

Introduction

[Hi, I am Ingo Sorke, I teach Bible classes at Southwestern Adventist University in Texas, and I'm also part of a new church plant south of Dallas. But more importantly, I'm the husband for exactly 22 years, the father of 2 teenage sons, and a daily student of Scripture.] I will share my perspective on the emerging church and spiritual formation.

From 1988 - 1990 I was a theology student at a Lutheran Seminary in Germany.

The scholarship was profound. Big names taught there, using big words. Big theology was tossed around. But I made a painful discovery: Not everything that wets your appetite is water, and not everything liquid is living water! A theological system and practice that is not rooted in the Great Controversy Theme is dangerous. A spirituality and worship that is not grounded in Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy is not only dangerous but could prove deadly. I sensed a degree of lostness and bankruptcy in a framework that pitches its tents outside the shelter of the remnant movement.

Jesus' last temptation dealt directly with worship and spirituality. Since this is a key issue right now, we must be in the last phase of the final conflict. We cannot afford to drink from just any stream - some headwaters are polluted, some philosophies are poisoned. In fact, Revelation warns us that some religious systems "are fallen, and Babylon has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird" (Rev 18:2)! "Come out of her, my people" is the call of the hour (Rev 18:4).

The Emerging Church is a global, informal movement among Christians that emphasizes experience over doctrinal truth. It is wide-open to ecumenical efforts, values relationships at the expense of absolutes. It is feelings over facts.

And sure enough, influenced by non-remnant sources we now find that in Europe, for example, the principle of an Adventist Academy can be the head of the ecumenical movement in that region.

Hand in hand with the emerging church, spiritual formation embraces practices that could be in and of themselves ok (fasting, simplicity), but mixes them with dubious practices, such as contemplative prayer (repeating the word "Jesus" over and over), feeling your breath as you pray, emptying yourself (to what? to whom?) etc. It has its roots in the spiritual exercises of Ignatius of Loyola, and this is where the problem begins: this spirituality was really the primary Roman Catholic effort to counter the Reformation. Under the garb of simple spirituality and outreach, the content and methodologies of spiritual formation really serve an agenda that is contrary to the Advent movement with its focus on prophecy and doctrinal truth, and a meditation this is defined by Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy, and nothing else. Of course, I have met wonderful, sincere Catholics, including on our trip to GYC! I had a good conversation with a Catholic in a hotel hallway, and he sent me a message when I left "from your favorite Catholic"!

Seminary

I was thrown into this spiritual formation vortex long before I knew that spiritual formation was a buzz word - and a problem. I am not here to slam people or institutions - but I would like to share an experience with you.

For my Masters degree we had to read strange books: Desert fathers. Monks. Spiritual guides. None of whom knew anything about the health message, Sabbath-keeping, the Sanctuary in Heaven, and the antitypical day of atonement starting in 1844. I still remember the guy next to me in class raised his hand and innocently asked, "Why are we reading this stuff? Don't we have enough quality spiritual material in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White?" He was dismissed by the professor with a smirk and some mumbled comments.

Then I took a class on church planting. Again we read books - 5 of them! - but not *Gospel Workers*, not *Evangelism*, not *Acts of the Apostles*. I wondered . . . These authors don't know anything about the 3 Angels' message, and how to build a church based on Adventist principles. They don't even know veggie burgers and haystacks! Why are we reading this when we have trustworthy materials in the writings of Ellen White, directly inspired by God?! The professor's answer stunned me: "We read these books and then baptize the concepts with insights from Ellen White." Why eat steak when you can have your veggies first-hand? Why spend money on that which is not bread? (MH 441)

And why read this stuff when we have been warned directly about its background and motive? "It was their [the Jesuits] studied aim to secure wealth and power, to be devoted to the overthrow of Protestantism, and the re-establishment of the papal supremacy" (GC 234f.).

John Harvey Kellogg

"And the devil was wroth with the remnant." These strange spiritual concepts slithered into the Adventist church through a book I have right here: John Harvey Kellogg, *The Living Temple*. Kellogg proposed that God was in everything - teaching pantheism. **It blurs the lines between a supernatural being and a natural thing.** It effectively reduces God to a mere force, a mystical essence that pervades all reality. For example, "The air is God's medicine, and good food is God's medicine. There is power, life, in the pure water, because God's life is in it." Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White: The Australian years, 1891--1900, vol. 4 (Washington, DC: R~H, 1983), p. 284, quoting EJ Waggoner.

What is nature?--Nature is simply a philosophical name for God, who is the active force in nature--the "all in all." {LT page 483}

Red alert from Ellen White: "When you wrote that book you were not under the inspiration of God. There was by your side the one who inspired Adam to look at God in a false light." MR 11, 314. "Never teach such theories in our institutions; do not present them to the people" (Manuscript 70, 1905). Period!

EGW to AG Daniels, GC 1903: "I have something to say to our teachers in reference to the new book *The Living Temple*. Be careful how you sustain the sentiments of this book regarding the personality of God. As the Lord presents matters to me, these sentiments do not bear the endorsement of God. **They are a snare that the enemy has prepared for these last days.** We need not the mysticism that is in this book. Those who entertain these sophistries will soon find themselves in a position where the enemy can talk with them, and lead them away from God. It is represented to me that the writer of this book is on a false track. He has lost sight of the distinguishing truths for this time. Arthur L. White, Ellen G. White: The Early Elmshaven Years, 1900--1905, vol. 5 (Washington, DC: R&H, 1983), pp. 297, 298, quoting E. G. White, Letter 211, 1903.

You have virtually destroyed the Lord God Himself. Ibid., p. 305, quoting E. G. White, Special Testimonies, Series R, No. 2, 190~, p. 49, August 7, 1904.

Here is the key: it is not just the bad that's bad in the bad, it's the good that the bad destroys in the good by competing with it for attention and a place in your heart and mind!

We have so much good theology in the remnant movement; this other stuff is a fatal distraction!

“Be not deceived; many will depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. We have now before us the alpha of this danger. The omega will be of a most startling nature.” 1SM 197 . . . “In the book *The Living Temple* there is presented the alpha of deadly heresies. The omega will follow, and will be received by those who are not willing to heed the warning God has given.” 1SM 200 . . . “*Living Temple* contains the alpha of these theories. I knew that the omega would follow in a little while, and I trembled for our people.” 1SM 203

MR 11, 211: “specious workings, which are the Alpha of the Omega”. Definition of specious: superficially plausible, but actually wrong. misleading in appearance, especially misleadingly attractive. Reminds me of the tree of good and evil.

“The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed.” If you are feeling the pulse of this church it is happening in front of our eyes. “The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established. Books of a new order would be written. A system of intellectual philosophy would be introduced.” (1SM 204)

Ellen White's counsel is clear and concise: “Let the world go into spiritualism, into theosophy, into pantheism, if they choose. We are to have nothing to do with this deceptive branch of Satan's work.” (Battle Creek Letters, 109)

“The warnings of the word of God regarding the perils surrounding the Christian church belong to us today. As in the days of the apostles men tried by tradition and philosophy to destroy faith in the Scriptures, so today, by the pleasing sentiments of higher criticism, evolution, spiritualism, theosophy, and pantheism, the enemy of righteousness is seeking to lead souls into forbidden paths.” AA 474

Why does all this matter? I didn't not grow up Seventh-day Adventist. But I was reached not with strange methodologies, not with candles, and dark rooms, and reading from the fallacious library of human conjecture, not through doctrinal compromise, or a “Just Jesus” approach, divorcing doctrine from Jesus - I was reached by the Adventist message with its full prophetic remnant package.

I don't want to sound cheap or trite, but I do want to communicate to teenagers what I discovered as a teenager:

It's OK to be SDA!

Doctrines were not a hindrance to becoming Adventist - they were a catalyst for embracing Jesus! At age 18 I discovered Sabbath - wow! State of the dead - wow! Sanctuary - wow! Jesus in the Most Holy Place - wow! 1844 - wow! Spirit of Prophecy? Wow! It's OK to be SDA!

I received a Bible, I read the Bible, I devoured the Bible, and I was converted. No chanting, no breathing techniques, no re-visioning or re-constructing the Bible, or music that is a "bedlam of noise" and that is not CBA - Christian Berdahl approved - I read the Bible and I was rescued!

Shouldn't have happened, by the way. Non-Adventist literature and leaders and methodologies will tell you that doctrine is not how to reach a secular post-modern European teenager. Guess what? Here I stand, I can do no different!

Recommendation, esp. to Teenagers

1. Appreciate your Adventist identity.

It is good to be Adventist. It's OK to be SDA! Our history is rich and enriching. Learn from it. We are a God-ordained movement with a purpose. And our future - no matter what happens between now and the end - is glorious. Don't miss out! "And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings." (Rev 10:11) **The DNA of our Adventist identity is prophetic, not pathetic. It's OK to be SDA.**

2. Read and study your Bible.

"The one book that is essential for all to study is the Bible." *Loma Linda Messages*, 64.

It is on this point - the Word of God - that Adam and Eve fell - blatant rejection of the express Word of God based on feelings.

And it is on this point that Jesus had to correct the Emmaus disciples. Feelings were insufficient to understand Jesus! It took some hard-core facts from the Word of God and prophecy! It gave them heart-burn!

"Suffer not yourselves to open the lids of a book that is questionable. There is a hellish fascination in the literature of Satan. It is the powerful battery by which he tears down a simple religious faith. Never feel that you are strong enough to read infidel books; for they contain a poison like that of asps. They can do you no good, and will assuredly do you harm. In reading them, you are inhaling the miasmas of hell." FCE 93

"Our salvation depends on a knowledge of the truth contained in the Scriptures. It is God's will that we should possess this. Search, O search the precious Bible with hungry hearts. Explore God's word as the miner explores the earth to find veins of gold. Never give up the search until you have ascertained your relation to God and His will in regard to you." COL 111

"Let every student take his Bible and place himself in communion with the great Teacher. Let the mind be trained and disciplined to wrestle with hard problems in the search for divine truth." COL 334

"The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realized this, with what awe would we open God's Word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One." 6T 393

"One sentence of Scripture is of more value than ten thousand of man's ideas or arguments." 7T 71

"Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures, and who have received the love of the truth, will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive." GC 625

"We must be careful lest we misinterpret the Scriptures. The plain teachings of the Word of God are not to be so spiritualized that the reality is lost sight of. Do not overstrain the meaning of sentences in the Bible in an effort to bring forth something odd in order to please the fancy. Take the Scriptures as they read." —MS 30, 1904.{1SM 170.2}

3. Simply pray, pray simply.

Don't get tied up with lights, sights, candles, scents, smells, sounds, etc. You don't need stuff, you need to get down on your knees and pray. It's OK just to pray. You don't have to repeat the word "Jesus" 30x. You don't need to follow someone else's prayer, except Jesus. Just pray.

4. Read and cherish the writings of Ellen White instead of other writings.

3SM 83-84: "Men may get up scheme after scheme, and the enemy will seek to seduce souls from the truth; but all who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White, and has given her a message, will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days."

"It is a perilous step to slight the reproofs and warnings of God's word or of His Spirit." PP 635

And please, Don't call Ellen White a mystic. Ellen White was not a mystic, she was a prophet, preparing us for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Read her books. I did as a 17-year old, with English being my second language. You can read them, you can understand them, and can love them.

5. Don't leave Christ - and don't leave the church.

"Enfeebled and defective, needing constantly to be warned and counseled, the church is nevertheless the object of Christ's supreme regard." 7T 16

You have probably heard the quote that "the church may appear as about to fall" (2 SM 380). What is interesting is that just before that statement EGW warns us that . . .

"Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme. The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall." She makes this statement in the direct context of Satanic deception. "It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. {2SM 380}

“Divisions will come in the church. Two parties will be developed. The wheat and tares grow up together for the harvest. There will be a shaking of the sieve. The chaff must in time be separated from the wheat. Because iniquity abounds, the love of many waxes cold. It is the very time when the genuine will be the strongest.—Letter 46, 1887.{LDE 173.1}

We are in the shaking time, the time when everything that can be shaken will be shaken. The Lord will not excuse those who know the truth if they do not in word and deed obey His commands. LDE 173

When the law of God is made void the church will be sifted by fiery trials, and a larger proportion than we now anticipate will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.—2SM368

Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children. At that time many will separate themselves from those churches in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His word. Many, both of ministers and people, will gladly accept those great truths which God has caused to be proclaimed at this time to prepare a people for the Lord’s second coming. **The enemy of souls desires to hinder this work; and before the time for such a movement shall come, he will endeavor to prevent it by introducing a counterfeit.** In those churches which he can bring under his deceptive power he will make it appear that God’s special blessing is poured out; there will be manifest what is thought to be great religious interest. Multitudes will exult that God is working marvelously for them, when the work is that of another spirit. Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world.{GC 464.1}

Appeal

Recently my own mother - bless her heart - told my little nephew in Germany that "God is in everything. He is not the creator in Heaven, limited to a certain place, but I see Him in nature, in the waterfall, in the sunset."

Looks like John Harvey Kellogg is alive and well. And I wish he had stuck to cornflakes.

And it looks like I need to have a little talk with my own mother. I did. She said I made her think.

And I need to talk to my nephew.

Will you share the truth in love with someone before it is eternally too late?

It's OK to be SDA.
