

The True Christ

by Ekkehardt Mueller

Anyone who visits the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary in Washington, DC, would notice the variety of depictions and statues of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She comes in different forms and shapes—with a fair complexion or with different shades of skin color, slim and tender or as a robust figure. Different cultures have received her as their own, and although she was a Near Eastern youth, she has been made an African, Asian, Caucasian, or Hispanic lady, being incorporated into these respective settings. For some people Mary is simply the wonderful and extraordinary mother of Jesus. For others she is the mother of God, a resurrected and ascended heavenly queen who intercedes for human beings and at times seems to understand the human plight better than the Son of God Himself. For still others she is even a kind of female deity in the pantheon of gods—an idealized woman.

The Human Situation

The example of Mary's adaptation to different settings and life experiences indicates that as humans we see what we want to see—what we are used to, or what we expect to encounter. We may block out what is foreign, strange, or at first sight unacceptable. In other words, our environment, our upbringing, and the ideologies and philosophies that we encounter and consciously or unconsciously embrace—in short, our respective worldviews—condition us to shape a person in such a way that he or she fits our longings, ideals, and desires. If we do not make deliberate and informed choices, we will follow these strong influences uncritically, reflect and defend them, and may never be able to attain a more objective understanding of reality.

A myopic and culturally conditioned perspective is also applied to God. Brent Laytham has published an interesting book about God with the provocative title *God Is Not . . . Religious, Nice, "One of Us," an American, a Capitalist*.¹ In this volume, readers are confronted with human fabrications of the deity. As indicated, we tend to project on God our own life with its challenges and victories, and our presuppositions.² Thus, God easily becomes something like the Great Magician—good or evil—Santa Claus, or the Superman of all supermen. While we are created in God's image, we tend to make

God into our own images—a new golden calf—disregarding the second of the Ten Commandments. It is difficult for us to let God be God, who is not only immanent but also transcendent, not only approachable but also in some sense mysterious and unintelligible for limited human beings. But God is God and must be understood—as far as He has revealed Himself—and respected as such. “We long for a nonthreatening, usable deity, one who will boost our self-esteem and our sense of wellbeing (if not our golf handicap or our stock portfolio),” writes Laytham. “Church leaders—pastors and denominational leaders alike—give us exactly what we want: the nice god, a smiling, malevolent hybrid of the Grand Inquisitor and Mickey Mouse.”³

Portrayals of Jesus

Our worldview and presuppositions also determine how we see and understand Jesus. Jesus Himself raised the question of who the Son of Man is. The disciples' answer revealed that the masses understood Him basically as a prophet (Matt 16:13–14). While this was not completely wrong—He was also a prophet—it was not correct either because they missed the major point: Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God (Matt 16:16). Thus they had an insufficient and therefore false view of Him, which influenced their decisions and their lives.

Here are some contemporary voices about Jesus: Jesus “formed a political faction, was concerned with Israel alone, and spoke only of the God of Israel in typical ethnocentric fashion.”⁴ Jesus was a “collectivist person.” Therefore, “we can make no assumption that Jesus possesses self-knowledge.”⁵ Jesus' strenuous commands of “non-resistance, love of enemies, giving to all who ask, forgiving an infinite number of times”⁶ are exhortations of wisdom sayings, not to be taken literally but to be understood as an “ethic of intention.”⁷ One writer discusses the following portraits of Jesus: 1) “Jesus as Reasonable Visionary” 2) “Jesus as an Atypical Bandit,” 3) “Jesus as Spirit Person,” 4) “Jesus as Fatherless Son,” 5) “Village Healer,” 6) “Jesus as Utopianist,” and 7) “Jesus as Homo Religiosus.”⁸

But even if we do not subscribe to a negative critical view of Jesus that questions His incarnation, His divine nature, His resurrection, and the truthfulness and authority of New Testament books describing Him

and His message, we still may be affected by such an attitude. For instance, we may consider current scientific knowledge or popular philosophy more important than the Word of God, as the following quotation shows:

What has changed, of course, is our understanding of human nature. Science has shown human beings to be in certain important respects different from what used to be thought. . . . Human beings who can control the incidence of childbirth, mitigate the sterility of a partner in marriage, detect deformity or disability in a foetus four months before birth or, at the other extreme cause the destruction of thousands of human beings and irreparable damage in the environment by a single detonation, cannot be governed by exactly the same moral rules as were in force when none of these things was possible. . . . If our understanding and expectations of human nature have changed, so must the moral principles which we have traditionally based upon it [sic].⁹

And even if we would be careful not to go so far, we still may get it wrong with who Jesus was and still is. “We are much more powerfully influenced by the guiding images, ideas, and shifting values of the society in which we live than we even begin to suspect. And that very naturally shapes how we perceive Jesus.”¹⁰ Ellen G. White notes, “Many who suppose they are going to heaven, are blindfolded by the world.”¹¹ The bombardment by traditional and social media, pushing for the acceptance of their agendas, puts us under pressure. In the end we may think that truth and advancement of humanity is decided by certain loud voices or by the majority of society. We may become convinced these voices are correct; on the other hand, we might know they are wrong, while also being unwilling to be accused of political incorrectness or even hate by taking a biblical position.

Given the influence of society, it is quite logical that Matthew Richard presents *twelve false christs*—that is, portraits of Jesus found in various cultures and in part contradict the biblical portrayal of Christ.¹² But as previously stated, a partial understanding of Jesus and the omission of other elements of His life and teachings result in a distorted Christ. Lies or false doctrines typically contain elements of truth. Therefore, they are deceptive.

One of the examples Richard lists has to do with the pursuit of pleasure. In general, happiness can be appreciated—under the right conditions. However, the equation “what causes personal pleasure is good and what causes pain is evil” does not work and is unrealistic. It may even be dead wrong. Being happy, for instance, for having successfully robbed a bank contradicts not only God’s will but also society’s value system. Pleasure can be wrong, and pain may help us to heal or grow, even though we do

not like pain. Nevertheless, for many people the meaning of life and their ultimate goal seems to be the “pursuit of pleasure. . . . When ethical hedonism infiltrates Christianity, it sounds something like this, ‘God wants my life to be about success and happiness. As long as I do not hurt anyone, my choices are my choices’. . . ‘Everyone has the right to be happy without feeling guilty.’”¹³ The pleasure approach is a this-worldly approach, focusing on the well-being of people in the here and now and not taking into account the transcendent dimension. In this case, Jesus is the one to guarantee happiness and does not challenge anyone, supporting only or mainly a worldly dimension of life.¹⁴ This pleasure approach is related to what Richard calls “the Giver of Bling”—that is, the Master of Health and Wealth according to the prosperity gospel.¹⁵

In conjunction with the pleasure approach comes also the notion that personal experiences matter most. A subjective spiritual or even non-spiritual experience is taken as superseding the Word of God.¹⁶ The living Christ, who supposedly speaks to us, is understood as possibly wiping away whatever He taught before in Scripture.

Another distorted view of Jesus is that He is mainly interested in social justice. Jesus addressed the issue of justice repeatedly either by using the respective terminology or by referring to the concept. “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen . . . I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles . . . a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory” (Matt 12:18, 20).¹⁷ He challenged the scribes and Pharisees to pursue “justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Matt 23:23). At the end of time, the wicked will be separated from the just (Matt 13:49), and there will be a resurrection of the just (Luke 14:14). Jesus Himself is recognized as a just/righteous man (Matt 27:19). Jesus describes His earthly ministry in the following terms, quoting from Isaiah 61:1–2: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19). While there is a significant social dimension to Christ’s ministry, Jesus cannot be limited to a “social justice warrior.” There is much more to the ministry of Jesus, such as providing the correct representation of God and bringing eternal salvation to humankind.

A favorite “Jesus” among some secular people and many Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, is the loving Christ. This Christ accepts everyone, loving and supporting everyone unconditionally. He does not care, or at least, does not care much about sin and truth. He does not care for biblical doctrines,¹⁸ the divine law, and a moral lifestyle. He does not call for repentance and change. He does not insist on doing the will of God or respecting the boundaries that God has set for humanity in order to live in harmony with Him and each other and experience peace and joy. He is absolutely

tolerant and does not judge. Such a Christ is promoted not only in the public media but also by theologians. In this case, the question is how “love” and “sin” are defined. It also seems that the pendulum has swung all the way from a misguided, legalistic theological approach in the past to a so-called “cheap grace” approach now.¹⁹

While these are just some misrepresentations of Jesus, they are enough to show how we can be influenced by society around us. We now turn to Jesus in Scripture and take a brief look at how the Gospels and Revelation present Jesus.

Jesus in Scripture

Jesus and Love

It is no secret that Jesus is overwhelmingly associated with love. So we will focus on this theme for a moment. The following incomplete list contains love terminology.

1. *Jesus loves*
 - Jesus loves the heavenly Father (John 14:31)
 - Jesus loves His friends Martha, Mary, Lazarus, and John (John 11:3, 5, 16; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20)
 - Jesus loves His disciples and the believers (John 13:1, 23–34; 15:9; Rev 1:5)
 - Jesus loves His churches (Rev 3:9, 19)
 - Jesus also loves people who do not follow Him (Mark 10:21)
2. *Jesus teaches and commands love*
 - Love toward God (Matt 6:24; 22:37; Luke 11:42)
 - Love toward Himself (Matt 10:37; John 8:42; 14:15, 21, 23–24; 21:15–17)
 - Love toward the neighbor (Matt 19:19; 22:29)
 - Love within the community of believers (John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17)
 - Love in general (Rev 2:5, 19)
 - Love toward enemies (Matt 5:43–44)
3. *Jesus proclaims God’s love*
 - God’s love toward His Son (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 17:24, 26)
 - God’s love toward Jesus’ disciples (John 14:21; 16:27; 17:23)
 - God’s love toward the world (John 3:16)

Jesus’ love is also revealed in His interest in people as a group and as individuals—their well-being and eternal salvation (Matt 9:1–7, 18–37; Luke 19:2–9). He blessed the children (Matt 19:13–1). He associated with sinners (Luke 15:1–2). He touched the leper and healed him (Matt 8:1–3). He broke down barriers between people (Mark 7:24–30; Luke 10:30–37, John 4:7–30). He revealed to us God the Father.

Jesus and the Law

Jesus love, however, did not cause Him to be silent on the will of God as expressed in God’s law—and especially the Ten Commandments. He indicated that He did not come to do away with the law (Matt 5:17–19 and the rest of chapter 5). At various times He

pointed to the Decalogue as binding for His followers (Matt 19:16). In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7), He laid out the principles of the kingdom of God, also interpreting the law. In this case, He heightened the Ten Commandments and other moral laws, rather than downplaying them. In the conflict with rabbinic traditions He opposed human commandments (Matt 15:9) but reinforced and defended God’s law (Mark 7:8–13). For Jesus the law was not something negative to be avoided. He was clear: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The saints will “keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (Rev 14:12). Love and law are not contradictory elements; they go hand in hand if rightly understood and practiced. “We cannot understand the assurance of Mount Calvary unless we have heard the thunder of Mount Sinai.”²⁰

Jesus and Sin

Jesus was as serious about sin as He was about the law, and it is the law that reveals sin and makes us seek salvation. One of the reasons for Jesus’ seriousness about sin is that in spite of His love we may not be saved.

In Scripture sin is first of all separation from God. Sin separates and destroys relationships. Sin is to not believe in Jesus—that is, not being committed to Him completely (John 16:9; cf. 1:11). “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am He you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). Furthermore, sin is defined as transgression of the will of God, as missing the mark set by the Lord, as iniquity, and lawlessness (e.g., 1 John 3:4). It is associated with the devil (1 John 3:8), and the followers of Christ do not live a life of sin (1 John 3:6).

Sin is a serious problem. “If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell [Gk. *gehenna*]” (Matt 5:30). If people do not come out of Babylon, they will “take part in her sins” and experience her plagues (Rev 18:4). Jesus does not support or condone sin. He does not reinterpret sin. “Sin can come to be regarded in exclusively relational-therapeutic or social justice terms. This makes nonsense of sin as offensive to God apart from any this-worldly harm it causes human beings.”²¹

Jesus was not afraid to address the Pharisees and scribes and pronounce woes on them (Matt 23; Luke 11:52). In fact, He felt obligated to cleanse the temple (Mark 11:15–18). Jesus was not the “nice guy” in the sense that He tolerated everything and did not draw boundaries. He was not afraid to let the rich ruler go, although He loved him. He was not afraid to talk about sexuality and what could go wrong with it, about power and how it could be misused, about money and how it could become an idol and an oppressive tool. But still, even His harsher sayings and more forceful actions were driven by love. Jesus calls for a change of mind and action, for not being content with the status quo. He even calls for church members who sin to be placed

under church discipline if change does not take place (Matt 18:15–20). This is to be done so that they may not get lost. “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev 3:19). Jesus loves. He loves with a love that surpasses all of our love. But His love is not a spineless love.

Fortunately, Jesus came to “save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). He “came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt 9:13). The good news is that through Jesus sins can be forgiven (Matt 9:6). We are free and saved. However, after this has happened, Jesus says, “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you” (John 5:14). “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11). According to the New Testament, love “does not rejoice at wrongdoing (unrighteousness), but rejoices with the truth” (1 Cor 13:6). “Love is a Christian virtue that tolerates no evil while it rejoices in true goodness.”²² Sin is unacceptable. The sinner must be loved, but that does not necessarily mean that he or she is saved and can be part of the people of God.

Jesus and Judgment

Jesus’ love can also be seen in announcing God’s judgment in unambiguous terms. He wants people to be saved. Therefore, He has to speak up. This judgment may happen here and now. The final judgment will happen in the future. “I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment” (Matt 5:22). “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak” (Matt 12:36). “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” (Matt 23:33). “Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev 3:16; see also 2:5).

Behold, I am coming soon . . . to repay each one for what he has done. . . . Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood” (Rev 22:12, 14–15).

Jesus even serves as judge (John 5:22; Rev 19:11). However, “even Jesus’ highly critical confrontations with religious leader do not fall outside his loving solidarity with all people: they were the only way he could bring home to such people the character and demands of God’s love as it impinged on their particular situation.”²³

On the other hand, there is good news. Jesus tells us that we have a choice and through faith in Him can receive everlasting life. “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God”²⁴ (John 3:18; see also Mark 16:16). “Those who have done good [will be raised] to the resurrection of life, and those who have

done evil to the resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29). Forgiveness of sin and avoidance of condemnation are possible. “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (John 8:11). One scholar clarifies that “Jesus could not preach the reign of God without speaking of judgment. And that Jesus, who spoke with absolute certainty about the reign of God, also [spoke] with utter seriousness about judgment is something that . . . can no longer be doubted.”²⁵

Jesus and Salvation

There is more than this world and the seemingly important things that drive us. There is more than pleasure and temporary satisfaction here and now. There is communion with the God of love who satisfies all our deep longings for meaning, fellowship, and life in His eternal kingdom. But for salvation to be realized Jesus had to deal with our sins and the just demands of the law. Therefore, He died for us.

If Jesus would have gone the way of tolerance, he would not have gone to the cross but would have left us in our sins. . . . But because of His great love for us and His rich mercy, Jesus could not tolerate our sin. Indeed, the Son of God could not tolerate our sin, so He was compelled to the cross—in love—to do something about it.²⁶

This is the highest dimension of love. Says Jesus, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again” (John 10:17). “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). This is what Jesus did. He died for us on the cross, and this changes the believers’ outlook on life.

Jesus and Discipleship

Those who truly believe in Jesus are His disciples. Disciples love their Master. They are intrigued by His philosophy of life and His extraordinary teachings, which are the only ones that make sense—not only in the worlds untouched by sin, but even in our sinful world and our crooked societies. They have been tested by some and proven true. Disciples are intrigued by Jesus’ moral and absolutely consistent life. They are again and again surprised by His loving care for them, even here and now. They love His character and have gotten involved in His cause as His ambassadors.

But Jesus did not promise them only pleasure and no pain. Quite to the contrary! “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). No hedonism but self-denial; no crown in this life but a cross; not acceptance, praise, and honor but persecution, betrayal by friends and relatives, possibly martyrdom and hate (Luke 21:12–18)! “To take up the cross and follow Jesus meant embrac-

ing Jesus' utterly risky vocation—to be the light of the world in a way the revolutionaries had never dreamed of. It was to follow Jesus into political danger and likely death."²⁷

The Jesus who never challenges us, who fulfills all our wishes and looks away when we live a life of sin, is not the biblical Jesus. True followers of Him love Him more than their own lives and are willing to sacrifice what needs to be sacrificed, because they have understood Him and are no longer lords of their own lives but servants and friends of the Lord of lords and King of kings. Ellen G. White writes,

Love must be the principle of action. . . . And love will be revealed in sacrifice. . . . If we love Jesus, we shall love to live for Him, to present our thank offerings to Him, to labor for Him. . . . For His sake we shall covet pain and toil and sacrifice. We shall sympathize with His longing for the salvation of men. . . . This is the religion of Christ. Anything short of it is a deception. No mere theory of truth or profession of discipleship will save any soul. We do not belong to Christ unless we are His wholly.²⁸

A Comprehensive Picture of Jesus

We are ill-served with a truncated view of Christ. Instead of limiting Jesus to something He never was, we must accept the full picture of Him as presented in the New Testament and as briefly and partially outlined in this study. A Christ adapted to our culture and understanding of well-being, satisfaction, pleasure, and a painless life as the product and outcome of the gospel message does not serve us well. It means to serve two masters—and sitting “between two stools.” It may boost our egos but does not solve our deepest needs and longings.

Following the True Jesus

To always feel good, never to suffer disadvantages or challenges in life, to bring no sacrifices as followers of Christ but have only so-called success from a cultural perspective, does not reflect the religion of Christ. It describes a life centered on ourselves—a hedonistic attitude. True, it is easy to let our views on sexuality, marriage and divorce,²⁹ violence, termination of life, material possessions and the means to accumulate them, truthfulness, individualism versus community, tolerance, political correctness, and even the role and authority of Scripture be determined by society and culture. But we are followers of Christ as He is attested in Scripture.

To declare that Jesus is love, and therefore does not challenge us and does not care much about the divine law means to avoid to speak about judgment and sin and ultimately sanitizes Him into a culturally acceptable person who is more or less dispensable, a servant of our lusts and pleasures. But such a Jesus misses our deep lostness. Because if God's will is immaterial and

sin is no longer sin, cross and salvation become irrelevant, and the meaning of life gets lost.

At present we run the deadly risk . . . of accommodating Jesus to the thinking of our own time and watering down his demand. . . . Jesus is rendered irrelevant when his preaching of judgment, which makes up a significant portion of the gospel tradition, is ignored and there is talk only of the loving and tender Jesus. Jesus is tamed when there is no more preaching about his sharp words against the rich. . . . Jesus is tamed when it becomes taboo to speak of his celibacy. . . . Above all, Jesus is tamed and rendered irrelevant when he is presented only as a sympathetic rabbi, a prophet mighty in word and deed, or a gifted charismatic—or as the first feminist, a radical social revolutionary or a gregarious social worker. All that conceals his true claim. In all these categories Jesus is shrunken, distorted, twisted into shape, planed smooth, disempowered, accommodated to our secret desires.³⁰

But true love does not allow all things to happen; it is not constantly silent, nor does it support whatever people have in mind. Jesus was and is love, and this love is not complacent to evil and false decisions. Jesus' love for us took seriously our sin, takes seriously the law and judgment, and still saves us by His grace—if we allow Him to do so. The salvation experience leads to a walk with Him, following His footsteps as His disciples. Discipleship has been explained by the true Christ. It is not for us to define it.



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¹ D. Brent Laytham, ed., *God Is Not . . . Religious, Nice, One of Us, an American, a Capitalist* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2004).

² Matthew Richard, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? 12 False Christs* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2017), 4, defines presuppositions: “Presuppositions come from a lot of different places and circumstances such as political allegiance, emotional state, religious experience, psychological dysfunctions, physical environment, theological heritage, language, social conditioning, gender, intelligence, and culture values—to name a few. For example, if a person presupposes that good and evil are tied solely to pleasure and pain, then a person would view things in life that produce pain as evil and things that produce pleasure as good.”

³ Laytham, *God is Not*, 16–17.

- ⁴ Bruce J. Malina, “Social-Scientific Methods in Historical Jesus Research,” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. W. Stegemann, B. J. Malina, and G. Theissen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 15.
- ⁵ Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Ethnocentrism and Historical Questions about Jesus,” in *Social Setting of Jesus*, 38.
- ⁶ A. E. Harvey, *Strenuous Commands: The Ethic of Jesus* (London: SMC, 1990), 92.
- ⁷ Harvey, *Strenuous Commands*, 202.
- ⁸ Donald Capps, *Jesus: A Psychological Biography* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000), 7, 23, 36, 147, 165, 221, 260.
- ⁹ Harvey, *Strenuous Commands*, 199.
- ¹⁰ Gerhard Lohfink, *No Irrelevant Jesus: On Jesus and the Church Today* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 3.
- ¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 350.
- ¹² Richard, *12 False Christs*, xxiii, calls these false portraits “the Mascot, the Option among many, the Good Teacher, the Therapist, the Giver of Bling, the National Patriot, the Social Justice Warrior, the Moral Example, the New Moses, the Mystical Friend, the Feminized, and the Teddy Bear.”
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, notes that this false Christ “will never confront the sinful nature with God’s Ten Commandments; he will never call for repentance, and he will never talk about hell and damnation. Indeed, he will never condemn, correct, or criticize, which means that he waters down the Word of God to avoid unnecessary conflicts. He is an all-around nice guy who encourages his followers in their pursuits of pleasure and happiness.” Therefore, “a person can eat, drink, and be merry with no limitations, no guilt, and no shame. Pleasure can reign supreme” (*ibid.*, 10).
- ¹⁵ In this case, Jesus is perceived as a grand miracle worker who enables His followers to perform mighty signs and wonders and be blessed with prosperity, wealth, and health. Poverty is seen as a curse. Jesus is used to gain these material blessings and physical health. *Ibid.*, 76, states, “What the prosperity gospel teaching fails to realize is that sometimes, instead of solving our problems and giving us our wildest dreams, the Lord may allow our problems to remain. He may choose to have us suffer hardship for a time, even as He provides us with the power to stand. See 2 Corinthians 12:7–9. This also is the Lord’s loving care.”
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5–7, reports a Christian lady who had premarital sex. She felt this was a good experience. “When something is good, I just know with every fiber of my being that it is not sinful. . . . there are certain things I can no longer believe. There are certain things that I know Jesus would never support. The Jesus that I know is not like these other people’s Jesus” (*ibid.*, 5–6). The sixth commandment “she deemed . . . as repressive and wrong because it caused her to feel judged and feel emotional pain” (*ibid.*, 7).
- ¹⁷ All biblical quotations are from the ESV.
- ¹⁸ Richard, *12 False Christs*, 24, suggests, “To lose sight of Christian doctrine is to lose the pillar of our faith and summon troublesome alternatives.”
- ¹⁹ *Discipleship* is a book by the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, considered a classic of Christian thought. One of the most quoted parts of the book deals with the distinction which Bonhoeffer makes between “cheap” and “costly” grace. According to Bonhoeffer, “cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 44.
- ²⁰ Richard, *12 False Christs*, 13. He also states, “A false Christ without the Law of God who speaks pleasantries into ears only perpetuates the narcissistic epidemic of self-saturated persons” (*ibid.*, 15).
- ²¹ David J. Hamstra, “The Christian Debate on Same-Sex Marriage and Taylor’s Immanent and Transcendent Goods: Lessons from Adventist Approaches,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 57, no. 1 (2019): 187.
- ²² Richard, *12 False Christs*, 27.
- ²³ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 144.
- ²⁴ Believing in Jesus, according to John, is more than mentally acknowledging that He is the Messiah. It is accepting Him as Lord and Savior and following Him as a disciple. Leon Morris, *Jesus is the Christ: Studies in the Theology of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 186, stresses that “faith has content.”
- ²⁵ Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1997), 302. He continues that “the goal his preaching is intended to achieve [is]: repentance of individuals and of the whole nation, consisting in turning to him and the resolute performance of his works. For only through that repentance is it possible to avoid the inexorably approaching judgment. We must therefore presume that from the beginning the proclamation of judgment was a fixed, and for Jesus a very important, part of his preaching” (*ibid.*, 322).
- ²⁶ Richard, *12 False Christs*, 27.
- ²⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 47.
- ²⁸ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1900), 49–50. In White, *Gospel Worker* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1915), 183 she points out, “The question that Christ put to Peter was significant. He mentioned only one condition of discipleship and service. ‘Lovest thou Me?’ He said. This is the essential qualification.” Consequently, “obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship” (White, *Steps to Christ* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892], 60).
- ²⁹ E.g., Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 110, addresses this issue: “By forbidding divorce and remarriage, in appeal to the creation stories of the solidarity of husband and wife, Jesus was reinforcing the marriage bond as the essential core of the fundamental social form of the family.”
- ³⁰ Lohfink, *No Irrelevant Jesus*, 12, 17–18.