

## **“MY SOUL IS ON THE WING FOR GLORY”: ADVENTIST SPIRITUALITY, 1850–1863**

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My soul is on the wing for glory. I long to reflect the image of the Lord Jesus. O when shall I be made like him, perfect, as my Father which is in Heaven. . . . His promises are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus, and if I do not claim them all and go on my way rejoicing it is my own fault. O may the Lord prepare me for every good word and work, and eventually save me with that blessed company who have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb.<sup>2</sup>

This brief excerpt taken from an 1853 letter submitted to *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, the communication vehicle of the Sabbatarian post-Disappointment Adventists, captures the essence of their spiritual aesthetic.<sup>3</sup> United by a passionate belief in the soon coming of Christ and the seventh-day Sabbath, these believers shared an experience of God’s transforming presence that was as central to their commitment to the Advent movement as any specific doctrine or ritual practice.<sup>4</sup> These were individuals who had experienced revival-religion conversion: they knew conviction of sinfulness and the joyous relief that accompanied acceptance by God. This experiential knowledge motivated them to organize their lives around achieving union with God, whatever the personal cost.

The *Review’s* publication of individual and group spiritual experience forms the subject matter for this study of early Adventist spirituality because early Adventist experience shines out through the letters, the testimonies, and the articles featured there. The pages of the *Review* provide what Mary Frohlich calls “the material object—the actual, concrete things we study when we study spirituality.”<sup>5</sup> While the *Review* contains extensive doctrinal studies, the reader

<sup>1</sup>The authors wish to acknowledge with thanks the generosity and support of the Faculty Grants Committee of Walla Walla College.

<sup>2</sup>R. B. Wheeler, “From Sister Wheeler,” *Review and Herald*, August 4, 1853, 47.

<sup>3</sup>The name of this journal, originally called *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* and now called *Adventist Review*, has over the years been familiarly known as the *Review*, the name by which it shall be referred to in this article.

<sup>4</sup>While these individuals would eventually form the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the period between the failure of William Miller’s millennial predictions in 1844 and formal organization in 1863, they were simply Sabbatarian Adventists, believing that the Advent of Christ was near and that the date, October 22, 1844, held prophetic significance.

<sup>5</sup>Mary Frohlich, “Spiritual Discipline, Discipline of Spirituality: Revisiting Questions of Definition and Method,” *Spiritus: Journal of Christian Spirituality* 1 (2001): 71.

can find the evidences of lived Christian life (spiritual experience) interspersed among the theological arguments and business reports. The excerpts from these faith experiences reveal early Adventists' spiritual landscapes and journey.

*Christian Spirituality: Toward an  
Understanding of the Topic*

While there are many definitions of Christian spirituality, most focus on the individual experience of the presence of God and the transformations of consciousness and lifestyle that result from that encounter. Spiritual knowledge is experiential and provides a way to organize and respond to all other types of information and events. As William Stringfellow notes: "Whatever else may be affirmed about a spirituality which has a biblical precedent and style, spiritual maturity or spiritual fulfillment necessarily involves the *whole* person—body, mind and soul, place, relationships—in connection with the whole of creation throughout the era of time."<sup>6</sup> Stressing a lived experience of connection or communion with the transcendent rather than cognitive assent to a theologically orthodox belief set, the various definitions suggest ways to appreciate the interior spiritual world that can accompany religious faith. The landscape of the spiritual realm possesses its own geography, landmarks, places and spaces to explore, its own rhythm and cadence, laws and graces. Familiarity with this reality depends jointly on God's grace and individual spiritual vision and commitment to devote the time required to explore the territory.

Frohlich points out that "lived spirituality is an ongoing dynamic activity in which individuals and groups create and recreate meaning, joy, and shared life from whatever materials are at hand. It is always a bricolage (a patching together, a creative reinterpretation, a claiming-as-one's-own) of a somewhat happenstance conglomeration of elements from nature, historical accident, and established traditions."<sup>7</sup> Borrowing from the work of de Certeau, Frohlich asserts "lived spirituality is basically tactical rather than strategic," in its task to creatively organize the material at hand in a spiritually meaningful manner. "To say that lived spirituality is tactical rather than strategic is to say that it is more a 'making do' than a 'controlling' or 'grasping'; it has more in common with managing to survive in the thick of a wilderness than with flying over that wilderness pointing out the sights."<sup>8</sup>

If spirituality is, in fact, as suggested by Alister McGrath, "the quest for a fulfilled and authentic religious life, involving the bringing together of the ideas distinctive of that religion and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of that religion,"<sup>9</sup> then Seventh-day Adventist spirituality

<sup>6</sup>William Stringfellow, *The Politics of Spirituality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 22.

<sup>7</sup>Frohlich, 68.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 2.

is ultimately the experience of living out (in the face of eschatological delay) the conviction that now is the time to prepare for eternal life in God's presence.

Early Seventh-day Adventist spirituality arose out of a specific set of religious expectations, practices, and experiences, and reflected both the joy of personal experience with the transforming grace of God's presence and the angst of uncertainty that accompanied participation in the millennial disappointment. In this paper, we examine the critical events shaping early Adventist spiritual experience, the religious roots and traditions that informed the life of the proto-Adventist Church, and the way in which an idiosyncratic Seventh-day Adventist spirituality (Frohlich's experiential world of "meaning, joy and shared life") was constructed in the mid-nineteenth century.

### *Critical Events Shaping Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality*

At least three major shaping events can be identified for the initial members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church: the effect of the Great Awakenings on the American religious context,<sup>10</sup> William Miller's prophetic interpretation heralding the imminent Second Advent,<sup>11</sup> and the Great Disappointment of 1844.<sup>12</sup> Each of these historical events supplied material for the Adventist spiritual bricolage.

### The Second Great Awakening

The American spiritual awakenings reflected the growing disillusionment with a society unleashed from Divine imperatives and mandates, and formal religious

<sup>10</sup>For a helpful examination and discussion of the major American awakenings, see William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>11</sup>William Miller understood the prophecy of Dan 8:14, which speaks of "two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings," to point to the return of Christ sometime between March 21, 1843, and October 22, 1844. Millerism, the adoption of his interpretation of the biblical passage, has been extensively researched and documented. David Rowe's work is helpful for understanding the movement (*Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800-1850* [Chico, CA.: Scholars Press, 1985]). Edwin Scott Gaustad, ed. offers a valuable bibliography of the movement (*The Rise of Adventism: Religion and Society in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* [New York: Harper and Row, 1974]). Isaac C. Wellcome offers an insider's view of the phenomenon (*History of the Second Advent Message and Mission, Doctrine and People* [Yarmouth, ME: I. C. Wellcome, 1874]); see also Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ Jesus* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1835).

<sup>12</sup>The failure of Christ to return as predicted on October 22, 1844, became known as the Great Disappointment to people within the Advent movement. See Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). For a view of the lasting effects of Millerism and the Great Disappointment on the shaping of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, see Francis D. Nichol, *The Midnight Cry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1944).

observances that satisfied social ideas of religious duty without significantly altering the interior experience of the individual. While trans-Atlantic in nature, fed by Anglican as well as German pietism and influenced by the radical dissenters,<sup>13</sup> the American Awakenings gave rise to a distinctive response to the emphasis on interior religion. One public venue for the cultivation of this religious impulse was the revival meeting. At these meetings, individuals gathered to participate in a dynamic spiritual exchange focused on common spiritual realities and needs. In its emotionally charged atmosphere, believers, including Anglicans, Quakers, Mennonites, and Baptists, men and women of European, African, and Native American ancestry, “melted” under the force of spiritual power. At the meetings, sins were repented of and salvation sought, while preachers pressed home the necessity of heart religion. In the personal and corporate revival, many perceived the hand of God on the world, and bands of Christians explored ways to realize God’s kingdom in their daily lives. Transformed hearts could lead to a revolution in social ethics as spiritual insight and power were harnessed to build the New Jerusalem.<sup>14</sup>

While interdenominational in nature, the revival format encouraged a whole-person response to the gospel: songs were lively, prayers intense, the preaching theatrical, and audience participation expected as the Spirit moved through the meeting. The meetings were designed to stimulate individual spiritual crisis and evoke a personal appropriation of the grace of God.<sup>15</sup> In a religious style very appropriate to Jacksonian American sensibilities, contact between God and the individual was direct and unmediated by formal institutions, hierarchies, or organizationally mandated rituals or sacraments.<sup>16</sup> Penitents wrestled with the Spirit, and converted individuals stood in the presence and glory of God. God met “man” at the mourners’ bench. In short, direct contact with the power and presence of God (through the Holy Spirit) was as available and accessible to the common person as to the cleric or

<sup>13</sup>See Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1978); for a discussion of these influences, see also B. W. Ball, *The English Connection: The Puritan Roots of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1981).

<sup>14</sup>McLoughlin, 128-130, traces the connection between the stress placed on human ability to change and remake behavior, the obligation of the regenerate to advance God’s will on earth, and the social perfectionism that fueled reform movements in the early nineteenth century.

<sup>15</sup>Charles Grandison Finney, the master of the revival format, was clear that his success came from the stimulation of emotions: “Mankind will not act unless they are excited. . . . Men are so sluggish, there are so many things to lead their minds off from religion and to oppose the influence of the gospel that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them till the tide rises so high as to sweep away the opposing obstacles” (cited in McLoughlin, 125-126).

<sup>16</sup>For a helpful discussion of this link between American cultural sensibility and the religious movements, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

religious virtuoso. The personal encounter with the Divine was an expected, and even mandatory, part of the spiritual experience.

### William Miller and Apocalyptic Prophecy

William Miller's reading of biblical eschatological passages added an additional twist to the religious sensibilities of the early nineteenth century. Christ was returning soon; earthly life was about to pass away, and each individual would stand before God's judgment seat. The impending advent shifted attention to the spiritual dimension of life. Now was the time to make the decision that would seal one's eternal fate. There would be no later opportunity to get ready to meet God. The announcement stimulated renewed interest in biblical prophecy and questions of sanctification and one's relationship to God and neighbor.

Miller's proclamation of the "Advent Near," Christ's soon return, created a climate of urgency and intensity. In light of this great impending event, resources were liquidated to finance tracts and preachers to spread the warning; social, religious, and familial relations were strained by the urgency to believe in the Advent Near; and professions and preparations for careers were abandoned in the pursuit of perfect readiness to stand before the Judge of the universe. Both the level of spiritual intensity and sense of urgency separated the Adventists from their fellow Christians.<sup>17</sup>

The suggestion that the great chasm dividing earth and heaven was about to be dissolved released believers from the yoke of inevitability that bound their lives to conventional understandings of their possibilities and place within the given order of things. It allowed individuals to recognize their deepest longings for union with God. That God was about to change everything legitimated individuals' interior distress with daily experiences in the humanly constructed world and created a desire for an alternate experience. The belief in the Advent Near created a new world where earthly forms were relativized in face of the grand reality of God's redemption. In this new world, attention focused on spiritual goals and eternal destiny: the new order irrupted into reality as the spiritually hungry were fed and the naked were clothed. Pain and alienation were being removed from human experience as God reconciled and reunited the children of Adam. Once unleashed, this transforming power would not be stopped until everything was conformed to God's paradigm. This was the blessed hope that liberated believers from the tyranny of the ordinary and sent them forth singing as pilgrims headed for a better land.<sup>18</sup> They were on their way home to God.

<sup>17</sup>Writing of this time, Seventh-day Adventist cofounder Ellen G. White noted: "We needed great patience, for the scoffers were many. . . . Professed lovers of Jesus scornfully rejected the tidings that He whom they claimed as their best Friend was soon to visit them. They were excited and angered against those who proclaimed the news of His coming, and who rejoiced that they should speedily behold Him in His glory" (*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915], 59-60).

<sup>18</sup>Beverly Beem and Ginger Harwood, "Pilgrims and Strangers: Adventist Spirituality, 1850-1863," *Spectrum* 31/4 (2003): 67-75.

### The Great Disappointment

When prophecies concerning the end of the world failed in 1844, Millerite men as well as women wept all night as millennial hopes were dashed and the movement of the Advent Near was thrown into disarray.<sup>19</sup> Miller publicly made his own peace with the disappointment, renounced the process of date setting, and retained his conviction that the end was nigh. While he stated that he was not cast down or discouraged and that his hope in the coming of Christ was not diminished,<sup>20</sup> his experience was not representative of the masses that had expected to enter the kingdom on October 22, 1844.

The Great Disappointment created a major spiritual and religious crisis for Millerite Adventists. How could they maintain faith in light of the disconfirming evidence? How had they been so mistaken when their position had been based on careful and reasoned study of the Scriptures? What did their failure indicate about the reliability of Scripture or appropriate hermeneutics? How was this failure to be understood and integrated into individual spiritual experience?

The vast majority of Adventists concluded that Miller's hermeneutic and calculations were erroneous and abandoned the movement. Individuals trying to redeem their hope reexamined the material from which their conclusions had been derived and considered varying interpretations of the failure. While some resolved the crisis by acknowledging that their calculations needed to be refigured, others attempted to reconcile the situation on the basis of new revelations given to them in trances, visions, and dreams. These new revelations reframed and interpreted the experience and provided a way to maintain faith in the proximity of Christ's return despite the unanticipated delay.

#### *Maintaining Faith in the Face of Disappointment*

During the months following the Disappointment, those who believed that Miller's hermeneutic was sound (Scripture did indicate that the Advent was near) and that the Advent movement came from God were thrown on their own spiritual resources to weather the storm of disappointment and calumny. They sought God in prayer and meditation, searching the Scriptures for a further word from God. The spiritual confusion, distress, and discouragement needed to be met with clear evidence of God's imprimatur on the movement.

<sup>19</sup>As Hiram Edson, whose subsequent vision of Christ moving from one apartment into another within the heavenly sanctuary became the basis for providing an alternative understanding for the October 22 date, noted: "Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before" (cited in Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America: The Heart of the American Story from Colonial Times to Today*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002), 154.

<sup>20</sup>Miller's own reflections, both on how he arrived at his initial conclusions and how he stood after the Great Disappointment, are recorded in William Miller, *William Miller's Apology and Defence* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1854).

In certain circles, the best demonstration of God's leading was the manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Ellen Gould Harmon, who would become an important agent in the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, stood within such a group. A spiritually intense young person from a strict Methodist Millerite family, Harmon had reveled in the community of believers pressing toward the goal of sanctification in light of the nearness of Christ's return.<sup>21</sup> She struggled to integrate the "truth" of the message (as revealed through its spiritual fruits) with the failure of expectations and received an ecstatic breakthrough while praying with a small band of young women.<sup>22</sup> She was caught up in vision and shown that the believers in the Advent Near were on a journey toward heaven, with Christ leading the way. The path was steep and led away from the world of darkness, and pilgrims must not turn back or they would suffer eternal loss. Thus, whatever disappointment or hardship suffered by Adventists, they must not question the correctness of the Advent message or turn away from preparations to stand in the presence of God. The Second Advent was still near.

Harmon was convicted that her vision needed to be communicated to her former associates, many of whom were struggling to retain their faith. James White, an itinerant Adventist lay preacher who would subsequently be united with Harmon in marriage as well as spiritual labor, heard in Harmon's testimony to the community the very reassurance of God's presence and leading that was needed to revive the failing movement.<sup>23</sup> Harmon's vision served as evidence of God's endorsement of the Advent movement and the validity of continuing in it. The direct communication from God was the guarantee that the Advent message was not the product of human invention or imagination and that their hopes were not in vain. White promoted Harmon's vision as a rallying point for those who accepted "spiritual gifts."

More than a word of reassurance was needed to revitalize the dissipating movement and open the door for the formation of a distinctive spiritual practice. Joseph Bates, an established and recognized Millerite leader, added this necessary element with the introduction of the idea of an important "truth" that had been neglected in their preparation to meet God, the observance of the fourth commandment. Bates convincingly demonstrated to James and Ellen White that the seventh-day Sabbath was a binding command of God and then united with them in coalition-building to restart and maintain the Adventist movement with this new light. James White and Joseph Bates managed to attract a small group of believers to their combined views on "present truth," as they provided a way to integrate the eschatological delay into a comprehensible spiritual journey. Together they labored to redeem millennial expectations in person and in print,

<sup>21</sup>White, 17-63.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 64-67.

<sup>23</sup>Gerald Wheeler, *James White: Innovator and Overcomer* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 38.

preparing broadsides, and answering detractors in various Advent periodicals. God had given them new truth to herald, the seventh-day Sabbath, and spiritual gifts to sustain them along the journey.

*Charismatic Dimensions of Adventist  
Spirituality, 1845-1863*

In the months immediately following the Great Disappointment, prominent Advent movement leaders rejected Ellen White's visions as emotional fanaticism.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of the Whites, Joshua Himes's refusal to consider Ellen White's testimony reflected the established split between charismatic Christians and "formalists."<sup>25</sup> In short, while united by their eschatology, the two groups expressed two divergent pneumatological views, and these views were fundamental to their spiritual formation.

Ellen White's visions were connected to a specific spiritual worldview that posited the importance of personal experience with the Holy Spirit and God's direct communication to individuals under the Spirit's sway. For the group that would rally around Ellen White's visions, belief in spiritual gifts, including that of on-going revelation from God, was essential to their assurance that their faith in the Advent Near was the product of God's work. The Holy Spirit's direct intervention in the lives of believers served as the tangible evidence of God's leading despite the discounting judgment of family, friends, and religious authorities. Thus dependence on the Holy Spirit and recognition of God's leading through visions became an integral part of this group's spiritual endeavor. A *Review* account of an 1857 meeting reflects the group's charismatic style and the centrality of an affective encounter with God in their worship and spirituality. As James White recounted the session, he reported:

We went to the house feeling that we had nothing for the people. We told brethren on the way that we could not decide on any subject, and wished them to select. We sung a hymn, and had great freedom in prayer; sung again, but felt perplexed as to duty. In this state of mind, knowing not what to do, we gave liberty to others to use the time, when Mrs. W. arose and spoke with much freedom. The place was filled with the Spirit of the Lord. Some rejoiced, others wept. All felt that the Lord was drawing very near.

<sup>24</sup>The negativity of leaders, such as William Miller and his chief lieutenant Joshua Himes, was not particularly focused on the content of Ellen Harmon White's visions, but was a generalized response to the numerous claims of visions and direct revelations that came pouring in at the time of the Great Disappointment.

<sup>25</sup>Even before the Millerite crisis, questions concerning spiritual manifestations in public worship divided Christians in various congregations, a tension that continued within the Advent movement but which was superseded by the immediacy of the Second Coming. Visions, trances, and ecstatic states, as well as individual impressions of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, were regular phenomena among certain Adventist groups (including those of Ellen White's Portland, Maine, home), but rejected by others. The leaders of the largest segment of Adventists distrusted and discounted such displays as "enthusiasm."

How sacred the place. Those present will never forget that meeting. When seated, Mrs. W. began to praise the Lord, and continued rising higher and higher in perfect triumph in the Lord, till her voice changed, and the deep, clear shouts of Glory! Hallelujah! thrilled every heart. She was in vision.

Unknown to us there was a poor, discouraged brother present, who had thrown his armor down, in consequence, in part, at least, of neglect by his wealthy brethren, and was returning to strong habits which threatened the happiness of himself and family. A most touching and encouraging message was given for him. By the grace of God he raised his head that very evening, and he and his good wife are again happy in hope. Monterey church will never forget that evening. At least they never should. . . .

In the afternoon the Lord's Supper was partaken by the believing assembly. But while in prayer at the commencement of the meeting, awful solemnity rested down upon the place. Most all wept, several aloud. The scenes of Calvary came vividly up, and we all felt that it was good to weep before the Lord. . . .

Sabbath, the 17th, we spent with the church at Battle Creek, and enjoyed freedom and a blessed season in speaking upon the unity of the church of Christ and perpetuity of the Gifts. We gave it as our opinion that instead of undervaluing what Gifts are manifested among us, it would be better to thank God for what we have, and pray for more.<sup>26</sup>

The report stands as a record of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit and the affective response of the believers and concludes with an exhortation that the gifts (charisma) of the Spirit should be actively sought rather than rejected. The account includes waiting for direction from the Spirit, the role of prayer in preparation for a manifestation of God's presence, congregational rejoicing and weeping, ecstatic states and utterances, the salvific work accomplished (a discouraged brother rescued), and the unity effected by the charismatic experience.

Private and corporate worship were shaped by the belief in the power of the Spirit to change lives, to open the mind to the Bible truth, to heal, and to manifest the power and will of God. Brother G. W. Holt offered an account in which he relates the manner in which the Holy Spirit functioned in a particular meeting in 1857:

The power of God was manifest in our first meeting. The preaching of Bro. Cornell was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

The spirit of confession was cherished in our meetings. And as heart-felt and deep confessions were made, the cry for mercy from a broken heart, was breathed forth with earnestness and fervency that we scarce ever witnessed before. The Lord heard, and souls were set at liberty. Shouts of "glory" from full hearts might have been heard afar off. Parents confessed to children, and children to parents. Some have been converted, and are going to mount Zion with their parents. . . . The conversation we hear now,

<sup>26</sup>J[ames] W[hite], "Report of Meetings!" *Review and Herald*, October 22, 1857, 196-197.

is about “gold, white raiment and eye-salve,” and less about farms, houses, horses and other things of this world.<sup>27</sup>

The charismatic spirituality modeled in this account was precisely the model repressed by the “formal” brethren.

Scores of letters were printed to demonstrate the reality of the spiritual gifts that stood as the evidence of God’s presence and leading. In addition to stories of spiritual and emotional healings, the *Review* carried stories of physical healings. In these accounts, the writers extolled the untapped power of God available for physical healing. The following letter details the case of a woman near death who believed in the power of prayer and was healed through the spiritual ministrations of the faith-filled. It reads:

It is thought by some of the Brethren who attended this meeting, that a brief account of it, through the *Review* and *Herald*, together with a notice of the blessing of God bestowed upon Sister Emeline Rice, might not be out of place.

Sister Rice has been sick with consumption for some months, and apparently brought quite near the grave: Yet she believed it to be the will of Him who said, Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up, that she should be “raised up.” She also believed that the precious promises contained in this scripture were written to be realized by his children at the present day, as much as at any previous time; just as I hope all believers in present truth do; and not as do many, who “know not the scriptures, nor the power of God” fling these promises back, to be realized only by those living in the days of the apostles.

Agreeable to request, Brn. Morse, Butler and others, went to Granville on Friday last. On Sabbath morning we repaired to the house of Sister Rice, found her able to sit up awhile, but quite feeble. Her pale face, sunken eye and emaciated form, with the usual symptoms attending a sure and immediate victory of this fatal disease, were all swift evidences that death would soon set its cold silent seal upon her lips, if the Great Physician of soul and body, did not interpose in her behalf and bid disease depart. But blessed be God, we expected he would. Prayer was made in “faith believing”—and the glory and blessing of God came down. Our Sister arose from her bed, shouting “Glory, glory to God, I am free—I am made every whit whole.”

Sister Rice then rode to Bro. Kendall’s, (one mile,) where we met with brethren from other towns, and with them enjoyed much of the Spirit of God through the Holy Sabbath. Our sister who had just left a room of sickness, and come out to enjoy another meeting with the brethren, gave strong testimonies in favor of the cause of truth. In one exhortation, said she, “If I die within one week, don’t say God did not heal me, for I know the work is done.” The little company of believers in the “third angel’s message,” at Granville, seemed to gain much strength and gather new courage, to “keep the commandments of God,” from this day’s opportunity.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>G. W. Holt, “From Bro. Holt,” *Review and Herald*, February 5, 1857, 110.

<sup>28</sup>A. S. Hutchins, “From Brother Hutchins,” *Review and Herald*, July 8, 1852, 39.

The result of the healing, as noted, was not only the physical restoration of the woman, but the encouragement of the believing community. The spiritual gift of healing was utilized as evidence of the validity of the band's religious ideology.

This story was one of dozens that detailed the effects of the presence of God in the circle of Sabbatarian Advent believers. Producing the *Review* allowed James White and the group most closely associated with him to promote their understanding of the Spirit-led religious life, as well as reinforce faith in Christ's soon appearing. The paper encouraged personal, charismatic religious experience by including reports of meetings, where healings, visions, and physical responses to the Holy Spirit were cited as key evidence of God's presence and the success of the meeting. The accounts of the manifestations of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit simultaneously asserted the group's claim that God was with them and sketched the outlines of a Spirit-led life for believers awaiting Christ's return.

*Sabbatarian Adventist Spirituality: A Journey  
Toward God on the Path of Truth*

Drawing Near to God

The spiritual Psalmist said that it was good for him to draw near to God. He spoke from experience. Some of my readers have had a similar experience. It is a comfort to believe that this article will be read by some who know that it is good to draw near to God. What are some of the effects of so doing—effects which led the Psalmist to pronounce it good?

By drawing near to God, we are made to feel that he is love. It is not difficult to form some conceptions of the power, wisdom and justice of God. We can do all this while we remain at a distance from him. But to know the meaning of the expression, God is love, we must draw near to him. When we are near to him, we are in an atmosphere of love. We feel that God is love. All dread and distrust are banished. We see the propriety of the expression, God is love. We have some knowledge of its meaning. It is the most precious knowledge that we can possess.<sup>29</sup>

Early Adventist spirituality was characterized by personal knowledge of God and firsthand experience of the work of the Holy Spirit. The various testimonies and stories printed in the *Review* underscore the experiential nature of Adventist spirituality. While learning the theory of truth might be a precursor to the experience of truth, knowledge without experience was considered to be incomplete. An article by I. N. Pike entitled "Begin Now: Spoken from Experience" explores the relationship between knowledge and experience. "I would say a word through the *Review* to those who are almost persuaded to obey God, and come out and keep all his commandments. Make a trial." It was only by experiencing life conformed to the proposed standards that a person was in the situation to judge the salutary effects of redeemed living. The spiritual road could only be known in the walking. He explains:

<sup>29</sup>"Drawing Near to God," *Review and Herald*, October 22, 1857, 195.

Do not delay as I have done, in matters that interest the eternal welfare of the soul. I was brought to see the necessity of a change of heart when a youth, but got into a backslidden state, and remained there some five and thirty years; not without some strivings of the Spirit at different times, and often would I resolve anew to start and serve God, yet remained where I was until I was led to see and put in practice the keeping of God's Sabbath, since which time a flood of light has flown in upon my soul that I never before saw, for which I feel to praise and bless God.<sup>30</sup>

Every step forward led the pilgrim further into the path of light.

Spiritual understanding was deepened and progress made when individuals practiced their faith and "put it to the test." The spiritual life of the Advent people was shaped by opening their lives to receive the "truth" God revealed through the leading of the Holy Spirit and then by experiencing the joys of fuller dwelling within God's design. Throughout the *Review* are letters like that of Sister Cynthia Paine, who testified of the movement toward holiness. She wrote to the readers of the paper:

It is a little more than a year since we commenced to keep the seventh day, and we are more and more convinced that we have the truth. The subject of the Sanctuary together with the Sabbath are glorious doctrines to us. New beauties in them do we continually behold, and it is a great wonder to us that we did not see the truth and believe it before; but it was rather difficult to get rid of a tradition which we had had for fifty years. But the Lord was able to bring us to the light, and to rejoice in his precious truths.—And we know that he will finally bring us off victorious, if we put our trust in him.

We know how to prize the company of the saints, now we are so widely separated from them. The blessed hope cheers us that the time is short, and that very soon we shall all meet no more to be parted forever.

Yours, hoping soon to be gathered with all the saints,

Cynthia Paine.<sup>31</sup>

Each edition of the *Review* labored with readers to continue in their journey of faith through Bible study, prayer, and experiment. It is important not to overlook the connection early Adventists perceived between correct doctrine and spirituality. As Mary Borden shared in 1857: "I do not want a good theory merely, but I want the Spirit and power of the Lord to rest upon me, that I may know his will and obey it."<sup>32</sup> The "truth" revealed in the doctrines held spiritual treasure. Elizabeth Degarmo, in an 1854 letter, captured the spiritual riches Sabbath-keeping brought to her experience. Commandment-keeping linked her with the Holy Spirit and filled her with peace and joy. She described filling the night with praise in response to experiencing the truth. She reported: "I have been alone in trying to keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. It brings such sweet peace that I often in the night, while

<sup>30</sup>I. N. Pike, "Begin Now: Spoken from Experience," *Review and Herald*, April 23, 1857, 198.

<sup>31</sup>Cynthia Paine, "From Sister Paine," *Review and Herald*, September 13, 1853, 78.

<sup>32</sup>Mary Borden, "From Sister Borden," *Review and Herald*, March 12, 1857, 151.

meditating on the beauty of the commandments am led to speak out in praise to God. My course I mean shall be onward and upward till I see Jesus."<sup>33</sup>

The value of the doctrinal expositions is best understood when seen in the light of the approaching Advent. Christ was returning for his people and each Christian needed to be ready to meet him. Those who intended to dwell eternally in God's presence began to accommodate themselves to the mind and life of God in the present. The Holy Spirit served as the guide to assist believers in their search for and conformity to ennobling truth. E. M. Barrows reflected on the link between doctrinal light, sanctification, and the preparation to join God. In an 1853 letter to the *Review*, she wrote, "I am thankful that the Lord is so mindful of his people. He has not only given us light and truth, in these last days of peril, but he has given us his holy Spirit, which is to 'lead us into all truth,' and enable us to detect the spirit of error. . . . I love the Lord, and I thank him for all his benefits."<sup>34</sup>

Sister M. A. E. Townsend, requesting that a messenger be sent to further explicate the peculiar Adventist truths, articulated the connection between Adventist doctrine and spiritual progress in this way: "I am as it were almost alone here, in reference to keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. . . . I have never had the privilege of hearing one of our faith preach. O, that some might be directed this way, that we may be taught more perfectly in the way of life."<sup>35</sup>

Based on an examination of the *Review* from 1852-1863, key ingredients of Adventist spirituality can be identified. The writers assume a conversion experience that includes a personal experience of the Holy Spirit and reception of spiritual gifts, the process of sanctification (the preparation to meet God acquired through the exercise of spiritual disciplines), a sense of urgency increased by the impending Advent, and persevering patience. While each of these issues contributed to the emerging Adventist spirituality, a sensibility shaped by the controlling metaphor of a transformative journey toward complete union with God, special attention needs to be given to the emphasis placed on sanctification and patience.

### *Sanctification: The Gold Tried in the Fire*

Readiness for Christ's return required complete conversion, not simply awareness of one's sin and need for a savior. Conversion involved not only the experience of God's grace and love, but a response to that love that gave priority to union with God over any other consideration or concern. The call to stand ready to meet God, conformed to his will and filled with his Spirit, provided the foundation for Sabbatarian Adventist spirituality. The approaching union with God was more important than either the prospects or pain of conventional reality and needed to be pursued with a singleness of

<sup>33</sup>Elizabeth Degarmo, "From Sister Degarmo," *Review and Herald*, August 22, 1854, 15.

<sup>34</sup>E. M. Barrows, "From Sister Barrows," *Review and Herald*, August 4, 1853, 47.

<sup>35</sup>M. A. E. Townsend, "From Sr. Townsend," *Review and Herald*, September 13, 1853, 78.

purpose that happily relinquished anything that would obstruct progress toward the goal. The prime characteristic of the converted Christian was seen as the willingness to abandon cultural, familial, and religious convention in order to progress toward holiness by conforming to God's revealed truth.

Conforming their lives to revealed doctrinal truth stood as a significant part of the Adventist spiritual model in that it simultaneously tested their devotion to their goal and deepened the experimental aspect of their faith. The urgency of living in the last days, the time of Judgment, called believers to discern between things of earthly and heavenly value, to be willing to sacrifice the earthly for the heavenly, the temporal for the eternal. In an 1858 letter, Lucinda Dawson exhorted the community to avail themselves of the power of the Holy Spirit to transform their lives in preparation for the Advent. Calling for a more complete sanctification in light of the shortness of time, she wrote:

I feel as if we were resting too much on the theory of the truth while it is not having that sanctifying influence upon our lives that it should have; for we must be pure and without fault before the throne of God. Is it not time for us to arise and put on the whole armor of God, and prepare for the loud cry of the Third Angel's Message? O for more faith to overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil with all of his works, that we may have a right to the tree of life and enter through the gates into the city. Who of us that profess the truth now, will have these glorious privileges? and who will be shaken out? O let us prepare for the coming crisis.<sup>36</sup>

Many writers pressed the urgency of attending to spiritual matters based on the shortness of time. The reminder of the nearness of the Advent accompanied many exhortations to holiness, as believers such as Brother L. Schellhous directed the Adventists to attend to their sanctification: "We have no time to lose. I feel the need of a deeper work of grace in my heart, for the time draws near when he that shall come will come and will not tarry. May the Lord help each and every one of us to be in earnest; to be zealous and repent. May we realize that without holiness of heart no man shall see the Lord."<sup>37</sup>

"Gold tried in the fire" is one of the dominant images in early Adventist spiritual rhetoric, appearing frequently in letters and articles. Brother Schellhous wrote again: "My dear companion is striving with me to overcome and to heed the admonition to buy of him gold tried in the fire that we may be rich towards God, and raiment that we may be clothed, and eye-salve that we may see clearly the way of life."<sup>38</sup> Based on the imagery used in Rev 3:18, gold tried in the fire, white raiment, and eye-salve, the necessary elements for entrance into eternal life, are the treasures of ultimate value and ultimate price. In the article "Buy and Sell," A. J. Richmond sees the anointing eye-salve as the gift of the Holy Spirit, but the precious treasure of gold tried in the fire, purified of all dross, must be purchased. "Yes, *bought!* And don't be surprised if in following the

<sup>36</sup>Lucinda Dawson, "From Sister Dawson," *Review and Herald*, July 8, 1858, 62.

<sup>37</sup>L. Schellhous, "From Bro. Schellhous," *Review and Herald*, July 22, 1858, 79.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

counsel of this Witness, and of the Holy Spirit in buying them, you are called to part with *all* you have in this world."<sup>39</sup>

For this group, Sabbath-keeping, requiring a break with tradition, convention, and custom, and frequently engendering a host of social sanctions, provided the believers with a test of their own commitment to the process of sanctification.

### *Perseverance: The Patience of the Saints*

One final component of Adventist spirituality must be mentioned: patient perseverance. It is not enough to renounce the world and embrace the hope of Christ's return. The journey toward God must be continued until its desired result is obtained, whatever the ultimate timetable. It was by clinging to the hope despite opposition, lack of evidence of immediate fulfillment, and the disadvantages entailed that the "gold tried in fire" was obtained. As Sister Tryphena N. Elliot wrote in 1858:

I ever believed that God led his people out on the tenth of the seventh month, 1844, and that they did his will in preaching time. I then expected to see my Saviour coming with clouds, in power and great glory, to take the throne of his father David, and reign forever and ever; but the two thousand and three hundred days ended, and the Lord did not come. But as I had come out of Babylon, I had no desire to return again, therefore the last five verses of the 10th of Hebrews were very precious to me. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."<sup>40</sup>

Adventists persevered despite repeated eschatological disappointments, the community derision, and the great loneliness of pursuing what was for many a solitary path. The act of holding onto belief in the face of dashed expectations stood as the separating point between the saints and those who returned to the world (or at least relinquished their Advent hope). This act of keeping the faith when outward confirmation was denied became an important aspect of the Adventist spiritual experience.

### *The Review and Adventist Spiritual Formation*

For many Adventists, the *Review* replaced the local congregation or denomination as their provider of religious education, guidance, and inspiration. The pages of the early *Review* are filled with encouragement and instruction in the spiritual disciplines, particularly prayer, Scripture-reading, family worship, public meeting, and active service. The articles, exhortations,

<sup>39</sup>A. J. Richmond, "Buy and Sell," *Review and Herald*, October 29, 1857, 206.

<sup>40</sup>Tryphena N. Elliot, "From Sister Elliot," *Review and Herald*, July 22, 1858, 79.

and letters served as a resource for spiritual education, presenting spiritual-growth materials gathered from a variety of Christian sources. Sections of each publication were devoted to exhorting individuals to continue or commence spiritual disciplines and practices: Bible study, private and public prayer, renunciation of “the world,” attendance and participation in “social meetings,” and the articulation of personal spiritual experience in testimony. The *Review* stressed the importance of developing a spiritual voice, a move important not only for its association with acceptable notions of spiritual development in the pietistic and emerging holiness revivalism of the day, but also as an ongoing part of individual participation in the group’s spiritual vitality.

The articles devoted to the various spiritual disciplines reveal the group’s basic spiritual stance: the soul is to be cultivated. Believers are to actively pursue their sanctification and proceed on their spiritual journey. Waiting for Christ is not a matter of confessing one’s sins, being forgiven, and then waiting passively for God’s promised coming. The hope-filled believer grows in grace through intentional spiritual practice. The *Review* provides the scattered ones with material to stimulate both love for God and knowledge concerning how to “draw near to Him.”

As well as functioning as the nerve center of the Sabbatarian Advent group, the *Review* was a steady source of spiritual affirmation and instruction. The following notice placed in the *Review* reveals the active role the paper played in creating a spiritual community and training believers to develop their spiritual voice:

Wanted—On our table a large pile of spirited and interesting articles and communications, from, not only the Corresponding Editors, but also every interested believer of present truth in the land. Where are the pens consecrated to the cause of truth? Where are those all over the land who we are constrained to believe might, and therefore ought, to have a few thoughts to utter in behalf of the message, or a few familiar words of exhortation or experience, for the encouragement of their brethren and sisters?<sup>41</sup>

The harvest of the appeal is reflected in the subsequent letters where believers submitted their personal testimonies of the power of God in their own lives.

The *Review* articulated the identity of the Sabbatarian Adventists as a spiritual community preparing itself as the bride of Christ. The discourse in the *Review* provided evidence that Adventist religious commitments were part of a reasoned and reasonable spiritual pilgrimage, however disparate from the privileged (dominant) religious traditions and conventions, and pressed its readers to continue the journey.

### *Conclusion*

The pages of the early years of the *Review* are a fruitful source of material for the reconstruction of early Adventist spirituality, as they record the spiritual experiences of a people longing for the fulfillment of the millennial hope. The

<sup>41</sup>“Wanted,” *Review and Herald*, November 24, 1859, 8.

articles and letters reveal their spiritual practices and the meaning they found and made in the face of the millennial delay. They document the efforts of disappointed millenarians to create an authentic spirituality that integrated both their hopes and their frustrations. They reveal the spiritual landscape of a people who have known both the mountaintop of expectation and the valley of disappointment and have then been consigned to journey across the plain of ordinary life.

Early Adventist spirituality was shaped by the major features of the contemporaneous religious climate and the pain of the Great Disappointment. Those who clung to the Adventist hope retained their Second Great Awakening experience of the immediacy of God and maintained the Millerite sense of urgency concerning the importance of preparing for life in God's presence. They abandoned social approval in pursuit of a life anchored by faith in the reliability of Scripture and prophecy, encouraged by manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and characterized by a deep and constant longing for union with God. Perceiving a radical separation between themselves and other Christians that they saw as having a system of beliefs without an accompanying zeal,<sup>42</sup> they pictured themselves as pilgrims headed for "Glory." On this journey, anything that distracted from the destination had to be jettisoned as they sought the "gold tried in the fire" that made them rich in eternal goods. Finally, these post-Disappointment Adventists realized that, despite their fondest hopes, seeing this journey to its end required perseverance and patience from those whom God would save "with that blessed company who have made their robes white in the blood of the lamb."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Godfrey T. Anderson, "Sectarianism and Organization, 1846-1864," in *Adventism in America*, ed. Gary Land (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 38.

<sup>43</sup>Wheeler, 47.