

Will Christ Return in the Year 2000?

Norman R. Gulley
Southern Adventist University

Will Christ return in the year 2000? This is a “hot potato” issue for many Seventh-day Adventists. They believe Christ will come by that date. That’s only months away. “For just as the work of creation took six days, so human history will last 6,000 years,” they reason. “Just as the Sabbath followed six days of creation, so the Millennial Sabbath in heaven will follow 6000 years of human history.” They see creation week as an analogy of the seven thousand years between creation and recreation. They refer to prominent Adventist leaders of the past who taught this view, such as O. R. L. Crosier,¹ Joseph Bates,² James White,³ T. M. Preble,⁴ W. H. Littlejohn,⁵ S.N. Haskell,⁶ and J. N. Andrews.⁷

¹O. R. L. Crosier, “The Sabbaths under the Law typify the great Sabbath, the seventh millennium.” *The Day Star Extra*, Feb 7, 1846.

²Joseph Bates, “The Millennium is the seventh thousandth year,” *The Seventh-day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign*, 1849, 282-29.

³James White, “The age to come will be the great Jubilee, the seventh millennium, in which the land, the whole earth will rest.” *The Advent Review*, September, 1850. Reference to God’s great week, referring to 6000 years of history and a 1000 years of rest, *Review and Herald*, March 6, 1856.

⁴T. M. Preble, “Advent believers expect their rest in the seventh thousand years,” *A Tract Showing that the Seventh Day should be observed as the Sabbath, instead of the First Day: According to the Commandment*, See copy in George Knight, *The Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*, 184.

⁵W. H. Littlejohn, “Just as the land is tilled for six years with a Sabbath rest so the earth is occupied by humans for six thousand years followed by a Sabbath rest when the it will lie desolate,” *Review and Herald*, March 4, 1844.

⁶S. N. Haskell, “The weekly Sabbath was a stepping stone leading up to the other sabbatic institution; and besides being a memorial of creation, it pointed forward to the final rest of jubilee.” *The Cross and its Shadow*, 248.

⁷J. N. Andrews wrote a *Review and Herald* series of six articles (July 17 to August 21, 1883) titled, “The Great Week of Time, or the Period of Seven Thousand Years Devoted to the Probation and Judgment of Mankind.” He believed the 7000 years is cut off from the eternity of the past and the eternity of the future and assigned to the probation and judgment of mankind (July 17, 1883). “We think that God chose the six days such as are known to man for the work of creation in order to

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

These seven writers were convinced and are convincing others. The question, though, is not who taught this view, but was their teaching right?

We must ask by whose authority they came to this conclusion? Who told them that human history would be only 6000 years? It isn't found in the Bible. Nowhere in Scripture does it say the purpose of creation week is to inform us about the length of human history. Creation week is history and not prediction. Creation week is about the past and not about the future. Creation week is about what Christ did and not about what He will do. Scripture is silent on the date for creation and the second advent, as well as the length of time between the two. Eschatology is based on prophecies and not on protology, or the study of first things like creation week.

Seventh-day Adventists know the difference between descriptive and pre-scriptive passages in Scripture. That's why texts about early Christian meetings on the first day of the week are not viewed as proof for a change of Sabbath to Sunday. First day meeting stories in the New Testament do not require us to keep Sunday. If we saw them as more than stories we would radically alter our Eschatology about Sunday laws. Those first day meetings are historical records without any other significance. So is creation week.

Some see the Sabbatical years (Lev 25:1-7) as a type of the coming Millennium. Just as six years were followed by a Sabbatical year, so 6000 years of history will be followed by a Millennial rest (Rev 20:1-7). The Sabbatical cycles (six years of harvesting the land and one year of rest) were pragmatic and not prophetic. They were for the good of the land and had nothing to do with Eschatology. Nowhere does Scripture say they illustrate the length of human history before the Millennium. Every fiftieth year was a Jubilee, a time of liberty when people and land were freed (Lev 25:8-55). Some see this Jubilee year as a type of the Millennium, Pope John Paul 11 speaks of the year 2000 as a Jubilee year.⁸ Will the coming Jubilee be the Millennial Sabbath? Evidently the Jubilee year was an idea never carried out. There is no biblical or extra-biblical evidence that the Jubilee was ever kept. There is no biblical evidence either that the Jubilee year ever acquired prophetic significance. Proponents of the creation week model for 7000 years believe the Sabbatical years and Jubilee are types of the Millennium.

However, typology cannot be assumed. It cannot be gifted to a passage from an external source like human reason. Typology is rooted in the biblical record itself. Biblical typology is always stated within Scripture. One is not left to read typology into Scripture. The absence of biblical typological statements must not be made up by creative interpretation. In his doctoral dissertation on biblical typology, Richard M. Davidson says, "The nature of biblical typology remains ambiguous as long as an a priori understanding of its conceptual struc-

represent to man that in six days of 1,000 years each, days such as are known to God, he would accomplish the period assigned to man before the judgment" (August 21, 1883).

⁸Pope John Paul 11, *Ut Unum Sint*, (Boston, MA: Pauline, 1995), 11-15.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

tures is brought to the biblical text instead of allowing these structures to emerge from careful exegetical analysis.⁹ Unless there is a clear, unequivocal biblical linkage between the Sabbatical and Jubilee years with the 6000 year time frame of history and the Millennium, there remains an unsure foundation upon which to build such an hypothesis. So far I have not seen a convincing biblical reason for such a linkage.

It is not good enough to link the days of creation with the fact that 1000 years is like a day to God (Psa 90:4; 2 Pet 3:7-8). This is a common argument among proponents of the 7000 year theory, reaching back to the Early Fathers.¹⁰ A 7000 year period is not the only way to misinterpret Genesis 1-2 by Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:7-8. It could also argue for 1000 years for each creation day. It's up for grabs—either a 7000 time-frame for salvation-history or 6000 years for creation. The two are mutually exclusive.

What about Archbishop Ussher's 6000 year chronology? Dr. R. H. Brown, physicist, specialist in age-dating and former Director of the Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California, wrote a perceptive article on the question.¹¹ Computations on when that 6,000 years is complete vary radically from AD 336 to 1822 to 2037, depending on which factors are taken into consideration. That's a difference of 1701 years! The Jews place it more than two hundred years in the future! Surely not a good guide for telling us when Christ will come.

So if the Bible is silent on the length of human history, do we get the 6000 theory from the Early Church Fathers, Ussher's chronology, or Mrs. Ellen G. White? It is true that many of the early Church Fathers did speak of the 7000 year time frame.¹² It was "characteristic of the first three centuries,"¹³ and taught in subsequent centuries. In AD 221 Sextus Julius Africanus believed the earth would last only 6000 years, the Millennium to come in AD 500, or 254 years from his time.¹⁴ Contemporary Hippolytus of Rome, in AD 234, counted 5738 years back to creation, and hence the Millennium would begin in 262 years from his day.¹⁵ Lactantius (260-330), speaking of the last times, says, "I have already shown above, that when six thousand years shall be completed this change must take place, and that the last day of the extreme conclusion is now drawing

⁹Richard M Davidson, "Typology in Scripture: A study of hermeneutical *tupos* structures," Th.D. Dissertation, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1981), 7.

¹⁰For example, Lactantius gives this as the evidence for his 7000 year theory based on Psalm 90:4 and 2 Pet 3:8, *The Divine Institutes*, 7. 14, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (after as ANF), 7:211.

¹¹R. H. Brown, "Usshering in the Second Advent," *Perspective Digest*, 3/3, 1998, 48-52.

¹²For example, Irenaeus (c. 130-200) *Against Heresies*, 33.2, ANF, 1:562; Lactantius (260-330) *The Divine Institutes*, 7.14, ANF, 7:211; Barnabus, *Epistle of Barnabus*, 15. 1-9, Johnnes Questen, *Patrology*, (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1990, 5th printing), 1:89.

¹³Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 3:426. Oden is a specialist in the Church Fathers.

¹⁴Sextus Julius Africanus, *Chronicles, Patrology*, 2:138.

¹⁵Hippolytus of Rome, *The Chronicle, Patrology*, 2:176.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

near.”¹⁶ These last three Church Fathers concluded that nearly all of the 6000 years had passed by their time. By contrast, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) said, “there should follow on the completion of six thousand years, as of six days, a kind of seventh-day Sabbath in the succeeding thousand years.”¹⁷ He considered the Millennium to be from the first coming of Christ until the end of the world, and hence already in progress.¹⁸ These views about the Millennium are all based upon 1000 years for each creation day. The fact that they varied on when the 7th thousand years begins, though all drew their chronology from the Bible, demonstrates the uncertainty of the creation date.

Perhaps the earlier Adventist writers were influenced by Ussher’s chronology. Perhaps today, though, most Adventists looking to the return of Christ in 2000 are doing so on the basis of statements by Ellen White. In *The Great Controversy* she speaks of 6000 years. Concerning time just before Christ’s return she says, “For six thousand years the great controversy has been in progress.”¹⁹ Commenting on the controversy after the Millennium, she says, “For six thousand years he has wrought his will, filling the earth with woe and causing grief throughout the universe.”²⁰ What do we make of these statements?

First it should be noted that these statements do not specify the year 2000. They merely talk about 6000 years. They do not use any biblical evidence for their assertion. Was Ellen White using the popular Ussher’s time frame as she used accepted chronology for writing historical sequences in the rest of *The Great Controversy*? The fact that she had no date in mind is seen by her repeated warning against setting a date for the second advent.²¹ Also, soon after 1844 she said Christ could have come by then if the saints had been ready.²² There’s no mention that He really could not come because 6000 years of human history hadn’t yet transpired. He delayed because of human unreadiness, not because the year 2000 was still future. So He could have come nearly 150 years before the year 2000! Of course it could be argued that the 6000 year statements take all this delay into consideration. Yet even that does not bring us to the year 2000, for no one knows when the 6000 year period began.

The last biblical time prophecy ended in 1844 (Dan 8:14), and Ellen White says, “Our position has been one of waiting and watching, with no time-proclamation to intervene between the close of the prophetic periods in 1844 and the time of the Lord’s coming.”²³ Christ said of His coming, “The Son of Man

¹⁶For example, Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 7.25, ANF, 7:220; Augustine, *The City of God*, 20.7, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF)*, First Series, 2:426.

¹⁷Augustine, *The City of God*, 20:7, NPNF, First Series, 2:426.

¹⁸Augustine, *The City of God*, 20:8, NPNF, First Series, 2:428.

¹⁹Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 656.

²⁰Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 673.

²¹Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 32-42.

²²Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 695-696 (1883); *Desire of Ages*, 633-634 (1898).

²³Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 36.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matt 24:44; Luke 12:40). So there is always an urgent imminence that transcends any date.

What if time goes beyond 2000? Could there be a great disappointment for those who expect Christ to come that year? That is a real possibility, and such a disappointment could cause many to give up as they did in 1844. Calendar dates should have nothing to do with our belief in Christ’s return. Fulfillment of biblical prophecy has everything to do with His coming. That’s the only safe place to fix our gaze. We must be people of prophecy and not people of speculation. In my latest book *Christ is Coming!* is traced the many end-time movements that are rapidly fulfilling prophecy, like Spiritualism, the Charismatic movement, the Christian Coalition, the global power of the Papacy, the uniting of church and state, Dominionists, the New Age movement, the promotion of Sunday, and the uniting of churches. When one looks at all that is happening, the combined picture is overwhelming.²⁴ It shouts out loud and clear, “Christ is coming soon!” without any reference to the year 2000. Let’s look at one of these movements—the Ecumenical movement, or the uniting of churches. Revelation 13:3-4 says all the world will wonder after and worship the Catholic church. We will see that this is well underway. But first some historical background.

Ecumenism

“Ecumenism comes from the Greek word *oikoumene*, meaning ‘the entire inhabited earth’ (Acts 17:6-7; Matt 24:14; Heb 2:25). More precisely, it’s an attempt to unite all Christians.”²⁵

“Will it involve the whole world in the end?”

“Yes. The whole world (Rev 13:3-4)!”

“But that’s more than Christian churches. That means all religions and everyone, religious or not.”

“True. That’s the finale. We’ll just look at what’s happening among Christians that leads to that universal union.”

Christ prayed, “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (John 17:21). That is what motivates the churches. Proponents

²⁴The book presents end-time movements, end-time doctrines, and end-time events. The last 100 pages (of the 585 pages) is a journey through final events.

²⁵From an Evangelical perspective, see David F. Wright in *New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, 1988), 219-22. He gives perceptive critiques. T. Weber in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 340-342. From a Catholic perspective, see August B. Hasler, Victor Conzemius, and Karl Rahner in *Sacamentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner, (New York: Herder and Herder, npd), 2:191-202. Other sources include, R. Rouse and S.C. Neill, eds., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*; H. Fey, ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1948-1968*; R. M. Brown, *The Ecumenical Revolution*; N. Goodall, *The Ecumenical Movement and Ecumenical Progress: A Decade of Change in the Ecumenical Movement, 1961-1971*; J. D. Douglas, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*; B. Leeming, *The Vatican Council and Christian Unity*; J. D. Murch, *Cooperation Without Compromise: A History of the National Association of Evangelicals*.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

say Paul urged it: “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephes 4:4: 3-6). In his ministry Paul wrestled against forces seeking to divide the church. As T. B. Weber observed, “Throughout his ministry, the apostle worked to maintain the unity of the church in the face of theological deviation (Galatians and Colossians) and internal division (I and II Corinthians).”²⁶ As we’ll see, that’s a very different story from today’s Ecumenical Movement.

1. Historical Overview

Often ecumenism is studied in light of the schisms from the Roman Catholic Church in ancient times (Syrian and Egyptian), in 1054 (Eastern Orthodox) and from 1517 onwards (Protestants). It is assumed that the Catholic Church was established on Peter, by Christ, and the Church remains authentic through apostolic succession, so that ecumenical means a return to the one Church of Christ. However, one should keep in mind that the Catholic Church began in the 4th century AD, not in the time of the apostles. It is significant that the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), in its final report in 1982, said that “the New Testament contains no explicit record of a transmission of Peter’s leadership; nor is the transmission of apostolic authority in general very clear.”²⁷

Here is an overview of ecumenical endeavors in the light of departures from the Roman Catholic Church and the gathering for an ultimate return to her communion.

1. 325 The Nicene Creed affirmed belief in the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”
2. 1054 Eastern Orthodox church split from the Western Catholic church.
3. 1517- Protestant churches began to leave the Catholic church.
4. 1846 Evangelical Alliance formed from over 50 denominations in Britain and America.
5. 1908 Federal Council of Churches formed from 31 American Protestant churches.
6. 1910 International Missionary Council at Edinburgh resulted in forming the next three organizations.
7. 1921 International Missionary Council, Lake Mohonk, New York, tried to get Protestant missionary agencies to co-operate with each other.
8. 1925 Conference on Life and Work, Stockholm, sought unity among churches in solving social, political, and economic problems

²⁶T. Weber in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 341.

²⁷*The Final Report*, London, 1982, 83, as quoted by David F. Wright in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 219-220.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

9. 1927 Conference on Faith and Order, Lausanne, looked at the theological basis for unity.
10. 1948 World Council of Churches (WCC) formed with 147 denominations from 44 countries at Amsterdam.
11. 1954 WCC at Evanston, Illinois.
12. 1961 WCC at New Delhi, India.
13. 1964 (Nov 21), Vatican Council II. Decree on Religious Freedom and Decree on Ecumenism.
14. 1964 (Nov 21), Pope Paul VI's Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*).
15. 1965 (Dec 7), Pope Paul VI and Patriarch of Constantinople lifted the excommunication which Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Caerularius imposed on each other in 1054.
16. 1968 WCC at Uppsala, Sweden.
17. 1975 WCC at Nairobi, Kenya.
18. 1983 WCC at Vancouver, British Columbia.
19. 1995 (May 25), Pope John Paul II's Encyclical on Ecumenism (*Ut Unum Sint*).

This list gives a quick overview of ecumenical landmarks. There were attempts to win or force back the Eastern Orthodox church after its split from the Catholic Church. But there was no effort for unity of the churches for three centuries (17th - 19th). In fact, the Protestant churches continued to divide all the time, until today there are over 300 different denominations. Not until the twentieth century did ecumenism become a driving force among many churches. For much of the first half of the century, ecumenical efforts were promoted among Protestant churches. Concerning the 1910 Edinburgh Ecumenical Conference, August B. Hasler reports, "The Roman Catholic Church was not represented, but Orthodox Churches assured the organizers of their support."²⁸

In his book *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, Paul G. Schrottenboer notes four facts that are drawing the churches together today: 1. "The growth and spread of secularism and anti-Christian ideologies in an increasingly hostile world." 2. The use of Mass media by the Catholic Church and the gifts of Pope Paul II have "projected to the world a completely new image of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution that is very attractive." 3. The formidable growth of Protestant independent churches who "are not clearly conscious of the doctrinal heritage of the Reformation and consequently of the sharp doctrinal differences between Roman Catholics and evangelicals." 4. "The clear anti-Marxist stance of the present pope has provided Catholicism with a new ground for acceptance even among Protestant or evangelical persons in

²⁸August B. Hasler in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 2:193.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

North America and Europe This acceptance on ideological grounds often does not take into account the demands of evangelical truth.”²⁹

2. Vatican Council II (1963-1965)

It was not until the Pontificate of Pope John XXIII that the Catholic Church began to really take a leadership role in ecumenism On January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII called for an Ecumenical Council, with “separated communities” invited to attend as observers. He also established a Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, with scholar Austin Cardinal Bea at its head. Vatican II Council was a purposeful outreach to “separated brothers,” to those who had left her, such as the Eastern Orthodox and the original Reformation Protestants. As Walter M. Abbott, S.J., affirmed, “The Decree on Ecumenism marks the full entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical movement.”³⁰ Vatican II went further than Protestant ecumenism in reaching out to Jews and to all non-Christian religions. In Vatican II the Catholic Church launched a mission to bring the world into its fold. It’s vision was universal union and not limited to Christian unity.

Vatican II is the 21st Ecumenical Council. The first eight involved the church worldwide, but after the Eastern Orthodox schism (1054), the later Councils were western Councils The first six defended important Biblical truths, including Christ (against Arius, Nestorius, Eutyches, and Monothelism) and the Holy Spirit But unbiblical doctrines were also disseminated by the Councils, such as Mary exalted to *Theotokos*, “bearer of God” (431), veneration of images (787), compulsory clerical celibacy (1139), Transubstantiation in the Mass (1215), condemnation of Protestant’s biblical beliefs (1545-1563), and Papal infallibility (1869-1870).³¹

In Vatican II, the Catholic Church is described as “God’s only flock.”³² What about the separated brethren? The Decree states: “For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.”³³ These “separated Churches” “derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.”³⁴ Clearly ecumenism is no mere unity of churches, but a return to the Catholic Church. So Vatican II hopes that, “all Christians will be

²⁹Paul G. Schrottenboer, *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 18-19.

³⁰Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967), 339.

³¹For helpful insights, see Justo L. Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 1:413-414 and August B. Hasler, Victor Conzemius, Karl Rahner, Gotthold Hasenbuttl, Johannes Brosseder, Willehad Eckert, Eduard Stakemeir, and Angar Ahlbrecht in *Sacramentum Mundi*, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder), 1:191-212.

³²*The Documents of Vatican II*, 344 (6.1.2).

³³*Ibid*, 345 (6.1.3).

³⁴*Ibid*, 346 (6.1.3).

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time.”³⁵ “For it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained.”³⁶ In this way the church replaces Christ as the means of salvation. Union is church-centered, rather than Christ-centered.

Here yet again is Satan’s studied strategy to shove Christ from view and replace Him with something else.

So many people focus on the terms “separated brethren” and “separated Churches” and rejoice in this change in the Catholic Church. But this has to do with method, public relations, the means to reach these groups. Where there is no change, and this is decisive, is in Catholic doctrines which brought about the separations from the Catholic Church in the first place. These Catholic doctrines remain the same. The Documents call these “weighty differences,” and they include the work of redemption, the mystery and ministry of the Church, and the role of Mary in the work of salvation. Vatican II expects the separated brethren to come back and celebrate the Eucharist together in visible union, and yet the Eucharist is one of the key causes for division among them.³⁷ In fact, Vatican II states: “In His Church He instituted the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist by which the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about.”³⁸ Evidently all the change in doctrine must be made by the separated brethren. Not one Catholic doctrine is changed in Vatican II. This is seen throughout the history of Catholic theology. There is development of doctrines, or additions to doctrines, but the traditions handed down by the church remain unchanged. As Pope Paul VI said in his *De Ecclesia*, “nothing really changes in the traditional doctrine” (1964).

A uniting on points of common concern is underway, a uniting that seems to override doctrinal differences. Catholic theologian Karl Rahner says Christians “have more in common than separates them and possess a common task in regard to the ‘world.’”³⁹ Some of these common goals are social, having to do with family values and the sacredness of life (vs. abortion). The force at work against these values is a common enemy for all Christians. This common enemy drives the churches together, very much as citizens of all persuasions come together in wartime. In fact, “the study of theology has become, in the second half of the 20th century, increasingly an ecumenical activity, with co-operation and interaction between scholars of different traditions, so . . . that confessional dis-

³⁵Ibid, 348 (6.1.4).

³⁶Ibid, 346 (6.1.3).

³⁷Ibid, 362 (6.3.20).

³⁸Ibid, 343 (6.1.2).

³⁹Karl Rahner, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 2:200.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

tinctives have steadily diminished.” There has been a “quest for consensus rather than truth,” which includes “taking the churches’ standpoints rather than the Bible as its basis.”⁴⁰

“It is hard to imagine any of the major Protestant churches embarking on doctrinal definition in the present theological climate;” says Gerald L. Bray, because “all the emphasis is on unbridled pluralism and the tolerance of any kind of faith or unbelief.”⁴¹ Concerning Protestants and Catholic churches, Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg note, “Today the churches share a largely common, supradenominational interpretation of Scripture, and a common awareness of the historical contingency of theological formulations. And on this basis new convergencies have grown up in our understanding of the content of faith. In this process, one-sided emphases have been corrected, emphases which were partly the cause of the division but which partly grew up as its consequence, and in the wake of the controversial theology that developed out of the separation.”⁴²

Protestantism is willing to change its doctrines to meet the common enemy. Not so the Catholic church. Speaking about Evangelicals and Catholics, Michael Horton says, “If it is not Rome that has altered its position in favor of the gospel, then it must be the other partner that has moved from its earlier position.”⁴³ Scripture says “Babylon is fallen” (Rev 14:8; 18:1-4). James R. White asks, “What has led to the ‘de-protestantization’ of much of Protestantism today?” He answers, “The Reformers knew the key to resisting the onslaught of Rome in their day, but many today seem to have forgotten what it is: The Bible, The Bible alone, and all of the Bible. *Sola Scriptura* is just as important today as it was for a Luther or a Zwingli or a Calvin at the time of the Reformation.”⁴⁴

While Biblical truth is overlooked in the quest for unity on common points of doctrine, the Catholic Church is not seen for what it really is, and its eschatological mission remains uncomprehended. While Roman Catholicism remains true to its doctrinal beliefs, it remains committed to the view that it alone is the real Body of Christ on earth. As Ansgar Ahlbrecht noted, “The Catholic Church does not regard itself as a confession, that is, as one denomination among others, but as the one Church of Christ.”⁴⁵

Consider this “de-protestantization.” Protestant and Anglican Churches sought union beyond truth, “suggesting that the question of truth did not matter.” Hence, “the slogan used in those days was doctrine divides while service

⁴⁰David F. Wright, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 219-220.

⁴¹Gerald L. Bray, *Creed, Councils and Christ*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 32.

⁴²Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds, trans. Margaret Kohl, *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 14.

⁴³Michael Horton, Foreword to R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 12.

⁴⁴James R. White, *Answers to Catholic Claims: A Discussion of Biblical Authority*, “ (Southbridge, MA: Crowne, 1990), iv.

⁴⁵Ansgar Ahlbrecht, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 1:211.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

unites.”⁴⁶ Today, ecumenism still has its common points of agreement high on the agenda, letting distinct doctrines slip from view (in non-Catholic churches), whereas the Catholic Church remains insistent on her unique doctrines. Vatican II states, “Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false conciliatory approach which harms the purity of Catholic doctrine and obscures its assured genuine meaning.”⁴⁷

Timothy Weber notes two kinds of ecumenism. 1. The World Congress on Evangelism (Berlin, 1966; Lausanne, 1974) declared that unity “is based on truth (adherence to the historic gospel) This was the ‘cooperative model’ of unity, where conservative evangelicals ‘sought to restore evangelism to primary place in the church’s mission in the hope that more visible kinds of unity would follow.’” 2. “The federation model of the World Council of Churches tended to downplay the necessity of doctrinal agreement and evangelism while stressing concerted social and political action in Christ’s name.”⁴⁸

“Today, for good or bad, the lines that separate evangelicals and Roman Catholics are fading,” says Davis Duggins. “More and more people from both sides are working together on common social causes, and many of them are describing their spiritual lives in similar language. Some evangelical leaders welcome the changing landscape. ‘Its high time that all of us who are Christians come together regardless of the difference of our confessions and our traditions and make common cause to bring Christian values to bear in our society.’”⁴⁹ Johannes Brosseder speaks of an ecumenical theology. He calls it “a theology of fellowship, a theology which has discovered that what is common is proportionally much greater than the differences and divergences. . .”⁵⁰ Charles Colson writes in the forward of Keith Fournier’s book, ‘When the barbarians are scaling the walls, there is no time for petty quarreling in the camp.’⁵¹

But doctrinal differences do matter. And they are not minor compared to points of common agreement. The differences call in question essentials of the gospel. Praying to Mary as co-Redeemer, for example, is not a peripheral difference. It radically calls in question the sole mediatorship of the one Redeemer, Jesus Christ. As J. Daryl Charles put it, “The profound theological differences, for example, that separate evangelicals and Catholics cannot be ignored or circumvented, nor can they be ‘negotiated.’”⁵² In commenting on the slogan “Doc-

⁴⁶Walter M. Abbott, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Introduction to the Decree on Ecumenism, 339.

⁴⁷*The Documents of Vatican II*, 354 (6.2.11).

⁴⁸Timothy Weber, in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 342.

⁴⁹Davis Duggins, “Evangelicals and Catholics: Across the Divide: How Can We Relate To One Another In This Secular Age,” *Moody Monthly*, Nov 1993, 12.

⁵⁰Johannes Brosseder, in *Sacramentum Mundi*, 1:207.

⁵¹Charles Colson, in Keith A. Fournier, *Evangelical Catholics*, (Nashville TN: Nelson, 1990), vi.

⁵²J. Daryl Charles, “Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue: Basis, Boundaries, Benefits,” *Pro Ecclesia*, 3/ 3 (1994), 293.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

trine divides, experience unites,” John M. Frame says, “we cannot brush doctrine aside as a mere impediment to unity, as many users of that slogan would like to do. A doctrinally indifferent church is a church that does not care about the gospel message, for the gospel is precisely a doctrine, a teaching, a narrative of what God has done for our salvation.”⁵³

In *Evangelical Renewal in the Mainline Churches*, eight scholars present what is going on in various major denominations. James Heidinger II notes, “doctrinal compromise and unbelief” is “the heart of United Methodism’s tragic decline.”⁵⁴ Waldo J. Werning comments, “The proper basis of such Lutheran fellowship lies in agreement in doctrine, not in human ceremonies, and in the recognition that Christian practice is the application of doctrine to life.”⁵⁵ Homer Tricules says, “Informed evangelicals reject the claim that doctrine divides while evangelism unites . . . American Baptist laypeople need to be grounded in the essentials of sound doctrine.”⁵⁶

Genuine unity can only come from the whole truth. It is only as churches accept all that Scripture has to say that the prayer of Christ for unity can be achieved. Any uniting on common points of doctrine, while ignoring distinct doctrines, is an insufficient basis for union. George Carey speaks of a “common core of truths,” which include six beliefs: that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior; that God is Triune; that faith in Jesus and baptism into him through the Trinitarian confession constitute the new birth and the initiatory rite into the church; that through the Holy Spirit the Christian church is constituted and that it takes all ministries and gifts in the body to express the fullness of the catholic faith; that our faith is divinely revealed in Scripture and expressed in the ancient creeds of the church; and that Jesus Christ will come again in glory as Lord, Judge, and Savior. He goes on to suggest that Protestants can accept Catholic emphasis on Mary as long as it does not obscure Christ.⁵⁷

⁵³John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion: Denominations and the One Body of Christ*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 84.

⁵⁴Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Evangelical Renewal In the Mainline Churches*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1987), 24.

⁵⁵Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Evangelical Renewal*, 76.

⁵⁶Ronald H. Nash, ed., *Evangelical Renewal*, 85.

⁵⁷George Carey, *A Tale of Two Cities: Can Protestants and Catholics Get Together?*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 161-162. In speaking of five common theological tenets that unite evangelicals, John Warwick Montgomery also takes a minimalist approach to unity which fails to take into consideration doctrinal distinctives that are biblical. His essentials are: conviction that the Bible alone is God’s objective inerrant revelation to mankind; subscription to the Ecumenical confessions as expressing the Trinitarian heart of biblical religion; belief that the Reformation confessions adequately convey the soteriological essence of the scriptural message, namely, salvation by grace alone through faith in the atoning death and resurrection of the God-man Jesus Christ; stress upon personal, dynamic, living commitment to Christ and the resultant prophetic witness for Him to the unbelieving world; and a strong eschatological perspective, *Ecumenicity, Evangelicals, and Rome*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1969), 17

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

Here non-Biblical dogmas are added to Biblical truths. This not only introduces human traditions as equal to divine revelation, but these very traditions obscure the uniqueness of Christ. Any addition to God's divine revelation is a human work that needs to be called in question by divine revelation, and not admired. The six beliefs cited by George Carey represent a minimalist basis for union, but these very beliefs are called in question by major doctrines in the Catholic church, such as human tradition as equal to divine revelation, the function of Mary in redemption, and human works needing to be added to the gift of salvation. Biblical truths are never served by human error. Human works can never add to Christ's gift of salvation.

It is an immense paradox that the Reformers, who stood so solidly for truth against error, through their heirs are seeking union with error at the expense of truth. At the same time, it is Roman Catholicism that remains staunchly opposed to any change of its doctrines, while allowing for superficial window dressing maneuvers to appear more inviting for the return of "separated brethren." What would Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli think? What would the martyrs think? All that they stood and fought for could be lost in a union on common points of doctrine.

No effort to unite churches will see Roman Catholicism losing its uniqueness or dominance. As Richard John Neuhaus noted, "Even when, please God, all the churches are in full communion in the one Church Catholic, there will likely be a Roman Catholic Church. By virtue of its size, tradition, structure, charisms, and energies, the Roman Catholic Church will have a singular part in shaping the world-historical future of Christianity."⁵⁸

It is from within Christendom that the final attack against Christ will come. A false Christianity will reject the true gospel. This false Christianity will have, by its very nature, joined the rest of the world; or as Prophecy puts it, "The whole world was astonished and followed the beast . . . they also worshiped the beast" (Rev 13:1-4). H. B. Swete, in his *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, perceptively states, "Those who take note of the tendencies of modern civilization will not find it impossible to conceive that a time may come when throughout Christendom the spirit of Antichrist will, with the support of the state, make a final stand against a Christianity which is loyal to the person and teaching of Jesus."⁵⁹

3. Controversial Ecumenical Document (March 29, 1994)

⁵⁸Richard John Neuhaus, *The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Postmodern World*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 287.

⁵⁹H. B. Swete, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 257, Quoted by Wilbur M. Smith in "Armageddon," *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 64.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

On March 29, 1994, thirteen persons,⁶⁰ Catholic and Evangelicals, issued a Document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the 3rd Millennium” (*ECT*). It was endorsed by twenty-five well known Catholic and Evangelical leaders.⁶¹ The document caused a furor in Catholic and Evangelical circles. Dave Hunt said, “The document, in effect, overturned the Reformation and will unquestionably have far reaching repercussions throughout the Christian world for years to come.”⁶²

One of the key differences between Catholic and Evangelical theology has to do with justification by faith alone through Christ alone. Martin Luther discovered in Romans that, “The just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17). This truth became the heart of the Reformation. It rejected the Catholic notion that Justification is through faith plus works. Any human works detract from the one saving work of Jesus Christ. “The doctrine of Justification,” wrote John Calvin, “is the principal ground on which religion must be supported.”⁶³

R. C. Sproul’s book, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, calls in question the *ECT* document. He rightly points out that justification by faith is understood differently by Catholics and Evangelicals. Even the Council of Trent taught justification by faith. But it was not by faith *alone*. That was the key issue of the Reformation. “The word *alone* was a solecism on which the entire Reformation doctrine of justification was erected. The absence of the word *alone* from *ECT*’s joint affirmation is most distressing.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰Charles Colson (Prison Fellowship), Juan Diaz-Villar, S.J. (Catholic Hispanic Ministries), Avery Dulles, S.J. (Fordham University), Bishop Francis George (Diocese of Yakima, Washington), Kent Hill (Eastern Nazarene College), Jesse Miranda (Assemblies of God), Msgr. William Murphy (Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Boston), Richard John Neuhaus (Institute on Religion and Public Life), Brian O’Connell (World Evangelical Fellowship), Herbert Schlossberg, Archbishop Francis Stafford (Archdiocese of Denver), George Weigel (Ethics and Public Policy Center), and John White (Geneva College and the National Association of Evangelicals).

⁶¹William Abraham (Perkins School of Theology), Elizabeth Achtemeier (Union Theological Seminary—Virginia), William Bently Ball (Harrisburg Pennsylvania), Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ), Robert Destro (Catholic University of America), Augustine DiNoia, O.P. (Dominican House of Studies), Joseph Fitzpatrick, S.J. (Fordham University), Keith Fournier (American Center for Law and Justice), Bishop William Frey (Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry), Mary Ann Glendon (Harvard Law School), Os. Guinness (Trinity Forum), Nathan Hatch (University of Notre Dame), James Hitchcock (St. Louis University), Peter Kreeft (Boston College), Matthew Lamb (Boston College), Ralph Martin (Renewal Ministries), Richard Mouw (Fuller Theological Seminary), Mark Noll (Wheaton College), Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute), Cardinal John Joseph O’Connor (Archdiocese of New York), Thomas Oden (Drew University), J.I. Packer (Regent College, British Columbia), Pat Robertson (Regent College), John Rodgers (Trinity Episcopal School of Ministry) and Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J. (Archdiocese of San Francisco).

⁶²Dave Hunt, *A Woman Rides the Beast*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1994), 5.

⁶³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (London: James Clarke, 1962), 2:37 (3.11.1).

⁶⁴R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 36.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

The key word “alone” is missing throughout Catholic thinking. Evangelicals believe the gospel is justification through faith *alone* by Christ *alone* found in Scripture *alone*. By contrast Catholics see faith as a human work, so there is *no faith alone, Christ alone, nor Scripture alone*. Human penance and purgatory are added to justification and to Christ’s work by Roman Catholicism just as the tradition of the Magisterium is added to Scripture. It is the human additions to the work of Christ in salvation and revelation that deny the free gift of the gospel. It is this “human addition” which distinguishes Roman Catholicism from authentic evangelicals.

For that reason, I believe the trend toward tolerance and cooperation is a destructive one because it blurs the distinction between biblical truth and a system of false teaching.”⁶⁵

4. The Council of Trent (1545-1563)

We need to look at this *ECT* document in the light of the Council of Trent. As one reads through the Canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, it is obvious that reform of the church is present, but reform of doctrine is absent. In fact, every unique doctrine of the Reformation is denied with anathemas.⁶⁶ Yet reform based upon error is only superficial. Real reform must be based upon Biblical truth.

The Council of Trent rejected the Reformer’s view on justification. Consider the following six canons:

Can. 4 If anyone says that man’s free will moved and aroused by God, by assenting to God’s call and action, in no way cooperates toward disposing and preparing itself to obtain the grace of justification, that it cannot refuse its assent if it wishes, but that, as something inanimate, it does nothing whatever and is merely passive, let him be anathema.

Can. 9 If anyone shall say that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification, and that it is not in any way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will—let him be anathema.

Can. 11 If anyone shall say that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the righteousness of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity that is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God—let him be anathema.

Can. 12 If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or

⁶⁵John MacArthur, quoted by Davis Duggins, *Moody Monthly*, Nov. 1993, 15.

⁶⁶*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. H. J. Schroeder, O.P., (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1978).

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

that it is this confidence alone which justifies us—let him be anathema.

Can. 24 If anyone shall say that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of increase—let him be anathema.

Can. 32 If anyone says that the good works of the one justified are in such manner the gifts of God, that they are not also the good merits of him justified; or that the one justified by the good works that he performs by the grace of God and the merit of Jesus Christ, whose living member he is, does not truly merit an increase of grace, eternal life, and in case he dies in grace, the attainment of eternal life itself and also an increase of glory, let him be anathema.⁶⁷

Here human works hide Christ's sole work for human salvation. Any addition to the gospel is not the gospel. Paul says, "Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Gal 3:11, cf. 2:16) Christians in Galatia accepted a doctrine of justification plus human works, just as Catholic theology does Paul called this "a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all" (Gal 1:6-7). Catholic theology has many human works, such as penance, intercession of saints, the role of Mary, and purgatory, which deflect attention from Christ's saving work.

Christ plus anything for human salvation negates the gift, negates grace, and negates justification. So many see the Catholic "gospel" as identical to the evangelical gospel, but this is impossible. Although it is good for Christians to come together to unite against humanism in its many forms (abortion, declining moral values, pro family issues), they need to realize that Christ plus anything human is also humanism. Wherever Christ is linked to human works, it's the human works that take center stage and become the driving force in the life. Humanism to earn salvation is no better than humanism in needless abortions. Both deny the proper place to Christ in human affairs.

This holds true of the Church as a corporate body. The Catholic church claims to be the Body of Christ, but in fact it takes the place of Christ. Salvation is based upon union with the Church. It is the sacraments of the Church that save. It is the Church that interprets Scripture, which means interpreting the mission of Christ. It is the Church that administers penance, last rights, and purgatory. Catholic theology is Church-centered rather than Christ-centered, even though it claims that the Church is merely the channel through which Christ works. Catholic ecclesiology is Christ plus the Church. As J. Daryl Charles

⁶⁷*The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, 42-46. There are 33 Canons opposed to the Reformation doctrine of Justification by Faith. The first four of these may seem correct to the Arminian. In the light of the last two, however, the true intent of the first four becomes clear—and unacceptable.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

rightly observed, “Genuine Christian unity will reflect a shift from a church-centered to Christ-centered focus.”⁶⁸

Trent emphasizes the place of human works in justification, and is thus contrary to the Reformers. It is important to note that neither Vatican Council I nor Vatican Council II changed the positions taken at Trent. It is therefore still the official position of the Catholic Church. Even in the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* the human element of Trent is still present. Thus justification “is granted us through Baptism” (2020). Sanctifying grace “is infused by the Holy Spirit” (2023). Merit is given “to man’s collaboration” (2025), for “Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods” (2027). And, “Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification” (1446).⁶⁹

These are alleged human contributions to salvation. It is these that detract from the only Savior Jesus Christ. It is this that makes Catholic teaching opposed to the teaching of Scripture, even though it uses the words, “justification by faith.” Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie note that the *ECT* “document overlooks the crucial disagreements concerning the nature and extent of justification: grace alone, through faith alone, based on Christ alone. Besides this, “Questions concerning the idolatrous implications surrounding the worship of the consecrated host are not addressed. Evangelical concern over inappropriate attention involved in the veneration of saints, images, and especially Mary is not addressed.”⁷⁰ Geisler and MacKenzie conclude, “in the eyes of historical Protestantism, it is a false gospel.”⁷¹

Clothing the true gospel with garments of humanism robs the true gospel of its good news. It is not good news that penance, human works for merit, and purgatory on the one hand, and saints and Mary interceding on the other hand, need to be added to the free gift in Jesus Christ. The gospel is either a free gift or it is not. It cannot be both. No matter how much of gospel language is used on the part of Catholic theology, if it is married to human works, the gospel gift is no longer intact. Anything that takes the place of Christ, or makes Him secondary, or ignores His free gift of justification, is against Christ, or anti Christ.

For a number of years I taught a class on Vatican II to graduate Seminary students. In reading carefully through the sixteen Documents, it became clear that changes were superficial compared to the absence of any doctrinal change. For example, it addressed “separated brethren,” but still in the context that the

⁶⁸J. Daryl Charles, “Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue: Basis, Boundaries, Benefits,” *Pro Ecclesia*. 3/2 (1994), 305. Charles is optimistic that unity can be achieved. He looks at matters that seem to be believed by Catholics and non-Catholics, but does not look at the differences that mitigate against union.

⁶⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994), 363, 489-490.

⁷⁰Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, 501.

⁷¹*Ibid*, 502.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Catholic Church is the only Body of Christ; and it allowed the Mass to be said in the vernacular, but the Mass is still the repetition of the sacrifice of Christ (even though unbloody) which denies the uniqueness of Calvary. Vatican II continued the double focus of Trent, by presenting change without any change of doctrine.

5. Pope John Paul II (May 25, 1995)

On May 25, 1995, Pope John Paul II released a 105 page Encyclical letter titled *Ut Unum Sint*, “that they may all be one”—words from Christ’s prayer (John 17:21). The Pope said, “In our ecumenical age, marked by the Second Vatican Council, the mission of the Bishop of Rome is particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ’s disciples.” This is true “especially as the Year 2000 approaches, a year which Christians will celebrate as a sacred Jubilee,” commemorating the incarnation.⁷²

Concurring with Pope John XXIII, Pope John Paul II says, “What unites us is much greater than what divides us.”⁷³ In other words, seek unity on what the churches have in common. The Pope assures, “we are on the way toward full unity,” for, “Truly the Lord has taken us by the hand and is guiding us.”⁷⁴ The Pope notes, “With increasing frequency Christians are working together to defend human dignity, to promote peace, to apply the Gospel to social life, to bring the Christian spirit to the world of science and of the arts. They find themselves ever more united in striving to meet the sufferings and the needs of our time: hunger, natural disasters and social injustice.” In fact, “Christians are becoming ever more united in their rejection of violence, every kind of violence, from wars to social injustice.”⁷⁵

The Pope is right in stating the basis of unity is truth. He said, “Love for the truth is the deepest dimension of any authentic quest for full communion between Christians . . . Full communion of course will have to come about through the acceptance of the whole truth into which the Holy Spirit guides Christ’s disciples.”⁷⁶ The Spirit of Truth has manifested that truth in Scripture alone. But the Pope believes the Spirit has also worked through “the great Tradition” and the “Church’s living Magisterium.”⁷⁷

The Pope asks, “how much further we must travel until that blessed day when full unity in faith will be attained and we can celebrate together in peace the Holy Eucharist of the Lord.” He notes that “The obligation to respect the truth is absolute,” and then enumerates those absolute truths as areas for fuller study. “1) the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of

⁷²Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, (Boston, MA: Pauline, 1995), 11-15.

⁷³Ibid, 32.

⁷⁴Ibid, 35, 37.

⁷⁵Ibid, 83-85.

⁷⁶Ibid, 46.

⁷⁷Ibid, 48.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

the Word of God; 2) the Eucharist, as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, an offering of praise to the Father, the sacrificial memorial and Real Presence of Christ and the sanctifying outpouring of the Holy Spirit; 3) Ordination, as a Sacrament, to the threefold ministry of the episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate; 4) the Magisterium of the Church, entrusted to the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him, understood as a responsibility and an authority exercised in the name of Christ for teaching and safeguarding the faith; 5) the Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ's disciples and for all humanity."⁷⁸ These non-Biblical doctrines remain unchanged in Catholic theology.

The Pope turns to the common martyrology held by the churches. He states that "the communion between our Communities, even if still incomplete, is truly and solidly grounded in the full communion of the saints—those who, at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory. These saints come from all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation."⁷⁹ To ground union on the "full communion of the saints" is not Biblical. The fact of Mary, saints, and martyrs living in heaven in communion today is not taught in Scripture. Even if it was in Scripture, communion in heaven cannot be the basis of communion on earth. Biblical truth is the product of the "Spirit of Truth," so truth is the only basis of authentic unity under the Spirit of Truth. Jesus spoke of His true successor—the Holy Spirit, and not Peter—and said, "the Spirit of truth" "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). "He will bring glory to me" (John 16:14).

In his final exhortation, the Pope refers to his Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, sent on November 10, 1994. He said, "In my recent Letter to the Bishops, clergy and faithful of the Catholic Church indicating the path to be followed toward the celebration of the *Great Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000* I wrote that 'the best preparation for the new millennium can only be expressed in a renewed commitment to apply, as faithfully as possible, the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and of the whole Church.' The Second Vatican Council is the great beginning—the Advent as it were—of the journey leading us to the threshold of the Third Millennium. Given the importance which the Council attributed to the work of rebuilding Christian unity, and in this our age of grace for ecumenism, I thought it necessary to reaffirm the fundamental convictions which the Council impressed upon the consciousness of the Catholic Church, recalling them in the light of the progress subsequently made toward the full communion of all the baptized. There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit is active in this endeavor and that he is leading the Church to the full realization of the Father's plan, in conformity with the will of Christ."⁸⁰

⁷⁸Ibid, 87-89.

⁷⁹Ibid, 93.

⁸⁰Ibid, 107.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

So the Pope gives credit to the Holy Spirit for leading in the reaffirmation of non-Biblical Catholic doctrines at Vatican II, and considers that faithfulness to the teachings of Vatican II will lead to true union. Jesus in His prayer for union pled to the Father, “that they be one as we are one” (John 17:22). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united in truth. In this same prayer for unity among His disciples, Jesus asked, “Sanctify them by the truth: your word is truth” (John 17:17). There is no true unity among Christians apart from a unity over Biblical truth. Non-Biblical doctrines, common social concerns, the fact of martyrs—none of these are the right basis for unity

“The Gift of Salvation,” A Second Controversial Ecumenical Document, October 1997

In an attempt to answer some of the questions raised by the ECT document and to state the meaning of salvation, a coalition of individual Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants⁸¹ drafted a document titled, “The Gift of Salvation,” the first week of October, 1997. An Alliance of ten Confessing Evangelicals responded with a critique of the document on November 15, 1998.⁸²

They first compared the new document with the ECT document, saying, “On the surface, this new statement seems greatly improved, and in some respects it is. However, we are profoundly distressed by its assertions and omissions, which leave it seriously flawed. We understand it to be expressed in terms that are consistent with historic Roman Catholic theology, while failing adequately to express the essential Protestant understanding of the gospel, and we plead with our fellow evangelicals not to be misled by this new initiative but instead to hold firm to the doctrine of ‘justification by grace alone because of Christ alone through faith alone,’ which is the biblical gospel.”⁸³

The major difference between the Catholic and Protestant understandings of justification by faith through Christ is the place where righteousness exists. For Protestants, Christ is their righteousness, and so righteousness is imputed to the believer, whereas for Catholics Christ’s righteousness is infused within the believer, and the believer needs to perform works of penance, receive the prayers of Mary and saints, and go to purgatory before salvation is gained. In summary, salvation is either received (Protestants) or achieved (Catholics). It is either a

⁸¹Many of the same persons who drafted the ECT document crafted “The Gift of Salvation” document.

⁸²The ten framers of the critique of “The Gift of Salvation” document are: John H. Armstrong (Reformation and Revival Ministries), Alistair Begg (Parkside Church, Cleveland), James M. Boice (Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia), W. Robert Godfrey (Westminster Theological Seminary, California), John D. Hannah (Dallas Theological Seminary), Michael S. Horton (Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals), Rosemary Jensen (Bible Study Fellowship), J. A. O. Preus III (Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis), R. C. Sproul (Ligonier Ministries), and Gene E. Veith (Concordia University, Wisconsin).

⁸³“An Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals,” document is on the world wide web at [http://www.alliance.org/pub/articles/Appeal to Evangelicals.html](http://www.alliance.org/pub/articles/Appeal%20to%20Evangelicals.html) 1.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

gift (Protestants) or earned (Catholics). It is either good news (Protestants) or bad news (Catholics). Both cannot be the gospel.

In summing up their criticism of the document, the ten evangelicals wrote, "Sadly the publication of 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' and now 'The Gift of Salvation' has provoked a severe controversy within the ranks of professing Evangelicals. It has divided Evangelicals from Evangelicals. To the degree it has done this, it has disrupted much of the unity once enjoyed by Evangelicals and has revealed that the unity we thought we had was not as deep as we believed." Further Unity apart from the Gospel is not biblical unity. In these troubled times we dare not compromise the Gospel in the slightest degree . . . We are concerned for the task of evangelism, being convinced that without the evangel there is no authentic evangelism. We agree with the Reformers that justification by faith alone is the article by which the church stands or falls and is indeed the article by which we stand or fall. We stand together on these truths. We call all true Evangelicals to stand with us."⁸⁴

The drive to union based on unbiblical premises is breaking up union based upon truth. We salute the ten evangelicals who stand true to biblical truth. These are God's people in other churches who will come out of Babylon and stand with God's remnant in the end-time (Rev 18:1-4), when all the world will wonder after the Catholic church (Rev 13:3-4).

7. The Coming Great Church

In his book *Ecumenism and the Evangelical*, Jacob Marcellus Kik has a chapter entitled, "The Coming Great Church." Along with other post-millennialists, who believe that Christ will come after the millennium of peace on earth, he believes that the churches will unite as one before the second advent. He finds the first hint of this in Genesis 3:15, where God said to the serpent, Satan, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike your heel." He rightly sees Christ as the One who brings this defeat of Satan. He wrongly believes this is worked out in history so that the Millennium comes before the second advent.

It is pertinent to our discussion to note that Roman Catholics interpret Genesis 3:15 differently. They follow the Latin Vulgate, which says, "she" will crush your head, rather than "he" The word "she" refers to Mary, they believe, in place of the "he," which refers to Christ. In Catholic theology it seems that Mary has become the great unifier of churches in the end-time. The unprecedented number of alleged apparitions of Mary today may well contribute to the uniting of churches

In his 1987 (Marian year) encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, Pope John Paul II presented Mary as the one who can promote unity among Christian churches. He

⁸⁴Ibid, 6.

JOURNAL OF THE ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

said, “Why should we not all together look to her as *our common Mother*, who prays for the unity of God’s family and who ‘precedes’ us all at the head of the long line of witnesses of faith in the one Lord, the Son of God, who was conceived in her virginal womb by the power of the Holy Spirit?”⁸⁵

Imagine the push for unity when Satan (2 Cor 11:14) comes as Christ⁸⁶ and calls all to follow him in keeping Sunday! This will be the final non-Biblical doctrine that unites the churches, a doctrine invented by Catholicism. Then those who follow Christ and keep His Sabbath will be found outside these churches. The important thing to focus on is this—the ecumenical movement is another example of Satan’s working to hide Christ and His truth. It is an important part of final events on planet earth.⁸⁷

Years ago Ellen G. White was shown the end-time. These insights are as up-to-date as the sources referred to in this chapter. She wrote that among Protestants, “the opinion is gaining ground that, after all, we do not differ so widely upon vital points as has been supposed, and that a little concession on our part will bring us into a better understanding with Rome.”⁸⁸ But the fact is, “When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result.”⁸⁹ Then, “there will be a national apostasy which will end in national ruin.”⁹⁰ In fact, “Every soul that is not fully surrendered to God . . . will form an alliance with Satan against heaven, and join in battle against the ruler of the universe.”⁹¹ How incredibly sad! No one will stand alone in the end-time. The world will be united with the Catholic church and Satan. The remnant will be united with Christ. The only protection from the false alliance is union with Christ and His truth.

The end-game is all the world wondering after and worshipping Catholicism and the devil who works through her (Rev 13:1-4). America takes the lead in this final union (Rev 13:11-16). That’s the universal destiny of the Ecumenical Movement. What should we know as we move towards the year 2000? We should know Christ is coming again soon, not because of the date 2000 but because of fulfilling prophecy, and the ecumenical movement is one of many prophecies being fulfilled with rapid pace.

⁸⁵Pope John Paul II, *The Encyclicals of John Paul II, (Redemptoris Mater)*, ed. J. Michael Miller, C.S.B., (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1996), 386.

⁸⁶Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 624-625.

⁸⁷Others given in *Christ is Coming!*

⁸⁸Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 563.

⁸⁹Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 445.

⁹⁰Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, 7:976.

⁹¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, 465.

GULLEY: WILL CHRIST RETURN IN THE YEAR 2000?

*Norman R. Gulley earned his Ph.D. degree in Systematic Theology from the University of Edinburgh, (Scotland) and is Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern Adventist University, where he has taught since 1978. He has been a pastor and missionary. He has served as Chair of the Religion Department at Madison College and of the Theology Department at Japan Missionary College. He was also founding Dean of the Graduate Seminary in the Philippines. He has written extensively for leading SDA journals, authored four Sabbath School quarterlies, and written five books—most recently, *Christ Our Refuge* (Pacific Press, 1996) and *Christ is Coming!* (Review and Herald, 1998). He is currently working on a three volume systematic theology. A charter member and founder of ATS who has been an officer ever since, Gulley has been president of the society, and is currently vice president for global outreach. He is taking ATS Bible Seminar teams to different parts of the world, and he also conducts last day events seminars throughout the world and speaks at campmeetings and ministerial worker's meetings. ngulley@southern.edu*