

My Road To Religions And Faith - Foreword

Although belief and religion, serving God and serving the church are related to some extent, and often times they are mingled among most believers, they are not exactly the same thing. Here I only refer to faith and service in a narrow sense, that is, joining Christianity and the co-worker activities in the church. I won't say too much about my fight for truth, freedom, justice and human dignity in my life.

My understanding of Christianity was prepared during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies (1978-1983, 1986-1989). I wanted to enter the door of Catholicism around 1995 (I lived near Xujiahui, Shanghai at the time, where there is perhaps China's greatest Catholic church). But Christian churches in history, especially the religious terror reign in Europe in the Middle Ages, the darkness of religion, the corruption of religion, and the destruction of European civilization by religion, etc., have left me with lingering fears. These imprints have not completely faded so far. To this day, there are still disturbing corruption scandals in various religious systems around the world from time to time. However, Christianity has produced some new positive elements after Martin Luther's reformation: Church autocracy has been curbed to a certain extent, corruption has been mitigated, and charity, education, and medical work have become mainstream. After hundreds of years of reformation, Christianity has become a powerful force for social progress and plays a pivotal role in the development of today's world. Today's Christianity is not a reactionary force of the Middle Ages, but a driving force of modern civilization. Where Christianity develops, people enjoy more freedom, more democracy, more protection of rights, more prosperity and more dignity. Therefore, I can no longer look at Christianity through the eyes of the past, but as Protestantism reborn from the ashes, a people's religion that has completely stripped the ancient Roman Church.

In this way, after many years of wandering, I finally mustered up the courage to step into a church of the Seventh-day Adventist Church located in a commercial building on West Wensan Road, Hangzhou, China on one Friday evening in September 2004. At that time, I lived in a nearby community, and it was only a few minutes' walk away. It has been nearly 4 years since I came to Hangzhou in early 2001. I have been earning a living alone and did not work formally (although I worked in two companies during the period, but the time was very short), so I felt a little lonely and needed a group environment. After thinking about it again and again, I feel that only the Christian church is the place where it is possible to find fellowship. I remember the first time I went to the church's evening Bible study. People there were quite enthusiastic and gave new comers a little warmth. So far, I can still clearly remember the scene when a sister in the church handed me the Bible at that time, which is vivid in my mind. Later, I went to the church frequently, mainly attracted by the psalms there. Since I listened to the hymns in the church, I basically stopped listening to secular songs. Even the violin concertos, piano concertos, and symphonies that I like very much over my long years before no longer catch my eyes. I bid farewell to Paganini, Heifetz, Menuhin and others. It's a pity that my vocal cords were not good enough to open my throat and sing loudly, but I still tried to participate in hymn singing activities of the church choir as much as possible. Gradually, my heart got a kind of cleansing, my soul was sublimated, and I felt that God was so close that there was no reason not to contribute to the cause of God. After nearly two years of hard work, under the call of God, and through the strict assessment of the church, in June 2006, together with a couple of other brothers and sisters, I was baptized in Wenxin Church in Hangzhou, and officially became a child of God in the name of the Lord. At that moment, I felt extremely comfortable and happy. Life has entered a new page, the old me of the past is gone, and the Spirit of God descends on me.

For a long time, I insisted not to associate with the evil, not to bow to the evil, and hence I have paid a huge price for it. Although I was not a Christian before, after reading the Bible, I discovered that I was still adhered to God's commandments and words in many ways, and upheld the spirit of God's fraternity in dealing with my parents, brothers and sisters, classmates, friends, colleagues, bosses, and various social relationships. And for this reason, I did not hesitate to give up many opportunities that seem very valuable today, including career in the top Chinese government, academic and business opportunities, so that my life and career have suffered serious setbacks. Sometimes standing up for faith—that is, truth and righteousness—comes with a price, including a huge price, up to life. My persistence is called stubbornness and paranoia by many people, and there are even more outrageous sayings. Even my brothers and sisters can't understand me, including my late mother who sometimes has quite a criticism. In today's world, there is increasing pressure to keep faith. As Christians, we live in a very challenging environment.

However, God has prepared beautiful promises for us. As long as we stick to our integrity and don't go with the tide or go with the crowd, we will surely get good blessings. Therefore, no matter where I am, no matter what my circumstances, I will remain a child of God.

After the spiritual issues were clarified, I had to take practical actions, so it became natural to participate in various holy work activities of the church. According to my actual situation, I choose to visit brothers and sisters as my main job, especially visiting brothers and sisters who were seriously ill was my main task. Because I think, if I get seriously ill, how I will long for someone to care about me, although I don't expect them to be able to get rid of the illness. I regard their sickness as my own, and pray to God for them. Of course, God has a plan of his own that is outside of our minds. I feel that it is one of the most meaningful holy work activities. Although we often took the bus for a long time, from the west to the east, from the north to the south of the city, and travelled long distances, we never tired of it (because most of us did not have our own private cars), eager to bring our greetings and concerns, and God's mercy and love to the sick brothers. The church members of all ages, occupations, and living conditions from all over the country participated in the visits together. However, there was no difference between us at this time, and we were all God's workers, called co-workers. What a wonderful profession! At that time, I admired that the main leaders of the church participated in the visiting work with us in a very low-profile manner. I was deeply impressed by their dedication and thought that there was no reason for us to do less.

In addition to visiting, I was also responsible for the management of some church equipment and other activities with several brothers, including giving one or two witnesses, and making a slide show for Christmas. In terms of evangelism, although I did not distribute promotional materials, wherever I went, I made no secret of my Christian identity and was proud of it. I firmly believe in the existence, justice and goodness of God, but I have also noticed various problems in the secular church. Now how much we need messengers and prophets to guide people's path, to return to the path guided by God, to leave Egypt, and to return to Jerusalem!

In 2011, due to yearning for my mother and the lack of improvement in my career in Hangzhou, I returned to my hometown. Because I lived alone, I can't find my own church, and most of the family churches are on the wrong road, so the interaction with the church was reduced, but I still don't forget my sacred mission and hope that I can give myself completely to Christ.

In 2019, to become a servant of God, I decided to restart the theological study plan that had been interrupted for 10 years, and decided that all future life planning will be based on the study of God's words, writing books, trying to understand God's will thoroughly, and sharing the results of my own research with the world. This is also the reason why I decided to study theology again, and I believe it was God's arrangement as well. Since my mother passed away more than **three** years ago, I have nothing to miss in this world. Studying theology and staying away from the world is my only choice. The three-year commemoration period has passed, and I decided to leave the place where I was born, to be called by God to be a servant of God.

Of course, I was well aware of my incompetence, because theology is different from ordinary science. General science is my forte, I have some special talents that help me to be successful in certain aspects of research, and for the past 10 years I have devoted myself to studying various sciences, and for this I have abandoned my business. However, theology is about the truth about God, the destiny of human beings, and even the laws of the universe. These contents are well beyond the understanding of ordinary human beings. Because of this, even though I had such an idea 10 years ago and made preliminary attempts, such as learning Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and reading various language versions of the Bible (Chinese, English, German French, Russian, Greek, Hebrew and Latin), I still felt lack of confidence in the end and had to give up. A theological researcher must have the ability and chances to experience everything, see everything, and thoroughly understand life, human beings, and God. Apparently I do not have such ability and opportunities. But, 10 years later, I've been through a lot. I was 56 years old that year and will soon be 57. I have experienced everything in life, ups and downs, joys and sorrows, life and death. My mother's death brought the tragedy of my life to a peak. My mother used to be my only sustenance and attachment, and her departure made me an orphan. There is really nothing which can seriously ruin my life expect my mother's departure. I will never find comfort in my soul. No one in this world can comfort my pain, grief, and despair, except God, only he can comfort my hurt heart. Everything in my past disappeared with the departure of my mother. I

have only to come back again, go to church, go to God's house to live again. I want to study God's words thoroughly, what is the purpose of creating us, what kind of person does He want us to be, and what kind of life we should have to be worthy of being God's children. In a word, what is the meaning of our life. Beyond that, I want to study the merits and legitimacy (from God's perspective) of various social systems today with the Bible and the laws of God's language.

Therefore I asked the church and a couple of seminaries to carefully consider my request, as well as my theological study and research ideas. As for the specific study plan, it must be gradually clarified in the future. At present, I can only start from the most basic, because my Bible foundation is not solid. Although I have read a lot, I can remember very little, let alone use it flexibly. So, everything has to start from scratch. Nor am I going to be a pastor, because I don't have the words and the ability to speak in public. But I am more suitable for intensive research and thinking. Systematic and logical may be one of my strengths.

Seventh Day Adventist Church, Hangzhou Branch

Drafted on 2019.06.15

Modified on 2023-09-09

P.S.:

This script was a modified version of my letter to a local SDA church pastor and leader to apply for a theology study, translated from Chinese.

My road to faith was changed after I cancelled my theology study plan at home and abroad, and now I am a solo Christian, reading Bible alone with no chance to participate in church activities, because in my vicinity there is no church and no serious gathering as well. There is a family group, but they are not gathering for God's mission, rather for their own businesses, as most of the family churches in China.