

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM, PILGRIMAGE, AND CHANGE [SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM, PILGRIMAGE, AND CHANGE – Rocky Mountain Conference of Seventh-day Adventists \(rmcsda.org\)](#)

In

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- [MV Spring 2021](#)

By John Skrzypaszek ... The global chain of political, social, environmental, and technological changes encompasses contemporary life with an encumbrance of an unexpected set of anxieties that cast a confusing shadow over the quality and purpose of life and its meaning. In response to the plethora of mounting pressures imposed on life's journey, Adam Fenner writes, in Ministry magazine, that the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces a serious task to maintain the relevance of its doctrinal expressions in its mission to the world. Errol Webster identifies the confronting reality by asking, "If knowing doctrines does not sustain members during personal crises or fortify them against secularism, is there something missing from our teaching?" He identifies two essential elements in the existing quandary: members' struggles in spiritual life and the lack of Christ-centered teaching of doctrines.

In his thought-provoking book, *The Safest Place on Earth*, Larry Crabb highlights the existing dilemma's core, arguing, "For too long, we've been encouraged by a solution-focused, make-it-work culture to flee to human mountains when life gets tough. . . . We've been counseled, medicated, religiously entertained and inspired, exhorted, distracted and formula directed long enough." In his view, the reactive solution-seeking response to the human heart's needs leads to a lost focus on spiritual living. Is it possible to entertain the notion that a clear, logically presented exposition of propositional truth flowered with the prophetic interpretation of events descends into the domain of solution-focused Christian activity? What needs to change to make it known that our conversations do not flow from an isolated dais of doctrinal superiority, but rather come from Christ?

The Heart of the Pilgrimage

Based on sound theological foundations, the Seventh-day Adventist identity story began with a journey, a spiritual pilgrimage with a new and revived focus on Jesus. In the prevailing climate of the Great Disappointment, a time of spiritual and doctrinal confusion, God raised a prophetic voice to provide comfort, encouragement and aide-mémoire of His return. Essentially, Ellen White's prophetic voice inspired the movement to "fix their eyes on Jesus."

Her influence emerged at a critical phase during the journey. David Sterling refers to such moments in history in terms of unexpected surprise, "when the blackness of the

present is understood to be so thick that God's purposes can neither be perceived nor fulfilled without a new direct intervention in both revelation and salvation." It energized the early Sabbatarian Adventists with open-minded plasticity, prodding them to study the Bible dynamically and apply the unfolding beliefs to life's journey. By 1860, the process had raised the movement's foundational theological framework, and the name Seventh-day Adventist had been adopted.

The discovered beliefs referred to as the "present truth" were not locked into a set of propositional assertions detached from the spiritual dimension of lived experience. Consequently, the selected name encompassed the spiritual component of faith expressed in doctrinal position, i.e., the faith-oriented depth of spiritual experiences weaved a renewed measure of relationally oriented trust in God's presence into Adventists' beliefs. According to Marjorie Thompson, "the spiritual life is grounded in a relationship. It has to do with God's way of relating to us, and our way of responding to God." Furthermore, it embodies "a deep hunger for direct experience with God, rather than second-hand faith," a yearning for personal faith to "catch fire."

John McClean discusses the close-knit relationship between spirituality, theology and its application to life's experience. He explains theology as part of the lived experience and asserts that it engages with drama. Moreover, the lived experience calls on "theology to step into the drama" to shape a dynamic, inspirational motivation towards a progressive understanding of God's revelation through Jesus (John 17: 3). Nevertheless, he forewarns, "A Christian theology that is true to its apocalyptic roots will resist the temptation to offer a neat, static, providential system that explains and justifies the world." Instead, it calls on followers to "take into a serious account the hiddenness of God's hand in the world that we see."

The hiddenness of God or, as these brief reflections suggest, the mystery of God breeds a new awakening and drive to rediscover a clear understanding of the hope imbedded in God's solutions—the Jesus story. In the named space, all doctrinal expressions flow from the depth of spiritual frustrations, struggles, doubts and often God's silence—the pathway of human struggles to know and understand God—a pathway that also unfolds the meaning and purpose of life designed by God.

In the spiritual journey's milieu, the work and function of the prophetic voice and the prophetic movement move beyond the boundaries of informative propositional expression of doctrines. Walter Brueggemann defines it as the responsibility to "nurture, nourish and to evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perceptions of the dominant culture around us." He further maintains that the alternative consciousness function serves to energize persons and communities with a visionary, inspirational "anticipation that God has promised and will surely give." It refrains from telling people what to believe in, how to believe and what to do. Rather, the depth of such a prophetic worldview invites all to step into the realm of God's space—a

space of alternative consciousness, the kingdom of God's grace, for a transformational experience with Jesus.

The Call for Change

The movement's evolving journey encountered the pressures exerted by the "consciousness" of the changing world. The organizational structure's escalating expansion, theological debates and arguments, confining the distinctiveness of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and fundamentalism's augmenting influence, effaced the movement's focus on the spiritual nature of its calling.

Defining the fixed application of doctrinal beliefs, Børge Schantz observes that between 1874 and 1889, the Seventh-day Adventists approved other missionary societies to lead people to Christ. However, the Adventists were "committed to bring them to the last warning" [the distinctively Adventist doctrines]. Consequently, the emerged struggles associated with understanding the depth of spiritual experience through the lens of righteousness by faith (1882-1888) prompted Ellen White to issue a warning: "The correct interpretation of the Scripture is not all that God requires. . . . We are to bring into our practice, in our association with our fellowmen, the spirit of Him who gave us the truth."

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the lost focus on spiritual authenticity, but during the entire period, Ellen White's voice immersed doctrinal beliefs into the inspirational Jesus' story: "Every true doctrine makes Christ the center; every precept receives force from his Word." She revived an undivided commitment to the authority of God's Word, not for the sake of argumentative disputes, but for an in-depth experience with Jesus. She called for a change built on an alternative consciousness to the surrounding consciousness of her time—a consciousness of implicit trust and confidence in God's presence: "Everyone needs to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart."

In the space of the spiritual attachment to Jesus, she called for renewal of the dynamic open-minded creativity towards a progressive understanding of the Bible and openness to a deeper application of God's revelation in Jesus to life's journey. She warned: "There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error." Her call for change encompassed a call for a renewed focus on Jesus imbedded in the gospel's story. It summoned the movement to present faith's sincerity and authenticity by transcribing doctrinal beliefs into an authentic theology in practice.

A Contemporary Call for Change

As outlined in the introductory paragraph, the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist movement faces an ongoing challenge to retain a meaningful voice amid the changing world's complexities. The inherited shift from the seekers of truth to established beliefs' defenders initiated a disengaging insensitivity to the value of a transformational journey with God.

The call for relevance challenges the movement to recapture the seeker's pioneering spirit—comprising passion, zeal and commitment to innovative creativity to explore new territories in the journey of faith. It further calls on the movement to step into the domain of human suffering and remain in a state of continual interaction with the changing nature of the social and cultural environment, sharing contemporary beliefs immersed in a Christ-focused theological practice.

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Suggested Reading

The Prophetic Imagination by Walter Brueggemann.

Theology and the Future: Evangelical Assertions and Explorations by Trevor Cairney and David Starling (Eds.).

The Safest Place on Earth Where People Connect and Are Forever Changed by Larry Crabb.

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson.

Desire of Ages by Ellen White.

Education by Ellen White.

Testimonies for the Church Volume 1 by Ellen White.