

My Early Experience

By Frank Zimmerman

*Psalm 119:130 - "The entrance of your words gives light;
it gives understanding unto the simple."*

I WAS raised as a Catholic. My parents came to Canada from Switzerland, after the second world war.

My father didn't want to have children, but my Mom did. My Mom once told a story to me about when I was born. My father was not pleased that more children were coming (there was already one girl, born a year previous), so my Mom says she thought in her mind,

"If you don't want him, then I give him to God."

And so she did. And so, throughout my childhood and youth I was often intensely interested in spiritual things! Interesting how that works.

I had many desires for holiness in my childhood, but it was a real *Romans 7* experience: trying and failing. I used to attend a non-denominational Bible Camp in the mountains by a lake, near to where I grew up. Young adults would come from a Bible College and lead the youth in groups. They would give their testimony in the evenings at the worship services. These were often quite emotional experiences, and I was moved by them. I would determine to be a better boy when I went home; I would obey my mother, and do what she asked me to do without murmuring or complaining, or trying to avoid the task. This worked for about 2 weeks, and then the effect wore off, and I went back to my old ways of sluggish and reluctant obedience.

At that time, the threat of nuclear war was looming (the "cold war" between USA and the USSR), and I feared that if I made great plans for my life, they could all be swept away by the horror of a nuclear war. This disturbed me, and kept me from being wholly absorbed in worldly pursuits.

I remember one experience when I was about 13 years old. I entered a model-building contest at a local hardware store, and won the prize. My name was then submitted along with about 200 others from stores across Canada. The prize was a new 10-speed bicycle.

My parents had been too poor to afford a new bike, so I was using one they got at an auction sale. It was a 3-speed, I think, and someone had spray-painted fluorescent orange spots all over the frame. But I cherished it and took care of it as if it was the best bike in the world.

However the thought of owning a brand new 10-speed racer, was thrilling. I remember every night, before I went to bed, praying earnestly that God would give me that bicycle, that He would influence the draw, so that my name would be selected. I was sure, that if I pleaded enough, God would hear me. Two weeks later a phone call came, and it was for me. I took the call, and it was the local store owner, informing me that I had won the bike! I was so happy, I remember jumping up and down for joy! And of course, I was also thankful to God for giving me what I asked for.

For a while, this was a strong evidence for me, of the existence of God, but it wasn't until I later learned more about the Bible, that I found out that this approach in prayer was entirely wrong! Christians do not bring solutions to God, they bring problems. We cannot tell God what He should do, He must tell us what we should do. I had it all backwards. Also, our prayers are to be for the advancement of God's work, and not for our own selfish desires.

In my teen years, because of the influence of scientific teachings in school, I struggled with atheistic ideas, and eventually gave up the Catholic church, as it seemed to be based on tradition, with no living power, except for maybe the odd person here and there who seemed to have a more living experience. I didn't consider myself an atheist, as I still had a lot of respect for the moral teachings of the Bible, and the life of Jesus Christ.

I read a little bit about the New Age teachings, as these seemed to be more alive, and promised to give the seeker the ability to unlock hidden powers. I also became very interested in rock music, and learned electric guitar.

I spent a year in university, intending to get into electrical engineering, and at the end of the year realized that university was not for me. I was more of a practical hands-on person. So I worked in a sawmill for a year and was intending to take an electronics technician course the next year. But some fellows I met at university the previous year wanted to form a rock band, and urged me to join them. At the last moment, instead of going to technical school, I joined them instead.

The band lasted for about a year, and at the end, some Adventists delivered a prophecy seminar notice to our door, and I wanted to go and see what they said. I knew almost nothing about Adventists, except there was an older man in the town I grew up in, that ran a Health Food store which was always closed on Saturday. They locals called him “Brother Ray” and he always seemed to have a group of young hippy-like people living or working with him. I found out later that he was in some kind of splinter Adventist group, or maybe on his own, I’m not sure.

So I attended the prophecy seminars, and for the first time, someone showed me that the Bible was true, and spoke to our times. I was greatly impressed by the evidence of the prophecies. The Bible workers pushed me for baptism, and although I was not really ready, I thought in my mind that I will follow the light that I saw, until greater light would be shown. So I was baptized and left the band, and joined the SDA church. I would have been about 22 years old then.

In the SDA church, there was one family who occasionally invited me to their place for Sabbath lunch, and one day, the mother pulled out a book and put it on the counter. I had a keen eye for books, and had canvassed the church book store looking for good things, so when I saw this book, which I did not recognize, my

curiosity was piqued, and I secretly hoped she was getting it for me. But later, as I was leaving the house, and she had not given it to me, I was disappointed, thinking,

“Oh, I guess it wasn’t for me.”

Then the mother suddenly said,

“Oh, I forgot, I wanted to give you this book!”

The book was titled, *Behold Your God*.

At that time, I was really struggling with inward sin, and also at the same time, trying to understand the history and message of 1888. The whole issue of justification/sanctification was a big blur, and I could not understand the book of *Romans*, especially chapters 6 to 8.

I didn’t read the book *Behold Your God* right away. Then a few months later, while attending an SDA camp-meeting, I had time to begin reading it in my tent. As I read, I did not fully understand everything that was written, but I saw that this man had a deep knowledge of the Bible, and the topic impressed me. I had never heard of him before, and thought he must have been an Adventist pioneer. So the next chance I had, I approached the woman who gave me the book and asked her,

“Who is Fred Wright?”

She didn’t want to tell me because she knew he had been disfellowshipped from the church, and thought I would reject him because of that. Instead, she gave me a cassette tape. One side had a study where Fred presented his life story, and the other side had a study on the seed principle.

The life story was very interesting. I learned a lot about church history from that, and was deeply impressed at his calm, teaching way of talking. But the other side really spoke to me. I knew he was presenting something I needed to know, but which I could not quite grasp because of all the previous errors I had been

taught from other books, about man's nature and what salvation was. So I listened to that seed principle study over and over...maybe about 8 times.

When I saw this woman again, I expressed my interest. She told me there was a camp meeting just over the border in the USA, and they were going for the weekend. I could come along. I was thrilled with that idea, and immediately agreed to come. This would have been about 1982.

I was used to the Adventist idea of camp meeting, and expected a large gathering of thousands of people, especially since the message that I had heard so far, was so wonderful.

We drove Friday afternoon and into the evening, and got into a house at around 11pm. We were shown a basement area where we slept. In the morning, I expected we would be taken to a large meeting place, but instead, I heard Fred's Australian accent from a lounge area in the basement. I was surprised, and thought to myself:

“You mean the meeting is here in this house?!”

Sure enough, it was, and there were only about 20 people attending. While this surprised me, I was still eager to hear what he had to say.

And boy, did he have something to say. Every study was so full of truth and light that I had never heard before, I was just amazed. He covered the Melchizedek priesthood, *Romans 7* and *8*, *Matthew 22* and *25*, and probably some other gospel topics which I can't remember now.

I remember having a couple of chances to speak with Fred. One time I asked him something about the carnal mind, as I was having trouble distinguishing this from the flesh and mental part of man. He didn't say much. He just reached into a box, pulled out a copy of *From Bondage to Freedom* and said,

“Read this.”

The next time, I asked him what role he thought the Adventist church would play in last day events. I asked this because I was still joined to that church and knew about the statements from Ellen White to the effect that “the church will go through” and so forth. But I knew Fred had the truth. So I couldn’t reconcile these two things. He replied,

“Oh they won’t really have that much of a role, except to join in building the image of the beast.”

This floored me! How could that be? But I knew Fred had good answers to every other question and he would have an explanation for this one. I purchased a copy of one of his booklets, *The Church of God Is Not Babylon*, and that explained it for me.

I remember buying whatever books and pamphlets were available at the camp, and then eventually ordering all the tapes, books, and pamphlets by mail. It was difficult to break away from the SDA church, but I had to be faithful to my commitment to follow the truth, and so I did.

And the message of “bondage to freedom” made a big difference in my life and finally answered all those questions I had about justification. It freed me from that failing struggle I had been going through, with the imaginations of my evil heart.

So I can say, with me, the gospel was the thing I was seeking most, and other topics, such as the Character of God, Sabbath Rest, the Seven Angels, etc., came in later. I’m glad for that. It has never been just the arguments that drew me, but the revelation of the power of Christ to save from sin.

I was baptized by Fred in 1984. As a Catholic, I had been sprinkled as a baby, and I had been baptized into the SDA church (an intellectual conversion), but that was my true baptism. And that was my introduction to the Sabbath Rest Advent Church, and the beginning of my real Christian experience.