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Foy, William E

AN EXAMINATION OF THE VISIONS OF
WILLIAM E. FOY

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INTRODUCTION

The express purpose of this paper is to examine the three visions of William E. Foy in respect to his relationship with Ellen Harmon White, and the Bible. As far as I have been able to determine, there has only been one term paper written on Mr. Foy, and it consisted of biographical information and not his visions.

Foy has often been a neglected character forced into the background of Mrs. White or confused with Hazen Foss. In fact, in the Seventh-Day Adventist Encyclopedia, there is only a brief column devoted to him. It would seem that the first prophet within the denomination would be deserving of at least a modest biography, if only to determine what lay in his character and background that would cause the Lord to appoint him as His messenger in the middle of the 19th century, when gentlemen of his ethnic persuasion were not usually asked for their opinion on Christ. Surely, with the number of historians the church has produced, one would have the academic acumen to dig through the records that may have been recorded within the various cities where he had spoken in order that one might fully understand what effect he had in the early 1840's.

Unfortunately, this is not a master's thesis so I must of necessity limit myself to the information which lay within easy access; therefore, the most obvious topic for a paper concerning Elder Foy would be an investigation of the three recorded visions which he had.

FIRST VISION

In describing his first vision, Foy writes that he was immediately seized as though he was in the agonies of death, and that his breath was taken from him. After God separated his spirit from his body, he was shown an angel arrayed in white raiment who possessed a radiant countenance. Whereupon, he was led alongside a river which had a mountain of pure water in midst. Along the bank stood a multitude of people journeying westward who began to walk upon the water until they reached the mountain; here, the righteous were separated from the wicked, for the righteous were able to pass through the water, but the wicked were held without. As the righteous passed through the mountain, they underwent three changes. As a man is purified by baptism, so the water in this instance, manifested a similar effect. First, the bodies of the righteous were glorified; then they received pure and shining garments, and finally crowns. Thereupon, the righteous passed into a boundless plain, which is the Paradise of God.

The initial aspect of William Foy's vision bore a striking similarity to the first vision of Ellen White. Three years before Mrs. White received her first vision, William Foy, a black Episcopal minister, received prophetic manifestations. In each of his experiences that are recorded, he states that he was afflicted with an absence of breathing; on the first occasion for two and a half hours and in the second for twelve and a half hours, a fact which is collaborated by the testimony of eight witnesses and a medical doctor. On August 26, 1848, at a "Brother Snow's" place in Hannibal, Mrs. White underwent a similar experience for one and a half hours; similarly, she was taken away in the spirit. Obviously, what is taken before God when a prophet is in vision is the breath which God breathed into the

nostrils (Gen. 2:7). This breath in actuality is more than a mere exhale of air, but that element which activates the electrical system within man which in turn causes the brain to think and the lungs to breath--it is man's soul (Eccl. 12:7).

In vision, Foy saw that the hosts of heaven were being divided up into groups of various sizes, and in the midst of the saints stood an angel which had preached the gospel on earth; Foy later identifies them as guardian angels. It is safe to infer from this that the groups which surrounded the angels were composed of the individuals to ^{whom} which that particular angel had ministered ~~to~~ from his birth to his death or translation. The reason for the variance in distribution would appear to be due to the fact that not every angel would minister to the exact same number of people, nor would all of his charges be saved. As the saints entered into the gates of heaven, which had just been opened by Christ, they beheld millions of exuberant angels rushing to them, bidding them welcome and handing each one of them a card upon which was printed their new name, which only they could read. As Foy looked up, he found that there was no sky, but in its stead were countless angels who sang with a power they had never attained to before, and whose wings cried Holy! Holy!

The angels that Elder Foy saw bore cards which the Spirit of Prophecy states (E.W. Pg. 17) are given to all angels commissioned to visit the Earth. The cards which the saints carried is reminiscent of the white stone of Revelation 2:17, which is given to those who overcome with a new name written which only the receiver knew. They had claimed the promises made to the church of Sardis for those who overcome and as a result they are now clothed in white raiment (Rev. 3:4-5). As the wings of the angels cried out praises to God, visions of Ezekiel beholding the living wheels which

could see and the sound of the seraphims and cherubims wings must have passed through Foy's mind as he saw the inheritance of the saints.

Before him, he saw a multitude of people ^{whom} which he describes as having not passed through death. Whereupon an angel appeared on the boundless plain "and came to the spirit of one of those which had not passed through death, and cried with a loud voice, saying, 'This is my Mother.' " Thereafter, Foy saw a high mountain of pure silver which was perfectly round; on the side of it, there appeared a choir of angels. And they were joined in a chorus with the righteous beings. On the right side of the mountain stood one "with raiment of burnished gold, his legs were like pillars of flaming fire, his countenance was like lightning, and his crown gave light to this boundless place, and those that had not passed through death, could not look upon his countenance. And on the side of this mountain, inscribed in pure, were the words, The Father and The Son."

^ "Directly under these letters stood the mighty angel, whose crown lighted up the place and all the heavenly host worshipped at his feet, round about the mountain. This mighty angel then raised his right hand, which appeared like a flaming sword, and all the multitude of those who had not passed through death were caught up to the top of the mountain; and there was a large book opened, and their names came up out of the book in the form of cards which were stamped upon their foreheads."

In describing those who had not tasted death, Foy doesn't describe them as being merely bright, but ^{or} having the brightness of the stars. The fact that Foy was able to distinguish between the 144,000 and those who had passed through death implies some visible distinction discernable. Why would an angel decide to pick out one of those who had not seen death and say, "This is my Mother." Either she was his mother, in which case, he couldn't be an angel, because it is obvious from Mark 12:35 those resurrected from the dead will be like the angels who neither marry nor are given

in marriage. And if he's not an angel, then Foy was mistaken. Later on in his vision, Foy states that he saw small angels on branches. Could it be that what he actually saw were the children of those who had been saved. Mrs. White speaks of seeing children using their wings to fly up the mountain of God. This, of course, would mean that Foy was wrong in interpreting his vision. However, since Foy was able to distinguish angels from the redeemed on prior occasions, it is only logical to assume that he would do so in these occasions. The most logical conclusion is to assume that the angel was speaking symbolically and that since only guardian angels are spoken of by Foy as being guides, that this one must be her guardian angel because he immediately became her guide. Perhaps when he spoke thus, he was in a sense implying that in respect to piety and purity, she had attained the level where she was above him, therefore, she became his mother in a spiritual sense in that she was able to teach him lessons of love and humility by means of her example. As one of the 144,000, this would fit in with her spiritual development. This is the only rational way of explaining how a member of this group could possibly be the mother of an angel.

This Angel standing under the letters of Gold whom the angels worshipped was obviously Jesus Christ. The description is right out of Revelation 1. With the raising of his right hand, the 144,000 were caught up to the mountain where their names came out of the Book of Life and were stamped upon their heads. Mrs. White refers to these individuals as having, "God, New Jerusalem, and a glorious star containing Jesus' new name," written upon their foreheads. Both Foy and E. G. White are recorded as seeing an immense tree with two limbs; which E. G. White describes as straddling the river of life. Mrs. White identifies it as the Tree of Life with fruit

which looked like gold mixed with silver. When both desired to eat of this fruit, they were told that "those who eat of the fruit of this tree return to earth no more," and found themselves immediately returned to Earth suffering from much sadness and much homesickness.

SECOND VISION

Again Foy was taken from his body into the Spirit, but this time found himself standing alone upon the earth. He was entering into his vision of the judgment. Out of the west, a cloud rose and covered the sun so that it became like sackcloth. Then there appeared, stretching from the south to the north, a flaming bar of fire before which all mankind was gathered. Thereupon, they were caught up to the bar and where the righteous had their bodies changed until they resembled transparent gold, similar to what he had seen the saints undergo in his first vision. The saints were then clothed in light and shining garments, crowns placed upon their heads and shining cards upon their breasts. They then passed through this bar of fire, but when the wicked attempted to follow, they found themselves unable to do so, but upon an earth engulfed in a darkness their spiritual blindness had caused in fires fanned by their past deeds.

Just as Mrs. White in vision beheld Fitch and Stockman in heaven, so shall all the saints have the opportunity to find their friends in paradise. But not every loved one will be there. When Foy look down upon the earth, and viewed the fate of the wicked, he recognized those whose names were recorded on the church books on earth. Some had even been preachers of the gospel, but because of their actions, they were counted as part of the wicked. Then he was taken to the plain of heaven where he saw the seventh angel preparing to sound his trumpet, and an angel whose name he doesn't mention, but by inference suggests must be the Son of God. Here, the saints of all ages have been gathered together as one body in order that they might take possession of their inheritance: the city of God.

Then he saw a multitude of people clothed in white garments wearing bright crowns and singing a song which the saints and angels could not sing. They were standing in a perfect square, but their size was only that of a ten-year old child. It is obvious that these individuals are the 144,000. They are portrayed in a similar fashion in Rev. 14:2-5, and in Great Controversy (p. 644). This difference in size is attested to by the latter reference as being a result of centuries of sin which have decayed the human condition. The picture painted by Foy is almost exactly (re) duplicated in Great Controversy. (Either they had the same vision, but at different times or there was plagiarism on the part of Mrs. White; I am inclined to the former.)

As Foy was to be taken back to the earth, he beheld the world as it will exist ; with saints and angels passing from heaven to earth and back again through a pure and bright, silvery sky.

THIRD VISION

In Foy's third vision, he was shown the pathway of the people through the heavenly city.

"He saw a great platform, or step, on which multitudes of people gathered. Occasionally, one would drop through this platform out of sight, and of such a one, it was said to him, "Apostatized." Then he saw the people rise to a second step, or platform, and some there also dropped through the platform out of sight. Finally a third platform appeared, which extended to the gates of the holy city. A great company gathered with those who had advanced to this platform."

Elder Loughborough states that, because he expected Jesus to come, he failed to recognize the fact that a third message was to follow the first and second messages of Revelation 14. As a result of this, the vision was inexplicable. Why is there no written copy of this vision or that of his fourth vision? There could be a number of reasons--foremost, among them would be that his fourth vision was the same as his third or related to it. Due to the fact that he didn't fully understand it, he may not have proclaimed it wholeheartedly, or not at all. But if he had not proclaimed the message with all the vigor at his disposal, surely he would have been rebuked in the same manner. Hazen Foss was when he refused to proclaim the message the Lord gave him. The fact that he didn't understand it, however, doesn't necessarily cast any aspersion against him. It is not always given to a prophet to understand his visions, but merely relate what he saw. When Mrs. White and D. A. Robinson discuss William Foy, there appears to be no evidence that he showed the type of anxiety as did Foss. In the manuscript prepared by J. and C. H. Pearson in 1845, there is a printed certificate showing he was a member in good standing at the Freewill Baptist

Church in Augusta. In no way is his manner in 1845 similar to that he manifested in 1842 when he feared to bear the message. On the contrary, he appears to be happy and thoroughly devoted to Christ. Mrs. White describes as joyous [?] were he heard her relate her vision which he describes as being the same as the one he received. The fact that he seldom preached after 1844 may be due in part to financial problems which he states had caused him cease his ministry for three months in order that he might provide for his family. Or it may have been due to ill health, ^{to her} seeing as ~~how~~ he died a year later. For him to have ceased his ministry because of prejudice in 1844 is not very valid because as Elder Loughborough states he was well accepted:

"By invitation, he went from city to city to tell of the wonderful things he had seen; and in order to accommodate the vast crowds who had assembled to hear him, large halls were secured. . ." (pg. 146).

Though this was prior to 1844, is there any reason to presume that things would change over night? However, the assertion that after March 21, 1844, people were no longer interested in hearing about the parousia, especially from one of his background is not without relevance. Loughborough does say that "his work continued until the year 1844 near the close of the twenty-three hundred days. Therefore, this would appear to be a valid argument. He may have been among those who did not agree with ^{S.S} Hiram Snow's belief that October 22 would be the day of Christ's coming after he didn't come in March. The fact that he attended Mrs. White's meetings in 1845 is further proof that he didn't give up the Advent faith.

Perhaps one of the reasons Hazen Foss was given a similar vision in 1844 to that of William Foy was due to Foy's inability to proclaim the message or to proclaim it with Foy and in time become Foy's successor since God in his fore-knowledge realized that Foy had a short time to live. God

nowhere promises that the ministry of His prophets will be long, as is shown in the cases of Amos and Stephen, but that as long as they are in harmony with Him, He will use them as long or as short as their ministry lasts.

The interpretation of the three platforms of William Foy is to be found in the section dealing with the three angels' messages in Early Writings. As people advanced to each tier, some were lost through apostasy. This was a time of testing for the people of God that He might know those who served Him out of love and those who did it out of fear. When the first angel's message was proclaimed in 1840, many gladly received it. However, there was a mistake in the reckoning hidden from all. When the Lord failed to appear in 1843, those who truly loved Jesus were greatly saddened by His absence. But those who embraced the message out of fear were happy that the Lord hadn't come; so the true nature of their hearts were revealed. They, along with the righteous, had stepped upon the first platform, but when the time of testing arrived, they were found wanting and declared apostate and fell through the platform.

But this was not the end of it through God's mercy; the mistake was found and explained with a reasoning that was irrefutable. This brought a new surge of power to the movement, and again the gospel of Christ's soon coming was proclaimed: this was the second tier of the platform, and the second angel's message. As with the proclamation of the first angel's message, many had been carried away by the passion of those sincere ones, but they manifested no evidence of a true conversion in their own lives. As a result, when October 22, 1844 came and went, so did their fear and support of the Advent Movement. They, like their brethren, fell through the platform. The reason those who rejected the light of the first angel's message did not return once they had fallen through the platform lies in

the fact that in refusing the first, they lost the light of the second. Instead, the former brethren derided the children of Israel for their folly.

There was yet one final message to be given; that of the third angel. All who accepted this message are led inside the sanctuary of God. The mark of those who keep the message of this angel is that they keep the ~~commandments~~ of God. After this message, the significance of the Sabbath was revealed along with the health message, and true significance of the doctrine of the atonement.

"I saw a company who stood well guarded and firm, giving no countenance to those who would unsettle the established faith of the body. God looked upon them with approbation. I was shown three steps-- the first, second, and third angels' messages.

(E. G. White)

The people of God had been guided up each step until they stood upon the solid foundation. Those who rejected the first message could not be benefitted by the midnight cry, which was to prepare them to enter with Jesus by faith into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. As the Jews darkened their understanding of Christ by rejecting John the Baptist, the herald of Christ, so those who rejected the first two messages blinded themselves to the light of the third angel's message.

The visions of the three steps were designed to mollify the effect of the great disappointment for the children of God. But the true significance of the steps ^{visions} weren't seen until after 1844; however, those who believed and trusted in God survived and built the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, albeit not on a foundation of fear, but of love.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps more than any other facet of this course, I have enjoyed preparing this paper the most. Although a history major, I have found it to be a constant trial to get enthused about much of denominational history; but in reading William Foy and Ellen G. White, and by comparing what they had to say concerning the inheritance of the saints, I was terribly impressed by the depth of God's benevolence toward man. I saw that there was so much He wanted to do if He were only given the chance, and that striving for any type of mastery while on earth was a vain pursuit. That our sojourn was only preparation for our real walk with God, and not an end unto itself.

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