliefs was adopted, not as a traditional creed or confession of faith, but as an indication of the kind of doctrinal fellowship the Alliance encouraged. This statement, *The Basis of the Evangelical Alliance*, will be used to compare evangelical beliefs with those of early Adventists.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Interestingly, Joshua V. Himes, a prominent leader of the Millerite movement and editor of the most influential Adventist journal, the *Advent Herald*, attended this conference with two other colleagues, Richard Hutchinson, from Canada East, and F. G. Brown. See their assessment of the conference in "Correspondence of the English Mission. Number XIV," *Advent Herald*, September 30, 1846, 60-61.

<sup>21</sup>This statement can be found in Philipp Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York:

The *Basis* states in its preamble that the doctrines listed in it are “usually understood to be Evangelical views”; they are basic Christian doctrines held in common by evangelical denominations. Although it mentions all the major doctrines of Christian theology, the *Basis* falls short of being a thorough and complete articulation of doctrines like that of the Protestant confessions of faith of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The attentive reader must be careful not to read into the nine brief doctrinal affirmations more than was intended by the assembly. However, apart from the doctrine of predestination, the *Basis* touches on all the major theological issues familiar to Reformed theology and follows the traditional presentation of Reformed confessions of faith.

The *Basis* starts with two statements on the doctrine of Scripture and its interpretation. These evangelicals believed in the divine inspiration, authority, and perspicuity of the Scriptures, and that anyone can privately interpret them. These statements reaffirm the Reformation position that the Scriptures are the only norm of faith and practice, and that they are sufficient for salvation. The starting point of the *Basis*’ theological system is God and his revelation to mankind.

In addressing the doctrine of God, article 3 simply affirms belief in the Trinity and unity of the Godhead. Article 4 highlights the total depravity of humankind as a consequence of the Fall. The following article on the doctrine of Christ affirms his incarnation, his work of atonement for sinners, and his mediatorial ministry and reign. As mentioned before, no reference is made to predestination or to the sinner’s acceptance of grace in the salvation process. Perhaps we have here an indication that these evangelicals were not all in agreement and preferred a broad consensus instead of further division. This theological void in the *Basis* may also indicate some willingness on the part of many Reformed evangelicals to at least consider Wesleyan-Arminian denominations as part of the evangelical fold.

Articles 6 and 7 deal with the doctrines of salvation and the Holy Spirit, affirming that justification is by faith alone and is the work of the Holy Spirit, who effects the conversion and sanctification of the sinner.

The next article is the longest, with a statement on personal and universal eschatology. These evangelicals affirmed the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body; the judgment of the world by Christ will be followed by the eternal blessedness of the righteous and the

---

Harper, 1919), 827-828. An analysis of the outcomes of the Evangelical Alliance is given in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, eds. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 318-324. The American Branch of the Evangelical Alliance was organized in January 1867. It adopted the same nine articles of beliefs in its doctrinal basis, adding only a longer preamble; see Schaff, 827.

eternal punishment of the wicked. Interestingly enough, this statement on last-day events does not mention anything about the Second Coming of Christ or the Millennium. This is surprising given the wide publicity the Millerite movement's premillennial message had received in both North America and Great Britain a few years before, and the general millennial fever that English-speaking countries were experiencing at the time.<sup>22</sup> The omission of a millennial affirmation in the statement is perhaps an indication that evangelicals were also divided over this theological issue and decided to avoid any declaration that could be divisive.<sup>23</sup>

The *Basis* concludes with the doctrine of the church in affirming the divine institution of the ministry "and the obligation and perpetuity of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper."

### *The Albany Statement (1845)*

Although the Albany statement was written only one year before the *Basis of the Evangelical Alliance*, a quick comparison between the two reveals a great contrast. Whereas the later document refers briefly to all doctrines of systematic theology, the former centers exclusively on matters of eschatology. In the Albany statement, all references about God, Christ, salvation, and the church are made in the context of a premillennial Advent of Christ and imply an intrinsic acceptance of the authority of Scripture, with all the articles written in a scriptural style, incorporating biblical expressions and phrases.

The intent of this statement helps us understand this wide difference; it is mainly an exposition and clarification of Adventist eschatological beliefs in the months following the end of the Millerite movement. It is not, so to speak, a systematic exposition of doctrines in the traditional understanding of a confession of faith. The statement was written to solidify the Adventist faith in a time of internal turmoil and loss of meaning and identity for Adventists. The ecumenical group of Christians, who had united under Millerism, needed an affirmation of the particularities of their faith at that specific moment. One can, therefore, understand why the statement is so emphatic on eschatology and speaks

<sup>22</sup>For further commentary on early nineteenth-century millenarianism, see Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), and Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1979).

<sup>23</sup>In his description of the Conference, Joshua V. Himes mentioned that an amendment to this article was proposed to add the phrase "his blessed coming" (either in reference to the resurrection or the judgment of the world). But this motion, seconded by his colleague F. G. Brown, was withdrawn and not voted on. See "Correspondence of the English Mission. Number XIV," *Advent Herald*, September 30, 1846, 60-61.

very little about other important doctrines.

The *Basis of the Evangelical Alliance* avoids being specific about eschatological issues, but the Albany statement delves into them. Yet, in spite of being a strong eschatological statement of beliefs, it affirms many evangelical beliefs. It clearly affirms the authority and primacy of Scriptures, the incarnation of Jesus Christ (article 2) and his eternal reign (article 10), and salvation by faith in Christ alone (article 4). Concerning the doctrine of last events, and in agreement with the *Basis*, the Albany statement professes the resurrection of the body (article 5) and that Jesus will judge the world (article 2), grant eternal blessedness to the redeemed (article 10), and destroy the wicked (article 1). It also briefly affirms the importance of the ministry in its obligation to preach the gospel to all the world in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ (article 9).

However, the Albany statement is silent on a number of doctrines. It does not mention anything about the doctrine of God and the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, human depravity, and the atonement and intercessory ministry of Christ.

There is, furthermore, one major theological difference between the two statements that may have led to further divergences in the following years. The Albany statement is silent on the immortality of the soul and the eternal punishment of the wicked. In such a strong statement on eschatological beliefs such a silence is very noticeable. Although Millerites did not want to divide themselves over this and other doctrinal issues, as time went on, early Adventists became more and more polarized in debating the conditional immortality of the soul. And even though the Albany statement wished to present a united front, it still gave evidence of a strong conditionalist influence by its choice of words in describing the state of the dead awaiting the return of Christ. In a few instances the statement refers to the saints sleeping until the resurrection (articles 5, 6) or being awakened at the resurrection (article 10). The last article also clearly states that “the departed saints do not enter their inheritance . . . at death” but at the Second Coming of Christ. This also explains the silence of the statement on the eternal punishment of the wicked and simply refers to their destruction (article 1). Since many early Adventists did not believe in the traditional doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the eternal punishment of the wicked, this theological difference had major repercussions upon the Adventist worldview and theological system. It is also interesting to note that during the discussion surrounding the adoption of the *Basis of the Evangelical Alliance*, Richard Hutchinson moved that the nonbiblical phrase, “immortality of the soul,” as applied to human nature, be rescinded from article 8. After some

discussion, the majority voted to keep it.<sup>24</sup>

A comparison between the *Basis of the Evangelical Alliance* and the Albany statement shows enough theological similarities to assert that these early Adventists were within the evangelical theological heritage. However, one doctrine in particular, anthropology, presented a tangible theological difference. This difference is seen also in the Seventh-day Adventist statement.

### *The Evangelical Adventist Statement (1869)*

The Evangelical Adventist statement closely resembles the *Basis of the Evangelical Alliance* and, in fact, follows more or less the same traditional presentation of doctrines and is similar in theological content. Its fifteen articles present first the doctrine of Scripture, then the doctrines of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It follows with the doctrines of eschatology, anthropology, and salvation, including affirmations on the law of God and the day of rest. It concludes with the doctrine of the church and one last article on eschatology. This statement touches on every major doctrinal belief of traditional Christianity and systematic theology.

The only substantial doctrinal difference between the two statements of beliefs concerns eschatology. It is understandable that such a statement would emphasize eschatological beliefs and even place the doctrine of eschatology in its center. Where evangelicals are silent about the doctrine of the millennium, Evangelical Adventists emphasize it. They believe in a premillennial personal coming of Christ. This event will be a day of judgment and will begin the millennium. Subsequently, the earth will be made new and Christ will reign for eternity. In spite of this different emphasis, Evangelical Adventists were within the evangelical theological perspective. They basically had the same epistemological framework, and the same fundamental conceptions about God, humanity, and salvation.

Yet, as we note the theological similarities between two evangelical groups, Evangelical Adventists had one major theological difference with other Adventists. Although in section two I endeavored to describe the common broad evangelical religious roots expressed in these Adventist statements, one needs to keep in mind that these statements of beliefs represent the important doctrinal truths held by different groups. All three groups were keenly aware of doctrinal differences between themselves and at times emphasized these differences in their mutual controversies and debates. Furthermore, J. N. Andrews, in his introductory remarks about the Evangelical Adventist statement of

<sup>24</sup>“Correspondence of the English Mission. Number XIV,” *Advent Herald*, September 30, 1846, 60-61.

beliefs, mentioned that Evangelical Adventists differentiated themselves from other Adventists in believing in the immortality of the soul, the eternal punishment of the wicked, and the Trinity. Clearly, according to Andrews (who was a Seventh-day Adventist leader) an evangelical Christian is one who believes in these three doctrines among others. Moreover, he equated the designation *evangelical* with orthodoxy, saying that if the title *Evangelical Adventists* is "used to designate this body as orthodox, in the common acceptance of the term, then the designation is proper and exact."<sup>25</sup>

One event during the process of institutionalization of Adventist denominations particularly singles out these theological differences. In 1858, Adventists supporting the *Advent Herald* decided to establish a conference to oversee the administration of its journal and other organizational matters. As it did so, it adopted the designation of *Evangelical* in its name: *The American Evangelical Advent Conference*. The formation of this conference caused a major division within the largest group of Adventists. Many Adventists clearly associated the descriptive name *Evangelical* with the belief in the natural immortality of the soul. However, by then the vast majority of Adventists believed in conditional immortality.<sup>26</sup> The formation of this conference galvanized the doctrinal differences among them. It led, two years later, to the formation of a conditionalist Adventist denomination, the *Advent Christian Association*, which centered around its own journal, *The World's Crisis*.<sup>27</sup> This later group kept using the Albany statement of beliefs, as slightly modified in Providence in 1856, for many years. The Evangelical Adventists for their part adopted a new statement of beliefs in 1869.

Thus, although the Evangelical Adventists were clearly within the same theological framework as other evangelical Christians, many Adventists did not consider themselves within this same framework—in particular, Advent Christians and Seventh-day Adventists.

### *The Seventh-day Adventist Statement (1872)*

Of the three Adventist statements of beliefs we are comparing with the *Basis of the Evangelical Alliance*, the Seventh-day Adventist statement

<sup>25</sup>J. N. Andrews, "The Creed of the Evangelical Adventists," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, July 6, 1869, 12.

<sup>26</sup>John Pearson, Jr., and F. Gunner, "Adjourned Meeting of the Nineteenth Annual Conference," *Advent Herald*, November 20, 1858, 369-372.

<sup>27</sup>"Convention at Providence, R.I.," *World's Crisis*, August 1, 1860, 86; "Meeting of the Advent Christian Association," *World's Crisis*, October 24, 1860, 26. See also Hewitt, 236-245.

is the most different. While affirming some basic doctrinal similarities with other evangelical denominations, this one introduces other doctrines and is articulated around a different theological center.

The Seventh-day Adventist doctrines of God (article 1), Christ (article 2), and Scripture (article 3) resemble what we have seen in the other three statements of beliefs. The same holds true for their doctrines of salvation (articles 5, 14, 15), baptism (article 4), and a general understanding of premillennial eschatology (articles 20-25). These articles confirm a basic evangelical framework.

At first glance, this is a very confusing statement of beliefs; the formal order of presentation of doctrines is very untraditional. The statement starts with the doctrines of God (article 1), Christ (article 2), and Scripture (article 3). Then it goes on to affirm baptism (article 4) which traditionally belongs to the doctrine of the church close to the end of a statement. New birth is joined to the second coming of Christ in article 5. The next five articles deal with eschatological understandings of biblical prophecies. These are followed with the doctrines of the law of God (article 11) and the Sabbath (articles 12 and 13). Then follow the doctrines of the work of the Holy Spirit (article 14), justification (article 15), and the gifts of the Spirit (article 16). Articles 17 and 18 return to biblical eschatology, and articles 19 and 20 deal with conditional immortality. The last five articles affirm a premillennial eschatology, the resurrection of the body (articles 21, 22), the reign of the redeemed in heaven for a thousand years while the devil and his angels are left on a deserted earth (article 23), the final judgment of the wicked and their annihilation (article 24), and the renewal of the earth (article 25).

When one compares this order of doctrines with other traditional confessions of faith, as we have done so far, one could easily conclude that Seventh-day Adventists in 1872 (and Uriah Smith in particular) held doctrines in no particular order, without any systematic theological approach. But is this really so? Is there a theological pattern within the Seventh-day Adventist statement of beliefs? I suggest that there is indeed one which is theologically different from nineteenth-century evangelicalism. Whereas the other two Adventist statements have basic doctrinal and theological similarities with the statement of the Evangelical Alliance, the Seventh-day Adventist statement shows a fundamental theological innovation. If, for example, the doctrines of salvation, the church, and eschatology are intermingled with other beliefs, it is because Seventh-day Adventist theology centers around its doctrine of the sanctuary and the progressive work of Christ's atonement. This theological center stemmed from their understanding of the Millerite movement.

For most Adventists, the religious revival associated with the Millerite movement in 1843-1844 was due to human factors and miscalculations of biblical prophecies. When the day for the expected return of Christ on October 22, 1844 passed by, most Adventists simply declared that they had made a mistake in their calculations. However, some early Sabbath-keeping Adventists viewed the whole matter differently. They believed that "the mistake of Adventists in 1844 pertained to the nature of the event then to transpire, not to the time" of the event (article 9). Hence, the cleansing of the sanctuary referred to in the prophecy of Daniel 8:14 did not refer, as believed by the Millerites, to the judgment of the wicked and purification of the earth at the Second Coming of Christ, but to the typological purification of the heavenly sanctuary. Consequently, Christ started in 1844 a phase of his intercessory ministry corresponding typologically to the purification of the Israelite sanctuary as described in Leviticus 16, which Seventh-day Adventists refer to as the investigative judgment. During this investigative judgment, God determines "who of the myriads now sleeping in the dust of the earth are worthy of a part in the first resurrection, and who of its living multitudes are worthy of salvation—a point which must be determined before the Lord appears" (article 18). This is not suggesting that the all-knowing God seeks some new information during the investigative judgment. The need for this judgment flows from the great controversy theme between Christ and Satan in which God's character is vindicated before all the universe through the salvation of redeemed humanity. This doctrine, as affirmed in articles 2, 9, 10, and 18, is the theological center of early Seventh-day Adventism and becomes the principle of articulation of all other doctrines.

Thus, the plan of redemption, as revealed in the typological sanctuary services, includes all the actions of God through history (article 1), the incarnation of Christ, his sacrifice on the cross and his atoning work as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary (article 2),<sup>28</sup> the works of the

<sup>28</sup>Uriah Smith was quite emphatic in saying that the atonement did not occur on the cross. He wrote in article 2 that Christ is "our only mediator in the sanctuary in Heaven, where, with his own blood, he makes atonement for our sins; which atonement, so far from being made on the cross, which was but the offering of the sacrifice, is the very last portion of his work as priest, according to the example of the Levitical priesthood, which foreshadowed and prefigured the ministry of our Lord in Heaven." Although this understanding of the atonement was greatly emphasized in the Seventh-day Adventist papers of the middle of the nineteenth century, not everyone totally agreed with it. (For analyses of differences on the doctrine of atonement within early Seventh-day Adventism see P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews Univ. Press, 1977], 170-176, and Morten J. Davis, "A Study of Major Declarations on the Doctrine of Atonement in Seventh-day Adventist Literature"

Holy Spirit and the salvation of humanity (article 4, 14, 15). Everything revealed by God to humankind in the sanctuary services is for the express purpose of redeeming and preparing a people for eternal life. All eschatological events are related to the termination of Christ's heavenly ministry.<sup>29</sup>

There are also two other basic differences between Seventh-day Adventists and Evangelicals. Seventh-day Adventists, like Advent Christians, believe in the conditional immortality of human beings (articles 19 and 20) and the annihilation of the wicked after the last judgment (article 24). This view of the nature of the soul is fundamental to their eschatological interpretation of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, their understanding of the character of God, and the type of life the redeemed will enjoy in the hereafter. Furthermore, even though Seventh-day Adventists believe in the Holy Spirit and his active participation in the plan of salvation (see articles 1, 14, 16), this statement does not contain a separate article on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, nor does it speak of the unity of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Many early Seventh-day Adventists, including Uriah Smith, were Arians. This fundamental theological difference inevitably sets Seventh-day Adventists apart from evangelicals. These theological differences are sufficient to question to what extent nineteenth-century Seventh-day Adventists were theologically within evangelicalism in the official expression of their doctrines.<sup>30</sup>

### Conclusion

A comparison of early Adventism with nineteenth-century evangelicalism has demonstrated both similar religious roots and

---

[unpublished M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1962].)

<sup>29</sup>It is interesting to note that the latest statement of 27 fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, adopted in 1980, does not have the doctrine of the sanctuary as the principle of articulation of all other doctrines. It is placed at the end of the statement (article 23), strictly within the section on eschatology. This statement follows a very traditional exposition of Christian beliefs similar to Reformed confessions of faith centered on the doctrine of God and his revelation to mankind (see *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1997* [Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1997], 5-8).

<sup>30</sup>In an 1892 article, M. E. Kellogg, an assistant editor of the *Review and Herald*, attempted also to answer the question: "Are Seventh-day Adventists Evangelical?" In the true definition of the term, he believed that Seventh-day Adventists are evangelicals, since they teach the truth of the gospel as found in the New Testament. However, as compared to other evangelical churches, he strongly denied that the term applied to them. He insisted that Seventh-day Adventists are not evangelicals, because they do not believe in the immortality of the soul, they observe the seventh-day Sabbath, and they consider all evangelical churches in need of receiving further biblical truths (*Review and Herald*, March 15, 1892, 170-171).

theological heritage, and some divergent theological frames of reference.

Evangelicalism was first of all a religious temperament. Using Doan's paradigm to analyze the nineteenth-century statements of beliefs of Advent Christians, Evangelical Adventists, and Seventh-day Adventists, one can conclude that Adventism was truly part of evangelicalism. Whether it be in its Arminian soteriology and Pietist lifestyle, biblical message, emphasis on mission, and premillennial eschatology, Adventism reflected the broad evangelical religious perspectives. Our study also demonstrates that these three Adventist denominations had common evangelical religious roots and temperament.

The theological comparison of Adventist statements of beliefs with the *Basis of the Evangelical Alliance* shows theological similarities and differences between Adventists and evangelicals. Evangelical Adventists were clearly in the same theological tradition as other evangelicals; the theological similarities between the two statements are evident. For their part, Advent Christians and Seventh-day Adventists shared basic evangelical theological roots and, at the same time, showed important theological differences with evangelicalism. Each had a different understanding of anthropology. Seventh-day Adventists were the most theologically removed from evangelicalism in emphasizing their doctrine of the sanctuary as the center of their theological articulation.