

THE STATE OF THE LIVING¹

By Paul Penno Jr.

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She was a church member in good and regular standing, and she knew the proof-texts about the state of the dead. Yet she was taken in by the claims of Spiritualism. Mrs. Reynolds in Pennsylvania had a son in the war who was reported by the military as missing and presumed dead. A neighbor invited her to a séance so she could talk with him but she refused, citing the usual proof-texts that “the dead know not anything.”

A week later the neighbor returned. “Guess what: Last night your son appeared to us and said he felt hurt that you didn’t want to meet him.” Next evening Sister Reynolds attended, and sure enough, she saw “him.” Definitely, her son Dwight. For six months mother and “son” visited each evening. She felt her church had deceived her and asked to have her name taken off the membership list.

One morning the doorbell rang and there stood Dwight in the flesh, much alive. Mrs. Reynolds blurted in confusion, “Why are you here? We’re not supposed to meet again until tomorrow.” The military had transmitted mistaken information.

We are told that the delusion of Spiritualism “will spread, and we shall have to contend with it face to face” (EW 88). Seventh-day Adventists can be deceived; and apparently proof-texts are not always effective when strong emotions become operative.

¹ Rev. 16:13, 14. “We Are Living, We Are Dwelling”; Baptism; 508.

“Satan has power to bring before us the appearance of forms purporting to be our relatives or friends who sleep in Jesus,” good people (p. 262). What would happen if (a) the media should be saturated with a terrible international crisis of impending war and terrorists holding the world for ransom—even the silly advertising, sexy movies, and rock music are suspended because of the crisis; (b) the pope of Rome succeeds in averting the unspeakable horror; (c) in hysterical gratitude the United States and the world enforce the mark of the beast; (d) the alternative before faithful Seventh-day Adventists is the loss of every earthly security; (e) at this juncture an inspired writer appears, complete with her 19th century black dress and distinctive nose physiognomy and mannerisms, and solemnly appeals to us to use common sense and not forfeit world security by the only apparent means of averting world desolation. Times have changed, “she” would confidently assure us, and the Lord has sent the Pope to save the world in an emergency. Remember, it would be a clever, sophisticated job.

The bottom line of all this excitement about life after death is the coming issue of the mark of the beast. That will be our final exam; and the emotional as well as economic pressures will be unimaginable. To resist will appear as certain suicide and disloyalty to friends, family, and the lovable father figure who appears to save the world from the agonizing long-drawn out mass deaths imposed by neutron bombs or something worse.

The question becomes relevant, “Who shall be able to stand?” Over-confident students frequently fail stiff final exams.

The emotional punch packed into the life after death issue is evident in the fact that many bereaved widows try to talk with their dead husbands. Elvis Presley’s fiancée, claims, “It’s exactly as if he had never died.” “Elvis” tells her how to run her love life and how to make money in show business.

In contrast, it seems that the total impact of our literature presenting Bible truth regarding death gets to comparatively few people.

A pair of teen-age lovers, calmly jumped off the YMCA roof in Chicago because they expected life after death to be more fun than life before death, since they were too young to marry.

Robert Nicolaus killed three children with a .38 revolver because “I thought it was best to send them to heaven.” Starting with the false premise of natural immortality, the reasoning, in a bizarre way, is sound.

The stories told of how their patients have described their out of body experiences when they hovered near death are convincing to many. These patients supposedly hover over the hospital beds or operating tables where doctors and nurses and paramedics frantically labor to restart their stalled hearts. They note who is there, how they are dressed, and what they say. One wonders if our Adventist pioneers ever dreamed of such a challenge to a foundation doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Yet, calm, Biblically oriented thinking recognizes that there is no proof of out-of-the-body consciousness. None of these patients ever truly died; all were merely near death. Hallucinogenic drugs can induce similar experiences in people who are not near death. A little careful thinking reinforced by a “thus saith the Lord” can save a person from this simple deception.

But we have hardly as yet come “face to face” with the reality of Spiritualism’s delusional power. When one comes up against the paranormal, one tends to get highly confused at first, and inevitably to contradict some of one’s previous views. This is what happened to Sister Reynolds in Pennsylvania—the paranormal appearance of her “dead” Dwight caused her to choose to “contradict” all the proof-texts she had learned.

Many pastors and laypeople scuttle their faith because of what they consider as insufficient evidence for the sanctuary doctrine. Many have also abandoned confidence in the integrity of the spirit of prophecy. Yet the sum total of these assaults on our convictions so far hardly amount to even getting our feet wet in the Jordan. What will we do “in the swelling thereof” when the water gets up to our chins? (Jer. 12:5).

The paranormal “evidence” can become almost overwhelmingly coercive. Genuine Biblical faith can shield us, but let us not be like Peter and boast prematurely of our invulnerability. We might better inquire, “Who is sufficient for these things?” Our only hope is in the promise that where sin abounds, grace will “much more abound.” Satan will perfect

his delusive power in this final test of Rev. 13 in ways that the stalwarts of former ages, including Paul and certainly our pioneers, never had to meet. It follows that more abounding grace must be received by those who would stand in the time of trouble, more than even Paul and the martyrs ever knew.

The links that bind Spiritualism to paganism are obvious. And the links that bind it to Catholicism are obvious. What is of particular concern to us is the Spiritualism links with Protestantism. If these links are real and pervasive, then we must note with concern our constant tendency to be like ancient Israel, to be like the nations around us.

A famous London medium in a seance was told by her spirit teacher “Philip”: “We are going to make an all-out effort to reach the orthodox churches . . . We are prepared to shake the very mortar between the stones of the buildings.” The Spiritual Frontiers Fellowship is a “church-oriented interdenominational movement . . . to encourage and interpret to the churches . . . the mystical, psychical, and paranormal experience.” Arthur Findlay said that “the time will come when the Christian Church will absorb all the teachings of Spiritualism.” Desmond Shaw wrote of the day when Spiritualists would “use our places of worship . . . for the demonstration of life after death.” Dr. Carl Wickland said, “People will pay money to the church but it will be to further the work of the beautiful truth of the life beyond. . . . Every minister will speak regarding the philosophy of life and spirit

return, and all isms will be done away with.” (30 Years Among the Dead, pp. 346, 347).

Outstanding personalities are examples of how Spiritualism has infiltrated Protestantism. Millions of sophisticated people are influenced by a blend of natural immortality and God-within self-affirmation. It is Spiritualism.

Evangelical’s premier evangelist said: “Without hesitation, I can assure you there is life after death. . . . With my own ears I heard my dying mother describe what she saw beyond the grave. And years earlier, my grandmother had a startlingly similar deathbed experience, coming face to face with her dead husband and Christ.” His descriptions of their emotional reunion with their dead husbands and “Christ” is moving. “My dying mother was looking into heaven and seeing my father. . . . It was miraculous. She could hear organ music and a choir singing as she slowly drifted toward the light. ‘It was as if I was in the most beautiful cathedral in the world—enveloped in music and singing and joy.’”

This tugs at people’s heart strings. Says this evangelist: “I look forward to [death] with joy and anticipation!”

This is in conflict with Scripture which says that death is an “enemy.” In fact, Christ personified as Wisdom says, “All they that hate Me love death” (Prov. 8:36). Do you catch the significance of this Scripture? To love death unmistakably involves an infatuation with the Antichrist.

One thing is sure: when we come to the final test, the “Christ” of popular Christianity will prove to be

the Scriptural Antichrist. But what is most serious is that this ultimate delusion cannot come unless preceded by decades of doctrinal confusion. "Through false doctrines, Satan gains a foothold, and captivates the minds of men, causing them to hold theories that have no foundation in truth." "The faith of every individual will be tested, and everyone will pass through a trial of close criticism." (Evangelism, pp. 589, 591).

This same evangelist declared that all the churches must unite and the logical one to head them all is the Pope.

An popular exponent of natural immortality and life after death assurance coupled with a God-within species of righteousness by faith had church leaders endorsing of his doctrines. The incident recalled serious infatuation with pantheistic Spiritualism which Ellen White labeled the "alpha" of "doctrines of devils," the "omega" to follow later. This discloses how easily we can be deceived.

Currently, a fresh species of Spiritualism and God-within philosophy is appealing, presented in highly popular seminars, with its rainbow and emphasis on Holism and blatant self-esteem. The New Testament doctrine of the cross and the believer's crucifixion to self "with Christ" is anathema to such popular theology.

Here is something important to recognize:

(1) How could Ellen White have been so outstandingly right in all her declarations about Spiritualism written since she was a teenager? If your confidence in her is waning, let me suggest you go through the nearly half a thousand

statements about Spiritualism, and find just one that needs to be retracted or even modified, now that we're nearly a century further down the road. This is no time to jettison one's confidence in Ellen White.

(2) Pioneer Seventh-day Adventists stuck their neck out in their bold recognition of the Papacy as the little horn of Daniel and the beast of Revelation 13 and the coming threefold union of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Spiritualism. If they were basically wrong about anything, here was a splendid opportunity to blow it; but behold a bull's eye hit in prophetic recognition. This is no time to jettison confidence in our basic prophetic positions. Adventist Futurism innovations in prophetic interpretation may not on the surface appear to be Spiritualism, but they will inevitably weaken confidence in what has made us to be a people and render us vulnerable in the final crisis.

The most important aspect of modern Spiritualism, and perhaps the least appreciated by Seventh-day Adventists. Ultimate Spiritualism is not merely attempted conversations with the dead; it is that of course, but such is its more crude form. Its real essence is an involvement of the human heart and spirit with a counterfeit Holy Spirit. And it's easy for us to call it a "sweet, sweet Spirit in this place," unless our discernment is far better than the Laodicean one that is said to be "blind."

One of the most profound statements ever written by Ellen White was penned in her extreme youth. Her prophetic ministry and to a great extent our denominational integrity, stands or falls on the truth or otherwise of this startling statement. In EW

55, 56 she is describing the change in Christ's high priestly ministry from the first to the second apartment. Those who followed Him by faith, discerning the present truth of this change in heavenly ministry, with that consciousness prayed to Him in the Most Holy Apartment, asking for the gift of the Holy Spirit. "Then Jesus would breathe upon them the Holy Ghost." Next she describes those who did not discern or would not recognize the change in His high priestly ministry: "I turned to look at the company who were still bowed before the throne; they did not know that Jesus had left it. Satan appeared to be by the throne, trying to carry on the work of God. I saw them look up to the throne and pray, 'Father, give us Thy Spirit.' Satan would then breathe unholy influence; in it there was light and much power, but no sweet love, joy and peace."

I am awestruck as I ponder the implications of that. It is also repeated in essence in EW 260, 261 and GC 464. "Revival" and "reformation" are specifically said to be Satan's specialty for the deception of modern Christians. "Like the Jews, who offered their useless sacrifices, they offer up their useless prayers to the apartment which Jesus has left; and Satan, pleased with the deception, assumes a religious character, and leads the minds of these professed Christians to himself, working with his power, his signs and lying wonders, to fasten them in his snare. . . . The churches are elated, and consider that God is working marvelously for them, when it is the work of another spirit." (p. 261). What is that other "spirit?" The answer: Spiritualism. No

inspired word more frightening has ever been written; if Ellen White was wrong here, she was wrong everywhere. If she was right here, then the time is more than overdue when we should get crystal clear discernment and lead our youth out of these subtle snares.

The current Protestant revivals and church growth movements assume an entirely different character when this distinctive light is shed on them, as ultraviolet light transforms what otherwise was not conspicuous. Satan's ultimate deceptions are aimed directly at a little remnant of Rev 12:17; his massive infiltrations of modern Christendom are an elaborate maneuver to accomplish that other distinctive objective.

We need the faith of Elijah. But the Baal worship he had to meet in his day is to this what the ox-cart is to space travel.

Watch TV those tears welling up in thousands of eyes; catch the heart-tug of his emotional appeals based on the doctrine of natural immortality. What are you witnessing? Do you know what it is?

Watching and listening and reading these popular Protestant evangelists will confuse you. You begin to think you are listening to the true gospel. But they haven't seen the Sabbath. Is it really true that their understanding of righteousness by faith is correct, that all they need is to tack on to it our Sabbath doctrine? Or has the true gospel of Scripture somehow eluded them? Is the question a difficult one to face and answer? If so, be assured that when the mark of the beast blossoms out in its full-

blown maturity, recognition of it may be equally if not more difficult.

We are told that multitudes now in the church will prove at last to be “base metal” and will accept the mark of the beast in crisis. It may be that some “who have been regarded as worthy and righteous” among leaders and pastors may at last “betray sacred trusts” and urge God’s people to go along with the powers that be rather than “subject themselves to derision, insult, threatened imprisonment, and death.” “Ease-loving souls will be engulfed in the general ruin. . . . In the mighty sifting soon to take place we shall be better able to measure the strength of Israel. . . . Satan, clothed in angel robes, will deceive, if possible, the very elect.” “Many a star that we have admired for its brilliance will then go out in darkness” (5T 211, 81).

There is an irreplaceable element of the pure gospel which Ellen White represents as being ministered only to those who have followed Christ by faith into the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. She speaks of it as “love,” but obviously it is the quality of love that dominates the New Testament as *agape*. It is markedly different from the popular sentimental, self-centered idea of love that pervades many Christian churches, including many Seventh-day Adventist ones.

But the third angel’s message in verity is *agape*, and “the last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of [God’s] character of love [*agape*]” (COL 415).

Occasionally someone who has no conscious awareness of the sanctuary truth comprehends

something of the significance of *agape*. Anders Nygren, Lutheran Bishop of Lund, Norway, confesses that the doctrine of natural immortality does not comport with Biblical *agape*: “This idea of the natural immortality of the soul,” he says, “is completely foreign to the *Agape* motif Wherever the natural immortality of the soul becomes the fundamental religious dogma, we can be fairly certain that we are within the sphere of eros [an anti-**agape**, self-centered idea of love].” (**Agape and Eros**, p. 224).

The Life After Death enthusiasm appeals to deep levels of human emotion, to the very roots of personality. Spiritualism wears a beautiful, heart-thrilling mien. It coerces and if possible cancels proof-text reliance. Speaking with the tongues of men and of angels cannot compete with it, neither can understanding all mysteries and having all faith that moves mountains contend with it, nor can bestowing all one’s goods to feed the poor and giving one’s body to be burned save one from its delusive power. Only one thing can meet it “face to face,” to borrow Ellen White’s term, without being vanquished by it: *agape*. And that is actually a unique Seventh-day Adventist truth.

If Spiritualism will eventually masquerade as a counterfeit Holy Spirit, we must inquire how we can be sure of distinguishing between the true Holy Spirit and its opposite. Jesus warned us to beware of “false Christs” for they would be very deceptive (Matt. 24:24). A superlative false Christ will make a final debut just before the end: “As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will

personate Christ. . . . The great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come, . . . a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. . . . The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. The shout of triumph rings out upon the air: ‘Christ has come: Christ has come.’ The people prostrate themselves in adoration before him. . . . His blessing is pronounced upon the worshipers of the beast and his image, the very class upon whom the Bible declares that God’s unmingled wrath shall be poured out” (GC 624, 625). Although we read that there is only “one Lord,” that means only one **true** Lord. Satan sees to it that “there be gods many and lords many” (1 Cor. 8:5). Why does he also counterfeit the Holy Spirit?

Long before his impersonation of Christ will come his clever misrepresentations of truth. A false Holy Spirit is “that spirit of antichrist” that John warns us against (1 John 4:3). It is what Ellen White describes as “another spirit,” the source of numerous false revivals that are widely hailed as blessings from heaven (GC 464). Whereas the true Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin and motivation to forsake it (John 16:8), the counterfeit will bring the opposite—the conviction that all is well and sin need not or cannot be overcome. He induces the inner feeling and outward claim which is false assurance, “I am saved,” which COL 155 warns against. He prepares souls to protest sincerely “in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy

name done many wonderful works?” But the Lord must reply, “I never knew you.” (Mt 7:21-23). Their constant sense of “Christian” euphoria, their unending miraculous answers to prayer, their phenomenal success in soul-winning, their confident assurance of salvation, were all induced by “another spirit.”

The false Holy Spirit subtly disparages genuine Christian experience which is a deep humbling of self before the cross wherein human pride and self-importance are crucified “with Christ.” To “fall on the Rock and be broken” is ridiculed as being negative. At some mysterious, unseen moment the hidden line is crossed where the true Holy Spirit’s insistent conviction of sin is rejected as being the work of the devil, and the soul surrenders to Satan’s alluring sense of confident well-being when in fact the final sin against the reproof of the Holy Spirit in *agape* is indulged.

While one class afflict their souls in deep contrition and receive the seal of God, the other class receive the final seal of Spiritualism. One has security by *agape*-induced faith alone; the other embraces a false security by assumption and presumption.

An orphan, he had been reared by a loving uncle who helped him get married and raise his family. The uncle was like a father to him, and enjoyed doing all he could for the family. Then the old man became sick. The nephew tenderly cared for him, and the uncle willed all his possessions to him. Then he died. Immediately trouble began. Misfortunes afflicted the young man’s family sickness, crop loss, accidents. A witch or

soothsayer assured him that his uncle's spirit was angry with him; he must build an elaborate tomb for him. The young man was poor and struggling to support his family and educate his children, yet he sacrificed much and built the tomb. Still the troubles continued. The witch doctor said that the dead man was demanding more sacrifice, even a bull. Then the young man began to think. During his lifetime, the uncle was as kind and loving as anyone could be. Why should he change now after death to be so vengeful, cruel, and selfish? "Who is this spirit? Is he really my dead uncle?" he asked.

The young man fortunately had a friend who introduced him to the Bible. There he learned the truth about the dead, that they are asleep and know nothing; they cannot harm us in any way. Then who are these evil spirits that seek to frighten us and trouble us? The Bible says that they are "the spirits of devils, working miracles" (Revelation 16:14), the evil angels who joined with Satan in rebellion against God (12:7-9). But should we be afraid of them? Not at all, says the Word of God, for at the cross Christ has conquered Satan and all his evil angels. "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," He says (John 16:33).

The weakest, humblest believer in the Saviour is delivered from all such fear. If some "ghost" or "spirit" seeks to terrify him, he can laugh at it and command it in the name of Jesus to go away. Light shines upon our pathway, the Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Let us cherish the light, thank God for it, and let Him take all fear out of our hearts.