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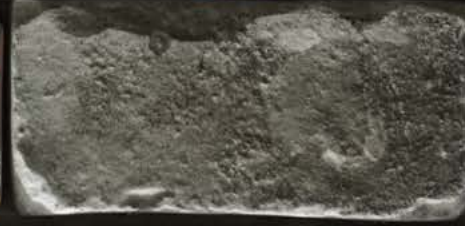
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“What puzzles the reader, familiar with traditional Adventist leadership, is how to explain why people in leadership positions fail to practice the leadership styles the author identifies.”

Depression versus sorrow

Thank you for the excellent article by Ronald W. Pies and Cynthia M. A. Geppert (“Clinical Depression or ‘Life Sorrows’? Distinguishing Between Grief and Depression in Pastoral Care”—May 2015).

This article clearly delineated the differences between the two, which facilitated a pathway to clear understanding. Having been involved in pastoral care both in the lay and professional sides of the equation, it was my first time seeing the comparisons so clearly spelled out. I deal with a mainly senior congregation, and so the grief experienced at losing a spouse is often an issue presented to me. My understanding of how to deal with those experiencing both grief and depression has largely been built around experience rather than some clear understanding of the differences and appropriate processes. This understanding and the clear comparisons that

were charted will be an ongoing tool for my continued pastoral ministry.

—Grant Wright, pastor, Tauranga Central Baptist Church, Tauranga, New Zealand.

Thank you and congratulations for the excellent article on grief and depression, written by Ronald W. Pies and Cynthia M. A. Geppert. I feel that Adventists tend to shy away from the topic of depression because we fear it is a sign of not trusting God or a poor relationship with God. I believe, because of the extraordinarily toxic effects of depression on our mental and emotional processes, our spiritual relationship suffers, rather than the other way around.

Publishing this article is very timely and vital to help pastors understand what they see in parishioners; and, when necessary, to counsel them to get the necessary medical help.

—David Trim, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

The Christian leader

Larry Yeagley’s article “The Way of a Christian Leader” (May 2015) identifies the opportunities and behaviors that are associated with contemporary and successful Christian leadership. What puzzles the reader, familiar with traditional Adventist leadership, is how to explain why people in leadership positions fail to practice the leadership styles the author identifies. The Methodist pastor referenced in the article who believed “a leader of ministers should go back to pastor a church every four or five years” hit it right.

As implied in the article, those who serve the parish are frequently on a path far different from that of the administrator’s trek. The two paths are each in their separate worlds. It is doubtful those who have spent significant time in an administrative position have even a modest grasp of what is taking place in the organization they attempt to administer. Implementing what Yeagley and contemporary management gurus suggest might well bring about a positive and productive result.

Kudos to the author for sharing his thoughts, and to *Ministry* for publishing this article.

—Lawrence Downing, retired pastor, Santa Ana, California, United States.

Balancing priorities

S. Joseph Kidder’s excellent article (“Balancing a Busy Life”—May 2015) should be required reading for seminarians and old guys like me! Thanks for writing.

—The Reverend Dr. Tony A. Metzke, St. Paul’s Lutheran Church, Columbia, South Carolina, United States.



Making room for young leaders

One of my most fulfilling ministry activities is teaching Hope Sabbath School, an in-depth interactive Bible study with a small group of young adults. We limit the group to 12 and strive for a diverse mix with an average age of 30.

Two years ago, the executive producer of the program suggested that we give teaching opportunities to some of our young adult team members. The result was electrifying, and the response from our audience was almost immediate. The vast majority of our Hope Sabbath School members liked this new format. Unfortunately, as one might expect, not everyone agreed. One longtime participant gave this response: “I definitely would not let the young leaders take the helm. Not sure about these new generations. They have yet to prove themselves.” Such reticence is understandable, but how can future leaders prove themselves unless we give them an opportunity?

Young adults are innovators. They feel no compulsion to defend the status quo, and they have little turf to protect. Mark Zuckerberg was in his early 20s when he and four university colleagues launched Facebook. By age 23, he was a billionaire, and by age 26 he was named *Time* magazine’s Person of the Year.¹

Sergey Brin and Larry Page were 21 and 22 respectively when they met at Stanford University. Larry was a University of Michigan graduate, and Sergey was the Stanford student assigned to show him around campus. Within a year they were working together on a search engine called BackRub. Before they had reached their

mid-20s they registered the domain name Google.com.² Though still working out of their garage office, they had a bold vision to change the world. Today, Google’s net worth is approximately US\$350 billion.³

The Bible is filled with narratives of young adults who were called by God to make a difference in their generation. Joseph was a young adult when he was promoted from an incarcerated prison warden to Pharaoh’s appointed second-in-command. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, were young adults when they stepped into significant leadership positions in Babylon. Jesus was 30 when He began His ministry, and He intentionally made room for young leaders. For the most part, His disciples were not a group of senior statesmen, but young adults.


As editors of *Ministry*, we also want to make room for young authors. Two of the articles in this issue of *Ministry* were written by young authors—Kéldie Paroschi and Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu. Both were prizewinners in our most recent student writing contest. Paroschi’s manuscript, based on Isaiah 14, will challenge you to think carefully about the Word of God. Wogu’s manuscript is a thoughtful consideration of mission to non-Christians in Africa.

Do you have young adults in your circle of influence who have leadership potential? Mentor them, nurture them, and give them room to lead. Yes, they will make some mistakes, but they will also make a difference. You might even want to send a note of appreciation to some of your mentors who had faith

Do you have young adults in your circle of influence who have leadership potential?

in you and gave you room to lead as a young adult.

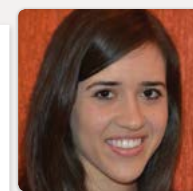
If you are a young leader, we want to encourage you to start writing for *Ministry*. When I was a young author, I often struggled with this thought: “someone can write it better.” I finally concluded that, while that might be true, God was still asking me to write. If God has given you something to say, write it down. Your manuscript, like the ones written by Paroschi and Wogu, may be used by God to impact many lives. Each person who reads *Ministry* has a circle of influence.

Why not make a decision today to become a contributor to our professional journal for pastors? We are committed to making room for you. 

- 1 Lev Grossman, “Person of the Year 2010: Mark Zuckerberg,” *Time*, December 15, 2010, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683_2037183_2037185,00.html.
- 2 *Google* is a play on the word googol, a mathematical term for the number represented by the numeral one followed by 100 zeros.
- 3 Their Net Worth.com, <http://www.theirnetworth.com/Businesses/Google/>.

Tell us what you think about this article. Email MinistryMagazine@gc.adventist.org or visit www.facebook.com/MinistryMagazine.

Kéldie Paroschi is currently studying toward a theology degree at Brazil Adventist University, São Paulo, Brazil.



The fall of Lucifer in Isaiah 14: *Is the interpretation still valid?*

Editors' note: *This manuscript merited one of two first prizes in the most recent Ministry Student Writing Contest.*

Traditionally, the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 was interpreted as being Satan, with particular application of verses 12–14 to his fall from heaven. This interpretation has lost traction among scholars in the past two centuries with the rise of different approaches to Scripture. Archeology's findings of ancient Near East myths and sagas have contributed much to this abandonment of the traditional interpretation, leading many to seek explanations in extrabiblical sources. Even so, many Christians still use the text to explain the origin of evil and the notion that Satan was called Lucifer before his fall. Can this interpretation be sustained by the biblical text?

The Song¹

Isaiah 14 is a prophetic song of God's victory over evil. Its opening informs the reader that the Lord has promised to give rest to His people, explaining the circumstances under which this rest and its commemorative song should be remembered (v. 3). The song then elaborates on how He will achieve this. In verse 4, the construction "take up + proverb + say" carries negative connotations and introduces a prophetic warning,² indicating that

God is going to achieve His purposes by destroying the king of Babylon. The song is appropriately patterned after a funeral song,³ but, ironically, after the Lord defeats the wicked rulers and the king of Babylon by breaking their staff and rod (vv. 4–6), then the earth breaks forth in exultant singing (v. 7), a joyous occasion for God's people.⁴ God is again active in the conclusion of the song, where Isaiah once again makes it clear that the destruction of the king was the result of divine judgment (vv. 22, 23), His actions creating the frame around the poem, emphasizing that God is faithful in fulfilling His promise of providing rest for His people.

The poem is built almost entirely by using parallelism. The parallels are mostly between two elements, one expanding on the meaning of the other. In verse 5, for example, we are not only dealing with the "wicked" but with wicked "rulers." This type of parallelism is found in both short and longer phrasal units.⁵ This becomes relevant to the comprehension of the scope of the song when we observe the changes in perspective within the poem:

The paralleling of the two third-person sections leads to an interesting observation. In the opening verses, the impression the reader has is that God deals with the wicked rulers of the earth in general, resulting in peace throughout the entire earth (v. 7). In the ending section, however, the subject receiving judgment is more specified—judgment is particularly directed to the king's posterity. How are these groups receiving judgment related? Is the second group included in the first group of wicked rulers? Or are both groups to be seen as parallel? By applying the same parallelism principle found in the smaller units of the poem, we reach the conclusion that both groups are complementing each other, stressing the view that the wicked rulers mentioned in verses 4–7 are equaled to the offspring of the king, who are judged in verses 21–23. This implies that all the wicked rulers of the earth are in some way directly connected to or influenced by the king of Babylon. The notion of God destroying the power of rulers and enemies in general, all considered "offspring" of the king, points to a universal perspective

Verses	Perspective ⁶	Focus
4–7	Third person	Wicked rulers
8–12	Second person singular	The king seen by others
13 & 14	First person singular	Intimate wishes of the king
15–20	Second person singular	The king seen by others
21–23	Third person	Offspring of the king

in which oppression and tyranny will be completely wiped out.⁷

By observing the movement and space within the poem, two dimensions come to light. First, the word *earth* is a “connecting thread” throughout the poem.⁸ Adding its synonyms *nations* and *land*, we reach a total of 12 occurrences. As Alter comments, this is one way of underlining the cosmic scope of the poem.⁹ References to this perspective are made by using expressions such as “whole earth” and “all the kings of the nations.” The entire space is used up: the forests and deserts, the cities and waters. The whole earth sings, trembles, gets destroyed, and eventually finds peace. Then, there is the vertical dimension. Activity is not restricted to the whole earth; it extends its reach to include Sheol and the heavens, completing the vertical axis. The attention shifts between those three levels, and God’s judgment against the king of Babylon affects heaven, where he is cast out from; the earth that finds the promised rest; and Sheol, excited over the coming of the king, thus further developing the universal reach of Isaiah 14.

The heart of the king

When observing the parallelism within the poem, something distinctive happens in the two central verses. After an introduction (“For you have said in your heart,” verse 13, NASB), a series of seven parallel phrases describe the king’s desire to elevate himself. Since all other forms of parallelism found in the song involve only two elements, this concentration of parallels clearly stands out, demanding closer study. An analysis of the king’s innermost thoughts reveals the reason why he was eventually destroyed. All of the desires are connected, expressing the wish to go up to a heavenly sphere and to make for himself a stable reign, where God is enthroned and resides (Pss. 27:5; 57:5; 78:69). The ultimate desire of the king is to sit on the highest and mightiest throne possible. Not only that, but an analysis of the theological connotations of the verbs indicates that he tries to gain such status and position as God.

One cannot compare God with earthly beings or kings—it is foolish to even try (Ps. 89:7; Isa. 40:18; 46:5).¹⁰ Still, that is exactly what the king of Babylon sought after. And instead of humbling himself before God, recognizing His superiority, he wished to be the one receiving homage. Instead, he fell from heaven to a humiliating, violent, and degrading end.

Because of their magnitude, mountains were often associated with the unchangeable. But even the mighty mountains are subject to God, and He frequently chooses mountains as symbol of His control. On Sinai, Israel

10). Thus, God’s victory over the king of Babylon is justified, for the adversary dared to occupy God’s own throne.

The king

The designation of the king of Babylon as “morning star, son of dawn” in verse 12 (NASB) has led many commentators to the ancient Near East, where astronomy and astrology often played central roles.¹² Some associate the title with Canaanite mythology¹³ because the information was found in the *Ras Shamra* texts,¹⁴ though, as Watts points out, “no such myth has been found in Canaan or among other

And instead of [Lucifer] humbling himself before God, recognizing His superiority, he wished to be the one receiving homage. Instead, he fell from heaven to a humiliating, violent, and degrading end.

experienced the greatest manifestation of God’s presence. Both Sinai and Zion (cf. Ps. 48:2) “are linked with covenant and theophany.”¹¹ The connection to the word *assembly* automatically reminds the reader of the tent of meeting, the sanctuary, chosen residence of God amongst His people, and implies that on this mountain is God’s throne, the place where He meets His creatures. Thus, the ambition of the king was to sit on an exalted throne on the mount of assembly in heaven, in the dwelling place of God Himself.

Therefore, what caused his downfall was his pride and refusal to bow down to God. He might have achieved temporary glory, but, ultimately, he failed and lost the little glory he had, becoming like the dead, weak kings of the nations (v.

peoples.”¹⁵ Probably Isaiah was simply making an astronomical analogy by associating the king with the morning star: even though the star tries to rise above the horizon every morning, this morning star disappears when the sun comes out and does not succeed its ascension “above the stars.”¹⁶

Isaiah 14 gives us insights into the world of the powers of darkness and to God’s act of overcoming these powers. Such insights appear throughout the Old Testament (OT) passages where the desire to become like God (Gen. 3) or willing to reach heaven (Gen. 11) are portrayed. The character in Ezekiel 28 also has striking similarities to the king of Babylon.¹⁷ Together, the text and the OT as a whole point to a universal, cosmic reality beyond the historical figure of the

king of Babylon, but the New Testament (NT) gives us a clearer picture of the great controversy between the powers of good and evil. Even though there are no direct quotes of Isaiah 14 in the NT, there are several allusions to it—particularly to verses 12–15—all in contexts where Satan is mentioned (Luke 10:13–16, 18; Rev. 8:10; 9:1; 12:9; 20:3), thus completing the bridge between the cosmic conflict hinted at in the OT and the identification of Satan as God’s opponent found in the NT.

Tertullian, Justin, and Origen were probably some of the first Christian writers to identify the king of Babylon as the devil,¹⁸ an association that was no doubt influenced by intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature¹⁹ in their attempt to identify Satan as a fallen angel, a connection which was later picked up by the NT and the early church fathers.²⁰ This identification was common during the Middle Ages but lost its popularity in recent times, especially after biblical criticism gained force in theological circles. Possible connections with pagan mythology spoke more loudly, making most scholars lay aside the traditional interpretation as being allegorical and seek explanations in ancient Near East myths. Today, only a minority of authors even bring up the subject of Satan when commenting on Isaiah 14.

It seems, however, prejudicial to the text to seek parallels exclusively in sources outside the Bible, for they neglect the biblical point of view. The identification of the king of Babylon as Satan is an idea that does not come explicitly from Isaiah or the OT, but sufficient indications clearly point beyond a mere historical figure to a greater, cosmic battle. Turning to the NT, there seems to be enough evidence that the NT itself—via Jewish tradition—provides the basis for the traditional interpretation. That way, it is Scripture itself that shows us how we should understand the king: not only as Israel’s historical enemy but as the evil power working against God and His people, identified in Revelation as the devil and Satan.²¹

Conclusion

Isaiah 14 was written first and foremost with the promise of release from the Babylonian exile in sight. At the same time, we notice that there are some aspects that are very hard to explain on a historical level, leading many authors to maintain the impossibility of identifying the king with one historical figure.²² A linguistic study of the passage confirms the universal reach of the poem, taking us into a greater spiritual battle between God and adversaries who stand in the way of the ultimate rest promised to God’s people. When scrutinized and compared with the rest of Scripture, we reach the conclusion that identifying the king of Babylon with Satan is both possible and legitimate. The focus the Hebrew text gives to verses 13 and 14 highlights of the fairness of the divine judgment against the king, whose defiance against the Lord eventually led to his ruin.

Thus, when God says in Isaiah 14:22 that He will destroy Babylon’s name and posterity, He is not only freeing Israel from their historical enemy but also giving all humanity a promise of freedom from the powers of evil and of rest from their sorrow and bondage. Nothing will stand in the way of the earth breaking forth into singing and rejoicing, for the king of Babylon, the ultimate enemy, is struck down. 🏆

- 1 The Hebrew word *mashal* is often translated as taunt, proverb, or elegy. The construction in which it is found, “take up + proverb + say,” is a typical formula of a prophetic warning against someone. The rhythm of the poem is characteristic of a funeral song, but the use of *rinnah* in verse 7 indicates joyful singing. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic, 1985); Gerald Wilson, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (NIDOTE), s.v. “msl.” In this paper I have chosen to call it a song because of its nature as a poem and an elegy, but with divine prophecy in mind.
- 2 Robin Wakely, NIDOTE, s.v. “sahar.”
- 3 The rhythm of the song is 3 + 2, typical of a lament or a funeral song. The “how” cry in verses 4 and 12 also usually describes the lament at someone’s death. See Leander E. Keck, *Isaiah–Ezekiel*, New Interpreter’s Bible 6 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 150–61.
- 4 The irony is further stressed by the fact that instead of *qinah*, “lament,” Isaiah uses *rinnah*, “joyful

singing.” Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 18.

- 5 In verse 9b, e.g., “all the leaders of the earth” is parallel to “all the kings of the nations” (NASB).
- 6 The changes in perspective relate to verbs and suffixes.
- 7 John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, Word Biblical Commentary 24 (Waco, TX: Nelson, 1985–1987), 203, 204; Wim Beuken, Ulrich Berges, and Erich Zenger, *Jesaja 13–27* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 61.
- 8 Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 149.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 A. H. Konkel, NIDOTE, s.v. “dmh.”
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Jack Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 1860, 1907.
- 13 John Goldingay argues that these motifs would be recognized by the Israelite audience as coming from foreign myths, for both “morning star” and “son of the dawn” are titles of Canaanite gods. *Isaiah*, New International Bible Commentary 13 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 102–03. J. Oswalt says, “The indications are that the prophet was not dependent upon any one story, but used a number of current motifs to fit his own point.” *The Book of Isaiah 1–39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 322. However, it cannot be said for sure that the Israelites were influenced by foreign mythology. There is always the possibility that the influence went the other way around.
- 14 Wakely, NIDOTE 4:85–9.
- 15 Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 209.
- 16 G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmut Ringgren, eds., *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 7, Lothar Ruppert, s.v. “sahar.”
- 17 Walther Eichrodt, *Der Herr Der Geschichte Jesaja 13–23 u. 28–39*, Botschaft des Alten Testaments 17 (Stuttgart, Germany: Calwer, 1967), 25.
- 18 Otto Böcher, *Theologische Realencyclopädie*, s.v. “Teufel.”
- 19 See 2 En. 29:1–4 and Apoc. El. 4:11, where echoes to Isaiah 14 are found.
- 20 *Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, s.v. “Satan.” These early identifications of Satan and the widespread belief that Satan was called Lucifer (in Lat., “light bearer”) before his fall led “morning star” to be translated as “Lucifer” in “literature affected by the Latin Bible and the KJV. However, the translation ‘Lucifer’ is untenable and is no longer found in new versions.” Larry L. Walker, *Isaiah, Jeremiah & Lamentations*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 6 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 68. See also: Keck, *Isaiah–Ezekiel*, 159.
- 21 Walker says: “Although Satan is not the immediate referent in Isaiah, the rest of Scripture makes it clear that he is the evil being behind evil kings” (*Isaiah, Jeremiah & Lamentations*, 68). So also Derek Thomas: “Despite the fact that Satan is not referred to specifically in 14:12, his shadow lies behind this passage.” *God Delivers: Isaiah Simply Explained*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, U.K.: Evangelical, 1991), 126.
- 22 “The attempt to identify a precise historical figure is probably futile. . . . None of the kings of the Neo-Babylonian empire fits, nor do any of the Assyrian kings of Isaiah’s day.” Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah 1–39*, 311–14.

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Ministerial Student Writing Contest

Ministry,

International Journal for Pastors, announces its fifth Ministerial Student Writing Contest. All students enrolled in a full-time ministerial preparation program on the undergraduate or graduate level may participate.

Submission requirements

1. Writers must choose a category from the list below for their submission.
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 - b. Historical studies
 - c. Theological studies (including ethics)
 - d. Applied religion (preaching, leadership, counseling, evangelism, etc.)
 - e. World missions
2. All submissions must follow the Writer's Guidelines as to length, endnotes, style, and other features of the manuscript. Please carefully read the guidelines found at www.ministrymagazine.org.
3. Submit your manuscript in MS Word to www.MinistryMagazine.org/swc. Please include the following information at the top of the manuscript: your name, address, email address, telephone number, category for which you are submitting (see above), religious affiliation, name of college/university/seminary you are attending, and title of your manuscript.
4. *Ministry* will accept only one submission per writer.

Prizes

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The evaluation panel will determine if all prizes will be awarded. The decisions of this panel are final.

Publication

1. All submissions become the property of *Ministry* and will not be returned.
2. Writers who are awarded a prize give the rights to *Ministry* as outlined in the Writer's Guidelines. While the editors intend to publish such manuscripts, publication is not guaranteed.
3. Manuscripts that are not awarded a prize may be purchased at a price to be negotiated.

Submission deadline

All submissions must be received no later than **JUNE 30, 2016.**

Chigemezi Nnadozie Wogu is currently studying toward a master of theological studies degree at Friedensau Adventist University, Möckern-Friedensau, Germany .



The salvation of non-Christians in Africa:

An Adventist perspective

Editors' note: *This manuscript merited one of two first prizes in the most recent Ministry Student Writing Contest.*

Africa's religious landscape includes all the major religions of the world in addition to its own variety of indigenous faiths.¹ The existence of such varied faiths raises a fundamental question for Christians, and Seventh-day Adventists in particular. The question touches the basic issue of salvation: what will be the ultimate end of those who do not profess Christ as their Savior?

Christian groups have given many and differing answers. Adventist scholars² have also contributed to the ongoing discussion. This article will briefly look at the answers from both perspectives.

The non-Adventist response

Traditional Christian attitude towards other religions include (1) Christianity is the only religion where people are saved; (2) salvation is in Christ alone; and (3) there are many ways to salvation but one norm.³

The approach of scholars is not too different, and it falls in one of three schools: exclusivism, inclusivism,

and pluralism.⁴ Exclusivism follows Cyprian's dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*⁵ and assumes that "other religions are marked by humankind's fundamental sinfulness and are therefore erroneous, and that Christ (viz. Christianity) offers the only path to salvation."⁶ Inclusivism maintains "in some sense the uniqueness of Jesus Christ while also admitting that God's grace and salvation are present and effective in and through other religions as well."⁷ Pluralism asserts that other religions are also legitimate ways (or valid paths) of salvation. Pluralists who appear to reject exclusivism go further to affirm that Christ is one Savior among other savior figures.⁸

The Adventist response

Seventh-day Adventists approach the issue differently. Derek C. Beardsell argues that Adventists are not fully exclusivists, inclusivists, or pluralists.⁹ This is because the "Adventist interpretation and understanding of basic Bible teaching places Jesus Christ at the centre of the salvific stage";¹⁰ therefore, it is impossible to accept these positions. What, then, is the Adventist position? In dealing with this question, Gottfried Oosterwal raises another important question: "Is there an Adventist response, generally

acceptable to most Adventist Church and mission leaders that could guide believers as they face the challenge of the plurality of religions at their door step?"¹¹ His answer: "Yes, there is."¹²

Oosterwal states that the "basis and starting point of an Adventist response" is found in the notion of the everlasting gospel,¹³ with an emphasis on the saving grace of God for all humankind (see John 3:16–21).¹⁴ That is to say, Scripture does not make any distinction as to whom God gives grace. Paul's thesis in Romans 1:14–17 includes everyone in God's saving act. Although this emphasis places everyone as beneficiaries of God's saving grace, it is evident that it comes with an injunction. This injunction is the absolute faith in Jesus Christ, meaning that there must be an acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as the Savior—the One through whom this grace is received (see John 3:16–21; 14:6, 7; Acts 2:38). However, it appears that Jesus Himself spoke about those who have not yet professed Him as Savior. These He referred to as His own ("other sheep," John 10:16), with the promise to "bring them" to Himself. His plan to bring them in to Himself is seen in the sending of those already in "the fold" into the world to make His salvation (i.e., the gospel) known to all nations (cf. Matthew 28:18–20).

Ellen White states that among non-Christians (1) the working of the Holy Spirit exists; (2) people worship God, and His law is upheld, though ignorantly; and (3) there is a spirit of kindness and grace. Therefore, White appeals for the need to carry the message of salvation to those who long for “the light.”¹⁵ This view corroborates with the statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on relations with world religions.¹⁶ Although this statement is not basically on the salvation of non-Christians, clearly Adventists affirm the working of God’s Spirit and existence of “certain values and truths” among “other faiths” (world religions). Also, in this statement, the longing to

religions who have some truths.²¹ While this helps to deny the “superiority of Christianity to other religions,” at the same time, this inculcates a “responsibility in sharing access of salvation to others.”²²

Based on this, Stefan Höschele suggests that the Adventist contribution to the answer of religious pluralism and to the question of the salvation of non-Christians is “missiological universalism.” Missiological universalism can be defined as a position that sees the need for communicating God’s plan of salvation as well as having a “positive view of people’s potential access to His grace for all humans, whatever their affiliation to particular religious

God’s grace beyond the borders of the Adventist Church and even Christianity, (3) a denial of other religions as vessels of grace, and (4) a special responsibility of sharing the message of salvation with non-Christians. How then should these salient points be applied in Africa with respect to the salvation of non-Christians?

1. God’s Spirit among non-Christians.

The emphasis of God’s Spirit working among non-Christians did not develop in a vacuum. That Scripture places emphasis on “the light that gives light to every man” and the knowledge of God among all men respectively becomes evident in Scripture texts (John 1:9; Rom. 1:18–20). Paul’s argu-

God’s abundant grace is available even beyond institutional Christianity.

be joined with adherents of world religions together with other believers in worshipping God is implicitly expressed.

Based on this, Adventist scholars tend towards a moderate type of exclusivism.¹⁷ Though not mentioned explicitly by Beardsell, this position is seen in the fact that while Adventists believe that only in Christ is there salvation, they also affirm that many will be saved who have never heard of Christ.¹⁸

What does this mean? On the one hand, the position of a moderate exclusivism is based on the insight that the end of time is yet to come. Therefore, the importance of the church’s witness to God’s saving work is stressed while the church (in contrast to the exclusivist view) refrains “from limiting access to salvation to persons with a nominal church membership.”¹⁹ On the other hand, although Adventists deny “the notion of the religions as parallel, or even partial, ways to salvation,”²⁰ they view other religions in a positive light. This means that God has also revealed Himself to adherents of other

systems.”²³ Propelled by an emphasis on God’s grace, this position is not bound to institutional Christianity. Still, Adventists “would emphasize that this grace is not inherent in other religious systems” even as they affirm the working of God’s Spirit among non-Christians.²⁴ Missiological universalism is alternative to the pluralism that asserts that “many religions are fully valid paths of salvation.”²⁵ This position, however, comes with the responsibility to spread the good news of salvation. The implication of this position in Höschele’s perspective is that it does not draw a straight line to differentiate between Christians and non-Christians but leaves the issue of salvation to God.²⁶

The Adventist response and the salvation of non-Christians in Africa

The Adventist response on the salvation of non-Christians emphasizes (1) the working of God’s Spirit among non-Christians, (2) the working of

ment in Romans may have been the basis of Ellen G. White’s view, although White quotes only John 1:9 on this matter.²⁷ White states that those who will be saved at the end of the age may include those who may not have heard about Christ “but [have] cherished His principles.”²⁸ Thus, people who may not have any knowledge of God’s written law may still worship God and do His will ignorantly.

This position begs mention because of the evidence of God’s Spirit working among non-Christians in Africa, especially in African traditional religions (ATR). The assumption is that, before the coming of the Christian witness to Africa, there was a “positive” tradition in which Christ (or God’s Spirit) was “somehow” at work among the people.²⁹ Philemon Amanze affirms that one of the basic beliefs that make up ATR is the belief in God. This belief centers on God’s revelation of Himself to the Africans, a reality resulting in a distinct name for God in every African community.³⁰ Consequently, a major application of

the working of God's Spirit among non-Christians would infer a far-reaching awareness and affirmation of this reality. This awareness and affirmation will not only instill a spirit of tolerance towards adherents of other religions but also create avenues for mutual and respectful relationships with non-Christians and resulting opportunities for Adventists in Africa to witness to non-Christians in their societies.

2. *God's grace for non-Christians.* While affirmed that the grace of God is available to adherents of other religions, Adventists deny the notion that all religions are valid paths to salvation. This denial results in a passionate desire to reach those who, though saved in ignorance, may also perish in it. God's abundant grace is available even beyond institutional Christianity.

As already stated, Adventists believe that God has made His grace available to everyone. In this respect, it is important to note that non-Christians have theologies in respect to salvation and grace, although different from that of the Christians. For example, among representatives of ATR, it is believed that religiosity, which connotes an affirmation of the Supreme Being, influences their understanding of grace. This understanding is evident in the reality that grace is seen in the working of the Supreme Being in the affairs of humans. Therefore, to speak of grace speaks of the Divine.³¹

Although this is structurally similar to the Christian understanding, the theology of salvation is different. Salvation in ATR is achieved in life after death when the individual becomes an ancestor.³² These ancestors then serve as mediators and intermediaries between the Supreme Being and the human,³³ a belief that is in contrast to the Christian teaching that Christ is the only mediator between God and humans. Based on this major difference, it is understandable why Adventists do not accept other religions as ways to salvation. Therefore, Adventists in the African context are encouraged to acknowledge the universality of God's grace beyond the borders of institutional

Christianity but should deny any notion that accepts that salvation is inherent in all religions. It may be affirmed that although salvation is gained through Christ alone, those who might never hear of Him may be saved by letting the Holy Spirit direct their lives according to the light they received.

3. *Responsibility of mission.* Furthermore, the understanding of the Adventist response comes with an important task of spreading the good news of this salvation. White's assertion, and basically the Adventist emphasis in the working of God's Spirit and the availability of God's grace among non-Christians, comes with a clarion call for mission. The call was centered on the reality that some adherents of other religions are seeking "the light." These will continue in their ignorance except as the gospel is taken to them.³⁴

White's assertion, as well as the Adventist position on missiological universalism, reveals a tension between general and special revelation, although this tension is considered fruitful.³⁵ The tension is fruitful because the mission of the Adventist Church in Africa will emphasize the uniqueness of special revelation in the person of Christ and, at the same time, refuse to deny the existence of general revelation among non-Christians. Consequently, Adventists in Africa will develop a radical passion to reach adherents of the multiple traditional religions and indigenous faiths.

Conclusion

The Adventist response to the question of the salvation of non-Christians appears to be a reaction to the positions that (1) exclude non-Christians from the grace of God, (2) include other religions as vessels of grace and salvation but still emphasize the uniqueness of Christ, and (3) affirm that other religions are valid paths to salvation. When we apply this position to the African context, it will affirm the working of God's Spirit and grace among adherents of different religions as well as multiple indigenous religions.

This means that it is possible to agree with Ellen G. White that those non-Christians in Africa who may not come to know Christ might be saved if they live up to "the light" they are given. Although it is reasonable to agree to this, it may be better to leave the issue of the salvation of non-Christians for God to decide. Even in this affirmation, Adventists still deny the notion that other religions in Africa are valid paths to salvation. Based on this, that the desperate action of taking the gospel to non-Christians is encouraged, implications that arise from this might suggest a rethinking in the ways of sharing the gospel to these adherents. Though sharing the gospel involves different strategies and several methods, the author suggests that interfaith dialogue,³⁶ critical contextualization,³⁷ and religious education³⁸ might be considered and adopted for the cause of the gospel among non-Christians in Africa. ❏

1 See John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Gaborone, Botswana: Heinemann, 2008, 1st edition 1969), xiii, 1. In the preface to the second edition of this book, Mbiti posits that it was the "diversity of African religiosity" that made him use "African Religions" in the plural.

2 For a comprehensive bibliography, see Stefan Höschele, "The Emerging Adventist Theology of Religions Discourse: Participants, Positions, Particularities," in *Passionate Reflection [Festschrift in Honour of Jerald Whitehouse]*, ed. Bruce Bauer (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University, 2011), 355–76. Also online at http://www.academia.edu/1752769/Adventist_Theology_of_Religions.

3 Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 73–144. One norm here according to Knitter is in reference to the revelation of Jesus Christ in other religions. This argument in his view shows that Christ, the final cause of salvation, is incarnated in other religions. See Knitter, 120–44.

4 Although these views are more popular, John Sanders's classification (restrictivism, universalism, and inclusivism) is also referred to and quoted by scholars when it comes to discussing the faith of the unevangelized. See Adventist scholars like Jon L. Dybdahl, "Is There Hope for the Unevangelized?" in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*, ed. Jon L. Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 55–57; Clifton Maberly, "Adventist Use of Non-Christian Scriptures," in *Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission: Global Mission Issues Committee Papers*, vol. 1: 1998–2001, ed. Bruce L. Bauer (Berrien Springs, MI: Department of

- World Mission, Andrews University, 2006), 61. Cf. John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation Into the Diversity of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992).
- 5 The Latin pronouncement means “outside the church, there is no salvation.” It was used in the third century by Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, to express the role the church plays in the salvation of the world.
 - 6 Gavin D’Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 52.
 - 7 Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Nottingham: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 52.
 - 8 See Knitter, *No Other Name?* 126, 127; Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 24, 25.
 - 9 Derek C. Beardsell, “The Unfinished Task: Is There Salvation Outside Christianity? Do Other Christian Churches Also Fulfill the Great Commission?” in *Adventist Mission Facing the 21st Century: A Reader*, ed., Hugh I. Dunton, Balduur Ed. Pfeiffer, and Borge Schantz (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990), 34.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, 28.
 - 11 Gottfried Oosterwal, “Adventism Facing the World Religions,” in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century*, 50.
 - 12 *Ibid.*
 - 13 *Ibid.*
 - 14 All scriptural references are from the New International Version.
 - 15 See Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1940), 638; *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), 171; *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 385.
 - 16 This statement was originally published in *Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission: Global Mission Issues Committee Papers*, 179–80. Cf. Stefan Höschele ed., *Interchurch and Interfaith Relations: Seventh-day Adventist Statements and Documents*, *Adventistica* 10 (Frankfurt au Maim: Peter Lang, 2010), 168.
 - 17 A moderate type of exclusivism differs from the exclusivist view that follows Cyprian’s dictum as earlier defined. Russell Staples suggests that this position is most compatible with the Adventist identity and mission. See Russell Staples, “Exclusivism, Pluralism, and Global Mission,” *Ministry* (November 1992): 13.
 - 18 Beardsell, “The Unfinished Task: Is There Salvation Outside Christianity?” 28.
 - 19 Höschele, “The Emerging Adventist Theology of Religions Discourse,” 362, 363.
 - 20 Oosterwal, “Adventism Facing the World Religions,” 51.
 - 21 Dybdahl, “Is There Hope for the Unevangelized?” 59; Maberly, “Adventist Use of Non-Christian Scriptures,” 56–66. Cf. Ellen White statements already referred to, and Adventist Statement on Relationship with World Religions.
 - 22 Höschele, “The Emerging Adventist Theology of Religions Discourse,” 364, 365.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, 366.
 - 24 *Ibid.*
 - 25 *Ibid.*, 365, 366.
 - 26 *Ibid.*, 367; Dybdahl also concurs to this. “Is There Hope for the Unevangelized?” 60, 61.
 - 27 White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 385.
 - 28 White, *The Desire of Ages*, 638.
 - 29 Keith Ferdinando, “Christian Identity in the African Context: Reflections on Kwame Bediako’s Theology and Identity,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 1 (March 2007): 126.
 - 30 Philemon O. Amanze, “God of the Africans: Ministering to Adherents of African Traditional Religion,” *Ministry* (October 2007): 14.
 - 31 See Ferdinand Nwaigbo, “Faith in the One God in Christian and African Traditional Religions: A Theological Appraisal,” *African Journals Online* 7 (2010): 61, 62.
 - 32 *Ibid.* See also note on “Belief in Ancestors” in Amanze, “God of the Africans,” 14.
 - 33 B. Afeke and P. Verster, “Christianization of Ancestor Veneration Within African Traditional Religions: An Evaluation,” *In die Skriflig* 38, no. 1 (2004): 49. For more details, see also Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 69.
 - 34 See White, *Prophets and Kings*, 171.
 - 35 Höschele, “The Emerging Adventist Theology of Religions Discourse,” 366.
 - 36 Although people welcome interfaith and/or inter-religious dialogues for a variety of reasons, dialogue should not be a replacement for mission as advocated by pluralists. Rather, the aim for interfaith dialogue should be mission.
 - 37 It is a process in which people are brought to a position where they are willing to deal biblically with all areas of their lives. For more details, see Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1985), 186, 187.
 - 38 A religious education centering on world religions with emphasis on mission for both trained ministers in ministry and those undergoing training at the undergraduate level.

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“Lord, fully revive my sight”

I was walking outside of the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland, with Faith, one of my colleagues. She suddenly stopped and walked back to the bus stop in front of the building. There, sitting on the curb, was a woman smoking a cigarette. I backtracked and joined Faith as she talked with the woman. Faith lovingly asked how she could help her. The woman was homeless and was waiting for the bus to take her to her son’s apartment, where she was staying for a while. She also said she could use

a grocery store gift card and a candle to light so she could remember her mother’s death, which was several years ago on that very day.

Faith wrote down the son’s address and said she would come by with the gift card and candle. I thought to myself, *Here is this very needy woman and I just walked by. It was as if I was blind and didn’t even see her. She was like an object but not a real person as I passed by.* I was like the blind man whom Jesus touched, and the blind man, at first, saw people as objects (Mark 8:22–25). I need to have my sight

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fully restored, so I can see everything clearly (v. 25).

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Old Testament principles relevant to mutually consensual homoerotic activity—Part 1 of 3

This first section of a three-part study seeks to identify principles in the Old Testament relevant to the relationship between God's community of faith and individuals who engage in some forms of sexual activity outside heterosexual marriage. My primary focus will be on *mutually consensual homoerotic activity* as practiced by people within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) spectrum.¹

Impact of the Fall on the Creation ideal

Genesis 2 describes the Creation ideal for human sexual relationships: A male and female human being eternally joined as "one flesh" in a covenanted monogamous union, emulating the holy union of the Trinity. Through such marriage, two perfect humans made in God's image as complementary sexual opposites are to continue, through procreation, His Creation.²

The Old Testament shows how the Fall (Gen. 3) has affected the Creation ideal for marriage and sexuality in several ways. First, the male tends to be dominant (v. 16). Second, marriage is no longer eternal because husbands

and wives die (vv. 19, 22–24). Third, a man can become dissatisfied with his wife and divorce her (Deut. 24:1).³ Fourth, sinful humans follow their desires to contract marriages that are not according to God's will (e.g., Gen. 4:19—bigamy; 6:1–3). Fifth, people follow their desires to engage in various kinds of sexual activity outside marriage.⁴ Sixth, due to various factors, some people are infertile (Gen. 11:30; 25:21) or even unable to perform sexually (Isa. 56:3—eunuch).

God responded to the fallen human condition by permitting and even blessing remarriage after the death of one's spouse (Ruth 1:4, 5; 4:10–17), allowing but regulating divorce under certain conditions (Deut. 24:1–4), regulating and discouraging polygamy (Exod. 21:10, 11; Lev. 18:18; Deut. 21:15–17),⁵ allowing marriage between close relatives (Gen. 4:26; cf. v. 17) but later prohibiting it as the human race degenerated (Lev. 18; 20), and prohibiting all forms of sexual activity outside of marriage (also Lev. 18; 20). Thus, He mercifully accommodated to human weakness in some ways, but He did not change the principle that sexual activity is restricted to marriage, defined as a

covenanted union between a man and a woman. This principle survived the Fall and consequent depreciation of the image of God in human beings.

The fact that God limits legitimate sexual activity to marriage rules out the possibility that His community of believers in full and regular standing can include those who violate His will by engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage as He defines it (Lev. 18; 20). Since the Fall, this permanent principle must be applied to a human condition that has become rather messy. For one thing, distinctions between the genders are not always as clear as they were before the Fall. The Bible defines sexual identity as either male or female solely in terms of reproductive organs, but some individuals can have characteristics of both genders.

Growth in grace

Another complication comes because all types of people come to God through Christ to be saved (e.g., Matt. 9:10; John 12:32; cf. Luke 14:21–23) and their transformation involves a learning curve as they progressively understand and follow divine principles. Not all issues between them and God

instantly vaporize the moment they start coming to Him, but He nurtures their positive response. For example, God commanded the Israelites to love the resident foreigners among them and treat them well (Exod. 22:21 [in the Hebrew this is v. 20]; 23:9; Lev. 19:10, 33, 34). These foreigners were not full-fledged citizens like native Israelites, and they were not responsible for keeping all of the religious instructions that applied to the Israelites, such as requirements for observing annual festivals and giving tithes and first-fruit offerings (e.g., Exod. 23:16, 19; Lev. 23:4–44; 27:30, 32; Num. 18).

However, they were accountable for allegiance to the covenant Deity (Exod. 12:19; Lev. 16:29), compliance with His basic guidelines for moral (including sexual) behavior (Lev. 17:10, 12, 13; 18:26; 20:2; 24:16, 22), and purification from physical ritual impurity, in some cases (Lev. 17:15; Num. 19:10). They were permitted to engage in ritual worship with the Israelites, provided that they followed the applicable rules (Exod. 12:48, 49; Lev. 17:8; 22:18; Num. 9:14; 15:14–16), and they were required to gain expiation from violations of divine commandments through purification offerings (so-called “sin offerings”; Num. 15:26, 29). In these ways, God sought to draw foreigners who had little or no knowledge of Him into closer relationships with His faith community in order to partly fulfill His purpose of making the descendants of Abraham a channel of blessing to all people (Gen. 12:3; 22:18).

Basically, the same divine approach applies today to spiritual “Israel” (Gal. 3:26–29), with the qualifications that we are a church of believers, rather than a theocratic nation belonging to a certain ethnic group, and are also informed by the life and ministry of Christ (2 Cor. 3). In harmony with His example (Matt. 9:10, 11; Luke 15:1, 2), we should allow faulty people (like ourselves!) to come to God and gain strength in their relationship to Him by granting them access to fellowship and worship with us, without compromising the

principles for which we are accountable to Him, so that influence flows in a positive direction only. When the Pharisees questioned Jesus’ inclusive outreach, He replied, “ ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners’ ” (Matt. 9:12, 13, ESV).

Our response

God does not hold people accountable for light that they have not received or do not understand (James 4:17). So we would be committing a serious

crime if we were to bar our hearts and church doors against individuals with issues, including sexual issues, who are foreigners to God’s ways and morally immature but whom He is drawing to Himself (cf. Matt. 19:14). Whether or not they will be able to officially join and remain in the faith community depends on their acceptance of “nonnegotiables” to which God holds the community accountable. According to Jesus, the greatest nonnegotiable expressed in the Old Testament is the eternal, outgoing, and redemptive principle of unselfish love (Matt. 22:37–40; Luke 10:27–37; cf. Lev. 19:18, 34; Deut. 6:5).

(Part 2 will appear in the November 2015 issue.) ❖

1 An earlier form of this study was presented on March 18, 2014, at the “In God’s Image: Scripture, Sexuality, and Society” summit organized by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, held in Cape Town, South Africa. For much more discussion of this issue, see Roy E. Gane, Nicholas P. Miller, and H. Peter Swanson, eds., *Homosexuality,*

Marriage, and the Church: Biblical, Counseling, and Religious Liberty Issues (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), which includes Richard M. Davidson, “Homosexuality in the Old Testament,” 5–52; Robert A. J. Gagnon, “The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: A Critique of the Arguments of Two Adventist Scholars,” 53–161; and Roy E. Gane, “Some Attempted Alternatives to Timeless Biblical Condemnation of Homosexual Acts,” 163–74.

2 James V. Brownson argues that “the language of ‘one flesh’ in Genesis 2:24 does not refer to physical gender complementarity, but to the common bond of shared kinship. Therefore, to say that the same-sex erotic acts depicted in Romans 1:26–27 are ‘against nature’ because they violate the physical complementarity of the genders depicted in the one-flesh union of Genesis 2:24 is simply mistaken” (*Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* [Grand Rapids,

MI: Eerdmans, 2013], 35). It is true that Genesis 2:24 emphasizes unity, but other parts of the Creation account reveal complementarity. For example, in 1:27, 28, God created male and female and blessed their procreation. In 2:18, God says of Adam, “ ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’ ” (ESV). The words “fit for him” translate Hebrew *K’negdo* (cf. v. 20), in which *neged* refers to “that which is opposite, that which corresponds” (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, transl. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 1:666). This indicates difference as well as similarity (cf. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, 30, esp. n. 27).

3 In the New Testament, Jesus also referred to the possibility that a wife could divorce her husband (Mark 10:12).

4 These include premarital sex (Exod. 22:16 [in the Hebrew this is v. 15]), rape (Gen. 34:2), adultery, incest, homosexual activity, and bestiality (Lev. 18; 20). The Old Testament does not mention masturbation. Onan’s sin was *coitus interruptus* to short-circuit the purpose of levirate marriage (Gen. 38:9).

5 On Leviticus 18:18, which some interpreters take to be a comprehensive prohibition of all polygamy, see Roy E. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers, NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 319, 320.

God does not hold people accountable for light that they have not received or do not understand.

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Mission: *Restoring the link with God*

I began my ministry years ago with the notion that Adventist evangelism implied teaching Bible doctrines. After my first year of engaging people at this level, I realized something was amiss. I was ministering to a people who had heard only tidbits of the gospel story, yet I was attempting to engage them in Adventist theology. It dawned on me that I neglected to first address people's misunderstanding of God and how they may connect to Him. I was schooled to teach the truth. My ministry experience, however, challenged this mission theology. In this article I would like to share my personal journey as I wrestled with what constitutes evangelism and what it means to communicate the gospel.

Mission's missing link

The Bible declares that God created human beings in His "image" (Gen. 1:26). "When Adam came from the Creator's hand, he bore, in his physical, mental, and spiritual nature, a likeness to his Maker. . . . Face-to-face, heart-to-heart communion with his Maker was his high privilege. Had he remained loyal to God, all this would have been his forever."¹ This "image of God" enabled our first parents to be in community with Him, to live in a harmonious and loving relationship, and connect closely with the Creator. Although the image was marred by sin, the connection between God and humanity cannot be fully obliterated.

However, when humanity separated from God, the peaceful community was interrupted (Gen. 3). Indeed, there came a spiritual void in the original community established at Eden.

Humans seek to fill this void, and their search is conditioned by their social and cultural patterns. To the extent those patterns are defective and far removed from biblical pattern, the connection with God remains a bridge too far away. Lack of connection and community with God leads to a more difficult journey in understanding God. This is the theological tension in which Christian missions have to operate.

For example, some societies perceive God as entirely the other, far removed from where society is. Such a concept may reflect the hierarchical structure of the society where one can approach someone in authority only through a known intermediary. Even children cannot approach their father freely and without fear, and they often make their wants known through an intermediary. Such a posture is transferred to a relationship with the Creator God. He is perceived as approachable only through a mediator known to the family. I discovered this peculiarity while working with the Himba tribe found in northern Namibia and southern Angola. They are largely nomadic herdsman. They acknowledge the Creator God but believe Him to be approachable only through a spirit being. Thus, a

family ancestor becomes the mediator. One author refers to these mediator ancestors as the spirit of the dead.² Being known to the family and trusted, the spirit is able to best represent the family to God.³ Mission to the Himba must, therefore, lead to a true link with God that will restore their community with Him. He is a God who longs to live with them.

Paul Hiebert suggests another example, drawn from modern anthropological trends that characterize some people groups.⁴ This modernity emphasizes individuality within a group (or subgroup). Although subgroups may be formed and remain active, the focus is on the individual and whether his or her needs are important. If individuals are not served at their level, they will leave and find another group. Thus, an unspoken contract is entered between group members. This understanding of the world is often transferred to a relationship with God. They "allow" God to be in their lives for "personal gain." When their desires or needs are not met, they withdraw from God. That is to say, people expect God to be always the source of meaning and victory in their lives. If that does not happen, God has broken the contract. This contract cannot fill the void in their lives any more than an ancestor intermediary can.

What can we learn from these two examples? Primarily this: our humanity has this innate desire to connect with the

Creator. Yet our propensity is to distance ourselves from Him. This paradox wars within us as we wrestle in our daily decisions. We are incomplete without a connection to God but do not realize this connection will fill the void.

Jesus our Example

Jesus understood the need to connect people with God. The purpose of His ministry was captured in these words: “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:6).⁵ His task was to reveal the person of God to the world. He accomplished this through various methods; He taught, preached, and healed. In each method He took time to focus on the individual rather than the masses. Ellen White states that when He spoke to the crowds, He always addressed the individual in the crowd.⁶ He wanted to complete their humanity. He took time to be with them. He listened to their heart-cry and invited them into a new relationship with God. He desired to help them see that God is present. He connected with each person. People, in turn, shared with their network their experience. The mercy and grace they received from Jesus illustrated God’s desire to connect.

Consider two instances from the ministry of Jesus. The demon-possessed man of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1–20) lived among the tombs, and he felt isolated and alone. The isolation from society resembled his disconnect from God. Banished from society, he felt the full wrath of God, or so he thought. Perhaps he did something to anger God? The separation from family and his childhood friends gnawed at him. How could he be reunited with society and God again? It was not his choice to live among the tombs. Neither was it his choice to do the things he was doing, for there was a power that controlled him. Then he met Jesus.

Jesus met this man calmly. He was not flustered by his anger or insults. Notice in the passage how he harassed people, but Jesus would not be harassed. Jesus saw the man. He would not allow the demon to distract him.

The demon recognized that One with authority was present and appealed to Him not to destroy him. In casting out the demon, Jesus was saying to the man, *God wants you to be part of His family.* Jesus not only restored peace to the man’s life but connected him with God. This enabled him to reunite with society. He also experienced reunion with God. It is this experience of restoration with God that he takes throughout the Decapolis.

A second example is the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). This story is very different from that of the demon-possessed man. Zacchaeus was rich and powerful but had a questionable life and lifestyle. Zacchaeus heard about Jesus and admired His simple lifestyle. He heard the manner in which He served and treated people. He knew Jesus as a well-respected religious teacher whose teachings and miracles were known throughout Palestine. So, Zacchaeus wanted to meet Jesus. To his astonishment, Jesus desired to visit him at his home. Notice that Jesus was not ashamed to associate with this despised man. We do not have the conversation between Jesus and Zacchaeus, but we can imagine that they talked about economics. In God’s understanding of economics, giving is a core value, for in giving one receives (Acts 20:35), and in treating people honestly, an increase will be realized. These principles of economics may have been discussed at length. Zacchaeus learned that in giving he was receiving. He was giving not to receive the blessing but that he may be the instrument of the blessing. This was a paradigm shift for Zacchaeus. The fact that Jesus took time to be with him and talk to him helped him realize God is magnanimous. For him to experience such a magnanimous God implied that he needed to show generosity. In connecting with God, Zacchaeus was reunited with his community. Herein is our humanity made complete—where we find true peace.

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The goal defines who we are, what we do, and how we plan to do it. The book of Revelation defines the final eschatological goal: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people’ ” (Rev. 21:3). Here the goal is God dwelling with His people. This suggests that the goal of our mission is to ensure people understand God’s desire to be present with us. He wants a relationship that will develop and grow to the point where He can meet face-to-face with us. This is important to us as Seventh-day Adventists—we are Adventists in that we anticipate that Christ will come soon to dwell with us; and we believe in the Sabbath that we experience now and will experience forever when He returns. That is, we show that God has come to be part of our lives today. No matter our circumstance, He is present now and He will be with us through eternity. There is that permanent connection with God.

The mission task assigned to us today, therefore, is no different from that assigned to Jesus. We are to reveal God as being One with all people. He is present with the urban person and the rural person. He connects with the healthy and the physically ailing. He is the God who calls Himself Immanuel; that is, He is with us in all our circumstances. No situation exists that He will not step into and be involved. He is present. Hence the psalmist says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1).

Serving the Himba was a transforming experience to me. Initially, I focused on teaching doctrines, for I wanted to improve their Bible knowledge. However, God spoke to me and helped me understand that this is not what His people need. Being a student of mission, I tried to contextualize the message of salvation. Being an outsider, I struggled with this because I had little knowledge about being Himba. I grew up in a city. I was now living among seminomadic farmers (cattle rangers). They are always on the move, seeking grazing and water for the animals.⁷ Upon

my arrival, I was cross-examined. One of the first questions I encountered was, “How many farms do you have?” I did not understand the significance of this question until years later. I thought of this question in terms of wealth. But the Himba were curious to know whether I could speak to their circumstances. They understood far more about my mission than I did. My training focused on disseminating information, sharing the truth. I spoke about the Trinity, the Bible as the Word of God; I spoke about a day of worship, and other topics. These are theological topics that are unrelated to their nomadism. I was not addressing their questions. They needed to know about a God who is present with them as they travel and face the many dangers of the wilderness.

The biblical story that jolted my mission understanding was the story of God meeting Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3). In this story I learned numerous mission principles. Two are significant: God has a special name He calls Himself, “I AM.” In this name God demonstrates His desire to be with people. That is, He wants to incarnate Himself into each human circumstance. He is not a distant God or One who is uninvolved in our circumstances. He desires to be involved in our daily lives. He wants to commune with us.

The second principle I discovered is that God commissions Moses to rescue Israel from Egypt for the purpose of bringing them to a place of worship. That is, He desires them to enter His very presence. This is later symbolically represented by the tent of meeting (Exod. 25). God wants to establish a connection, not only in our lives; He desires that we connect with Him in worship. Thus, the relationship we establish with God is an intertwining one. God wants to be present with us and desires us to be in His presence. Thus, mission consists of preparing people to be with God in worship.

The Sabbath is a weekly reminder of both these principles. Raoul Dederen proposed that the Sabbath affirms our connection to God—a time when we can recognize His presence in our lives

and worship Him. The Sabbath is God’s invitation to all people to “participate in his rest.”⁸ “God has come into man’s world and he has come to stay.”⁹ Thus, the Sabbath is a symbol of our reestablishing community with Him.

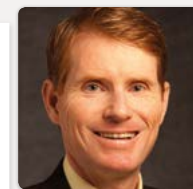
Conclusion

Even though mission is so often perceived as taking place in a foreign land, Jesus’ ministry demonstrates that people everywhere need to connect with God at a personal level. And they need to experience God connecting with them. Living among a nomadic people, I needed to understand what it meant for God to be present among nomads. I needed to live a nomadic lifestyle (as best an outsider could) so I could know how best to reveal God’s way of being with a nomad, modeling how God can be present as they travel from pasture to pasture. That God is beside them as they face life. I needed to help them worship God under the tree, around the fire at night, and as they walked the dusty cattle tracks. The foundation of Christ’s ministry was that to be fully human, we need to be connected to God. The image of God must be restored in each person. I needed to help them embrace God so that His image could be restored in them and they could be truly themselves. In doing this, I was preparing the Himba to live with God today and into eternity. That, I believe, shows what God sent me to do—to prepare people to live in His presence. ▣

- 1 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 15.
- 2 John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969).
- 3 H. G. Luttig, *The Religious System and Social Organization of the Herero: A Study in Bantu Culture* (Utrecht, Netherlands: Kemink, 1934).
- 4 Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).
- 5 All Scripture passages, unless otherwise stated, are from the English Standard Version.
- 6 White, *Education*, 231.
- 7 David J. Phillips, *Peoples on the Move: Introducing the Nomads of the World* (Carlisle, UK: Piquant, 2001).
- 8 Raoul Dederen, “Reflections on the Theology of the Sabbath,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982), 295–306.
- 9 *Ibid.*

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The church, Scripture, and adaptations: *Resolute in essentials, considerate in peripherals*—Part 2 of 2

In part 1 of this article (June 2015), we explored the role of the church in interpreting, applying, and even adapting certain scriptural instructions to the community of God. We reviewed the authority that Christ gave to the church in handling the “keys” of the kingdom (Scripture) and “binding” and “loosing” its teachings to its members (interpreting and applying scriptural standards to the Christian community and its members) and how this authority is exhibited in the statements of belief, standards of conduct, and redemptive discipline the church implements for the benefit of its community.

We also discussed the limits of all human law in trying to implement transcendent and eternal standards of justice and order in finite and imperfect human language. These limits made necessary human judges who could adjust written laws so the letter of the law would continue to advance the intent and spirit of the law. We noted the role the church plays in applying certain scriptural instructions in both the Old and New Testaments.

We also noted that moral law, especially as exhibited in the “principled rules” of the Ten Commandments, is not

subject to adaptation. It is always wrong to murder, steal, and commit adultery. But Christ Himself, in discussing the story of David eating the showbread reserved for the priests, revealed that ritual and organizational instructions may sometimes be adapted and even modified to meet human need and the mission of the faith community. In order to understand the way this principle of adaptation occurs, we are now going to look at examples of it in various scriptural stories.

A king in Israel

The Scripture makes it apparent that God’s ideal plan for the nation of Israel was not that of kingship (1 Sam. 8:10–20). God wanted them to be led by a combination of prophets, judges, priests, and elders. Still, when Israel desired a king, God accommodated this desire, even though the choice was prompted by the surrounding society and culture. “The LORD answered [Samuel], ‘Listen to their voice and appoint them a king’” (1 Sam. 8:22).¹

At that point, not only did the kingship become acceptable to God, the king himself became the Lord’s anointed, literally, when Samuel poured oil on Saul (1 Sam. 10:1). Thereafter, kings were

frequently anointed by prophets or high priests as a sign of divine appointment (1 Sam. 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39, 45; 2 Kings 9:1–6; 2 Chron. 23:11).

That the kingship was a burden to Israel and that individual kings fell into sin did not change God’s endorsement of the institution. This story of kingship shows that God is willing to vary His organizational ideal to accommodate cultural circumstances and the desires of His people. Since God was not willing to reject His people for rejecting one of His organizational norms, it should cause us to reflect seriously on how we relate to one another when there are differences in understanding such ideals.

Some will note that, already in the book of Deuteronomy, God Himself had made allowance for the variance of kingship (Deut. 17:14–20). Deuteronomy does indeed talk about Israel having a king at some point in the future. But the language used indicates that this is not God’s plan, but the people’s. It was the people who would say, “‘I will set a king over me like all the nations who are around me’” (Deut. 17:14).

God’s prediction of the variance—His foresight of Israel’s departure from the divine theocratic template—did not make it any less a variance from the

ideal, as both the prediction and the fulfillment reveal. But the Bible also reveals that not all variances need to be predicted, or revealed by God ahead of time, to be appropriate. Adaptations might come about in spontaneous response to circumstances and human requests.

The daughters of Zelophehad

In ancient Israel, sons were intended by divine law to inherit property (Deut. 21:15–17). But the four daughters of Zelophehad had no brothers, and once their father died, his name and property would be dissipated among the people. The daughters petitioned Moses that they be allowed to inherit property. Moses brought the case to the Lord, who said that “the daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father’s brethren” (Num. 27:7, KJV).

This is a remarkable event. Divinely given statutes being modified at the request of marginal, largely powerless members of the divine community. The Lord indeed explicitly approves the adaptation, but He does it in response to a human request. There was nothing in the law prior to the daughters’ entreaty that suggested adaptation or variation of the law was permissible. Rather, God modified His law, His civil statutes, at the request of not just important community leaders but of young, unmarried girls in a highly patriarchal culture. The story thus indicates that there is some role for the community of believers in adaptations of God’s plans for ordering His people.

Deborah and Barak

Some will note that the Lord explicitly approved Moses’ inquiry and request of the daughters of Zelophehad. But other stories show such variation without obvious and direct divine intervention. Deborah “led” or “judged” Israel, and “held court” under a palm tree, where she decided the “disputes” of the Israelites (Judg. 4:4, 5, NIV). There are indications

in the story that a female judge was a rare and unusual event. Deborah is the only woman recorded in the Bible to have been a judge of Israel. This uniqueness is supported by Ellen White’s comment that “in the absence of the usual magistrates, the people had sought to her [Deborah] for counsel and justice.”²

Further, when it came time to mount a military campaign against Sisera and his army, rather than take command as most judges did, Deborah called on a warrior, Barak, to lead the troops. He was unwilling to assume the command unless she came along to support him at the battle. This she agreed to, but in a rebuke of his failure to carry out his role as a man, she told him that the glory for the victory would go to a woman (Judg. 4:9).

Deborah’s role as judge and military escort was unusual, made necessary by circumstances, including the failure of men to accept their expected roles. Circumstances of national peril called for a response, which was then taken in light of the organizational and missional needs of God’s people, and the response, which varied from the divine pattern, then received divine blessing in terms of national success and prophetic proclamation in the song of Deborah.

King David and the Moabite restriction

The laws of purity and organization that God gave Israel could even be modified to allow a forbidden outsider to play the most powerful leadership roles in the land. The reigns of David and Solomon, and the genealogy of Jesus demonstrate this. Because the Moabites had seduced the Israelites into idolatry, God had commanded that a Moabite shall not enter into “the assembly of the LORD; . . . even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter into the assembly of the LORD” (Deut. 23:3). This was relevant to David because his great-grandfather was Boaz, who married Ruth, the Moabite (Ruth 4:16–20) but had done so contrary to a Mosaic prohibition that had been repeated by Joshua (Deut. 7:3; Josh. 23:12, 13).³

Under a strict application of the Levitical code, Boaz’s marriage to Ruth was illegitimate. She and her descendants should have been forbidden from playing any formal roles in the nation of Israel until ten generations had passed. This would have excluded David from being king. The Babylonian Talmud records that this was indeed one of the objections to David’s kingship. The book of Ruth can be seen as including an extended defense and legal argument as to why Ruth was really a Jewess and no longer a Moabite.⁴ Her famous soliloquy, “where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16), takes on a whole new significance when this larger context is understood.

Once one understands the truly spiritual nature of Jewish identity, all these arguments work. Obviously, they worked in their historical context, as a majority of Israel and Judah accepted David as king. None of these “exceptions,” however, can be found in the law itself! They were all created, or at least understood, by the circumstances of the story itself, as Israel’s legal and spiritual expositors and leaders wrestled with the meaning of God’s laws and the *spirit behind them* in a particular concrete context.

David, the showbread, and Christ

We have already discussed at some length David’s act in eating the showbread and Christ’s approval of it (1 Sam. 21:1–6; Matt. 12:1–4). Just to add a point, it is intriguing that Ahimelech was willing to break one ceremonial rule—non-priests eating the showbread—but desirous of keeping another rule—ritual purity from sexual relations. Remember, he inquired as to whether David and his companions had been chaste for the three days prior (1 Sam. 21:4, 5).

This partial adaptation is characteristic generally of individual and spontaneous human attempts to adapt and modify ritual or organizational laws to new or exceptional circumstances.

One alters the original only as much as needed to deal with the exigent circumstance. It is evidence that the exception granted was a spontaneous, human-devised alteration and not one found in the original law itself or in some other legislatively created standing law.

This nuanced caveat is what one would expect from a human agent engaged in ethical or legal reflection, thinking about how he would explain his conduct to others. “Well, I did give him the bread, but it was an emergency, and also I made sure he was ritually pure . . .” The story ultimately shows that God’s ritual and organizational ideals are expected to be applied in a common-sense manner, in an orderly way, to further the larger values, mission, and unity of the community.

Again, our view of this story does not arise merely from the narrative itself. It is Christ Himself who ratifies what David and Ahimelech did. By extension, He ratifies human ability, at least in community, to adapt biblical instructions that provide ecclesiastical order in pursuit of higher principles of the preservation of the life, health, and well-being of the community and its members.

The Jerusalem Council: Differences over divine ideals

These Old Testament (OT) stories provide the backdrop to the first major event where the Christian church grappled with what to do with clear OT commands that some thought to be obsolete but others viewed as of continuing validity. We sometimes lose sight of the dramatic nature of the circumcision discussion. Circumcision was a vitally important act for every male Israelite. It was a sign of God’s everlasting covenant with Abraham, to be kept “for the generations to come”; in fact, those who were not circumcised were said to have “broken the covenant” (Gen. 17:9–14). Remember, the Lord “sought to kill” Moses when he failed to circumcise his son (Exod. 4:24–26). Circumcision, from an OT view, was

considered essential to the identity of Israel as God’s covenant people.

There is no record of Christ doing away with circumcision as a sign of the covenant. Rather, this would have to be worked out from the significance of His death and the implications that flowed from it, and from the rending of the temple veil. In our day, we have all sorts of New Testament (NT) scriptures that we rely on to argue that the OT system of sacrifice and ceremony was disbanded and that this includes circumcision, as an ethnic identity marker of Israel. But the NT church itself had to test the authority of the NT letters on their coherence with the OT scriptures.

Just because Paul might tell them that circumcision was a thing of the past does not mean it was so, because Paul himself had to be checked and tested, just as the Bereans themselves did (Acts 17:11). It took a combination of experience, scriptural study, and sanctified reasoning and discussion for the group to come to believe that the Holy Spirit was leading them to the conclusion that the OT passages about the validity and importance of circumcision had been superseded by a circumcision of the heart and were no longer applicable to the people of God (Acts 15:28, 29; Rom. 2:29).

Conclusion: Steadfast in absolutes, tolerant in secondary matters

As the above examples show, God in His love and grace accommodates His divine organization and ritual ideal throughout Scripture and salvation history. Again, this reasoning does not apply to universal moral commands or truths. None of the examples set out above involved variations or deviations from God’s moral laws, whether it be the Ten Commandments or other injunctions from the natural moral law against sexual immorality. Sin is sin, and adaptation of organizational and ritual ideals should not obscure this.

But these organizational ideals are different from moral absolutes. They should not be lightly or cavalierly disregarded, certainly not defiantly so,

for then they do become a moral issue. But the Bible reveals that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the divine community may adapt them to further the mission of God’s church. Some may apply and adapt these organizational ideals differently than others—such differences are inevitable given different cultural and social perspectives. But under biblical principles of mutual Christian liberty, we should grant tolerance and forbearance to each other in these applications.

The Bible describes Christians as “submitting yourselves one to another” (Eph. 5:21, KJV). Submission only has meaning when we do not actually agree with each other; if we agree, there is no need to submit. Submission involves tolerating a brother’s or sister’s views or practices that we do not agree with, that we might even think as being biblically erroneous. Yet, if it is not a moral absolute, an issue of salvation, we tolerate the difference and continue the fellowship. Toleration sometimes seems crabbed and ungenerous, but it is actually a vital part of church fellowship.

Irwin Evans, editor of *Ministry* in 1931 and senior church leader for many decades, wrote an editorial on the importance of Christian *tolerance* in the church that I believe speaks profoundly to our situation today and our need to make allowances on differing views of nonmoral biblical instruction:

“Controversies that have divided Christians into various sects have seldom been on vital elements of faith, essential to salvation, but on nonessentials, so far as salvation is concerned. Truth cannot be compromised, but nonessentials, which do not enter into our salvation, directly, ought not to bring alienation between brethren. Here is a wide sphere for tolerance.

“Tolerance is not always found where we might naturally look for it. . . . All leaders in religious revivals, and promoters of the deeper spiritual life among the people, should possess this indispensable Christian grace. Yet how often do these seem to lack the spirit of tolerance. They not only assume that

they have the correct interpretation of all Scriptural doctrines, but they feel constrained to condemn all who do not accept their teachings as special light from God. . . .

“Tolerance must certainly be one characteristic of the last church. Without it there must come breaking of fellowship.”⁵


May God grant us the courage to know when we need to stand firm and make no compromise. To resist attacks on basic Christian and Adventist doctrine, such as a six-day creation, a worldwide flood, the atonement, the sanctuary, and the three angels’ messages. To oppose attempts to modify central biblical morality on marriage, divorce, and homosexuality. But may He also give us the wisdom to know when issues are secondary, and peripheral, less important than the principles they were given to protect.

It is a dangerous mistake to miss the distinctions between primary and secondary matters. To equate the

peripheral with the essential is a danger Christian doctrine and fellowship can ill afford. The fate of such an approach is actually the destruction of the more important first-tier principles themselves. History shows that many of the liberal, mainline churches usually went through a split around the beginning of the twentieth century, where a vocal, agitated minority pressed an extreme, absolutist reading of Scripture, which scared the moderates into the arms of the liberals in the church.

The result was often a small conservative splinter group, enduring just beyond the edges of the mainline church. The larger part of these denominations typically became liberal and generally shrunk rather dramatically. In short, it was a disaster for both the “conservative” and “liberal” segments of these church bodies.⁶

May we learn from history and Scripture, and commit to being faithful and firm where God would have us be so and to being flexible and submissive

where an understanding of God’s grace and equity teaches us to do so. 

- 1 Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture passages are from the New American Standard Bible.
- 2 Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power* (Silver Spring, MD: E. G. White Estate, 1995), 259.
- 3 A number of commentaries on Ruth recognize the central focus of the book as dealing with and making acceptable the identity of Ruth as a Moabite: see Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 40–42; Murray D. Gow, *The Book of Ruth: Its Structure, Theme, and Purpose* (Leicester, UK: Apollolis, 1992), 132–36 (Gow notes that both the Babylonian Talmud and the Midrash on Ruth reference ancient arguments made against David’s legitimacy based on his Moabite ancestry); Kirsten Nielsen, *Ruth: A Commentary*, *The Old Testament Library* (London, UK: SCM Press Ltd, 1997), 23–28.
- 4 That the purpose of the book of Ruth is to “promote the interests of David and his dynasty” is the position of a “large consensus” of modern interpreters: Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, 37.
- 5 Irwin H. Evans, “Tolerance,” *Ministry* (October 1931): 5, 31; emphasis added.
- 6 This story is well told in terms of the American Presbyterian Church in Bradley Longfield, *The Presbyterian Controversy: Fundamentalists, Modernists, and Moderates*, *Religion in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993).

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A revival ministry made of postal boxes

From time to time I receive boxes delivered to my home. My name is on the box along with the sender’s, but other than that, the box looks like just an ordinary box. What makes each box special, however, is not what is on the outside but what is on the inside.

This is what ministry is all about—*carefully opening and nurturing the lives of those around us*. This is no easy challenge. During the past several years I have grown concerned once I realized that many “boxes have not been opened.” The treasure on the inside was not being appreciated

because it is not always easy to get past what we can see on the outside. The vast worth and potential of the individual is seemingly overlooked. Such is the case of the deaf. Such is the test of our own character.

“I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested

benevolence. This is God’s test of our character.”*

Revival and mission, regardless of the outside appearance, begins wherever we are.

—Larry Evans, associate director, General Conference Stewardship Ministry, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

* Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1947), 191, 192.



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Adventist mission: *From awareness to engagement—* Part 2 of 2

In part 1 of “Adventist Mission: From Awareness to Engagement” (July-August 2015), we considered Adventist mission from its inception to the present. We now want to consider ten trends we believe should lead the missionary efforts of the church in the coming years:

1. Essential personal involvement. As Gottfried Oosterwal reminded us 40 years ago, “The Adventist missionary movement stands, or falls, with the concept that mission is always reaching out to those who do not know Christ, not by proxy, but by personal involvement among all the kindreds and peoples and tribes and tongues.”¹ This principle applies everywhere in the world; lately, perhaps even more so, in the West.

The Adventist Mission office at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has been developing new initiatives to bring awareness about mission opportunities to church members and leaders, such as the recent launching of the magazine *Mission 360°*. Other programs have existed for a while, such as the Global Mission pioneer program, which began in 1993. Pioneers understand the culture, speak the local language, and live and work within their own culture to establish new groups of believers. They extend the healing ministry of Jesus by helping people with physical and spiritual needs.

In a larger sphere, every church member should be involved in a spiritual “prayer watch” for world mission. The Moravian prayer vigil for missions that lasted uninterrupted for 100 years reminds everyone of the spiritual nature of the battle in which mission finds itself and the power of a community that relies on God through prayer.

2. The global scope of Adventist mission. The scope of Adventist mission is to “every nation, people, tribe, and tongue.” About 25 years ago the Seventh-day Adventist Church established a global mission strategy aimed at reaching the whole world with the gospel. This work included study centers geared to foster relationships and understanding with the major world religions. The Global Mission office of the church established such centers for Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam. Strategies for reaching postmodern and secular people, along with the urban masses, have also been implemented more recently through a fifth and a sixth center.

Global Mission has established a goal to place a church among each one million of earth’s population. This trend was seen in recent General Conference decisions to empower laypeople and fund projects in areas with little or no Adventist presence, such as Pakistan, Myanmar, and Brunei.² Bruce Bauer, chair of the World Mission department

at Andrews University, remarks that “much is employed where the church has been working for a hundred years or more and little is directed to the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist/Chinese worlds. Very few missionaries are working where there is no or only a few Christians of any denomination. It is time to redirect our resources to the 10/40 window where 63 percent of the world population live, but only 20 percent of Adventist missionaries work and only 20 percent of Adventist volunteers are located.”³

3. Flexible mission structures. The Adventist Church continues to face two major mission challenges: the opportunities and “impossibilities” in the 10/40 window area and the growing secular/postmodern population, particularly in urban areas. The history of Adventist missions includes a history of Spirit-led initiatives as well as individual and institutional activities.

In the past, many interdivision employees (IDEs) as well as non-IDEs were called and sent from the developing world to work for the denomination in underdeveloped places, answering to other developing-world-type administrators, and so various approaches for mission were implemented. That system/structure has changed considerably since then. Before 1901, in a few parts of the world, the church established lines of communication and responsibility so

that mission outreach went forward in a limited and structured manner.

More than 110 years ago (1901–1903), close to six decades after the Adventist movement began (1844), a major reorganization greatly helped the church to better serve the needs of mission. In some places schools and hospitals were established; in others, the publishing work flourished. Missionaries and church leaders studied the best approaches in mission work and worked under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in reaching people for Christ. Most efforts of the church were aimed at mission work. Structural adaptations that favor Adventist indigenous movements and expressions in traditionally challenging areas have been implemented in order to foster missionary activity.

The Middle East and North Africa Union Mission (MENA), created in 2011, shows us an example of this flexibility in recent times. Another example is the Adventist Church in China. As G. T. Ng, executive secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, points out, this is not an unorganized territory, but one based on “mother churches.” Under those churches (34 in 2012) exist a group of smaller churches and groups. Among different activities, mother churches become missionary-sending bases in those other areas.⁴

4. Mission from everywhere to everywhere. The shift in membership concentration is beginning to produce a reverse missionary movement from the Southern to the Northern Hemisphere that redefines the previous notions of missionary “sending” and “receiving” countries.⁵ Mission from everywhere to everywhere fosters traditional mission (North-South), reverse mission (South-North), and parallel mission (South-South), according to different diaspora mission patterns.

As we continue with the church’s mission in the twenty-first century, new forms of mission need to emerge. The church needs to rethink the way it does mission. New forms and platforms for mission will be developed to mobilize the laity in serious mission, particularly in some of the more challenging regions

of the world—places where access to more traditional types of mission has become impossible.

One such example of this form of mission is tentmaking.⁶ Not only are tentmakers being recruited, they are also being developed from among the hundreds of Adventist laypeople who have already moved to emerging job markets and seek to share their faith in these new contexts.

Another example is nonresident missionaries, or people and/or groups that focus attention, funds, and materials to creatively access people groups, yet still live at “home.” One instance could be where specially trained people work among students in North American, Latin American, or European universities. Another instance is where people focus on helping the thousands of refugees living in border areas, ministering to those with psychological trauma, spiritual displacement, and physical needs. Imagine a conference sponsoring a “one-day school” in a Syrian refugee camp in Turkey. This may also include relocation services. This movement will only continue to grow in a new globalized, flattened world.⁷

5. Active missionary partnerships. The fact that the biggest tithe contribution still comes from the global North and the largest concentration of human resources seems to be in the global South leads to different types of partnerships. No longer can this be called mission *to* or mission *for* but mission *with*. “Never has the missional task been more pressing, or the need for meaningful partnership between North and South been more urgent.”⁸

As major shifts and changes are continually occurring in the world and these shifts have a direct impact on the church and the makeup of its resources (human and material) used for mission, the church must endeavor to fulfill its mission by looking at various approaches and types of mission opportunities.

Thus, several questions, such as the following, need to be asked: How can short-term volunteers become long-term tentmakers? How can they be best positioned to fulfill a specific purpose? What

is “short-term mission” and how can it be used to create long-term commitment for cross-cultural mission work? How can a multitude of people in a variety of occupations be trained for missions? What specific mission will they be sent for, and involved in? How can they best be organized for strategic mission? How can we coordinate pioneers, tentmakers, and institutional positions for the most effective sharing of the gospel? Can new structures and platforms for mission be provided so more missionaries will serve in the least-evangelized areas (10/40 window, for example)? Can the church create more service opportunities on the continuum between IDE and Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS) and/or tentmakers? What methods should the church use to recruit specific people for specific mission tasks? “Why should not the members of a church, or of several small churches, unite to sustain a missionary in foreign fields? If they will deny themselves, they can do this.”⁹

A hybrid form of tentmaker/pioneer/Waldensian student/AVS could be an attractive and viable way for the church to continue its mission outreach. Financial costs could be reduced significantly, and more people of various backgrounds deployed for mission service. This form (hybrid) would involve a partially funded tentmaker or pioneer who already works in a certain region. He or she would establish the “platform” for mission service through his or her professional skills or employment. The church would support this endeavor with a partial salary, so this person could recruit, support, and nurture others in the same or various other types of mission.

6. Intentional cross-cultural communication. Communication is at the core of evangelization. In order to be effective and reach out to many, as part of a larger plan, the church will continue to use new media to evangelize. The first two decades of this century have witnessed the emergence of new ways to communicate. There are already some very dynamic Adventist television and Internet ministries around the world, but these ministries will have to become more integrated with the overall

strategy. Consequently, this should lead to a discussion about the shaping of the message to reach different audiences.

Annual Council delegates, in October 2013, gave one more step in a five-year process that aims at communicating the church's core beliefs, using "clearer—and frequently more inclusive—language."¹⁰ Clearer and more inclusive language in a world as diverse as ours would mean being able to articulate the Adventist faith across generations, ethnic groups, languages, and geopolitical borders.

7. Wholistic mission. The health message has been a part of Adventist mission understanding from the beginning, but neglected often in practice. Missiologists have stressed the need of an approach consistent with the wholistic Adventist view of human beings. Recently, the church has announced the first phase of a comprehensive approach to health outreach. Mark Finley provoked this by asking, "What would happen if 70,000 Seventh-day Adventist churches opened their doors to . . . teach wellness?" He believes "this will broaden the base for an evangelistic approach that goes beyond preaching—addressing spiritual, mental, and physical modalities."¹¹

8. Academic reflection on mission. Graduate programs on mission studies are being implemented in continents where Adventist colleges and universities traditionally had little to offer. Doctoral programs offered by the World Mission department at Andrews University are partly responsible for these new opportunities. The doctor of missiology (DMiss) program, a new doctoral degree in mission, aims at fostering that discussion and making this more accessible to those who will not necessarily follow an academic career. The *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* has also been an arena for sharing Adventist missiological thinking.

9. Relevant mission in the large cities. Most of the people live in urban settings, but those contexts are not where, traditionally, our churches are located. One of the consequences of urbanization has been economic inequality, which is seen in the development of luxurious skyscrapers towering over massive

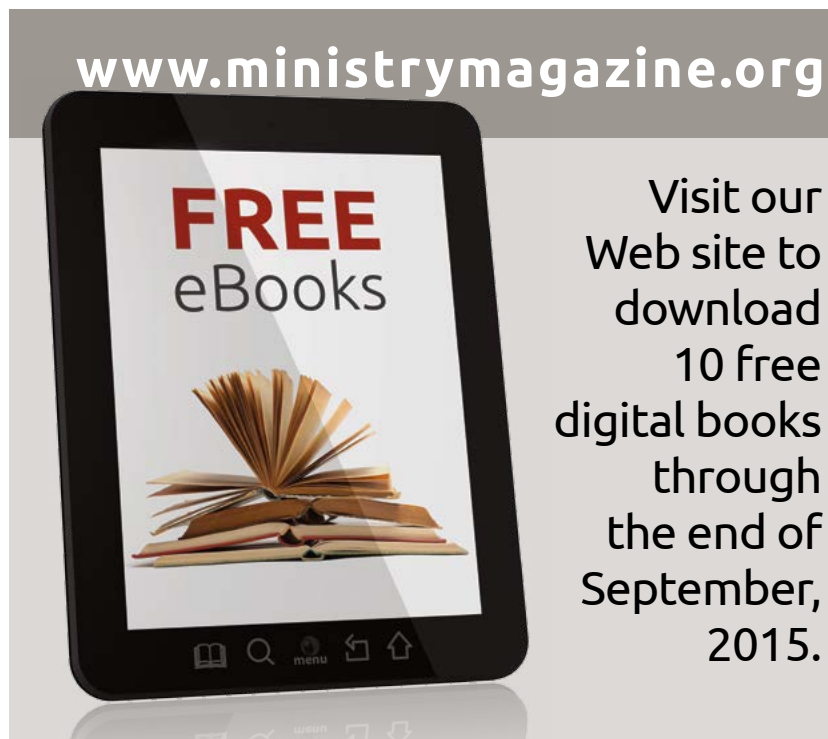
slums. Both settings represent challenges to traditional mission strategies. "Fewer than 1 in 500 Christian foreign missionaries work in slums."¹² Ellen White described centers of wholistic ministry, which she called centers of influence, that should be established in large cities around the world. They had the objective of giving opportunities for church members to serve their own communities. Adventist urban mission cannot concentrate exclusively on the attempt to attract people, as a spiritual magnet, from the streets to the church buildings. The main initiative of the church should be to inspire, train, and deploy church members from their pews to their communities.¹³ Workplaces, offices, factories, shops, must be seen as "sacred sites" where the Spirit is alive and operational. We cannot enjoy the luxury of bemoaning postmodernism; we must, instead, learn to understand it as a legitimate culture and learn how to communicate Jesus within that culture. Mission must focus on the experiential as well as the traditional cognitive experience.

10. Persecution. More Christians were martyred in the twentieth century than

all previous centuries combined, and recent statistics show a rise in religious persecution. Cases of Christians killed for their faith doubled in 2013 (2,123 cases) compared to the year before.¹⁴ This confirms a trend as the number of countries with religion-related terrorist violence has doubled over the past six years; the number of countries with a very high level of religious hostilities has increased.¹⁵ Missionaries in many parts of the world are facing major opposition. Fundamentalist forms of religions have emerged, sometimes giving birth to terrorist groups. This must be factored into the calculus of mission.

Conclusion

Clearly, much still has to be done in terms of mission awareness in the Adventist Church. Globalization has made of everyone a world citizen, but a question remains: have you become a world Christian? Adventist leaders of a hundred years ago sacrificed to send missionaries to faraway places, while they could easily have justified their staying in their own countries since there were many local needs. Because they sent them out, today



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the Adventist Church is widespread around the world.

Are you brave enough to do the same and send workers to the 10/40 window? Or to go yourself?¹⁶

Other suggestions include:

1. Continue to promote a Seventh-day Adventist mission-coordinated strategy—a long-term strategic plan for mission that is theologically and biblically sound, missiologically appropriate, and structurally practical.

2. Create fresh guidelines and policies to help coordinate and set parameters for missionary sending and receiving.

3. Carefully choose, train, and strategically send mission-visioning teams.

4. Establish some advisories where the church intentionally seeks input and advice, and connect them with specific ways of implementing the new ideas.

5. Establish and welcome new partnerships with “supporting ministries” in order to enlarge the mission vision and work.

6. Invite mission practitioners to work in closer cooperation with church missions, conferences, unions, divisions, and the General Conference, so their input will affect day-to-day plans and decisions in regard to mission service.

7. Create new categories between IDE missionaries, on the one hand, and AVS volunteers, on the other. For example: (a) volunteers who also get service credit and retirement benefits; (b) missionaries with a hybrid contract arrangement (shared costs); (c) missionaries sent to a different territory/division and supported by home and/or local churches and/or conferences; (d) missionaries sent by church-affiliated institutions such as publishing houses or departments, Adventist Health System, or ADRA; and (e) relatively young, but just retired, Adventist lay professionals who would go as missionaries on a volunteer basis.

8. Assign returned missionaries as mentors for new ones.

9. Have a system of tracking former IDEs, volunteers, and people who have expressed interest so positions can be

filled quickly and appropriately when they become available.

10. Train a group of long-term missionaries with advanced skills for cross-cultural mission service among the least evangelized peoples.

11. Employ resources adequately and effectively as the church plans for mission work in various difficult or unentered areas of the world, such as the 10/40 window. Ellen White states that “to send missionaries into a foreign field to do missionary work, unprovided with facilities and means, is like requiring bricks to be made without straw.”¹⁷

God has blessed the Adventist movement, and many people around the world have been reached with its message of hope. This is primarily the result of Seventh-day Adventists who have engaged in a way of living that is credible to those who are watching and witness their faith, which includes their prophetic understanding, passion for God’s justice, and missionary zeal. In order for this experience to be perpetuated, the specific mission (Rev. 14:6–12; Matt. 28:18–20) given by God to the Seventh-day Adventist Church must be placed as priority by the worldwide church leadership in planning, supporting, and implementing the work of the church. But above all, it has to be engaged by everyone who claims Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and commits to being His disciple. ❏

1 Gotfried Oosterwal, “Adventist Mission: After a Hundred Years,” *Ministry* (September 1974): 26.
 2 Elizabeth Lechleitner, “Adventist Treasurer Makes Case for Inclusion of Young Adults,” *Adventist News Network*, accessed July 20, 2015, archives.adventistreview.org/article/6748/archives/issue-2013-1528/28-cn-annual-council-treasurer-s-report. “The ten countries listed as receiving the most missionaries per million population averaged 2,634 per million people. Because of their large Christian majorities, however, together they received one international missionary for every 32 non-Christian in 2010.” Center for the Study of Global Christianity, *Christianity in its Global Context, 1970–2020*, June 2013, 77.
 3 Bruce Bauer, “O Desafio Restante,” *Foco na Pessoa*, 2013, no. 4, 47. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from the authors.
 4 “The Beiguan Church in Shenyang, for example, was started in 1985 with just one church with a few believers. Today it is a conglomerate of eight mother churches and 130 daughter churches with a

membership of more than 7,000. The mother churches operate three old folks’ homes, one kindergarten, one primary school, and two high schools with dormitories. In recent years Shenyang has become a local, church-based mission agency sending young self-supporting missionaries to ten localities, two of which are in foreign countries.” G. T. Ng, “Seventh-day Adventist Mission: The Shifting Landscape,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, 2012, no. 2, 40.

5 Ng, “Seventh-day Adventist Mission,” 39. “Of the ten countries sending the most Christian missionaries in 2010, three were in the global South: Brazil, South Korea, and India. The second top ten included six Southern countries: South Africa, the Philippines, Mexico, China, Colombia, and Nigeria (making nine of the ‘top 20’ from the South).” Center for the Study of Global Christianity, *Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970–2020*, 76.
 6 Tentmakers are missionaries who use their own profession and abilities to work and be a witness in areas of the world that are not open to traditional missionaries in order to make disciples and start congregations. Tentmakers collaborate with the church organization in order to help establish a Christian presence even though they do not work for the church. They are not dependent on church-based funding because they access unreached areas and peoples by finding jobs that match their education, skills, and experience.
 7 Thomas L. Friedman popularized the idea the world is flat in his international best-selling book, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005). In his analysis of globalization, he uses a metaphor to describe the world as a level playing field in terms of commerce.
 8 Ng, “Seventh-day Adventist Mission,” 45.
 9 Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), 466, 467.
 10 Elizabeth Lechleitner, “Annual Council Delegates Review Suggested Wording Changes to 28 Fundamental Beliefs,” *Adventist News Network*, last modified October 22, 2013, archives.adventistreview.org/article/6749/archives/issue-2013-1528/28-cn-annual-council-delegates-review-suggested-changes-to-28-fundamental-beliefs.
 11 Ansel Oliver, “First Phase of Comprehensive Health Ministry Will Promote Future Work,” *Adventist News Network*, posted October 18, 2013, archives.adventistreview.org/article/6751/archives/issue-2013-1528/28-cn-first-phase-of-comprehensive-health-ministry-will-promote-future-work.
 12 Center for the Study of Global Christianity, *Christianity in Its Global Context, 1970–2020*, 85.
 13 Gary Krause, “Centros de Influência,” *Foco na Pessoa*, 2013, no. 2, 14, 50.
 14 Tom Heneghan, “Christian Persecution Doubled in 2013, Reports Annual Survey by Open Doors,” *Huff Post Religion*, last modified January 23, 2014, www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/09/christian-persecution_n_4568286.html.
 15 Angelina Theodorou, “Key Findings About Growing Religious Hostilities Around the World,” *Pew Research Center*, January 17, 2014, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/01/17/key-findings-about-growing-religious-hostilities-around-the-world/.
 16 Bauer, “O Desafio Restante,” 49.
 17 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1963), 330.

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► GC Ministerial Association team reelected

San Antonio, Texas—During the 60th General Conference (GC) Session of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, held in San Antonio, Texas, July 2–11, 2015, all seven members of the GC Ministerial Association were reelected for a five-year term that runs through June 2020.

Jerry N. Page, Ministerial Association secretary, and his wife, **Janet**, who serves as associate ministerial secretary for pastoral families, were reelected on July 6. Joining them in being reelected the following day were associate secretaries **Jonas Arrais**, who oversees training and equipping of elders, deacons, and deaconesses; **Robert Costa**, who provides evangelism resources;

Willie E. Hucks II, who promotes theological education and ministerial preparation within Adventist colleges, universities, and seminaries, as well as serves as associate editor of *Ministry*; **Anthony R. Kent**, who coordinates the PREACH program, continuing education, and serves as lead host for *Ministry in Motion*; and **Derek J. Morris**, editor of *Ministry Magazine*, who serves as cohost for *Ministry in Motion*.

According to Jerry Page, “In 2010 we prayed much and watched as the Lord put together our current Ministerial Association team. It has been a powerful experience working together, employing our complementary gifts, witnessing God’s leading through those various gifts, and seeing

the work for ministers, their families, elders, and now the deacons and deaconesses, move forward in so many ways. I am very happy and excited that the Lord and His church have asked our team to serve together for the next five years. I believe the best days are just ahead as we seek Him and let Him lead us all. Hopefully, He will come before another GC session takes place. We need your prayers continually!”

The entire staff of the General Conference Ministerial Association looks forward to working alongside ministers, local church leaders, and pastoral families during this next quinquennium as we strive to finish the work God has entrusted to all of us. [Willie E. Hucks II] ▼



L to R: Robert Costa, Anthony R. Kent, Jerry N. Page, Jonas Arrais, Janet Page, Willie E. Hucks II, and Derek J. Morris. Photo credit: Daniel Bedell.



Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture by David Platt, Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2015.

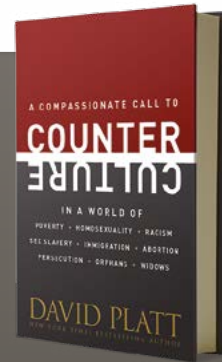
In our world where a daily barrage of alarming headlines highlight the rapid decline of societal morality, David Platt issues a radical challenge to professed Christians. Rare in its authenticity, *Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture* shares not merely the theoretical musings of a contemplative theologian but a prophetic challenge to engage society based on the practical experiences of a submissive disciple. Platt reminds this generation of “Christians,” whose mores are increasingly aligned to dominant society, that “the gospel of Christ is not a call to cultural compromise. . . . It is a call to countercultural crucifixion” (22).

Fully transparent, Platt shares his own countercultural saga. When he and his wife allowed the gospel to penetrate their hearts, they voluntarily chose a simple life and took seriously the biblical mandate to become parents to orphans. He even acknowledged the racism within him as he made conscious efforts to become an agent of reconciliation.

Most of the topics in the book address the complicated fallout of sexual distortion in society. He not only addresses abortion and same gender relationships but deals with the terrible effects of pornography that manifest itself in the international sex slave trade. His treatment on the issue is infused with humility as he confesses that male heterosexuals are “responsible for the vast majority of sexual immorality in the world today” (165).

The other subtheme is the place of Christianity among other religions. Platt rightly applies the first amendment religious clauses in the Constitution of the United States as guarantees of the right

Most of the topics in the book address the complicated fallout of sexual distortion in society.




for anyone to practice whatever faith they desire in this nation. However, his concern for religious liberty is by no means driven by a pluralistic view that elevates all religions to the same plane. On the contrary, he has become convinced that Christianity is the only true religion and urges believers to get serious about bringing the gospel to the two billion unreached people in the world (246).

Counter Culture contains a wonderful demonstration of the gospel in action. The gospel is too often viewed as a rational acceptance of certain creeds. While not dismissing the importance of doctrines, Platt challenges the church to a radical Christianity demonstrated in acts of compassion. Imagine how differently our faith communities would be viewed if every pastor and member decided to *live* the gospel. Of course, this will never happen unless individuals in the body of Christ make a conscious effort to discern God’s will by imbibing the content of the gospel.

Ironically, while impressively strong in describing the practical

gospel, the author’s understanding of the comprehensive content of the gospel is highly questionable. It seems as if Platt’s compassionate call for Christians to involve themselves in ministries of compassion is undergirded by the fear of punishment from an inflexible God. In his understanding, God’s grace is limited only to those who actually *hear* the gospel, and others unfortunate enough to have been born in societies where they are never exposed to Christ are destined to an eternally burning hell. His political biases are also exposed when he appeals for his readers to vote for anti-gay-marriage candidates (154) but says nothing about siding with candidates who are concerned about the unequal distribution of wealth. These aberrations notwithstanding, this book is a compulsory manual for all leaders who wish to put their faith into action.

—Reviewed by Keith Augustus Burton, PhD, professor of theology, Oakwood University, Huntsville, Alabama, United States. 



Marcos Bomfim serves as director of health ministries, South American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Brasilia, Brazil.

A curse turned into a blessing

I was born into a ministerial home as the oldest of three. By the time I was three years old, I had already undergone three major surgeries, resulting in removal of much of my intestines. This seemed to be a curse. But even though my life was preserved by a miracle, my relatives would say, “With your poor health you will not be able to be a physician as is your Grandpa.”

And he really could not help me because he died shortly after I was born. My mother often recalled how she would find him eating a kind of a highly sweet condensed milk—even after he had been diagnosed with diabetes.

I cannot stop thinking about what could have led that intelligent, highly competent doctor to consume that kind of product, even though he knew that it could eventually kill him! When wrestling with my own personal battles against self, I do not like to face the truth that what prevented him from seeing all his other grandchildren was probably not the diabetes but the lack of self-control. Would I commit the same missteps? My parents were born in an extremely well-developed part of the country where food was very accessible, but the diet is heavily based on meat consumption. While preparing and eating meat, people strengthen identity and socialization, and if someone tries to change his or her personal diet, they will probably lose some of their relationships. That is no doubt why my parents never thought seriously about changing their lifestyle before.

But after some years, my father was called to be the administrator of a Seventh-day Adventist hospital in São Paulo, Brazil. Feeling himself unable to face that challenge, he began searching

the inspired counsels God gave Ellen G. White about health. One evening, he arrived home with a small gray book and announced: “From now on, we will read from this book every evening for family worship.” That book was *Counsels on Diet and Foods*.

So, every night, after the story, usually told by my mother, my father would read a very small portion of that book before saying a prayer and sending us to bed. After reading, they usually made some interesting comments or simply

diet and exercise, not only really matter for success or failure in this life but also affect our spiritual perceptions and make us more or less prone to make sound moral and spiritual choices.

I think that knowing those truths helped us to accept all the changes at home—not as a stubborn idiosyncrasy of our parents but as a natural submission to the will of God who wants the best for us. While looking at their struggle to obey (it was not easy), we learned that we need to seek the Lord’s

We perceived that salvation really came to our home only after my mother enrolled in a vegetarian cooking school.

looked thoughtfully at each other, as if saying, “We didn’t know this before! We need to do something about that!”

And they did! Step by step, they started making changes even when it meant facing some discomfort in family gatherings. They understood that while giving up this part of their culture, they were now looking for a new one—another citizenship. We perceived that salvation really came to our home only after my mother enrolled in a vegetarian cooking school.

My father emphasized that there are spiritual implications associated with every choice we make. He also said that our physical habits, such as

guidance for every aspect of our lives. When our heart and preferences are not on the right side, we must seek God for a miracle, saying like David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).

Those lessons were probably the best heritage we received while we were still living at home with our parents, and I am trying to apply them, not only to my personal life but also to my family life. And, by the way, my health is doing very well. My original weakness—which felt like a curse that the enemy intended to be my downfall—is now the very proof of the goodness and graciousness of our God! 🙏

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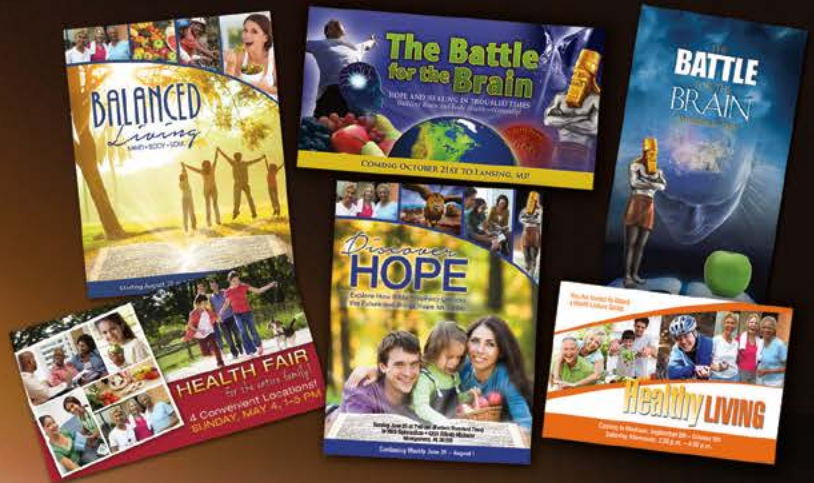
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