

THE COMING OF THE KING

The parousia, or return of our Lord Jesus Christ — which has always been one of the central hopes and beliefs of the Christian Church — is based on Christ's many promises, such as the positive statement *I will come again*.

4

It is clear from Scripture that the early church and its leaders believed this return of their Lord was imminent, *for the coming of the Lord is at hand*. Yet the Lord did not come in their generation. There seems to have been growing awareness in the apostolic church that, after all, only the Father knew the time of the return and that, according to the Scriptures, some human history still had to unfold before that event would take place. Paul reminded the Thessalonians of this when he said: *Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled . . . as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise; for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed*. But even with this awareness there was the conviction that *He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry*, and this belief has been present in the Christian Church to a greater or lesser degree ever since.

From time to time the hope of the imminence of Christ's coming has led to the setting of definite or approximate dates for the event, such as the 1843-44 experience, in spite of the fact that our Lord had said: *But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father*. And again: *Watch therefore, for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh*.

Less specific declarations frequently voiced about the nearness of Christ's return, such as "in this generation" or "in our lifetime," echo the same longings and hopes present in the hearts of the apostles and witness to the faith in our day that the promises of the parousia will be fulfilled.

Varied interpretations as to the nature and details of the Second Coming have developed within the Christian Church. Some of these have come and gone, mainly those involving detailed interpretations of as yet unfulfilled prophecies and the final events associated with Christ's return. Such detailed accounts of future events at best often obscure the real message of the Scriptures, and at worst directly contradict it.

The name *Seventh-day Adventist* indicates the church's commitment to the biblical doctrine of Christ's Second Coming. It is not unexpected, therefore, that one of the important subjects discussed at a meeting of representatives of the World Council of Churches with representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist church March 4 and 5, 1970, at Andrews University (Michigan) should be this belief in our Lord's return.

This issue of SPECTRUM presents (a) a shortened version of the paper in which Raymond F. Cottrell gave at that meeting a Seventh-day Adventist perspective of the Second Coming of Christ, (b) responses from Paul S. Minear and Eugene H. Maly, representing the World Council of Churches, (c) a comment on this dialogue by Jack W. Provonsha, and (d) an article on the Second Coming by Derek J. Prime, minister of the Charlotte Baptist Chapel in Edinburgh, Scotland. These presentations, prepared in a spirit of Christian fellowship to foster discussion and understanding of one of the basic doctrines and expectations of the Christian Church, inspire all of us to say with the apostle John: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

MOLLEURUS COUPERUS