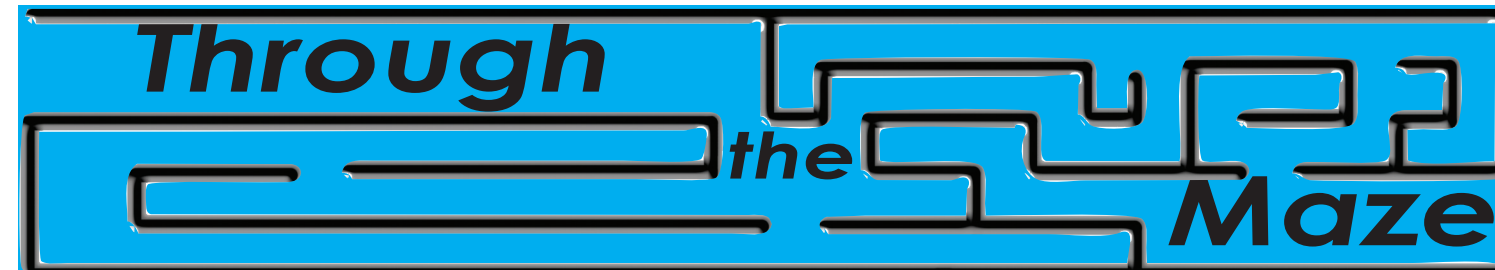


**“Truth without Love is too hard; Love without Truth is too soft”**

=====**Living Faith Church**=====



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## **The First Six Great Christian Councils**

### **Who speaks for God?**

**A**s a Protestant, I am committed to the concept *solo scriptura*. As Luther said, “a simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest pope without it” Again, John Wesley stated in the 18th century, “In all cases, the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not the Scripture by the Church.”

However, that does not mean the Body of Christ is not a safeguard against erroneous private interpretations of scripture. When, for example, I study the Bible, I examine my own interpretations in light of what respected Bible scholars have said about the passage. There is safety in many counselors. (Prov. 11:14)

During the first millennium of Church History, many

doctrinal disputes arose among Christians, particularly concerning the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is to be expected. To resolve these disputes, pious and intelligent Christian leaders came together to search for the best understanding of what the Bible taught about these important issues.

Between 30 A. D. and 680 A.D. six so-called Ecumenical (entire church) Councils were held. These Councils followed the practice the Apostle Paul started when he traveled to Jerusalem to see if the Gospel he preached met with the approval of the other Apostles. Through the Third Council of Constantinople, these Great Councils wrestled with thorny problems. Two millennia later, the Body of Christ continues to accept their pronouncements in their entirety, without change! (cont. page two)

**I** am standing in the lobby of the Ameritel Inn in Pocatello, Idaho with Ed Decker. We are on our way to a meeting about Mormonism on the campus of Idaho State University. Ed’s face is beet red and he doesn’t look good at all. He has had lots of health problems and I don’t want him to die on my watch.

I do the one thing I always do when I am in trouble: I call my wife, Margaretta, and ask her what to do. She is a Registered Nurse who works with cancer patients. I describe Ed’s appearance. She is silent for a while then says: “Go to the meeting and if he passes out call 911.”

I always joke that when I go to Mormondom to do seminars on Mormonism I never worry; but I do have someone else start my car! Although it is a joke, there is probably wisdom in the thought. And traveling with Ed makes things even more dicey. Ed and I have made sev-



Ed Decker as he appeared in *The God Makers* movie

## **Travels with Eddy:**

### **He is da man!**

eral trips into Mormon towns and cities, usually announcing our meetings with an ad in the local paper titled something like “Why we love Mormons, but not Mormonism.” We can usually get a crowd.

Getting to the meeting itself often is a little more difficult.

Both Ed and I are sort of high energy and very talkative—not to mention forgetful. We often drive by our meeting site several times before we remember to turn in. After one such series of meetings I bought us matching bumper stickers for our cars which read: “Would someone please just tell me what the heck is going on?” I have that bumper sticker on my filing cabinet where I am writing this. Along with a note from Ed—a quote actually from George Eliot—which reads: “Friendship is the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a per

(cont. page six)

# First Six Great Christian Councils

49 A.D. Paul at Jerusalem	381 A.D. First Council of Constantinople #2	451 A.D. Council of Chalcedon #4	680 A.D. Third Council of Constantinople #6
<b>30 A.D.</b>	<b>325 A.D. Council of Nicea #1</b>	<b>431 A.D. Council of Ephesus #3</b>	<b>680 A.D.</b>
30 A.D. Death of Jesus		<b>553 A.D. Second Council of Constantinople #5</b>	

Comparison between Creed of 325 and Creed of 381	
First Council of Nicea (325)	First Council of Constantinople (381)
We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible.	We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only-begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;	And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds (æons), Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father;
by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth];	by whom all things were made;
who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man;	who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man;
he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven;	he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead;
	whose kingdom shall have no end.
And in the Holy Ghost.	And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic Church; we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.
[But those who say: ‘There was a time when he was not;’ and ‘He was not before he was made;’ and ‘He was made out of nothing,’ or ‘He is of another substance’ or ‘essence,’ or ‘The Son of God is created,’ or ‘changeable,’ or ‘alterable’ — they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]	<i>Note: Some confusion arises over the use of the phrase “holy catholic and apostolic Church.” This is not a reference to the Roman Catholic Church. It describes the Body of Christ—all born again believers. Sometimes this is called “the invisible Church,” but it does not describe a denomination, but all those “saints” saved by faith in Christ.”</i>

cal debate was concerning the Nature of Jesus Christ (or, more particularly the degree of sameness or difference between the Father and the Son). A division had grown up in the Church at Alexandria (Egypt) between two groups. One saw the nature of the Son as separate from and subordinate to the Father—saying the Son was a creation of the Father. The other saw the divine nature of the Father and the Son as one and the same. The first group was led by a theologian named Arias, and the second a theologian named Athanasias.

Critics of orthodox Christianity—including almost all of the cults such as Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses—normally agree with the Arians, seeing Jesus as a creation of God and not Eternal. These groups often ridicule the serious nature of Nicea, claiming the Bishops were puppets of the Emperor Constantine, who they see as an evil dictator who feigned a conversion to Christianity so he could introduce “Greek” theology into the Church. This is pure invention and hogwash! He attended the entire conference, but he did not vote.

Constantine hosted a council of some 300 Bishops from throughout the Eastern and Western realms, including Bishops from Gaul, Spain, Russia, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Neocaesarea, Thebes, and Persia. These were the cream of Christian leaders. Along with their retinues, the throng numbered more than 1,500 attendees. Many of them came bearing scars of torture as martyrs for the Christian faith, persecution which had ended just two years earlier with The Edict of Milan. The Edict of Milan was issued in 313, in the names of the Roman Emperors Constantine I, who ruled the western parts of the Empire, and Licinius, who ruled the east.

This kind of gathering, which would occur six times by 680 A.D, established Christian orthodox theology through the very biblical method of submitting controversy to the entire Church. When such a doctrinal consensus exists universally, it is worthy of the most serious consideration. Today Roman Catholicism claims to speak with authority for the Christian Church. However, it does not by any rational argument represent the entire Body of Christ. This is the fallacy of Catholicism’s doctrine of Church Authority. Such authority could only exist in a great predominance of all blood-washed believers—the *real* Church!

The Council of Nicea was necessary because the Arian controversy had escalated to a first class fight and threatened the unity of the Church. Hanging in the balance was the very essence of our worship of Jesus Christ. If He is not fully God, then it is blasphemy to worship

event, all such legalistic attempts have failed to gain an upper hand in orthodox Christian theology. Thus was Legalism relegated to the ash heap of failed religion.

### 325 A.D. Council of Nicea—First Great Council

*(Jesus is fully God)*

The most prominent of all the great councils. By 325 A.D. the Christian Church had risen to first place among Western Religions, supplanting the paganism of the Greek and Roman worlds. In every metropolis in the Roman Empire, the Christian Churches recognized the most influential pastor as the Bishop of the city or region. Great theological debates were the order of the day as the (relatively) new Church fought to describe its beliefs.

An example of the fruit of the theological debate of that era was the establishment of the Canon of Scripture. The Old Testament Books were agreed upon by the time of Christ. But after His death, the Church wondered what Christian writings were worth dying for (literally, for in that era one could be executed for professing Christian faith). Before the Council of Nicea, Christians had settled—often through vigorous debate—the content of the Canon of Scripture. That canon has stood without revision until this very day.

The first great theologian

### The Worth of Words

How easily we forget that the *Word* of God was manifest in the flesh. The holy word or *logos* is how God has chosen to speak to us. Part of what is embodied in the revelation of the *logos* is that idea that God is *rational*. Our word “logic” is about words. To our detriment, we have been convinced that “one picture is worth a thousand words.” While that may be true on some level, for conveying truth—spiritual or otherwise—we are hamstrung without words. Inconography, stained glass windows, music, and painting can convey *emotion*, but they are poor media for delivering *doctrine* (teaching or understanding). When Roman Catholicism finally began rendering the mass in the native tongue of its communicants, real knowledge about God surged among the masses.

In the last one-hundred years, pictures, images, and television have dramatically changed the way we communicate—we are poorer for the loss of verbal dialogue. Some concepts cannot be conveyed without words. *(So then faith [cometh] by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* Rom 10:17) That is why the Bible puts such a premium on reading and hearing the Word of God.

Today some Evangelical churches have replaced solid Bible-teaching on Sunday morning with what they hope are spiritual experiences. While drama and music and “atmosphere” can be useful in providing an emotional backdrop to aid in conveying the Gospel message, they cannot replace it. Today a movement within the Church called “the emergent (or emerging) church movement” is substituting dogma and doctrine with candles, incense, lighting, and meditation. Such a move supposedly allows people to somehow “absorb” religious truth. But it is a mistake to think we can disciple people to Christ without the rigors of doctrine. Bible-illiterate disciples are no disciples at all.

As we revisit the verbal battles of the First Seven Councils, we begin to appreciate the stress the early scholars placed on “rightly dividing” the Word of God.

*For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb. 4:12)*

Him. (In fact, that is why He was crucified, for claiming to be the I AM.)

At the conclusion of the huge conference only two Bishops (and Arius) refused to agree to the arguments of those supporting Christ as fully and forever God. Forthcoming from the conference was the Nicene Creed, which orthodox Christians still see as a cogent statement of the Christian faith, stating of Jesus, “...not made, being of one substance with the Father.”

Paul would have said his meeting was necessitated: “...because of false brethren....who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:” (Gal 2:4)

### 381 A.D. First Council of Constantinople—Second Great Council

*(Affirmed Nicea and clarified doctrine on the Holy Spirit)*

Interestingly, after Nicea, Arianism again began to prosper. In 381, the Church gathered to end it with finality. It reaffirmed Nicea and added language clarifying doctrine concerning the Holy Spirit—affirming that He, too, is of one substance with the Father and the Son. This formulation gives foundation for the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This council effectively thwarted Arianism and opened the door to a discussion of the *human* nature of Christ, in following councils.

In addition, it clarified the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Triune God.

### 431 A.D. Council of Ephesus—Third Great Council

*(Declared that Jesus is one Person with two Natures)*

This council was convened to combat the heresy of Nestorianism which taught that Jesus the Son is embodied in two persons, a divine one (the *logos*) and a human one (the man Jesus of Nazareth.) The implications of this teaching are (1) that Mary did not give birth to God the Son, but only the human man Jesus; and (2) therefore Jesus the Eternal God was not nailed to the cross, but only the human Jesus. This of course does great damage to the Atonement, because only God can atone for all of mankind’s sins.

Ephesus confirmed the Nicene Creed and condemned Nestorius, the author of the heresy. The Council of Ephesus stated that Jesus the Son is *one person* who embodies *two natures*, one human and one divine.

### Picky or Accurate?

Some of these distinctions seem to us to be rather fine or picky, but as the great Church Father, Augustine, said, “See where these things take us.” In other words, getting the Nature of Jesus wrong shows up in practice in very egregious

ways. One modern theologian has said, “A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pew.”

Such narrow distinctions are demanded by the Apostles. Paul said: *For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.*

*Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30)*

He also told his disciples: *As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines....(1 Tim 1:3)(NAS)*

Finally he warned us all in 2 Cor. 11 that we are in danger of those who would preach to us a “false Jesus.” And in Galatians 1:6-8 he warns us that we must guard the Gospel against redefinition even if by angels!

### 451 A.D. Council of Chalcedon—Fourth Great Council

*(Affirmed the full Humanity of Christ)*

Chalcedon was located in what is now Istanbul, Turkey. Here a council was convened to further clarify the nature of Jesus.

Chalcedon precipitated out of a controversy not over whether Jesus was *divine*, but answered those who asserted that he was not really *human!* Some claimed that after the Incarnation Jesus remained divine, but that his apparent human nature was not human in the fullest sense. Chalcedon formally declared that Jesus Christ was the God-man and that in the Second Person of the Trinity there existed (after the Incarnation) *two natures*—one human and one divine. God truly hung on the cross, but Jesus the man suffered and died.

As I write this, understanding that these matters are indeed hard to get hold of, I am reminded of the great Hillary of Poitiers, a Post-Nicene Father who stated that we would not have to formulate doctrinal statements if there were not heretics among us:

*But the errors of heretics and blasphemers force us to deal with unlawful matters, to scale perilous heights, to speak unutterable words, to trespass on forbidden ground. Faith ought in silence to fulfil the commandments, worshipping the Father, reverencing with Him the Son, abounding in the Holy Ghost, but we must strain the poor resources of our language to express thoughts too great for words. The error of others compels us to err in daring to embody in human terms truths which ought to be hidden in the silent veneration of the heart. (On the Trinity 2.2)*

### 553 A. D. Second Council of Constantinople—Fifth Great Council

*(Reinforced Earlier Councils)*

This, the Fifth of the Six Great Councils is very interesting. Before I describe it, I want to refer to an event in my own ministry. Many of you reading this will remember a newsletter I wrote about a meeting I held in Pocatello, Idaho in the summer of 2005. That meeting was as close to being anointed as any one I have ever conducted. I operated there in part-

nership with my respected friend and colleague, Lenny Meyer, Pastor of Spirit of Life Christian Center in Central Point, Oregon. During the day we met with a handful and especially beloved and tuned-in pastors from Pocatello. That night I preached from 2 Corinthians 11:4:

*For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear {this} beautifully.*

I preached that verse in the face of the fact that Pocatello is a Mormon dominated city, and Mormonism teaches that God is a man and that men may become God. As I preached I asked “How is it possible that such a blasphemous doctrine could be preached without the Christians of the city rising up to rebuke that blasphemy?” As I warmed to my subject I said, “How can you and I sit idly by while such monstrous lies against the Nature of God are promulgated?”

Why do I tell that story? Because, as I read the proceedings of the Second Council of Constantinople, I could hear the indignation coming from the 165 Bishops in attendance at the Council. Indignation that heretics could blithely mutter blasphemy without challenge.

Let me set it up. The Second Council of Constantinople was not addressing anything new. It addressed a few influential Christian leaders who refused to submit to the mandates of the earlier councils. It would be like an assembly of modern day Christian leaders convening to address Mormonism, to condemn it, to anathematize it. To command its leaders to stop blaspheming against the nature of God. We *should* do that. The difference is *they* actually *did it!* In my mind that is huge!

Actually, the conference addressed only three men: Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), Theodore of Cyrus (d. 457), and Ibas of Edessa (d. 457). These men had written against the conclusions of Chalcedon and many were influenced by them. So the Second Council of Constantinople anathematized their writings. In so doing, it strengthened the case for the four earlier Councils.

### 680 A. D. Third Council of Constantinople—Sixth Grat Council

This council clarified the description of the two natures of Jesus, the Second Person of the Triune God. It stated that the divine and the human nature existed in “hypostatic union.” Or, again that Jesus Christ was both truly divine and truly human.

Remember, the Councils were made up of hundreds of Bishops from everywhere in the Christian world. The Bishops were both pious and learned. They devoted their lives to the study of God’s word and they were convinced that heretics—if they were not corralled by precise language—would introduce soul damning heresies. The believed this first because it was taught in the Bible:

*But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. (2 Peter 2:1)*

They also believed heretics must be dealt with because of their experience. Anyone with spiritual discernment who has been in the Church for some time sees false prophets come and go. In my ministry I have encountered dozens of such people. They come with a “new wrinkle” on doctrine, a new understanding of scripture. They present themselves as knowing and wise. Paul speaks of such men in the first chapter of

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Romans:

*...for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness....[who] became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. (Rom 1:18-22)*

These Bishops—true men of God—had seen it all. And they knew, as St. Augustine knew, that they were not just wrangling over words. *What people do is based on what they believe!* Augustine, speaking of the Pelegians (who taught that humans could live without sin) said, “These pompous windbags have no understanding of the depths of the sinful tendencies of the heart.” As Augustine knew they would, the Pelegians concluded that since man *could* live sinlessly, he *must* live sinlessly—or he was not really saved.

Augustine fumed, “Look where this will lead!” He meant that if people really believe they can live without sin they will have to lie to themselves. They will become arrogant, judgmental, critical—withered old prunes! That is not what Jesus died for!

So the best minds and the most pious men of Christendom in the first thousand years of Christian history paid the price of prayer and scholarship and met together and argued and haggled until they hammered out—on the anvil of God’s Word—minimum acceptable statements about God. Lots of room exists in the Body of Christ for liberty, but not on basic questions like: “How many Gods are there and will you be one?” Or “How many good works must be added to the work of Christ on the cross for salvation of our souls?” Or “Who qualifies to be welcomed as a member

of the Body of Christ?”

Such questions are answered wrongly by false prophets everyday in modern America. Just as they were in the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.

### Further Councils

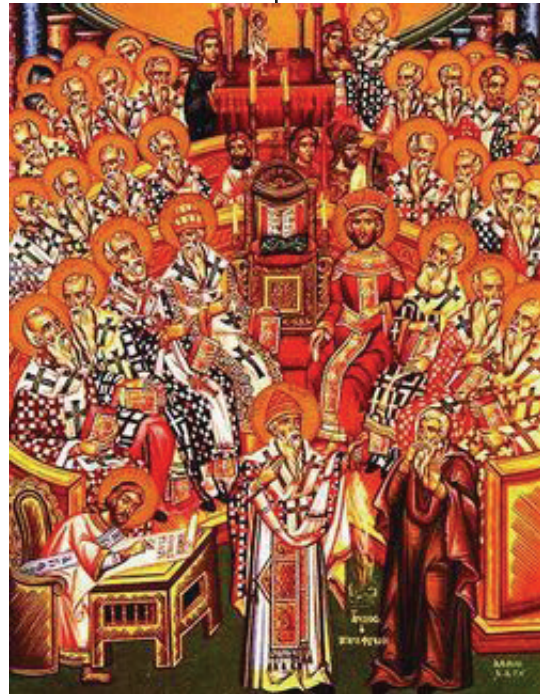
Great Councils would continue in *segments* of the Church right up until 1962 when Roman Catholics under the direction of Pope John XXIII convened what has become known as Vatican II. But the current Roman Catholic Church can make no legitimate claim to represent all of Christendom.

In the Second Millennium, the Church fractured into East and West in the Great Schism. Seven hundred years later the Protestant Reformation would separate itself from the Western Church.

In studying the First Great Councils, most people include the Seventh Council (The Second Council of Nicea). However, there is some discussion over the true ecumenicism of that council and even some questions about its procedure. For sure, Anglicans and Protestants have never accepted it.

The most startling aspect to the Great Councils is that the theology they established has never been seriously challenged by a significant part of the Body of Christ. The ideas they came up with on the Unity of God, the Three Persons of the Trinity, and the Two Natures of Christ serve as bedrock minimum declarations for any who would consider themselves Christians. All prophets and their followers who depart from these formulations find themselves outside the fellowship that binds Christians together.

As the Apostle Paul cogently penned under the direction of the



Holy Spirit:

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.[There is] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who [is] above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph 4:1-6)*

■

### Travels with Eddy

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Along with a note from Ed—a quote actually from George Eliot—which reads: “Friendship is the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words.”

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Ed Decker is the real deal. What you see is what you get. Lots of people (including, unfortunately, many Christians) do not like Ed. They think he is too brusque or too combative. Some think he is disingenuous. They are wrong. I take comfort that I also knew the late Walter Martin very well. I am always shocked when people say that Walter was a “hard man.”

Not at all. He was tough in debate and fearless in preaching, but he was as sweet a guy as you would ever want to meet. A perfect mentor for Ed (and I hope for me as well).

Not to get sidetracked, but a word or two about Walter. He was a kick. I remember when we had a Capstone Conference in Salt

Lake City in the 1980s and Walter preached in a flack jacket. Lots of Mormons were unhappy with these large “anti-Mormon” conferences. Threats were common, fire alarms went off in the middle of the night, cops and Mormon security people seeded the meetings.

Back in those days when I still pastored a church, before I moved full-time into the apologetics ministry, I would always ask Walter for a “word.” He always said the same thing: “I’m not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but you are too fat!” Accurate, but not the word I was looking for.

Those were good times. At the height of those meetings we would have several hundred people in attendance. The *Deseret News* carried

an abstract of one of my talks. We usually had those meetings around the 24th of July—the great summer holiday in Mormondom celebrating the Saints arrival in Utah in 1847. On the 24th, the Mormons hold a huge parade in downtown Salt Lake City. We would pour out of our meetings and hit the streets passing out tracts. We also hung a bed sheet on a building on Main Street and screened the movie “Temple of the God Makers.” On one of those nights I led a dozen Mormon teenagers in the sinners prayer. And Ed Decker was at the head of the pack urging us all on.

Of course Ed’s greatest contribution to the task of winning Mormons to Christ is his movie “The God Makers.” Without a doubt that film has had a greater impact on Mormonism than all other efforts combined. Some people may disagree with me about this, but I am dead serious. Tens of thousands of Mormons have seen the movie, many eventually coming to Christ because of it. Hundreds of young evangelists have been motivated by the movie to focus their energies on winning Latter-day Saints.

Ed and I often stayed after our meetings talking to people for hours. Ed was especially patient and loving. It was not unusual to see him hugging Mormons and praying with them. After one meeting we were besieged by several young Mormons recently home from their missions.



Ed and I encounter Steven Mayfield at one of our meetings. Years earlier Steve, a Mormon, had infiltrated Ed Decker’s *Saints Alive!* organization under the pseudonym Stan Fields. When he was exposed, Ed frankly forgave him. Steve is still a Mormon, but has become a good friend of both Ed and me.