

The Adventist Pilgrim: A Construct for Theological Reflection

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One practice that engages Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) identity in a tangible way is the practice of visiting Adventist historical sites. The significance of these sites is evident in the way formative figures of the church considered them during their lifetime. For example, in her last visit to Portland, Maine, Ellen G. White demonstrated an enthusiastic interest in sites associated with her childhood home.¹ In the 1930s and 1940s, White's son W. C. White, along with historian A.W. Spalding, continued to demonstrate an interest in Adventist sites by making a concerted effort to locate and photograph them. This eventually led Spalding to publish a helpful guide for all who would later visit Adventist historical sites, *Footprints of the Pioneers*.²

What started out primarily as history buffs frequenting these sites scattered across New England, has, over time, made its way into the

¹ Arthur L. White, "The Long Trip Home," in *Ellen G. White: The Later Elmshaven Years, 1905-1915* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1982), 6:210-214.

² Arthur W. Spalding, *Footprints of the Pioneers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1947). This book has since been updated by Ron Graybill and re-titled *In the Footsteps of the Pioneers*. Merlin D. Burt provides the most recent guidebook for visiting these sites, *Adventist Pioneer Places: New York and New England* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2011). See also the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist sponsored Adventist Heritage Ministry—the official custodian of many of the historical Adventist sites: "About Us," Adventist Heritage Ministry, accessed September 12, 2017, <http://www.adventistheritage.org/article/143/resources/about-us>.

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curricula of college and seminary courses. Students, pastors and lay people alike have joined a variety of tour groups trekking across the Northeastern region of the United States. In this context, the potential to engage the Adventist historical site as spiritually transformative, rather than merely intellectually edifying, is enormous. Captivating as it may be to hear stories of our pioneers in the very place the events unfolded, an attempt to examine the theological dynamics of such visits in terms of praxis, “the critical relationship between theory and practice whereby each is dialectically influenced and transformed by the other,” is lacking.³

Adventist historians and tour guides refer to site visits using words like “living experience,” “spiritual reflection,” and “sacred space,” but these terms are not adequately engaged, thus rendering them abstract and relegating them to the background.⁴ Michael Campbell suggests, for example, that those who participate in an Adventist historical site visit are “personally confronted with the reality of God’s continued leading.”⁵ But what exactly does this mean, and perhaps more importantly, how does it happen? We need a more systematic way of connecting these places with our own experience, laden with personal meaning.

The purpose of this brief study is to more fully explicate the significance of these terms, and place them in the foreground of the personal and/or group site visit by reframing such visits as a practice in theologically reflective Christian pilgrimage.⁶ I approach this subject as practical theologian whose primary work is to bring together such fields as biblical studies, church history, and social science (among others) with the

³ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York, NY: Seabury, 1975), 243.

⁴ See Burt, *Adventist Pioneer Places*, viii; Michael W. Campbell, “New England Adventist Heritage Tours: Understanding the Roots of Adventism,” *Journal of Adventist Education* (April/May 2012): 53.

⁵ Campbell, “New England Adventist Heritage Tours,” 54.

⁶ Here I understand “practice,” as articulated by practical theologian John Swinton, to be a form of individual and communal value-laden action emerging from various contexts which shapes the way one views and encounters the world. In terms of Christian practices, “We practice what we believe in quite literal ways. In this sense, Christian practices are embodied theology which can be read, interpreted, and understood in a way similar to the way which we read and interpret texts.” Practical theology rests on these premises. See *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 16-17, note 1.

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goal of interpreting lived religious experience and transforming practice. I also approach the practice of pilgrimage as one that has frequented Adventist heritage sites in New England, New York, Michigan, Iowa, California, and various countries in Europe with a variety of groups over a period of many years. Additionally, I have participated in a formal pilgrimage to the quintessential Christian pilgrimage site, the Holy Land, where elements of this paper were put into practice.

This study is comprised of three parts. The first part lays a normative groundwork by discussing the contours of Christian pilgrimage biblically and historically. Part two consists of a case study where I discuss a pilgrimage-like visit I took to the Church at Washington, New Hampshire and the significance of this site for the SDA Church. The final part offers a theological reflection on the pilgrimage experience. In total, this research project represents one example in how to reflect theologically on pilgrimage-like visits to Adventist historical sites.

Christian Pilgrimage: Yesterday and Today

For many Christians, pilgrimage—the practice of one who perseveres on an arduous journey to a sacred place—rests largely in the shadow of the magisterial reformers' condemnation of how this practice had been abused by the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. Leading the charge was Augustinian friar Martin Luther. Church historians Richard Kieckhefer and Graham Tomlin list several reasons for Luther's strong opposition: pilgrimage sites were often enmeshed with financial corruption; pilgrimages encouraged escapism from the true duties of the Christian life; pilgrimage destinations were a distraction from the places where God could be found locally, namely one's parish.⁷ Concerning the latter Luther penned these words: "For if Christ is sitting at the right hand of His Father, why, then, should we seek Him in Rome...? You will not find God there; you will find the devil. For God will not let Himself be found in a place of our

⁷ Richard Kieckhefer, "Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion," in *Christian Spirituality II: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1987), 105; Graham Tomlin, "Protestants and Pilgrimage," in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes (Hants, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004), 112-116.

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own choice and choosing.”⁸ Despite their theological disagreements, John Calvin (and other Reformers) shared this point of contention with Luther, though Calvin’s primary objection was the cult of the saints—the belief that relics of saints possessed supernatural power and served as a point of contact between divine and human worlds.⁹

Despite the abiding influence of great Christian luminaries like Luther and Calvin, modern day pilgrimage is undergoing its own reformation. As a practice that belongs to the whole Church, disciples of Jesus across the spectrum of Christianity are reclaiming this ancient biblical discipline as twenty-first century pilgrims. This is exemplified by one of the most prolific New Testament scholars today, N. T. Wright, who has taken up the subject of pilgrimage and applied his own stamp of approval. At one point in Wright’s life, however, he confesses: “I no more contemplated going on pilgrimage than I would have considered kissing the Pope’s ring.”¹⁰ But his thinking was radically changed based on an experience he had on his first visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. In that moment, he realized “he had become a pilgrim.”¹¹

Such is the sentiment of many Christians today as they depart by the millions on pilgrimages to the Holy Land, Rome, Santiago de Compostela, and numerous other “sacred places” around the world. Of Western Europe’s six thousand plus pilgrimage sites approximately 100 million people visit each year, 60-70% are religiously motivated.¹² What was once thought, especially among Protestant Christians, as an ancient medieval exercise tethered to a system of salvation by works, is now being

⁸ Martin Luther, “The Gospel of St. John 2:22,” in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition (55 vols.; ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia, PA: Muehlenberg and Fortress, and St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955-86), 22.250.

⁹ J.G. Davies, *Pilgrimage Yesterday and Today: Why? Where? How?* (London: SCM, 1988), 100. See also John Calvin, “Catechism of the Church of Geneva” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J.K.S. Reid (London: SCM, 1954), 120; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Tom Wright, *The Way of the Lord: Christian Pilgrimage Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 4.

¹¹ Wright, *The Way of the Lord*, 4-7.

¹² See Craig Bartholomew and Robert Llewelyn, “Introduction,” in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes (Hants, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004), xii.

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incorporated as a meaningful spiritual discipline across denominational lines.

This ebb and flow of pilgrimage throughout history as a viable practice of the faithful is revealing. What accounts for the range of responses? Scholars observe a tension in scripture between the significance of place versus person. Whereas the people of God portrayed in the Old Testament were required to go on three pilgrimage-feasts (Heb. *chag*) to Jerusalem each year, the New Testament authors Christologically transformed the holiness of place so that, as Andrew Lincoln writes, “Jesus is the true place of worship, and so to go on pilgrimage is to come to Jesus.”¹³ The author of Hebrews (Heb 11:13-16) and the apostle Peter (1 Pet 1:1; 2:11) recast pilgrimages as a metaphor (Grk. *parepidemos*) for the Christian life.¹⁴

Digging deeper, however, unearths how there is more to these apparent Old Testament/New Testament dichotomies; elements of the tension between both perspectives can be found in either Testament. What is needed is to embrace these polarities of truth as a both/and proposal versus an either/or proposition. While there is much to be written on this topic, I offer two observations. First, the impetus for pilgrimage today is quite different than that of medieval times. In fact, “Pilgrimage belongs to the deepest impulse of the evangelical tradition—reformation.”¹⁵ In an evangelical treatment of the subject, Christian George asserts:

A medieval theology incorrectly viewed pilgrimage as credits to a purgatory account—the more trips you make, the less time you bake. However, grace-based theology rediscovered by Martin Luther and the other Reformers revises our understanding of pilgrimage as a discipline of sanctification, not justification. Pilgrimage does not save us. Rather, it is

¹³ Andrew T. Lincoln, “Pilgrimage and the New Testament,” in *Explorations in a Christian Theology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Craig Bartholomew and Fred Hughes (Hants, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004), 39.

¹⁴ Many today, especially those in the “spiritual but not religious” category, are extending the NT metaphor to include pilgrimage as a Jungian archetype for one’s journey in life. See Jean Dalby Clift and Wallace B. Clift, *The Archetype of Pilgrimage: Outer Action with Inner Meaning* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004).

¹⁵ Christian George, *Sacred Travels: Recovering the Ancient Practice of Pilgrimage* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 16.

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a grace that reminds us that salvation is a journey with Christ as our guide and heaven our goal.¹⁶

“One might assume,” Philip Sheldrake notes, “that a religion based on the doctrine of the Incarnation would have been consistent in according a fundamental importance to human history and to material existence.”¹⁷ The truth of the matter is that despite the personal in-breaking of God into human history through the Incarnation, there have always been distinct eschatological voices within Christianity who have disavowed any importance of the particular in exchange for a “spiritual” and eternal realm beyond time and place.¹⁸ My second observation, therefore, is that the current interest in pilgrimage is, in part, a direct reaction against the devastating effects of dualism that has been so pervasive in Western Christian theology. The result has been a denigration of materiality, the body, and our relationship to God’s good creation. For Adventists, pilgrimage is consistent with its holistic theological anthropology meeting the need to embody one’s faith; it also strikes at the heart of our prophetic identity. In Ellen White’s first vision she portrays the Advent people on a journey traveling along a “straight and narrow path” to the heavenly city, in short, a pilgrimage.¹⁹

As interesting as the history of pilgrimage may be, like the Sabbath it is not an intellectual activity so much as an experiential one. Thus, assuming the viability of Christian pilgrimage, how does one practice it? Based on the work of French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep and his study of the rituals and rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, three general phases of pilgrimage emerge: separation, transition, and

¹⁶ George, *Sacred Travels*, 16.

¹⁷ Philip Sheldrake, *Spaces for the Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University, 2001), 22.

¹⁸ Perhaps the most influential theologian who laid the foundation for this understanding of human beings in history is Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.), which he expounded in his massive tome, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).

¹⁹ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific, 1943), 196. Former General Conference President, Jan Paulsen, also portrays the Adventist experience as a Christian pilgrimage, see “The Pilgrim’s Journey: Who Owns Our Future?” *Adventist Review*. <http://archives.adventistreview.org/issue.php?issue=2006-1505&page=8> (accessed September 11, 2017).

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incorporation.²⁰ These three categories constitute the basis for Victor and Edith Turner's classic study on pilgrimage and their revolutionary concepts of *liminality*—the experience of being “in between worlds,” and *communitas*—the experience of oneness by pilgrims in shared rituals.²¹

The first stage of pilgrimage, separation, is about exchanging the familiar for the unfamiliar; it is about leaving home. The next stage, transition, is about moving from ordinary time to sacred time. It is about letting go of the structures to which one has become accustomed and learning to inhabit a new kind of rhythm. Consequently, this may be the most unsettling aspect of pilgrimage because it knocks one off balance. But the experience of disequilibrium is often necessary to enter into the heart of pilgrimage and its final stage—incorporation, or how one reenters ordinary life. This stage is critical, for the powers, structures, and roles of pre-pilgrimage life can easily subvert the life changes encountered along the way. In the next section I shall relate a case study of my own pilgrimage to a well-known Adventist historical site.

Revisiting the Church at Washington, New Hampshire:

A Case Study

The little white church with two separate front doors, located two miles west of rural Washington, New Hampshire measures only 30 feet wide by 40 feet long. Despite its diminutive size and reclusive location, the hundreds if not thousands of Adventists who visit this church each year easily outweigh its obscurity. In the words of Merlin Burt, this “is the location of the earliest Sabbath keeping Millerite church that continues to this day as a Seventh-day Adventist church.”²² This precise description alludes to three important aspects of this historic church: (1) an emphasis upon the premillennial return of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by William Miller and company, (2) the centrality of Christian Sabbath keeping as a seventh day practice, and (3) the church's connection to primitive Adventism exemplified by visions and other supernatural phenomena.

²⁰ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—The Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart* (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths, 2013), 58f.

²¹ Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1978).

²² Burt, *Adventist Pioneer Places*, 92.

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The stories told from this place are some of the most memorable and read as a “Who’s Who” among Adventist pioneers and formative figures, including names like Frederick Wheeler, Rachel Oaks Preston, James and Ellen White, Joseph Bates, and John Andrews. Not to be forgotten are unique characters such as prophet-bashing Worcester Ball; pork-eating, tobacco-chewing William Farnsworth; and testimony letter-hiding Stephen Smith—all of whom experienced powerful conversions under the prophetic guidance of Ellen White.²³

Like the churches Jesus addressed in the book of Revelation, the Washington Church had its strengths as well as its “growing edges.” What began with fiery zeal and a passionate open-ended search for the truth was later perforated by disappointment, rejection by both family members and the local Congregationalist community for their peculiar beliefs, and becoming discouraged by the vicissitudes of life. These factors occasioned the first comparison of an Adventist church to that of lukewarm Laodicea by James White, resulting in the two major revivals of 1867 and 1885. Historian Mark Ford writes:

At Washington, New Hampshire, the hopes, disappointments and victories of an entire denomination can be viewed as if in a microcosm. All that is good and right and inspiring about Adventism can be found in its history. If there could be a single birthplace for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this is the place.²⁴

Truly this was an extraordinary place, one in which the marked power of God’s Spirit influenced congregants to change their lives. But that was then and this is now. What could possibly result from a *present-day* pilgrimage to this Adventist site? In what follows, I would like to provide a description of my personal experience as a pilgrimage practitioner.

Before relinquishing the comfort of my downtown Boston loft apartment to embark on a mid-winter pilgrimage to Washington, New Hampshire, there was necessary preparation. In addition to acquainting

²³ For helpful overviews of these individual’s lives and aforementioned stories, see Mark Ford, *The Church at Washington, New Hampshire: Discovering the Roots of Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002); Burt, *Adventist Pioneer Places*, 92-107.

²⁴ Ford, *The Church at Washington, New Hampshire*, 11.

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myself with the Washington Adventist Church narrative, town history, and surrounding geography, my primary means of preparation was prayer. I spent many wintery mornings traversing Boston's Fenway Park, echoing the longing of the ancient Hebrew pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem: "I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in his word do I hope" (Ps 130:5, NASB). My preparation also included reading sundry material such as an essay by Wendell Berry, where he detailed the difficulty of transitioning from interstate highways to his beloved remote woods.²⁵ When it came time to finally depart on my pilgrimage I, like Berry, opted for "crooked" and less traveled roads to diminish the harsh transition from city to country. This route followed closely Joseph Bates' own trek through Nashua and Hillsborough, which eventually led him to the door of the Farnsworth home near Millen Pond to discuss the Sabbath.

Despite my best efforts, I battled my own anxieties and numerous pressures along the way. After a delayed start, I worried I would arrive late for my meeting with Ken Brummell, a pastor and the site director of the Washington SDA Church. This threatened to set the tone and pace as I hurried through tollbooths, past factory smokestacks, colleges, and ski resorts. Furthermore, Pastor Brummell and the unexpected accompaniment of his wife threatened my independent spirit. I had envisioned going on this pilgrimage alone; now I was one of three.

A recent polar vortex had submerged the Northeast under several feet of snow, complicating our approach. We had to park some distance from the church, snowshoe in from King Road, and then carve out a six-foot radius to pry the doors loose. (According to the Brummells the church had not been opened since last October, so they were eager to learn of its condition.) Once inside, I reflectively situated myself in the historic Farnsworth pew, sitting at length in the stillness. As the day grew old I proceeded to strap on the snowshoes and trudge around the property. I bypassed the recently constructed Sabbath Trail and eventually ended up in the adjacent burial ground. These would be my last moments before journeying home.

As my brief foray into the world of pilgrimage was concluding, I felt a nagging disappointment that nothing had happened—no personal revelation

²⁵ Wendell Berry, "An Entrance to the Woods," in *Recollected Essays, 1965-1980* (San Francisco, CA: North Point, 1981), 230-244.

or moment of insight. I was left with only the evocative silence of a lonely cemetery. But as I persisted, I was confronted with one of the stories I had encountered during my preparation. In the most unlikely of places and through the most unlikely of people, there lied metaphorical meaning in the life of a teenage girl and her mother. Through engaging in theological reflection during my pilgrimage experience, Rachel Oaks Preston's daughter became a window into the working of God.

From Historical Site to Theological Reflection

For many there is a sense of adventure when visiting Adventist historical sites. But moving past this transient experience, the lacuna needing to be filled is how to derive the most from such an encounter. In what way can pilgrimage be transformative? How can our brush with the past intersect with our lives in the present? The answer, in part, may be found by engaging in a more formalized theological reflection of one's experience of place.²⁶

Briefly defined, theological reflection is "the artful discipline of putting our experience into conversation with the heritage of the Christian tradition."²⁷ Such a discipline is indispensable if the Church is to maintain its fidelity to the gospel as its authentic witness. "A constant criticism of religious people and institutions in secular society," writes Stephen Pattison, "has been that faith is separate from the rest of life."²⁸ Theological reflection, therefore, "has the effect of ensuring that faith and religious ideas do not become encapsulated and cut off from our experience of everyday life."²⁹

²⁶ In a recent article, Gerald A. Klingbeil moves in the direction of reflecting more intentionally on his visit to Adventist historic sites. However, he does not propose a formal model for reflection nor does he draw on the practice of pilgrimage as a framework for the Heritage Tour. See: "Route to Roots: Tracking Adventist Pioneers," *Adventist World: NAD Edition* (March 2014), 24-28.

²⁷ Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1993), 2.

²⁸ Stephen Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks: A Basic Introduction to Theological Reflection," in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, ed. James Woodward and Stephen Pattison (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 2000), 138-139.

²⁹ Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks," 138.

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There are numerous models for doing theological reflection.³⁰ For this personal experiment in Adventist pilgrimage I opted for Pattison's approach. His starting point in theological reflection involves a three-way conversation between: (1) one's "ideas, beliefs, feelings, perceptions, and assumptions"; (2) "the beliefs, assumptions and perceptions provided by the Christian tradition"; and (3) "the contemporary situation which is being examined."³¹ It is important to note how the mutually critical relationship of this triad occurs naturally in everyday life; the theological reflection process simply shapes and sharpens it.³² Here, the empirical situation put into conversation with the Christian tradition and one's own assumptions is the practice of pilgrimage with its distinct stages: separation, transition, and incorporation.

Pattison relates how the starting point of theological reflection does not matter; the important thing is finding a way into the conversation. For me, that meant questioning my assumptions. Every aspect of my pilgrimage was intentional, actively resisting any personal agenda and remaining open to receive whatever God wanted to communicate. Yet, as much as I tried to hold in tension my desire to wait on God, very little happened. My pilgrimage was really quite ordinary, tainted with a specter of frustration. Perhaps Luther was right, I thought: God is not to be found in a place of our own choosing. I struggled with the separation and transition stages of pilgrimage—leaning into the unfamiliar and unanticipated in order to inhabit a new rhythm of life—even if only for one winter day. In the end, I realized that any attempt to approach pilgrimage as a *tabula rasa* is impossible. The question is not whether one will leave one's agenda behind, but rather what expectations and assumptions one brings to the pilgrimage experience.

³⁰ Theological reflection is one of the tools utilized by a variety of theological disciplines, most notably practical theology. It makes sense, therefore, that many of the key texts come from this particular field. For a good overview of six models of theological reflection, consider: Elaine Graham, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM, 2005). For a classic text on theological reflection in ministry, see: James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Kansas City, KS: Sheed and Ward, 1995).

³¹ Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks," 139.

³² Pattison, "Some Straw for the Bricks," 140.

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Perhaps it was my reading of *parepidemos* in the New Testament and the depiction of the protagonist, Christian, in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* that influenced me, but I had originally envisioned myself as a pilgrim on a solitary journey to the Washington Church. The reality was that in order to gain access I needed the assistance of the pastor, the "gatekeeper" assigned to the church, who was accompanied by his wife. Initially perturbed by this challenge to my assumption that pilgrimage is a solitary experience, I then recalled Victor Turner's concepts of *liminality* and *communitas*: when on pilgrimage, expect the unexpected and embrace fellow pilgrims along the way. When it comes to pilgrimage I had to learn that the focus is not so much on the site destination as it is incorporating everything that happens along the way as substance for reflection. The truth is, if it were not for my fellow pilgrims I would not have had the snowshoes needed to traverse the property, especially the cemetery. It was there, in the final moments of my pilgrimage that I came to terms with my difficulty in separating and transitioning. While prayerfully contemplating the lives of those buried beneath the scattered tombstones, my experience started to come into focus and I began to sense a movement towards the final stage, incorporation.

Most accounts of the Washington Church, as it relates to the Sabbath, speak of the pivotal role of Rachel Oaks Preston, a Seventh Day Baptist who introduced her Sabbath keeping ways to Frederick Wheeler and the early Advent believers. Any mention of her only daughter (Rachel) Delight, whom she delivered at the age of sixteen, is usually only in passing. But as I made my way to the rear retaining wall I was drawn to the chiseled letters "Rachel Delight Oaks" on the towering obelisk before me. Of all the people involved in this congregation over the years, she was the one who shined like a beacon of light on this particular day. We know little about her life other than the fact that as a teenager she accepted a teaching position at Washington, New Hampshire and her mother, then a widow, joined her.³³

If Delight had not come to this small town to teach at the one-room schoolhouse, her mother would not have accompanied her and Wheeler, Bates, and the Whites would not have been introduced to the Sabbath. In

³³ Merlin D. Burt, "Oaks-Preston, Rachel (Harris) (1809-1868)," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 480-481.

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moving to Washington, I doubt they set out to change history. Rather, these seemingly insignificant Christian women were simply trying to survive while remaining faithful followers of Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath. Yet, their pilgrimage of faith, which also included separating and transitioning from the known of Upstate New York to the unknown of New England, converged with those at the little Washington Church and led to incorporating the Sabbath as a communal practice.

As I continued to scroll through the familiar narratives in my mind, I realized the story of Rachael and Delight Oaks provided some insight into how the Holy Spirit worked with such power in this place. As Christ's followers, their lives revealed wholeness, and wholeness can be nothing less than conforming the entirety of one's life—what one believes and how one lives—to the teachings of Jesus. Similarly, both distinct revivals experienced by those early Washington Church believers grew from a realigning of what they believed with how they lived.³⁴ Through the Oaks' embodiment of their Sabbath beliefs, Delight and her mother inspired other Advent believers to accept this Bible truth. Integrating these narratives, I reflected once more on the theology of Christian pilgrimage as a practice of following Christ wherever He may lead (i.e., *parepidemos*), despite anxieties, frustrations, and disappointments along the way.

Conclusion

To some extent we are all topophilic; that is, we can describe an emotional attachment we have to particular places, such as a mountainous terrain, a tropical beach, or the cityscape of a large urban area. "One way of grasping the importance of this connection," writes Christian spirituality scholar Belden Lane, "is to observe the sense of alienation that prevails

³⁴ In the 1867 revival, Ellen White revealed supernatural insight by pointing out the secret sins of the community, one of whom was a hypocritical, tobacco-chewing man named William Farnsworth. This resulted in parents and children confessing to each other, followed by the baptism of 12 young people in a frozen Millen Pond. In 1885, Eugene Farnsworth (son of William) conducted revival meetings where Stephen Smith, a ruthless critic of Ellen White and the Adventist Church, repented of his critical ways. An important aspect of this conversion story is Smith's discovery of a hidden letter from White, which he had buried in a trunk for nearly thirty years. It turns out that letter prophetically disclosed the details of his life if he did not heed the Lord's counsel, all of which came true. See Burt, *Adventist Pioneer Places*, 98f.

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when it is lost.”³⁵ The hope for any Adventist, visiting an SDA historical site, is to make an emotional connection so that these places become sacred for us personally. But in order for that to happen the story of the Adventist site has to somehow intersect with our own lives—our stories. Stories are important because they are how humans throughout history and across cultures have communicated important truths and constructed meaning. The prevalence of narratives in the Bible serves as a case and point. From the Exodus and the Exile, to Jesus’ parables and Luke’s narrative of the early church, stories speak to the intellect; they touch the emotions, and help us make sense of life.

This is where the work of Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, is particularly helpful to the current study. In addressing the hermeneutical problem and promise of the Old Testament land motif, Brueggemann writes:

Scripture interpretation has thrived on the antitheses of space/time and nature/history. In each case scholars have often regarded the latter as particularly Hebrew. It is implicit in the foregoing argument that such antitheses or at least polarities misrepresent the data. In the Old Testament there is not timeless space, but there also is no spaceless time. There is rather *storied place*, that is, a place that has meaning because of the history lodged there...[Yahweh] is Lord of places as well as times.³⁶

Thus, to apply the language of Brueggemann to Washington, New Hampshire: This is not a timeless place nor does it exist in spaceless time; it is a *storied place*, for Yahweh is Lord of places as well as times. We must move beyond a mere historical site to reflect on the pilgrimage experience of visiting this “storied place.”

To be sure, educators engage Adventist sites as “storied places,” even incorporating opportunities for worship during Adventist Heritage Tours. For example, Campbell likes to punctuate his tours with a “spiritual meeting” at the William Miller Farm, which includes a communion service in the William Miller Chapel, foot washing on Ascension Rock, and an

³⁵ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 7.

³⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 198-199.

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“old-fashioned ‘testimony’ time so that participants can witness to the evidence of God’s leading in their lives.”³⁷ As a result, Campbell knows of one person who made the decision to be baptized while attending the first Southern Adventist University (SAU) Heritage Tour. Doubtless there are numerous journal memorandums of Heritage Tour participants, like Suzanne Ocsai, who wrote glowingly of her experience in the following SAU freshman blog entry on none other than October 22:

Along with the personal impact from the Ellen White stories, the William Miller chapel in New York proved to be a rather moving experience also. I guess what hit me the most is that I was actually standing and sitting where some of the great pioneers in our church’s history stood and sat and walked and talked and worshiped together. All the stories we were told came alive in the chapel. Especially when we were singing some of the old Advent hymns. It was like being there in the mid-1800s with the amazing expectation that Jesus was going to return.³⁸

Incorporating worship homilies, opportunities for prayer, and foot washing are important practices, but any shifts in thinking or experiences that lead to transformation and incorporation seem to occur haphazardly. Notably absent from the itinerary of historical site tours, extant within SDA university courses on Adventist history, are the theological processes and resources needed to facilitate such transformations.

One example of this can be found in Jud Lake’s syllabus for the Southern Adventist University Adventist Heritage Tour, RL139A: “Origins of Adventism.” Beyond the more cognitive-oriented objectives for the course, such as demonstrating knowledge of Adventist pioneers and an appreciation of how God led the early Advent believers, he does require the students to keep a written journal of their experience. However, he does not mention a specific method of theological reflection to guide the student’s writing. When presenting an earlier version of this paper to Lake for review, he acknowledged the significance of reframing such tours as a

³⁷ Campbell, “New England Adventist Heritage Tours,” 53-54.

³⁸ Suzanne Ocsai, “Lest We Forget,” Freshman Blogs, Southern Adventist University (October 22, 2008).

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practice in Christian pilgrimage, along with the need for more structured modalities to reflect theologically upon a participant's experience.³⁹

The purpose of this paper has been to reframe the visiting of Adventist historical sites as a practice in Christian pilgrimage with three distinct stages and to suggest a basic construct of theological reflection for getting the most out of such a practice. While we reject the notion that there is something inherently magical about Adventist historical sites, we also cannot disregard the historical reality that something meaningful did happen in these places. My hope is that by reorienting the way we experience Adventist historical places, and by intentionally and formally engaging in theological reflection, we will not only gain knowledge *about* God, but will grow in knowledge *of* God, and "knowledge *of* God is necessarily experiential, practical, and transformative."⁴⁰

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³⁹ Jud Lake, e-mail message to author, May 6, 2014.

⁴⁰ Swinton, *Dementia*, 17.