

ESCHATOLOGY

The meeting of the Universal Christian Council at Evanston, Illinois, in the fall of 1954 helped to make the word *eschatology* somewhat familiar to newspaper readers. It has long been a familiar word in theological circles, meaning the study of the various aspects of the ideas connected with the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, and the judgment of all humanity dead and alive. It comes from the Greek word *eschatos*, meaning “the last” or “the extreme” of anything—the end of a stick or the end of a road. Thus the consideration of any or all of the subjects connected with the end of the present order of the world is included in the word.

The parable of the wheat and the tares, as recorded in Matthew 13, has made this general subject familiar to students of the Bible. In explaining the parable Jesus said, “The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares

are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels." Matthew 13: 38, 39. He further explained that both the wheat and the tares, the righteous and the wicked, would be allowed to "grow together until the harvest." (Verse 30.) When we remember that "the harvest is the end of the world," it is plain that there cannot be any period before the coming of Christ for a worldwide peaceful, sinless condition, in which all men will be converted and turn to God. The Master went on to say, "In the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." Verse 30.

The theory of world progress toward something like moral and social perfection is directly contrary to the teaching of the Bible. Nothing resembling it is to be found in the Holy Scriptures. The idea is based entirely on wishful thinking and on a superficial view of the history of the past century or two, ignoring or twisting the history of the preceding thousands of years.

The elaborate scholarly works of Amold Joseph Toynbee ought not to have been necessary to teach the world the falsity of this theory of world progress. Toynbee found it hard to decide how many successive cycles there have been of what we term civilization, alternating with the periods of decay and barbarism, the whole comprising the long total of the play and counterplay of the unseen forces of good and evil between Jesus and His relentless adversary.

Every high school student reads about the Renaissance that preceded and prepared the way for the Reformation. This was a revival of the literature and the civilization of the Classical period of Rome and Greece. But the Graeco-Roman civilization was itself a renaissance. The preceding age of Crete, a thousand years before, had been superior in many of the arts and crafts to the days of Socrates and Augustus. And still older than the golden age of Crete was, of course, the age of the Pyramid builders of Akkad and Ur.

The sophisticated, artificial life of every successive civilization produces conditions that make it extremely difficult for the Creator to gain the attention and obedience of the individual soul. "The true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" suffers too much chromatic aberration from the prejudices and false ideals generated by traditional habits and customs. Thus, when the Manager of the universe in His wisdom sees that the opponents of His people and His truth are in danger of getting out of hand, He removes His protecting hand, and the great destroyer is permitted to wipe out that particular form of civilization. Then He can initiate new conditions of life, under which, after a few more centuries, there may be promise of better results.

The scientific discoveries and mechanical inventions of the past two centuries have brought about speedy travel and almost instantaneous communication throughout the world. This has resulted in our realizing that the human race is now one big community—albeit a restless, quarrelsome community.

But this global condition is a striking fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel, given twenty-five centuries ago. Daniel was told that some of the important parts of his vision would not be understood for a long time, but would be closed up and sealed till the time of the end. But when this time lock is opened, he was informed, “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Daniel 12: 4.) We now see the fulfillment of this prediction.

The reason for this plan of divine Providence to make the world one community in the time of the end becomes clear with a little careful consideration. Time was running short. Because the end of the ages was coming on, plans would need to be laid for closing out all the affairs of human history in a reasonable, dignified way, with a timely warning and a merciful admonition; for “surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.” (Amos 3:7, R.S.V.)

In accord with this principle, Jesus declared, “And this gospel of the [coming] kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Matthew 24:14.

Then in the fourteenth chapter of the Revelation, just before the account of the harvest, or the end of the world, as given in the last half of this fourteenth chapter, we find a unified group of three divine messages which are going to be proclaimed to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. The first is a form of the gospel especially adapted to the intellectual climate of our times with its evolutionistic philosophy, declaring that the hour of God’s

judgment is come, asking our generation of pantheistic evolutionists to worship the personal Creator, and warning against those who give worship to the opposing powers of earth who will be arrayed against God and the people of God in these critical times. These faithful people of God are described as “they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” (Revelation 14:6-12.)

As we look around to see if there is anything going on in our modern world corresponding to these divine messages warning about the end of the world, we see the people called Seventh-day Adventists, who for over a hundred years have been claiming that they are giving these very messages. They constantly use these verses of the fourteenth chapter of Revelation as their slogan, the keynote of all that they believe and teach. And they have succeeded in planting their sanitariums, schools, publishing houses, and mission stations in just about every part of the inhabited globe. They are in dead earnest. Their zeal and sacrificial giving are a constant challenge to others. If they are not fulfilling this divine prophecy, then who is?

We definitely seem to be living in the very end of the age. Just such a divine warning is now due. While nobody else pretends to be doing this sort of work, the Adventists claim to be doing it. Why should not every intelligent person take the time to at least examine their message and their work to see if they are divinely sent?

The rise and fall of many successive civilizations have already been mentioned. Many great cities, like

Thebes, Nineveh, and Babylon; many mighty nations, like the Hittites, the Assyrians, and old imperial Rome, have had their day, have reached the end of their allotted probation, and have been extinguished by the God of heaven, whom their people have forgotten or continued to despise.

Then why may not just such a doom overtake the world? Why does the Creator, the patient, kindly Creator, not become tired of the constant tendency to degenerate, the perpetual need for renewing a disintegrating civilization? Why does He not wipe out the entire festering mess and have a clean, happy universe with not the slightest tendency toward evil?

Someday He is going to do just that. But first the entire universe must become thoroughly sick of sin in all its forms, the deceptive and seemingly attractive forms as well as the repulsive. The entire onlooking universe must become fully convinced that God's ways and plans are always best.

And this radical change in the divine method of handling the problem of sin and evil is what is embraced under the term "eschatology."

It is unreasonable and even unthinkable that a wise and good God is going to continue the career of sinful mankind indefinitely. Neither the Bible nor the experiences recorded in history tell us that human nature is showing the slightest tendency of outgrowing what E. A. Hooton of Harvard terms man's "aboriginal cussedness," or what the Bible calls sin. Moreover, the small percentage of individuals who are cured of it through true religion is not increasing. More heathen people are being born every day than

are being reached by the gospel in a month. A well informed recent estimate is that the world's population increases every year by over forty million persons, the overwhelming majority in lands where Christianity is not popular. Since 1800 the earth's population has almost tripled, while the death rate has fallen sharply. Even in so-called Christian lands how small is the number who are true Christians!

Europe and other parts of the Old World, like Mexico and Peru in this hemisphere, are dotted with the ruins of dead empires and forgotten civilizations. As cities and nations one after another have all had their day, *why not a world?*

This is what the Bible tells us from beginning to end. And God's merciful warning is now being sounded throughout the earth. What we term "modern times" or "our day" the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures repeatedly call "the time of the end."

But the end of human history is only another chapter in the larger problem of God's method of handling the problem of sin and evil for the universe as a whole, which has resulted from the cosmic mutiny of Lucifer and his followers. This cosmic rebellion was initiated at the headquarters of the universe long before the beginning of this earth's history. In His wisdom the Creator did not at once destroy the rebels, but after expelling them from heaven permitted them to transfer their evil schemes to this earth, where by deception their leader seduced the first parents of the human race. Thus all human history—including the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and His reinstatement in heaven as the

acting Manager of all God's universe—is only a part of the much larger, much more important, history of the great drama of the ages.

The period called in prophecy “the time of the end,” the century or two that we call modern times, is a milestone of great importance; and its characteristics will be the subject of the succeeding chapters.