

My Search for Truth

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Everyone, at some point in his life, comes to realize that his deepest needs can be satisfied only with supernatural help. Others have said it, and I agree, that all of us have a God-shaped hole in our hearts that can be filled in no other way. I did not always think this way. This is an account of how my own God-shaped hole came to be filled.

The year was 1976. Already a married man with two children, I had physically survived the war in Vietnam more than a decade earlier. But the principled boy that entered the service came away from the experience with the battle scars of a guilty conscience over surrendering nearly all the nobler virtues by which the world’s truly admirable men are appropriately measured.

The road to prodigality may have steep downgrades for one man, and gradual ones with twisting turns for another. The godly influence of my paternal grandfather and the decent values and healthy work ethic learned in my own home certainly worked to help shape the basically decent youth I was when I entered the Army in 1962. But when one associates with less principled peers over several years’ time, it is not altogether strange that he begins to behave in much the same fashion. On one particularly shameful occasion, I took my GI (government issue) Bible and threw it forcefully into a nearby dumpster. God did not zap me, though I had insolently dared Him to do so. Perhaps He saw in me a wretched, confused soul crying out inwardly for answers, even though my outward body language gave the appearance of daring Heaven to take my life, if in fact there were a God somewhere out there.

Three years after the Bible trashing incident I would undertake to complete a higher education. Or was it really a *lower* education? In a Western Civilization course, my instructor offhandedly included a couple books as recommended outside reading. Oh, the power of the printed word! Before he knows it, this young man finds himself pseudo-intellectualizing with Darwin on his *Voyage of the Beagle*. Having thus rather casually cast aside belief in a literal creation of mankind, in its place adopting an evolutionary point of view, the stage was set for a near-fatal deathblow to all my Christianity. A second heretical book nearly completed the job.

Along came Thomas Paine, that heroic pamphleteer of the Revolutionary War era. His book *The Age of Reason* was a merciless attack upon all the elements of faith that make up Christianity—elements such as the virgin birth and the miracles of Jesus. But the recent impressions made by Darwin’s speculations made it rather easy to embrace Paine’s self-proclaimed deism (alas! more accurately a species of infidelity).

“Intellectual honesty” would hereafter be my plea for excusing myself from church attendance with my wife. I at least would not play the hypocrite, making a show of being a Christian when I had jettisoned most of its characteristic teachings. Somehow I clung to this shallow self-deception for 10 years.

The year 1976 found me living a life that lacked both direction and purpose—something akin to what Thoreau termed quiet desperation. Despite the unbounded optimism that the mass media gushed in the mid-1970s, I was locked in an intellectual struggle to make sense of the age-old problems of war, suffering, death, and a possible future existence. I wanted to know the real truth.

By this time I was materially successful on the outside but tortured within. Many a sleepless night found me struggling over the great issues confronting an increasingly troubled world. But I had left myself no reserves with which to explain these troubles, and I had no reason to believe that there was any way of arriving at comforting answers. And so I resolved to find out for myself. I would invest \$829 in a 54-volume set of the Great Books of the Western World. Surely the greatest minds this world has produced over the millennia would, between them, provide all the clues I needed. I had only to sort through the puzzle pieces to put the big picture together.

In this state of mind, I would soon learn that God knew all this about me and much, much more. He recognized in me a heart willing to know the truth about life's big questions: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? In fact He knew me so intimately that He spared me the time and expense that I would have invested in poring over great books written by great men, only to arrive at the conclusion that man, unaided, cannot grasp the great spiritual truths that answer the big questions.

God knew also that I am inclined to make an uncompromising quest of anything I decide to collect. That had been true of my complete sets of baseball, football, and hockey cards. It had been true of my collection of Elvis Presley records—possibly the most complete in the world in 1976.

I recall attending a movie, *The Exorcist*, about that same time. I was completely shocked into a terrifying sense that real demons are active in the affairs of mankind. Nothing in my past experience prepared me for this frightening revelation, and I remember lying in bed all that night, trembling in abject fear of what was going on in dimensions unseen.

My wife and I spent a day of my summer vacation by going to a Detroit Tigers baseball game on August 25. After returning home I uncharacteristically decided to stay up a bit longer to read mail that had accumulated over the days we had been gone. By now the hour was getting quite late, and my wife decided to flick on the TV. Not being much of a night owl, I had never watched Tom Snyder's *Tomorrow* show; after all, I normally hadn't been able to stay up long enough even to get past Johnny Carson's monologue on the *Today* show, which preceded this program!

Moments into the show, one of the guests that evening, an author by the name of Hal Lindsey, caught my attention. He was discussing the reasons why he felt his best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, was finding such a warm reception with readers around the country. Lindsey talked about the inerrancy of Bible prophecy—how this was the only book whose predictions

were 100% accurate because inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Having majored in English, I had read a great many books, but this topic so intrigued me that I was waiting for the public library to open the next morning so that I could check out this book and its claims. That very evening, August 26, 1976, I began reading *The Late Great Planet Earth*. The material on prophecy was riveting, and I soon felt myself being drawn somehow into the very presence of God there in the quiet of my bedroom. Lindsey concluded several chapters with frank invitations that readers accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. The appeals were very simple, inviting the reader to ask Jesus to accept that sinner's imperfect life. The reader, in turn, might accept the gift of Christ's forgiveness. In this simple transaction, requiring only a feeble, tentative faith, Christ would enter the sinner's life and make it pleasing to God.

No more than 69 pages into a 180-page book, I found myself convinced that God alone had the answers I had been seeking for so long. I felt urged by Heaven to confess my sins and seek the peace of which Lindsey seemed so confident. I was not disappointed. I knew with absolute surety, then and there, that God heard my sincere prayer, and that I was on my way to being a real Christian. (I am talking about becoming a Christian by choice, by a highly conscious faith-choice, and not merely by adding one's name to a church roll.) And so on the night of August 26, 1976, I was converted to the religion of Jesus Christ. I never enjoyed so peaceful a night's rest in my life. That night, alone with God, I had finally reached the turning point of my entire life.

I have often looked back to the events of that evening in wonder that God must have loved me so much as to find me when I needed Him most. The consciousness that all my past sins had been rolled off my back and that Jesus had already borne those burdens on a cruel cross, came as healing balm to a soul which only the day before had felt utter hopelessness. I think also of the chain of events that prepared me to accept God's proffered hand that fateful night. He knew, far better than I, that I was making a sincere attempt to know the truth about life's big questions. I have already mentioned my Great Books scheme. Then there was the scary movie—enough to frighten a grown man into the stark realization of just how helpless we humans are against the forces of evil . . . without Divine intervention on our behalf. And finally the timing of Lindsey's life-changing book. Only the Holy Spirit could know the very best time to reach our minds and hearts, and if we are open to His leading, He will not fail to accomplish the mission of saving our souls.

As I reflected on the years previous to my conversion, I began to piece together some of the links in a chain of events along my journey—links of which I was ignorant at the time. There was the day that dear old Grandpa passed away. He would have given his final sermon on May 2, 1971, but Grandpa felt ill and told Grandma that he needed to lie down for a few moments before church services began. He quietly passed away in his sleep in the parsonage next to our old church in Detroit. But it wasn't until much later that I learned how he had died with his prayer list on his breast.

I know that Grandpa was very concerned about his family. When a Billy Graham evangelistic meeting was scheduled for television, he would phone our home and ardently encourage us to

watch. How disappointing he must have been that we always seemed to find something else to watch. Yet to think that this man's prayers for me were answered more than five years after his death, well, I can't wait to meet Grandpa in Heaven and thank him for sending up my name to the heavenly throne. Somehow I always think of him when I come across these Bible passages: "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works to follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

Reference has been made to my penchant for collecting, and how I believe God has used this idiosyncrasy to bless me. Upon completing the book that led to my conversion, I found myself frequenting Christian bookstores. I was fast becoming acutely aware of my responsibility to rear my two little children in a Christian home setting. I wanted to do all in my power to steer their feet into right paths from an early age (they were only seven and five at the time); after all, I was well acquainted with false paths from my own bitter experience. By this time I was also reading two versions of the Bible for myself, one of which was *The Children's Bible* (Golden Press)! I wanted to make very sure that I understood the gist of what the Scriptures had to say, English majors notwithstanding!

A single Little Golden Book recounting the story of David and Goliath might make a satisfactory addition to a home library, but not in *my* home. If there were other Golden books treating religious themes, I would also procure them. I'm into complete sets, not halfway measures. It might be obsessive, it might be compulsive, but it's a fair descriptor of who I am. I say it again: God also knew this, and therefore I simply could not rest until the one remaining but elusive Golden Press publication was in my hands. The only problem was that this volume was beamed at adults, and being published in 1957, it was already long out of print. Its title was *The World's Great Religions*, jointly published by Time Incorporated, the *Life* magazine people.

After a most diligent search, I finally located a single copy of the book at the Macomb County Library. Now began a series of revelations of truth that I could not have foreseen in my wildest dreams. At that time I was persuaded that one could be a quiet Christian and never add his name to a church roll. I had not yet acquainted myself with Paul's pointed Biblical teaching: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:25). I was to be disabused of my false notion in short order, but most certainly not in a way I could have predicted.

The World's Great Religions is one of those coffee table-sized publications, replete with full-color photos and illustrations. I briefly reviewed the basic tenets of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism, before turning to Christendom. Remember, I was trying to justify *not* affiliating myself with any creed or denomination. Thus I read the section on Christendom very carefully. As I read, I began wondering why there were so many different Christian denominations in the world. Something must be terribly wrong or there wouldn't be such a confusing array of faiths, yet each evidently professing to have the truth. This seemed to me very alien and unlike anything Jesus Christ had in mind for church unity. Hadn't I only recently read in the Bible about "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5)?

Then I came upon a two-page spread (pages 204-205), a chart titled “Christians, Their Practices.” It is quite a wonderful chart, placed there to be a handy basis of comparison between ten large and six smaller Christian groups. The capsule examination of the ten compares each on the basis of six categories: (1) membership and assets; (2) basis of authority, government of church; (3) fundamental theology and basic beliefs; (4) baptism, communion, and other sacraments; (5) concepts of salvation and afterlife; and (6) history and special characteristics.

This chart absolutely captivated my attention, as it permitted me to make informed comparisons by using the six categories to compare and contrast the 10 featured church bodies: (1) Roman Catholics, (2) Eastern Orthodox, (3) Lutherans, (4) Presbyterians, (5) Anglicans, (6) Baptists, (7) Methodists, (8) Congregationalists, (9) Disciples of Christ, and (10) Latter-day Saints (Mormons). My conscious purpose was to come away from even this study with a justification for excusing myself from any formal fellowship. That smug attitude was soon to be erased forever.

After sifting through all this information and carefully comparing each denomination’s characteristics against what the Bible itself teaches, I rather easily was able to mentally cross off all ten groups from my admittedly preconceived idea of an ideal, Bible-based church. So far, so good, thought I, my smugness still intact.

At the bottom of the spread the chart rounds out with a much briefer thumbnail sketch of those six smaller groups. The Coptic Church is the only one of the six that isn’t based in the United States. The remaining five are the Adventists; Church of Christ, Scientist; Jehovah’s Witnesses; Unitarians and Universalists (in the process of merging in 1957); and Friends (Quakers).

Once again, I ruled out all of them . . . except one. All that is said of the Adventists is that they “have 300,000 U.S. members (one million in world); largest are Seventh-day Adventists. Stress imminent end of world and Second Coming of Christ, Who will destroy evil, reign on a purified earth.” The thumbnail sketch seemed vaguely Biblical, at least, but I needed more information. That highly unusual description intrigued me to the point of looking in the Yellow Pages for the nearest Seventh-day Adventist church. Intellectual honesty would not permit me to scratch off the last possible candidate until I learned firsthand more of their belief system. My smugness was about to vanish forever within a matter of hours. It was now December, 1976, less than four months since my conversion experience.

In those days I was a pharmaceutical salesman with a territory on Detroit’s east side and a few northeastern suburbs. Once I located the nearest church to the route in which I was presently working, I scheduled an oil change at a service station in Warren, less than two blocks away. While waiting, I casually strolled over to the church unannounced to inquire whether its pastor might be able to tell me more about Adventist beliefs.

Pastor Edmund Grentz “just happened” to be in his office and gave me a warm but not aggressive welcome. If he had tried to do a sales number on me, this story would have turned out

differently. As it was, he calmly related to me the whole story of a great controversy between God and Satan, a controversy initiated by Satan himself in Heaven and later transferred to Planet Earth shortly after Creation, a controversy that is still being waged for every living soul. The pastor's ready grasp of the whole sweep of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, made a wonderful impression on me. I felt as though God Himself was rewarding me for being serious enough to make this honest inquiry. Everything Pastor Grentz related agreed perfectly with my recent reading of the entire Bible. More than this, he represented accurately the belief system of Adventists, whose expectation of the Second Coming is part and parcel of its name. All of this came as welcome news to a soul hungering and thirsting to know not merely any truth but *the* truth.

After 20 or 30 minutes of listening in rapt attention, I excused myself to leave, knowing my car should be off the hoist. Passing toward the exit, we passed through the foyer, and Pastor Grentz casually handed me a bulletin left from the previous weekend. He said something like: "By the way, we worship on Saturdays here. We believe that the seventh-day Sabbath of the Bible is the proper day of rest." (This, of course, forms the other important component in the name Seventh-day Adventist.) The pastor's last comment hit me like a thunderbolt. Instantly I *knew*, I *absolutely knew*, that God had led me there that day to discover the lone church on earth that believes in and observes *all* of the Ten Commandments. Even so I would study the matter further to be completely certain that these folks didn't have some flawed doctrine. That wouldn't be difficult, as the bulletin's back flap listed most of the doctrines of the denomination, and *all* of them provided unambiguous Scripture references. I now had something in common with the noble Bereans, who "received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

The excitement of these unfolding discoveries was exceeded only by one thing in my entire life's history up to that time, and that was my conversion of only a few months previous. I would soon be on my way to attending Seventh-day Adventist services faithfully on the Lord's true Sabbath, and after three more months of intensive study into every church doctrine with Pastor Kenneth Lee and his wife Rosalie, I joyfully entered the baptismal waters of the church in East Detroit (a small satellite of the Warren congregation). That unforgettable day was February 19, 1977.

Did my spiritual journey reach an end with my baptism? Hardly. The thrill of so many wonderful things happening to me in fewer than six months only constrained me to want to do service to the God Who so graciously had led me away from a worldly, empty life, to a place where I might find full-time employment in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with other honest seekers after truth.

Before I had even become a church member, Mrs. Lee gave me a Christmas gift, a copy of *The Desire of Ages*. As I began to devour this exquisite volume, no one needed to "inform" me that its author had the gift of inspiration. The more I read, the greater my conviction that this Ellen G. White lady must have somehow been *on the very scene* to write with such authority and conviction. At my first camp meeting in Grand Ledge, Michigan, in 1977, I purchased the entire Spirit of Prophecy library and began systematically drinking in "the message." When I

eventually came to Sister White's comments on topics such as the danger of reading infidel authors like Thomas Paine, no one needed to persuade me that her messages were inspired; I had had first-hand experience in nearly being derailed from Christianity forever because of Paine's and Darwin's readings.

About a year after my baptism I entered into denominational work with Christian Record Braille Foundation. I was privileged to call upon blind persons, enroll them in Bible courses, pray with them in their homes, and recruit blind youth for summer camp. Later I worked for a number of years as a principal and teacher in Seventh-day Adventist schools. Today I am back as editor at Christian Record Services (under its present name). I am chiefly responsible for editing nine different magazines, managing a lending library, and supervising a Bible correspondence school. It is wonderfully rewarding work. How ironic that my own *spiritual* blindness was dramatically removed upon my conversion 27 years ago! John Newton had it just about right as he penned the immortal lines: "Amazing grace! how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see."

In summary, the only thing I can say in my own behalf is that I knew I needed help. God filled a gaping hole in my heart. In answer to my need, I not only found in the Bible the voice of God to my soul, but in Christ my soul hunger has been satisfied. "And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). Evidently God accepts any honest-hearted approximation of seeking "truth" in general, or Him in particular!

I am deeply grateful that God knows us so intimately. In His omniscience He knows the methods to use in leading us in the path of life eternal. If He can do that for me, He can do it for anyone. The praise is all His. This is a true account of my actual experience.