

“The First Step in Apostasy:
The Anti-creedalism of Charles Beecher as a Source of Early Adventist Historiography”

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Adventist historiography has been focused principally on the relationship of prophecy and history. William Miller may have claimed that he let the Bible be its own interpreter, but he was the heir of an historical method of interpreting prophecy that was inconceivable without the historical record. One of the central pillars of that method was the identification of a sequence of empires that dominated the world of the Bible. Sometimes Adventist have been so keen on identifying and describing this sequence of empires as a fulfillment of prophecy that they fail to consider what the category of an empire is all about. In 1846 Charles Beecher, in a series of sermons preaching in Fort Wayne, Indiana, took a broader view of history and suggested that there were elements of the imperial system that threatened the Christian church from within. He sought to warn the church from taking even one step toward the apostasy that would occur if it were to adopt that system.

At least for the Adventists, the beginning of the imperial system was described in Genesis (10:10; 11:9) as Babel and that system formed the central concern of the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation. Adventists taught that the sequence of metals in Daniel 2 and the sequence of beasts in Daniel 7, 8, and in Revelation describe the continuity of the imperial system from Babylon through Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome to the final remaining absolute monarchy in existence—the Papacy. I would argue that Beecher describes four constitutive elements that run like a thread through all these empires:

1) **A centralized authority**, often seen as divine, semi-divine or at least divinely ordained.

2) **A hierarchical bureaucracy** that ensures continuity even when the individual with the centralized authority changes. The Roman expression of this governmental system was the most successful imperial rule ever, lasting at least 1500 years (49 BC to 1453 AD).

3) **A demand for conformity** though not uniformity. For example, Rome gloried in the great diversity of its empire, but it did seek unity in devotion to the cult of the emperor. Up until the time of Diocletian, the intent of the imperial persecution of Christianity was not to destroy it but to bring it into conformity to what the entire empire was doing. Everyone had to wave incense to the emperor. Roman authorities could take an imprisoned Christian bishop and, using brute force, put the incense in his hands and make those hands wave it before the altar. They didn't care that the bishop was resisting the charade the whole time. They didn't care where his internal commitments were. They simply wanted conformity.

4) **Coercion** as the only way to achieve conformity. You did what the king or emperor or pope wanted, or you faced severe consequences.

It is clear that Beecher and the early Sabbath-keeping Adventists were alarmed at any attempt to develop in the church a centralized authority, supported by a hierarchy that demanded conformity with the threat of punishment.

Before going further, though, we need to give some background. Charles Beecher, the son of Lyman Beecher, had twelve siblings, among whom were Henry Ward Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The Beechers were "New School" Presbyterians, meaning that they were a part of the faction of the Presbyterian Church that advocated revival and human accountability for their actions. Charles Beecher came of age during a time of high conflict between the New

School and the Old School. In fact, his father was tried in 1835 for heresy, hypocrisy, and slander, being specifically charged with pretending to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith but actually undermining it with New School interpretations.¹

Charles Beecher was twenty-nine when he experienced conversion while living with his brother, Henry, in Indianapolis. Henry proposed that he take up the ministry in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Charles agreed but arrived in Fort Wayne in May of 1844 to discover that an Old School preacher had taken his place as the pastor of the Presbyterian Church. With help from his brother Henry and his father Lyman, Charles started a New School Presbyterian church, nurtured its growth to an attendance of about 200 people, and set out to build a new church building. At the dedication of that building on February 22, 1846 he preached two sermons on the theme “The Bible a Sufficient Creed,” both of which were later published together in Boston.² In the first 15 years of the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Beecher’s second sermon was quoted or referred to eleven times, sometimes extensively.³ Some of this material was used by Ellen White

¹ Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) 155.

² Charles Beecher, *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, (Boston, 1846). The book is available on Google Scholar.

³ J. N. Andrews, “Thoughts on Revelation XIII and XIV,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, I, No. 11, May 19, 1851, 84; [James White], Editor, “Signs of the Times,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, IV, No. 10, Sept. 13, 1853, 74; J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV. 6—12: The Two-horned Beast.” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 26, April 3, 1855, 201; [James White], Editor, “Signs of the Times,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 28, May 1, 1855, 220; [Uriah Smith], “A Sad Picture,” *Review and Herald*, IX, 4 (November 27, 1856), 31; [Uriah Smith], “THE TWO-HORNED BEAST.— Rev. Xiii. Are the United States a Subject of Prophecy? (Concluded.),” *Review and Herald*, IX, 21 (March 26, 1857), 164; James White, “SIGNS OF THE TIMES. BRIEF EXPOSITION OF MATT. XXIV.” *Review and Herald*, X, 21 (Sept. 24, 1857), 164; J. N. Loughborough, “IMAGE OF THE BEAST. (Concluded.),” *Review and Herald*, XVII, 10 (January 22, 1861), 76-77; S. B. Whitney, “Both Sides,” *Review and Herald* XIX, 13 (February 25, 1862), 102; M. E. Cornell, “Azazel or Satan,” *Review and Herald* XXVII, 15 (March 13, 1866), 116; “Creed Power,” *Review and Herald*, XXX, 16 (Sep. 1, 1867), 250-1. Beecher’s sermon is also quoted by J. N. Andrews, *The Three Messages of Revelation xiv, 6-12* (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Assn., 1872), 87 and Uriah Smith, *The United States in the Light of Prophecy*, (Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Assn., 1874), 86-7,110; Uriah Smith, *Daniel and Revelation* (Battle Creek: Review & Herald Pub. Assn., 1907), 661.

in *The Great Controversy*.⁴ What I intend to do in this paper is review Beecher's arguments and show how they were used and extended by early Sabbath-keeping Adventists.

Beecher's first sermon is an expository treatment of 2 Timothy 3:16, 17: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Beecher's sermon focuses on how the man of God may be perfect. For him being perfect is not a matter of individual sinlessness; rather, he interprets perfection in this verse as synonymous with being "thoroughly furnished unto ALL good works." Thus the sermon states four things. 1) The Bible alone furnishes the man of God with the **doctrines** needed to make him perfect. 2) The Bible alone provides the man of God with the **reproof** necessary to keep out heresy. God is displeased with any other test or barrier of error; 3) The Bible alone provides the entire ground for **correction** within the Church. If an offence cannot be proved from the Bible, it is an offence against a human figment, and, Beecher says, "let it be committed." 4) The Bible alone is necessary for the **instruction** of children, adults and ministers in personal holiness and practical morality. Beecher makes a point of noting that when he speaks of the Bible "*alone*" he includes in that phrase the influence of the Holy Spirit that accompanies its diligent and careful study (9).

Beecher concludes his first sermon by claiming that the principles he has expounded are not just Protestantism but the foundation of all Christianity. He affirms that the Bible, as God wrote it, with every man his own interpreter, every man responsible only to God, is the rule and only teacher. The Bible is the means whereby all truth is inculcated, all error extirpated, all discipline enforced, and all holiness attained. While early Adventists would probably have

⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Ca: Pacific Press, 1911), 388, 444.

agreed with the ideas in this sermon, it was not the focus of their interest and they did not quote from it.

It was Beecher's second sermon that captured early Adventist's attention. In it Beecher propounds the thesis that "The substitution of any other creed for any of these purposes [doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction] is one step in APOSTACY." Surprisingly, he begins by defending the efforts to systematize doctrines and publish them in book form. That is not the substitution that he refers to. Nor is it the claim that one of these systems is THE only system taught in the Bible. He finds that claim presumptuous but not his chief concern. Rather, he argues that when a church goes beyond claiming to have in its book THE system of truth taught in the Bible and that church "requires the acceptance of that book by every candidate for licensure or ordination, as a test of his qualification," that church is taking one step in APOSTACY (21-23).

Beecher argues that the requirement that ministers accept a creed is a direct contradiction to the teachings of the Holy Spirit in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17. According to him the church of his day virtually declares that the man of God who adopts the Bible is NOT perfect unless he also adopts a creed. According to Beecher this is analogous to what the Roman apostasy does. Rome does not deny Christ nor does it deny that he is the Mediator. What she does is add other mediators, the virgin and the saints. According to Protestants, this is the very essence of Rome's apostasy on this point. So Protestants on the road to apostasy do not deny the Bible, nor do they deny that it is perfect for some specified purposes. What Protestants teach is that only the person who receives and adopts the Bible "*and this creed*" is perfect (25).

Beecher next draws another analogy to Roman teaching. He argues that the worship of the saints arose *not* by the encouragement of bold, bad men but by the backing of pious and

decent men seeking to respect the memory of the martyrs. This initial impulse to honor martyrs received the endorsement of good men with good motives, but it passed beyond its initial stage to the “horrid consummation” of saint worship. Beecher asserts that the same thing happened with fasting from meats, forbidding to marry, and all the other features of the “Romish Apostacy.” He contends that in precisely the same manner Protestant apostasy is “creeping stealthily through its first innocent stages, among good men, from good motives,” and will pass beyond his day into a similar consummation. In words quoted by Uriah Smith, John Loughborough, and Ellen White, Beecher says, “Our best, most humble, most devoted servants of Christ, are fostering in their midst what will one day, not long hence, show itself to be of the spawn of the dragon. They shrink from any rude word against creeds, with the same sensitiveness with which those holy Fathers would have shrunk from a rude word against the rising veneration of saints and martyrs, which they were fostering” (27-28).⁵ Beecher and his Adventist followers would probably have agreed with the sentiment that the road to apostasy is always paved with good intentions.

Beecher argues that the practice of adding a creed to the Bible is a feature of Romanism “revived under a Protestant form” (28). According to Beecher, the voice of history tells how the Roman claim to have the sole right of interpreting the Bible arose first by creed-making. Beginning in the second century, “the creed-making power . . . crept slowly and stealthily forward” until it was first exercised in a general council in the fourth century and afterward found itself centered in the Vatican. Beecher says that the first step was “The making of an authoritative creed, to which the clergy were compelled to subscribe;” the last step was “the

⁵ [Uriah Smith], “THE TWO-HORNED BEAST.—Rev. Xiii. Are the United States a Subject of Prophecy? (Concluded.)” *Review and Herald*, IX, 21 (March 26, 1857), 164; J. N. Loughborough, “IMAGE OF THE BEAST. (Concluded.)” *Review and Herald*, XVII, 10 (January 22, 1861), 76-77; Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Ca: Pacific Press, 1911), 388.

absolute prohibition of the Bible to the people” (29). He implies that there is a slippery slope from one to the other.

Beecher calls on the facts of history to document that the early church had no creed. Even the apostle’s creed, which he correctly states was not made by the apostles, was never used as a test. Beecher uses this moment to clarify an especially crucial point: “In this argument, ‘Creed,’ means not articles of belief, but articles made authoritative *tests*” (30). In this he is in line with other anti-creedalists who did not object to creating a list to *describe* beliefs but strenuously objected to using those lists to *prescribe* beliefs.⁶

The idea of such tests, Beecher contends, “was borrowed from the political world by the Greeks, who were versed in such features of civil administration. The idea of an authoritative creed is, therefore, exclusively political. It is not of Christian parentage” (30). Church councils consolidated the local churches into a political union and formed a HIERARCHY (31). This happened gradually until A. D. 325 when the first General Council was called and the first general creed was made. Beecher asks, Who called this Council? Was it by the authority of Christ or the Church? No, it was called by the “absolute political power” of the Roman Emperor, who was not even a member of the Christian Church! According to Beecher, Nicea fully settled the doctrines of the Bible, banished Arius, and compelled his followers to subscribe to the creed. After this, creeds multiplied in swarms, “creating and fomenting those very divisions they were designed to suppress.” Thus, Beecher argues, creeds [as authoritative tests] are a political idea introduced into the Christian church under a Roman Emperor’s mandate.

⁶ Jonathan Dickinson, the first president of Princeton University, Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of the Christian movement and John Mason Duncan, a Presbyterian pastor, held this opinion. On Dickinson, see Luder G. Whitlock, “The Context of the Adopting Act,” in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, by David W. Hall, 94-104. (New York: University Press of America, 1995), 97. On Campbell see Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address*, Proposition 7. On Duncan see John Mason Duncan, *Remarks On the Rise, Use, And Unlawfulness of Creeds And Confessions of Faith In the Church of God ...* (Baltimore: Cushing & Jewett, 1825), 40-2.

What are the arguments that supported the creed-making power? Beecher says they are these:

Truth is one—therefore true believers cannot differ. But they *do* differ. Therefore there is heresy. Heresy must be kept out. Make a creed to keep it out; and as to which side *is* heresy, “*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus,*” –that is, heresy is the opinion which is in the *minority*.... Yes. Shear off the troublesome thinkers, and sing stagnant hallelujahs! This by way of keeping the Church pure!” (33)⁷

Beecher finds Protestants using the same arguments. “We must keep the denomination pure! We must keep out heresy” (33). Beecher cites as an example that when the Westminster Assembly formed the Confession and Catechism, the Scots commissioners wanted the members of that body to subscribe to the shorter catechism. According to Beecher, the proposal was rejected after discussion as an “unwarrantable imposition.” However, within forty years, subscription to the catechism was made a test of ministerial standing.⁸

Beecher next turns his attention to the clergy. In another statement quoted by three different authors in the early *Review and Herald*,⁹ Beecher states “The creed system is now exerting upon the clergy of the Protestant churches a secret, unsuspected, but tremendous power against the Bible—a power of *fear*. Yes, while it professes to venerate and defend the Bible, it is

⁷ “*Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus creditum est*” means “what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.” It is a statement from St. Vincent of Lerins [5th Century], *Commonitorium*, II.

⁸ Beecher’s source for this appears to be John Mason Duncan, [1790-1851], *Remarks On the Rise, Use, And Unlawfulness of Creeds And Confessions of Faith In the Church of God...* (Baltimore: Cushing & Jewett, 1825), 54. Duncan may be the source of many of Beecher’s ideas. Concerning the incident at the Westminster Assembly, Duncan cites Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, Vol. III, 387. Note. [p. 329 in the edition of William Baynes and Sons, 1822 available on Google Books]. Neal cites two sources: *Conscientious Nonconformity*, printed for Noon, 1737, p.77; and, *The Religious Establishment in Scotland Examined*, 1771, p. 104.

Beecher cites Duncan’s trial in Baltimore for heresy three times in *The Bible a Sufficient Creed*, describing in his third reference how Duncan was brought to trial, condemned, excommunicated, and had his pulpit declared vacant because he said what the Westminster Assembly said, that to require the reception of the Westminster Creed as a test of ministerial qualifications was an unwarrantable imposition (40-41).

⁹ J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV. 6—12: The Two-horned Beast.” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 26, April 3, 1855, 201; J. N. Loughborough, “IMAGE OF THE BEAST. (*Concluded.*),” *Review and Herald*, XVII, 10 (January 22, 1861), 76-77; S. B. Whitney, “Both Sides,” *Review and Herald* XIX, 13 (February 25, 1862), 102.

virtually undermining it” (34-35). As evidence, Beecher describes how Protestant ministers must subscribe to a denominational creed in order to be licensed. The Protestant denominations have made it certain that “a man cannot become a preacher at all, anywhere, without accepting some book besides the Bible” (37).¹⁰

The denominations say that they are not inflicting a penalty on potential ministers by requiring them to subscribe to the creed, Beecher acknowledges. They say they only decline to receive into their ranks those who do not agree with them. Beecher calls this argument not only specious but “the most consummate stroke of infernal craft, and doubly-distilled jesuitism” (37). The denominations may claim that requiring subscription doesn’t do the candidate any harm but in fact it silently leaves a candidate who will not subscribe to the creed to his inevitable fate. That fate is to be silently and invisibly crushed, dead in the religious world that might license and hire him. So during the seven years of training that a minister receives, he knows he must conform or suffer the penalty of being considered unsound, unsafe, and heretical. If he dares say, “I do not receive your creed as containing the system of doctrines contained in the Bible,” he becomes a spiritual martyr, and it is the apostate Protestant church that martyrs him.

Beecher feels compelled to explain that the final form of apostasy will not come from Rome with “the Pope’s long arm outstretched to snatch our Bibles; nor by crosses, processions, and baubles... Apostacy never comes on the outside. It *develops*. It is an apostacy that shall spring into life within us; an apostacy that shall martyr a man who believes his Bible ever so holily.” In another statement quoted by Ellen White in *The Great Controversy*, Beecher argues that “There is nothing imaginary in the statement that the Creed-Power is now beginning to

¹⁰ This statement is quoted as part of lengthy excerpts from the last part of Beecher’s sermon in articles by J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV. 6—12: The Two-horned Beast.” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 26, April 3, 1855, 201; and J. N. Loughborough, “IMAGE OF THE BEAST. (Concluded.)” *Review and Herald*, XVII, 10 (January 22, 1861), 76-77; as well as by Ellen White in *The Great Controversy*, 388.

prohibit the Bible, as really as Rome did, though in a subtler way.”¹¹ During the time Protestant ministers are in training, they see before them an authorized statement of what they MUST find in the Bible or be martyred. In a passage quoted four times in the *Review and Herald*¹² Beecher asks, “Is that freedom of opinion?—‘the liberty wherewith Christ maketh free’? Rome would have given that. Every one of her clergy might have studied the Bible to find there the Pontifical creed on pain of death. Was that liberty?”(41).

According to Beecher, the whole boasted liberty of the theological seminarian consists of a choice of chains. Will he wear the Presbyterian handcuff, or the Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal or evangelical handcuff? As a result the ministers dare not study their Bibles. “There is something criminal in saying anything new. It is shocking to utter words that have not the mould of age upon them.” As a result, through the ministry the same spirit has been conducted to the people. Any departure from the creed is seized upon to make political capital. Beecher certainly knew something about this, since he, his father and virtually all his brothers were tried for heresy at some point in time. Beecher analyzes what was happening in the denominations:

Houses must be built; salaries must be raised. This requires wealth. Wealth requires numbers and patronage. This creates a servile dread of novelty, for every thing that another party can get hold of, strikes at the gold. Therefore, the people watch their minister, and the minister is afraid of his people.... Oh, woful [sic] day! Oh, unhappy church of Christ. Fast rushing round and round the fatal circle of absorbing ruin! Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked (43).

¹¹ White, *The Great Controversy*, 389.

¹² [Uriah Smith], “A Sad Picture,” *Review and Herald*, IX, 4 (November 27, 1856), 31; J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV. 6—12: The Two-horned Beast.” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 26, April 3, 1855, 201; and J. N. Loughborough, “IMAGE OF THE BEAST. (Concluded.),” *Review and Herald*, XVII, 10 (January 22, 1861), 76-77; “Creed Power,” *Review and Herald*, XXX, 16 (Sep. 1, 1867), 250-1.

Writers in the *Review and Herald* used the final portion of this quotation five times as evidence that the Protestant churches truly were apostate.¹³ Ellen White uses a couple of the next paragraphs to illustrate the future direction of the Protestant Church in America. The Evangelical denominations are not only formed within a climate of merely human fear, they “live, and move, and breath, in a state of things radically corrupt, and appealing every hour to every baser element of their nature, to hush up the truth and bow the knee to the power of apostacy” (43). All of this has happened so stealthily, nobody knows how, among good men, out of good motives! Beecher asks (as does Ellen White), “Was not this the way things went with Rome? Are we not living her life over again? And what do we see just ahead? Another General Council! A World’s Convention! Evangelical Alliance and Universal Creed!”¹⁴ (44).

Beecher concludes his second sermon with both apocalyptic and aquatic imagery. The waves of the coming conflict are beginning to be felt. They will convulse Christendom to her center. “The deep heavings begin to swell beneath us... Thunders mutter in the distance. Winds moan across the surging bosom of the deep. All things betide the rising of that final storm of divine indignation which shall sweep away the vain refuges of lies.” Judgment will begin at the house of God. Our only defense is to trust in Him whose name is THE WORD OF GOD (44-45).

While Beecher’s own congregants were thrilled with the sermons and arranged for them to be published, other members of the New School Presbytery of Fort Wayne were troubled by their message. Beecher’s fellow ministers made an appointment with him to express what they

¹³ [James White], Editor, “Signs of the Times,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, IV, No. 10, Sept. 13, 1853, 74; [James White], Editor, “Signs of the Times,” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 28, May 1, 1855, 220; James White, “SIGNS OF THE TIMES. BRIEF EXPOSITION OF MATT. XXIV.” *Review and Herald*, X, 21 (Sept. 24, 1857), 164; [Uriah Smith], “A Sad Picture,” *Review and Herald*, IX, 4 (November 27, 1856), 31; J. N. Andrews, “The Three Angels of Rev. XIV. 6—12: The Two-horned Beast.” *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, VI, No. 26, April 3, 1855, 201.

¹⁴ White, *The Great Controversy*, 444.

considered to be his “misapprehension of the views and practices of the Presbyterian Church.” At the conclusion of the interview they decided not to press charges of heresy against him. However, they did file a report that expressed their opinion that some of his views were “subversive of all order in the house of God.”¹⁵ Charles remained at the church in Fort Wayne until 1850 when he moved back East for financial and health reasons.

Eventually Charles came to accept his older brother Edward’s ideas concerning the pre-existence of souls.¹⁶ Thirteen years after leaving Fort Wayne, some members of his congregation in Georgetown, Massachusetts charged him with heresy for teaching those ideas from the pulpit after promising not to. He was tried and convicted of heresy but appealed the conviction. His church split over the issue and the larger portion remained loyal to him and withdrew the complaint. A few years later another conference of ministers reversed the conviction and restored him to good standing.¹⁷ He died at age 84 in 1900.

Beecher’s sermon suggests a broad view of historical developments. For him the Protestant opposition to Roman Catholicism was as much to its Roman-ness as to its Catholicism. Evidence for this is found in the fact that Beecher uses the word Catholic only once (33) while he uses the word Rome and its derivatives (such as Roman, Romish, and Romanism) seventeen times. He never puts the words Roman and Catholic together.

¹⁵ Susan Man McCulloch to Maria Halsey, February 26, 1846, quoted in Elsmere, *Henry Ward Beecher*, 219-20 and cited in Peggy Seigal, “A Passionate Missionary to the West: Charles Beecher in Fort Wayne Indiana, 1844-1850.” *Indiana Magazine of History*, 106 (December 2010), 343.

¹⁶ These ideas were propounded in a lengthy book with the title *The Conflict of Ages* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Company, 1853). In the book Edward Beecher describes a “great controversy” between those advocating ideas of the original depravity of man resulting in the necessity of supernatural regeneration, and their opponents (4, 85, 255, 258). Edward Beecher eventually wrote a sequel to it entitled, *The Concord of the Ages* (New York, 1860). It describes the “titanic struggle between God and Satan,” where God finally wins by assuming the form of Jesus, according to Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers*, 406. Early Sabbath-keeping Adventists were quite familiar with Edward Beecher’s first book. See “Miscellaneous Extracts on Hell,” *Review and Herald*, XIV, No. 21, October 13, 1859, 161. “A Beecher on the Spirits,” *Review and Herald*, XXI, No. 14, March 3, 1863; GWA [George W. Amadon], “Thoughts on Immortality,” *Review and Herald*, XXI, No. 18, March 31, 1863, 187.

¹⁷ Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981) 412-13.

Beecher is not impressed with the claim to catholicity that argues for the truth of something on the basis that it has always been believed everywhere, by everyone (32-33). But his deeper concern is with the Roman origins of the creed-making power. The Roman Emperor used his authority to call a Council that finalized the last stages of the development of a church hierarchy, wrote a creed, and then demanded conformity by a threat of coercion. In its adoption of an imperial Roman system Beecher sees the Church's original apostasy (30-32) and he warned that a similar imperial system in the Protestant churches would bring another apostasy in his day. Sabbath-keeping Adventists used Beecher's ideas as evidence that American Protestantism had already imbibed the wine of the imperial system and was already apostate.

John Loughborough explicitly cites Beecher as a source for his description of how the image to the beast (Rev. 13) would be formed. He argues that the process whereby the (Roman Catholic) beast developed out of the pagan Roman dragon was the same process the image to the beast would develop under the influence of the lamb-like beast which represented the United States. Loughborough describes five steps in the development of the first (Roman Catholic) beast. The first step in apostasy was making a creed. Second, that creed was made a rule of faith and a test of fellowship. Third, unruly members were tried on the basis of the creed rather than the Bible. Fourth, anyone who did not subscribe to the creed was branded a heretic. In the fifth step, the Church secured the power of civil law to enforce penalties on those who were branded heretics. Loughborough states that the "nominal, creed-making Protestants" who constitute the "ecclesiastical power" of the American government have already taken four of those steps and are prepared to take the fifth by enforcing Sunday legislation, thus constituting the image to the beast.¹⁸

¹⁸ J. N. Loughborough, "IMAGE OF THE BEAST. (*Concluded.*)," *Review and Herald*, XVII, 10 (January 22, 1861), 76-77.

What then can we say about the nature of the historiography of Charles Beecher and the early Sabbath-keeping Adventists? First, it was Protestant in that it affirmed the basic reformation belief in the authority of the Bible. They believed that the Bible alone, without any human statement of beliefs, is capable of accomplishing all that needs to be done to make the man (or woman) of God perfect. When it came to interpreting the Bible, Protestants rejected priestly authority in favor of private judgment. Thus Beecher and the early Adventists understanding of history was undergirded by a deep commitment to freedom of conscience as opposed to bondage to the Church and to the statements of its Councils. They viewed history from the Protestant perspective of freedom from the oppressive Roman Church's coercive demands.

Second, it is apparent that Charles Beecher and the early Sabbath-keeping Adventists also viewed history from an eschatological perspective. They believed that knowledge of the past enabled them to see and be warned of future dystopian developments. From the seeds of imperial creed-making evident from Nicea to his time Beecher could see a worldwide conference enforcing a common creed even in Protestantism. Adventists saw even more: from the rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath in the early church and its replacement in Christian creeds with Sunday they saw worldwide apostasy from God's law, the enforcement of unbiblical Sunday observance in America, and, finally, the persecution of true Sabbath-keepers with all the ensuing events leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus.

Sabbath-keeping Adventists were also deeply concerned about their own body of believers as they contemplated organizing a hundred and fifty years ago. They did not want their movement to follow the imperial way of Babylon. Some opposed organization because they equated it with the adoption of Babylonianism. Only when it was clear that organization did not

involve the making of a creed as a test of fellowship were they willing to take the first steps in adopting “Gospel Order.” As they organized their church they wanted to be sure they did not follow the imperial system of Babylon and take the first step in apostasy.