

MY CHAINS ARE GONE

THE MORMON CONNECTION

ProclamationMagazine.com

# Proclamation!

FORMER ADVENTISTS  
INQUIRING ADVENTISTS  
SABBATARIANS  
CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

SUMMER 2015  
VOLUME 16, ISSUE 2

**HOW THE CLEAR WORD  
DISTORTS ATONEMENT**

**SHOULD BAPTISM BE  
REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP?**

**SCAMMED!**

**HOW I GOT WHAT  
I DON'T DESERVE**

## THE AGNOSTIC PHARISEE

I WAS BLIND BUT NOW I SEE





COLLEEN TINKER

## OBSERVING THE GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

**A**s this issue of *Proclamation!* is getting ready to go to the printer, Richard is streaming coverage of the 60th General Conference (GC) Quinquennial Session in our office while we work. This extravaganza featuring delegates and presenters from every world division of the organization is themed, “Arise! Shine! Jesus is coming!”

We have listened to plenary sessions, Sabbath School lessons, interviews, musicians from various world divisions, and *Let’s Pray* hosted by David Franklin and Kandus Thorp. We have heard a variety of speakers urging attendees to “finish the work” so Jesus can come before the next GC session can convene.

**BUT ADVENTISM WAS WRONG. IT DID NOT TEACH ME MY ONLY WAY OUT OF TERMINAL SIN WAS IN BEING BORN AGAIN.**

## Proclamation!

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**LIFE ASSURANCE**  
MINISTRIES

We have supplemented Hope Church Channel’s coverage with news stories published by Adventist News Network, *Adventist Today*, and *Spectrum* magazine and have learned that Ted N.C. Wilson was re-elected to another five-year term as president by a more than 90% vote and that the delegates succeeded in suspending the newly-introduced electronic voting devices.

I am saturated with Adventist publicity and practice, and I realize it feels familiar. Even though I never attended a GC session, I participated in countless camp meetings and services as an Adventist. I recognize the pride of being “special”, of being selected for position or performance at the pinnacle of Adventist experience: the GC session which, Ellen White said, was “the highest authority that God has upon the earth.” When the GC is in session, private judgment must be surrendered (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 492).

It feels familiar—and at the same time, I have a sense of being sucked into unreality. The pomp and circumstance, the pride of Adventist identity, the confidence that they carry “truth”—I remember that I shared that pride and identity. Those things once defined me.

Looking back and reliving an echo from my past, I know now that as powerful as Adventism is, it was never the strongest force in my life. The Father was always drawing me, protecting me even inside Adventism, and ultimately, in His time and way, revealing the beauty of the gospel and the irresistible fact that Jesus is my Substitute. Jesus keeps the covenant with the Father, and in the fullness of His time, He overwhelmed me with the fact

that He has done everything necessary for my salvation. I bring nothing to Him—not even Sabbath-keeping—nothing but the admission of my depravity and my need for a Savior.

The Lord Jesus is my life! He is truth, and He has rescued me.

Adventism was a mirage; it seemed to offer fellowship, identity, purpose, belonging, but those things were shadows of reality. Adventism did not offer an infallible Jesus and His inerrant word. It did not teach me that I am utterly unable to seek, please, or find God (Rom. 3:9-16). It taught me that I could—and should—avoid sin by prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit. But Adventism was wrong. It did not teach me my only way out of terminal sin was in being born again.

The agnosticism Martin Carey describes in his article in this issue is all too familiar. The confusion promulgated within *The Clear Word* which Steve Pitcher describes summarizes the Adventism that shaped my worldview, and the subtle but powerful similarities between Ellen White’s descriptions and those of Joseph Smith discussed by Dale Ratzlaff reveal the deception which posed as reality and obscured the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

This week as I am observing Adventism, I thank my Father for opening my eyes and showing me what I couldn’t see. I pray that those who desire truth will hear His voice and will become so uncomfortable with the dissonance between Adventism and God’s word that they will not rest until they fall at the foot of the cross in repentance and find mercy and grace—and life.

As you read Joni Schmidt’s faith story and Carolyn Macomber, Rick Barker, and Chris Lee’s columns, ask God to teach you what He knows you need to know and to show you the truth of the gospel. His word cannot fail, and Jesus is Lord of all.

He, not Adventism, is the final word. †

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Back issues of *Proclamation!* and the blog site **[ProclamationMagazine.com](http://ProclamationMagazine.com)**
- Books and other materials by Dale Ratzlaff **[LifeAssuranceMinistries.com](http://LifeAssuranceMinistries.com)**
- Day by day commentary on the Sabbath School lessons **[BibleStudiesForAdventists.com](http://BibleStudiesForAdventists.com)**
- Testimonies, Bibles studies, and the forum **[FormerAdventist.com](http://FormerAdventist.com)**
- Large body of resources for studying Adventism **[TruthorFables.com](http://TruthorFables.com)**



## A MESSAGE TO ADVENTIST LEADERS

If you could say something to the leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as they reflect on their quinquennial General Conference session in July of this year, what would you say?

It was my original hope that with the publication of *Sabbath in Christ* and *Cultic Doctrine*, the Seventh-day Adventist church would move away from some of its cultic beliefs. When I first published *Cultic Doctrine* in 1996, I wrote an open letter to the then-president of the Seventh-day Adventist organization, Elder Folkenberg, and sent it by certified mail. This letter was included in the first edition of *Cultic Doctrine*. I felt I was gracious, even though I asked some penetrating questions.

Some weeks later I received a terse letter from one of the assistants to the president. He said that Elder Folkenberg did not have time to respond to my letter, and it was well-known what Adventists believe.

Since that time over five million members have left the Adventist organization, and more are leaving every day. Today with e-books, YouTube presentations, and internet web sites, the Adventist church can no longer hide the errors upon which it was founded.

Is it too much to hope that you, the Adventist leaders, will someday cut Adventism loose from the errors of its cultic past? If all of the Adventist doctrines can be supported by honest Bible study as you claim, then why not completely eliminate the mention of Ellen White from your doctrinal statement and depend on Scripture alone?

Dale and Carolyn Ratzlaff have authored six books: *Sabbath in Christ*—a volume that explains new covenant Sabbath rest, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventism*—explores the false Adventist 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, *My Cup Overflows*—Carolyn's autobiography, and *Gospel Transformation*—which teaches what the Gospel is and accomplishes.

Each of these books is available at [Ratzlaff.com](http://Ratzlaff.com) or by phoning (928) 554-1001.

Ted N. C. Wilson, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



ANSEL OLIVER/ADVENTIST NEWS NETWORK

Furthermore, it is well-known that your honest scholars know that the cleansing of the sanctuary and investigative judgment as taught by Ellen White cannot be honestly supported. Why not also cut this doctrine out as well? Additionally, any Bible student knows the Holy Spirit is the "seal of God" and that this seal has nothing to do with the Sabbath. Why not drop "Sabbath as the seal (or the 'sign of the seal') of God" as well?

In your public relations you appear to present Adventism as just another evangelical church which chooses to worship on Saturday. Why not actually become an evangelical church rather than masquerading as one?

Why not set the Adventist church free—free to do good works which come as a natural result of knowing that God has already given the believing Christian the verdict of "not guilty" in Christ Jesus? Why not

submit to the truth of Scripture, believe in the Lord Jesus and His finished work alone, and experience the Spirit giving your spirit new birth?

Then, why not have a true "Gospel Conference" where the fundamental tenets of Christianity can be clarified? Why not help your members to understand fully the righteousness of God that comes apart from law and study justification, redemption, propitiation, reconciliation, substitution, and representation? Help them to know who they are when they are "in Christ Jesus" seated at the right hand of the Father. This knowledge will help them focus on "things above", and as they trust our triune God and His word, the Holy Spirit will work out in their lives the fruit of the Spirit.

We who invested so much time and treasure in Adventism would be happy to see it become truly a gospel-centered, Christ-centered, Bible-centered church, for that is what we thought it was and were deeply disappointed when we discovered it was not. We pray that God will guide you.

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



# MY CHAINS ARE GO

JONI SCHMIDT

**H**aving been raised a fourth-generation Adventist, I was proud that I didn't have to search for Bible "truth", because I had it. Consequently, when I was 10 years old, I was baptized into the Adventist church after a Dick Barron evangelistic series. I didn't feel the joy, though, that I thought I should feel when "giving my heart to Christ". Oh well, I thought, maybe I was just too young. So, at age 19, I was re-baptized. When I came up out of the water that time, however, all I felt was—wet.

I married when I was 20, had a daughter Nicole when I was 21, and divorced four years later. Through all the tumult, I was unquestioningly raising my daughter in the Adventist church.

I remarried at age 30, this time to a wonderful man who, although raised in the Catholic church, was not a practicing Catholic. He knew my beliefs and told me what I believed was wrong, but he didn't bother me about my religion as long as I was happy. In fact, he used to joke with his friends that I was a cheap date: I didn't drink alcohol, eat shellfish, or wear jewelry!

Shortly after our wedding, Carl and I gained full custody of his two children, and I began taking Alaina and Aric to church every week with Nicole. Alaina grabbed onto the structure of Adventism with both hands and is still an Adventist, but Aric just went to church to make me happy. Not sure how to "keep" the Sabbath, I made it a drudgery for my whole family. All I allowed them to do was to sit in the house and do "lay activities" [taking naps] like we did when I was growing up. It was a day of rest, after all.

When Nicole became a teenager, the criticism from older church members began: "Your skirt is too short." "Your mother let you wear that to church?" She began to rebel, and when she was 17, she moved out and rejected Adventism once and for all.

## Trying to connect with God

I figured it wasn't biblical to get baptized every nine years, but not knowing how to connect with God without my sin getting in the way, I went forward at nearly every altar call for re-dedication. Those were the only times I felt any hope of getting close to Him. I couldn't connect with Him during the week—I kept sinning, no matter how hard I tried to obey Him. Nevertheless, since we Adventists had the "truth", I presumed God would see that I was sincerely trying to live up to all the light I had.

I could not believe how difficult it was to be a Christian! It was full-time hard work. I despaired at my shortcomings, and despite using every ounce of effort I could muster to follow Christ's sinless example, I still didn't feel saved. For the life of

me, I couldn't figure out what the Savior did for me if I had to work so hard to be perfect.

Then, in 1999, my sister-in-law Lidia (and a third-generation Adventist) organized a women's retreat to share what she had learned at a non-Adventist conference. She did the most unbelievable thing—she invited several non-Adventist Christian speakers for the weekend, and for the first time, I felt I could be close to God. After that, every so often, I felt peace. In fact, when Nicole visited on occasion, she would remark that I was different, and she wanted what I had.

In 2002, I helped organize a church plant in San Antonio for Adventists who liked contemporary music and an informal atmosphere. About 25 of us enjoyed our Northside Adventist Fellowship (NAF), but one weekend the pastor went out of town. Our elder (who was a very young man) preached that Sabbath on the new covenant, and he said that God's grace is enough. I had never heard that message before! It resonated with me, but the thought that God's sufficient grace might not be compatible with Adventism never entered my mind. Shortly thereafter, our little fellowship disbanded, and I was adrift—an Adventist without a home church.

I "Sabbathed" at home for several months before finally becoming a member at the Adventist church where my brother and sister-in-law attended. It never really felt like home, and I had to force myself to get up every Sabbath morning. I was discouraged about ever achieving the perfect character of Christ as Ellen White said we must by the time Jesus returned. In fact, several times I told my friend that I felt I had to die in church on Sabbath in order to go to heaven.

## Venturing out

In the meantime, Nicole had been baptized in a non-denominational church called Oak Hills Church, had married a wonderful Christian young man, and had a daughter. Every so often they allowed me to take my one-year old granddaughter Brielle to Sabbath School and church. She should have access to the "truth", I reasoned, and if her mother wouldn't provide it, I would.

Moreover, I dropped comments to Nicole that she needed to find a Sabbath-keeping church if she was to be saved. Oak Hills might be nice, but it wasn't the "true" church. Oh, how she resented my remarks!

"I love my church," she would respond. Since she visited my church occasionally out of love for me, I would also attend church with her sometimes. (I didn't tell her, but I loved her church, too! I

# ONE!

could sense the Holy Spirit's presence there.) Once, I even had the audacity to walk up to the minister, Max Lucado, and give him a copy of the *Ten Commandments, Twice Removed* by Danny Shelton and Shelly Quinn. Nicole almost died of embarrassment. Max graciously tried several ways to decline my gift but finally accepted the book.

In July of 2012, I was asked to become a worship director at my Adventist church. My task was to find someone to lead the song service each fourth Sabbath and to make sure the program flowed smoothly. I asked a talented young Adventist to lead worship, and he brought his band. Our head music director accompanied them on the piano, and the worship was beautiful—but only for some of the congregation. Several other members who were determined not to be “entertained” at church complained to the pastor. The next week the pastor notified the worship committee that this young man would not be allowed to lead worship again. That incident was the final straw for me. I knew in my heart I did not belong in an organization that held evangelistic series to bring new members in the front door while actively escorting our precious young people out the back door. I was not offended, mad, or vengeful, but the final ember of my Adventist joy had finally been irrevocably extinguished. I wrote a letter to the church secretary informing her I would not be coming back. This time, I was religion-less.

### Preparing for radical change

A week later, the Adventist pastor visited with my sister-in-law Lidia and me to explain the Adventist teaching about God's seal. God's “true” church, he said, would be sealed with the Holy Spirit,



and Sabbath-keepers would be sealed with a special seal. He supported his argument with a verse from the Old Testament that said the Sabbath was a “sign” between God and His people. When we pointed out that “sign” and “seal” were not the same, he claimed the words were interchangeable.

A quick word study proved the pastor was wrong. Lidia and I were now both sure we weren't Adventists, but what were we? I couldn't know that God was about to change my life radically!

On October 19, 2012, Lidia had news. After spending the whole night researching the word “seal” using the online study Bible eSword, she had discovered that the seal of God was not the Sabbath as the Adventist church taught. In fact, it had nothing to do with the Sabbath!

Immediately I remembered the sermon on the new covenant and grace I had heard years before from the elder at NAF. A little light was flickering in the back of my mind—could that grace be real? I had to find out!

I researched. The little light of hope brightened. Could it really be this easy to be saved? Lidia discovered the Life Assurance Min-



# I burst into tears of joy! Yes! It really is that easy to be saved! God's grace had saved me! **Christ wasn't my example—He was my Substitute!** "It Is Finished" finally took on its real meaning to me.

istries website, and there we found the online study "The Covenants" by Christopher Lee. I printed it out and, with Bible in hand, read it—and read it again. I highlighted sections of it. Then I read the entire books of Galatians and Ephesians—twice.

I burst into tears of joy! Yes! It really is that easy to be saved! God's grace had saved me! Christ wasn't my example—He was my Substitute! "It Is Finished" finally took on its real meaning to me. The old covenant was finished, and the new covenant was now in place. Finished means FINISHED—completed, ended, not continuing in the same old way. How I praise God that I live this side of the cross!

I mailed a letter to the Southwest Conference of Seventh-day Adventists requesting my name be removed from the membership roll and from all future mailings. My burden had finally lifted and would never weigh me down again! It amazed even me how quickly I shed the Adventist mantel. I began attending Oak Hills Church with Nicole and her family every Saturday evening. The sermons spoke to me like no sermon from an Adventist pulpit ever had, and it was comforting and encouraging to see that the pastors are humble men of God.

Christmas and Easter have taken on new meanings for me. Instead of being seasons to endure, I now understand why Christians celebrate the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and I finally know why I need a Savior.

In January, 2013, I listened to Chuck Swindoll's sermon series on the radio entitled "The Grace Awakening", and then I purchased the series on CD and two of the accompanying books: one for me, and one for Lidia. The amazing truth of God's grace was now firmly planted in my heart. I cry tears of joy often when I think about Jesus' sacrifice. Each time I hear a song about God's grace, I bow before Him (if only in my mind) and thank Him for His indescribably generous gift. "Amazing Grace (My Chains are Gone)" is my anthem. My God, My Savior has ransomed me; I no longer feel as though I have to prove my value to my Savior in order to gain eternal life. Hallelujah and glory to God forever and ever!

## New mercies

Nicole and I attended the Spring, 2013, women's Bible study at Oak Hills Church, and our relationship became more solid than ever before. It turns out that she and her table mates at previous Bible studies had been praying for me to find freedom from

**Joni Schmidt** lives in Boerne, Texas, with her husband, Carl. They have three children and seven grandchildren and one on the way. The legacy she desires for her grandchildren is that they are certain that their "Mermmer" loves Jesus with all her heart.

the Adventist church. The last week of the study, I was invited to give my testimony to the 175 attendees, and as I looked into the faces of the women there, I saw Nicole crying. I can't thank God enough for my daughter.

My family of origin has varying reactions to my new life. My father, although shocked at my decision, was surprisingly supportive. He has since passed away, and I know he is in God's hands. My mother still instructs me, "Joni, you shouldn't shop (or work) on the Sabbath. For six days shalt thou labor..." Now I know how Nicole felt whenever I told her that. The contrast between Adventism's teaching that the seventh-day Sabbath identifies those who are saved in the end times and the Bible's teaching that believing in the Lord Jesus defines the saved could not be greater. The Sabbath (when we worship) makes Adventist salvation works-driven. Jesus (Who we worship) makes true salvation the work of God.

My marriage is much happier, too, because I am less judgmental and "right". I no longer feel I have to be the "priest" of the home, and my respect for my husband has increased tremendously. After 24 years of marriage, I finally see that Carl has a relationship with God, and he leads our family accordingly. And that's what matters. I also pray that someday soon my sister will be open to hearing about the joy I've found in Jesus.

On February 10, 2013, for the third—and last—time, I entered the waters of baptism, but this time at Oak Hills Church, not an Adventist church. When I arose from the water, I felt—free! And saved! And I felt joy, unspeakable JOY! The world seemed brighter, the flowers more beautiful, and the colors of nature more vibrant. I let out a war whoop of thanks and praise to my Savior.

The joy that a relationship with Jesus brings is what had been missing for me for 52 years! I applied for membership at Oak Hills Church in April, 2013, and it is such a delight to serve my Lord. I tell people how much I love my church and invite them to visit. In fact, often I even tune in online on Sunday mornings to hear the entire service again, after having attended the previous evening. Moreover, my brother and his family have also joined Oak Hills Church, so we're together in church again.

Each quarter, when I receive my *Proclamation!* magazine in the mail, I read it from cover to cover, and I ask God why He let me flounder in Adventism so long. Then I remember that His timing is perfect, and I am satisfied. He is faithful! I have the rest of my life on this earth to tell others about Jesus and how much He loves them. I can't stop talking about Jesus to everyone I meet. And I can't wait to meet HIM.

Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn. 14:6). When I was an Adventist I thought I knew everything about doctrine and prophecy and was miserable. Now I know Jesus, and I have joy. I finally love Him! His grace is amazing! The Son has set me free! †

## Adventism's Fundamental Belief #15: Baptism

By baptism we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify of our death to sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life. Thus we acknowledge Christ as Lord and Savior, become His people, and are received as members by His church. Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit. It is by immersion in water and is contingent on an affirmation of faith in Jesus and evidence of repentance of sin. It follows instruction in the Holy Scriptures and acceptance of their teachings. (Rom. 6:1-6; Col. 2:12, 13; Acts 16:30-33; 22:16; 2:38; Matt. 28:19, 20.)

### Comments about the belief statement

The method and timing of baptism has been a contentious doctrine in mainstream Christianity for centuries. In view of these conflicts, this Adventist belief statement falls within the range of positions commonly expressed by orthodox Christian groups.

However, this description does go beyond what is specifically stated in Scripture. Looking specifically at the verses cited in support of this statement, none of them teach:

- that baptism is the means by which we “are received as members by His church”;
- that we “become His people” through baptism; on the contrary, Acts 16:31 is clear that it is belief in the Lord Jesus that is the means to salvation and of becoming one of His people;
- that repentance must be “demonstrated and evident”.

Looking at the practices within the Seventh-day Adventist Church and at the explanations of baptism in their book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, however, we find several extra-biblical teachings that are contrary to orthodox Christianity.

Baptism is presented as a work of obedience required in order to be saved. According to Adventist teaching, salvation doesn't occur until the obedient act of baptism is performed.

“But baptism, like [Noah's] obedience in entering the ark, is ‘the answer of a good conscience toward God.’ When man by God's power gives ‘the answer,’ salvation provided ‘by the resurrection of Jesus Christ’ becomes effective.”<sup>1</sup>

Since Adventism also teaches that a person must demonstrate repentance through a changed life before he can be bap-

tized, the ultimate conclusion for the Seventh-day Adventist is this: salvation cannot be effective until after a person has sufficiently changed his or her life. Multiple works must be performed before the saving blood of Christ can be effective for a person, including the work of being baptized. Salvation may come as a gift from God, but it cannot come until after a person has demonstrated being worthy of receiving it through the evidence of his changed life.

A second unbiblical understanding of baptism within the Adventist church is the practice of performing multiple baptisms on the same individuals when they “have broken their covenant with God through grievous sin or apostasy.”<sup>2</sup> This practice is not taught in Scripture and is directly contrary to the ideas of “one baptism” and Christ's “once for all” sacrifice. It also negates the new birth which is the transfer from spiritual death to life.

Adventist literature justifies this practice based on Acts 19 (along with the writings of Ellen White); however, the rebaptism that occurred in Acts 19 is for those who were never baptized in the name of the Triune God, nor did they have knowledge of, or faith in, Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice for their sins. The men baptized in Acts 19 had never been baptized as Christians; therefore, they needed another baptism beyond the baptism for repentance which they had previously received. †

## ADVENTISM'S FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF #15: BAPTISM

# SHOULD BAPTISM BE REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP?

...THE ULTIMATE CONCLUSION FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST IS THIS: **SALVATION CANNOT BE EFFECTIVE** UNTIL AFTER A PERSON HAS SUFFICIENTLY CHANGED HIS OR HER LIFE.

<sup>1</sup> Jemison, *Christian Beliefs*, p. 244. As quoted in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 51, 162; Ellen White, *Evangelism*, p. 375. As quoted in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 222.

**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.

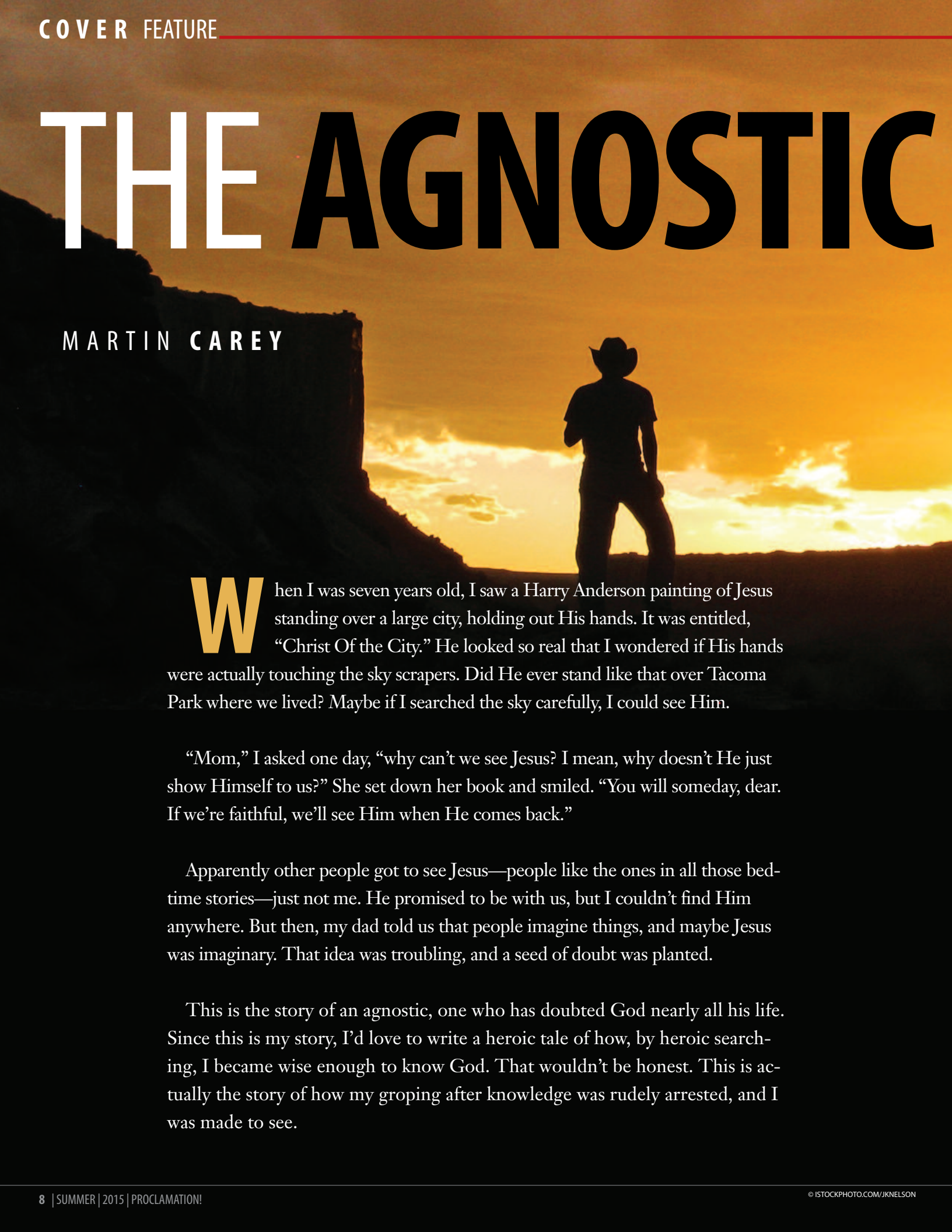


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# THE AGNOSTIC

MARTIN CAREY



**W**hen I was seven years old, I saw a Harry Anderson painting of Jesus standing over a large city, holding out His hands. It was entitled, “Christ Of the City.” He looked so real that I wondered if His hands were actually touching the sky scrapers. Did He ever stand like that over Tacoma Park where we lived? Maybe if I searched the sky carefully, I could see Him.

“Mom,” I asked one day, “why can’t we see Jesus? I mean, why doesn’t He just show Himself to us?” She set down her book and smiled. “You will someday, dear. If we’re faithful, we’ll see Him when He comes back.”

Apparently other people got to see Jesus—people like the ones in all those bedtime stories—just not me. He promised to be with us, but I couldn’t find Him anywhere. But then, my dad told us that people imagine things, and maybe Jesus was imaginary. That idea was troubling, and a seed of doubt was planted.

This is the story of an agnostic, one who has doubted God nearly all his life. Since this is my story, I’d love to write a heroic tale of how, by heroic searching, I became wise enough to know God. That wouldn’t be honest. This is actually the story of how my groping after knowledge was rudely arrested, and I was made to see.



# PHARISEE

## Huxley's agnosticism

What is an agnostic? Here is a useful definition from the *Oxford Dictionaries*:

**Agnostic:** A person who believes that nothing is known, or can be known, of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena; a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God.<sup>1</sup>

There are different kinds of agnostics. The agnostic *atheist* does not believe in any gods, but does not claim certainty about them. The agnostic *theist* does believe in a god, but is not confident in his knowledge of that god. There are also apathetic agnostics who don't believe anyone can have knowledge about gods, since these questions are of academic interest only.<sup>2</sup> They would rather not be bothered by thinking about God.

The modern agnostic movement began with Thomas Henry Huxley, 1825-1895. Huxley was a mostly self-educated biologist with a passion for knowledge. His debating skills and scientific knowledge placed him among Britain's greatest minds. He befriended Charles Darwin and so vigorously defended the theory of evolution, they called him "Darwin's bulldog." Huxley coined the term "agnostic," wanting to contrast the scientific mind from the Gnostics of the early Christian era.<sup>3</sup> Huxley had no use for anything mystical or supernatural, explaining his agnostic worldview:

**"In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: in matters of the intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable. That I take to be the agnostic faith."**<sup>4</sup>

Reason and evidence, without "any other consideration," defined Huxley's skepticism. Christians had failed to demonstrate

their claims about an unseen God with evidence or moral living, he believed, so their religion was a fraud. Huxley's term, *agnostic*, became popular, much to his satisfaction. In fact, since he introduced the term, there have been many famous agnostics: Susan Anthony, Arthur Conan Doyle, W.E.B. DuBois, and recently, theologian Bart Ehrmann, astronomer Carl Sagan, and Bill Nye the Science Guy. Skepticism is fashionable, and altogether, about one in five Americans is either agnostic, atheist, or without any claim to faith.<sup>5</sup>

There is, however, another kind of agnostic besides the "Huxleyan" secularist: a religious kind. Religious agnostics have significant doubts about God's existence or goodness while keeping a religious identity.<sup>6</sup> They gather around educational centers and are common in Adventism. I know, because I was one of them.

My religious doubts began in a conflicted family. From earliest memories, my parents took opposite sides on many issues, especially religion. Mom was a loyal Seventh-day Adventist, while Dad questioned his faith. His father was a dogmatic, abusive Adventist pastor, so my dad decided early on that he would find his truth from books, not his father's church. As an adult he read philosopher Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*, and his disbelief solidified. Dad was a voracious reader who loved sharing knowledge, teaching my two sisters and me to distinguish between facts and foolishness.

When we took Sabbath afternoon trips to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, I would stare at the great dinosaur skeletons and dream of life in prehistoric times. There in the Smithsonian I learned the secular worldview: life is a brutal struggle, and death always gets the last word. They didn't teach us that viewpoint in Sabbath School, however, where Ellen White's authority ruled. In my young mind a life and death battle also raged between competing authorities: secular science

and Mrs. White. Out of that internal struggle, truth would have to survive.

My mom loved Jesus, loved church, and was devoted to the Adventist message as taught by the prophet Ellen White. Convinced that Adventism had lost its way, in 1961 she joined the maverick evangelist Robert Brinsmead's new Awakening movement. She was determined for us all to get ready for the judgment. At our house, tensions mounted as two prophetic visionaries fought for our allegiance: Ellen White and Ayn Rand. A division formed in my mind—a desire for God, and a deep suspicion that religion was fantasy.

When my parents separated, Mom took us three children to live in rural Arkansas where we absorbed the Adventist worldview. We spent our days without television, exploring field and forest, growing natural foods, and reading books, especially Ellen White. When I discovered astronomy, all those vast distances and long ages didn't fit into our small, young universe. Church folk explained faith and science contradictions by telling us that scientists were either deceived or dishonest. Therefore, I could believe science or the Bible, but not both. This dichotomy presented a dilemma: the Bible says the heavens declare His glory, but if we studied the heavens, would we be deceived? In spite of this confusion, I wanted to explore the universe, not hide from it.

My dad did not live with us, and our cultural isolation allowed my doubts about God to go dormant, for awhile. However, my mother's isolation experiment didn't work. She remarried, this time to an angry, unstable man, and we moved constantly. We couldn't escape the popular media, public school, neighbor kids, kooky religious people, and our own natural urges. At age 13, my rebellion needed more structure than Mom could give, so she sent me to live with my Adventist aunt and uncle on the island of Guam. This move was a turn for the best, and under their care and discipline, this uncouth rebel was mostly civilized.

## The theology of doubt

Seeds of doubt were also planted and watered by our religious ideas. We were very devout Adventists, but for us, God couldn't quite rule his own universe. The central doctrines of Adventism reduced God in important ways.

**The Great Controversy:** White's book *The Great Controversy* taught us that God's original purposes had failed, and now he was playing defense to Satan's maneuvers. In the deep past Jesus' divinity was uncertain, so when God exalted Jesus over Lucifer, the highest created being, Lucifer rebelled and claimed that God and his law were unjust. Now under suspicion, God was forced to let Lucifer run amok in the universe, tempting other worlds to distrust God. Jesus then took a sinful nature and came to earth to keep the law and to vindicate God's character. With sinful propensities, however, Jesus could have failed in his mission, thus becoming infinitely evil.<sup>7</sup>

The Godhead's weakened sovereignty enlarged Satan's power. While Jesus was prone to failure, Satan took on god-like powers, accusing God of injustice and freely wreaking havoc on

God's universe. We didn't believe history was commanded by God. Instead, it was shaped by a "controversy" between two nearly equal beings, Christ and Satan. Because earth was the center of this battle, human lives were being sacrificed to prove to the universe how bad Satan really is.

God loved us, but we feared Satan's power because of the terrible things he could do to us. We had all heard scary Satan stories. Since God refused to control Satan or evil people, we had trouble believing his promise to work all things, including bad things, for our good (Rom. 8:28). *Great Controversy's* god was a weak politician who feared losing popularity, making big promises that reasonable persons should doubt. Therefore, we put our hopes in belonging to the remnant church, in building strong minds and bodies, and in keeping Sabbath. Our futures always hung in the balance, because after all, in war there are casualties.

**The Sabbath Test:** The fourth commandment tested our loyalty to God and separated us from the sinful world. Yet, with multiple versions of the rules, who really kept the Sabbath? Could we cook food, wash dishes, or talk business on the Sabbath? Mrs. White said we couldn't, yet most Adventists we knew, did. What about kids riding bikes or getting rowdy? It was easier to do what we wanted, and then rationalize. Whenever we adjusted the rules, nervous jokes covered our guilt and doubts.

**Ellen White, the Last Word:** She was our gatekeeper of reality. Any important life question was subjected to her writings with her thousands of commands to induce a continual sense of inadequacy. If she was history's final prophet, disobeying her words had terminal consequences. No one told us that Jesus was the final prophet (Heb. 1:1-3), or that only He possessed the authoritative last word (Jn. 12:47-50). Later I learned she was often wrong in her predictions and borrowed heavily from other writers. Nonetheless, they said her errors couldn't disqualify her as "the pen of inspiration." If the inspired Mrs. White had faults, they reasoned, so did the inspired Bible. Never doubt her, she warned, for we would doubt the Bible and leave the faith altogether.<sup>8</sup> For me, that warning became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**The Sanctuary Doctrine:** The investigative judgment (IJ) is the essential doctrine justifying Adventism's existence. Yet, among most members, it is least understood. We heard gentler versions of this frightening doctrine, raising ever more questions.

The sanctuary doctrine taught us that all our sins were recorded in heavenly books, waiting for the investigative judgment. When we asked for God to forgive us, instead of our sins being "remembered no more" (Jer. 31:34), they were transferred to the heavenly sanctuary.<sup>9</sup> Our sins could still be used against us, so we had no real assurance of salvation.<sup>10</sup> With only provisional forgiveness, we were always on probation like naughty foster children who could be rejected and sent back.

## Despair and confusion

Growing up with a weak Jesus and a scary Satan, my eternal destiny was decided by a strong will. But I wasn't strong, and like a spiritual parolee, I looked outside of Adventism for release and freedom. Release was coming alright—the kind that leads to despair.



At La Sierra University, I majored in behavioral science and religion to prepare me for a psychotherapy career. My La Sierra professors were likeable, and their love of good scholarship was contagious. I was especially drawn to Rick Rice's "openness of God" theology with its radical free will. There is nothing to predetermine our choices for or against God: not our genetics or our histories, not Satan or God. We are so free, not even God knows our future choices.<sup>11</sup> It all seemed so just and logical. Traditional psychology, however, taught us the deterministic power of early influences and drives and denied our free will. I was especially struck by Freud's withering assessment of belief in God. Said Freud,

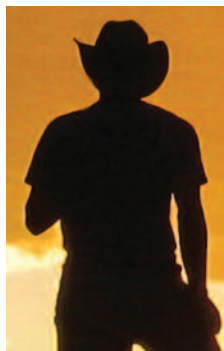
**A personal god was nothing more than an exalted father-figure: desire for such a deity sprang from infantile yearnings for a powerful, protective father, for justice and fairness and for life to go on forever.**<sup>12</sup>

Faith in God as a childish wish for a cosmic father became a key piece in my thinking. Like many in the psychotherapy profession, I accepted Freud's assertions about faith as authoritative without examining the assumptions behind them. After all, psy-

who always trade with "equal value" and never "grant the unearned or undeserved, neither in matter nor in spirit."<sup>13</sup> When the producers are cornered they withdraw to their secret enclave and watch the world fall apart. In Ayn Rand's ideal world, people always get what they deserve, for only parasites and looters expect what is unearned.<sup>14</sup> Rand especially hated Christianity for teaching self-sacrifice and for rewarding the vices of stupidity and weakness.

Although Rand's dogmatic atheism felt extreme and I still hoped for a god, her rationalism and individualism were my inspiration. A just god would surely govern according to Rand's ideals. What I couldn't see in her "virtue of selfishness" was that a life without mercy is a life of regret.

Politics became my religion, with self-reliance and nationalism as my creed. As commentator Dennis Prager said, I was now "drunk with freedom." Obviously, among all my favorite psychologists, philosophers, and theologians, there were mighty contradictions. Even so, I crammed them all into my philosophical basket, a cornucopia of confusion. I was still culturally Adventist, but now I sported a bigger, prouder worldview.



**WE DIDN'T BELIEVE HISTORY WAS COMMANDED BY GOD. INSTEAD, IT WAS SHAPED BY A "CONTROVERSY" BETWEEN TWO NEARLY EQUAL BEINGS, CHRIST AND SATAN. BECAUSE EARTH WAS THE CENTER OF THIS BATTLE, HUMAN LIVES WERE BEING SACRIFICED TO PROVE TO THE UNIVERSE HOW BAD SATAN REALLY IS.**

chology supposedly replaced our need for religious superstition, so Freud's father-projection theory seemed self-evident.

Meanwhile, during the late 1970s, the war over salvation theology raged between Bob Brinsmead and Desmond Ford on one side, and Adventist leadership on the other. My family had followed Brinsmead's teaching since the early 60s, and his new Reformation emphasis on justification by faith alone was compelling. His widely read magazine *Verdict* strongly impacted the Adventist church and challenged the evangelical world. The Reformation gospel was both amazing and disturbing, and through the years of confusion I never forgot it. When Desmond Ford and Bob Brinsmead exposed the IJ as an unbiblical fraud in the late 70s, we rejoiced. Then in 1980, the Adventist hierarchy, by political intrigue and a blizzard of theological argument, expelled Desmond Ford from the ministry. That was the single event that most alienated me from Adventism and from all church.

Now I was ready to join my dad in reading *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand. Unlike church men and politicians, Rand's brilliant heroes never compromise their rationality or integrity. Her villains are corrupt mediocrities who grasp by fraud what they cannot earn by merit. The heroes are industrious wealth producers

## The Badventist

Adventists who frequently break Adventist rules while keeping an Adventist identity are often known as "Badventists." As a Badventist, my Adventist doctrines had new meanings. Rejecting Ellen White's cosmic drama, I now imagined that the cosmic government existed to preserve my freedom. In fact, protecting my freedom was God's primary occupation. My self-created god minded his own business and was irrelevant to human history. God's providence in our lives was now just a warm, fuzzy feeling, but ineffectual. To be sure, I wanted a confidence-inspiring god, but no one seemed qualified for the job. Besides, any god strong enough to guarantee my future could restrict my freedom. My destiny was all up to me now; I just needed enough self-reliance.

The Sabbath question remained. What if Ellen White's predictions of an oppressive Sunday Law came true? To suppress any nagging worries, I practiced a loyal but loose Sabbath observance. Around Loma Linda we understood that regardless of our convictions, Sabbath-keeping brought healthy benefits. We believed the Sabbath had healing powers, as long as we weren't legalistic. Our Sabbaths might include shopping or going to restaurants after church, where I often saw other Adventists at nearby tables. We

might raise our wine glasses and smile quietly across the room. We had our own “don’t ask, don’t tell” Sabbath policy.

My response to Ellen was now rebellious compliance. I still feared and hated her control. She provoked both loyalty and loathing, like the parent who treated you as special 70% of the time and threatened you the other 30%. So why obey her at all? I was hedging my bets, out of fear that some of her threats might be right. When I complied with Ellen’s warnings, it was not from conviction but from superstition.

Could a marginal Adventist claim to be one? Adventist churches usually accepted me and tolerated my doubts. After all, Adventists are a diverse group and individually believe many different things. As one pastor stated, we all ate at the Adventist doctrinal smorgasbord where we could choose what we wanted. If the Bible was flawed and open to different interpretations, then much of its theology was optional. Therefore, if “my truths” are only products of my wishes, they have no external reality. In fact, it was hard to take any of Adventism’s dogma seriously. Religion was a personal matter, I reasoned, so on Sabbath I might go church-hopping for the best speaker or just stay home. I concluded that staying Adventist merely meant staying connected to other Adventists through church, and being nice.

To add to my confusion, in the mid-1980s Bob Brinsmead, my favorite theologian and a family friend, loudly divorced himself from the Christian faith. Brinsmead’s Awakening had begun in the 1950s as the quintessential Adventist movement, building a large following. In 1987 he declared that “Christianity is the Antichrist” and offered a new Jesus, one that did not save, but who pointed us to a grand evolutionary destiny.<sup>15</sup> He persuaded many of us to reject our “man-hating, world-denying” Christian beliefs and “join the human race.”

## Darwin’s awards

Breaking free from the restrictive Adventist yoke was exhilarating. What forbidden pleasures had I been missing all those years? The usual Adventist sins seduced me: drinking, movies, vulgarity, casual relationships, and more. Bertrand Russell, the mathematician, philosopher, and atheist, wrote that “every prisoner has believed that outside his walls a free world existed,”<sup>16</sup> and so did I. Ellen White’s words haunted me, but no church disciplined me. Since I decided right and wrong, what were the limits of freedom?

My mom worried and prayed for me, I knew, although she didn’t often condemn. I was grateful to her but also certain that she demonstrated the hard truth that religion was for the weak. She lived in a trailer park with few possessions, suffering from continual physical and mental health problems. She had survived several episodes of major depression and clung to her odd perceptions of the world. She loved reading her raggedy Bible and pinned her favorite texts to the walls. I needed her much more than I could admit, but her sad life embarrassed me and became my counter-example of right living. Having climbed the prison walls of her religion, I was determined to show I could live stronger and smarter.

The marriage and family therapy masters’ program at Loma Linda University was challenging, and when I wanted to quit, my dad stepped in with the help and encouragement I needed.

Finishing the degree, I worked as a nonpublic school therapist in the San Bernardino ghetto. These were kids the public schools rejected, the “conduct disordered” and “emotionally disturbed,” who lived reckless lives and loved to defeat therapeutic interventions. Therapy in the best neighborhood requires a big-hearted realism that I lacked. Could anyone help these kids, or were we wasting tax-payer money? Perhaps Darwin was right; our destinies are controlled by random mutations and natural selection. Ghetto kids belonged to what Darwin called the “lower races,”<sup>17</sup> deemed unfit to survive. But then, I had to ask myself, if I was so fit for the good life, why was I down in the ’hood struggling with them? I started indulging in cynicism about my job, about my profession, about life.

Fast motorcycles were my joy, and in 1987, I purchased a Honda Hurricane 1000. At high speeds I felt strong and free enough to cheat death. On the other hand, one hidden oil patch could change my fortunes in a blink. Riding that Hurricane, I thought of “The Darwin Awards”, a website with stories of how people, mostly young males, ended their lives in a spectacularly foolish way. They received the “award” because they supposedly improved the gene pool by removing themselves from it. I could imagine old Darwin looking on, chuckling through his beard, “Well, go ahead then, and try not to make too big a mess of yourself!” Reckless behavior had its rewards while I played Nature’s lottery, just like my ghetto kids.

## Fundamental questions

One evening in 1989, my dad and I debated the existence of God. Dad’s arguments brought Thomas Huxley to life: religion is illogical and immoral, so show me from reason and evidence! I suddenly realized I didn’t have good arguments for God because I had stopped wanting to know about God. I wanted to defend the possibility of a god without facing the demands of a real one. God was an intellectual exercise, not the Supreme Being who would disrupt my comfortable universe. My atheist dad was right; the God of the Bible was not a trivial idea, but a dangerous one. His existence is too consequential to be toyed with, and my agnosticism was just a game. I realized that either God is good or He is a monster. Integrity allowed two choices: I would seek God and find Him, or reject Him altogether.

Nietzsche wrote a parable of a madman who ran into the marketplace shouting, “I seek God, I seek God!” But no one believed in God, and they laughed at him. The madman rants and raves, “We have killed him, you and I!” How could they commit such a monstrous crime against the universe? Who let them sponge away the horizon or cut loose the earth from its sun? Didn’t they know what God’s death really meant? Killing God is too great a crime for little men, so they must become gods to seem worthy of it.<sup>18</sup> The atheist philosopher grasped the cost of God’s absence better than most religious people.

I hadn’t murdered God; I had merely trivialized Him to death. Disgusted, I walked into my bedroom, picked up my old Bible from the dresser, and walked outside. Opening the dusty book for random words of wisdom, I saw only a confusing jumble of words. “God,” I heard myself mumble, “I don’t know if you’re real. Please help me! Teach me about yourself.” That was all.



For some years I kept that book safely tucked away. I wanted to meet God in a place of my choosing, perhaps in the stars. The heavens were always my passion; even to this day I share with everyone who will come and look at them with me. While I was agnostic, however, the heavens remained vast, meaningless, and silent.

How does one seek God? I would try hopping around different churches, asking basic questions about faith and science, about trusting the Bible. They had to give me better answers than, “God did it,” or, “God said so.” Some Sunday school teachers thought I was derailing their discussions, while others tried to send me to the beginners’ class. But I didn’t want to sit with the beginners, and I started provoking arguments. After I told one pastor that I needed God to “make sense to me,” he mockingly quoted me in his sermon. I know, I had probably acted superior, and he retaliated. Fundamentalists annoyed me with their simplistic certainties, their aversion to real science books, and their redneck culture. I stereotyped them with the predatory televangelists whose staged miracles drew hordes of gullible followers. No, Christians had to prove themselves to me. I was proud of my skepticism, and it seemed my pursuit was going nowhere.

One afternoon in 1993 I got a call from the Highway Patrol, telling me that my mom had a serious car accident and was now in intensive care. I rushed over to the hospital and found her with broken ribs, a punctured lung, and a cracked pelvis. Her breathing was labored, and when I pressed her doctor for the prognosis, he was evasive. Feeling numb, I sat by her bed and fumbled in her Bible for a favorite text to help her forget the pain. She asked me to read from Lamentations 3:22-23:

**But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.**

I wondered what the new mercy was that He supposedly gave her that fateful morning. “This could be the final curtain for her,” I said to myself, fighting tears. Life support machines beeped and hissed around us while Mom told me the accident was the other driver’s fault. I listened quietly, remembering terrifying moments as a child, riding in the back seat of her car. We had shared many brushes with death. Nevertheless, with her numerous weaknesses, she had always found a way, day after day, to care for her kids. What now? If her heart stopped and they took her away, what purpose was served? If God was indifferent or dead, she became dirt in a box and her suffering was pointless. Death is a terrible enemy, tearing apart what should stay together.<sup>19</sup> Someone was sponging away the horizon, and it was wrong, whoever was responsible. We needed a higher set of laws, a place where all of us who are weak could find mercy.

Mom recovered from her injuries, and I quickly suppressed those hard questions about death. It was more comfortable to think of God in more therapeutic, self-affirming ways.

### The outside of the cup

In 1996 I walked into a Sabbath School class filled with sophisticated, friendly professionals and led by a retired college

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## NEARLY FORTY PERCENT OF ADVENTISTS LEAVE ORGANIZATION

Statistics released by David Trim, director of the office of Archives, statistics, and research for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on July 3, 2015, at the 60th General Conference Session, show that attrition from Adventist membership during the past 50 years is higher than previously thought. In his report he stated,

[Membership] audits of the last four years revealed major losses. It is not just that deaths have been underreported. So, too, have the numbers of those who have left the church. We currently describe them in official statistical reports in two ways: first, there are the “dropped,” a term that has replaced the older term “apostasies.” Second is the category of “missing”: that is, people who simply can’t be found when an audit is carried out. The result of the widespread audits over the last five years was that a total of 3,068,141 members were dropped or registered as missing, and 261,888 deaths were recorded, while a total of 5,563,377 were added by baptism or profession of faith. The number of reported deaths increased slightly but remained relatively stable, whereas the totals of the missing and those dropped from membership increased steeply.

These recent figures reflect those who have died or have left the Adventist organization over the past several years without being previously reported.

Trim states that recent memberships audits have shown “the actual scale of losses...[in] the last fifty years. In those five decades, a grand total of 33,202,016 people have been members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—but 13,026,925 of them left the Church. Our net loss rate is 39.25%: in effect, four of every ten church members have slipped away over the last half-century.”

The fact that essentially 40% of Adventists have left the organization over the past 50 years reveals the lack of certainty with which many Adventists live. In 2011 the General Conference Nurture and Retention Committee oversaw the development and implementation of two surveys. One was administered to former members, and the other was given to members who had left for a while but returned. The surveys showed that 58% of those who have left “still believe in the gift of prophesy manifested in Ellen White,” while 81% of those who returned still believe in her.

These statistics confirm that Adventists are taught to interpret reality through a grid of Ellen White’s commentary. Without a biblical worldview and a belief in Jesus as their Substitute and the sufficient Sacrifice for their sin, they lack conviction and have no anchor for their souls. —Colleen Tinker

Note: David Trim’s reports are available at [AdventistArchives.org](http://AdventistArchives.org).

professor. They were fun; they accepted me and questioned things like I did. Sabbath school could be useful, I told myself, with deep discussions, new friends, and attractive women. Maybe these smart people had better answers. I kept returning and became active in that church, editing the church newsletter, joining the church board, and playing special music. Being involved and friended, getting respect from church people—church life was good.

There was a young woman named Sharon who sat in our class and smiled at me. She was part of our social group, and over the months in her unpretentious way, she made it clear we could be friends. At first, I wasn't attracted to Sharon, unable really to see her, but then my vision improved. Sharon was a Badventist like me, but with a wiser and gentler heart. One evening at dinner in 1998 I presented Sharon with my heart and a diamond ring, and we joined our lives that August. Some of our best moments happen when we discover how clueless we are.

Membership was sweet, but at the deep conviction level, I had never joined that church. Beneath the good works and calm exterior, a troubled soul stored a reserve of anger and bitterness. My authentic feelings came out in private conversations as sarcasm and meanness, but they were seldom public. Private thoughts can't be sins, I thought, for no one was harmed, and aren't we entitled to our feelings? I was good at making a show of honoring God while my heart was comfortably far away.

No church member ever calls himself a Pharisee, yet the harshest words from Jesus condemned the religious actors. They were condemned because, while they appeared good on the outside, they treasured evil on the inside. As John Piper said, the hypocrite is not just deceptive:

**A hypocrite is a person for whom lying has gone down into the personality. Hypocrites don't just tell lies, they are lies. . . . A hypocrite is a horrifying spectacle. Truth has become utterly alien, swept away by deep, deep devotion to self-protection, and self-preservation, and self-exaltation.**<sup>20</sup>

As a therapist, I believed that the good person is "authentic" because he thinks and acts according to his true feelings. Acting out my feelings in private was "just being real," so I wasn't a hypocrite. However, those real moments often got me into real trouble, hurting people I cared about, and revealing what Jesus said:

**What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mk. 7:20-22 ).**

## Coming into judgment

In July of 2006, the Adventist Sabbath School lessons featured the investigative judgment, Adventism's defining doctrine. The debates were intense, but I didn't have an informed opinion. Not wanting to look ignorant, I began studying. In the Adventist literature I found a confusing tangle of reinterpretations of this doctrine, while conservative Protestant scholars were

clear: sins are instantly forgiven, not stored in heaven like criminal records. I doubted truth could be that simple; then I prayed for help. The next few weeks I became obsessed in knowing what is true, spending long hours digging deeper. The Scriptures finally became clear; the gospel proclaims the instant and final forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34; Rom. 8:1; Heb. 8:12). Anything less makes the gospel worthless and Jesus a liar.

When one asks the God of Jacob for help and really means it, he receives help, along with surprises for which he never bargained. I discovered *Proclamation!* magazine with many articles critical of Adventist doctrines. The first article I read was about death, and it claimed things no Adventist agnostic can believe. Believers have living spirits, it said, and when their bodies die, they go to be with Jesus (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-23).<sup>21</sup> Two years before, my mom had passed into eternity, and I hoped that somehow I would see her again. So, instead of just being ashes in a purple velvet bag, my mom was—alive? My mind reeled. I wanted to believe that, but this sweet, warm comfort felt like heresy—or fantasy. Real faith still eluded me.

One late night I sat at my computer, reading an article on the doctrine of divine judgment. The article was tedious, until the author got my attention with a passage in John 5. Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees and claiming that, as God's equal, He had authority to judge the world and give life to whomever He will. I had heard all this before, like one asleep. This time, however, verse 24 woke me up:

**Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears my word and believes Him who sent me...**

These were not vague words meant to manipulate our feelings; He meant what He said, and we could count on it. I had heard Jesus' words all my life, but I still doubted, so what now? But then, I realized, I had never really heard Him before.

I was certain, in my therapist's mind, that guilt and submission are words that healthy people avoid. On the other hand, if "healthy" meant excusing arrogant, hurtful intentions, health wasn't worth having. The man making these claims in John 5 faced down the hypocrites by speaking the truth, and it got Him killed. His words could heal the broken, or slice like a sharp sword. I wanted to be like Him, to have His kind heart and His death-defying integrity. But who is able to hear Him? He had told the exasperated, agnostic Pilate, "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate saw before him only a harmless Jewish fanatic, not a king. He asked, "What is truth?" (Jn. 18:37, 38).

After years of my playing the agnostic's intellectual games, it was truth time. One thing was certain; doubting for me was as natural as breathing, and no evangelist's gimmick could make me believe. If truly hearing His words required believing from the heart, I was a lost man. But I read on: "...Has eternal life." This statement was maddeningly simple. "He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." There would be a final judgment, but those who believe Jesus will have already passed into life. If I could only believe His words, that life would somehow become real.

A final judgment against evil comes as bad news, for genuine forgiveness is never cheap or easy. I realized as I sat at my com-

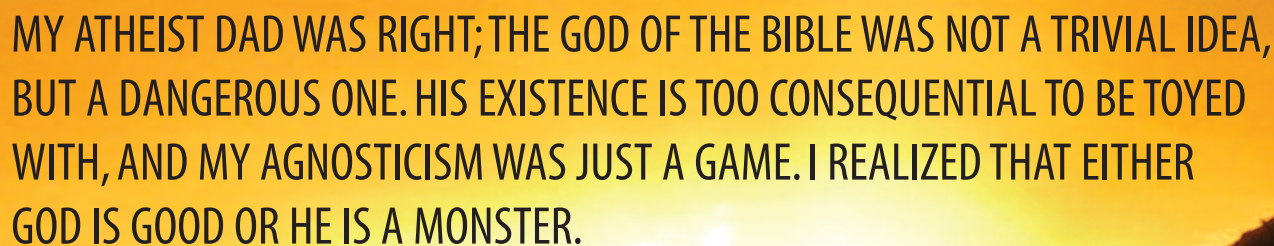


puter that I didn't just feel guilty, I was objectively guilty. There was no denying the damage that I, an undeserving, unloving, duplicitous fraud, was responsible for causing. Just saying, "I'm sorry," didn't pay for any damages. Yet, He didn't ask for payment but for repentance. The Judge could declare me righteous, now and forever, because He paid for my life with blood. So, if I believed, I could not be condemned in any future judgment, having already passed from death to life.

At that moment I had the sense that He was there in the room, personally making this offer to me. The pure grace of His words had now swept all my excuses off the table. I saw no vision, no occultic special effects, but I saw something real. For the first time, I could see the Crucified One through His words, speaking to me. That night, in His presence, I wondered at His pure majesty. I said quietly, "It's over; I'm done fighting. Lord, I believe, please help my wretched unbelief!" That night in front of the computer monitor I passed from death to life.

is most valuable.<sup>23</sup> The religious leaders were blind to God's glory because they loved human praise and power (Jn. 12:42, 43). Rand's philosophy eliminates the factor that makes rational living beautiful: a gracious God who withheld nothing to give us everything. When God is our highest value, we love Him with both heart and mind, and our natural self-protection gives way to loving boldly.

With eyes to see, the heavens no longer feel cold, but ablaze with the glory of God. The universe reveals design and exquisite fine tuning that is evident,<sup>24</sup> not in the "gaps" of scientific knowledge, but in common knowledge that is available to anyone willing to see it (Rom. 1:18-20). Now, having passed from death to life, tensions between science and God's word are invitations to study. I have to be content that Genesis is an accurate and sufficient account of creation, but it is not designed to satisfy scientific curiosity. There are many things about the universe we don't understand, as any scientist will admit. So many



MY ATHEIST DAD WAS RIGHT; THE GOD OF THE BIBLE WAS NOT A TRIVIAL IDEA, BUT A DANGEROUS ONE. HIS EXISTENCE IS TOO CONSEQUENTIAL TO BE TOYED WITH, AND MY AGNOSTICISM WAS JUST A GAME. I REALIZED THAT EITHER GOD IS GOOD OR HE IS A MONSTER.

### Living in splendor

Near the end of his life, Bertrand Russell reviewed his accomplishments and found only despair. In his Godless universe, he only saw a dark and narrow prison with no escape.

**There is darkness without, and when I die, there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing.**<sup>22</sup>

Studying science had that effect on me. Although I was gathering facts about astronomy and enjoying the skies with friends, the splendor and vastness of it all had been slowly fading. Without God, triviality and nothingness awaited me in the end. I was blind to the glory behind the splendors of the universe. Jesus said,

**The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (Mt. 6:22, 23).**

Seeing with eyes of faith is seeing with the entire mind, heart, and spirit. Jesus did not command us to abandon our rationality or be absorbed into a mindless collective, as Ayn Rand supposed. Jesus taught rational principles: the laws of non-contradiction and cause and effect (Mt. 16:1-3), as well as of individual integrity and personal responsibility (Mt. 5 and 6). However, rational and responsible people can be blind to what

articles on cosmology are filled with philosophical speculations, such as "multiverse" theory. I love to stare at galaxies and ponder their histories—every galaxy tells a story—but their mystery humbles me, as their Creator intended. The cosmos is a strange, dangerous, and utterly faithful place, just like its Creator.

You probably wonder whether I am an "old earth" or "young earth" creationist. I personally believe—but not as dogma—that the universe is very old, for both biblical and scientific reasons. Did God create starlight to give a deceptive appearance of ancient age? Did He create galaxies that only appear to have slowly torn each other apart? First, the universe's appearance is a question of God's integrity. The heavens declare His righteousness and faithfulness (Ps. 50:6; 71:19; 97:6), and the fixed order of laws and cycles in nature testify of His eternal faithfulness (Jer. 31:35-37). The speed of light and all the other physical constants demonstrate their Maker's integrity. This God can be believed because He cannot deceive or fail, and His grand design ensures that our scientific studies of the heavens can yield trustworthy knowledge.<sup>25</sup> For those reasons, I accept the current astronomical measurements, including the red shifts of distant galaxies and the cosmic expansion rate, indicating great age. Henry Drummond said, "Nature is God's writing, and can only tell the truth; God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, I have brothers and sisters in Christ with young earth views, whose biblical scholarship and integrity I

have learned to respect. We can debate whether God's universe is 13.7 billion or 6000 years old, but our ignorance should make us all humble. Now we see through (telescope) mirrors dimly, but then we shall know fully.

Not a day goes by without some agnostic thought slithering in. By nature, I am an unbeliever. The clinical voice in my head with a beard and a stinky cigar says, "It is childish and primitive to ask God for help," or, "If you were intelligent, you wouldn't need those old myths." Sigh. Yes, I am a needy, foolish child, so I run to God and His word. According to Freud, that desire for a fatherly God is founded in childhood fears and longings. The irony of Freud is that his own painful, dysfunctional life reveals how an atheistic worldview can be shaped by tortured longings. His seething hatred against the Judeo-Christian God grew out of his personal experiences, including his teenage attraction towards his young step-mother, resentments against his father, and the severe persecution of the Jewish minority in Europe.<sup>27</sup> Freud's opinions are not science, even though he spoke with the authority of science to persuade millions. As Thomas Huxley would say, he pretended that his conclusions were certain without sufficient evidence.

Where will our deepest longings lead us? As John Calvin said, the human heart is a "perpetual forge of idols."<sup>28</sup> Religions are filled with projections of human passions, fashioned into the gods that we want. Someone above us has to tell us the truth about ourselves.

**These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself (Ps. 50:21).**

To show Himself truly divine, the real God must show that His heart is unlike our hearts, not grasping and corrupt. We find that quality uniquely in the person of Christ. He did not have our infantile passions, grabbing all the attention and goodies for Himself or forcing others to serve His desires. He didn't come to be served, but to serve (Mt. 20:28). Instead of grasping at His equality with God, He humbled Himself as a servant and was obedient to the death (Phil. 2:5-11). No other faith has a God like that.

The real God is the one we naturally don't want. I was running about, seeking God like a madman, and I could not find Him; He found me. Faith in God is not a product of working or wishing, but a daily gift of mercy to rudely disrupt our natures. The Lord Jesus is faithful, and once He claims us, He stays with us always. We no longer tremble at Satan running amok in the universe, or any other Godless fairy tale. Once we belong to Him we will never become a battle casualty, for His sheep hear His voice, He knows them, they follow Him, and He gives them eternal life. No one can pry them from His grip (Jn. 10:27-30). †



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I was scammed! In fact, the scam was so deceptive I am still reeling. I went to a search engine to find the customer support number for a large company. After clicking on what seemed to be the “official” website, I called the number listed. I was transferred to a “supervisor” and told I had a horrible network virus and needed to purchase their virus-removal software immediately. Finally, I smartened up and ended the conversation, but not before giving them access to my computer. Ugh!

I have realized I have also been scammed regarding the love of God. Often as an Adventist I heard the phrase, “God loves you,” and I was also taught that God’s love was “unconditional”. Unfortunately, the words used in Adventism to teach me about God’s unconditional love were contradictory and legalistic. I understood God’s love to be something I earned. I felt like His love was disappointed in me for not being perfect.

I have gotten into trouble when I have compared God’s love with human love. Often I have expected too much from humans. Human love at times will disappoint, either because of rejection, insensitivity, or blindness to needs. Too often human love is fraught with hidden selfishness and strings attached. God’s love is completely “other”, because He is God, not human. Human love falls short by comparison.

This year I am reading through the Bible looking for only one thing: what the Bible says about God’s love. I am also praying that He will move my understanding of His love from my head to my heart. It is a prayer I know He will answer, because He “loves” to grow me up in His perfect character.

My Bible is quickly becoming marked. Slowly the knowledge of His great love for me is traveling from my head to my heart, and I am constantly finding myself in worship and praise.

Here are a few of the gems I have found: “Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good, His love endures for ever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures for ever” (Ps. 136: 1-2).

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken or my covenant of peace be removed.” Says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (Is. 54:10).

# I WAS SCAMMED

SLOWLY THE KNOWLEDGE  
OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR  
ME IS TRAVELING FROM  
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“Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him” (Is. 64:4).

The gospel of John is full of statements regarding God’s love, and they are related to his main purpose stated in John 20:31, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

In the book of John, Jesus instructs His disciples: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn. 13:34). Jesus said it clearly, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make Our home with him” (Jn. 14:23). “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in His love” (Jn. 15:9-10a).

I do not desire to be scammed any longer regarding God’s great love for me. Slowly, I am allowing His love to penetrate me at a deep level and my joy is increasing. “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (Jn. 15:11-13). †

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# HOW THE CLEAR WORD

STEPHEN PITCHER

This article is excerpted from a forthcoming book by Stephen Pitcher on the Adventist “devotional paraphrase” of the Bible, *The Clear Word* (TCW). Written by Jack Blanco when he was chairman of the religion department at Southern Adventist University, TCW was first published as a whole work in 1994 with the title *The Clear Word Bible*. The Adventist organization denies that this work is “official”; yet the Adventist Review and Herald Publishing Association prints the book, and Adventist Book Centers sell several versions of this book as Bibles, both online and in their stores. In spite of statements denying its being an official Adventist Bible, inside the organization it is treated and marketed as a Bible.

**T**he Investigative Judgment (IJ) is unique. No other church (except a few Adventist offshoots) teaches an IJ that began on Oct. 22, 1844, in the second compartment of the heavenly sanctuary. This doctrine teaches that from the time of Jesus’ ascension until 1844, he had been ministering in the first compartment (holy place) of a literal heavenly sanctuary. Then, on Oct. 22, 1844, Jesus moved from the first to the second compartment (most holy place) in the heavenly sanctuary to perform a work of investigative judgment. This investigative judgment is an investigation of the lives of believers, beginning with those from ancient times and moving to those alive today, to determine if they had honored God’s law and lived up to all the light that had been available to them.

The early Advent believers, called Millerites, originally thought Jesus was to return to earth in 1843, but when He failed to appear, they set a new date: October 22, 1844. Following the great disappointment when that date also failed to usher



# DISTORTS ATONEMENT

- WHAT IS THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT?
- IS CHRIST CURRENTLY MINISTERING IN THE HEAVENLY SANCTUARY?
- DOES *THE CLEAR WORD* TEACH BIBLICAL HELL?

in the second coming, Hiram Edson had a “vision”, and then he and O. R. L. Crosier developed a new explanation for their calculated date: rather than returning, Jesus had begun the investigative judgment which would conclude with a “cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary” (ostensibly based on Daniel 8:14) from the sins of believers. This teaching has yielded two fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that are central to its identity: they are the “remnant church” entrusted with the unique revelation of “Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary”. These beliefs are articulated as numbers 13 and 24 in the list of Adventism’s 28 Fundamental Beliefs.

Fundamental belief number 13 is as follows:

**13. The Remnant and Its Mission:** The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4; 2 Cor. 5:10; Jude 3, 14; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Rev. 21:1-14.)<sup>1</sup>

This statement reveals Adventism’s self-identity as God’s remnant people living in “a time of widespread apostasy” with a mission to proclaim the messages of “the three angels of Revelation 14”. Moreover, this proclamation “coincides with the work of judgment in heaven” and “announce[s] the arrival of the judgment hour.” This “judgment hour” refers to the investigative judgment that ostensibly began in 1844 when Jesus supposedly moved into the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. In order to understand the significance of this judgment, we next look at fundamental belief #24.

**24. Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary:** There is a sanctuary in heaven, the true tabernacle which the Lord set up and not man. In it Christ ministers on our behalf, making available to believers the benefits of His atoning sacrifice offered once for all on the cross. He was inaugurated as our great High Priest and began His intercessory ministry at the time of His ascension. In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second

and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus. The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom. The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent. (Heb. 8:1-5; 4:14-16; 9:11-28; 10:19-22; 1:3; 2:16, 17; Dan. 7:9-27; 8:13, 14; 9:24-27; Num. 14:34; Eze. 4:6; Lev. 16; Rev. 14:6, 7; 20:12; 14:12; 22:12.)<sup>2</sup>

The most important point here is that Christ supposedly “entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry.” In other words, Adventism teaches that the atonement was only begun on the cross but not finished there. The cross was simply the sacrifice, the first phase of the atonement, while in the second phase, the atonement is applied to the account of the believer, if he has remained loyal to God by keeping his commandments and having faith in Jesus. The insecurity of the professed believer is further emphasized in this belief statement by the last sentence which admits that all humans—including believers—are “on probation” until the end of this investigative judgment.

Early Adventist theologian Uriah Smith explained these doctrines in a book entitled *The Sanctuary and Its Cleansing* published in 1877. Smith was important to the shaping of early Adventism—but who was he?

In 1863, when the General Conference was organized, Uriah Smith was elected its first secretary. This was a position that he subsequently held five different times. He was ordained to the Adventist ministry in 1874. With the founding of Battle Creek College in 1874, Elder Smith became the Bible teacher, a position he held for the next eight years, the last two of which he was also chairman of the board. Smith also served as General Conference treasurer from 1876-1877.<sup>3</sup>

Uriah Smith clearly states the Adventist belief that Jesus did not complete the atonement on the cross. In *The Sanctuary and Its Cleansing*, he wrote the following:

The death of Christ and the atonement are not the same thing. And this relieves the matter of all difficulty. Christ did not make the atonement when he shed his blood upon the cross. Let this fact be fixed forever in the mind.<sup>4</sup>

Ellen White also adds her voice to the varied comments about the atonement and the blood of Christ:

As in the typical service there was a work of atonement at the close of the year, so before Christ's work for the redemption of men is completed, there is a work of atonement for the removal of sin from the sanctuary. This is the service which began when the 2300 days ended [1844]. At that time, as foretold by Daniel the prophet, our High Priest entered the most holy, to perform the last division of His solemn work—to cleanse the sanctuary.<sup>5</sup>

## The Clear Word supports IJ

The “unofficial” Adventist Bible paraphrase, *The Clear Word*, has altered the words of Scripture to support this unbiblical doctrine. Let's look at Daniel 8:14, the text Adventists use to argue for the 2300-day prophecy and the investigative judgment, to see how Adventists have written this spurious doctrine into their paraphrase of Scripture. We'll compare *The Easy English Clear Word* and *The Clear Word* with the *English Standard Version*.

### Daniel 8:13-14

#### *The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids*

Next I saw Gabriel and the Son of God talking together. Gabriel asked Him, “How long will all this last and the little horn be allowed to attack the truth about the heavenly sanctuary?” He answered, “God is very patient. He will wait for many days, but near the end the truth about the heavenly sanctuary will be restored.”

#### *The Clear Word*

The Holy One said something to my angel who asked Him, “How long will the little horn be allowed to transgress so rebelliously and pervert the truth about God and the heavenly Sanctuary? How long will all these things go on and the little horn's power last?” He answered, “After two thousand, three hundred prophetic days (which represent actual years), God will restore the truth about the heavenly Sanctuary to its rightful place. Then the process of judgment will begin of which the yearly cleansing of the earthly Sanctuary was a type, and God will vindicate His people.”

#### *English Standard Version*

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.”

Notice that both TCW versions identify Gabriel speaking with the “Son of God” while the ESV only specifies two “holy one[s]” speaking with one another. Moreover, TCW capitalizes “Him” to refer to one of the “holy ones”, thus identifying him as deity—a

designation missing from the biblical text. Finally, TCW greatly expands verse 14 to suggest scriptural support for its only unique doctrine—the one doctrine without which Adventists have admitted the Seventh-day Adventist Church would have no reason to exist.<sup>6</sup> TCW is clearly an Adventist version of the Scriptures.

## The sanctuary and judgment

The book of Hebrews tells us that Moses was shown a pattern to copy when he made the sanctuary and its furnishings. Adventists, however, use this passage of Hebrews to support their “heavenly IJ”. Look at the following comparison:

### Hebrews 8:5

#### *The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids*

But what they do only points to what is taking place in heaven. This is what God had in mind when He said to Moses, “Build a sanctuary exactly like the plan you saw on the mountain.”

#### *The Clear Word*

But the work they do here is only an imperfect copy and shadow of what is being done for us in heaven. This is what God had in mind for the services of the earthly Sanctuary when he said to Moses, “Build according to the plan which I showed you on the Mountain.”

#### *English Standard Version*

They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.”

*The Clear Word* versions focus on “what is being done in heaven”, implying that Jesus is rendering a Levitical-type of service, atoning for our sin as our High Priest. Yet Jesus is not a Levitical priest but a priest according to “the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 7:11). Hebrews describes Jesus in heaven not judging people's salvation or atoning for sin but interceding always for “those who draw near to God” (Heb. 7:25). To be sure, in the gospels Jesus does talk about judgment, and He clarifies what happens to the unbelieving who do not take God's righteous requirements seriously. Significantly, though, the Bible's statements about judgment are very different from Adventism's statements.

In Matthew 5, for example, Jesus says the unrighteous will be liable to the fire of hell. *The Clear Word*, however, changes the words to make the passage more compatible with Adventism's disbelief in eternal hell. Moreover, notice how *TCW for Kids* incorrectly teaches them that looking down on others and name-calling calls their salvation into question:

### Matthew 5:21-22

#### *The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids*

“Everyone knows that if you kill someone, you're breaking the law and will be taken before a judge. Don't be angry and hate people. Don't even look down on others and call them names. If you do, how can God give you eternal life?”

#### *The Clear Word*

“You've heard the scribes and Pharisees tell you not to kill, and that if you do, you'll be held responsible by the courts for commit-



ting murder. They're right. But I'm telling you that even if you don't kill, but you hate someone so much that if you had the opportunity you would kill him, you'll be held responsible by the heavenly court the same as if you had committed murder. To go a step further, if you treat someone with contempt because you think you're better than he is, you're in danger of losing eternal life."

#### **English Standard Version**

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."

Blanco's versions both distract from the reality of hell, and TCW guilt the reader instead of allowing God's word to expose the human heart.

In the next comparison, notice that *TCW for Kids* diminishes the Day of Judgment into a person's merely having "a hard time explaining [one's] actions to God". Additionally, TCW removes the personal judgment of shaking the dust from one's feet when leaving people who reject the gospel.

#### **Matthew 10:14-15**

##### ***The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids***

That goes for a city or town, too. If they don't want to listen, just quietly leave. Someday they will have a hard time explaining their actions to God.

##### ***The Clear Word***

If you come into a town that's hostile or not interested in what you have to say, go on to the next one. I'm telling you that Sodom and Gomorrah's corruption will look better on the Day of Judgment than the towns that reject the offer of God's grace.

##### **English Standard Version**

And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

Notice in the next comparison that Blanco diminishes the certainty that those who believe pass at that moment from death to life and do not come into judgment. Because Adventism teaches that all believers must be examined in the investigative judgment, they can't allow John 5:24 to say what it says. This comparison shows Blanco's rendering in his paraphrase of the New Testament as well as in TCW.

#### **John 5:24**

##### ***The New Testament: A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth***

Those who listen to what I'm saying and believe that the Father has sent me will escape everlasting annihilation and, instead, receive eternal life, because the seeds of death have been replaced by the seeds of life.

##### ***The Clear Word***

Those who listen to what I'm saying and believe that the Father has sent me have eternal life. They will not be judged guilty because the seed of death in them has already been replaced by the seed of life.

#### **English Standard Version**

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Notice in the passage above that Blanco has inserted the words "everlasting annihilation" into the text, since Adventism teaches that unbelievers are not sentenced to eternal hell. Moreover, Blanco retains the Adventist understanding that all professed believers are being judged by changing "does not come into judgment" to "will not be judged guilty". Finally, Blanco changes the certainty of passing from death to life when one believes into the uncertain hope that the "seed of life" (whatever that is) will germinate into eternal life after the resurrection of the just, and after passing the scrutiny of the investigative judgment.

In the next comparison Blanco removes the implications of eternal punishment by substituting the teaching of eternal death for references to the "resurrection of judgment". Adventism insists on annihilation instead of eternal hell.

#### **John 5:29**

##### ***The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids***

"Those who accept Me and do good will be resurrected and given eternal life. Those who continue to do evil will be judged guilty and will die forever."

##### ***The Clear Word***

Those who accept the Son and have done good will be resurrected and will have life forever. Those who reject the Son and have done evil will be found guilty and be condemned to die.

##### **English Standard Version**

... those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Next we see Jesus explaining that He came into the world for judgment. TCW, on the other hand, removes Jesus' role in judgment and replaces it with people's decisions. While there are several Adventist beliefs underlying this alteration, the reason germane to this article is this: TCW cannot have Jesus engaged in judgment during His earthly ministry because the Adventist investigative judgment did not begin until 1844.

#### **John 9:39**

##### ***The New Testament: A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth***

Then Jesus said, "My presence in this world makes people decide either for me or against me. What happens is that those who don't seem to understand suddenly see and those who say they could understand are blind."

##### ***The Clear Word***

Jesus said to those nearby, "My presence in this world makes people decide either for me or against me. Those who are blind see, and those who see become blind."

##### **English Standard Version**

Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."

## EGW: the source of Adventism's judgment

Jack Blanco's editing of the gospels' teaching on judgment may be better understood when one grasps Ellen White's warnings that Adventists must know the IJ's meaning and timing. For example, she says:

The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need a knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time, or to occupy the position which God designs them to fill. Every individual has a soul to save or to lose. Each has a case pending at the bar of God. Each must meet the great Judge face to face. How important, then, that every mind contemplate often the solemn scene when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened, when, with Daniel, every individual must stand in his lot, at the end of the days.<sup>7</sup>

She gives those who do not clearly understand the sanctuary and the IJ poor hope for entering into eternal life at the end of days. There is no relief for the Adventist's burden of the IJ; its scrutiny will be merciless. In fact, believers in the IJ not only carry the burden of coming into judgment at any moment, but they also live with a relentlessly stern warning to put away sin and purify their lives completely:

While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon earth.

I saw that many were neglecting the preparation so needful and were looking to the time of "refreshing" and the "latter rain" to fit them to stand in the day of the Lord and to live in His sight. Oh, how many I saw in the time of trouble without a shelter! They had neglected the needful preparation; therefore they could not receive the refreshing that all must have to fit them to live in the sight of a holy God.<sup>8</sup>

According to EGW and Adventist theology, believers must not only carry the burden of wondering when their names will come up in the unbiblical investigative judgment supposedly begun in 1844, but they must also live with the insecurity of knowing Jesus' atonement for sin is not completed until He finishes this judgment.

In 1844...[Jesus]...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.<sup>9</sup>

Adventists, then, must make the IJ harmonize with the great white throne judgment described in Revelation 20:11-12, the judgment of the wicked. Following we will examine four versions of this text. The first three are from Blanco's early New Testament paraphrase called *The New Testament: A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth*, his *TCW for Kids*, the standard TCW, and they are compared with the ESV:

### Revelation 20:11-12

#### *The New Testament: A Devotional Paraphrase to Stimulate Faith and Growth*

Now, before the wicked were destroyed, I saw a great white throne. The form of the One who sat on it was so radiant that the

earth and the sky seemed to flee from His very presence. Then all the wicked who had been great or not, stood together with Satan in front of the One sitting on the throne. The Book of Life was opened for the righteous and the Book of Death for the wicked. Then the wicked saw their lives replayed before them and before the universe, and they understood why they were not allowed to live, for they were judged by what they had done.

#### *The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids*

Just before that happened, I saw God sitting on a great white throne. His face was so bright that everything around Him seemed to disappear. All the wicked stood in front of Him, including Satan and his angels. The Book of Life and the Book of Death were opened.

#### *The Clear Word*

Before they [all the wicked] were destroyed, I saw a great white throne. The form of the One who sat on it was so radiant that the earth and the sky seemed to disappear from His very presence. Then all the wicked who had been resurrected to be judged whether they had been great or small, stood together with Satan in front of the One sitting on the throne. The Book of Life was opened and the Book of Death. The lives of the wicked were shown to them, and they were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.

#### *English Standard Version*

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

Two of Blanco's three paraphrases have Satan standing with the wicked before the great white throne—a claim not made in Scripture. He includes Satan before the throne because the investigative judgment is God's way of answering his claims. According to Adventist theology, Satan accused God of making a law that was too difficult to keep. ("His [Jesus'] perfect obedience to God's law, even unto the death of the cross, has given Him all power in heaven and in earth ...")<sup>10</sup> Blanco also states that the "Book of Death" was opened—a book not mentioned in Scripture. Where does Blanco get his authority to mention the Book of Death? From Ellen White. In *Early Writings* she says:

The books are opened—the book of life and the book of death. The book of life contains the good deeds of the saints; and the book of death contains the evil deeds of the wicked. These books are compared with the statute book, the Bible, and according to that men are judged.<sup>11</sup>

Also note that Blanco states that it "seemed" as though earth and sky fled away, whereas the Bible states specifically that "earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them."

Furthermore, in his New Testament paraphrase, Blanco writes that "the wicked saw their lives replayed before them and before the universe," reflecting a popular belief among many Adventists that their lives will be replayed as though video-taped before a universal audience. This notion is speculation and is not biblical.

All of EGW's and Adventism's concerns about being scrutinized in an investigative judgment, however, are unnecessary. According



to Elihu, the one friend of Job whose teaching is not condemned with that of Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar, God does not need to perform an investigation when judging the wicked.

Let's see what TCW does with two verses from Job 34 that deal with a judgment and investigation:

#### **Job 34:23-24**

##### ***The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids***

He doesn't have to investigate or ask questions before taking action. He can overthrow kings and rulers. He does it openly so that people can see what happens to the wicked, to those who don't respect His ways.

##### ***The Clear Word***

God doesn't need to examine them more closely. There is no need for Him to judge them more carefully. Without asking questions, God removes leaders and replaces them with others.

##### ***English Standard Version***

For God has no need to consider a man further, that he should go before God in judgment. He shatters the mighty without investigation and sets others in their place.

These two verses state that God does not need an investigative judgment to judge the wicked. To state that God began the investigative judgment of believers on October 22, 1844, ignores the fact that God already knows who is righteous and who is wicked. Revelation 20:12 mentions books and the book of life being opened and used to judge the dead, but these books do not inform God about who is or is not going to enter eternal life. God does not need to investigate the books to know who are and who aren't His.

Even though *The Clear Word* alters the wording and waters down the forceful statement that God "has no need to consider a man further," that "He shatters the mighty without investigation," still even TCW admits that God knows people's characters without asking questions. In spite of Blanco's efforts to write the IJ into Scripture, he has still managed to contradict this most central doctrine of his religion.

There is still an EGW teaching we have to address related to the "sanctuary truth" of Adventism. According to *The Clear Word*, the heavenly sanctuary, which John saw, will be found just outside the city walls of the New Jerusalem to be used as a memorial. This claim, however, is not found in Scripture.

#### **Rev. 21:22**

##### ***The Easy English Clear Word and The Clear Word for Kids***

I didn't see the temple in the city. It really didn't need one, because God and Jesus were there. The Temple was located outside the city as a reminder of what God had done for His people.

##### ***The Clear Word***

I didn't see the temple in the New Jerusalem. Actually, there was no need of one, since God and the Lamb were there. The Temple I had seen was now outside the city as a memorial of what God had done for His people.

##### ***English Standard Version***

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

*The Clear Word* versions say a physical temple exists in the new earth, but it is outside of the New Jerusalem. There is no such claim in Scripture; instead, the Bible states that there is no temple any longer, for the "Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" are the temple. To say a physical memorial temple exists is to go beyond the words of Scripture.

## **Conclusion**

The Investigative Judgment and the "heavenly sanctuary service" are not truths of Scripture. Instead, they are the theological devisings of a group of people who refused to accept that William Miller's prophecies of Christ's return were wrong. Rather than admit the error of William Miller's prophecies, they tried to save face by developing a complex system involving a heavenly sanctuary, an investigative judgment beginning in 1844, and an incomplete atonement requiring the completion of this invented investigation.

In order to enhance Adventists' belief in this confusing doctrine, *The Clear Word* and its permutations have distorted Scripture in order to make it appear that these teachings are biblical. Although the Adventist organization officially denies TCW as an "Adventist Bible", it still produces, advertises, and sells it as a Bible.

What Adventism does with *The Clear Word*, not what it says about it, reveals its true importance to the organization. †

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, second ed., Pacific Press, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> From the website: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uriah\\_Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uriah_Smith), online as of 11/8/13.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, Uriah, *The Sanctuary and Its Cleansing*, 1877, p. 276.

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen, *The Great Controversy*, 1911, p. 421.

<sup>6</sup> Rodriguez, Angel, quoted in pastor's conference "Answers to

Ratzlaff's Challenges to Adventism", April 16, 1998, 2:00 PM, Double Tree Inn, South Center, Seattle, WA.

<sup>7</sup> White, Ellen, *Evangelism*, 1948, pp. 221-222.

<sup>8</sup> White, Ellen, *The Faith I Live By*, 1958, p. 337.

<sup>9</sup> White, Ellen, *The Great Controversy*, 1888, p. 480.

<sup>10</sup> White, Ellen G., *Counsels for the Church*, 1991, p. 351.

<sup>11</sup> White, Ellen G., *Early Writings*, 1882, p. 52.

**Stephen Pitcher** became a Christian at age 17 through the ministry of Young Life and was baptized in a Baptist church. He later converted to Adventism which he left after 18 years. He is currently a member of Trinity Evangelical Free Church in Redlands, California. He continues a 38-year study of cults, world religions, and the occult from his home in Yucaipa, California.



# THE MORMON CONNECTION

## Did Ellen White copy from Joseph Smith?

DALE RATZLAFF

**S**ome Adventists would recoil in horror to hear that several of the visions and prophecies of Ellen White were based on the writings of Joseph Smith. But I am getting ahead of the story.

### Twenty years of study, eighty boxes of documents

Recently as Carolyn was updating our *Proclamation!* mailing database, she noticed that the issue sent to Phyllis Watson of Angwin, California, came back marked “deceased”. A few of us had known about Phyllis’s research; she had been preparing a book that would show Ellen White’s dependence upon Joseph Smith for her early visions and extra-biblical statements. We had not wanted to publish any of her material, though, until the book was printed.

Both Phyllis and her ghost writer, however, were up in years and went to be with the Lord before this work was completed. The book may still be printed, but much work still needs to be done to confirm the evidence she compiled. Originally, Phyllis intended not to have her name connected to the book which was to be entitled *The Mormon Connection*. Phyllis, however, knowing that both she and her ghost writer were in fragile health, wanted at least some of her work to be preserved, so she sent me and several others some of her findings. I believe that now, out of respect for the years of research Phyllis did, she ought to be acknowledged. Furthermore, I spoke personally with her son Dennis Watson, and he gave me permission both to mention her name and to use her written material.

### The illusive dependency of plagiarism

From the research done by Walter Rea, Fred Veltman, D.M. Canright, Sydney Cleveland, Ronald Numbers, and many others, it is clear that Ellen White plagiarized large amounts of material. However, she often did not copy verbatim; such plagiarism would

have been too easy to spot. In most of her copying, therefore, she and/or her secretaries would change a word here and a phrase there to make it less apparent that she was getting her ideas from other sources. In fact, many illustrations of such copying of ideas and thoughts are recorded in Rea’s *White Lie*, in Sydney Cleveland’s *White Washed*, and in D.M. Canright’s *The Life of Mrs. E.G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet—Her False Claims Refuted*, in the chapter “A Great Plagiarist”.<sup>1</sup>

It is not always easy to prove the dependence of one author upon another, especially when the “borrowing” author wants to hide her dependence. In fact, several possibilities must be considered in determining whether or not an author copied. For example, both writers might have quoted or drawn from a common source such as the Bible or historical data. Another possibility is that both writers just happened to use the same words, style, and subject matter. When similar words—especially unusual words—are found in clusters or in the same order, this occurrence may indicate a form of plagiarism. Another possibility to consider is that both writers may have been inspired by the same spirit.

While these options must always be considered, if there is enough similarity in words, style and subject matter, we may safely conclude that one author copied from the other, especially if the similar words and phrases are not common expressions. Furthermore, if one author claims to be writing Christian literature and uses words, ideas, or repeated themes which are not found in Scripture but which are found in another author’s work, this similarity may indicate dependency.

### Evidence of deceptive plagiarism

In a letter to Adventist historian and author L. E. Froom, dated January 8, 1926, Ellen’s son Willie White offered the following information about his mother:





Ellen G. White, Adventist Prophet

Notwithstanding all the power that God had given to present scenes in the lives of Christ and His apostles and His reformers in a stronger and more telling way than other historians...she always felt most keenly the result of her lack of school education. She admired the language in which other writers had presented to their readers the scenes which God had presented to her in vision, and she found it both a pleasure and a convenience and an economy of time to use the language fully or in part in presenting those things which she knew through revelation, and which she wished to pass on to her readers.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, Willie White published the following very revealing statement about his mother on February 23, 1984:

In the early days of her work, mother was promised wisdom in the selection from the writings of others that would enable her to select the gems of truth from the rubbish of error. We have all seen this fulfillment, and yet when she told me of this, she admonished me not to tell it to others.<sup>3</sup>

After Walter Rea published his book *White Lie* which demonstrated her massive plagiarism, the denominational leaders appointed Dr. Fred Veltman to do an in-depth study of *The Desire of Ages*, said to be Ellen White's best book, to determine if Rea's work was accurate. Dr. Veltman took eight years researching this book, comparing it to many—but not all—of the books that were the sources of her statements. *Ministry* magazine reported on the Veltman report upon its completion:

The official Veltman report frankly concluded that not only had Ellen White voraciously copied the works of other writers, but both she and her co-workers had deliberately lied to cover up the truth of her copying. Here are two of the conclusions of the Veltman report:<sup>4</sup>

It is of first importance to note that Ellen White herself, not her literary assistants, composed the basic content of *The Desire of Ages* text. In doing so she was the one who took literary expressions from



Joseph Smith, Mormon Prophet

the works of other authors without giving them credit as her sources. Second, it should be recognized that Ellen White used the writings of others consciously and intentionally...Implicitly or explicitly, Ellen White and others speaking on her behalf did not admit to and even denied literary dependency on her part."<sup>5</sup>

Here is Dr. Veltman's personal conclusion regarding the integrity of Ellen White:

I must admit at the start that in my judgment this is the most serious problem to be faced in connection with Ellen White's literary dependency. It strikes at the heart of her honesty, her integrity, and therefore her trustworthiness."<sup>6</sup>

### Denial of plagiarism throughout her ministry

Significantly, both James and Ellen White denied that she obtained her "testimonies" from any source other than God. Following are some examples of these denials:

**1847, James White:** "[Ellen White] does not 'obtain the sentiments' of her visions from previous teaching or study."<sup>7</sup>

**1873, Ellen White:** Some are ready to inquire: Who told Sister White these things? They have even put the question to me: did anyone tell you these things? I could answer them: Yes; yes, the angel of God has spoken to me....But...for the future, I shall not belittle the testimonies that God has given me, to make explanations to try to satisfy such narrow minds, but shall treat all such questions as an insult to the Spirit of God.<sup>8</sup>

**1876, Ellen White:** The Lord has seen fit to give me a view of the needs and errors of His people...I have faithfully set before the offenders their faults and the means of remedying them, according to the dictates of the Spirit of God...Thus has the Spirit of God pronounced warnings and judgments.<sup>9</sup>

**1906, Ellen White:** I have written many books, and they have been given a wide circulation. Of myself I could not have brought

out the truth in these books, but the Lord has given me the help of His Holy Spirit. These books, giving the instruction that the Lord has given me during the past sixty years, contain the light from heaven, and will bear the test of investigation.<sup>10</sup>

Will the books of Ellen White really bear the test of investigation? Here is another one of Dr. Veltman's conclusions about Ellen White's "best book":

The content of Ellen White's commentary on the life and ministry of Christ, *The Desire of Ages*, for the most part [is] derived [copied] rather than original. ...In practical terms, this conclusion declares that one is not able to recognize in Ellen White's writings on the life of Christ any general category of content or catalog of ideas that is unique to her.<sup>11</sup>

### Connection between Ellen White and Mormonism

Clearly, Ellen Harmon was influenced by William Miller on the subject of the second advent, but who bore the greater influence on her religious views at this time: the Methodist Church or William Miller? Alternatively, was there another powerful influence as yet undiscovered which shaped her work? The Mormons moved into Saco Valley in 1832, and into Portland, Maine, in 1835. Ellen Harmon was only a small child when these events transpired; however, by 1842, when she had her first dream about entering a temple, she was a young lady of fifteen. It is a well-known fact that Ellen had a voracious appetite for reading and "borrowing" thoughts, ideas, and words from others. Is there any evidence that the writings, teachings, and practices of Joseph Smith, the prophet of Mormonism, influenced Ellen White?

Many of Ellen White's relatives had Mormon connections, and Mormonism was flourishing in the area where Ellen lived in the early years of her life. In 1842, Ellen Harmon's second cousin, Agnes Moulton Coolbrith Smith, widow of Don Carlos Smith, became a wife of Mormon prophet Joseph Smith at Nauvoo, IL.<sup>12</sup>

### Summary

We have only given a very brief introduction to the facts outlined above.

- Ellen White used massive and deceptive plagiarism.
- Ellen White claimed she did not generate but received her information, including her visions, from God.
- Research done by credible scholars such as Dr. Walter Rea, supported by Dr. Fred Veltman, indicates that little, if any, new material actually came from Ellen White herself. Rather, most if not all the material in her writings and even in her visions came from others.
- Ellen White grew up where Mormonism was flourishing. Many of her relatives accepted Mormonism, including her second cousin who was a wife of Joseph Smith.

### First vision

If the summary above is true, then we might ask ourselves, from where did Ellen White get her first vision and subsequent visions? Could some of her visions be a veiled reflection of Mormon teachings?

Following is a comparison between Joseph Smith's vision described in his book of 1st Nephi and Ellen White's account of her own first vision:

#### JS, 1 Nephi 8:2,9,19,20,24,30,32.

Behold, I have dreamed a dream...

And I also beheld a straight and narrow path, which came along by the rod of iron into a large and spacious field...

And it came to pass that I beheld others pressing forward and they came forth and caught hold of the end of the rod of iron...

And they did press their way forward continually holding fast to the rod of iron...

Many were lost from his view, wandering into strange roads...

#### EGW, 2T 594-497

While in Battle Creek in August, 1868, I dreamed...As the path grew more narrow small cords were let down...these we eagerly grasped...exclaiming, "we have hold from above!" The same words were uttered by all the company in the narrow pathway...Where were such now? They were not in the company. At every change, some were left behind. Before us, on the other side of the chasm, was a beautiful field...Nothing I have seen upon earth could compare in beauty and glory with this field.

#### JS, 1 Nephi 8:26-33

And I...beheld...a great and spacious building...

He saw other multitudes pressing forward...

And he also saw other multitudes feeling their way toward the great and spacious building...

And great was the multitude that did enter that strange building. After they did enter into that building they did point the finger of scorn at me.

#### EGW, EW 78-79

I dreamed of seeing a temple to which many people were flocking...In my anxiety to reach the temple I did not notice or care for the throng that surrounded me. On entering the building I saw that the vast temple was supported by one immense pillar. Even after entering the building a fear came over me and a sense of shame that I must humiliate myself before these people.

#### JS 1 Nephi 8:1, 21-23, 28

I have seen a vision...and I saw...

And it came to pass that there arose a mist of darkness; yea, even an exceeding great mist of darkness insomuch that they who had commenced in the path did lose their way, that they wandered off and were lost

...and they fell into forbidden paths.

#### EGW, EW 14; WLF (*Word to the Little Flock*), p. 14

God has shown me in holy vision...I saw...the light behind them went out leaving their feet in perfect darkness, and they stumbled and got their eyes off the mark and lost sight of Jesus, and fell off the path



## ENDORSEMENT OF NEW BOOK BY DALE RATZLAFF: GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

down in the dark and wicked world below. It was just as impossible for them to get on the path again and go to the City as all the wicked world which God had rejected. They fell all the way along the path.

### JS Nephi, 7:16-20

And they did bind me with cords...

But it came to pass that I prayed unto the Lord, saying: O, Lord, according to my faith which is in thee, wilt thou deliver me from the hands of my brethren; yea, even give me strength that I may burst these bands with which I am bound.

And it came to pass that when I had said these words, behold, the bands were loosed from off my hands and feet.

### EGW, EW 240-242

I saw a number of companies that seemed to be bound together by cords...I heard the voice of earnest, agonizing prayer...then I saw those who had been praying reach out their hands for help and at last they broke the cords that bound them.

If we assume Ellen White was not the real source for much of her writings, one might wonder where she got her false prophecies. Could they have come from the false prophet Joseph Smith?

Joseph Smith predicted the division between the northern states and the southern states on December 25, 1832.

Verily, thus saith the Lord concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass, beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls; and that time will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning in this place. For behold, the southern states shall be divided against the northern states, and the southern states will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called, and they shall call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations and then war shall be poured out upon all nations. And it shall come to pass, after many days, slaves shall rise up against their masters who shall be marshalled and disciplined for war...<sup>13</sup>

Ellen White appears to follow Joseph Smith's prediction. She penned the following prediction on January 4, 1862.

I was shown some things in regard to our nation...My attention was called to the Southern rebellion...The system of slavery, which has ruined our nation, is left to live and stir up another rebellion...It seems impossible to have the war conducted successfully...I was shown that if the object of this war had been to exterminate slavery, then, if desired, England would have helped the North...This nation will yet be humbled in the dust. England is studying whether it is best to take advantage of the present weak condition of our nation, and venture to make war upon her. She is weighing the matter, and trying to sound other nations...if England thinks it will pay, she will not hesitate a moment to improve her opportunities to exercise her power, and humble our nation. When [note this prophetic statement] England does declare war, all nations will have an interest of their own to serve, and there will be general war, general confusion.<sup>14</sup>

Interestingly, Ellen White's prediction that England would enter the Civil War came nearly 30 years after Joseph Smith wrote his prediction. She easily could have had access to his book *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the timing of her prophecy—

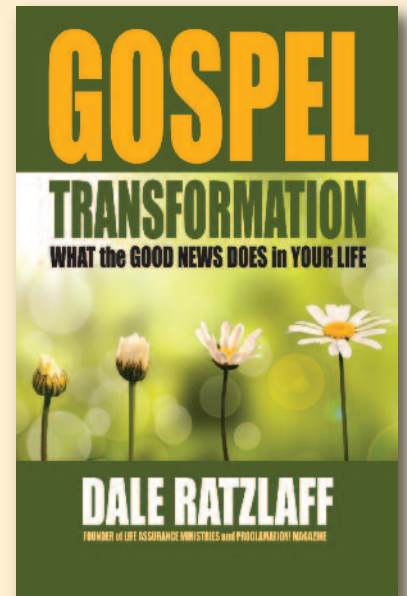
The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ comes to us, not as good advice that we should follow, but as good news about what God himself has done for us in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, in fact, the announcement of something that has happened, the victory that God accomplished through the death and resurrection of His Son. And it is an announcement that demands our whole-hearted response of trust in and gratitude for the One through whom the good news is possible. That good news is the means by which we enter into salvation and receive the gift of new life in Christ. But it is not just something for the beginning of our Christian lives.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, for the beginning, middle and end of our spiritual lives. As such, God's Good News needs to permeate our entire lives. The good news arouses our love for Christ, our hatred for sin and our dependence on the risen Christ, through His Spirit, for every aspect of our Christian lives. The gospel isn't just something we believe so that we are sure of what will happen after we die; it is the truth that shapes, empowers and directs our lives before we die. The gospel isn't just a message we believe and proclaim; it is a life-shaping power that results in a lifestyle that demonstrates its truth.

I am deeply grateful for my friend Dale Ratzlaff's understanding of and love for God's gospel, which shines on every page of this little book. By taking us into a consideration of the great words of the gospel and by reminding us of the wonderful truth of our union with Christ, he not only increases our understanding of God's work on our behalf, he deepens our love for Christ.

Christians are good news people. We are created by the gospel, and are called to be centered on and shaped by it. Our calling is to be gospel people, good news people who believe, guard, proclaim and embody the gospel. God's Word tells us that, as we behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ. The gospel is sufficient to save us and powerful to transform us. Dale's book is a God-given aid to enable us to behold the glory of our Lord Jesus in the gospel, and thus to experience gospel transformation. †

—Gary Inrig, *Teacher of Loma Linda Word Search (LomaLinda-WordSearch.com) and former senior pastor of Trinity Church in Redlands, California.*



occurring right in the middle of the war—would have been compelling to her flock.

Now let us consider one of the most glaring of Ellen White's false prophecies. She stated that some of the people attending a conference with her would not see death but would live to see Christ come. Could it be possible that even this idea came from the false prophet Joseph Smith—one false prophet following another? On the other hand, perhaps both prophets were following their “angel”—a being that appears to have been a lying angel. Ellen, in fact, received her first vision just a few months *after* Joseph Smith died. Millerism was growing, but some of the people considering joining the movement had been complaining that the Millerites did not have a living prophet as the Mormons had. One has to wonder if Joseph Smith's angel became Ellen White's angel. The fact that both Ellen and Joseph Smith used similar terms to describe those who would supposedly not die before Jesus came lends weight to this possibility—or to the possibility that Ellen depended on Smith's already-written prophecy for the idea:

**JS, 3 Nephi 28:7, 8, 25.**

Therefore, more blessed are ye, for ye shall never taste of death; but ye shall live to behold all the doings of the Father unto the children of men, even until all things shall be fulfilled according to the will of my Father, when I shall come in my glory. And ye shall never endure the pains of death...behold, I was about to write the names of those who were never to taste death, but the Lord forbade; therefore I will write them not, for they are hidden from the world.

**EGW, 1 T 131-132; LS 321. (two accounts with some variation)**

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.”

At the conference a very solemn vision was given me. I saw that some of those present would be food for worms, some subjects for the seven last plagues, and some would be translated to Heaven at the second coming of Christ without seeing death.

It is our understanding that Ellen White, reminiscent of Joseph Smith's account, refused to publish the list of those who were present at that meeting who would supposedly not die. Someone did make a list, however, but the list is meaningless as all of those named died many years ago.

In the article “The Adventist Health Message: From Where Did It Come?” in the Spring, 2015, issue of *Proclamation!* author Cheryl Granger quoted Ellen White's words:

As our first parents lost Eden through the indulgence of appetite, our only hope of regaining Eden is through a firm denial of appetites and passions.<sup>15</sup>

Interestingly, this idea reflects the same idea acted out in Mormon initiation rites:

In the Mormon initiation rites, initiates representing Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden stood before the veil in front of the endowment room, the Apostle Peter takes their oaths which lead to eternal life, including “a constant reminder that desires, appetites and passions are to be kept within the bounds the Lord has set”.<sup>16</sup>

It is of interest that the Genesis account says nothing about appetite or passions. Adam and Eve did not overeat from the tree nor indulge a forbidden appetite; rather, they doubted God's word and believed the lie of Satan that the fruit would make them wise:

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate (Gen. 3:6).

For more comparisons of Ellen White's statements and those of Joseph Smith, go to: [http://www.truthorfables.com/EGW\\_Plagiarizes\\_Joe\\_Smith.htm](http://www.truthorfables.com/EGW_Plagiarizes_Joe_Smith.htm).

## Conclusion

For years we at Life Assurance Ministries have known about the many problems in the writings of Ellen G. White. Without doubt Ellen White wrote some accurate things. However, even in her best books one will find error intermingled with truth. This mixture makes her writings even more dangerous because her deceptions are camouflaged amid details that sound correct.

These errors include the following:

- Many unbiblical additions to Scripture
- Many blatant contradictions to Scripture
- Many self-contradictions
- Some contradictions to historical facts
- Many contradictions to the facts of science
- About 10 false prophecies
- Some false visions—what she “saw” was not there
- Statements made about others which proved to be untrue
- Visions based on what other people told her
- Taking advice from her dead husband
- Massive, deceptive plagiarism from good evangelical writers while claiming she received this information from God.
- Basing visions on extra-biblical information including the writings of Joseph Smith.
- Many statements undercut, confuse, or contradict the gospel.

One wonders how long Adventist leaders will continue to mislead their members about the true nature of Ellen White's writings.†

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>All these titles are available at [www.ratzlaf.com/books](http://www.ratzlaf.com/books)

<sup>2</sup>Le Roy Froom, *Ellen G. White, The Lonely Years*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>William C. White, Secretary, EGW Estate, Washington, D.C., *Review and Herald*, February 23, 1984. Italics supplied.

<sup>4</sup>Sydney Cleveland, *White Washed*, LAM Publications, p. 8.

<sup>5</sup>“The Desire of Ages Project: The Conclusions,” *Ministry*, November, 1990, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup>James White, *To the Remnant Scattered Abroad*, 1847.

<sup>8</sup>Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup>Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>*Ministry*, November, 1990, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup>*United by Faith—The Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith Family*, pp. 361, 362. Edited by Kyle R. Walker.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, p. 87:1-4

<sup>14</sup>Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 253-259.

<sup>15</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 491.

<sup>16</sup>Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Evolution of the Temple Ceremony*, p. 94, 136.





### One unbelievable article after another

Vol. 16, issue 1 has outdone itself again with one unbelievable article after another. I confess, I never cease to be amazed with wonderment—OK, and bewilderment—as I read each *Proclamation!* edition.

I just knew you could use some helpful editorial advice. It is unfortunate you did not send me the drafts before publishing, but here goes anyway. Cheryl Granger made an astounding discovery in the annals of history that she just had to share: the “jaw-dropping quote” on page 21 about some German Seventh-day Adventists’ thoughts regarding Hitler: “Seventh Day (sic) Adventists...rejoiced

in an August 1933 circular that the nation was now being run by Hitler ‘who has his office from the hand of God; and who knows himself to be responsible to Him. As an anti-alcoholic, non-smoker, and vegetarian, he is closer to our own view of health reform than anybody else.’”

Fair enough argument—derisively denounce a plant based diet because a supposedly God-appointed man by the name of Hitler practiced, to whatever degree, a “health reform” lifestyle. This line of reasoning must cause the editorial board nightmares when it comes to whom God and the devil set up, or appoint, or sanction as civil or uncivil, as the case may be, rulers on this earth over the eons of time.

I mean, who appointed Tiberius Caesar as the one in charge of the levers of government when Christ was crucified? Was Tiberius God’s man or the devil’s man of the hour? Hmmm? Was Nero God’s man or the devil’s man of the hour? I mean, the blood of martyrs proved fruitful ground for the exponential growth of Christianity. According to Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar was God’s man of the hour, and this is the same man who threw good men into a fiery furnace. How can it be that a “good” man could do such a terrible bad deed? Oh, the stuff of *Proclamation!* editors’ nightmares....

Colleen proclaims on page 17, “What one eats is immaterial, Paul says, as long as one eats ‘for the Lord.’” Dale contends for “intelligence” in regards to healthful practices for Christians, and Colleen contends it is “immaterial” what one eats as long as it is done “for the Lord.” So which is it? The cognitive dissonance in *Proclamation!* within the same issue between these two competing, polar-opposite ideas is just plain awesome. My guess is that Dale needs additional deprogramming to fully accept the “immateriality” provisions of the New Covenant.

Colleen and Dale, you have got to get your heads together

and figure out this cause and effect business or you will continue to offer odd (as in Hitler was not a kinder man for eating plants, a fact intended to destroy the myth that kinder/healthier/less sensual people don’t dine on the carcasses of dead animals) and conflicting views and advice. Come to think of it, that is almost exactly the same sort of castigating argument Dale offers on Ellen White’s supposed confusion on the issue of the “right arm of the gospel”.

VIA EMAIL

**Editor’s note:** We are accustomed to readers taking issue with our articles using all manner of persuasive devices, from anger to shame to sarcasm to logic. We

disasters; Scripture, however, is unequivocal: God is utterly sovereign. We can trust that God is not surprised by anything that happens. We cannot thwart His purposes, and all that occurs is within His sovereign will. He is the God of history, the One “who was and is and is to come” (Rev. 4:8).

### Truth with love and boldness

While pastors and theologians shrink from the message of truth in Mark 7:18-19, you put it forth with love and boldness. This diet-lifestyle-yoga training is certainly not limited to Loma Linda.

I’m so grateful to you, and I’m sending your website to all those I know who are either concerned about it or are into it, advising

YOUR LATEST PUBLICATION SHOWS ME  
THAT YOU ARE ALL VERY ANGRY AND IN  
NEED OF **PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING**.  
TRY GOOGLE AND GET SOME HELP THERE.

want to address, however, this letter’s rhetorical questions about appointments being from God or the devil.

There is no question about Who is in charge of history. God is sovereign over everything. Paul said, “He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation” (Acts 17:26). Job 12:23 says, “He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away.” Further, Isaiah deliver’s God’s own words, “I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things” (Is. 45:7).

Adventists debate over what God may or may not know, and they insist God does not “cause”

they download your Spring issue.

Thank you.

WINNETKA, IL

### You need counseling

It would do you a world of good to bring your “gospel” to the Hindus and the Muslims rather than slandering the Adventist church—or are you afraid to challenge them? The Muslims will not even touch the swine, much less eat it.

Dale, regarding tea and coffee: do not write something scientific if you do not have the biochem or physiology background to back your words....

Cheryl Granger, originally the Hindus got their vegetarian theology from the Garden of Eden as written in the Bible. So if anyone writes about a vegetarian diet, does it mean they are plagiarizing it? Ellen White also got

### LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES

#### MISSION

To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

#### MOTTO

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

#### MESSAGE

“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

her message from the Bible, like you (I hope) and I would.

Your latest publication shows me that you are all very angry and in need of psychological counseling. Try Google and get some help there.

VIA EMAIL

#### First article bringing laughter

"From Where Did It Come?" is the first article in your magazine that brought laughter as I read it. Here is the GC president stating that he's a vegetarian because it affects his frontal lobes and nerve endings. The Rosen-volds are astounded that Adventists have catsup on their tables. There is disappointment that some outside the church think there is fanaticism in the church over diet. The writings of Ellen White breed fanaticism!

When I pastored someone came to our home for my wife's birthday party, and that evening he became sick and threw up only the cake and ice cream, but not the fruit. He stated it was a judgment of God for having eaten something unwholesome. He got up during announcement time [the next Sabbath] to let the whole church know about this experience, to the horror of my wife.

Church members shouldn't eat chocolate, cheese, ice cream, spices, pickles, and the dreaded catsup. They mustn't drink tea or coffee. They must only eat two meals at day and never, ever mix their fruits and vegetables. One conference president's wife refused to offer prayer over "this

junk food". All this sounds to me like salvation by the belly!

ONTARIO, CANADA

#### Present love; don't bash

I am not sure why I am giving you the "whatever" of an email, but [here it is]. I do not understand your tactics. Why don't you present the love of Christ, rather than bashing the Adventists? Why not the Baptists or the Methodists or the Catholics?

VIA EMAIL

On the subject of the kundalini spirit as part of the Hindu religion—thank you for exposing this phenomenon for the world to see. I was part of a Christian church 20 years ago that allowed this spirit to operate under the guise of the Holy Spirit (they called it the "renewal"). It is interesting for me to remember that some of the strange behaviors included actual animal sounds (barking, etc.) and poses... We were told not to worry because it was all just "holy chaos". This

JUST BECAUSE YOU **DON'T LIKE WHAT**  
**YOU'RE HEARING** DOESN'T MEAN THIS  
PUBLICATION IS BASHING ANYBODY.

#### Pray for body of Christ to discern

Wow and wow! Your last issue on the health message of Seventh-day Adventism was right on. I nearly read it cover to cover in one sitting. The Lord is definitely warning all His people about health-related systems of thought and teaching that are based in the occult. I'm all for healthy eating, good lifestyle practices, and so forth, but some take it to an "unhealthy" extreme, especially where Yoga is concerned. Talk about a trick of Satan on the people of God. We need to pray the body of Christ develops more discernment.

church today attracts thousands (especially vulnerable young people) from all over the world yearly to their services and school. There is spiritual power there for sure, but not always the Holy Spirit. I believe they have been deceived by their own fleshly desires, as are the Adventists who believe they can grow closer to God by something done in and through the flesh (Saturday Sabbath keeping, vegetarianism, etc.).

Thank you for sounding the alarm about the roots of Seventh-day Adventism. I will continue to pray for these poor deceived souls to find the freedom of knowing Jesus paid it all.

WHITMORE, CA

#### You need prayers

I will never support your false teachings. If you are teaching truth, why do you constantly run down the Adventist church? You will need all the prayers you can get in the day of judgment.

DUNNEGAN, MO

#### Who's bashing whom?

I very much appreciate this publication. It is apparent that the writers and editors work very hard to present each article, each topic, in a thoughtful, studied manner. Thank you for your hard work and dedication to the truth.

One thing that disturbs me from month to month are the angry letters I read accusing this magazine and this ministry, of "bashing" the Adventist church. I suppose these accusations are made with the assumption that no Adventist would ever say negative things about another church or another Christian's beliefs. But I have attended too many evangelistic meetings and adult Sabbath School classes and read too many of their publications (including, or especially, Ellen White), to know that assumption isn't true. Adventists are very willing to "bash" other Christians—note the many negative statements made about the Catholic church, or their saying "Sunday-keeping" Christians are part of Babylon, the harlot's daughters, worshiping the beast, deceived by Satan himself. How is that NOT bashing, but placing Scripture next to Ellen White and pointing out the inconsistencies and error IS?

I understand defensiveness when you feel your house is being attacked, but I think Adventism, and the members themselves, would be better served if they would listen to what these people have to say, instead of just trying to shout them down. And if for no other reason than maturity, don't be one of those people who "can dish it out, but can't take it." Just because you don't like what you're hearing doesn't mean this publication is bashing anybody.

CRESTLINE, CA

## PARTNERING THROUGH THE SUMMER SLUMP

We thank each of you for your participation in the ministry of *Proclamation!* and of Life Assurance Ministries (LAM). We pray for all of you, that God will reveal the glory of His mercy and grace in Christ Jesus to each of you, that He will bless and provide for those who financially support this ministry—often sacrificially—that He will bless richly each of you who pray for LAM, and we ask that He will raise up those He knows need to be donors.

Again we are coming to you, asking you to prayerfully consider supporting this ministry if you are not already doing so. We again face greatly reduced income, and we pray that God will provide what we need to publish the magazine and to pay the bills. We thank Him for His faithfulness and for bringing those of you who share our love for our Adventist friends and family and desire that they, too, know the astonishing reality of being born again and knowing Jesus.



## Freedom is obedience to divine commands

I wondered how Sharon Clark (“Recovery from Adventism”, Spring, 2015) would have felt in the Garden of Eden? Would she have felt free as she does now? God placed some restrictions on Adam and Eve with their “freedom and choices.” Eve must have thought why can’t we eat of all the trees and experience complete freedom? Most individuals not happy with the Adventist Church or any other church don’t want to feel others, including God, have the right or authority to make rules that when broken, yield consequences. True freedom is found only in obedience to divine commands!...

Having trained as a physician at Loma Linda and attending many religious classes and services, there never entered my mind I was a slave to a bunch of dreamed up religious notions! Strange, obedience made me feel free!

VIA EMAIL

**Editor’s response:** To be sure, rules provide structure that bring order out of chaos. Never the less, the issue is not whether or not we will live by rules; the issue we each face is whether or not we will trust Jesus, believing He has paid the price for our sin, repenting before Him, and acknowledging Him as our Savior and Lord. Salvation is not bad people becoming good; it is dead people becoming spiritually alive.

We are born spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3), and only by believing are we made alive and pass out of death into life (Eph. 2:4-10; Jn. 5:24; Jn. 3:3-6; 16-18; 6:29). When we believe Jesus and are made spiritually alive, our Father transfers us out of the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

It is this life and the concurrent indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13-14) that sets us free, for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). Paul tells us that “For freedom Christ has set us free;” and he commands us not to submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1).

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Freedom is being made alive in Christ through faith by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This new birth frees us from the law (Rom. 10:4), but never are we to use our freedom for license. We now submit to the Spirit and serve one another, for “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:8). “For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ (Gal. 5:14).

... I AM HAPPY THAT YOUR PROCLAMATION! MAGAZINE HAS CONTINUED TO SHOW UP IN THE MAIL AT MY CHURCH, AND THAT I EVENTUALLY DECIDED TO TAKE ONE HOME AND READ IT.

## My heart is broken

Thank you for your study, courage, bravery, and tenacity for the Biblical truth.

My heart is broken over the fact that I need to leave my church, but since I have been too ill to attend, at least I will no longer beat myself up over that. However, I love my pastors.

I hate thinking that all of their wonderful sermons are so tainted. However, it has always annoyed me greatly that E.G. White is quoted almost as often as Scripture from the pulpit in a supposed Bible-teaching church!

I wish I could find a nearby church that would help me transition away from the specific fellowship I am in right now. At least I am happy that your *Proclamation!* magazine has continued to show up in the mail at my church, and that I eventually decided to take one home and read it.

FRESNO, CA

## Plan to prosecute

Quit sending me your *Proclamation!* magazine! I don’t want it; you are harassing me, and I intend to pursue legal action against you if the harassment does not stop.

I have attempted to contact you several times yet continue to receive this offensive propaganda.

You are hereby ordered to remove my address from your mailing list. It may be addressed to “Occupant” but my family and I are the only occupants at this address. Again, if this harassment does not stop, I plan to go through all the proper channels to see that

you are prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

MISSOULA, MT

**Editor’s note:** Thank you for finally giving us your name and full address. We frequently receive phone messages or even emails which do not clearly share the recipient’s name and address. If one wishes to be removed from the mailing list, please be sure to share all of one’s contact information.

## Adventists visiting prison

I have been receiving *Proclamation!* magazine ever since I’ve ordered books from Life Assurance Magazine. I often see letters from prisoners, and I wondered about getting a subscription for one.

I have been assisting in prison ministry by communication with prisoners who have become Christians. I decided that one I’m currently corresponding with (who has terminal cancer) could benefit from

your magazine. There are some Adventist people who visit the prison, and while I have been able to teach that prisoner with whom I correspond about why Adventist teaching needs to be avoided, I think it would be great if he could receive your magazine.

Thank you for your consideration.

NORTH LIBERTY, IA

## I am free!

Every time I get my *Proclamation!* magazine in the mail, I get mad—mad that I was duped for 52 years of my life by the Adventist church; mad that I didn’t believe my husband when he told me during our first 22 years of marriage that what I believed was wrong (even though he gave me the freedom to practice what I believed). Then I sit down to read my *Proclamation!* from cover to cover and shed tears of joy for the grace of God that saved me from Adventism, and for the Life Assurance Ministries publications that assisted with my transition. Chris Lee’s “A Study of the Covenants” was the final nail in my Adventist coffin. I am amazed that it took me all of 12.5 seconds to leave “God’s True Church” once I read in the Bible that there wouldn’t be two sealings (Holy Spirit sealing and Sabbath sealing). I am now assured of my salvation all the time, thanks to Jesus’ sacrifice and God’s great mercy and grace, and can’t help but tell people my story. I love Jesus, and I am FREE!

VIA EMAIL

**The FAF Fall Conference** in Michigan has been cancelled for this year. Our church host, The Chapel, will be near the end of a large building project at that time. You are invited to attend our Winter Conference in Southern California this coming February. Watch for more details in the next *Proclamation!*

MAIL LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:  
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## THE LIFE A F T E R WITH CHRIS LEE

**N**ebraska's unicameral legislature recently voted to repeal the death penalty. The Republican-dominated body then voted to override the Republican governor's veto. It was a surprising turn of events in a solidly red state. Naturally, this legislative coup has engendered a good deal of debate here. I'm not going to join that debate in this column, but I would like to draw a few parallels that have been on my mind recently.

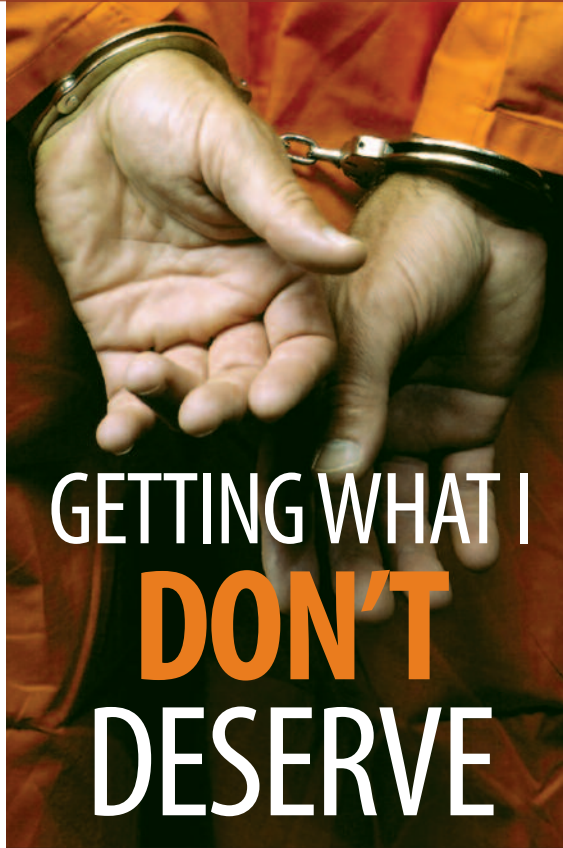
Entwined in the debate of the death penalty has been much discussion of the ten men on Nebraska's death row. If you can stomach that kind of thing, do a Google search. It's not hard to find summaries of the crimes for which they were convicted. All are heinous in the extreme. Reading these accounts engenders horror that heats to anger before simmering into melancholia as one contemplates the utter depravity of mankind. By the time you reach the tenth account, you will be heart sick and will feel a deep longing for justice.

I would argue that what we experience as we read these accounts is a product of the *Imago Dei*, the image of God reflected in His creation. We feel horror, anger, sadness, and the need for justice because our creator made us to reflect some of His attributes. The difference between us and God is that we tend to experience wrath against sin only in the most extreme, shocking cases, and then only for a little while. Our outrage fades as the news cycle moves on to the next story.

God, on the other hand, is absolutely perfect in His righteousness, holiness, justice, and wrath against sin—all sin. The wrath that flares so briefly in us when we hear of some depraved crime is only a dim reflection of what God feels, all the time, against everything that falls short of His perfect standard. As a God who is absolutely perfect in all His attributes, He cannot wink at any sin, and He cannot simply wave justice aside. As a result,



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in our natural states, we all are under the wrath of God and under a sentence of death. Let me make that more personal: I deserve the ultimate death penalty, and so do you.

In my previous life, I didn't fully appreciate the staggering reality of God's wrath. As a result, I didn't grasp the depth of my own depravity. I tended to think that if I just cleaned my act up, maybe everything would work out okay. But that way of thinking underestimated God's wrath against all sin. Even if I could have magically lived a perfect life from then on, I had already blown it. Nothing I could do would ever close the gap between me and a perfect God. The only thing I would ever deserve, no matter what I did, was an eternal stint in the ultimate death row.

Fortunately for us, God is also absolutely perfect in His love, mercy, and grace. Because He loves us, He took His natural wrath against our sin and poured it all back on Himself in the person of Jesus. The eternal weight of God's wrath against every sin ever committed, large or small, was poured out on Him as He hung on the cross. Jesus came as a man, lived a perfect life, and credited His righteousness to our account. He paid the full debt of sin, dying in our place under the wrath of God. Jesus then rose from the dead to assure us of eternal life in Him and to make us joint heirs with Him.

One can't fully appreciate how good the Good News is until one feels the depth of the bad news. The truth is, by God's perfect standards, I'm a thief, a murderer, an adulterer, and a liar. I will never deserve anything other than death. In Christ, I am a son of God in good standing. Here's to not getting what I deserve. Praise Jesus! †