

# “Watchman, what of the night?”

*“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,  
the hour and the end!”*

*Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)*

Issue # 24    ♦    Aug. / Sept. 2017

▶ THIS ISSUE'S READING

**THE LAODICEAN ENIGMA**

*Editor's Preface*



The release of last bi-monthly's WWN prompted a number of subscriber responses. Many seemed to agree that apathetic indifference, the main topic discussed in Issue # 23, was indeed a problem of growing concern. But more than just this astute acknowledgement, we detected an underlying tenor that seemed to indicate that a "nerve" had been aroused in most. They linked the article (entitled: *Pathetically Apathetic*) to Christ's message to the Laodiceans found in Revelation 3: 14-22, and generally pointed out how this end-time warning is the most flagrant illustration of apathy and its danger in all of Scripture. A few wondered why we had not included it in the write-up. Since this editor (and associate) is always thankful for the feedback that we receive, accordingly, and in conjunction with this subject, we perceive that an explanation to all subscribers of the thought paper is in order at this time.

First, we are in full agreement that the Laodicean message is the most pointed example of apathetic indifference found in the Bible. Originally, we had included a discussion of it at the closing end of the article. It was edited out for two basic reasons. In order to understand better why this decision was made, we will present the missing text which is as follows:

"Next, and in closing, perhaps the most conspicuous example of apathy in the Bible. Jesus says: 'And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; ... I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither

cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: ... As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.' (Revelation 3: 14a-17, 19).

"While there is so much that could be commented on in this message (and, the Lord willing, we plan to in a future issue of WWN), we will now briefly note that apathy among God's professed end-time 'church' will be a major factor in their corporate rejection by Christ. 'Because [*they are*] lukewarm, (apathetic) ... [Jesus] *will* spue [them] out of [His] mouth.' (reject them! - emphasis added). And because there is no indication that the corporate body of the Laodiceans (the end-time church) ever heeds the call to 'be zealous and repent,' Christ's appeal switches to a call to the *individual*: 'If *any man* hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' (Ibid. 3: 20, emph. added). Suffice to say, that in light of the near universal deception and apostasy that 'BABYLON THE GREAT' and her allies will bring upon the entire world just before the second coming of Christ (see Ibid. chapters 17-18), the attitude - 'Why bother? There's nothing that can be done anyway' - toward this last appeal from heaven will be eternally fatal! How *pathetic* can this whole condition possibly be? Think it over - **AGAIN!!**"

As stated, we were planning to present a more comprehensive exposition of the Laodicean message "in a future issue of WWN" anyway. And when we ran out of space to include all we had written for Issue # 23, we simply deleted this segment as a result. Now, however, though we were not going to pre-

sent a more in-depth discussion of the topic in this present issue, we are convicted that we should not wait to begin to do so at some later date. In light of all that has transpired over the last two months, we believe that an article written by Elder William H. Grotheer, former editor and founder of this thought paper, would be an excellent presentation to start with. Though it was written thirty years ago this March, it will provide a historic/theological basis to this subject that many Seventh-day Adventists today are dimly, if not completely, unfamiliar with. As always, it is hoped that this will serve as a primer to stimulate further thought and study as we too hope to again re-visit this theme in upcoming issues of WWN. Because some sections of this 1987 article are somewhat "dated," corrections, explanatory notes and commentary are provided by the present editor - italicized within brackets - where deemed necessary.

### **LAODICEA A FAILURE? OR IS THE CHURCH GOING THROUGH? <sup>1</sup>**

If there is one question above another which is troubling the "concerned" in the Adventist Community today, it is the question of Laodicea. The Seventh-day Adventist Church identifies itself with Laodicea. This self-identification has been brought into sharp focus through the recent publication by Elder R. J. Wieland - "As Many As I Love".<sup>2</sup> In the very first chapter, Wieland states emphatically - "Christ's direct rebuke to 'the angel of the church of the Laodiceans' applies specifically to us." (p. 1). Thus to everyone who identifies himself as a Seventh-day Adventist, the very thought of the question - Laodicea, a failure? - causes deep emotional distress. [*Even in 1987, the "concerned" were in the minority. However, the corporate ma-*

*jority back then at least seemed to be somewhat knowledgeable of "Laodiceanism." Sadly today, it appears that those which identify themselves as Seventh-day Adventists are near, if not totally, ignorant of the message, its application, its meaning and implications. Now, the concerned are practically non-existent, as some of those seemingly few who even mention Laodiceanism do so in a way that suggests Adventists should, in some manner, actually be 'proud' [?] that they are identified as "the Laodicean Church." How pathetically tragic! ]*

The self-perception held by conservative Adventists is well stated by Wieland. He introduces the theme of his book with the following:

"We begin with a deep conviction: this church is the prophetic 'remnant' of Revelation 12: 17, a unique people with whom the dragon is 'wroth' and makes 'war' because they are called to 'keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus.' This same group tell the world the true good news of 'the everlasting gospel' (ch. 14: 6-12). They are a vital ingredient in world stability." (p. 1).

Just as positive as the above expressed human conviction derived from Revelation 12: 17 and 14: 6-12, so are the words of the True Witness - Who does not lie - "I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. 3: 16). Does not faith come from "hearing" and the word of the Lord? Then will not true "righteousness by faith" be both manifest and proclaimed in the acceptance of the verdict and decision of the True Witness? Or does the True Witness not mean what He says and we should supply the word - perhaps - into His statement? Just what does the Word of the Lord really say?

**Some Historical Background --** Within the Adventist Church up to at least 1911, two different views of the Churches of Revelation, Chapters 2 & 3, have been held and set forth in the published literature of the Church. What could be called "the original view" was expressed by Joseph Bates in the first issue of the Second Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald - (November 1850).<sup>3</sup> Bates considered the prophecy as giving the "states" of the Church. In his article - "The Laodicean Church" - he based his presentation solely of Revelation 3. He wrote: "As the first four states of the church were in the past (about A.D. 1798) let us confine our exposition relative to the last three, which are all in an organized state, at the present time."

Bates defined "Sardis" as "the present nominal church, the Babylon, which God's people came out from under the second angel's message." To him, the "Philadelphia" state represented those who followed by "faith" the open door into the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary. He wrote - "The Philadelphia church *kept the Saviour's word* and have *not denied His name*. Those that left this state, and became Laodiceans, took the opposite, i.e., they did not hold fast His word, and hence they denied His name." (Emphasis his). Bates termed Laodicea, "the nominal Adventist."

This view by Bates was expressed as late as 1911 in the Signs of the Times - (January 17).<sup>4</sup> There Milton C. Wilcox, the editor, in a copyrighted article wrote: "The last three churches present three present-day conditions: (1) Great worldliness, dead while professing to live, having not the life of Christ, seen in the great popular churches; (2) Devoted, earnest seeking of God, manifested

among a far smaller number who are looking for their Lord's coming; (3) Those who possess an outward knowledge of God's truth, who feel rich because of that knowledge, proud because of their superior morality, but who do not know the sweetness of God's grace, the power of His redeeming love.

"There is hope in neither Sardis nor in Laodicea. Out of these conditions must come the victors into that of Philadelphia brotherly love. He pleads with the few names in Sardis. Upon the greater part of those in Sardis, Christ will come as a thief in swift judgment, but He will save some. He has no promise to Laodicea as a whole. 'If *any man* hear My voice,' He pleads with the individual; but the individual who opens the heart's door and lets Christ in, who comes into that wonderful communion with his divine Lord, will by that very process come into the condition of brotherly love. They will constitute the remnant who keep the word of His patience, against whom there is no condemnation, who are ready for translation. Out of that condition of lukewarmness means a hard struggle, earnest zeal, severe conflict; but he who wins shall share Christ's kingdom eternally." (Emphasis his).

The other view of the Seven Churches was expressed by Uriah Smith in his first edition of Thoughts on the Revelation, in 1865.<sup>5</sup> He perceived of the churches of Revelation as "stages" of one historical church. He wrote of Laodicea: "It is the last stage of the church. It consequently applies to believers under the third message, the last message of mercy before the coming of Christ, chapt. xiv, 9-14, while the great day of atonement is transpiring, and the investigative judgment is going forward upon the house of God, - a period during which the just and holy law of God is taken by the waiting church as their rule of

life." (pp. 58-59).

It is this view of the Seven Churches as "stages," which prevails at the present time.

*[ It should clearly be understood that these two views of the "Seven Churches" ("states" and "stages") are definitely not mutually exclusive from one another. In fact, the "stages" interpretation is the classical historicist approach which describes the primary "state" of each consecutive historical period of the Christian Church throughout the gospel era. Moreover, while the historicist method is the principal understanding to the Seven Churches advocated by the Lord's Messenger, Ellen G. White (see AA, p. 585), she also understood these messages as having an immediate application to the state of each literal first century church listed in Asia Minor during John's time (Ibid., p. 584), as well as each of the seven having a general spiritual application to the state of all Christian churches to the end of this present age. (Ibid., p. 586).<sup>6</sup> ]*

**A Re-Examination** -- A careful restudy of the Seven Churches beginning with Thyatira casts some very interesting light on the key question as to whether Laodicea will fail, or not.

*Thyatira* is a duality. There are those who permitted "that woman Jezebel ... to teach and to seduce" the servants of "the Son of God." (2: 20). There are others who did not have "this doctrine," and who did not know "the depths of Satan." To this latter group, "the Son of God" declares - "Hold fast till I come." (2: 24-25). This is the first introduction of the concept of the coming of Christ into the "states" of the seven churches. This admonition would have no meaning unless this church were also in existence at the Second Advent.

*Sardis* recognized as the "Reformation" state had a "few names" which "had not defiled their garments." (3: 4). The One having the Seven Spirits of God warns the church that if they do not "watch," He "will come on (them) as a thief." (3: 3). This is the language used by Christ in connection with His second coming. (See Matt. 24: 42-44). This would justify the conclusion that this church, too, will be in existence at the return of Christ.

*Philadelphia* also receives the counsel - "Behold I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (3: 11). Thus all three church "states," Thyatira, *Sardis*, *Philadelphia* - are warned and counseled with respect to the Second Advent of Christ.

When we come to the *Laodicean* state, there is no association, no such warning. There is not a single suggestion in regard to the second Advent. Why? The conclusion is inescapable - she has been spued out! To those who desire to continue in the *Laodicean* state, and sustain a "vain hope" that perhaps the True Witness does not mean what He says, would have us believe that *mellō*, the [ *Greek* ] word translated, "will," in the pronouncement of Jesus - "I will spue thee out of my mouth" - does not mean that for sure, but really means, "perhaps" He will. Further, if we "only believe" that concept hard enough, we can turn the divine decision around. Just "only believe" - don't look at the facts!

**How Is *Mellō* Used In Revelation?** -- According to the sources available - not counting them myself - *mellō* (Gr. - μελλω) is used by John in the book of Revelation, 13 times (1: 19; 2: 10 [2x]; 3: 2, 10, 16; 6: 11; 8: 13; 10:

4, 7; 12: 4, 5; 17: 8). In each use of the word, whether as a verb, or a participle, it is connected with an infinitive expressing the purpose or result. When used as a verb, it appears in the present tense (6x) and in the imperfect (2x), and once in the subjunctive mood.

Since, in the text under consideration - Rev. 3: 16 - *mellō* is used in the present tense, let us check each of the other uses in the present to see if there is a conditional element that would negate the stated purpose:

1: 19 - "Write thou therefore the things which thou sawest, even the things which are and the things which are (*mellō*) to occur after these things." (Literal).

2: 10 - "Do not fear the things which thou art (*mellō*) to suffer. Behold, the devil shall (*mellō*) cast some of you into prison that ye may be tried." (Literal).

12: 5 - "And she bore a son, a male, who shall (*mellō*) shepherd all the nations with a staff of iron." (Literal).

17: 8 - "And the beast which thou sawest was, and is not, and shall (*mellō*) come up out of the abyss." (Literal).

It should be obvious that each stated intent or purpose as defined by the infinitive modifying *mellō* IS to occur - not perhaps, nor maybe. In the case of Rev. 12: 5, the book itself tells the time when it will take place, and states it in the same language. See Rev. 19: 15.

There are two uses of *mellō* in Revelation which indicate "perhaps" or that the stated purpose can be altered - BUT, in each instance, *mellō* is in the imperfect Greek tense, and not in the present. Note:

3: 2 - "Be thou watching, and establish the things remaining which were (*emellon*) dy-

ing." (Literal).

Robertson in his Word Pictures in the New Testament, comments relative to the use of the imperfect - "The imperfect looking on the situation 'with delicate optimism' (Swete) as having passed the crisis, as sort of epistolary imperfect." (Vol. VI, p. 314).<sup>7</sup>

*10: 4 - "And when spoke the seven thunders, I was going (emellon) to write, and I heard a voice out of heaven saying: Seal thou the things which spake the seven thunders, and not them write." (Literal).*

It is obvious in this verse (10: 4) that the intent is not carried out - but John was even forbidden from doing so. To convey this use of *mellō* the Greek imperfect is used, NOT the present as is found in Rev. 3: 16. Furthermore, the use of *mellō* in Rev. 3: 16 is followed by an infinitive in the Greek aorist, and not by a present infinitive as with the five other uses of *mellō* in the present tense. The use of the Greek aorist infinitive indicates "punctiliar" action, or as happening immediately upon the decision of the one acting, and not an indecisive prolonging of the contemplated action. (See An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 105).<sup>8</sup>

In simple language, The True Witness gave Laodicea time to repent with a special call to repent in 1950, and when she did not do so, He acted! It was not a temporizing to see if some "messengers" could persuade Laodicea to turn around, and then the True Witness could change His mind. The present indicative is used in the verb form, it will or has taken place; it is certain - and the aorist infinitive confirms a decisive judgment, and not a prolonged haggling. [ *This evaluation by Elder Grotheer of the meaning of the Robert Wieland / Donald Short protest warning which they in 1950 delivered to the General Conference leadership ("1888 Re-examined")*,

*and its subsequent rejection, ought to be given serious study and careful consideration by all who claim to be Seventh-day Adventists. In light of the general apathy that has increasing settled in among us over the last thirty years, a more comprehensive knowledge and prayerful understanding of what has transpired in our history regarding this matter may help many to become "concerned" today. ]*

This is exactly the picture in the Writings: "In the balances of the sanctuary the Seventh-day Adventist church is to be weighed. [Definite]. She will be judged by the privileges and advantages that she has had. If her spiritual experience does not correspond to the advantages that Christ, at infinite cost, has bestowed on her, if the blessings conferred have not qualified her to do the work entrusted to her, on her will be pronounced the sentence 'Found wanting'. By the light bestowed, the opportunities given, will she be judged." [Punctiliar] (8T, p. 247).<sup>9</sup>

The parable of the Ten Virgins indicates that the Philadelphians and the Laodiceans were to be mingled together for a period of time. This was the concept perceived by Wilcox as he studied the existing states of the church in Revelation 3. [ *Read again on page 3, col. 2 and page 4, col. 1, his comments for Groups 2 & 3. ]*

"The state of the Church represented by the foolish virgins, is also spoken of as the Laodicean state." (EGW, R&H, Aug. 19, 1890).<sup>10</sup> The parable, however, indicates there will be a separation. The light supplied by the oil - the Spirit of truth - goes out in the hearts of the foolish virgins. They go to the vendors who sell oil, but in so doing, on them the door is shut!

Bates emphasized this loss of truth in describing the difference between these two states of the Church. Note again his comment: "The Philadelphia church kept the Saviour's word and have not denied His name. Those that left this state, and became Laodiceans, took the opposite, i.e., they did not hold fast His word, and hence they denied His name." (R&H, Nov. 1850).

This is indeed the picture. Corporate Laodicea has not kept Christ's word - committed in sacred trust - but compromised the final atonement in seeking to reach an accord with the Evangelicals. Thus they denied His name as understood by Bates. The verdict - "I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3: 16) - could not be escaped.

The message to the individual - "if any man hear my voice" - is the call of Jesus as He stands at the door knocking. This is the call to every Seventh-day Adventist today.

*[ Suffice to say, considering that "today" is now thirty years later, does it not behoove "every Seventh-day Adventist" - with an insight of God's mercy toward us - to perceive the urgency of the hour and immediately heed "the call of Jesus as He stands at the door knocking" and "open the door" (REPENT) and let Him in! Think about it! ] ❖ WHG [ GLP ]*

1. William H. Grotheer, *"Watchman, what of the night?"* (Lamar, AR: XX, Mar. 1987), 1-2, 6-7.
2. Robert J. Wieland, *"As Many As I Love" - Christ's Call To Laodicea* (Uniontown, OH: Adventist Realities, 1986), 1.
3. Joseph Bates, *The Laodicean Church* (Fairhaven, MA: Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Nov. 10, 1850), 7-8.
4. Milton C. Wilcox, *The Seven Churches - A Review* (Mountain View, CA: Signs of the Times, Jan. 17, 1911), 7.
5. Uriah Smith, *Thoughts Critical and Practical, on*

*the Book of Revelation* (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1865), 58-59.

6. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), 585, 584, 586.

7. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, vol. 6* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1933), 314.

8. William D. Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York, NY: Macmillan Company, 1941), 105.

9. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church, vol. 8* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 247.

10. White, *Present Truth and Review and Herald Articles, vol. 2* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890), 420.

\* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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