

The Buckeye Battleground

“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3).

This was not an easy article for me to write, friends. But honesty and ecclesiastical decency demand that I write it as an act of urgent spiritual hygiene—a long overdue peek behind the liberal curtain in Ohio. And I must warn you that there will be times when I may step on a few toes. Would you be tolerant enough (in the spirit of postmodernism) to allow me a step or two, and then I will gladly let you slap me later— if you feel inclined to do so.

I owe so much to the liberating doctrines of this church. Thus it is beyond my comprehension to understand those who, like Esau before them, despise their Adventist birthright. In my judgment, the honorable thing for them to do would be to reconcile their hearts with truth or find another church that they agree with. But liberalism is not self-sustaining. It must attach itself to a host to survive. Thus, resenting the doctrines of this church and lacking the courage to leave, they set their hand to dismantling the truths of this Movement to satisfy their progressive disdain. We live in a time of many moral changes and there are a lot of restless people who seek constant change, even in the church. Lacking peace within, they want to be part of something bigger than themselves – thus they can escape the self they hate. By changing everything around themselves they seek to change their lives in the process. I am not angry at these progressives. I feel sorry for them.

I have lived in Ohio for 53 years, born as a seventh generation Anabaptist in a community near Covington. Ohio was where I was introduced to the Adventist message in 1986, and Ohio was the soil on which I worked out my own salvation with more than a little trembling & fear (Philippians 2:12). It was here that Jesus found me, and delivered me in 1988 from spiritual darkness into His wonderful light. So it is with ‘skin in the game’ and ‘boots on the ground’ that I deliver this state-of-the-state I live in.

First, there are many faithful Adventists in Ohio, and I am grateful for each of them. We are related through the blood of Christ, and united by the hope we share. An example:

Last month I attended a laity-sponsored grassroots Campmeeting in Ohio, called Forward to Zion. Was it good? Let’s just say that I am already looking forward to 2014! Some of the speakers were Dr. Philip Samaan, Scott Ritsema, and Steve Wohlberg. It was a great meeting – like campmeetings used to be in Ohio. But they’re not anymore, and that brings me to the reason for this article.

The Ohio Conference’s current leadership would never invite these individuals or any other – gasp – “conservative” individuals – who believe and teach the three angel’s messages – to come and speak. But they will invite people who teach that you can visit the lost City of Atlantis in your subconscious (Leland Kaiser), or people who openly celebrate occult festivals with wiccans (Samir Selmanovic), or any number of modern social justice advocates. Let me put it this way. If you are a Manchurian Montanist monk teaching magic meatloaf mysticism they will probably trip over themselves inviting you here, but if you are a committed Adventist who happens to believe that obedience to the Law of God in preparation for Christ’s return is a good thing — “No way, baby!!”

For the last forty years the Ohio Conference has been growing ever more progressive and it is now one of two critical liberal vanguards in the NAD (the other being SECC). Here is a brief travel map how we got here.

The previous Ohio conference president (Ed Motschieder) I consider a friend and love him as an individual. Yet during his tenure the Ohio Conference gained a lot of liberal inertia. The Celebration movement, the anti-shame excesses of liberal legalism, and a frenetic obsession to ordain women all found fertile soil here in Ohio. During

this period (1985-1998) Ohio had many pastors that were faithful to the Adventist Message, and some who would become incubators for every wind of doctrine.

Ed left office early (moving to the Columbia Union), allowing a hand-picked executive committee to select the next Ohio president. This can be a legitimate process to replace a president who retires mid-term; unfortunately it can also be an administrative maneuver to tip selection power towards a committee chaired by the equally liberal Union president. In other words, while the selection committee may have gone through the motions, I believe that the outcome was a foregone conclusion—sealed by the sound of a rubber stamp. Here's why.

The committee appointed Raj Attiken on May 17th 1998. Curiously, Raj personally told me on March 14th of that year (11:15 AM) that he was going to be the next president. Was he clairvoyant or did he know that the Union President [elder Lee] was going to make it happen? I served with Raj on the Camp Mohaven Committee for several years and we appreciated him and his wife. I found in him a sense of humor that was similar to mine, but somewhere along the line I stopped laughing when I saw what was happening to Ohio.

In 2002, Nancy & I attended our final conference-sponsored camp meeting (final because it was so offensive). On Friday night, they had a rock band called 'Oasis' playing in the main auditorium. Then there was a series of skits that openly mocked hymns, church bulletins, and anything conservative. Now I have a sense of humor, but this stuff was unbelievably offensive. I did something I have never done before – I got up and walked out, my wife and our two sons in tow. Outside we discovered a large amount of people standing around in little groups – a silent testimony to the sacrilege they had just witnessed. We sensed that a dangerous fault line had just opened up in Ohio. And that was just the beginning of a reckless journey – the next stop was the Emerging Church and pagan spiritualism.

Various liberal individuals were brought into Ohio as leaders, and pastors who didn't go along with this agenda were eventually pruned from this strange vine (Jeremiah 2:21).

In 2004 elder Attiken organized a national Innovation Conference ¹. This was a way to bring Emergent Church thought leaders and inter-spiritual mysticism into Ohio and have our pastors and leaders learn from these teachers. They would then go back and teach their congregations, slowly spreading the virus statewide. A partial list of Innovation speakers includes Leland Kaiser (an occult savant if there ever was one), Leonard Sweet (the chief evangelist for spiritual formation), Doug Pagitt (an emerging church thought leader), Marcia Prager (she self-identifies as a Jewish rabbi, and teaches people how to "connect with the divine feminine" through tarot cards), and the theologically malnourished Samir Selmanovic. In October 2010, Selmanovic even held worship services with wiccans at Faith House Manhattan to celebrate the occulted festival of Samhain with them.² Unbelievable.

Despite knowing these things, Attiken kept inviting Selmanovic to Ohio several years in a row. Learning this – a few constituents began to get very concerned. When the president was publically called out on his dangerous array of Innovation Conference speakers at a town-hall meeting in April, 2010 – his response was "We are mature enough to handle these kinds of speakers, maybe some of you aren't." Encapsulated in this jarring response are four elements:

- An elevated unsanctified pride (Proverbs 16:18; Jeremiah 13:15-16).
- A belief that leaders are not accountable to the people (Mark 10:42-45; Ezekiel 34:7-10).
- A belief the leaders are smarter than the people (John 9:34).
- The revelation that he doesn't understand the nature of the enemy that he is playing with (Proverbs 14:16; Ephesians 5:11).

Each of these elements reveals a spirit apart from the mission of the Advent Message. Under current leadership, the Ohio Conference has had flat line (slightly negative) growth for the last ten years (2001-2011)! ³ It is essentially a lost decade. Small wonder – when we consider the strange fires kindled by this leadership.

Buttressed by a complicit Columbia Union and an enabling NAD division, Ohio has become a petri dish for inter-spiritual mysticism, gender confusion, and a radical liberalism that downgrades doctrine as divisive. Stripped of the elements of obedience and the biblical Godliness that define Seventh-day Adventism, Ohio leadership is left seeking experiences that lie beyond objective biblical truth (i.e. Innovation Conferences etc.). I note this not with any attempt to condemn but to recognize what is now fully apparent. And there's more...

Ohio leadership has long been infatuated with female headship, and women's ordination is the holy grail of their agenda. It is common knowledge that not being in favor of women's ordination is pretty much a deal breaker for getting hired as a pastor in Ohio, or even as a president of Columbia Union⁴. This places a loyal Adventist in a difficult position – driving a wedge between the Ohio conference and the world church (who has twice voted against ordaining women).

You may recall the July 29 Columbia Union Special Constituency meeting last year, when the Columbia Union raised the fist of rebellion towards the world Adventist church and voted to “ordain without regard to gender” (a move that could eventually require the Union to ordain homosexuals and individuals given to “gender-fluidity”). Ohio leadership gives their full encouragement to this rebellion.

On August 17th 2013, the Ohio Conference is sponsoring a “Celebration of Ordination” ceremony where they will further their defiance by “ordaining” several women in direct opposition to the expressed will of the world church.

By now you're probably saying “Gee, I'm glad I don't live there.” That isn't my goal in this article. There are some good things and good people here in Ohio. However when I travel around the country, people often tell me they have heard that Ohio has many problems. Sadly, much of what they hear is correct. There is a dark current of pride & rebellion flowing through the ecclesiastical arteries of our state. And the Bible is clear – pride pushes God away (Psalm 138:6), and rebellion causes dry land (Psalm 68:6). Nothing grows in a dry land. I believe that the lack of growth in Ohio is directly related to the celebration of a decade of rebellion. And rebellion can lead to even worse things (1 Samuel 15:23). May God have mercy on our people. I am grateful for both the grace of God and the freedom that His Spirit provides when we surrender our heart to biblical truth. Humility and biblical truth could turn Ohio around.

Now I need to speak a word in favor of the thousands of faithful believers who have not “bowed before Baal.” There are still many of God's precious people in this state, lots of them unaware how bad things are, and some standing on the shores of discouragement. It is not my intention to add to their discouragement—to do so would sit heavily on my conscience. My goal in writing this is to inform people of what is happening, and to encourage those who are salvageable.

In the political realm, Ohio is called the “battleground state” – that is even truer in the spiritual realm. Not only is there is a spiritual struggle going on for the hearts and minds of believers here, the errors I have outlined above are being exported like the virus they are, to other areas. Even to dear believers in China. It is not God's will that the dark elements of the world be replicated in or through His people, but rather that we would bring the blessing of truth to a world that is facing the Second Coming of Jesus.

So while most of this article sounds like a lamentation, I'd like to end with something upbeat. What is needed?

Repentance. Just as Israel prospered under the leadership of Josiah and Hezekiah, I believe that God wants to confront us in Ohio with a long overdue interlude of repentance and renewal. Please forgive us Father, for allowing this dangerous spirit in our midst. And restore unto us the years that the locusts have eaten.

Ohio needs new leadership. The spiritual faith of Israel was damaged deeply by leaders that brought the ways of the world into their midst. It is the same today. Any good that progressive leaders do is quickly swallowed up by the collateral damage of iniquity. The cost of such progressive recklessness is measured in the souls of our children, neighbors and loved ones. We cannot afford that price. It is time to demand new leaders whose hearts

are tender towards truth – leaders who recognize our biblical role in the Advent Movement and do not despise that divine identity.

Ohio needs prayer. I am praying the God will expose the spiritual lies surrounding us, and lead us in Ohio to renounce them with tears. I am praying that God would humble everyone in Ohio (myself included) and lead us to seek His face through repentance! Pray for us dear friend that we might understand our true condition (Rev. 3:18), and then repenting – rejoice together.

Ohio needs the joy of obedience. When we do our part, God will do His wonderful part. When we renounce the tyranny of lawlessness disguised as righteousness by faith, we will lay aside the sin that so easily besets us and we will run the race with our eyes fixed on the Author & Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2). We will find our highest joy in serving Him, and we will have a faith that works! A simple faith that says “*Take away these infected cisterns*” and give me wisdom from the Bible.”

¹ <http://spectrummagazine.org/node/1715>

² <http://www.faithhousemanhattan.org/2010/09/07/living-room-samhain-a-season-of-harvest-a-circle-of-remembrance/>

³ http://www.adventiststatistics.org/view_Summary.asp?FieldInstID=2178466

⁴ Columbia Union Visitor, February 15, 1998 Volume 103, #4 page 8.
http://docs.adventistarchives.org/docs/CUV/CUV19980215-V103-04_C.pdf#view=fit