



## Contingency Plans | BY BONNIE DWYER

*"Christ is contingency. . . . Contingency is the only way toward knowledge of God, and contingency, for Christians, is the essence of incarnation."*

It is the poet Christian Wiman writing on the lessons of sorrow in *My Bright Abyss* (all quotes taken from Christian Wiman, *My Bright Abyss* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013). With bracingly honest words, he sketches his changing relationship with Christianity, and his fight with cancer. But faith, the lack of it, the return to it, the struggle with it, takes center stage, not the cancer. He speaks of pain and sorrow, but also of joy. Of silence and the varieties of quiet, and this: "The purpose of theology—the purpose of any thinking about God—is to make the silences clearer and starker to us, to make the unmeaning—by which I mean those aspects of divine that will not be reduced to human meanings—more irreducible and more terrible and thus ultimately more wonderful. This is why art is so often better at theology than theology is."

My summer vacation in words is underway. I am excited to think anew about change in the Christian life, which for Wiman is its essence. "Faith is not faith in some state beyond change," he asserts later in the book, "Faith is faith in change."

Then this,

*The minute any human or human institution arrogates to itself a singular knowledge of God, there comes into that knowledge a kind of strychnine pride, and it is as if the most animated and vital creature were instantaneously transformed into a corpse. Any belief that does not recognize and adapt to its own erosions rots from within. Only when doctrine itself is understood to be provisional does doctrine begin to take on a more than provisional significance. Truth inheres not in doctrine itself, but in the spirit with which it is engaged, for the spirit of God is always seeking and creating new forms.*

There are so many ideas that I could quote. My copy of

the book is dog-eared, and underlinings abound. This summer reading trip has refreshed me immensely, and as always, also influenced my understanding of what I am reading to prepare the current issue of *Spectrum*.

It was the poet Billy Collins whom I first heard call poetry "travel literature"—a journey from the first word of the poem to the last. The essence of the trip is how the poet gets you there.

This travel issue of the journal, with its amazing reports from Machu Picchu, North Korea, and Afghanistan, also contains poetry, so you can travel with Adventist university students and alumni and observe their turn of a phrase. As usual, we begin in the Bible, this time examining the texts that infuse the Adventist doctrine of the Investigative Judgment, and our changing understanding of them. Ronald Lawson takes us on a trip around the world with his research on the growth of Adventism, comparing it to the other indigenous American religions—Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses. His comparisons changed my understanding of Adventists abroad.

At the end of his book, Wiman declares, "So much of faith has so little to do with belief, and so much to do with acceptance. Acceptance of all the gifts that God, even in the midst of death, grants us. Acceptance of the fact that we are, as Paul Tillich says, accepted. Acceptance of grace."

The contingency plan for this issue is for it to be a summer vacation that changes some of your thoughts and leaves you amazed with our authors at the trip we have made. ■

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**Correction:** In the Spring 2013 issue of *Spectrum*, on page 23, in the article "Toward Oneness and Freedom: The Road from Babylon to General Conference Organization," the date for the gathering of the Seventh-day Adventists was incorrectly stated as May 22, 1863. The meeting actually took place on May 20 and May 21, 1863.