

Contemplating prayer: Should we seek wisdom from other faith traditions?

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# Proclamation!

FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS  
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS  
SABBATARIANS  
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

SPRING 2013  
VOLUME 14, ISSUE 1

## A NECESSARY DIVORCE

BEYOND LEAVING THE ADVENTIST PEW

No reason to exist without the central pillar





COLLEEN TINKER

## A call to accountability

**T**he Christian world has just celebrated the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and I am overwhelmed again by what Jesus did. He took a mortal body, and, without losing any shred of His divine attributes, He lived among us and took all our sin into Himself. He died our death on the cross, and He rose from the grave on the third day. He broke Satan's control over this domain of darkness (Col 1:13) and opened a new, living way for us to approach God directly (Heb. 10:20).

Ever since we began ministering to former and questioning Adventists in 1999, Richard and I have found our greatest joy in seeing people come to

ing God's word to tell us the truth and then in being willing to submit to it. The minute we try to improve our experience by disciplines and methods enhancing our experience with God, we add our works to the finished work of Jesus.

Moreover, He asks us to believe Him just as Abraham did; He asks us to submit to His word and to stop trying to create the experience or program we think we deserve. He asks us to trust Him in our pain and in the mundane ordinariness of life. He meets us and gives us meaning as we obediently take the next right step—and He is faithful to show us that next step when we trust Him.

We have dedicated this issue of *Proclamation!* to calling us to accountability. Dale Ratzlaff challenges us to trust God's word when it conflicts with Adventist doctrine. Terry Mirra challenges us to unpack and completely divorce ourselves from our Adventist worldview, and Martin Carey explores the roots of contemplative prayer and Christian mysticism that are growing in popularity among evangelical churches. Julius Botelho tells how he found his true Savior, and we share a retrospective of the eighth Former Adventist Fellowship conference in Redlands, California. Rick Barker explores the fifth Adventist fundamental belief, and Carolyn Macomber discusses suffering as a Christian. Chris Lee concludes our issue with a reminder that we must celebrate our rights in Christ.

Trusting the risen Jesus for our salvation is the thing that changes our identities. Trusting the Lord Jesus for our growth, our provision, and our lives, however, is the thing that bonds us to Him. When we experience Him providing for us and redeeming our pain—just as He promised to do—we are transformed. His word is alive, and it changes us when we trust it, because we know He cannot lie. He is risen!

**The minute we try to improve our experience by disciplines and methods enhancing our experience with God, we add our works to the finished work of Jesus.**

understand God's grace to them because the Lord Jesus died in their place and rose again for their eternal life. Seeing people become born again and spiritually alive is still the biggest joy of our lives. We have a growing concern, however, for many we see who leave Adventism, thrilled about the new covenant, but gradually become enmeshed in more subtle works religions that promise peace, victory, and power through the means of learning special methods of prayer and spiritual disciplines. It has become a deep grief to me to see former Adventists who drift away from the power of the gospel and confuse their love of the new covenant with a search for something more.

Being dissatisfied with the gospel and God's word as His provision for our power leaves us vulnerable to false teachings—but it also leaves us subtly but powerfully connected to the thing we thought we left: the false gospel of Adventism.

Two things are necessary in order to be free from our Adventist entanglement. The first necessary thing is taking the time to “unpack” our Adventist worldview, which includes the nature of man, the nature of sin and salvation, the nature of Jesus, and the impact of the new covenant. The second thing is learning to trust that God cannot lie, that His word is sufficient and alive, and that He will transform us as we submit our minds to it.

It is hard for us to lose our Adventist “intellectualizing”, but it is necessary if we are going to become mature and confident in our identity in Christ. The power of the Christian life is in allow-

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Founding Editor **Dale Ratzlaff**

Editor **Colleen Tinker**

Design Editor **Richard Tinker**

Copy Editor **Cristine Cole**

Contributing Editors **Rick Barker, Martin L. Carey, Chris Lee, Carolyn Macomber**

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Web: [LifeAssuranceMinistries.org](http://LifeAssuranceMinistries.org)

E-mail: [proclamation@gmail.com](mailto:proclamation@gmail.com)

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# Is there a coming time of trouble?

Do you believe there is a coming time of trouble? If so, how can we prepare for it?

The Bible tells us there will be a tribulation before Jesus returns as King to reign (Matt. 24:21). We also know that the outpouring of God's wrath in judgment is not for believers but for unbelievers (Rom. 2:6-11; 1 Thess. 1:10). While there are differing opinions within Christianity regarding whether the church is present or absent during the final tribulation on the earth, we do know that those who are in Christ will experience tribulation while they are in the world (Jn. 16:33), but Jesus has overcome the world. Perhaps we can encourage our hearts from the little book of Habakkuk.

"How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and you will not hear?" This was the cry of Habakkuk some 2,600 years ago as he observed the demise of his culture. He witnessed violence, iniquity, and wickedness wherever he looked. There was strife and contention as the law was ignored; justice, he said, was never upheld. The wicked surrounded the righteous, and what little justice there was came out perverted.

As I write this it seems that Habakkuk may have looked ahead to this evening's news: bribery, self-serving leaders, terrorism, immorality, and corruption in high places is everywhere we turn—you know the list. We cry out, "How long, O Lord, will you put up with this evil?"



Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff have authored five books concerning Adventism: *Sabbath in Christ*—a volume that explains new covenant Sabbath rest, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*—explores the unique doctrine of a pre-advent judgment that decides eternal destinies, *Truth About Adventist "Truth"*—a little book that's perfect to give to Christians that need to understand Adventism, *Truth Led Me Out*—in which Dale Ratzlaff tells his own story of following Jesus, no matter the cost, and *My Cup Overflows*—Carolyn's autobiography. Each of these books is available at [Ratzlaff.com](http://Ratzlaff.com) or by phoning 800-355-7073, or 520-836-9790.

I wonder if God's answer to Habakkuk could be His answer to us as so much of our culture descends rapidly into the darkness of evil. It was not what Habakkuk expected, nor is it something we would desire. He was astonished that God would use the Chaldeans, who were even more wicked and violent than Judah, to correct His people. But He did. Later God judged the Chaldeans for their sin; He does keep an account with the nations.

As Habakkuk looked ahead to the coming devastation of his country, he uttered what would become Paul's gospel theme: "the righteous will live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). He prayed, "Lord, I have heard the report about You and I fear. O

Lord, revive your work in the midst of the years...in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2). His vision seemed to encompass the ultimate Savior. "His radiance is like sunlight; He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power" (Hab. 3:4).

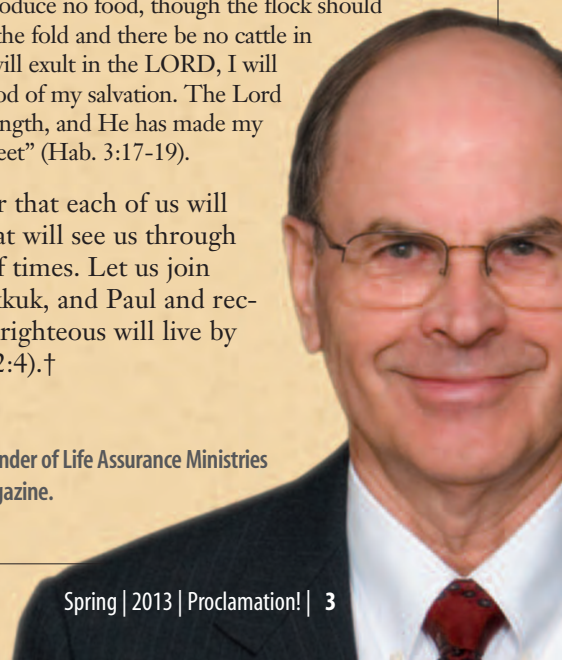
As Habakkuk contemplated what was coming, he said, "I heard and my inward parts trembled, at the sound my lips quivered. Decay enters my bones, and in my place I tremble" (Hab. 3:16).

He had to wait for the day of distress when the Chaldeans would invade, yet observe the power of his faith.

"Though the fig tree should not blossom and there be no fruit on the vines, though the yield of the olive should fail and the fields produce no food, though the flock should be cut off from the fold and there be no cattle in the stalls, yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds' feet" (Hab. 3:17-19).

It is my prayer that each of us will have the faith that will see us through even the worst of times. Let us join Abraham, Habakkuk, and Paul and recognize that "the righteous will live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4).†

Dale Ratzlaff is the founder of Life Assurance Ministries and *Proclamation!* magazine.







# I found my **true** Savior

JULIUS "HAP" BOTELHO

I was born and raised a Seventh-day Adventist. Now, some of you might wonder why I would need to tell you that detail as part of my testimony. Indeed, some might wonder why Trinity Church supports a Former Adventist Fellowship at all, since the Adventists you know or with whom you work seem like fine Christian people. So what if they worship on a different day and don't eat bacon?

Frankly, when I started coming to Trinity a few years ago, I wondered that, too. I had left Adventism years before after reading Walter Martin's book *Kingdom of the Cults* where he addressed some of the same questions about their strange doctrines that I had. I'd been frustrated for years that my Adventism didn't seem to have the power to help me be the Christian I wanted to be, so when Martin confirmed my suspicions that the weakness came from holding to non-Biblical doctrines, I left the Adventist church, thinking that I would never look back.

Years passed. My wife Nancy and I tried a couple of different

churches, but I could never get comfortable in them. Then we visited Trinity to check out the "Light and Power" program for adults with intellectual disabilities, a program which our adult son was enjoying. We enjoyed the service, and it just happened to be a day on which the prospective members class was being offered, so I went. I discovered that Trinity was part of the Evangelical Free denomination that "majored in the majors, and minored in the minors". Coming from my hyper-legalistic background, this emphasis was a real breath of fresh air, so we became members and felt as if we finally had a church home. I saw a notice in the worship folder about the Former Adventist Fellowship and went once to see what it was all about, but I had no interest in joining them because I thought I was completely done with all that Adventist stuff.

Even though I was being bathed week after week in great Bible teaching, however, I began to see a bothersome difference between the other members of Trinity and myself. I just didn't

seem to fit in. I knew something was wrong, but I couldn't put my finger on what it was. It came to a head one Sunday when I arrived just before second service and ran into a friend coming out of first service who told me with great enthusiasm that I was going to love the service this week because it's "all about Jesus". Not at all inspired by that news, I went in and sat through song after song about Jesus and then through a sermon about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

I didn't understand why everyone seemed so jazzed. So He died for us; what good was that if He wouldn't help me be a better person now? Even though I had everything going for me—a great business, the perfect wife, and I was living the American dream—I was a mess inside. I had no power, no confidence, absolutely no interest in "sharing my faith", and that morning I felt surrounded by people who appeared to be fired up about Jesus, and I had no clue why. I left the service in a foul mood that wasn't helped by my wife's coming to me with some magazine to read that she had gotten in Elizabeth Inrig's class that morning. I could see that it was some of that former Adventist stuff. Oh, goodie. But since my wife really is perfect, I took her advice and started thumbing through her *Proclamation!* magazine. I found myself skimming an article by Louis Talbot, chancellor of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, entitled "Why Adventism is NOT evangelical" (July/August/September, 2010). All of a sudden I found myself reading a quote I recognized as being from the Adventist prophet Ellen White's book about the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*—my favorite of all her books. Let me share it with you and see if you notice anything fishy about it.

"Yet into the world where Satan claimed dominion God permitted His Son to come, a helpless babe, subject to the weakness of humanity. He permitted Him to meet life's peril in common with every human soul, to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss" (*Desire of Ages* p. 48).

Next Professor Talbot quotes from an official Adventist publication, *Signs of the Times*:

"In Christ's veins was the incubus of a tainted heredity, like a caged lion, ever seeking to break forth and destroy. Temptation attacked Him where by heredity He was weakest—attacked Him in unexpected times and ways, yet in spite of bad blood and inherited meanness, He conquered. Jesus took humanity with all its liabilities, with all its dreadful risks of yielding to temptation" (by L. A. Wilcox, editor, *Signs of the Times*, 1927).

As Talbot went on to point out the terrible heresy in these statements which claimed that the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father might have failed, I realized that I had been duped.

**Julius (Hap) Botelho** grew up in the northeast and attended Adventist schools through college. He came to California in 1981 for a two-week visit that extended a little longer than he expected: he still lives in Redlands, California. Retired from a career in the insurance industry, Julius and his wife Nancy enjoy spending time with their seven children and six grandchildren. Julius loves to ride his recumbent bicycle long distances and last year rode in the Death Valley Double Century event. He is currently listening to a Hebrews series by Andrew Farley on his mp3 player.

During all those years in Adventist schools, I had been taught the most grievous of lies and false doctrines. I felt ill.

The beautiful thing about God's truth, though, is the way it can uncover and remove lies. I began to study with the former Adventists and read some of the books they recommended—no, make that all the books they recommended. Error after error in my thinking about spiritual things began to be revealed, and a new strength and joy began to emerge. Now instead of thinking that I had to add to Christ's work on the cross with my Sabbath keeping and diet as good Adventists do, I realized that I was buried and resurrected in Christ. Moreover, I am made complete and have no condemnation in Christ. I possess forgiveness, liberty, complete redemption, and have even been given a spiritual gift in Christ. The future looks so different to me; I've finally figured out that for the Christian, eternity has already started. Think about it, in heaven you won't be worrying about what the future holds, because you know that God is in charge of heaven. I finally get it; He's in charge of earth too!!! That's some good news.

So why did I start this story by telling you I was an Adventist? Has all this been to bash them or malign them in some way?

No, my goal has been to clarify for you that the teachings to which your Adventist friends and coworkers are being subjected is non-Christian to its very core. You have a tremendous opportunity to share truth with them, because they are missing out on the joy of the real gospel. Finally learning the "real gospel" has made such a difference in my life, and I will be forever grateful to you, the Christians known as Trinity Evangelical Free Church, for giving the Former Adventist Fellowship a place to call home, so that they could help me find my true Savior, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. †

Hap shared this testimony at Trinity Church during the Sunday services on March 9, 2013. You can watch the video of his testimony here: <http://youtu.be/CQQD45rBicE>.







# NO REAS

DALE RATZLAFF

The Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment and cleansing of the heavenly Sanctuary based upon Daniel 8:14 is indeed the central pillar of the Adventist faith. Some Adventists may disagree; however, it is. Ellen White said, “The scripture which above all others had been both the foundation and central pillar of the Advent faith was the declaration, ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed’.”<sup>1</sup>

A recent book on the topic of the sanctuary by Dr. Roy Adams is subtitled, *Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology*,<sup>2</sup> and it confirms the central role of this doctrine in Adventist theology. The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, 2001, is entitled, *Pillars of Our Faith*. It includes chapters on “The Sabbath”, “The Heavenly Sanctuary”, “The Hour of God’s Judgment”, “The Remnant”, etc. The last two presidents of the General Conference have both expressed publicly that the Adventist church will not change its historical doctrines, especially the doctrine of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. (All emphases here and throughout this article are mine).

I recently reviewed the tape of the Adventist Ministerial/ Evangelism Council held in Seattle, Washington, on April 16, 1998. The speakers were all professors from the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary: Dr. Richard Davidson, Dr. Roy Gane, and Dr. Angel Rodriguez. Dr. Rodriguez is also Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference. This conference was called to answer the many questions Adventist pastors were asking about the 2300 days, 1844, and so on, after reading my book, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*. Following are a few excerpts from this meeting.

Dr. Roy Gane: “I was extremely excited about the fact this man, Ratzlaff, affirms that the sanctuary doctrine is central to Seventh-day Adventist theology...I do appreciate that fact, that he does say that it is central...It is impossible to argue with Ratzlaff’s experience. His presentation of his experience is really very impressive in that he presents it candidly and honestly, and many of us can relate to that kind of a struggle.”

Dr. Richard Davidson: “I had my pilgrimage with the sanctuary doctrine, and I came to the same conclusion that Dale Ratzlaff did. If the sanctuary doctrine could not stand the test of the closest investigation, I didn’t want to be an Adventist as a cultural Adventist. If the heart of the doctrine centered around the sanctuary...” (Davidson then states that he came to believe in this Adventist doctrine.) “I admire his [Ratzlaff’s] integrity, that when he came to the conclusions that the sanctuary is not biblical he had the integrity to say, ‘I’m bailing out.’ I have to applaud him for that, being willing to follow his convictions where they led and be consistent with them.”

One of the pastors present asked the question: “If I believe in the sanctuary doctrine but do not believe in the 2300 days and 1844, is that OK?”

Dr. Rodriguez answered: “Without 1844 and the doctrine of the Sanctuary—this may sound strong to you but I have already published it—there is no reason for us to exist. 1844 provided for us our identity and our mission. And if we are wrong, then we are simply wrong. See, that’s what he [Ratzlaff] is arguing in the book [*Cultic Doctrine*], and I think he is right. If

# ON TO EXIST WITHOUT THE CENTRAL PILLAR

we change that [the investigative judgment and cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary] we would be transmuted into something else. But we will [would] not be who we are. In other words, I find it extremely difficult to deny this fundamental doctrine clearly associated in Adventist thinking with 1844 and Daniel 8:14. I find it very difficult to understand, how could we really be Adventists and yet deny the very foundation of our existence—deny our birth.”

Later Dr. Rodriguez, in answer to a question about some of the exegetical problems associated with this doctrine, states:

“The real issue here is prophetic interpretation [regarding the] 2300 days, 1844. The fundamental issue here is prophetic interpretation. Now I am going to tell you very clearly, because I think there is no other way to say this thing. The method of interpretation we use for Daniel and Revelation is passé. It’s a methodology that is not used by any serious scholar outside Adventism. It is not used any longer. When we discussed this method with our good friends the Lutherans, they were asking us, ‘What in the world is that?’ and we told them, ‘This is the methodology that Luther used.’ . . . If we are wrong in our interpretation of Daniel—historicism—then we are wrong. Why do we use this method of interpretation that is passé, gone? We use it because we believe it is the one that the biblical text provides for us. In other words, this is based in the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. This is the way we have taught it. This is the way we still believe it. That’s why we, even [when some] among ourselves would like to use a more modern approach while the church is still saying, ‘Hey, we believe what the Bible says,’ this is the methodology to use. And once we use that, it seems to me that it is very logical to support the date for 1844 and the fulfillment of the 2300 days.”

There should be no question in the minds of our readers—Adventists and others—that the investigative judgment and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary is indeed the “central pillar of Adventism.” Let’s quickly review the facts:

- Ellen G. White said that Daniel 8:14 is the foundation and central pillar of the Advent faith.
- A recent book on the sanctuary by Adventist leader Dr. Roy Adams is subtitled, *The heart of Adventist theology*.
- A recent *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, entitled, *The pillars of our faith* includes chapters on the “The Sabbath”, “The Heavenly Sanctuary”, “The Hour of God’s Judgment”, and “The Remnant”. It includes this quotation from *Early Writings*, p. 263, “Jesus entered the most holy of the heavenly, at the end of the 2300 days of Daniel 8, in 1844, to make final atonement for all who could be benefitted by His mediation,

and thus to cleanse the sanctuary.”

- Dr. Roy Gane stated that he was excited to know that Ratzlaff understood that the sanctuary was central to Adventists.
- Dr. Richard Davidson referred to the sanctuary as the heart of doctrine.
- Dr. Angel Rodriguez, professor of theology at the Adventist seminary and associate director of the Adventist Biblical Research Institute, stated forthrightly, “Without 1844 and the doctrine of the Sanctuary—this may sound strong to you but I have already published it—there is no reason for us to exist. 1844 provided for us our identity and our mission. And if we are wrong, then we are simply wrong.”

We can see that the stakes are high. Because of the limitations of space, I will only evaluate a few of the many items included in this “central pillar”. I studied this doctrine thoroughly before leaving the Adventist ministry and was amazed by the many places it undermines the work of Christ. Come, let us reason together. Truth has nothing to fear from honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

## Nine cracks in the pillar

1. **This teaching is built on 22 linking assumptions;** 14 of the 22 are contrary to fact, and the other 8 cannot be proved.<sup>3</sup>
2. **The Adventist interpretation of Daniel 8:14 completely ignores the context.**

The late Dr. Raymond Cottrell, Adventism’s top Hebrew scholar, stated that to get Adventist theology out of Daniel 8:14, one either has to completely ignore the context or one has to make Christ the wicked little horn mentioned in the prophecy. There are no other options—as the top secret committee of Adventist scholars found in their five year study. Instead of admitting this doctrine had no biblical basis, the committee disbanded and left no minutes. Most Adventists to this day know nothing about this cover up. The administrators, knowing the problems, told Adventist pastors to continue to teach the investigative judgment and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary “based upon traditional assumptions”.<sup>4</sup> Notice that a “contextual” understanding of Daniel 8:14 makes Christ the wicked little horn. Is this something the Holy Spirit would do?

### **3. This teaching denies Christ's finished atonement at the cross.<sup>5</sup>**

In fact, the original form of this teaching that Ellen White endorsed stated that *no* atonement was made at the cross.<sup>6</sup> If one believes that the atonement was made and finished at the cross, then this foundation and central pillar of Adventism is dead wrong at its very inception. Notice again that this central pillar does away with the finished atonement of Christ at the cross. Why would the Holy Spirit want to undermine Christ's last words on the cross, "It is finished"?

### **4. This doctrine teaches that only those who have believed in God come into this judgment.<sup>7</sup>**

John 5:24 states, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." Some will try to soften the contrast by saying that the word in John means "condemnation", an argument which is partly true. However, the Greek root word in both John 5:24 and Revelation 14:7 is *krisis*. Leon Morris states, "The implications of the present possession of eternal life are brought out in the assurance that its possessor 'cometh not into judgment.' This is the usual Johannine thought, that judgment is something that takes place here and now. The man who accepts the way of darkness and evil has already been judged. His judgment lies in that fact. So with the man who has eternal life. His vindication is present in the here and now. He has already passed right out of the state of death, and has come into life. Though this is a present state, it has future implications. The man who does not come into judgment will not come into judgment on the last great day either."<sup>8</sup> Why is it that this central pillar of the Advent faith undermines the gospel and the assurance of salvation and then contradicts the Apostle John? Who would inspire that?

### **5. This doctrine teaches that Christ did not go into the most holy place and sit at the Father's right hand until October 22, 1844.<sup>9</sup>**

Thus, it contradicts the many passages that teach otherwise such as Hebrews 6:19-20, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, [Most Holy Place]<sup>10</sup> where Jesus has entered [aorist tense indicating a point of time and that point is the ascension] as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Also, Hebrews 1:3, "When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," (Sat down is aorist tense, a point in time and that point is the ascension). Notice also Ephesians 1:19-20: "and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:19-20).

One has to be puzzled why the spirit behind this doctrine would want to take away the immediate blessings surrounding the ascension and the seating of Christ at the Father's right hand which is the very center of all the "in Christ" truths mentioned in the epistles.<sup>11</sup> One also wonders why the Adventist Fundamental belief No. 4, "Son", does not mention that Christ is seated at the Father's right hand? Should we believe the writers of Scripture or the central pillar of Adventism?

### **6. This doctrine teaches that the final punishment for the sins of the righteous will be placed on Satan.**

Ellen White states: "When Christ, by virtue of His own blood, removes the sins of His people from the heavenly sanctuary at the close of His ministration, He will place them upon Satan, who, in the execution of the judgment, must bear the final penalty."<sup>12</sup> If this is true, then Christ really did not suffer the full penalty for our sins; His death served mostly to transfer our sins to heaven and then transfer them again to Satan who becomes the final sin bearer. The "transfer" of sin is the underlying motif of Adventist sanctuary theology.<sup>13</sup> However, 1 Peter 2:24 states, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed." "Bore our sins" is aorist tense indicating that this was a one-time event at a point in time, and that point is "on the cross". What spirit would want to undermine the complete atonement at the cross? You must ask yourself, "Who is my sin bearer: Christ or Satan?"

### **7. This doctrine teaches that God's people will have to live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor.**

"When he [Christ] leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor."<sup>14</sup>

This teaching has struck fear in the hearts of countless thousands, if not millions of Adventists. This topic was discussed in the conference mentioned above. I found Dr. Roy Gane's comments to be almost unbelievable.

"In the context of living in the sight of God without a mediator, [what] she is talking about there is mediation for sin. God will do in us a work like what the Holy Spirit did ...in the virgin Mary by implanting Jesus in her womb; Christ will be implanted, His character implanted in our minds and hearts. We will accept, we will say as Mary did, 'let it be to me according to your will, word.' We will accept what He does in us so that sin simply dries on the vine in our lives. God does a work in us that he wants to do, brings us to this maturity so that He no longer has any work to do there in terms of mediating for sin. He still will be answering our prayers; the Holy Spirit will be still ministering to us. In fact Ellen White talks about the Spirit will be taken from the world and put on us as it is withdrawing, but furthermore, there is one thought that we should keep in mind. Where was Christ during the time of Jacob's trouble? In Jacob's arms, as close as he could get. And I believe that is where Christ is going to be, right there with us struggling through this terrible experience with us. He will not abandon us, and there is no evidence that he will."

Carefully observe how this central pillar of the Adventist faith contradicts Scripture and undermines the work of Christ in several ways:

### **A. Hebrews 7:25 states, "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."**

This Scripture states forthrightly that Christ is always living to make intercession for His people. There is no hint that there will be a time when He will not be doing this. Notice that the writer of Hebrews has salvation in view. Is the writer of Hebrews right or wrong?

### **B. Dr. Roy Gane seems to place the instant change that Christians will experience at the second coming<sup>15</sup> to a time before Jacob's time of trouble.**



This assumption is in harmony with traditional Adventist teaching that last day Adventists will reach a point of personal perfection before the second coming. Thus, they will have 100% of Christ's righteousness imparted to them, and will no longer need any of Christ's righteousness imputed to them. Perhaps this is why they downplay the importance of Christ seated at the Father's right hand at the ascension. I had never heard of Adventist perfection being compared to God's work in the Virgin Mary before. However, this fits nicely into traditional Adventist thinking in that Christ's perfect life was not enough to settle the issues of the great controversy; God needed a group of people, they say, to demonstrate to the inhabited universe that His law could be perfectly kept.

**C. Dr. Gane also states that according to Ellen White, God will take the Spirit that is in the world and place that Spirit on Adventists.**

According to the Apostle John, the Holy Spirit is not accessible to the world. "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you (Jn. 14:16-17).

**8. The teaching that flows from this central pillar of Adventism contradicts Scripture and nullifies the grace of God.**

Paul stated, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). The writer of Hebrews shows us that our perfection is always "in Christ". "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). "Perfected" is perfect passive in Greek indicating that this perfecting resulted from the past event of the "one offering" at the cross, the results of which continue in the present and on into the future. We who have been placed into Christ by the Spirit at the moment of saving faith continue to live in the state of Christ's perfection.

**9. This doctrine teaches that the investigative judgment and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary are the very things that vindicate the character of God before the onlooking universe.<sup>16</sup>**

The following quote is from the *Adult Sabbath School Lesson, Three Angel's Messages*, First quarter, 2008, p. 47.

"With sobering timeliness we study the subject of God's investigative judgment on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary (sesquicentennial) of its commencement in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary on October 22, 1844. Through this judgment work God has committed Himself to explain completely to the universe of unfallen beings His work of redemption, and His perfectly fair and loving way of dealing with sin and sinners. The judgment settles all accusations, doubts, and concerns about the justice and goodness of God."

This doctrine flies in the face of Romans 3:24-26. Christ has already done what Adventists think they will do by reaching perfection: "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

## What spirit would want to undermine the complete atonement at the cross? You must ask yourself, "Who is my sin bearer: Christ or Satan?"

Can you see that this central pillar of Adventism is wrong on every count? It contradicts Scripture, perverts the gospel, and undermines Christ's finished work. This doctrine actually usurps the atonement at the cross. Who is right, this doctrine, or Christ who said, "It is finished"? I have only scratched the surface in divulging the many errors associated with this teaching. However, there should be enough evidence herein to allow you to make an informed decision.

My study leads me to conclude that the Spirit of God had nothing to do with the formation and development of this doctrine. It is not the true gospel; it is a false gospel. It has the imprint of another spirit. This means that the foundation and central pillar of the Adventist faith, the very heart of Adventist theology, is unbiblical and undermines the finished work of Christ. Remember what Paul wrote to the Galatian church:

"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"<sup>17</sup>

It is of interest that the Adventist church claims that Ellen White had over 2,000 visions. She writes, "I asked my accompanying angel..." a number of times. She uses the phrase "said the angel" some 382 times. She uses the word, "my angel" about 793 times.<sup>18</sup> However, her angel was caught in several lies.<sup>19</sup> Those who "are living by the Spirit" should have nothing to do with such a false doctrine that undermines the saving work of Christ. It should be openly rejected and renounced as error.

### What is the solution?

There are many, perhaps the majority, of Adventist pastors and Bible teachers who want to run as far away from Daniel 8:14, 1844 and the investigative judgment, and the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary as possible. Yet the church cannot dismiss this doctrine. This doctrine is not only the central pillar in name, it is the central pillar holding up the whole Adventist identity. I agree 100% with Dr. Rodriguez on this point. If the Adventist church were to jettison this teaching, the organization would be morphed into something it is not.<sup>20</sup> That is why the last two General Conference pres-

idents have openly endorsed Ellen White and the sanctuary doctrine. If they were to admit the errors of October 22, 1844, and the investigative judgment as the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary as taught by Ellen White, then Ellen White would fall as “a continuing and authoritative source of truth”. If Ellen White is rejected, the doctrine of the remnant church would fall on the heap. If the remnant church doctrine goes, then the Sabbath as the seal of God for end time believers and Sunday as the mark of the beast crumbles into the dust.

Remove the central pillar, and the whole structure falls. Adventist church leaders know this fact, and they also know the errors of this teaching. To avoid the catastrophic results that would occur if they admitted the errors of this central pillar, they continue to teach it based upon traditional assumptions. Otherwise, as Dr. Angel Rodriguez states: If this doctrine is wrong, “there is no reason for us to exist...We are simply wrong.”

Yes, indeed. †

## Endnotes

- 1 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 409 (1911)
- 2 Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary—Understanding the Heart of Adventist Theology*, (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1993).
- 3 Desmond Ford, *The Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment*, p. 174ff. Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine*, Chapter, “The Broken Chain”.
- 4 <http://www.lifeassuranceministries.com/art.html>, click “Sanctuary Doctrine, Asset or Liability.”
- 5 “In 1844 our great High Priest entered the most holy place of the heavenly Sanctuary, to begin the work of the Investigative Judgment.” Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 1887-03-22. “Attended by a cloud of heavenly angels, our great High Priest enters the holy of holies, and there appears in the presence of God to engage in the last acts of his ministration in behalf of man,—to perform the work of investigative Judgment, and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits.” Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 308.
- 6 “If the atonement was made on Calvary, by whom was it made? The making of the atonement is the work of a Priest; but who officiated on Calvary? Roman soldiers and wicked Jews. The slaying of the victim was not making the atonement; the sinner slew the victim, Lev. 4:1-4, 13-15, &c., after that the Priest took the blood and made the atonement. Lev. 4:5-12, 16-21. Christ was the appointed High Priest to make the atonement, and he certainly could not have acted in that capacity till after his resurrection, and we have no record of his doing anything on earth after his resurrection, which could be called the atonement. The atonement was made in the Sanctuary, but Calvary was not such a place. He could not, according to Heb. 8:4, make the atonement while on earth. If he were on earth, he should not be a Priest.” The Levitical was the earthly priesthood, the Divine, the heavenly. Therefore, he did not begin the work of making the atonement, whatever the nature of that work may be, till after his ascension, when by his own blood he entered his heavenly Sanctuary for us...Now put by the side of this text another on this point from his [Peter’s] discourse at the 9th hour of the same day, Ac. 3:19, “Repent ye therefore; and be

- converted, that your sins may be blotted out when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”...Everyone can see that the blotting out of sins does not take place at repentance and conversion; but follows and must of necessity be preceded by them. Repentance, conversion, and baptism had then become imperative duties in the present tense; and when performed, those doing them “washed away” (Ac. 22:16), remitted or sent away from them their sins. (Acts 2:28; [sic.] Acts 2:38) [They] of course are forgiven and have “received the atonement;” but they had not received it [the atonement] entire at that time, because their sins were not yet blotted out.... Quoted from O.R.L. Crosier in the *Day Star Extra*, See Knight, *Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*, p. 126. Of Crosier’s theology, Ellen White said, “I feel fully authorized by the Lord to recommend that Extra to every saint.” See *Word to the Little Flock*, p. 13.
- 7 “In the typical service only those who had come before God with confession and repentance, and whose sins, through the blood of the sin offering, were transferred to the sanctuary, had a part in the service of the Day of Atonement. So in the great day of final atonement and investigative judgment the only cases considered are those of the professed people of God.” Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 480. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 420.
- 8 Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John*, p. 316
- 9 It is clear from the earliest records that this was the teaching and belief of early Adventists. In the *Hiram Edson Manuscript Fragment*, Mr. Edson relates his experience in the field the day after the great disappointment which laid the foundation for the reinterpretation of Miller’s 1844 prophecy which, in turn, laid the foundation for the SDA investigative judgment. “Heaven seemed open to my view, and I saw distinctly and clearly, that instead of our High Priest coming out of the Most Holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month, at the end of the 2300 days, that he for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary; and that he had a work to perform in the Most Holy before coming to this earth.” See Knight, *Rise of Sabbatarian Adventism*, p. 126. Ellen White states, “Thus those who followed in the light of the prophetic word saw that, instead of coming to the earth at the termination of the 2300 days in 1844, Christ then entered the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary to perform the closing work of atonement preparatory to His coming.” *The*

- Great Controversy*, p. 422. “As foreshadowed in the type, and foretold in the Scriptures, Christ, at the time appointed, entered the most holy place of the temple of God in heaven. He is represented by the prophet Daniel as coming at this time to the Ancient of days: ‘I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came’—not to the earth, but—to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him.” Ellen G. White, *Southern Watchman* 1905-01-24.
- 10 Every time Scripture uses the term “with the veil” it always refers to the Most Holy Place, contrary to what Ellen White taught.
- 11 See David K. Spurbeck, *An Introduction to “In Christ Truth”*, (Know to Grow “In Christ” Publications, Forest Grove, Oregon, 1999)
- 12 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 422. See also *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 266.
- 13 This was brought out time and again in the Adventist Ministerial/Evangelism Council held in Seattle mentioned above.
- 14 Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, Vol. 4, p. 432. See also *Early Writings*, p. 280; *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 1, p. 198; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 614, 647.
- 15 1 Cor. 15:51, 52.
- 16 “The final judgment is a most solemn event, which must take place before the assembled universe. When God honors His commandment-keeping people, not one of the enemies of truth and righteousness will be absent. And when transgressors receive their condemnation, all the righteous will see the result of sin. God will be honored, and His government vindicated; and that in the presence of the inhabitants of the universe.” Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, 1901-06-18.
- 17 Gal. 1:6-9.
- 18 According to the White Estate, Ellen G. White CD.
- 19 “I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel: ‘Some food for worms, some subjects of the seven last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus.’” *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 1, p. 132. (1856) See also, Sydney Cleveland, *White Washed*, chapters, “Failed Prophecies” and “Who Was That Young Man?”
- 20 I pray that the Adventist church would drop these teachings and become a true, gospel-centered evangelical church. It would, however, no longer be the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



**Dale Ratzlaff** is the founder of Life Assurance Ministries, Inc., and owns LAM Publications, LLC. He served as an Adventist pastor for 13 years, seven at Monterey Bay Academy where he taught Bible. He and his wife Carolyn left the Adventist church in 1981 when he realized he could no longer teach the investigative judgment in clear conscience. He has authored *Sabbath in Christ*, *The Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists*, *The Truth About Adventist “Truth”*, and *Truth Led Me Out*. These are available through his website, LifeAssuranceMinistries.com. The Ratzlaffs reside in Casa Grande, Arizona.





## Fundamental Belief #5. The Holy Spirit:

God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ's life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth. (Gen. 1:1, 2; Lk. 1:35; 4:18; Acts 10:38; 2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:11, 12; Acts 1:8; Jn. 14:16-18, 26; 15:26, 27; 16:7-13.)

**S**eventh-day Adventists often struggle with the idea of God as spirit and with the Holy Spirit in particular. Those familiar with the range of teachings in Adventism must acknowledge that there remains controversy within the Adventist church, despite the Fundamental Belief statement, as to whether the Holy Spirit is a person in the Godhead or only a force. I believe that this confusion stems from an overall confusion in Adventism regarding the nature of spirit.

Adventists deny that we have immaterial spirits within us, spirits that are separate from our bodies. This denial creates great obstacles in understanding the nature and role of the Holy Spirit in verses such as Romans 8:16: "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." Adventists are intensely indoctrinated into the idea that "spirit" only means breath or is only a metaphor for the human mind. As a result, it is hard for Adventists to think biblically when talking about the Holy Spirit. In Adventist minds, He is just as unreal as their own spirits.

Seventh-day Adventists believe in the gifts of the Spirit in theory; however, in practice they generally emphasize only one spiritual gift after the first century: the prophetic legacy of Ellen White. Furthermore, by referring to Ellen White and her writings as the "Spirit of Prophecy", they have given Ellen White the title and role of God, since the Holy Spirit is the one and only true Spirit of prophecy! Giving a mortal the title belonging only to God is blasphemy.

**...by referring to Ellen White and her writings as the "Spirit of Prophecy", they have given Ellen White the title and role of God, since the Holy Spirit is the one and only true Spirit of prophecy!**

Adventists have a unique view of what the inspiration of the Holy Spirit means. This view is based solely on the writings of Ellen White, not on scriptural passages, and is summarized as God inspiring the writer rather than the words. Moreover, this view insists that the resulting words are not only imperfect but must contain error. This false understanding of inspiration substantially diminishes the role and power of the Holy Spirit.

Adventists have denied some of the key roles of the Holy Spirit, including obscuring the fact that the Holy Spirit is the seal of God given as the promise of our inheritance. Instead, Adventists have taught for over a century that the seal of God is the Sabbath. While Adventist apologists will obfuscate with double-talk about the Sabbath being the sign of the seal rather than the seal itself, their baptismal study guides, evangelism seminars, and Ellen White's writings still say Sabbath is the seal. Not only does this teaching replace the Holy Spirit with the Sabbath, but it also strips the Holy Spirit of His role as a guarantee.

How reliable is a guarantee from God? God says that by placing His Spirit in us He is bearing witness that we are His children (Rom 8:15-17) and guaranteeing our inheritance (Eph 1:14; 1 Cor 1:22). God's seal is an unbreakable promise guaranteed by giving us Himself. By contrast, the Adventists' imitation seal is a human act—Sabbath keeping—and not until the second coming will Adventists know if their seal was reliable.

Seventh-day Adventists give their prophet the name for the Holy Spirit, and they assign His role as God's Seal to the Sabbath. These unbiblical doctrines reveal that Adventism has a confused theology regarding the Holy Spirit. †

**Rick Barker** is a native of Southwestern Ohio and facilitates a weekly Bible study for former and transitioning Adventists in the Dayton, Ohio, area. Rick graduated from Andrews University in 1987 and received a Masters degree from the University of Dayton. Rick and his wife Sheryl formally left the Adventist church in 2004. Prior to this they had been active in the Miamisburg and Wilmington, Ohio, churches.





TERRY MIRRA

**BEYOND LEAVING THE ADVENTIST PEW**

# NECESSA

Divorce is an ugly word. It evokes images of fighting, legal battles, and dissension of every sort. Divorce is defined as: “total separation; disunion.” While divorce in the marital context is never in God’s plan (except in cases of marital unfaithfulness), there are some circumstances and relationships along life’s path necessitating a divorce—a disunion—in order to walk in harmony with God’s plan for our lives.



**W**hen a person leaves the Seventh-day Adventist Church for the sake of truth, it's a positive step, but relinquishing denominational allegiance is only the first part of the journey towards gaining freedom in Christ. People raised in an organization riddled with false teaching and scriptural inconsistencies need to process and own the heresy before they can fully comprehend the biblical gospel message. The only way to heal and preserve integrity is to sever completely the relationship with the false religion—a spiritual divorce. Only with time, distance from the warped theology, and immersion in the unadulterated word of God can one attain a proper perspective.

Just as in marital divorce, moreover, there is loss and grieving—but it's a necessary loss, a growing pain. While it's especially painful to scrutinize what one once believed was the “truth”, ignoring the implications of those false doctrines merely delays growth and resolution. Close examination and understanding of what one believed shows a person how he has been shaped and impacted over time. Debriefing false teaching is imperative; one cannot accurately evaluate something one hasn't analyzed. In other words, not knowing what one doesn't know can hurt a person and hinder one's growth. Understanding God's truth requires open scrutiny in order to see error and make a conscious separation from it toward the true gospel (1 Cor. 15:3, 4).

The first step in dealing with a problem is to admit there is a problem. For example, if I'm on the Titanic, I dare not sit and mar-

It is widely known within the banking community that the best way to spot a counterfeit bill is to know real currency impeccably. While it would be too overwhelming to learn every counterfeit possibility, it's fairly simple to spot an impostor when a person knows the real deal; if anything is out of alignment, no matter how seemingly inconsequential the detail, the bill is an impostor.

In the same way, it is imperative to know God's truth. When being off-center has been a person's “normal”, one's sense of direction is distorted. When one becomes a believer, however, it is essential to study truth and align with it daily (Ps. 119:133). We may think that we've left Adventism behind and have embraced being a “regular Christian”, but unless we unpack the errors that we learned and compare them to Scripture, it is not possible for us to fully embrace truth. This process is much like untangling a wad of Christmas lights that have become impossibly twisted—it's hard to know where one strand ends and the next one starts. Only by unpacking each doctrine individually can we compare it to what the Bible says or doesn't say. What we once thought was biblical is often a denominational “extra” mixed in with what the Bible says. This untangling process is important for people examining their Adventism because of the confusion that is the legacy of the Adventist prophetess, Ellen G. White (Heb. 1:1, 2). Many of her “truths” are deceptively mixed in with what the Bible says, and it takes a long time to untangle God's reality from the destructive heresies introduced by a false prophet (2 Pet. 2:1). As

we pursue this untangling process, however, we are less and less likely to turn a blind eye to inconsistencies.

Just as a surgeon spends many years studying and practicing to be able to excise not only a visible tumor but also all invisible disease below the sur-

face, so we must be diligent to study God's word so we can spot what is “diseased”—a corruption of God's truth (Ps. 119:15; Ps. 119:78), and excise it all. We may think nothing of spending decades of our lives perfecting our careers, yet we often invest little time pursuing mastery of God's word—a pursuit yielding eternal value (1 Tim. 4:8).

In physical conditioning, lasting life and dietary changes won't occur unless we untangle our emotional attachments to our unhealthy habits. Similarly, we can't completely lose false beliefs without examining our emotional attachments to them and to our Adventist identity. Without in-depth dissection we remain confused, often in subtle but profound ways, about the character and nature of Christ as revealed in His word.

### **Causes of spiritual compromise**

Many people who leave the Adventist organization never fully embrace the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Many of them discard organizational beliefs, never fully understanding why—they just know they don't believe them anymore. Others claim to be true evangelical Christians, but they never talk about their previous life as Adventists, stating that they don't need to dwell on the past;

# RY DIVORCE

vel at the engineering genius of a failed system—I must get on a lifeboat. Similarly, without honest admission of denominational heresy, it's easy to gloss over false doctrines (1 Jn. 4:1). Many rationalize and make excuses for discrepancies, minimizing the errors of the Adventist “gospel”. It takes humility to walk head-on into the necessity of dissecting one's belief system. It requires vulnerability.

### **God's word as our spiritual compass**

When a person has been raised in a belief system built on false doctrine, one's focal point is off-center. This skewed focal point leads to bizarre and even dangerous conclusions. For example, if a ship's captain relied on a faulty instrument that registered a mere one degree off course, what would result? While the impact might seem insignificant initially, the end result would be devastating! Deceptions that are closest to the truth are often the hardest to discern; people tend to write off the hard-to-see discrepancies as “no big deal”. To be sure, most people can spot a bizarre cult—but what about 99% truth with just a smidgeon of heresy? Consider two identical bowls of punch—identical, that is, except for the single drop of cyanide in one of the bowls. Would it matter which bowl contained the poison when one needed a drink?

they just want to move forward. The following are a few common reasons people refuse to examine their Adventist upbringing.

## Fear

It's horrifying to realize that the "truth" to which we clung may really be a lie—not just a slight aberration, but a bold-faced lie. It's tempting to rationalize that our beliefs might have been slightly "off" in a few areas. After all, what's the big deal if we went to church on Saturday instead of Sunday?

It's disorienting to learn that our beliefs were "off", but it's unnerving to find out that much of what we were taught was in direct contradiction to God's word. Rather than experience the anger these discoveries bring, many of us want to believe we've just "moved on" because we didn't believe in Ellen White, or because Sabbath-keeping just didn't fit our lifestyles anymore. We don't want to admit that Adventism is fatally flawed and that it betrayed us.

The truth is, however, that we cannot separate the organization from its core values and doctrinal roots. When we eliminate all the doctrinal details we deem irrelevant or unimportant, the whole system collapses. Without these components, there is no Seventh-day Adventist Church. We either accept or reject the entire package—Ellen G. White, soul sleep, the investigative judgment, mandatory Sabbath-keeping, the Three Angels' Messages, the health message—in short, all 28 Fundamental Beliefs. While we might not personally understand every nuance of the Adventist organization, it's important to understand that it grew out of failed date setting (Matt. 24:36, Acts 1:7) and a disturbed, deceitful woman who was elevated to the status of a prophetess (Matt. 7:15, 16; Deut. 18:21, 22; Heb. 1:1, 2). When we look at the facts, we inevitably conclude that the Seventh-day Adventist organization and God's church are in direct contradiction with each other in many major doctrinal areas and cannot be reconciled in good conscience (1 Tim. 6:3, 4).

Another facet of the fear we face is the fear of rejection and social isolation. We live in a culture where being politically correct or tolerant is valued over truth. The default presumption in our society is that everyone's deeply held beliefs are valid, and by definition this tolerance requires us to find the lowest common denominator in our spiritual agreement. Jesus, however, because of His finished work on the cross, claims exclusive rights as our way to salvation (Jn. 14:6). While most religions agree on the Golden Rule, their core doctrines are simply beyond reconciliation with Christianity. On the surface the Adventist faith can seem nearly identical to the evangelical position in many doctrinal areas, but upon close examination, major differences surface, although many Adventists won't freely admit this fact, even to themselves.

When they begin to realize there are serious disagreements between the Christian faith and Adventism, many Adventists bargain internally by rationalizing that they will remain Adventist in order to work to "change the church from the inside". While there are exceptions to every rule, this desire to stay inside the Adventist system is often fear or compromise in disguise. There is great fear in facing the unknown or in being "found out" by friends, family, or co-workers. There's also insecurity in one's ability to defend the faith (Mk. 13:11, Lk. 12:12). Moreover, compromise is always easi-

er than change. To be openly honest within the system is usually tantamount to social and professional suicide, although the repercussions may appear subtle to those observing from the outside (Jn. 15:21). A blatant turning away from Adventist doctrines is usually viewed as leaving "the truth" and defecting to "the other side".

Embracing and facing our fear should force us to take a stand. Compromise is never a solution, only a delay tactic. When it comes to the true gospel of Christ, there cannot be compromise. Too often we rationalize our actions when we may, in fact, be acting cowardly and avoiding confrontation. To remain silent, to ignore or downplay blatant heresy just to remain cordial or to maintain a relationship for one's personal gain, is to deny Christ and His finished work on the cross. There is no neutral position; for the transitioning Adventist, to remain silent is to support Adventism. Taking a stand means creating ripples—opposition against which one may have to defend oneself.

## Pride

This is a hard thing to release when leaving the Adventist faith. It's one of the most powerful driving forces of our sinful human nature. It's what led to Satan's fall (Is. 14:14, 15; Ezek. 28:13-19). Pride in her ability to obtain wisdom (and know what God knows) was what enticed Eve to take the apple in The Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:5, 6). Anything that moves the focus from Jesus and onto us is deception and is motivated by pride.

The Sabbath and the dietary laws are two distinct doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventists that are performance-based. While there's nothing inherently wrong with worshiping on any day of the week or with observing good dietary practices, the pride associated with Adventists' pursuit of these requirements is unbiblical and self-serving. In Adventism, Sabbath-keeping is the sign that ultimately separates the saved from the lost, and healthful living is a multi-faceted practice that prolongs life, allows the Adventist to hear the Holy Spirit with better clarity, and avoids stimulating one's "animal passions".

Moreover, these two activities are given disproportional importance over the finished work of Christ on the cross (which really isn't finished according to the Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment). To assign any measure of righteousness to works such as these, however, is prideful and heretical (Rom. 11:6). Pride, along with fear, are two of the biggest reasons people won't leave the Adventist faith. Once a person has left Adventism, it's a huge step to let go of the pride that's been fostered since birth. Adventism teaches that it is the only true religion, and its members are God's chosen remnant who keep the commandments of God, specifically the fourth (Rev. 12:17). Using the passage in Rev. 19:10, they say that "the testimony about Jesus" (also known as the "spirit of prophecy") is the mark of the remnant, or true church, which finds its fulfillment in its co-founder Ellen G. White. Letting go of the "chosen people" identity requires a humility and dependency that only God can bring about.

We believed the lie, hook, line, and sinker. Gnostic beliefs (special revelations) are popular and attractive because of our sinful and prideful nature—we all want to believe we're extra-special and have special insight into something unique and exciting that only



we know about. The biblical principle that we're all a part of the larger body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27) commissioned to serve people by bringing the gospel (not the Three Angels' Messages) to the whole earth (Matt. 28:19, 20) is antithetical to what we've believed growing up in the Adventist organization. The realization of who we really are (prior to accepting Christ)—hopeless sinners in desperate need of a Savior—is sobering. We're not special because of the day we go to church, nor are we special because of the food we put into (or don't put into) our bodies (Matt. 15:17-19).

All of a sudden we're just ordinary people in need of an extraordinary Savior. It's not about us! Relinquishing the pride requires hard soul-searching and examination of our motives. It can be a very difficult task, perhaps even triggering a grieving process of sorts. Losing our Adventist pride is a loss. We have to ask ourselves if we seek truth and integrity, or if it is more important to us that we be right, special, politically correct—or even just comfortable?

Another form of pride, although more subtle, is believing we're "above" needing to deprogram our false belief system. We're all human and are, at least partially, products of our experiences in life. While God can and does redeem anything we've experienced, He doesn't always spare us from, nor allow us to fast-forward through, the hard things that we need to process. It is often in the low times and in the dark and humble places where He does His greatest work in our lives. In these times we're the most vulnerable and pliable in His hands. He asks us to submit even our beliefs and our worldview to Him and to allow Him to cleanse us from spiritual and intellectual pride. It's all part of His plan and His work in us.

## Apathy

This hits everyone on some level. The reality is that it's hard work and it takes diligence to be ready at all times in the fight for the cause of Christ. Submitting to Jesus is an active pursuit, not a passive one. As stated before, the first step is to admit the problem and un-do, piece by piece, the entanglement of the faulty belief system. The next step is actively to replace false teaching with God's Word and His truth. If the heresy isn't replaced with grounding in biblical truth, it leaves us exposed to be mentally and spiritually deceived (Eph. 4:14). There is a much higher probability we'll be misled and enticed by another false concept or doctrine. Scripture reveals True North; if we do not immerse ourselves in God's word, True North is blurry, and we remain off course. Because Adventists teach that those outside their denomination are

**Paul and Terry Mirra** originally met as students at Newbury Park Adventist Academy in Newbury Park, California. They formally left the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2004. They live in Highland, California, where Paul works as a Supervising Criminalist in Firearms for the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department. Terry has a degree in nursing from Loma Linda University but is now a stay-at-home mom involved in the women's and children's ministries at Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, their home church. Their oldest daughter, Megan, is a senior at Long Beach State and is president of the on-campus Christian sorority, Alpha Delta Chi. Amy, 13, and Autumn, 11, are involved with the middle-school and children's ministries and love serving for Jesus!

evil at worst or uninformed at best, we need to hear the real gospel and meet the Lord Jesus to dispel false teachings and to replace the old rhetoric with healthy biblical truths about His forgiveness, grace, and salvation. It's important to obtain correct grounding to give us the only real point of reference for life—the Word of God.

It's so easy to become side-tracked and apathetic in our study of God's Word and the pursuit of His truth. Our culture equates sincerity with truth, encouraging people to latch on to whatever doctrine or system tickles their ears—if they're sincere enough, then that's all that matters (2 Tim. 4:3). In a tolerance-driven climate such as the one in which we now live, we can be labeled intolerant simply by supporting an unpopular viewpoint, even if we do so respectfully. This phenomenon is largely due to the widespread belief that truth is unknowable and thus not worth argument. If truth doesn't matter, we can believe whatever we want. All views can be accepted, because no view describes anything real. By crying, "We cannot know truth", we're in effect dodging personal responsibility. If we don't know what's required of us, how can we be held accountable for it? It's easy to become weary and to succumb to an attitude of, "Why bother? Is it really that important?" Hebrews 11:6 says, "And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him".

Learning the truth in God's word is never in vain, and His word never returns void (Is. 55:11). John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God" (emphasis added), and the Word is the author of the word.

His word is always True North and will never fail us (Ps. 119:105). He reminds us what and Who Truth is (Jn. 14:6). He tells us to not be afraid—if He is with us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)? He warns us about pride (Prov. 16:18) and tells us to be humble (Lk. 18:14), servants for His kingdom—everything contrary to what our culture and human nature tells us to be.

Most of all, we're to trust in Him, and in Him alone (Prov. 3:5; Ps. 118:8). As we shed the false teachings and fill our minds and hearts with God's word, the pride and fear fade away, and God's peace takes its place (Jn. 14:27). When we fully realize who we are in Christ and His finished work on the cross, all else pales in comparison (Col. 3:3, 4). Jesus and the gospel, in all their simplicity, take center stage and command our full attention. God will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5, 6), and we can count on His promises (Josh. 23:14). †





# CONTEM

SHOULD WE SEEK  
WISDOM FROM OTHER  
FAITH TRADITIONS?

MARTIN CAREY

We have become increasingly concerned with the spiritual confusion many people face as they meet Jesus and move out of Adventism into the Christian community. Many Christian authors and teachers have been adding spiritual disciplines and meditative practices to the gospel of the Lord Jesus in attempts to heal deep wounds and to find personal experiences with God. We run this article to help us see where these spiritual additions originate and also to remind us that the gospel is the source of our salvation and our deep healing; God's word is His unerring provision for revealing truth and reality to us.



# PLATING PRAYER

**P**lease, show me your glory!” The request was abrupt, childlike, and straight from the heart.

Moses had trembled before Sinai’s dark slopes and had received the law from God’s hand. He had heard God’s thundering voice and had viewed His throne on the mountain with the elders of Israel; he had even prayed for the fullest level of assurance for Israel’s future, and God had answered from the core of His being. Moses, in fact, had spoken to God in a singular way, for he was the covenant’s prophet. There was no other prophet like Moses (Deut. 34:10) except One (Deut. 18:15), and “the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex. 33:11). Yet Moses was not satisfied; he wanted a personal encounter with God’s glory.

We, too, yearn for direct, intimate encounters with God. What is prayer supposed to look like, we ask? Do we speak to God, or do we listen for Him to speak directly to us? Many books prescribe methods for making prayer more intimate and glorious, some even promising that we will literally hear God’s voice. Some Christians, moreover, believe that conventional prayers—simply talking to God—distance us from real communion with Him.

These feelings of prayer inadequacy form part of a larger, contemporary Christian anxiety that our spiritual lives are inauthentic. Of course, Christians know they can boldly draw near to the throne of grace and receive mercy, but how does an encounter with God become face-to-face?

## Our spiritual appetites

Communication with God lies at the heart of our spiritual lives. By nature we look for a spirituality that promises comfort through a tangible experience that will answer our felt needs. We want a healing touch to bring relief from our wounds and a revelation to initiate deep change. Consequently, Christians sometimes become frustrated with speaking to God, and they search for something that reaches deep inside and brings results. Richard Foster has stated:

Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that exciting worship services that emphasize instant gratification have not produced real inward change and soul satisfaction. Philosophy professor and author Dallas Willard agrees with this analysis and further says that our feel-good worship services are also paired with shallow preaching that is focused on “forgiveness of sins so you’ll go to heaven when you die.” It is a narrow, ineffective gospel, says Willard, that is reduced to the forgive-

ness of sins and assurance of salvation. A broader, stronger gospel encompasses the whole life and person.<sup>2</sup> Our ways of access to God’s power and presence are deeply flawed, Willard maintains, and as a result, Christians are suffering from spiritual stagnation. Over many centuries the church has lost its way, say Willard and Foster, and they offer a program for reform.

This program is a movement Foster and Willard have called “spiritual formation”, and it emphasizes imitating Christ’s lifestyle. True formation of the soul into Christ’s image, they teach, can only be realized through the intentional practice of spiritual disciplines. Instead of looking to the apostolic teaching of the new birth and submission to God’s word and will, this movement draws much of its theology and practice from the ancient Desert Fathers, a group of Christian hermits and ascetics who lived in the Egyptian desert in the third and fourth centuries AD. The primary activity of these monks was the practice of contemplative prayer, a kind of prayer that looks inward to the soul where, they said, they would find God. In their inner stillness they sought His immediate presence and guidance. Today in the evangelical world, Foster and Willard offer the disciplines of spiritual formation, especially contemplative prayer, as the solution to superficial spirituality, and believers from every denomination, both liberal and conservative, have been drawn to this revival of ancient spirituality.

## What is contemplative prayer?

Richard Foster has written a great deal on spiritual formation. He urges us:

If we hope to move beyond the superficialities of our culture, including our religious culture, we must be willing to go down into the recreating silences, into the inner world of contemplation. In their writings all the masters of meditation beckon us to be pioneers in this frontier of the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

That frontier is explored through the practice of an ancient spiritual discipline, the art of silence. Jan Johnson tells us:

Contemplative prayer, in its simplest form, is prayer in which you still your thoughts and emotions and focus on God Himself...The fundamental idea is simply to enjoy the companionship of God, stilling your own thoughts so you can listen should God choose to speak. For this reason, contemplative prayer is sometimes referred to as “the prayer of silence.”<sup>4</sup>

Contemplative prayer authors are unanimous about this “silence”, a quiet state of mind where the practitioner descends into wordless, intimate communion with God. In fact, verbal prayers are considered an obstacle to experiencing the deepest

levels of intimacy with God. While most of the contemplative authors have not entirely discarded verbal prayers, they often disparage such prayers as less than life-changing. For them, only an immediate, intuitive knowledge of God, experienced through a meditative state, can achieve real spiritual transformation. As Ruth Haley Barton says, we must develop "...a readiness to leave words behind and remain alone with God in an act of love...it requires us to let go of what we have known in order to open ourselves to something new."<sup>5</sup>

Barton, Foster, Willard, and others believe that only mystical prayer experiences can give us access into God's immediate presence to effect real heart change. The goal of mystical experience, therefore, is a union with God that Foster describes as a "sweet sinking into Deity."<sup>6</sup> It was this union, in fact, that motivated the Desert Fathers to flee from the cities after the Roman emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313 AD. Fearing the temptations and corruptions that came with official religion, many pious men left everything for the wilderness where they could isolate themselves, practice rigorous spiritual disciplines, and focus on subjugating the flesh and becoming more like Christ.<sup>7</sup>

### Pedigree of contemplative prayer

Interestingly, although both Orthodox and Catholic believers generally claim the Desert Fathers as practitioners of a pure, original form of their faiths, their ways did not form in a cultural vacuum. Their mystical practices developed within a greater milieu that, over the centuries, blended Christianity with the philosophy of Plato, Egyptian religions, and eastern religions including Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, they were not the first ascetics isolating themselves in the pursuit of holiness. For example, monastic living was established in Egypt well before 200 AD, and mystical rituals and prayers there date back before the days of Moses. Furthermore, cultural exchanges between Egypt and India were common before 200 BC, and we can read the records of Indian Emperor Asoka the Great who sent Buddhist emissaries to many regions, including Greece and Egypt, to make converts.<sup>9</sup> These facts should not surprise us because, by its very nature, mysticism is always able to cross boundaries and adapt itself.

In fact, Greek philosophy strongly influenced the Desert Fathers. The philosophers Plato and Plotinus had, in turn, developed their mystical ideas from even older sources—eastern religions—and their works reflect those influences.<sup>10</sup> Plotinus, for example, spoke the universal mystical language when he wrote this in 200 BC: "Set free your soul from all outward things and turn wholly within yourself, and forget even yourself, and so come within sight of that One."<sup>11</sup>

Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish contemporary of Christ, gives us more insight into these early desert ascetics as he wrote admiring descriptions of them, calling them *therapeutae*, a Greek term meaning "the healers." He told how they left their wives, children, and possessions to seek extreme austerity and to live the life of the spirit. They were hoping to catch a glimpse of the living God.<sup>12</sup> These earlier, non-Christian ascetics were predecessors of the Desert Fathers.

Prominent among the Desert Fathers, Antony the Great came from a wealthy Egyptian family but wanted to pursue a life of pure devotion to God. Accordingly, Antony gave away his possessions so he could retreat into the Egyptian desert and live an ascetic life of prayer, reading, and meditation on God in solitary confinement. He found various places including a cave, a tomb, and an old Roman fort into which he sealed himself, living for years on bread, salt, and water that others brought to him. It was told that while alone he was assailed by temptations and horrible apparitions of demons, even of Satan himself. The demons beat him severely until he nearly died, but he would not surrender. Antony claimed to have vanquished Satan, who personally admitted his defeat. Antony became renowned as a pious man, and many sought his wisdom until he died at age 105.<sup>13</sup> He was beatified by the Church and is considered the patriarch of monks.

Antony's pithy sayings on the ascetic life are widely quoted today. He believed that our highest faculty, the *nous*, transcended mere reason and grasped the divine through immediate experience and intuition. This was the true self that could know God; thus, by truly knowing himself, a person would truly know of God. Therefore, said Antony,

"Let us purify our mind, for I believe that when the mind is completely pure and is in its natural state, it gains penetrating insight, and it sees more clearly and further than the demons, since the Lord reveals things to it."<sup>14</sup>

The Desert Fathers embraced *apophatic*, or negative, theology which posits that because God is ultimate, perfect, and transcendent, He cannot be adequately described or understood. Therefore it is best to speak of Him negatively—in terms of what He is not. Moreover, they taught, we access this transcendent God's presence directly through non-rational experiences because the human spirit that knows God is non-rational. Therefore we must practice His presence by purging away our minds, the world, and everything that is not God.

Centuries earlier, Plotinus had illustrated this method of spiritual formation with the metaphor of a sculptor chipping away from a statue all that was not the true image. For Christians, however, it was the fifth-century philosopher and theologian Pseudo-Dionysius who brought a fully developed apophatic theology into the church.<sup>15</sup>

Pseudo-Dionysius taught that God only becomes truly knowable when we are able to cease speaking, seeing, or comprehending Him rationally. In such a meditative state, the seeker will enter a divine darkness and emptiness where God feels absent even though He is not.<sup>16</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius compared his paradigm for experiencing God to Moses ascending Mt. Sinai to meet God in the darkness, leaving his intelligible theology down below. To commune with God directly, he said, Moses entered the mysterious, unknowable blackness of the cloud on the mountain top. Pseudo-Dionysius used the Sinai darkness story as an allegory of the mystical seeker who rises above himself towards union with God through spiritual disciplines and prayer.<sup>17</sup> For mystics, this "cloud of unknowing" has since become the symbol of God's hidden presence.



## Climbing the ladder

In the seventh century, in an Orthodox monastery at the foot of Mt. Sinai, lived a devout monk named John. He took his monastic vows so seriously that he was asked to write a guide for monks on the monastic life. Little is known about John Climacus,<sup>18</sup> but his book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, remains a classic to this day.

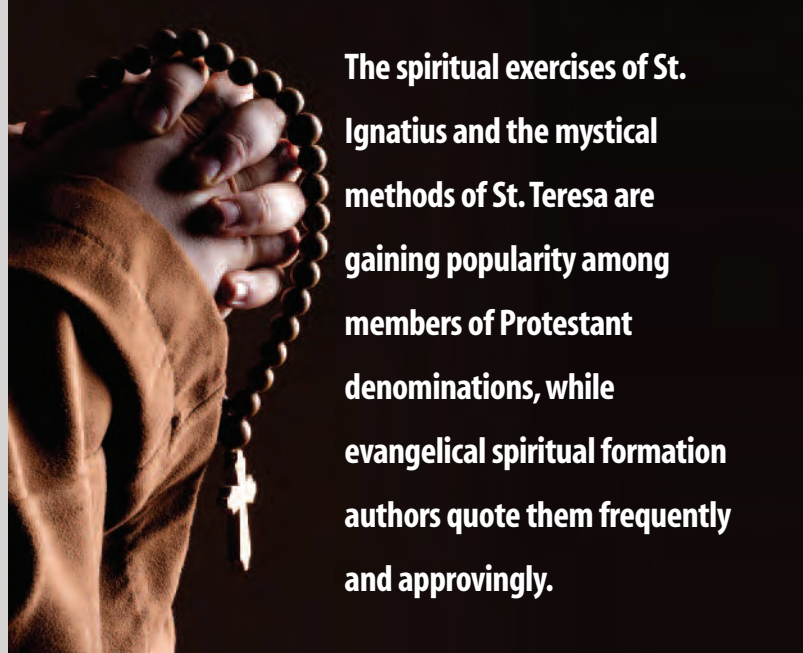
In *The Ladder*, Climacus offers sage advice on conquering vices, acquiring virtues, and readying one's body and soul over one's lifetime for union with Christ. The ladder has 30 rungs, one for each year of "the hidden life of Christ" before His baptism. The final rungs demand the renunciation of all one's pleasures, relationships, and passions, at last achieving "the silence" (*bessychia*). With the mastery of the flesh completed, one is left with pure love. At the top of the ladder is Christ waiting to embrace those who have left all, thus successfully imitating His life.<sup>19</sup> Naturally, there is no assurance of salvation on the ladder until one has passed the top rung and entered paradise to be one with Christ. All others still climbing the ladder are assailed by demons and can fall off at any time, even from the very top rung. Climacus said that God the judge was standing, watching the outcome of this contest, so only a fool or a worldly man thinks he is safe.<sup>20</sup>

We might be tempted to dismiss *The Ladder* as a quaint Byzantine tale, but *The Ladder* provides a graphic picture of the works-righteousness systems that keep reappearing in fresh, contemporary versions. Even though our modern pathways of spiritual formation are adaptable for busy professionals, unlike the ancient monks' harsh, demon-haunted exiles, the premises are the same. Our paths to holiness can be more subtle varieties of climbing a spiritual ladder, where superior discipline brings superior graces, and salvation is a lifetime personal achievement award. Such ladders, though, have broken rungs and ascend to nowhere. In the real gospel we find the answer to the eternal question: "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high?" (Mic. 6:6).

## The counter-reformers

Mystical spirituality has always had a place in Roman Catholic faith, even though it was not always viewed with favor by the hierarchy. During the times when the leadership in Rome has desired to protect and extend its influence, however, it has often called for a return to the church's fourth-century spiritual foundations, reviving the veneration of Mary and the mystical ways of the saints. The time of the Counter-Reformation after Luther challenged church authority was such a time.

Martin Luther had been a monk who practiced his monastic vows with such vigor that his fellow monks were worried. When Luther discovered the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith, however, he saw his monkish holiness along with all the works of the great saints not as a "treasury of merit," but as a "filthy puddle."<sup>21</sup> He saw that salvation is by grace alone, attained by faith alone through Christ alone, and found in Scripture alone. The Church hierarchy could not tolerate the "alones", for they exposed the structure of the Roman church as man-centered and as stifling



**The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius and the mystical methods of St. Teresa are gaining popularity among members of Protestant denominations, while evangelical spiritual formation authors quote them frequently and approvingly.**

pure faith in Christ. From a single doctrine sprang an entire Reformation.

Luther said, "Whoever departs from the article of justification does not know God and is an idolater; for when this article has been taken away, nothing remains but error, hypocrisy, godlessness, and idolatry, although it may seem to be the height of truth, worship of God, holiness, etc."<sup>22</sup>

The Roman church responded with its own Counter-Reformation, with a call back to its spiritual foundations, and the faithful responded. We will consider two noteworthy examples.

In 1521, the Spanish army was defending their citadel at Pamplona against the French when a Spanish officer was hit in the legs by a cannon ball. The officer, Don Inigo Loyola, was captured and treated by the French but nearly died from his injuries. During his long recovery, he devoted his life to imitating the great saints of old and began practicing extreme asceticism, including fasting from all food and water while living in a cave. During one severe fast, Loyola had a life-changing vision, intensifying his desire to live as a saint.<sup>23</sup>

Loyola wrote a book of spiritual exercises for ordinary believers to help them defeat sin. The exercises prescribe a 30 day program with sets of prayers, meditations, and thought experiments. One mental exercise prescribes imagining scenes in the life of Christ in a detailed way that involves all the senses. Seventh-day Adventists may hear an echo of Loyola's exercises in Ellen White's urging us "to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ," by imagining each scene in vivid detail.<sup>24</sup>

Loyola also founded the Society of Jesus, an organization dedicated to enhancing the reputation and reach of the Roman Catholic Church. His movement spearheaded the Counter-Reformation, and his military mind brought discipline to his Jesuits who pledged to fiercely defend the Church and overcome all resistance. The Church beatified Loyola in 1609 as "Saint Ignatius."<sup>25</sup>

A contemporary of Loyola, Teresa of Avila, was a 16th century Carmelite nun who entered the convent at age 20, devoting her

life to prayer and meditation. She took to reading the great mystical saints, and as she adopted their ways, she also experienced supernatural encounters. Further, she was zealous politically, joining the Jesuits and the Counter-Reformation movement to return the Church to its original monastic ideals. St. John of the Cross worked with Teresa in reforming the convents, and they also founded 17 new ones.<sup>26</sup>

During one of her meditative states, Teresa beheld a young angel approaching her with a golden spear. She lay helpless as he plunged the flaming spear into her, eviscerating her. She described feelings of terrible agony while simultaneously being carried into the most exquisite ecstasy. The erotic overtones in this encounter were not uncommon for Teresa, as was noted by William James.<sup>27</sup> The nun wrote of her mystical experiences in her best-known work, *Interior Castle*. She was beatified as St. Teresa and later named “Doctor of the Church” in 1970.

Ironically, today the legacy of the Counter-Reformers is making headway into evangelical Protestantism. The spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius and the mystical methods of St. Teresa are gaining popularity among members of Protestant denominations, while evangelical spiritual formation authors quote them frequently and approvingly. As this influence has grown, two pillars of the Reformation, justification by faith alone and *sola scriptura*, have been compromised or denied altogether. As John Piper said in 2007, justification by faith has become confused and cluttered. Protestants might well ask themselves, “What has become of our Reformation?”

### **The Cloud of Unknowing rediscovered**

The Catholic legacy of spiritual formation began trickling inexorably into the Protestant world during the 20th century, and it gained momentum after William Meninger rediscovered an anonymous 14th century book, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, in 1974. Meninger, a Trappist monk at St. Joseph’s Abbey in Massachusetts, was so delighted with this book on mystical prayer that he began to share it with his fellow monks.<sup>28</sup>

For over a decade, Meninger had been responding to the Pope’s Vatican II (1962-1965) challenge to Catholic leaders to dialogue with other religions. After discovering “The Cloud” in 1974, Fr. Meninger realized he had found something that Catholics had in common with other faith traditions, and he began inviting teachers of transcendental meditation and Zen Buddhism to join him in teaching meditation at the Abbey. The classes were thrown open to the public and soon became crowded to capacity. In 1978 fellow monks Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating joined Meninger in teaching contemplative prayer, and their written works soon became widely read outside Catholicism.<sup>29</sup> Today these three monks are counted among the “founding fathers” of the modern mystical movement in the United States.

Even before the St. Joseph’s Abbey revival, however, another studious Trappist monk named Thomas Merton pursued his fascination with the similarities between ancient Catholicism and other mystical religions by reading voraciously and studying with Zen Buddhists, Sufi Muslims, and other “renunciate brethren”. He became convinced that man’s original sin was alienation from his

true self and could only be healed by a journey deep within the self to encounter God and become renewed by a reunion with the divine spirit. Merton combined the panentheistic theology of fourteenth-century Dominican mystic Meister Eckhart with the psychology of “individuation”, the process of uniting the fragmented parts of the self into a unique whole, which he adopted from psychoanalyst Carl Jung.<sup>30</sup>

Merton was a compelling writer, thinker, and social activist, and his works are frequently recommended in Christian literature. In fact, today one can find his thoughts quoted and celebrated in diverse places, from the Trappist Abbey of Gethsemani<sup>31</sup> to the Biola University website.<sup>32</sup> What is often left unsaid is that Merton promoted deep ecumenism, believing that we must accept all religions, suppress doctrinal differences, and embrace the mysticism common to all traditions.

At St. Joseph’s Abbey, Pennington and Keating shared Merton’s mystical ecumenical vision and treasured the wisdom from the East: “We Christians should not hesitate to make use of the good techniques that our wise friends from the East are offering. . . .”<sup>33</sup> The techniques to which they refer are the meditative methods that Buddhists and Hindus use to unite with the divine. Christians can use Eastern techniques too, they say, as long they are intentionally seeking contact with their chosen god, Jesus.

### **Mystical theology**

We can better understand our modern mystic writers by reading Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth-century German theologian. Eckhart taught that God is in all things, and all things are in God—the doctrine of panentheism. In other words, all humans have a divine spark, an “uncreated aspect” that truly knows God. Deep down, he taught, everyone shares the divinity of God and can achieve oneness with Him by contemplation of the simple truth residing at the center of one’s being. Eckhart was indebted for this philosophy to the Neoplatonists who searched within their own souls to find unity with The One, and he kept the good life by a method he called “The Wayless Way”. This “Way” was uncharted except for its foundational premise: contemplation in “absolute stillness” would naturally yield loving actions.<sup>34</sup>

Thomas Merton loved Eckhart’s philosophy and stated its core insight eloquently:

“At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God. . . . This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us.”<sup>35</sup>

Mystical theology, in summary, is premised on the belief that every human, Christian or not, has some aspect of God within himself. This belief is contrary to Scripture’s declaration that we are all “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). Although most Christians who are attracted to mysticism would not identify themselves with panentheism, most have accepted its central assumption that people possess the glory of God, and their supporting Scripture is the KJV rendering of Luke 17:21, “The kingdom of God is within you.” (The final phrase of this passage reads “in your midst” in the NASB and “in the midst of you” in the ESV.) Because God is ineffable,



they say, He is best understood intuitively, not in propositional theology. In other words, God's presence and our true self are one and the same. Phillip Sheldrake said this:

"The more authentic our desires, the more they touch upon our identities and also upon the reality of God at the heart of our being."<sup>36</sup>

Mystical theology says God's blessings are accessed by peeling off the outer, "false self" through spiritual disciplines, especially silence and solitude. Reading the Bible and praying are not considered sufficient for accessing God's power; instead, shedding rational analysis and practicing an altered state of consciousness are considered mandatory for spiritual growth.

Moreover, because mystical theology is strongly subjective—truth is found deep in the self where God dwells—Scripture is not read in a straightforward manner. Words in the Bible are interpreted intuitively while de-emphasizing the universal, objective meaning that God intended for us to grasp with our minds. Francis Schaefer clearly perceived how this "new theology" uses religious words that are loaded with connotations but avoid clear definitions. Mystical language can feel profoundly spiritual and may excite deep motivations, but word definitions are obscured to provide only an illusion of meaning.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, many scholarly studies argue in favor of contemplative prayer, citing Scripture to support it. Most of these evangelical scholars are probably sincere and love God's word, yet one must inquire carefully to find those willing to articulate and defend *sola scriptura* in the Reformation sense. Richard Foster, for example, urges his readers to submit to the authority of Scripture, but at his Renovare Institute where Dallas Willard is also a staff member,<sup>38</sup> one will find teachings that directly contradict the Bible. These include the denial that God judges sin and statements that Genesis is myth, that Isaiah did not prophesy about Christ, that hell is escapable, and more.<sup>39</sup>

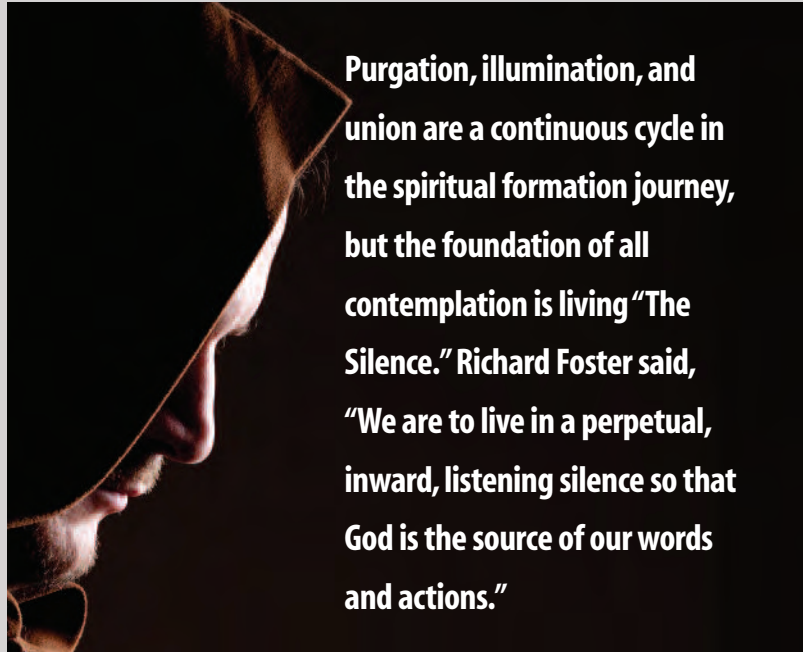
Furthermore, Foster cites Quaker founder George Fox for guidance on using Scripture. Fox wrote that God's love is the spirit of Scripture and insists that spirit should be exalted above the text of Scripture.<sup>40</sup> Quakers teach that it is not the Bible but the light of Christ within that brings spiritual insights and new life with God. To use the Bible to support the idea that its chief function is to inspire mystical experiences and to hear God's voice personally, outside of Scripture, is to exalt the self above God's eternal word.

## The mystical experience

Classical Christian mystical literature includes three overlapping stages in the contemplative experience: purgation, illumination, and union.

**Purgation:** First, the soul is purged of its passions, desires, and even of the intellect—of all that is not God. Here the believer strives for "perfect resignation and detachment from everything for God's sake alone."<sup>41</sup> This detachment leads to a "dark night of the soul," where one feels empty and abandoned by God while He purifies the soul.

**Illumination:** Once purged of self, one is now ready to receive spiritual truth directly from God, often in the form of hearing His voice, seeing visions, or receiving impressions.



**Purgation, illumination, and union are a continuous cycle in the spiritual formation journey, but the foundation of all contemplation is living "The Silence." Richard Foster said, "We are to live in a perpetual, inward, listening silence so that God is the source of our words and actions."**

Pseudo-Dionysius said, "The soul must lose the inhibitions of the senses and of reason," for God is known through unknowing and is illuminated by the 'ray of divine darkness'.<sup>42</sup> Richard Foster also recommends using the "tremendous power" available through the "door of imagination" to encounter God and have Him speak His words to us.<sup>43</sup> The personal words one receives during illumination are considered God's word and are to be obeyed as authoritative sources of truth. How will one know it is His voice? With practice, says Foster, one will learn that God's voice draws and encourages, while Satan will push and condemn.<sup>44</sup>

**Union:** One has finally passed through the outer layers of the self to reach one's center for unmediated communion with God. A sense of perfect oneness with God brings momentary ecstasy, powerful insight, and even an intense experience of romance with the divine, as many contemplatives have described.

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At the same time, however, there is controversy among Roman Catholics as to the sources of modern centering prayer methods. Cardinal Ratzinger has warned Catholics of the dangers of combining eastern meditation ideas and techniques, especially Buddhist, with Christian prayer.<sup>46</sup>

## The mystical prayer

A central premise of mystical prayer is that for one to be spiritual, one must detach from the mind and bring it to a standstill. Not only must ordinary, profane thinking be silenced, but also any thoughts of God or of His word. The accepted method of shutting down the mind is to use a mantric device, in which a word or phrase is repeated slowly until all

thoughts cease. Christian authors call the device a “sacred word,” or “breath prayer,” but its function is similar to Hindu and Buddhist mantras.<sup>47</sup> Along with the sacred word, steady breathing and comfortable posture are also emphasized, since meditation is also physical.<sup>48</sup>

Another venerable method of contemplation is through using the imagination to visualize a scene or a person in vivid detail. With regular practice and intense desire, the imagined scenes become live, supernatural encounters with spiritual beings. “Sacred words” and visualization are the methods taught by the Desert Fathers, by *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and by contemplative writers today including Foster, Willard, Pennington, Keating, Merton, Nouwen, Manning, and many others.

Mystical prayer produces an altered state of consciousness where ordinary thought processes are disabled. Trance researcher Dennis Weir found that repetition of a thought will cause an “awareness loop” that increases focus and limits other cognitive functions.<sup>49</sup> The altered mental state of meditation also involves dissociation, defined by Ernest Hilgard as “splitting off of certain mental processes from the main body of consciousness.”<sup>50</sup> During a trance, the person dissociates, or detaches from his emotions, senses, and body, with an altered sense of identity and reality.<sup>51</sup>

Trances have long been the tool of shamanism, magic, and divination accompanied with claims of paranormal abilities such as telepathy, telekinesis, and encounters with the spirit world.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, spiritual contacts have been a part of Christian mysticism beginning with the Desert Fathers and continuing through the ages. Indeed, one descends into the “deep silences” with the intent of having spiritual experiences, and within the heart, one may encounter the spirits’ realm.

Pseudo-Macarius said, “The heart itself is but a small vessel, yet dragons are there, and there are also lions...But there too is God, the angels, the life and the kingdom, the light and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace—all things are there.”<sup>53</sup>

There is no place in Scripture, however, that encourages us to explore the spiritual world through the heart. Nor does Biblical meditation ever teach us to enter an altered state of consciousness and descend into the heart to hear God’s voice. Jesus made it clear that the heart is the source of wickedness (Mk. 7:20-23), not the place to communicate with the spirit world. We are given a much better way to commune with God.

## A prophet like me

They pitched a little tent far outside the camp and called it, “The Tent of Meeting,” a place to meet with God. There was only one man, however, who could speak with God directly, friend to friend. Whenever Moses would walk out and enter the tent, the hovering pillar of cloud would descend to the tent’s door. That cloud contained the *shekinah* glory of God, and when the people saw it descend over Moses in the tent, they worshipped, each at his own tent’s door (Ex. 33:10). Moses was uniquely chosen to speak directly with God on their behalf as mediator, and there was no other way for anyone to speak face-to-face with God.

How did Moses prepare for his conversations with God? Certainly a man educated in the Egyptian courts where elaborate

mystical rituals were part of the temple worship would have enlightened us about the emptying methods he used to achieve his personal, intimate communion with God.

Moses, however, told us nothing. Instead, he entered boldly into God’s presence, and when they met they did something that may not seem very spiritual—they just talked. Moses got right to the point and pleaded with God about what was on his mind: God could not abandon Israel like orphans. He begged God personally to stay with His rebellious, undeserving people, because they were His people, and without His presence they were lost. God agreed, “for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name” (33:12-17).

Then Moses said, “Show me your glory!”

God’s answer to Moses’ sudden request may seem mysterious, even evasive. But God answered gloriously, building on His name, “I am.” He answered Moses for all of us:

“I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (vs. 19).

What can we learn about God’s glory from their conversation?

**God is personal, rational, and reveals Himself with words.**

God did not need Moses to be “silent” or perform “detachment” exercises to hear His voice or see His glory.

**God is holy.** He must be approached on His terms, for He dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). He is pure, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Worship isn’t focused on us or what we think we want from Him.

**God is truth.** His words are effectual: they always accomplish what He intends (Is. 55:10,11). As truth, they have *epignosis*—full, precise, specific meanings (Col. 1:9, 2 Pet. 2:20). God has revealed His glory to His people with content-rich, eternal words.

Through His words, God has also given us His glory, minus nothing. There was nothing revealed to Moses’ eyes or heart that God does not reveal to us with His word. This was not the ineffable God of the Greeks or the Desert Fathers, nor did Moses commune with God through a “cloud of unknowing.” Moses received the very answer he needed. A holy, sovereign God who speaks precise, effectual words can be trusted never to abandon His people. Moreover, these promises—and much more—are true for us today; God’s *shekinah* glory—his actual presence and authority—has descended to us!

## The last word

Three men, Peter, James, and John, climbed slowly up the slopes of a tall mountain, wondering where their leader was taking them. When they reached the summit they stopped, and as the leader stepped away from them He suddenly began to change.

“And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him” (Mt. 17:2,3).

A cloud overshadowed Jesus and the prophets, and a voice came out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to him” (Mt. 17:5).



Here, a man's face glows like the sun before a bright cloud overshadows them, and the watching disciples hear the voice of God coming from the cloud. Reading the story, we are taken back to Exodus 33 and 34 where Moses spoke directly with God—who spoke from a cloud. Moses bore God's words, and his face would shine with God's glory after his meetings with God in the cloud of *shekinah* glory.

Now, however, Someone else is taking over the role of delivering God's word: Jesus! He does not merely bear God's word and reflect His glory; He is the permanent tabernacle of God's glory, and He is the eternal Word. He became flesh and tabernacled among us, and we, too, have seen His glory. Remember, in Exodus 34:6, God told Moses He abounded in grace and truth. Now John tells us that the eternal Word is also filled with grace and truth (Jn. 1:14), and the Word was God (Jn. 1:1).

Jesus not only has all the authority of Moses, but He also has all the glory and authority of God. We listen to His words, just as Moses prophesied we must (Deut. 18:15), and we will finally be judged by His words (Deut. 18:19; Jn. 12:48). He is the final Prophet with the last words for all times (Heb. 1:2).

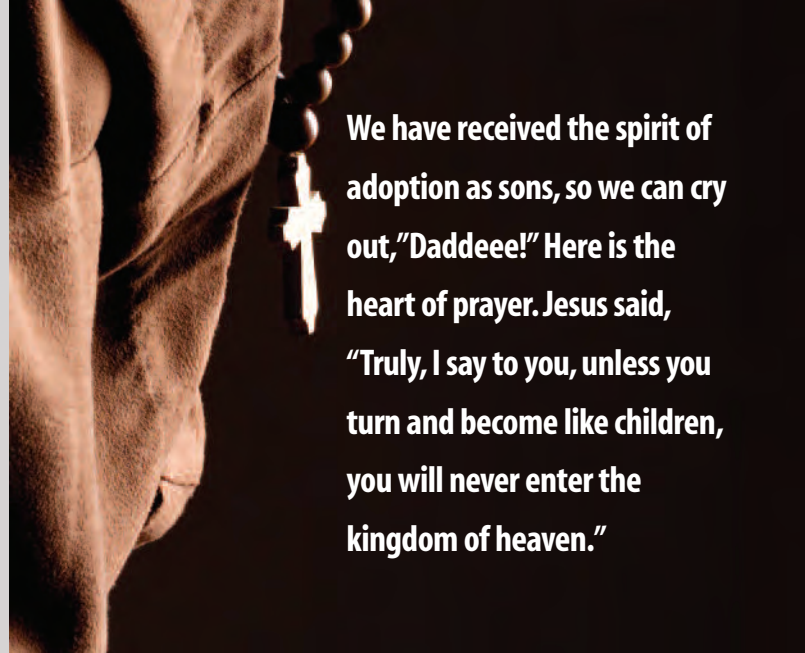
In the transfiguration passage in Matthew 17, when the other prophets and the obscuring cloud disappear, we see the Lord Jesus still standing, unobscured and alone. Now, whenever we ask God, "Show me your glory," He directs us to behold Christ alone—and we encounter Him in His word (1 Pet. 1:22-25; Eph. 1:13; Rom. 10:17-18). We are never to forget or detach from His words.

## The heart of prayer

In order to have intimate communion with God, we must first know the truth about ourselves: we are born dead with no spiritual life, not even a tiny spark (Eph. 2:1). We feel natural walking in sin, following the course of the world and the prince of evil (vs. 2). We are born children of God's well-deserved wrath (vs. 3). Until we are changed, that is the hopeless state of our innermost, true selves. No good comes out of the heart (Mk. 7:20-23), and no amount of "centering down" or spiritual disciplines can bring an arrogant, willful corpse to life.

There comes a time when the spiritual corpse hears the gospel, and the Spirit of Christ enters the soul and gives spiritual ears to hear and eyes to see Him. The cadaver looks up and sees Christ and Him crucified, punished for his sins and rebellion. That spiritual zombie suddenly becomes convicted of his wretched condition and he repents. He asks Jesus to be his Lord and Savior, and he becomes a living soul. His faith is a most unnatural gift of the Spirit that accompanies his hearing the word of God, the gospel. So it is our faith in the real, historical event of Jesus, who entered into history to die for our sins and rise again—that kind of faith receives the gift of life. That is the gospel in which we stand and grow in our salvation, if we hold fast to the word (I Cor. 15:1,2). The gospel is the only source of an authentic walk with God.

Someone might say, "Well, the gospel is fine for beginning Christians, but to become like Christ, we must practice His presence with intentional disciplines." They assume that salva-



**We have received the spirit of adoption as sons, so we can cry out, "Daddeee!" Here is the heart of prayer. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."**

tion begins by relying on the gospel but advances by imitating Jesus, our example. Jesus, however, is not merely an enlightened spiritual master. He is our Substitute!

We were united with Him in His sacrifice and risen life (Rom. 6:5), and we are declared righteous by faith in His finished work alone (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 3:9). When we attempt to imitate Christ without full reliance on His dying and rising, we will fail. As Graeme Goldsworthy said, "Without the grace of justification our attempts at the imitation of Christ are futile and, in fact, godless."<sup>54</sup>

Nowadays, we often hear the gospel presented in subjective language as the solution to our psychological problems. The magnificence of the real, historical Jesus fades from sight as we grope about for newer, more vivid experiences. We have to keep returning to reality: faith comes by hearing the word (Rom. 10:17). It is not a product of "intentionality," vivid imaginations, or hard work. Faith is powerful, not because of disciplines in the one wielding it, but because of its mighty Object: the Lord Jesus. The trembling faith of the weakest child can "still the enemy and the avenger" (Ps. 8:2). Living day to day as weak dependents, He empowers us to practice our biblical spiritual disciplines of prayer and reading His word. He guarantees what He commands. Are you worried that you won't be ready? "He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it" (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

We can be confident knowing that long ago, Jesus prayed for all of us to behold His glory and to be where He is (Jn. 17:24). We can put our full weight on the power of His prayer, for His words will not return to Him empty. We have received the spirit of adoption as sons, so we can cry out, "Daddeee!" Here is the heart of prayer. Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 18:3). That turning isn't easy, though, since we're self-sufficient and grown up. We need help learning to pray.

## How to pray like a child

**Be Real.** This is not the time to practice detachment or soul renovation. Just come. Bring the unprepared you, the filthy you to Jesus in messy, uninhibited repentance.<sup>55</sup>

**Be Helpless.** You are no spiritual master. The most helpless man who ever lived said, “I can do nothing,” and “Not my will, but your will be done.” You can stop climbing the spiritual ladder and surrender to Him, praying His will. Are you weak? Glory in your weakness, that His power may rest on you! (2 Cor. 12:9,10).

**Be Bold.** Speak what’s on your mind and heart, clearly and simply; no altered mental states are needed. Jesus intercedes for

us; we can boldly enter His presence and find help (Heb. 4:16).

**Trust.** In His gospel we see the light of His face, with no obscuring cloud, no “ray of darkness.” He has adopted us; He knows us; He gives us eternal life; we will never perish, and no one can snatch us out of His hand (Jn. 10:28-30). We cannot allow His precious assurances to be taken from us by anyone, no matter how impressive their reputation or credentials.

The heart and soul of all prayer is the gospel, the very glory of Christ and the light God calls into our dark souls (2 Cor. 4:6). There is no other way to enlightenment or knowledge of God than in the face of the crucified Son of God. He gave us His word. †

## Endnotes

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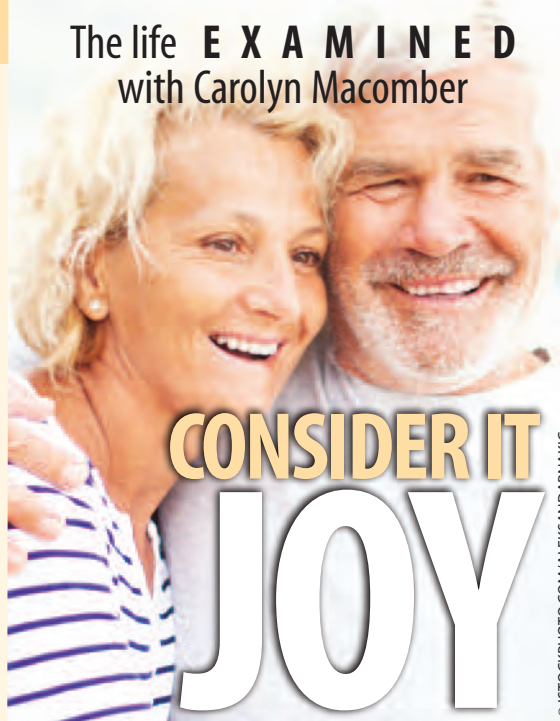
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**Martin L. Carey** grew up as an Adventist in many different places, including Tacoma Park, Maryland, Missouri, and Guam, USA. During daylight hours he works as a psychologist for a high school in San Bernardino, California. He is also a licensed family therapist. He is married to Sharon and has two sons, Matthew, 11, and Nick, 25. He continues to pine for clear, dark skies with eight different telescopes up to 20". Biblical research and classical piano take up his remaining energy. You may contact him at [martincarey@sbglobal.net](mailto:martincarey@sbglobal.net).







“Lord, please make it stop!” This prayer has been my heart’s cry over the last few months. In many ways it echoes the cries recorded in the Psalms. I have entered into a time of deep suffering—emotional, physical, and spiritual—the details of which are shared with a select few. I’m realizing, however, that suffering touches so many of us that I feel it would be helpful to make it the topic of my column.

Intense suffering can come in many forms: never being able to hug one’s child again; feeling alone in a marriage that wounds and tears; living with chronic pain or a disease that shames and humbles; losing one’s friends or family; struggling with financial burdens; living with trauma—and the list goes on. Jesus, however, does not leave us alone in our suffering but speaks to and enters into its depths. He, Himself, was considered a Man of Sorrows.

I have found that people often desire to lessen the suffering of another. Unfortunately, no one can truly lessen a friend’s suffering. Believers may try to bring meaning to suffering, believing that finding meaning behind the misery will somehow reduce it. In fact, many of us have endured people intoning, “All things work together for the good ....” Nevertheless, suffering is rarely reduced by trying to find meaning behind it; Job and his friends vividly demonstrated this fact.

I have often wondered if the words comforters speak during someone else’s suffering are more about their own discomfort than an honest desire to “weep with those who weep”. A friend of mine who has suffered greatly told me, “Just talk about suffering, and you’ll quickly watch people change the subject or leave the conversation entirely. They just want to run from the sufferer.”

The most helpful response when I suffer is a non-judgmental and listening ear, and when suffering is beyond words, then I cherish silent presence.

It has been said, “God doesn’t waste suffering.” Unfortunately, it becomes difficult to understand this platitude when the pain is unbearable. Nevertheless, I am beginning to view a treasure that can only come through suffering. Peter tells me in 1 Peter 1:6-7 that suffering produces a genuineness of faith that is much more valuable than gold, and faith is of high value to God. God’s economy is much different from mine. Therefore, it is a blessing when suffering comes, because it proves and produces in me that which is of great value to God.

**There is a place within suffering where the Lord alone can enter. Christ fully understands suffering, because He, Himself, endured its full impact. He is intimately acquainted with grief.**

James writes, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (Jas. 1:3-4).

Joy and suffering seem more like boxing opponents than bedfellows. Yet Scripture places joy and suffering side by side and hand in hand. This joy, however, is not a masochistic pleasure in suffering. Rather, we are to realize that our suffering is an occasion through which God will grow our faith. When we experience trials, we can consider our suffering to be an occasion for rejoicing that God is proving our faith to be genuine—even when the pain is more intense than our feelings of faith.

Another byproduct of suffering is isolation. There is a place within suffering where the Lord alone can enter. Christ fully understands suffering, because He, Himself, endured its full impact. He is intimately acquainted with grief. For the joy of our salvation He endured the shame of the cross and a suffering we cannot begin to comprehend (Is. 53; Heb. 12:1-2). As long as I am His, I am never alone even though no other human can fully share my pain.

Christ is our very great reward despite the agonies of suffering (Gen. 15:1; Matt. 5:12; Heb. 11:26). When

the pain is unbearable and the isolation is acute, do not forget there is a Friend Who knows, understands, and holds us in His hands. May He be glorified in and through our suffering. †

**Carolyn Macomber** was a doctoral student at Andrews University when she discovered inconsistencies between Adventism and the Bible. She withdrew her membership from the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 2009. She is a member of The Chapel Evangelical Free Church in St. Joseph, Michigan, where she is the leader of a Former Adventist Fellowship. She works helping families prepare their children for school readiness, and she is a small group leader for Bible Study Fellowship in Granger, Indiana.





# FAF Conference featured Biola professor Jon Rittenhouse



**F**riday, February 15, was the first of three days of the eighth annual Former Adventist Fellowship Conference at Trinity Church in Redlands, California. About 90 people participated in the weekend which was entitled “Living By The Spirit” and featured keynote speaker Jon Rittenhouse. His four topics were, “The Multifaceted Ministry of the Holy Spirit”, “He’s the Source!”, “Living Under the Influence”, and “The Foundation of Faith in Jesus Christ”.

Gary Inrig, Trinity’s senior pastor, delivered the Saturday “Morning Scripture” and used Hebrews to demonstrate that Jesus and what He inaugurated in the new covenant is better than all the shadows of the old covenant. Gary also spoke

Saturday evening about Jesus instituting the new covenant as He celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples, and then Gary led us in communion and a short time of sharing.

Dale Ratzlaff gave two talks during the conference on “In Christ Truths”, emphasizing that when we are born again, we are already seated with Christ at God’s right hand (Eph. 2:4-7) and can know that all of God’s power and riches are already ours. Dale also gave the keynote address at Friday evening’s public meeting to which the community was invited. His talk was entitled “Three Adventist Doctrines That Compromise the Gospel”. The contents of that talk appear in this issue of *Proclamation!* in Dale’s article “Without the Central Pillar ‘there is no reason to exist’”.

Carolyn Macomber from The Chapel, the E.V. Free church in St. Joseph, Michigan, presented a powerful talk on fear in which she divided the attendees into groups and had them write down the fears that shaped their experiences as Adventists. After sharing the groups’ results, she gave us Scripture passages that remind us that God is greater than our hearts and is our confidence and assurance.

Colleen Tinker gave a talk entitled “Sabbath Questions and Answers”. She set the stage by sharing a chart of God’s covenants, demonstrating that the Mosaic covenant, unlike God’s covenants with Adam and Eve, Abraham, David, and the new covenant, was conditional. God’s other covenants were unconditional. Then Colleen shared some of Adventist’s cur-



1. Dale Ratzlaff; 2. Worship leader Sharon Strum (center) with Pam Rathbun (L) and Catherine Owens; 3. Jon Rittenhouse; 4. Colleen and Richard Tinker with Woody Granger in break-out session; 5. Paul Carden, executive director of the Centers for Apologetics Research, with his wife Lisa.



rent favorite Sabbath arguments and showed from Scripture how those arguments are unfounded.

Paul Carden, executive director of the Centers for Apologetics Research and the general editor of Rose Publishing, attended the conference and gave his own story Friday evening of how he came to see Adventism to be dangerous.

Elaina Matthews, a 22-year-old vocal performance major from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, shared her powerful faith story of how she came to realize that she was depending upon the Sabbath for her security instead of Jesus. She shared how she was born again one evening when she read Ephesians 2, and she punctuated her testimony by singing “Before the Throne of God Above” and “Blessed Assurance”.

Julius (Hap) Botelho from Redlands, California, gave his faith story on Saturday. In a moving testimony, he shared that two uniquely Adventist attitudes had shaped his relationship to religion. First, he learned to argue everything, a skill honed in Sabbath School classes where it was a point of pride to stump the teacher with a better argument than he had. Second, he learned that the Bible was almost impossible to understand except by Adventist theologians, and even they disagreed. Two years ago he read the first of three installments of “Why Seventh-day Adventists are not Evangelical” by Louis Talbot in the July-September, 2010, issue of *Proclamation!* That article made him realize that he did not actually understand who Jesus really was and what He really did. He began to study and has come to know that God is not looking for him to get it right; rather, God has chosen him and has given him peace and life through Jesus...the real Jesus of Scripture—which actually can

be taken at face value without arguing about what the words mean.

The third faith story was given by Raul Lopez of Santa Ana, California. Raul converted into Adventism with his wife Margaret when they were a young couple. They spent many years in the church, but even though he was very involved, he was spiritually dry. Then they began attending a Christian church, and life changed. Raul is active in Bible studies, and he and Margaret love worshiping and sharing with their new church family. Raul said that now he is so happy he wants to stand on the roof top and shout his love for God!

Breakout session presenters included Dale Ratzlaff fielding questions about Adventism and “In Christ Truths”, Richard and Colleen Tinker with a presentation on the human spirit, Martin Carey with a seminar on the underlying implications of contemplative prayer, and Jim Valentine, director of Christian Apologetics and Research Information Services (CARIS), with a presentation on some of the less-known “Industrial Strength Ellen White Quotes” that show she was not a true prophet.

The general sessions were live-streamed again this year, and videos of the sessions are online here:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/FormerAdventist#g/u>.  
The weekend ended with lunch in the clubhouse of the housing development where a local former Adventist, Kit Satre, lives. The day was cool and sunny, and the venue was beautiful and spacious. It was a wonderful time of debriefing and sharing, and several really significant conversations occurred. That afternoon two people trusted Jesus. One was the wife of a staunch Adventist pastor, and the other was the son of a former



1. Elaina Matthews who gave her testimony Friday night, Carolyn Ratzlaff, and conference photographer Sharon Carey enjoy a break together; 2. Julius (Hap) Botelho gave his faith story on Saturday afternoon; 3. Gary Inrig, senior pastor of Trinity Church, delivered the Morning Scripture Saturday morning and also led us in communion that evening; 4. Carlyle Langhorn, a former Adventist pastor, and Martin Carey, a breakout session speaker, chatted together at a meal.



Adventist pastor who has been attending Trinity Church for about five months. The woman articulated that she finally knew she was sealed, and the young man stated that he was no longer Adventist, that Jesus Christ was his Lord and Savior, and that he didn't have to do anything to earn his salvation except to trust Jesus.

### Statements from attendees

The following comment is from a former Jehovah's Witness couple who attended the conference: "Thanks so much for inviting us to attend the FAF conference....We met and mingled with lots of people and we LOVED hearing their stories. That is by far our favorite part of the whole thing—seeing God's work in each person and how our stories are all so similar. It's faith-strengthening when you find others who have found Jesus in Scripture alone and you see that God worked in their lives as individuals, not as a collective (like our cults taught us—JWs teach you can't have God outside the group; we're sure that yours said that as well; it was never a personal relationship. It was a relationship to the religion). We also learned some things about Adventism that we didn't fully understand before."

This statement is from a young Christian woman who works at Loma Linda and is dating an Adventist:

"I just wanted to say a big thank you for allowing me to attend part of the conference last week. I really had not realized how much I really needed it. Your session about the Sabbath made me realize how much the legalism of the Adventist Sabbath doctrine had gotten to me, despite my best intentions not to let it become legalistic for me. I really needed to hear

your message, and it was just amazing to me how God orchestrates these things! And I know it was amazing for [my boyfriend] to attend on Friday night and realize that Former Adventists are not all people that have been hurt by the church and are trying to air their dirty laundry. Later that weekend he expressed to me how flabbergasted he was when I first came to him months ago explaining that I wanted to start studying with him because parts of Adventism seemed unbiblical. He had always been taught that the Adventists are the ones that know the Bible the best because they actually keep all the commandments. Wow, I had no idea at the time that he'd been so shocked when I'd first said that. Now I realize that he probably had all kinds of EGW alarm bells going off in his head warning him that I was probably tempting him with the evils of questioning! We both still have a lot of studying to do, but I do think it was really beneficial for him to hear perspectives from people that had held the Adventist church as dearly as he had and to hear the biblical reasons why they left. It was amazing for me to gain a better understanding of some of the Adventist doctrines. It's very interesting that they don't explain a lot of that to you as an "outsider" checking out the church. I truly wonder how many new "converts" really understand what they are getting into when they join. Very scary and sad. As I listened to the sessions, I realized that the messages I had taken away from some Adventist sermons were not what was intended...as a Christian, I took them at face value without even realizing some of the underlying doctrinal messages."

We praise God for his faithfulness and blessings and for glorifying the Lord Jesus at this year's conference! †



1. Carolyn Macomber spoke on combatting fear with God's word, and Joanie Yorba-Gray was on call to pray with people as they needed it; 2. Nicole and Carel Stevenson led the breakout sessions for the teens; 3. Colleen Tinker addressed "Sabbath Questions and Answers"; 4. Jim Valentine, director of Christian Apologetics and Research Information Services (CARIS); 5. Raul Lopez shared his story on Saturday evening.



**Thought I was the only one**

I love the magazine and greatly appreciate what you are doing. I was raised in a third-generation Adventist family and became a believer in 1968. Knowing only Adventism, I set out to honor the Lord by being the best one I could. But after about two months of Bible study, I realized that what I had been taught as a child was not what the Scriptures teach.

I renounced my Adventist affiliation, but I thought I was the only one like myself. It is terrific that your efforts and ministry are available to those whom God has called out of this cultish group. More power to you.

I'm including a check to help cover some of your costs relative to the magazine. God bless all of you at *Proclamation!*.

ROSEBURG, OR

**Broken record: dishonest worldview**

Upon receiving the winter issue, 2012, of *Proclamation!*, I did as I usually do: I flipped through the whole issue before turning to the letters.

I did not get to the letters as the title "Spiritual Abuse Among Religions" caught my attention.

I was hoping for an article without the slings and arrows with pointed barbs or a specific diatribe against Adventism. The title was general, and yet there was nothing referencing other religions except Adventism which was named 39 times by my count. Yet I am sure there are just as many problems in the Baptist, Free Will Baptist, Anglican, Mormon, Roman Catholic, and many denominations.

This article was well written yet followed the same old idea of the 'broken record,' if one keeps

repeating the same story, no matter how much truth or lie is in the story, it becomes believable. The title of the article and the substance of the article again showed your inability to be honest in your worldview. Yes, there is abuse in (sad to say) all religions and denominations; yet in keeping your focus only on one you give credence to the idea that all others are without fault.

RANCHO CORDOVA, CA

**Editor's response:** The principles outlining the nature of religious abuse which were defined in the article do describe religious abuse in any system. The specific applications of these characteristics to Adventism was our particular focus because this magazine is targeted for Adventists and former Adventists as well as for Christians who are concerned about Adventists and Adventism.

Adventists are generally oblivious to the fact that the way Adventism functions is by the principles of religious abuse, and they struggle with cognitive dissonance and confusion between their beliefs and the clear words of Scripture.

Although abusive people can exist within any organization, wherever the gospel of the Lord Jesus is taught and honored, people are able to be born again. In environments where the word of God and the Lord Jesus is honored, central, and all-sufficient, abuse is far less common.

**Disturbing**

I enjoy reading your magazine, but I've read some stuff in your most recent issue that is kind of disturbing to me....Dale Ratzlaff in his article says "This teaches us that God's provision may come

from unexpected sources at just the right time. We have seen this time and again at Life Assurance Ministries. It seems that God does not want us to get financially comfortable. Rather, it appears we are to pray as Christ taught His disciples, 'Give us this day our daily bread.'"

I couldn't agree more that "God's provision may come from unexpected sources at just the right time". However, I take strong issue with the statement that "God does not want us to get financially comfortable".

I am a father, and I have two boys. Not only do I want them to be "financially comfortable", I want them to be secure in my love, and comfortable in every sense of the word. Having my sons on pins and

need, and leave our fears and unbelief off the pages of our magazines. Lord knows we get enough of it in this world without reading it in the pages of *Proclamation!*

**Editor's response:** We are never promised prosperity. This idea that we can command and ask for whatever we want and receive it is, unfortunately, quite a first-world belief. The suffering believers in other nations are not experiencing health and wealth. We all have to trust God. Some of us have comfortable lives. This comfort is God's grace to us. Some of us have no bank rolls and compromised health. These situations are also God's grace to us. God disciplines and teaches us when we are His own (Hebrews 12:1-12). Our suffering is

**...after about two months of Bible study, I realized that what I had been taught as a child was not what the Scriptures teach.**

needles, wondering whether or not I'm going to take care of them, is not my idea of fatherhood.

Dale quotes Matthew 6:11, "Give us this day our daily bread". Like a lot of pastors and church leaders, he uses verses like this to cover his own doubt and unbelief. There is comfort in shared misery, and it's understandable that he would want others to feel the same way that he does, that God wants us to stand on the razor's edge, wondering if we're going to make it through next month or not.

How about quoting this instead? Mark 11:24- "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."

Brothers and sisters, this world is headed down a long, dark tunnel, and there is no light at the end of it. The only light is above, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's dive into His word boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of

for His glory and for the good of the body. Our success is for His glory and for the good of the body. In either case He asks us to trust Him and to let go of our expectation that we should expect health and wealth. We are living sacrifices as we present ourselves to Him for service (Rom. 12:1).

We praise God when we have plenty, and we praise Him when His provision comes at the last minute. Moreover, Matthew 6:25-34 is true: He provides all we need. In ways we cannot explain, God grants us the means to do what He gives us to do. We have often experienced the fact that God gives us the money to do what needs to be done even when on paper the numbers don't make sense. He really does keep His promises!

God blesses us and multiplies our "seed for sowing" and increases "the harvest of [our] righteousness." (2 Cor. 9:10). For some, this comfort involves having plenty; for others, it is having all we need in spite of financial limitations.

**Remember us in your prayers**

We pray for you, our readers, and thank you for your prayers as we seek to serve our Lord Jesus faithfully in proclaiming the Gospel. We also thank you for your generous support that keeps this magazine and our ministry websites continuing to reach out to those that are caught in the bondage of legalism and a false hope.

Remember to include this ministry in your will or trust by designating Life Assurance Ministries, Inc. as a beneficiary.

**Appreciate your insight**

I live in an Adventist retirement village, and we have the Adventist services but also [Christian] Church [services]. After I read *Proclamation!*, I pass it onto our pastor; it helps him alot. My dad's business partner's wife and her family were strong Adventists, and I still have contact with some of them, so I appreciate your insight and input. I pray daily for you and your ministry.

GRESHAM, OR

**A contented, thankful Adventist**

I started receiving *Proclamation!* about four years ago....I feel that you generalize too much as to what the average Seventh-day Adventist believes and what they are like. Each member has his own experience with God. Many churches are diverse, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a diverse group of people all over the world.

I am very saddened by some of the angry, judgmental, and vindictive letters written by Seventh-day Adventists. I am not threatened by your publication; I am saddened that *Proclamation!* seems to be capitalizing on the vindictiveness of those letters. I am also disappointed in the sarcasm against Ellen White...Yes, we have to decide if she is a prophetess of God or a tool of the Devil. I believe she is a

Prophetess who lived a godly life and lifted up Jesus Christ in wonderful ways through her many books like *The Desire of Ages*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, and so forth....

I feel that your understanding of Seventh-day Adventists being "under the law" because they keep the Sabbath is mistaken. The Bible is clear that if we love Jesus we will cherish/keep His commandments, not to earn Heaven or to avoid hell, but to honor the Savior. We as Christians should all be under

scapegoat on whom Jesus places the sins of the saved at the end of the investigative judgment.

Christianity is not defined as "following Jesus and His teachings". Jesus defined it as being born again of water and of the Spirit (Jn. 3:3-6). It is admitting one is hopelessly sinful and unable to obey God, and then placing the full weight of one's faith and trust in the atonement in Jesus' blood completed on the cross. It means receiving His own resurrection life as we believe and receive His eter-

were formed from an amalgamation of man and beast. When I read that in one of the prophet's writings, it made me want to vomit. Since that statement about amalgamation is a hideous lie, that makes the one who uttered it a liar, and thus a daughter of Satan. This magazine and sites which expose the unbiblical doctrines are essential to help people get out of that cult.

VIA EMAIL

**Hideous mark on the face of the earth**

Please remove my name from your mailing list. Your magazine is justified by Satanic forces, and your publishings are a hideous mark upon the face of the earth! I had no idea that I would have this junk coming to my mailbox. I believe in the Bible totally and for you to contradict the Holy Word is just outrageously disgusting! In the judgement you will have to answer for misleading people away from the true faith which is the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

MARIETTA, GA

**Second generation in Holland**

I am a second generation Seventh-day Adventist born in 1949.

In 2010 I visited a workshop of the International Cultic Studies Association in Connecticut. It was for second-generation former members of sects and cults, and I attended because of my work as a counselor for people who were born into cults or sects. Wow, what an eyeopener for me!

In Holland I cannot find the right information about the issues associated with Adventism, so I am happy with your site and with the world-wide web!

I look forward to reading your magazine, and I share it with other Adventists!

DE BILT, THE NETHERLANDS

**...your publishings are a hideous mark upon the face of the earth! I had no idea that I would have this junk coming to my mailbox.**

grace. Being under grace means that our motivation is not ego-centric. We follow Jesus wherever He goes with no selfish motivation. Being under law means we are selfishly motivated by fear of punishment, or we simply want our reward in Heaven....

I sign off as a contented and thankful Seventh-day Adventist Christian who believes in a holistic lifestyle, simple modest apparel, cherishing God's Sabbath, and preparing to meet Jesus when He comes so we can crown Him King. Perhaps the members of *Proclamation!* never saw the Adventist Church the way I do.

BELOIT, WI

**Editor's response:** We realize that no two Adventists will understand Adventism exactly the same. This fact, however, does not negate the reality that Adventists of all kinds share a worldview that has been designed by Ellen White's interpretations. Adventists hold these things in common: man has no immaterial spirit that survives the death of the body; Sabbath has some degree of eternal significance; Jesus could have failed in His mission; Ellen White was at the least a positive historical figure for Adventists, and Satan is the

nal seal and guarantee, the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14). We receive His imputed, personal righteousness credited to us, and we begin to live as heirs of God (Rom. 8:15-18).

Jesus fulfilled the law and keeps all the requirements of the new covenant. When we are in Him, we are no longer under the law. We are hidden with Christ in God, eternally secure and counted righteous!

**Religious abuse**

Thank you for the Winter 2012 issue of your magazine. You are right on in all your comments. Former Adventists need reassurance that we are on the right path to Christ, away from the Adventist church. People who have never been a member of that organization cannot understand the strong statements against it.

[Some] adherents to that cult think you have to be vegetarian to be saved. One person even told me that I had to give up using baking powder if I wanted to make it through the last days. Outsiders have no idea of the strange doctrines espoused by Adventists because of their so-called prophetess, Ellen G. White. Their worst belief is that some races of men

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"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:  
**Editor, *Proclamation!* Magazine**  
**P.O. Box 905**  
**Redlands, CA 92373**  
 OR EMAIL EDITOR:  
**proclamation@gmail.com**



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# Jesus: God's Final

# WORD

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ASSOCIATE PASTOR  
THE CHAPEL



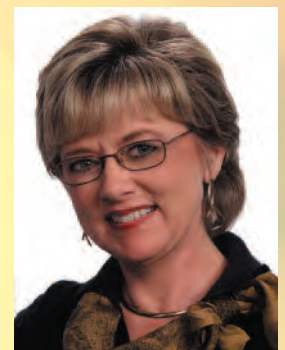
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The life A F T E R with Chris Lee

**T**he world has just celebrated Easter, and with Jesus' resurrection vivid in my mind, I find my thoughts turning in an unexpected direction. I am repeatedly drawn to a scrap of paper lying on my desk, covered with notes I scrawled while listening to my daughter's high school debate team. The two debaters were deliberating over when, or if, it is acceptable for one government to intervene in another government's affairs for the purpose of enforcing human rights. The debater advancing the argument that governments should intervene contended that there are rights which are intrinsic to humanity; to deny or abuse these rights is immoral and dehumanizing. Therefore, governments have a moral obligation to act when rights are being violated.

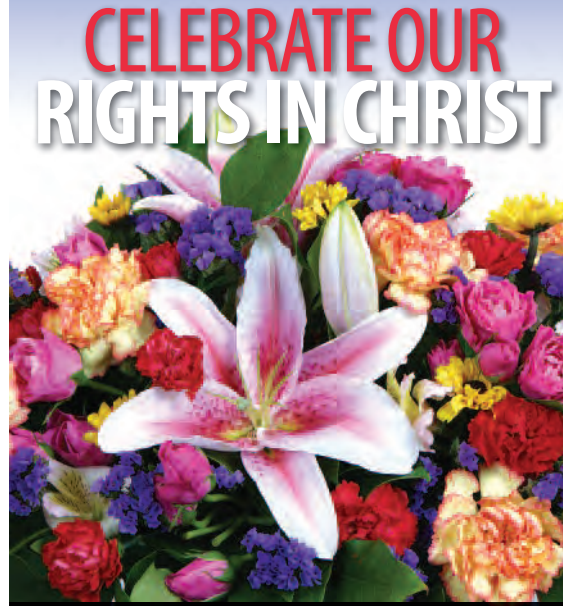
While I found the reasoning compelling, the antithetical argument, governments should not intervene, seemed to score strong points as well. I found myself writing questions such as, "What makes a right intrinsic to humanity? Which rights are truly intrinsic versus granted? Which abuses do we allow and which do we intervene in? Why is it immoral to dehumanize someone? Who defines this morality?" In the absence of answers to these key questions, either position could appear valid on the surface.

It seems to me that the associated ideas of human dignity and innate human rights are meaningless apart from an underlying supportive worldview. If humans are merely the product of time plus chance, then concepts of dignity and innate rights are absurdities. If there are such things as dignity or inherent rights, then these qualities must be derived by some objective standard. Apart from such a standard there is only relativistic subjectivity or the assertion that there is no right or wrong. Apart from any objective external standard, there is simply that which is.

A purely materialistic world view cannot satisfactorily answer why



**Chris Lee** lives in Lincoln, Nebraska with his wife, Carmen, and daughters, Ashlyn and Alyssa. They attend the Lincoln Berean Church. Chris is a self-described "theology junkie" whose mission is to proclaim the unfathomable grace of Christ in a clear, understandable, and Biblical way. Chris is the editor of the *Proclamation!* Blog at ProclamationMagazine.com. You may contact Chris by email at [ambulator@gmail.com](mailto:ambulator@gmail.com).



**Humans have intrinsic value because they bear the image of God and reflect some of His attributes.**

humans should be afforded dignity and rights or why this is an issue of morality. There is no strong reason why humans should have rights beyond that of any other species of animal if we are here through random mutation and survival of the fittest. There is no particular dignity in winning a genetic lottery.

Humans only have intrinsic dignity if that quality is in some way built-in. In Christian theology, human dignity is indeed built-in, bestowed by a Creator. Humans have intrinsic value because they bear the image of God and reflect some of His attributes. We have certain inalienable rights because those, too, are endowed by the Creator. These natural rights are not contingent upon human law, custom, culture, or govern-

ment, but upon the universal natural law that God has established within His creation.

These rights are not all we've been given, though. Our God did not merely create us, then leave us to fend for ourselves. Rather, He came into the world and became human to dwell with us. He came to those He created, and we humans put Him to death—but that's not the end of the story. He rose again and lives today. To any that believe in Him He gives the right to become children of God, born of God (Jn. 1:9-13). Because He rose again and sits at the right hand of God, those who believe are raised up with Him and seated in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). Because of Easter, we need not question whether we have dignity or rights. We have been afforded the ultimate human right; we have been adopted into the family of God. We have been given these great riches, not because we in any way deserve them, but because of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, that's a right we can celebrate! †

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