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GOD IN LIFE AND MISSION

A Festschrift honoring
JON DYBDAHL

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encountering
GOD IN LIFE AND MISSION

A Festschrift honoring
JON L. DYBDAHL

Rudi Maier
Editor

Department of World Mission
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan
2010

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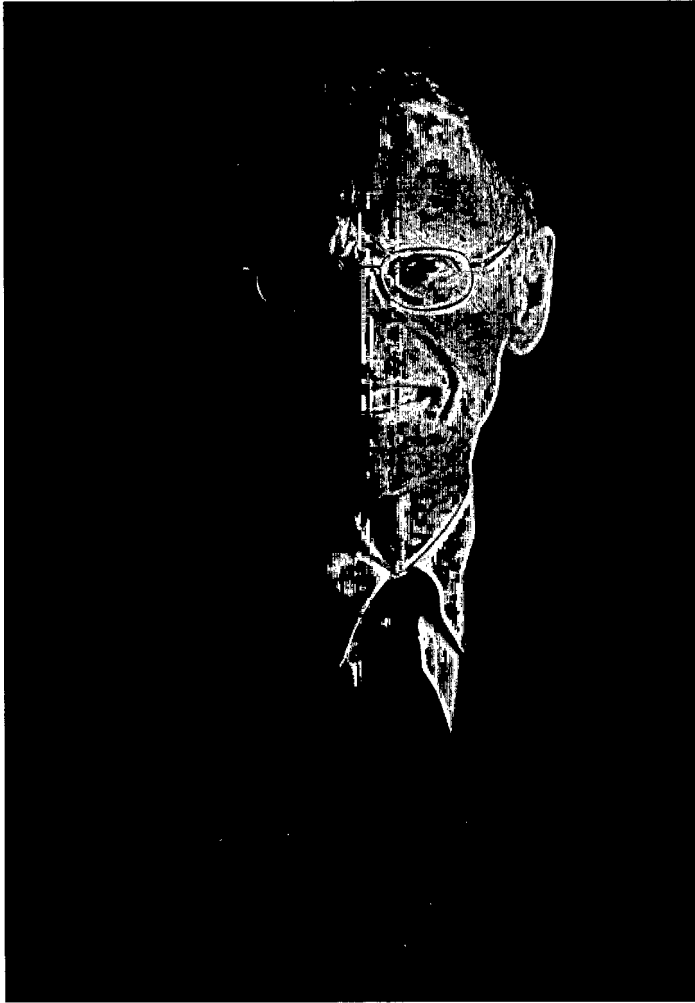
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Dedication

To Jon L. Dybdahl, mission pioneer, scholar, professor, and administrator, who has been a friend of many of his students who have become ministers and missionaries around the world as well as a colleague to many who have served with him at several Adventist educational institutions in North America and Asia. This *Festschrift* has been written by some of these students, friends, and colleagues as an acknowledgment of Jon's dedication and commitment to the cause of mission and the work of his church.



Dr. Jon L. Dybdahl

Director, Institute of Word Mission, and
Professor of World Mission, Andrews University (1990-2002)
President of Walla Walla University (2002-2006)

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INTRODUCTION

Rudi Maier

In academia, a *Festschrift* is a book honoring a respected person during his or her lifetime. The term is borrowed from German and could be translated as *celebratory publication* or *celebratory (piece of) writing*. A *Festschrift* contains original contributions by the honored academic's close colleagues. It is typically published on the honoree's retirement, special birthdays, or notable career anniversary.

This *Festschrift* is being published to honor our esteemed colleague and friend Dr. Jon Dybdahl who recently has retired from being the president of Walla Walla University and who has also lately passed his well-respected "retirement age."

The title of this book is *Encountering God in Life and Mission*. It has been chosen because the book has pulled together three important elements from the work and ministry of Jon Dybdahl: God, Life, and Mission. These three concepts have not been mere abstracts in Jon's life but they have influenced him and his ministry.

From the life story, written in this volume by Jon's son, we have seen a small glimpse of how Jon has encountered God in his life and how that life has been filled with a desire to make God's mission supreme in his work. As Paul interviewed his father for his life sketch, he posed a very important question: [Paul] "So, what are you, then? Are you a biblical scholar? A missiologist? A healer? A teacher?" Jon's answer is quite revealing of who he is. [Jon] "I'm not a biblical scholar in the traditional, classical sense of the word. At the heart, at the deepest level, I'm a missionary because the spiritual life and healing comes from my desire to communicate the

Encountering: God in Life and Mission

gospel. I believe that Jesus Christ is the answer for everybody. . . . When we have a real relationship with Him, we will share that. Since He was about healing, we should be, too. So, really at heart I am a missionary, and those other things I see as relating closely to missions.”

I believe that such a conclusion is not the result of a spur-of-the-moment thought, but must have matured throughout a life process in which Jon “wrestled” with God. It is interesting to note that the term “encounter” in psychology has the specific meaning of “authentic, congruent meeting between individuals.” It must have been this “authentic” encounter with God that has allowed Jon to face his own life’s struggles and still remained faithful to his divine call to mission. Many of us who have know Jon and observed him in these struggles have hurt with him, but we have also seen through his life that true strength can only come if we trust in God and His almighty power. In this sense this *Festschrift* is our own commitment to God and His mission.

It has been my privilege to put together this *Festschrift*. The idea of such a publication started actually several years ago when Jon “left” us here in the Department of World Mission and became the president of Walla Walla University. The actual work for the *Festschrift* started in January 2009. I was happy to spearhead such a project without knowing that my own life and work would change shortly after that. Twenty-six authors have contributed to this publication (and probably many more would have contributed if we had approached them). Although it has been suggested that the *Festschrift* should deal with the topic of mission, most authors wrote within the context of their own disciplines.

We have been fortunate that Paul Dybdahl has been able to write the biography of his father for this publication. Now Jon probably will understand why Paul suddenly had such a keen interest in understanding the family history. Dr. Andreasen has been kind enough to write the foreword of this *Festschrift*. Not only has Dr. Andreasen been president during Jon’s time here at Andrews University, but both of them have been presidents at Walla Walla University during various times of their work. They both understand what it means to lead.

The other authors come from various disciplines, have known Jon for extended periods of time and in different contexts. It is this variety of authors that make the content of this *Festschrift* unique, and that is the beauty of missions. We each have encountered God in our own way. We have had varied responsibilities and experiences in life, but all are committed to God’s mission in this world.

The book has been divided into four sections. Part **one** deals with our encounter with God. The Sabbath encounter as described in Richard Davidson’s contribu-

tion reminds us that we need time with God to be empowered for the task. Joseph Kidder and Jiří Moskala make it very clear that in the presence of God—through authentic worship—we can function in our various professions (such as “Money Changers,” see Ann Gibson’s article) and know when God truly speaks to us (such as dreams and visions). Hopefully these encounters will make us true servants of God.

The **second** part deals with theological encounters. As prophets of old have struggled to understand what God’s word meant to them, servants of God today are wrestling with the theological issue of “truth” and suffering, how to get involved in social issues and how to be relevant in the contexts of our time.

The **third** part deals with practical issues of mission from a historical as well as experiential perspective. Articles were written by church administrators and field practitioners as well as academic researchers. Several of the case studies deal with mission issues related to areas not traditionally included as “mission fields,” such as North America and Eastern Europe. Jacques Doukhan’s chapter is unique in Adventist mission thinking because it reminds Adventists not only about our close roots and similarities to Judaism but challenges Adventist mission strategists to develop plans and priorities on how to reach out to Jews.

The **fourth** and final part of this book deals with the encounter of other religions, particularly Islam and Buddhism. Jon and his family have worked for a number of years in Thailand and have had encounters with those two religions, particular Buddhism. It is tempting to compare these religions with our own faith. Unfortunately too many times we have very little knowledge of what Buddhism and Islam teach and what people believe in these religious communities. All four writers have had their own encounters with these faith traditions, and because of these encounters their Christian faith has become stronger without condemning the others.

It is easy to judge others without learning to know them. We all have known Jon for many years. We are proud to be his friends and colleagues. He has been an inspiration to many of us. Today we are dedicating this *Festschrift* as our thanks to Jon. Our wishes for health and courage accompany this publication.

This book has benefited from the input of many. Most articles received very little editing and they reflect the style of each author. Many of the articles were reviewed by external readers and received valuable input for the final preparation of the article. RosAnne Tetz and Beverly Pottle provided valuable assistance as copy editors.

Encountering: God in Life and Mission

With gratitude and with great pleasure I am able to present this collection of essays as a fitting testimony to our esteemed teacher, friend, and colleague Dr. Jon L. Dybdahl. As we celebrate his accomplishments, we salute him and his wife Kathy for their great examples.

Berrien Springs, May 2010

FOREWORD

Niels-Erik Andreasen
President, Andrews University

John Dybdahl: An Advocate Of “All Things Christian”

The organization and content of this volume in honor of Professor Jon Dybdahl helps overcome the common frustrations with such volumes, namely that they do not have a center. But here in this volume, a single organizing idea, “encounter,” is shared by its four sections. The related concept, “spiritual,” found throughout the volume also helps keep its content together, and the reference to “mission” makes the ideas of the volume expansive but not scattered. It is a fitting tribute to Dybdahl whose life of ministry, mission, teaching and administration in the Adventist church has done much to keep “all things Christian” together by demonstrating a natural integration between many aspects of Christian faith, life, witness and service.

Indeed, whereas some honorary volumes draw their chief value from brilliant individual chapters prepared by writers whose great reputations and illustrious careers are on display in a volume honoring another, the individual chapters and overall content of this volume additionally bring well-deserved recognition to its recipient, for Dybdahl has displayed throughout his remarkable life of service a probing interest in many areas of study along with an unusual synergy and integration between such different aspects of ministry and Christian service. His long

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years working with the mountain people in Thailand prepared him for teaching in a new way. With a degree in Hebrew Bible, he did not choose to become a published expert in the Old Testament discipline but developed into an effective teacher of Scripture, spirituality and mission. And in his most recent assignment as editor in chief of the new Andrews Study Bible, he corralled a group of fifteen international and cross-cultural Old and New Testament scholars into the challenging task of explaining difficult words or expressions of the Bible in language that even a first-time Bible reader can readily understand, all of it completed in a very short time period.

As with this volume, so with Dybdahl's career, it is difficult to place it in any one specific academic department or church organizational unit, or geographical and cultural environment. Does he belong to the Old Testament or Bible department, or rather in the theological or practical or missions departments? Is he a church administrator or a Christian foot soldier in remote outposts on difficult assignments? Does he feel most at home in a country with a long history of Christian dominance, or in a location where the Christian presence is brand new? The answer is in this volume, dedicated to him who inspired us by his life, that authentic Christians are people who listen carefully to God in the words of their own familiar language. They reach out to Him with deep spiritual longing within whatever culture they know best and wherever they live. They passionately share their faith in Him with those who are disenfranchised so that they too can participate in fellowship with Christ as equal members in a community of believers.

BIOGRAPHY OF JON DYBDAHL: A MISSIONARY AT HEART

Paul Dybdahl

Introduction

In this information age, certain details about Jon Dybdahl are fairly easy to access. Without too much trouble, one could discover his date of birth, educational accomplishments, publications, administrative positions, and career path. It would be a challenge, however, to discover the more intimate details of who Jon Dybdahl is as a person—his motivations, priorities, cherished successes, and dreams.

When I was asked to write the biography for this *Festschrift* honoring my father, I felt compelled to try to tell both sides of his story. So, while I will attempt to recount his professional and academic accomplishments accurately, I will also, without apology, spend time exploring some of the more personal parts of his journey. I will rely heavily on a series of interviews I conducted with him (under the guise of recording a “family history”) in September 2009. He knew nothing of this *Festschrift*, so he was not speaking for this audience. I have, however, quoted from those interviews in a number of places in this biography.

It will soon become obvious that I cannot write a dispassionate account. The other contributors to this *Festschrift* know Jon as professor, pastor, missionary, author, colleague, and even friend. I know him as my beloved father. While others may admire him for his professional accomplishments, I admire him for his char-

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acter as it was revealed in our home—the place where a man’s true character is shown. Based on that criteria alone, I can declare that my father is a great man, and I do love him dearly. My brief biography will not do him justice but is simply my humble attempt at providing an overview of his story.

Early Years

Jon Lee Dybdahl was born in Oakland, CA, on December 17, 1942, to Gerhard and Erma Dybdahl. Jon’s grade school years were spent in and around Loma Linda University in southern California. His father, a pathologist, taught at the University and worked at the University Medical Center. When Jon was a junior at Loma Linda Academy, his parents accepted a call to mission service in the Philippines. The move meant that Jon graduated from Far Eastern Academy (FEA) in Singapore.

According to the FEA annual that year, Jon’s career goal was to become President of the United States. In his more serious moments, though, he had decided to pursue a career as a medical doctor. So, in the fall of 1961, Jon enrolled at Pacific Union College as a Pre-Med major, with Religion as his secondary area of study.

In the middle of his sophomore year, Jon attended the usual Friday evening vespers. As he sat listening to the speaker, he had what he calls “one of the most amazing experiences of my life.” It was a powerful impression that he should be up front preaching. Jon struggled with this impression in the days that followed and finally spoke with Kathy Trefz, a young lady who was quickly becoming more than just a friend. According to Jon, she said she did not really want to marry a doctor, but marrying a minister would be just fine. The problem with all of this was that Jon really did not want to be a theology major or a pastor.

The next Friday night, the strange yet strong sense that he should be up front speaking came again. The same thing occurred the following week. Jon knew what he had to do. In the middle of his sophomore year, he became a theology major. He felt peace with that decision and has since said, “I really never looked back. I have always had a strong conviction that this was what God called me to do.”

Jon graduated from PUC in 1965 and was hired by the Northern California Conference. He and Kathy had already been married for one year, and they went directly to the Seminary at Andrews University. Jon received his MA in Systematic Theology from Andrews, and then an Master of Divinity in 1967. In March of that same year, Jon and Kathy became proud the parents of Jonna, their first-born daughter. In the fall, the family of three moved to Ukiah, CA, where Jon served as an associate pastor of the Ukiah Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Mission Service in Asia Thailand

While at Andrews, Jon and Kathy had been made aware of a need for a missionary family willing to go to southern Thailand. They were open to that idea, but the position had been given to another couple, and Jon considered the matter closed. In early 1968, Jon was surprised to receive a new invitation to go to Chiang Mai, a town in northern Thailand.

By that fall, the Dybdahl family was in Chiang Mai. Jon and Kathy's second child, Paul was born three months later on Jon's birthday in December 1968. Two years later, in October 1970, the family was completed with the birth of daughter Krista.

Jon was only 26 years old when he first arrived in Thailand, inexperienced and not yet ordained; however, his initial responsibilities were far-reaching. He was senior pastor of the Chiang Mai Seventh-day Adventist Church, where no one spoke English. He was also the district leader for the Adventist Church in the northern region of Thailand and thus was to supervise the work of seven or eight other workers.

His first months were spent in intensive language learning. Thankfully, he had a facility for language acquisition, and he preached his first sermon in Thai after approximately three months of study.

While in Chiang Mai, Jon began to notice people of different dress in the marketplace. He discovered that they were tribespeople (primarily Hmong and Karen) who lived in the mountains. Was the church working among them, he wondered? The response came that there had been some previous Adventist work among these peoples, primarily across the border in Laos, but that there was no ongoing work in Thailand.

Jon decided that this needed to change. At his request, the Thailand Adventist Mission (TAM) granted permission for him to develop an adult educational center (or "Tribal Center") specifically for these tribespeople. Jon managed to get 30 different landowners to sell adjacent portions of their land in order to create a large campus in the foothills about an hour outside of Chiang Mai. A series of providential events soon led to the building of dormitories, homes, and a church on that land. About a year later, TAM decided that that same location was the best place for a much-needed Seventh-day Adventist high school. So, Chiang Mai Adventist Academy was built next to the Tribal Center on the land Jon had previously purchased. The school remains to this day and continues to be one of the encouraging parts of the Adventist work in Thailand.

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The Tribal Center provided four years of accredited Thai education and accepted students who were at least 12 years old. In addition to this basic education, there was a work program, music classes (taught by Kathy), some English language instruction, and religion courses. In time, Jon also began to provide more focused training for pastors and evangelists.

The school began with a total of 17 students. Each term enrollment grew, so that by the third year the school was filled to capacity with about 60 students, most of whom were Hmong. In time, the Tribal Center became well-known among the mountain villages. People would come for health care as well as for education, so Kathy's experience as a registered nurse proved very helpful.

Jon's goal was to build relationships with the students so that he would then be able to more naturally establish contact with their home villages in the mountains. The plan worked very well. After a year on campus, nearly every student became a follower of Jesus. Early on, however, Jon made three very wise decisions.

First, he recognized the need for some basic literature that would aid the work of spreading the gospel. So he put together the very first Adventist book in the Hmong language. It contained songs, a statement of belief presented as a series of 12 questions and answers, and finally, a collection of key Bible passages. Jon has often said that this book—especially the doctrinal presentation of 12 key Bible teachings—was his most theologically creative (and perhaps even influential) publication because it forced him to think about what information was truly necessary for people who were making a decision to follow Jesus.

Second, Jon recognized that tribal culture was collective and communal rather than individualistic. Because of this, he determined he would respect the role of the family elders and, as a general rule, would not baptize students until they had the approval of those elders. As a result, a believing student often became the catalyst for their entire household (and sometimes, even the whole village) to become believers.

Finally, Jon felt that new believers should be welcomed into church membership in a two-step process. Often, after listening to only a day or two of teaching in a village, several animist families would want to “give up the spirits” and place themselves under the power of Jesus. These families would undergo the first step, which involved ridding their homes of spirit paraphernalia and learning how to pray. They would also receive a picture of Jesus and a card indicating they were Sabbath School members. While their lifestyle was still far from “Adventist,” they were recognized as believers and brothers and sisters in the family of God. Baptism was the second step and would only come after they had received further instruction.

These decisions (to produce literature, baptize with family approval, and welcome believers through a two-step process) were crucial to the spread of the gospel, but Jon would be quick to point out two other factors. First, he did not work alone but enjoyed the blessing of a supportive wife and the faithful, tireless service of key indigenous leaders. Second, the success was not merely the result of human labor. God worked in amazing ways to demonstrate His power among the villages. There were many cases of supernatural protection and healing, and God repeatedly gave evidence that He indeed had power over the spirits.

Three and a half years after starting the Tribal Center, and with three children at or approaching school age, Jon and Kathy felt that the time was right for them to transition to Southeast Asia Union College (SAUC) in Singapore. In addition to their work in the city of Chiang Mai, they left a well-established Chiang Mai Academy and Tribal Center, as well as a growing movement in the surrounding villages with approximately 50 households (each with between 15-50 people) as followers of Jesus.

Singapore

In Singapore, Jon served as senior pastor of the SAUC Church and the head of the Religion Department. It was in Singapore that Jon faced a growing spiritual struggle, one that had begun during his last few years in Thailand. Jon's battle was not against heresy or unbelief, but rather the fact that he had an intellectual understanding of grace without a heart assurance. He believed in God's mercy and acceptance but did not feel it personally.

As was the case with his initial call to ministry at PUC, the resolution to this spiritual crisis is still vivid in Jon's mind. It was a hot and muggy morning and Jon was in his study, worn out from his struggle. In despair, he cried out to God, "Unless I can sense your acceptance of me, your assurance, I can't really go on."

Finally, in that moment, there was an answer. Jon said, "I don't know how it happened, but all of a sudden, I tell people it just dropped the 18 inches from my head to my heart, and I felt an assurance and acceptance from God that I'd never felt before. It was an assurance that I was accepted and that I was His." It was a release that he shared with Kathy, who also understood and experienced that same heart assurance. This continuing experience of God's grace has been central to the rest of Jon's life and ministry.

While in Singapore, Jon became convinced that he wanted to continue his education. There were several academic institutions in need of faculty who were inter-

ested in his services and were willing to sponsor him in his PhD studies. Together, Jon and Kathy decided to accept an invitation to join the School of Theology at Walla Walla College (WWC).

Mission Service in North America Walla Walla

The Dybdahl family arrived in Walla Walla in 1976 after nearly eight years in Asia (six in Thailand and two in Singapore). After two years of teaching in the WWC School of Theology, Jon enrolled as a PhD candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary. He chose Fuller because it was relatively close to both sets of parents and because Fuller was one of the few places where his PhD program would allow him to study both the Bible and missions. He majored in the Old Testament, with minors in Missions and Semitic Languages. Jon's dissertation dealt with village land tenure in the Old Testament and how the logic of that ancient system could be illustrated by the land tenure systems that operated in rural Jordan into the twentieth century.

When his degree was completed, Jon returned to full-time teaching at WWC. He loved his job and did it exceptionally well, as is evidenced by stellar student and peer evaluations and other teaching awards.¹

One of the classes Jon taught was called Modern Denominations. Each year, he invited local representatives from a variety of religious traditions to come to class to share their perspectives. One such presenter was a local pastor who would gently but repeatedly chide Adventists for working so hard to fine-tune their theology while remaining ignorant about how to worship.

At first, Jon was not even sure what the pastor meant. What Jon did sense, however, was a personal spiritual hunger. He had finished his degree, he was doing something he loved, his family was happy, but he was unsatisfied. Over time, the pastor's repeated reproaches led Jon to begin to explore what worship meant. He read widely and soon realized that there was a whole area of the Christian life that he had not studied or experienced, and he wanted to know more.

He and a colleague, Henry Lamberton, decided to revive a class called Christian Dynamics and use it to discuss religious experience, emotion, and the spiritual life. They did so with some fear, both because they felt unqualified to teach the subject and because they wondered if any students would register for the class since it was an elective and not a required course.

They quickly discovered that they were not alone in their hunger for something more than purely “intellectual” religion. The class grew rapidly, eventually became a regular part of WWC’s curriculum, and proved to be life-changing for many students, as it was for Jon. Jon came to believe that while the mind is certainly crucial, “true religion has to be heart religion. Sometimes that happens naturally for people, but for many, especially the second generation, it has to be taught.”

Thailand (Again)

After 13 happy years at WWC, Thailand came calling once again. An accredited nursing school (Mission College) had been in place in Bangkok for a number of years, but TAM and others recognized a need for an expanded college curriculum for Thai young people. Land was already purchased and building was taking place in Muak Lek, Thailand. There was a need for someone to serve as president and to establish an academically sound four-year curriculum that would be accredited by the Thai government. Jon’s background—his church connections, academic qualifications, and his full fluency in Thai—made him an obvious choice for the job.

So Jon and Kathy left WWC in 1989 to be a part of building yet another school in Thailand. This time, the building projects were larger and issues of accreditation with the government were more challenging, but within a year’s time, Mission College (Muak Lek Campus) was running and Jon had accomplished what he came to do.

Berrien Springs

While in Thailand, Jon received an invitation to join the Institute of World Mission (IWM), located on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI. In time, Jon became the Director of the Institute, whose primary function is to provide training for all the missionaries sent out by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

This was a very rich and productive time for Jon. In addition to the joy of preparing missionaries for cross-cultural service, his position as Director gave him a voice in the strategic planning of global Adventist mission. He also had the opportunity to write several volumes in the Bible Amplifier commentary series. Finally, he began to teach classes at the Andrews University Theological Seminary.

In 1995, his involvement with the University became his full-time job as he

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moved across campus to become the Chair of the Department of World Mission at the seminary. He not only taught mission courses, but he also worked successfully to have classes in spiritual formation become a core component of the curriculum for all seminary students. He loved teaching pastors in both the area of mission and spiritual formation. Many had never had classes in either area, so Jon felt it was a great privilege to introduce students to the two subjects that he believed were interconnected and were such an important part of his life.

It was also during this time that Jon's longstanding interest in healing became more and more apparent. It was an interest that had developed over the last two decades of his ministry. He describes it as "a world view shift that came as a result of my own life experiences and a re-reading of the New Testament. It became clear to me that God really is active in this world. The best New Testament way to describe that activity is to call it 'healing' in the broad sense of the word—healing as restoration of physical health, relationships with others and with ourselves and with nature. It's been a dawning realization for me, and I think it is a message that my own western culture needs to hear."

Walla Walla (Again)

The sense of fulfillment that came from his responsibilities at the Seminary made the next move a difficult one for both Jon and Kathy. Walla Walla College (now Walla Walla University [WVU]) asked Jon to return as President of the institution. Jon declined the position repeatedly. However, a series of remarkable events led both Jon and Kathy to conclude that God must be calling them to Walla Walla. So, they returned to the Pacific Northwest once again in 2002. The transition was eased somewhat by the fact that all three of their children and their families were living in Walla Walla at the time.

Jon began his responsibilities as president, but soon began to experience troubling physical symptoms. While at Andrews, he had been diagnosed and treated for lymphoma, with assurances from the doctors that he would almost certainly never have to deal with the disease again. The doctors were wrong. The lymphoma was back.

Jon was forced to take a 5-month leave of absence to receive treatment in Seattle. To say it was a difficult time would be a gross understatement, but Jon and Kathy were blessed by the prayers and support of a loving community. Thankfully, God saw fit to restore Jon to health. He recovered and was able to continue as president until his official retirement in 2006.

For Jon, retirement in Walla Walla has not signaled an end of productive labor but rather greater freedom in choosing exactly what sort of labor he would engage in. Upon retirement, he began to teach (half-time) at Andrews University. He has maintained an aggressive international speaking schedule and continues to serve the worldwide church on a number of advisory committees. He regularly teaches classes at WWU, has written numerous articles and a book on spiritual life, and is currently completing his task as general editor of the *Andrews University Study Bible*. In other words, he has not stopped being Jon Dybdahl.

Retirement Reflections

When I conducted my interviews with my father in September 2009, I asked several questions that encouraged him to look back over his life and ministry. As I noted previously, he was not aware that his responses would be published, but in my opinion they are revealing and deserve a place in his biography. Here are those questions, followed by my father's responses.

Paul: As you look back over your career, do you have any regrets about what you have done?

Jon: No. In terms of personal choices I certainly wasn't perfect, but in terms of my career, I would say no. I've talked about this with Kathy, and I don't think we would do anything differently. I'm thankful for God's leading.

Paul: What would you say has been your greatest professional accomplishment?

Jon: By God's grace I've been able to be involved in starting some new things. There was the Tribal Center and buying land for the academy in Thailand. I was involved with the start of Mission College in Muak Lek as President. I started the spiritual formation class at Walla Walla and was a part of the start of the same thing at Andrews. Spiritual formation has now basically spread across all Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities, even around the world, and many lives have been changed as a result of that.

I feel really good about those things, but I really don't think I'm done starting things yet. I'd like to start an order or society of people who have made a commitment to healing and a radical commitment to mission. I think of it as a sort of lay missionary order that combines spiritual formation and healing with a missionary burden to touch people with the gospel. It combines my three main interests: missions, spiritual formation, and healing.

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Paul: So, what are you, then? Are you a biblical scholar? A missiologist? A healer? A teacher?

Jon: I'm not a biblical scholar in the traditional, classical sense of the word. At the heart, at the deepest level, I'm a missionary because the spiritual life and healing comes from my desire to communicate the gospel. I believe that Jesus Christ is the answer for everybody. . . . When we have a real relationship with Him, we will share that. Since He was about healing, we should be, too. So, really at heart I am a missionary, and those other things I see as relating closely to missions."

Conclusion

As I look back at what I have written about my father, I am certain that he would make a number of adjustments—and even corrections. I am not sure what all of those adjustments would be, but I am sure of at least three things that he would have included that I, to this point, have not emphasized.

First, he would have wanted me to acknowledge more clearly and thank the many, many people who served as “co-laborers” with him through the years.² In recounting my father's ministry, I have focused almost exclusively on him, but he did not labor alone. He cherishes the friendships that have been forged over the course of his life, and I know he would want to use this occasion to express his heartfelt gratitude to each one.

Second, my father would want to mention the importance of his family, particularly my mother. She will not have a *Festschrift* written in her honor, but she has labored alongside my father and made many of his accomplishments possible through her support. She left parents and friends to travel to a distant land while six months pregnant with her second child. She lived without electricity or air conditioning in a scorpion-infested home where a deadly poisonous snake once came up through the toilet. She delivered babies by flashlight, cared for the sick and the dying, and welcomed guests from near and far into her home. She listened to Dad's sermons and gave honest feedback, typed his papers, edited his articles, sat by his bedside as he battled cancer and death, and stood beside him at the grave of my older sister, Jonna. Most importantly, my mother's prayers have never ceased to ascend to heaven on behalf of my father. Dad would want you to know these things. He would want Mom's contributions to be recognized, and he would want to say “Thank you” to her publically.

Finally, my father would want to express gratitude to God. In recent years my father has often—at unexpected times—exclaimed, “I am so blessed. I just can't

believe how good God has been to me.” It is true. His life has not always been easy, but God has been very good to Jon Dybdahl. I believe that Dad has responded by letting God’s goodness and love flow through him in such a way that his life has been a blessing to the world. I know that Dad’s hope would be that others would join him in making his missionary dream come true—the dream that one day, “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations” (Ps. 22:27).

Notes

¹At WWC, Jon received the Zapara Award for Excellence in Teaching (1988), an annual award given to one of the institution’s top teachers. Later, at Andrews University, he was honored with the Andrews University Award of Excellence in Teaching.

²In this biography, I have purposefully tried to avoid mentioning the names of these co-laborers because there are simply too many of them. Any list I created would be incomplete, and I do not want to miss anyone.

Section 1

SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTERS

encountering
GOD IN LIFE AND MISSION

Chapter 1

* * *

SABBATH, SPIRITUALITY, AND MISSION: TORAH'S SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF SABBATH REST

Richard M. Davidson

Sabbath is a verb! The Torah (Pentateuch) utilizes seven different Hebrew verbs to describe the experience of Sabbath. These seven verbs encapsulate seven dimensions of joyous Sabbath rest: physical, mental, emotional, creative, spiritual, blessed, and holy. The multi-faceted experience of Sabbath rest may be regarded as the crown jewel of both biblical spirituality and mission.

Introduction

Seventh-day Adventists have devoted much careful research and evangelistic energy to substantiate the permanence and universality of the seventh-day Sabbath. Our “mission” with regard to the Sabbath largely has been to show which is the right *day*—the validity of Saturday Sabbath instead of Sunday, and its role as a testing truth in the last days. Little has been written dealing with the right *way* to keep the Sabbath, and often even this material has highlighted the negative, what is inappropriate Sabbath observance, and not showcased the powerful positive spiritual values of Sabbath for a vibrant Christian life, the joyous experiential significance of the Sabbath for Christian spirituality.¹ Furthermore, little attention has been given to Sabbath as a vehicle for mission—the winning witness, the “proof in the pudding” of a day of exquisite delight. Such witness to the practical relevance of

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the Sabbath for the spiritual life is especially needed in this postmodern generation where traditional proof-texts have little value when compared to the authenticity of the Sabbath experience in the individual's life.

In contrast to Seventh-day Adventist literature, a number of Jewish writers have given careful thought and expended creative energy in describing the experiential joy and blessing of Sabbath celebration.² In recent years a growing number of Christians who do not personally observe the seventh-day Sabbath have nonetheless discovered in the Sabbath a paradigm for vibrant Christian spirituality.³ For example, Dorothy Bass, in an article in *Christianity Today*, asserts, "The Sabbath is the most challenging—and necessary—spiritual discipline for contemporary Christians" (1997:1).

I am convinced that the time is ripe for Seventh-day Adventists to be revitalized by the deep spiritual values of Sabbath-keeping, as kept alive by our Jewish brothers and sisters who have been cultivating the delicate artistry of Sabbath observance for thousands of years. It is time for Christians who believe in the universality and permanence of the seventh-day Sabbath to savor and share the spiritual potential of this holy time, even beyond those evangelicals who write of a Sabbath rhythm or paradigm but do not actually observe the seventh-day Sabbath of Scripture. It is high time that the Sabbath becomes a powerful vehicle in our mission as a church, not merely as part of evangelistic campaigns showing that the Bible Sabbath is Saturday and not Sunday, but in practical demonstration that the Sabbath day overflows with potent spirituality in the lives of Seventh-day Adventists, with the result that those who encounter such Sabbath-keepers will long to experience this joyous Sabbath rest in their own lives.

Much of the literature written by Jewish and Christian authors on the spiritual values of Sabbath, contains little substantial biblical foundation for the conclusions drawn. In this study I wish to explore how the spiritual and missional potential of the Sabbath is grounded in Torah (the Pentateuch)—the foundational divine revelation given to Moses. According to Torah, Sabbath is a verb! There are seven different verbs used in the Pentateuch to describe Sabbath experience. I have found that each of these verbs leads us into a different dimension of joyous Sabbath rest. Let us savor the seven different dimensions of Sabbath rest highlighted by the various Hebrew verbs used to describe the Sabbath in the books of Moses. Inasmuch as this essay concerns the relationship of Sabbath to spirituality and mission, I will not hesitate to give case studies from my own and others' encounters with Sabbath, and especially with the joy of Sabbath rest found in the experience of my Jewish brothers and sisters with whom I have shared many a Sabbath.

Seven Dimensions of Sabbath Rest

Physical (Work-Free) Rest

As a first facet, God offers us *physical* rest. Genesis 2:2 indicates that God “rested [*shabat*] on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.”⁴ The verb *shabat* means “to cease, stop” (*HALOT* 2001, s.v. *shabat*). Already implicit in Genesis 1–2, and explicit in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, we are invited to follow God’s example, to cease from our week-day work, and rest on the *shabbat* (Exod. 20:10).⁵ For 24 golden hours we don’t have to work. We are free from the tyranny of toil!

Modern scientific studies have shown that human physiology involves seven-day (septacircadian) rhythms—we are wired for one day of rest in seven.⁶ The heart rate, the production of steroid hormones, the swelling after surgery, a variety of immune reactions, and the rise in the cortical hormones in human mothers’ milk—all exhibit “circaseptan biorhythms, or seven-day cycles.”⁷ Experiments on the optimum work-rest cycle in Britain during World War II revealed that man produced most efficiently if he worked six days and had one day to rest.

I first experienced the joy of this dimension of Sabbath rest as I was employed for the first time at the age of 14, working in a hospital kitchen washing dishes. Every afternoon after school, there were no sports, no leisure time; I rode my bicycle straight to work for three hours of washing dishes. Sunday morning found me waking at 5:30 a.m. to get to work—to wash dishes for eight hours. There seemed to be no end to the stacks of encrusted pots and pans. However, my father, a nurse supervisor at the hospital and personal friend of the chief hospital administrator, made arrangements so that I did not have to work on Friday night and all day Sabbath. No dishes to wash on Sabbath! I was free from the tyranny of the pots and pans!

In our various times of living in Israel, my family has had opportunity to celebrate the Shabbat with Jewish brothers and sisters. One Hebrew scholar, whom I had met at a scholarly conference in the United States, invited me to his home one Friday night to welcome the Shabbat. He lived in a modest single-floor flat in downtown Jerusalem. I only later learned that this unassuming man, Dr. Jacob Bazak, was actually a justice on the Israeli Supreme Court. Before the Shabbat began, Justice Bazak unplugged his phone, and with a twinkle in his eye told us, “I don’t have to answer the phone on the Shabbat!” I found this attitude prevalent among my observant Jewish brothers and sisters. Whereas Seventh-day Adventists often see the commandment in a negative way—“You can’t work on Sabbath!”—Hebrew Sabbath-keepers have grasped the positive implication—“I don’t have to work on the Sabbath!”

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According to other ancient Near Eastern creation stories, the deities created humans to be their slaves so the gods could rest.⁸ By contrast, in the biblical creation narrative the deity's rest after creating becomes the source of human rest as well. God rests from His six days of creation, and sets apart the Sabbath as a weekly day of rest for humankind. Humans are invited to rest one-seventh of their lives! As Jesus stated, "The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath is a recognition that we are not bound to an uninterrupted, frenzied attempt to control matter by our toil. Every Sabbath we are freed from the potential tyranny of physical toil, to realize the destiny to which we are called: a personal relationship with our Maker. The creation-rooted Sabbath reminds us not to place ultimate confidence in our work, not to become intoxicated with our own productivity, not to become a slave to toil.

Mental (Intellectual) Rest

The fourth commandment indicates that God rested *mentally* as well as physically. Exodus 20:11 reads that "In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested [*nuach*] on the seventh day." The verb for "rest" used here is not *shabat*, as in Genesis 2, but *nuach* (related to the name Noah). It means to rest in the sense of "repose, settle down, be quiet/tranquil" (HALOT 2001. s.v. *nuach*). After creating in six days, God sat back, as it were, in tranquil repose, mentally/intellectually rejoicing in the world that He had created (cf. Prov. 8:31). According to the Deuteronomic version of the Sabbath commandment, God invites human beings to join Him in this *nuach* rest (Deut. 5:14). On Sabbath we may experience a second dimension of sabbath rest—*mental* tranquility, an intellectual attitude of restful repose.

It was as a college student that I first began consciously to appreciate this wonderful dimension of Sabbath rest. I studied hard for my classes all week, struggling to keep up with all the work teachers piled on, but on Sabbath my professors couldn't tyrannize me—I didn't have to study! I could experience *mental* rest. That blessing of mental rest and repose from laborious mental work on the Sabbath I now appreciate even more as a teacher!

This mental attitude of tranquil repose is not limited to human beings. In Exodus 23:12 God commands humans to cease from work on the Sabbath "so that your ox and donkey may rest [*nuach*]." The divine will is not only that humans experience tranquil repose on the Sabbath, but also the animals.

Mental rest does not mean totally shutting off the mind on the Sabbath. Marva Dawn gives some personal suggestions as to how to practice “intellectual rest” on the Sabbath:

I also think it is important not to *work* at thinking on the Sabbath day. . . . I try not to think about whatever writing project I have in the works or about upcoming Bible studies to prepare. If new thoughts come to me, I consider them special Sabbath gifts from God and receive them gladly, but I try not to let myself *work* on them [F]or me, teaching a class is utter delight and usually the setting for a new experience of the Holy Spirit’s empowering. (I feel the same way whenever I play the organ, direct or sing in a choir, or give a sermon. . . .) However, I do not do any studying or practicing for those tasks on Sabbath morning! All my studying must be done in the days or weeks beforehand. Then, when it is time for me to teach, the Spirit can bring to my mind what I have learned and also give me new insights as I speak. . . . Then what fun the Sabbath is! I can enjoy to the hilt the creativity made possible by the intellectual rest of the day and experience the closeness to God that always overwhelms me when I have the privilege of handling the beautiful texts of the Scriptures (Dawn 1989:81).

Emotional (Restorative) Rest

In Exodus 31 the Sabbath commandment is repeated, but here God adds a third dimension of Sabbath rest. Verse 17 reads, “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed [*naphash*].” The Hebrew verb *naphash* means “breathe freely, recover” (HALOT 2001, s.v. *naphash*), “take breath, refresh oneself,” (BDB 1983, s.v. *naphash*), or more literally, “take on new soul or life (*nephesh*).”⁹ On that first Sabbath, even though God obviously was not tired (cf. Isa. 40:28), yet the text indicates that He took on new life, new “soul”; He experienced *emotional* rest. According to Exodus 23:12, God wants human beings, including even the servants and sojourners, to experience this emotional refreshment on the Sabbath.

On the Sabbath God invites us to recharge our emotional battery, to refresh and restore our souls. In Matthew 11:29, in the immediate context of the Sabbath (note the explicit reference to the Sabbath that directly follows in Matthew 12:1-14), Jesus promises, “You will find rest for your souls.” In his Shepherd’s psalm, David indicates that God “restores my soul” (Ps. 23:3). Translating this idea into Greek, the word for “soul” is *psyche*, and one of the Greek words for “restore” or “heal” is *iatria*. Repeating these two words together rapidly brings the realization that *psyche*

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iatria is the basis for the word “psychiatry”! Psychiatry is “the restoring/healing of the soul.” I like to imagine that every Sabbath God offers a free “psychiatric” session, compliments of the Great Psychiatrist who knows just how to heal the soul. This emotional rest we can experience especially on the Sabbath, and its healing effects of emotional refreshment will spill over into all the week. “The Sabbath is a day set apart for deepening our relationship with God, and that necessarily leads to emotional healing. . . . A special day set apart for emotional rest gives us the silence to discover ourselves, to recover our integrity and creativity” (Dawn 1989:74).

Our Hebrew brothers and sisters have captured this emotionally restorative dimension of the Sabbath. On Friday night at the beginning of the Sabbath, the whole family slows down and together savors the soul rest that the Sabbath offers. There is time to “breathe freely,” to take a breather from the hectic pace of the work week, to find refreshment in family fellowship and synagogue worship. Jewish essayist Achad Haam describes how the Sabbath has functioned to restore the soul of Israel throughout history:

We can affirm without any exaggeration that the Sabbath has preserved the Jews more than the Jews have preserved the Sabbath. If the Sabbath had not restored to them the soul, renewing every week their spiritual life, they would have become so degraded by the depressing experiences of the workdays, that they would have descended to the last step of materialism and of moral and intellectual decadence (Cited in Dawn 1989:42).

Dov Elkins rejoices in the great gift of the Sabbath to the Jewish people and to the world, using the analogy of psychiatry: “In following God’s commandment to observe a day of rest, we Jews gave a great gift to the world. . . . One does not have to pay a psychiatrist to learn that for over thirty centuries Shabbat has been an antidote to boredom, bitterness, stress, anxiety, and depression” (1998:xxvii).

Best-selling playwright Herman Wouk tells a story in his autobiography about the magical transformation that took place as he left the tense atmosphere of a Broadway production that was about to premier and experienced the emotionally restorative rest of Shabbat in his home:

Friday afternoon, during these rehearsals, inevitably seems to come when the project is tottering on the edge of ruin. I have sometimes felt guilty of treason, holding to the Sabbath in such a desperate situation. But then, experience has taught me that a theater enterprise almost always is in such a case. . . . So I have reluctantly taken leave of colleagues on Friday afternoon and rejoined them on Saturday night. . . .

Leaving the gloomy theater, the littered coffee cups, the jumbled scarred-up scripts, the haggard actors, the shouting stagehands, the bedeviled director, the knuckle-gnawing producer, the clattering typewriter, and the dense tobacco smoke and backstage dust, I have come home. It has been a startling change, very like a brief return from the wars. My wife and my boys, whose existence I have almost forgotten in the anxious shoring up of the tottering ruin, are waiting for me, gay, dressed in holiday clothes, and looking to be marvelously attractive. We have sat down to a splendid dinner, at a table graced with flowers and the old Sabbath symbols I have blessed my boys with the ancient blessing; we have sung the pleasantly syncopated Sabbath table hymns. . . . The boys, knowing that the Sabbath is the occasion for asking questions, have asked them. The Bible, the encyclopedia, the atlas have piled up on the table. We talk of Judaism, and there are the usual impossible boys' queries about God, which my wife and I field clumsily but as well as we can. For me it is a retreat into restorative magic. . . .

The telephone is silent. I can think read, study, walk, or do nothing. It is an oasis of quiet. When night falls, I go back to the wonderful nerve-racking Broadway game. Often I make my best contribution of the week then and there to the grisly literary surgery that goes on and on until opening night. My producer one Saturday night said to me, "I don't envy you your religion, but I envy your Sabbath" (Wouk 1959:59-60).

By celebrating Shabbat, we too may find the island of inner peace and tranquility that the Sabbath experience creates in our hearts, and this emotional refreshment will be noted and envied by others.

Some of my fondest memories of the emotional rest provided by the Sabbath have centered around connecting with God through His created works. I return from my excursions into God's "First Book" of nature emotionally renewed and ready to face a new week. It's great to celebrate God's works of creation on the day that memorializes His creative work, and find emotional tranquility and refreshment in our encounter with Him amid the things He has made for our enjoyment. Our senses are enraptured, and we cannot help but break forth into songs of love and praise.

Creative (Celebrative, Social) Rest

According to Exodus 31:16, God pronounces that "the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe [*asah*] the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant (NKJV). The Hebrew verb '*asah*' has the fundamental meaning

of “to make,” and is the same word used in the very next verse, “God *made* [*‘asah*] the heavens and earth.” The juxtaposition of these two occurrences of *‘asah* in successive verses implies that humans are to “make” the Sabbath, as God made the heavens and the earth, with all the creativity and energy and joy that God displayed in His creative process! (For evidence of God’s own celebrative joy in creation, see Proverbs 8:30, 31.) Our Sabbath rest is not one of slothful inaction. God invites us to experience a *creative, celebratory* rest. The NASB captures the meaning by translating Exodus 31:16 “to celebrate” the sabbath.¹⁰ God offers us a chance on the Sabbath to exuberantly celebrate His goodness.

In Leviticus 23:3, the phrase *shabbat shabbaton* is used to describe the weekly sabbath, with the meaning “a sabbath with special sabbath celebrations” (*HALOT*, s.v., *shabbaton*). This verse further indicates that part of the celebratory aspect of Sabbath is found in partaking in a “holy convocation to the Lord.” As Jesus’ “custom was” (Luke 4:16), we attend worship services on Sabbath as part of the enriching spiritual discipline of the Sabbath. The worship services on Sabbath should be characterized by joyous celebration to the Lord. This joyous mode of Sabbath celebration is summarized in Psalm 92, the “Song for the Sabbath,” where the dominant mood is praise and joy (see verses 1–4). It is also encapsulated in Isaiah 58:13, 14, as the Gospel Prophet calls upon God’s people to “call the Sabbath a delight [*‘oneg*].” The noun *‘oneg* appears only one other time in the Hebrew Bible, referring to the kind of delight that kings and queens experience in their royal palaces—“exquisite delight” (*HALOT*, s.v. *‘oneg*; cf. Isa. 13:22).

Among observant Jews today, many of the ancient customs of welcoming the Sabbath—some no doubt going back to the time of Jesus—have been preserved. Our faithful Jewish brothers and sisters have been developing the exquisite delight of Sabbath celebration for three and one-half millennia. As relative “newcomers” to Sabbath-keeping, Seventh-day Adventists have much to learn of Judaism’s positive contributions toward experiencing the royal delight of the Sabbath.

Our family was introduced to this vigorous, celebrative aspect of Sabbath when we went to Israel and joined with our Hebrew brothers and sisters in the “Great Sabbath Welcome” on Friday evening.¹¹ Here is a description. In the home of our Jewish hosts, the dining room table is covered with a white cloth and set for the Sabbath meal. On the table is placed the two loaves of braided *hallah* bread, the wine/juice and a goblet, silver candlesticks and candles, and the Sabbath flowers. The family members are dressed in their best clothes. All are ready to welcome royalty—“Sabbath the Queen.” Long before the sun actually sets, in their eager expectation the family begins their Sabbath celebration. The mother has the honor of

officially receiving the Sabbath by kindling the Sabbath lights. The children watch with wonder as she lights at least two candles. We hear her offering a prayer of blessing upon the family. Then the father tenderly takes his children in his arms or places his hands on their bowed heads and recites a blessing for each. Following this the husband sings or reads a love song to his wife—from Song of Songs or Proverbs 31—extolling her virtues.

Next comes the Sabbath evening meal. It is begun with the sanctification of the Sabbath over a cup of wine (symbolizing joy and cheer), the blessing over the *hal-lah* bread, and the special Sabbath courses. On Sabbath the choicest food of all the week is eaten. Before each course, someone says, “For the honor of the Sabbath!” During the meal the family heartily sings lively table hymns (*zemirot*) reflecting the joyous mood of the Sabbath. In the singing, eating, and fellowship of the “Great Sabbath Welcome” the family can forget their weekday burdens, worries, and sorrows. What a glorious celebration!

I long for Adventists to capture this same sense of Sabbath’s “exquisite delight” in harmony with Isaiah 58, perhaps by adopting or adapting some of the delightful customs of our Jewish Sabbath-keeping brothers and sisters. Our family incorporated some of the customs I described above into our Sabbath celebration while our children were growing up. When we lit the Sabbath candles, the eyes of our son and daughter sparkled as they watched the flickering Sabbath light. When we “toasted” the Sabbath with goblets filled with grape juice, sang table hymns interspersed between the special delicacies my wife had baked, greeted one another with a hearty “Shabbat Shalom,” when I blessed my children while holding them in my arms and sang a special love song to my wife from Proverbs 31—our family indeed experienced royal, “exquisite delight.” It made this father’s heart sing to hear his little girl and boy pray during the week, “Dear Jesus, please make it to be Sabbath again soon.” Our children are grown now, but the celebrative joy of the Sabbath has lost none of its luster in our family.

Another way to “make” the Sabbath creatively is to engage in acts of humanitarian service for those in need. This might be called “social rest.” Moses’ repetition of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy 5 gives a humanitarian, redemptive reason for Sabbath rest: “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm” (Deut. 5:15). As God freed the Israelite slaves at the time of the Exodus, so the Sabbath is to be a day for freeing others from various forms of servitude and burden-bearing. Isaiah 58:6, 7 describes this creative humanitarian outreach that is appropriate for the Sabbath: “Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen

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the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" This humanitarian, redemptive function of the Sabbath was stressed by Jesus in each of His seven recorded Sabbath miracles (Luke 4:31–37; 4:38, 39; 6:6–11; 13:10–17; 14:1–6; John 5:1–15; 9:1–34) and by His own commentary: "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (John 5:17). "Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:11).

When our children were growing up, we often took them and their friends to the hospital on Sabbath afternoon to visit the pediatric ward and sing to the children too sick to go home on the weekend. Often the sick children's parents were in the hospital room, and we introduced our youth group as Seventh-day Adventist young people who worked and studied hard all week but had time on Sabbath to reach out in the community to bring a blessing to others. As our Adventist youth were singing, the pained looks on the sick children's faces gave way to smiles, and the parents expressed their deep appreciation for such wonderful young people when we were ready to leave. Every week I observed in the eyes of our youth a fulfillment of the promise made by Isaiah to those who engaged in such humanitarian service: "Then your light will break out like the dawn, And your recovery will speedily spring forth; And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the LORD will be your rear guard" (Isa. 58:8).

The works of service to those in need includes animals as well as humans. We have already seen how the Sabbath was a time for the beasts of burden to be free to rest (Exod. 20:10; 23:12; Deut. 5:14; cf. Luke 13:15; 14:5). My daughter is currently writing her doctoral dissertation on the subject of the treatment of animals in the Torah, especially in light of the Sabbath commandments concerning the care of animals. It is a fascinating but long-neglected topic. How do we practically apply the Sabbath rest principle to animals as well as humans? A pastor friend of mine used to take his daughter to the animal shelter on the Sabbath; he would walk the stray dogs and she would stroke the cats. Our treatment and respect for animals all week long says much about how we value and uphold the principle of Sabbath rest.

The social and ecological and emancipatory dimensions of "creative rest" are captured in Torah by the extension of the Sabbath principle in the precepts concerning the sabbatical (every seventh) and Jubilee (every fiftieth) year (Lev. 25). Every seventh year even the land was to keep a Sabbath (Lev. 25:2, 4); it was a "year of rest" (Lev. 25: 5), a "year of release" (Deut. 15:9), in which debts were released (Lev.

25:1). The fiftieth year was the Jubilee, “to proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants” (Lev. 25:10); justice was to be served as everyone “shall return to his possession” and “his family” (Lev. 25:10, 13). Old Testament Israel failed to follow these injunctions, but when they went into Babylonian captivity God made sure that the land could finally keep its Sabbaths (2 Chron. 36:21).

Spiritual (Gospel) Rest

A fifth facet of Sabbath rest, *spiritual or Gospel rest*, is implied from the first reference to the Sabbath in Genesis 2:2: “And on the seventh day God finished [*kalah*] the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done” (NRSV). The Hebrew word *kalah* in the Piel intensive stem means “finish, complete, bring to an end” (*HALOT*, s.v. *kalah*). God rested by ceasing from his works on the Sabbath, and He invited Adam and Eve to rest on that first Sabbath. From what were Adam and Eve resting? From their own works? No, they had been created only a few hours before. They were resting in God’s finished work! Thus even before sin, we may infer the profound principle of righteousness by faith. Karl Barth makes this inference in his theology of the Sabbath:

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that this invitation [to observe the Sabbath] comes at a time when creation, and particularly man, had nothing behind it except its creation by God, so that there can be no question whatever of a relationship between this Sabbath observance and any work completed by himself. Before and apart from all work and conflict, irrespective of any merits of his own, he is invited to cease from his own works, to rest, and therefore to enter into the freedom, rest and joy of God Himself. . . .

As far as man is concerned, he has simply to recognize that God has really done all that is necessary, that He has invited him to participate in His rest, and that he may accept this invitation. In other words, he is left wholly and utterly with the grace of God. . . . That God rested on the seventh day, and blessed and sanctified it, is the first divine action which man is privileged to witness; and that he himself may keep the Sabbath with God, completely free from work, is the first Word spoken to him, the first obligation laid on him. It is thus decided once and for all that the history of the covenant which begins here is to be the history of the divine covenant of grace (Barth 1958:218, 219).

Paul draws the implication for believers in his day: “So there remains a Sabbath rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has

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himself also rested from his works, as God did from His” (Heb. 4:9, 10). Every Sabbath, as we rest from our work, we proclaim to the world our continuing experience of righteousness by faith, that we trust not in our own works, but in the finished work of Christ in our behalf! The Sabbath becomes the outward sign of the “rest of grace” (White 1957:928) that believers in Christ the New Joshua may experience all week long.

The precious thought that we can “rest in Christ” by faith and have assurance of our acceptance with Him is wonderful news! For several years as a young pastor I preached sermons full of Christ yet devoid of assurance that I was resting in Him. But finally, through a chain of marvelous providential leadings, the simplicity and beauty of the Gospel began to dawn before my eyes. I was “surprised by joy” with the clear Scriptural testimony that I could really have the assurance of entering His rest (see John 6:47; 1 John 5:13). This experiential grasping of the truth of justification by faith I will ever treasure as the most precious chapter of my life. Ellen White captures the essence of this Gospel rest:

A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him. Put away all doubt; dismiss your fears. . . . *Rest in God*. He is able to keep that which you have committed to Him. If you will leave yourself in His hands, He will bring you off more than conqueror through Him that has loved you” (White 1956:70-72).

Gospel rest will not only lead to peace and assurance and growth in one’s spiritual life; it will also prove to be a winning witness to the power of the Gospel and the truthfulness of the Sabbath to those who behold our “rest in grace” symbolized by Sabbath rest. The “proof is in the eating of the pudding,” and as non-Christians and non-Sabbath keepers observe the spiritual joy and peace of Sabbath rest, they will be led to savor this experience themselves. They will “taste and see that the Lord [of the Sabbath] is good” (Ps. 34:8).

Blessed (Empowering) Rest

As a sixth dimension of Sabbath rest, we go back to Genesis 2:3, where we are told that God “blessed” [Heb. *brk* in the Piel] the seventh day. In Hebrew thought, for God to bless something is to empower it to fulfill the function for which it is designed (Scharbert 1975:306, 307). The Sabbath is thus filled with power. We are empowered as we enter into His rest on the Sabbath. And that sabbatic empowerment spills out into all the other days of the week.

In Psalm 92, the Psalm for the Sabbath par excellence, the fourth stanza describes the abundant life empowered by the Sabbath blessing: “But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; you have poured over me fresh oil. My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies; my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants. The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon” (Ps. 92 10–12, NRSV).

Images of the empowered Christian life come fast and glorious in this stanza.

- **The exalted horn.** Symbol of defensive power and victory in the Christian’s spiritual disciplines, it underscores that God does the exalting. He takes responsibility for the success.
- **The wild ox** (or ibex). I can still visualize the poise and gracefulness of the ibex bounding from cliff to cliff in the Wilderness of Ein Gedi as I visited the area where David spent many days hiding from King Saul. The one who knows the Lord of the Sabbath experiences spiritual poise and gracefulness in negotiating the rugged terrain of the Christian life.
- **The fine oil.** Mixed with the balm of Gilead, the oil brings soothing and healing as applied to the open wounds. The Sabbath experience brings healing to the spiritual wounds received during the battles of the week.
- **The defeat of enemies.** The Sabbath provides power for joyous victory over spiritual foes, as well as past deliverance and future assurance of spiritual conquest.
- **The date palm.** Called by the inhabitants of the Near East a “blessed tree, sister of man,” with its perennial green foliage symbolic of victory and royalty and its vital force constantly renewing itself from its roots, the date palm yields more than 600 pounds of succulent fruit in a single season. The Sabbath experience is one of royalty, victory, and fruitful productivity in spiritual graces.
- **The mighty cedar of Lebanon.** Prince among the trees of the mountains,

symbolic of noble power and lofty growth, the cedar has fragrance in the evergreen needles and resin in the bark that renders the tree impervious to decay or infestation with insects. The Sabbath experience offers spiritual strength and nobility, a life of fragrance, impervious to temptation from within or without.

In short, the Sabbath experience, says the Psalmist, is the embodiment of the abundant and victorious life. Its blessing spills out from the 24 golden Sabbath hours into the rest of the week, filling each day with spiritual power.

Holy (Intimate) Rest

The seventh dimension of Sabbath rest is captured in Genesis 2:3: “God sanctified [Heb. *qadash*, made holy] the Sabbath day.” How does God make something holy? How did He make the burning bush holy? How did He make the sanctuary holy? By His presence (Exod. 3:2–5; 25:8; 40:34–38). So here we have an indication that the gift of Sabbath rest is not just the gift of a day, but the gift of a Person, filling the day with His loving presence! On the Sabbath God invites us into special intimate fellowship with Him—what I like to call “an all-day date with God.” As we partake of intimate fellowship with Him on this day, the promise of Exodus 31:13 comes true: “Surely my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you . . . that you may know that I am the Lord who *sanctifies* you (makes you holy).” In fellowship with God on His holy day, *we* ourselves are made holy as well!

This intimate fellowship with God on the Sabbath is the highpoint of the entire week. As Abraham Heschel states, “The Sabbath is not for the sake of the weekdays; the weekdays are for the sake of the Sabbath. It is not an interlude but the climax of living” (Heschel 1951:14). Because the Sabbath is the “climax of living,” all the week becomes fraught with meaning in relationship to the Sabbath. Marva Dawn suggests that “the more persistently we practice the discipline of preparing for the Sabbath in the three days preceding it, and the more thoroughly we enjoy its benefits in the three days following it, the more delightfully restful the Sabbath itself will be for us in its actual practice, as well as in its anticipation and remembrance as these transform the entire week” (Dawn 1989:54).

Ellen White writes that those who are truly under the sign of the Sabbath will “understand its spiritual bearing upon all the transactions of life. . . . Daily it will be their prayer that the sanctification of the Sabbath may rest upon them” (White 1900:353). Heschel is to the point: “All days of the week must be spiritually consis-

tent with the Day of Days. All our life should be a pilgrimage to the seventh day; the thought and appreciation of what this day may bring to us should be ever present in our minds. For the Sabbath is the counterpoint of living” (Heschel 1951:89). The various aspects of Sabbath rest that we have discussed need to be seen in relationship to each other: “each kind of resting plays an important part in the working together of the whole. Just as true resting from work is more than ceasing from work, so the complete resting of our whole being is more than mere physical rest without labor. To rest utterly in the grace of God is the foundation for wholistic rest” (Dawn 1989:54).

Conclusion

Dorothy Bass has not exaggerated the importance of the Sabbath for Christian spirituality when she states: “The Sabbath is the most challenging—and necessary—spiritual discipline for contemporary Christians” (Bass 1997:1). We have seen how the Torah has highlighted the spiritual potency of the Sabbath in the life of the individual believer and the corporate faith community. The Sabbath may be regarded as the crown jewel of spirituality. In the Sabbath one may see heavenly light refracted through all the facets of divine rest available to humankind—physical (work-free), mental (intellectual), emotional (restorative), creative (celebrative/social), spiritual (Gospel), blessed (empowering), and holy (intimate) rest. All the spiritual disciplines may find their ultimate expression in the context of this multi-dimensional experience of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is also the crown jewel of missiology. God’s original mission, set forth in the opening chapters of Genesis, reaches its climax in the Sabbath.¹² God’s mission in creation, culminating in His rest on the Sabbath, served “as an example to humanity upon whom devolves the duty of imitating the ways of God” (Casuto 1961:63, 64). God’s mission became humanity’s mission, to join in joyous communion with God on the Sabbath, the day that was specifically sanctified or set apart for such divine-human fellowship. The Torah illuminates this mission for humans, revealing the many-faceted rest available in the Sabbath. The remainder of Scripture highlights the continuation of this mission in the lives of God’s covenant people and its extension to the whole world, as evidenced in the Sabbath reforms of the Prophets (e.g., Isaiah [56:1, 2; 58:12, 13], Jeremiah [17:21–27], and Ezekiel [20:12, 20]) and climaxing in the mission of Jesus Christ Himself (see Matt. 11:28–30, Mark 2:27, and the seven Sabbath miracles mentioned above). The sabbatic missional concern throughout Scripture indeed involves identifying the right day

for the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week. But the major focus of the Sabbath mission by the prophets and the Messiah is in recovering and sharing the experiential dimensions of the Sabbath set forth in Creation and revealed in the Torah.

The Torah—both the written Torah of Moses and the corroborating Living Torah who is the Messiah, Giver and Embodiment of Torah—presents the multifaceted rest of the Sabbath as the crown jewel of spirituality and mission. It remains for God’s people in these last days to experientially receive and treasure this divine gift of Sabbath rest and share it enthusiastically and unabashedly with a restless, dark, and dying world.

Notes

¹Exceptions include treatments of Sabbath experience in Bacchiocchi (1980); Brunt (1981:55–63); Davidson (1988); and Walker (1999).

²See especially, Heschel (1951, 1966); cf. Elkins, ed. (1998); Millgram (1965); Yehoshua Rubin, (2003). From a Messianic Jewish perspective, see, e.g., Barry & Steffi Rubin (1998).

³This trend was spearheaded by such authors as Edwards (1982) and Dawn (1989). Dawn laments that “so many of the books and articles describing the disciplines of the spiritual life contain no mention whatsoever of observing the Sabbath” (1989:xii). But in the last 20 years a number of books by (mostly evangelical) Christians have appeared that highlight the spiritual experience to be found in the Sabbath. See, e.g., Baab (2005); Bass (2000); Casey (2006); Hickman (1999); Postema (1997); and Wirzba (2006).

⁴All Scripture references are from the updated *New American Standard Version* (NASB), unless otherwise indicated.

⁵Dawn (1989:45) notes that “the necessarily close connection of the sixth and seventh days would imply that human beings, whom God made in his image on the sixth day, will be faithful to that image by resting and ceasing on the seventh day, even as God did.”

⁶See, e.g., the research of Juan-Cardos Lerman at University of Arizona, which shows the biological need of rest for humans every seven days and examines the energizing value of physical rest, summarized in his lecture at the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Tucson, Arizona, reported by Carla McClain in an article entitled “Human ‘Clock’ Orders Day Off” in *The Idaho Statesman*, and cited by Dawn (1989:68, 69).

⁷See Baldwin (1984:3, 14). Baldwin cites a number of impressive scientific studies supporting this conclusion.

⁸See, e.g., Hamilton (1982:41, 42) for further discussion of this point, comparing the biblical creation narrative with the *Enuma Elish* and the *Atrahasis Epic*.

⁹The verb *naphash* is denominative, i.e., it derives from the noun *nephesh*, “soul, life.”

¹⁰See also NIV and CSB, which translate ‘*asah* here as “celebrating.”

¹¹For more details, see Davidson (1986:16–18; 1988:18–23); cf. Millgram (1965).

¹²Wright (2006:63) speaks of the *missio Dei*, “the mission of God,” as beginning at creation: “The opening account of creation portrays God working toward a goal, completing it with satisfaction and resting, content with the result.”

Chapter 2

* * *

WORSHIP IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

Jiří Moskala

Worship is a dominant theme in the book of Daniel and lies at its very center. History and apocalypics, stories and prophecy are intimately interlinked; therefore, what happened in the courts of Babylon and Medo-Persia locally (chaps. 1, 3–6) is magnified on the universal scale in prophecies (chaps. 2, 7–12) in a type and antitype relationship. The God of Daniel is always on the side of the oppressed until the end of time.

Worship is a dominant theme in the book of Daniel and lies at its very center.¹ Together with the concept of judgment, it plays a crucial role in the unfolding drama of God's people. There is an intense battle between true and false worship presented in this apocalyptic document. The issue is brought up in different stories describing events that happened in the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires, and is mentioned as well as one of the main problems during the time of the dominancy of the little horn and at the end of world history.

The Great Controversy arises over the issue of worship (Davidson 2000:106–108),² and the conflict between the forces of good and evil, God and Satan, will culminate with an intense struggle in this domain (Rev. 13–17; see Paulien 1994:122 and R. Stefanovic 2002:421–424). The heart of worship deals with a genuine relationship with God, not rituals; and in a broader sense, it includes the whole lifestyle (see Deut. 10:12, 13; Isa. 1:11–17; 58:3–14; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:12–15, 21–24; Mic.

6:6–8; Zech. 7:3, 8–10; 8:16–18; Rom. 12:1).³ Etymologically, our English word “worship” derives from the Old English *weordhscipe*, meaning “assigning worthiness to God,” and thus it refers to giving God the recognition He deserves, acknowledging His worth for what He is and does.⁴ This ascribing worth to God calls for a proper response to Him that is expressed in one’s ethical behavior in everyday decisions.

History and apocalypics, stories and prophecy are intimately interlinked in Daniel. History is like a micro-cosmos, and eschatology is like a macro-cosmos; therefore, what happened in the courts of Babylon and Medo-Persia locally (chaps. 1, 3–6) is magnified on the universal scale in prophecies (chaps. 2, 7–12) in a type and antitype relationship. In the book of Daniel things are painted around worship, where true and false attitudes stand in an antagonistic position to each other. Only worship related to the God of truth is acceptable.

Divine Judgment upon His People and Results of Right Decisions (Chapter 1)

The book of Daniel opens with an allusion to the issue of worship by stating that the Lord or Master (Heb. *Adonay*) delivered His household (literally gave King Jehoiakim) into the hand of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. It would have been disturbing for the ancient believer to read that God’s people were defeated by the Babylonian king, because that would mean that the Babylonian god Marduk was more powerful than Israel’s Yahweh. This is why the prophet Daniel⁵ explicitly articulates that it was the Lord who gave His people to their enemy (Dan. 1:2). Even though the specific reason for this tragedy is not supplied, Daniel provides the rationale for it later in the book. In the prayer recorded in chapter 9, which is marked by the ending period of the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, he declares: “We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets. . . . We have sinned against you” (Dan. 9:5, 6, 11), and he asks the merciful and faithful God of the covenant to intervene in favor of His people (see Dan. 9:17–19). Daniel’s deep confession explains that the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem came as the result of disobedience and rebellion. Other prophets speak about the same catastrophe of Jerusalem and emphatically state that what had happened was the consequence of idolatry and other sins. The prophet Ezekiel expresses it very eloquently: “Son of man, do you see what they are doing—the

utterly detestable things the house of Israel is doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary” (Ezek. 8:6; see also Jer. 7:2–20; 10:1–10; Ezek. 8:7–18; 20:30–38; 22:1–16; Zech. 7:11–14). It is important to note that Ezra uses in Aramaic the same phraseology as Daniel when stating that God “delivered [literally gave] His people into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,” and explains why it happened: “Because our fathers angered the God of heaven” (Ezra 5:12). False worship was a great offence in the eyes of God. His people perverted genuine worship, and thus their relationship with God was lost.⁶ God removed His presence as a demonstration of judgment.

It does not come as a surprise that God’s people were attracted to pagan worship when one considers the sinfulness of human nature. Namely, in idolatry people can manipulate their gods, create them to their own image, design them to fit their imagination and lust, buy their favor according to the principle *do ut des* (“I give in order that you give”), and secure salvation by performing certain external rituals.⁷ In pagan cults things were visible, mechanical, appealing to the carnal senses. Morality was base and low.⁸ Gods were fabricated according to the desire of people; they were actually the projection of their fears and hopes.

Chapter 1 ends with the victory of the true God in Babylon, in the heart of the Babylonian territory, where according to the pagan understanding Marduk should reign. Daniel and his three friends are given positions of honor above all the other wise men (Dan. 1:19, 20) because they decided to be faithful to their living God.

God of History, Daniel, and Nebuchadnezzar (Chapter 2)

A prayer is mentioned for the first time in Chapter 2.⁹ Daniel and his three friends ask their God urgently for help. They “pleaded for mercy” (Dan. 2:19), because King Nebuchadnezzar wants to know his dream and its interpretation without disclosing the content to those who had to tell and interpret the dream (Dan. 2:9). The astrologers rightly answer: “There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! . . . No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men” (Dan. 2:10, 11). Daniel confirms that the special knowledge does not come from his wisdom but from a God in heaven (Dan. 2:27–30; compare Dan. 1:17). After God reveals the matter to Daniel, he praises the Lord (Dan. 2:19). The original Aramaic text underlines that Daniel “blessed [*barich*] the God of heaven,” i.e., he was grateful. When God responds to their prayers, Daniel expresses his deep thankfulness in magnificent praises recorded in Daniel 2:20–23.

After Daniel explains the meaning of the dream to the king, Nebuchadnezzar

superbly honors him. The king “fell prostrate [*nepal ‘al ‘anpohi*] before Daniel and paid him honor [*segid*]¹⁰ and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him” (Dan. 2:46). This is the only place in the book where God’s faithful servant is given such homage, and Daniel does not refuse this exaltation. Why?

Nebuchadnezzar recognizes Daniel to be a representative of his God. While the king falls before Daniel, he is actually paying honor to Daniel’s God who is, in the vocabulary of the monarch, “The God of gods, the Lord of kings, and Revealer of mysteries” (Dan. 2:47). The account makes it clear that even the mighty king can clearly recognize the superiority of the living God. The story underlines the difference between the true and false religion. However, it is important to note that Nebuchadnezzar does not accept (at least not yet) this great God as his personal God. The true God remains for him a distant God; He is the God of Daniel, but not his own God. (See especially his statement about “your God” in Daniel 2:47a.)

Faithfulness of Three Friends in the Midst of Crisis (Chapter 3)

On the threat of death, King Nebuchadnezzar orders all the different groups of his Babylonian empire’s officials¹¹ to worship the golden statue he had erected (Dan. 3:5, 6).¹² This royal legislative degree was accompanied with music,¹³ and the civil power of the land was to enforce it. Once again the issue that sprang up in this situation was worship.¹⁴

How far could Daniel’s friends go to comply with the king’s command? They decide to go to the designated place, the plains of Dura, but they do not bow down to pay homage (*npl* and *sgd*; Dan. 3:15) to the king’s image or serve (*plch*)¹⁵ his gods. Because they dared to disobey, the king’s officials report the rebellious act of these foreigners to the king. The Aramaic text colorfully describes the attitude of hostility toward them in terms of “cannibalism.” Their malicious act is rendered as “they ate their pieces [*‘achalu qartsehon*]” (Dan. 3:8). Three Jews are accused of not paying attention to the king’s decree: “They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up” (Dan. 3:12).

The king summons Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and threatens them with a painful death. Nevertheless, they firmly state that they cannot worship an idol because they serve¹⁶ a living God who is able to rescue them from the fire. But even if their God will not save them, they boldly proclaim: “We will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up” (Dan. 3:18). They have the courage to say no and go against the mainstream! It is important to underline that those who are persecuted in the book of Daniel always show respect to authorities

(Dan. 2:37; 3:16, 17; 6:21) even though they stand uncompromisingly for the truth.

In this crisis, Nebuchadnezzar acts like a god. He asks the three young men who did not bow before his gods and the golden image: “What god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” (Dan. 3:15). The three friends boldly testify: “The God we serve is able to save us from it [fiery furnace], and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold” (Dan. 3:17, 18). In the climax of the story, however, Nebuchadnezzar himself openly proclaims: “They trusted him [God] and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. . . . No other god can save in this way” (Dan. 3:28, 29). Salvation comes only from the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

The best fitted background for this event is the revolt against Nebuchadnezzar from December of 595 until January of 594 that is recorded in the Babylonian Chronicles: “In the tenth year the king of Akkad (was) in his own land; from the month of Kislev to the month of Tebet there was rebellion in Akkad . . . with arms he slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy” (Wiseman 1956:73). The king had to secure his kingship; therefore, he required the loyalty oath (Shea 1982:30). To insure the loyalty of different groups of people, Nebuchadnezzar commanded that everyone had to bow down before the golden image he built as it represented his kingdom and his gods.¹⁷ “Praying to the gods of Nebuchadnezzar is placed on an equality with falling down before the image” (Keil and Delitzsch 1972:180).

True worship is connected with trusting God. The three friends of Daniel “trusted in him [God]” (Dan. 3:28); this is why they stayed firm and were faithful to Him even under the most unfavorable circumstances. God never abandons His faithful ones, as can be demonstrated by the fact that even in the fiery furnace the Son of God is with them (Dan. 3:25), protecting them—to the big surprise of the king, the nobles, and all the royal advisers gathered there (Dan. 3:27).

It is evident that the connection between worship and persecution is here firmly established. Worship is closely associated with persecution, because under certain conditions to be faithful to the Lord demands standing in opposition and may involve a matter of life and death. In chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar persecutes, but it is only an unplanned, accidental persecution due to his pride. It is a byproduct of his sinful ambition to rule as the greatest monarch and to secure his empire.

Nebuchadnezzar's Conversion and Worship (Chapter 4)

Chapter 4 records the personal experience of King Nebuchadnezzar. He testifies about his own dramatic conversion, which occurred most probably toward the end of his life when his pride was “brought low” (Isa. 2:11).¹⁸ At the end of seven years of total humiliation, Nebuchadnezzar recognizes the Most High God and His rulership and worships the one true God. It is stated twice that the king praises, honors, and glorifies Him personally (Dan. 4:34, 37). He declares that God’s “dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. . . . Everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (Dan. 4:34, 37).

Interestingly, King Nebuchadnezzar grew spiritually throughout the book of Daniel. According to the book, he first attacks Jerusalem and carries off the captives; consequently, he sees the superior knowledge of Daniel and his three friends (chap. 1); he acknowledges the God of Daniel (chap. 2); he praises the God of Daniel’s friends (chap. 3); he is humbled; and finally he comes to the Most High God with a contrite heart (chap. 4). There is a movement from Nebuchadnezzar’s distant attitude to God to his close relationship with Him. As time goes on, God teaches Nebuchadnezzar different lessons. First he hears of God, and then he gradually learns to know God personally. Finally, through the humbling experience of affliction, Nebuchadnezzar understands that “all his [God’s] ways are just” (Dan. 4:37) and worships Him “who lives forever” (Dan. 4:34).¹⁹

Pagan Worship and God's Judgment (Chapter 5)

According to chapter 5, King Belshazzar praises [*shabach*] false gods and uses for his idolatrous practices even the vessels from the Lord’s temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 5:2–4). This defiant syncretistic worship cannot go unpunished. False worship needs to be exposed, and the drunk and wicked king experiences divine judgment.²⁰ When the living God is treated like humanly created gods, the consequences strike. God’s sentence over him is unequivocal and categorical: “*Mene, mene, tekel, parsin*. . . . You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting” (Dan. 5:25, 27). “The same articles that were removed from the temple in Jerusalem as a sign of judgment on the conquered now become symbols of judgment on the conquerors: the king is killed and the kingdom falls to another ruler (Dan. 5:30, 31)” (Vogel 1999:281).

False worship, syncretism, and unbelief are under God’s judgment. There is

no partiality in God: whether performed by God’s professed people (Dan. 1:1, 2; 9:4–19) or pagans (Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45; 4:28–33; 5:25–28; 7:26; 8:25; 11:45; 12:2), everyone is judged. All are responsible for their actions and called to worship the only true God. The living God works with each person in order to lead everyone to know and follow the right path. Daniel expresses it to Belshazzar: “But you . . . have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. . . . You did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your way. Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription” (Dan. 3:22–24).

Daniel’s Worship and Deliberate Persecution (Chapter 6)

Chapter 6 presents a deliberate and premeditated attack on Daniel because of his worship of the true God. Daniel was a man of integrity, faithful, and without fault in his conduct and state affairs. “He was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent” (Dan. 6:4); thus, his envious colleagues devised a plot against him based on religious grounds. The text underlines that “the law of his God” (Dan. 6:5) was the only accusation that they could use against him. Consequently, they demanded that an unalterable decree would be issued that anyone who would “pray to any god or man during the next thirty days, except to” King Darius would “be thrown into the lion’s den” (Dan. 6:7; see Smith 1922).

Daniel prayed regularly as was his habit and did not hide his faith as he witnessed about his Most High God. At times he had enjoyed some religious respect and tolerance, but then it was deliberately and maliciously taken away. The legislators in our story, instead of being impartial, selfishly planned their advantages. Unfortunately, envy and lust for power are very bad advisors. Where there is no external control and accountability, there is basis for abuse. The worst tragedies occur when one religious group forces its views on another group. Hatred, different convictions, sometimes even existence *per se*, can lead to intolerance and persecution!

Power tastes sweet, but its misuse has bitter and often deadly results. However, the God of Daniel is a living God (Dan. 6:20, 26), and He intervened in Daniel’s favor and rescued him from the lion’s den and from the power of his enemies. If God is for His people, who can stand against them (Rom. 8:31–39)? Even the “best” planned attacks cannot do any harm to those who put their full trust in God (see Rom. 8:28; 1 Cor. 10:13; Rev. 13:15–17; 17:14). Daniel’s enemies were seeking to find a fault in him (Dan. 6:5), but instead they found him seeking and trusting God (Dan. 6:12, 23). In God Daniel found his strength (see Arnold 1993:484, 485).

The final royal doxology recorded in the book of Daniel is magnificent. King Darius exalts the God of Daniel: “For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions” (Dan. 6:26, 27).²¹

Worship During Church History and at the End of Time (Chapters 7–12)

At this point, the book of Daniel transitions to a prophetic section, which incorporates the visions and dreams of Daniel. The prophetic part of the book (Dan. 7–12) presents an attack of a religio-political power called the little horn (Dan. 7–8) against God’s people.

The Little Horn Oppresses

The little horn crushes and seeks to annihilate the saints of the Most High who worship the true God. This anti-godly power persecutes God’s faithful followers (Dan. 7:21, 25; 8:10, 24, 25; 11:33, 44); but at the end of the world’s history, this oppressive power will be condemned and supernaturally destroyed (Dan. 7:26; 8:25; 11:45). No one helps the aggressor; no one is for him.

This prideful religio-political power speaks blasphemy (Dan. 7:8, 20, 25; 8:25; 11:36), prospers (Dan. 8:12, 24; 11:36), attempts to change God’s law (Dan. 7:25), puts God’s truth down (Dan. 8:12), fights even against the Prince of princes (Dan. 8:11, 25), and leads people astray into false worship by deception (Dan. 8:23, 25). Activities of the little horn²² are performed during the Christian church era²³ and concentrate around worship. (See also 2 Thess. 2:3–12; Rev. 13:1–10.)

The phrase “the saints of the Most High” (*qadishe ‘elyonin*) occurs four times and uniquely in chapter 7 (Dan. 7:18, 22, 25, 27)²⁴ and indicates the close relationship between God and His people. They worship and obey Him even in the midst of pressure, and this is why, when the time of God’s judgment comes, they are vindicated. The final sentence is pronounced in their favor (Dan. 7:22).

The Little Horn Replaces the Daily Ministry of Christ

The religio-political power of the little horn is directed “against the daily” (*tamid*). This activity is taken from the Prince of the host (Dan. 8:11), Jesus Christ. The term *tamid* means “the daily, continually, regularly,” and in the Pentateuch this word designates different activities related only to the services carried out by the priest in the courtyard and in the first part of the sanctuary, the holy place, but never in the Most Holy Place. (See, for example, Exod. 25:30; 27:20, 21; 28:29, 38; 29:38, 42; 30:8; see also 1 Chr. 16:6.)²⁵ Rodriguez articulates it well: “Daily’ (Hebrew *tamid*) specified the daily/continual work of mediation and intercession of the priest in the sanctuary on behalf of the people. Daniel 8:14 refers to the yearly service through the verb ‘to vindicate/cleanse’ (Hebrew *nitsdaq*) which Scripture also employs in sanctuary contexts” (Rodriguez 2002:51, 52).

The fulfillment of this attack on the daily points to the usurpation of the intercessory ministry of Jesus Christ on our behalf in the heavenly sanctuary by the medieval dominant church. This earthly priesthood administered forgiveness of sins by requiring confession to priests instead of directly to the Lord Jesus Christ, by daily sacrificing Christ anew as the sacrament in the Eucharist, and by introducing numerous practices in contradiction to plain biblical teaching, such as praying to Mary and the saints for help and asking them to intercede for humans (*ora pro nobis*) in heaven, because their souls are in paradise.²⁶ Maxwell enumerates seven ways that Christ’s high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary was obscured by the little horn (2005:172, 173).

Hasel rightly spells out the problem: “The taking away ‘the continuance’ refers to the removal of the efficacies of Christ’s heavenly ministry by Rome through the introduction of substitute services, thus making ineffective Christ’s continual service in behalf of human beings” (1981:191). Rodriguez eloquently confirms:

But the horn could only usurp the work of the Prince—“it took away the daily . . . from him” (verse 11)—and in an act of “rebellion” it set up, or appointed, its own “host/army” over or in control of the daily (verse 12). The truth of the sanctuary was rejected and cast to the ground. This vivid description of the damage caused by the little horn found its fulfillment in the apostasy of the Christian church announced by Paul (2 Thess. 2:3–12), resulting both in the removal of Christ as our only and exclusive mediator before the Father and in the introduction into the Christian church of many other mediating figures between God and the believer The fact that the horn usurped the role of the Prince and established a false priestly system does not mean that the work of the heav-

only Prince/Priest came to an end. It simply became obscured (2002:53; see also Goldstein 1988:61–63).

This overshadowing and usurpation of the intercessory ministry of Jesus is a counterfeit that leads people astray from the biblical truth. The mediatory role of Mary and the saints beclouds the efficacy of Jesus Christ’s ministry for us. However, true worship is focused solely on Christ, because He is the only Mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim. 2:3–6; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

The Little Horn Changes the Law

Furthermore, the little horn will attempt to *change the law* (Dan. 7:25), and as a result truth, which is the foundation of genuine worship, will be “thrown to the ground” (Dan. 8:11). The phrase “set times/appointed times and the law” (in Aramaic *zimnin vedat*) in the sentence “to change set times and the law” is best taken as a hendiadys (a literary unit consisting of two words expressing the same idea with a qualifier). The original Aramaic text states that this power will change the law (*dat*), an expression that is applied in other biblical texts to the divine or royal law.²⁷ The plural term “times,” (*zimnin*, meaning “appointed times”)²⁸ refers to repeated or multiple points or moments in time in connection to changes in God’s law. Vogel aptly declares: “The little horn usurps divine prerogatives in the attempt to change divinely appointed times” (1999:172). Steinmann affirms: “Therefore, it is likely that the *zimnin*, ‘times,’ refers to the worship times appointed in the OT, such as the Sabbath, festival days, and morning and evening sacrifices (when the temple stood). Hence the little horn seeks to prevent worship practices ordained by God in his Word” (2008:363; cf. 373, 374; see also Lucas 2002:193, 194).

The question is which law does the little horn try to change? Can one be more precise? If the little horn’s activities point to the Christian era (as it was stated above), then the text cannot have in view the change of festival days, because by the beginning of the Christian dispensation of time the spring Jewish festivals had already been historically fulfilled, and Christians are not obliged to observe any of them (Doukhan 2009:7–31). Thus, the only law that has a reference to time and is still valid is the Sabbath, because the observance of the Decalogue, the *Magna Carta* of morality, is mandatory for all (Matt. 5:17–20; Rom. 3:31; 7:12; 1 Cor. 7:19). Shea distinctly explains: “This Aramaic word [*zimnin*] has more of a function of a point in time, but it is in the plural form indicating repeated points of time. These are connected with God’s law (the word for “law” is singular in the original lan-

guage). The feature of God's law that best fits this description is the fourth commandment where the recurring seventh day is featured as a point of time, or as regularly occurring points of time" (1996:139).²⁹ Thus, the religio-political power tries to change the time for worship. The battle of the saints of the Most High is to restore the original day of rest for worship and to stay faithful to the Lord until the time of the end.

Faithful Worship During the End-Time Crisis

The book of Daniel is about the end,³⁰ and world history terminates in the time of the end (*'et qets*; Doukhan 1987:2–7). This specific term occurs five times in the book, always in the prophetic section (Dan. 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9; for a detailed explanation of this term, see Pfandl 1992.)

God's people, His faithful remnant, are called to restore a true picture of God and elevate and proclaim His truth. They are people of commitment and integrity. Because the saints of the Most High worshiped God during their lives and followed Him no matter what, they will receive the kingdom from the Son of Man (Dan. 7:27a) and will worship Him forever and ever: "He [the Son of Man] was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped [*plch*] him. . . . His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship [*plch*] and obey him" (Dan. 7:14, 27). This universal eschatological projection of their final victory with the Son of Man is a guarantee of a joyful, peaceful, and secured life throughout eternity.

The dominant thought and the most crucial motif in the book of Daniel is the theme of divine judgment. God is our Judge (the name Daniel means "God is my Judge"), and we are all under His judgment! He has the final word. Humans are not in charge; they can only play God. With this prevalent concept, the book starts (Dan. 1:1, 2), climaxes at the center (7:9–14), and ends (Dan. 12:13), and is packed in between each story or prophetic section with the theme of judgment (Dan. 2:34, 35, 44, 45; 3:22–27; 4:33, 37; 5:22–28; 6:23, 24; 8:25; 9:7, 11, 16, 24–27; 11:45).³¹ At the judgment, the God of Daniel will reveal who is who, will demonstrate that He always stands on the side of the persecuted (Dan. 3:29; 6:27; 7:22; 12:1, 2; compare with Isa. 63:9), and as the Revealer of history will unmask the character and fate of all persecutors, who will receive their just punishment while the persecuted receive their great reward as God pronounces judgment to their advantage (Dan. 7:22).³²

Daniel's Model of Worship

In chapters 9 and 10 Daniel prays again. Chapter 9 eloquently describes the longest prayer in the book, and chapter 10 mentions his three-week mourning period, i.e., time of fasting and praying (see Collins 1993:372, 373; Goldingay 1989:290; Pace 2008:308, 309; Z. Stefanovic 2007:379–381). The verb “to pray” in Daniel 9:4 is better translated as “to intercede” (Hebrew root *palal* is in *hithpael*). The emphasis is on Daniel's intercessory and passionate prayer as part of his worship. This prayer is tied to the fervent search in the prophetic Word. The study of Jeremiah's prophecy about the 70 years of Babylonian captivity leads him to understand the urgency of the present situation, because this prophetic period is about to be fulfilled (see Dan. 9:2).

Daniel's prayer (Dan. 9:4–19) is related to gratitude for God's faithfulness, patient waiting, and urgent request for God's intervention.³³ This mixture provides a very special taste for his approach to God. His honesty and sincerity is apparent and deep. Daniel opens his heart to God, and he even addresses God by YHWH (the Lord). This is a unique feature, because in all 12 chapters of the book of Daniel, only here is God's proper name used (see Exod. 3:13–15). He is the Lord of His followers, the Lord of the covenant, God who intervenes in favor of His people. Worship as well as judgment is possible and is built on the concept of God's covenantal faithfulness. Because God is gracious, faithful, and just, one can worship Him, and because He keeps His eternal covenant of love, He is righteous in His judgments. While Daniel was still praying, the answer came from God (Dan. 9:21) in order to give him the understanding of the previous vision from chapter 8 concerning the evening and morning prophecy (Dan. 8:26).

In the final section of the book of Daniel (chaps. 10–12), it is twice stated that Daniel is in worship. He is fasting and praying, and God responds to his pleas for mercy (Dan. 10:2, 12). This fasting and praying results in the coming of God's messenger to him saying twice that he is highly esteemed by God (Dan. 10:10, 19). In chapter 10 this mourning for three weeks is associated with prayer: “Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them” (Dan. 10:12).³⁴ Doukhan comments: “Daniel had barely begun his prayer when already his words were heard. His three weeks of praying and fasting were not even necessary. From the first day God had heard his prayer. Scripture does not record the words of such a lengthy prayer, as though to remind the reader of the little value words have before God. The Lord hears the prayer before it is even formulated, let

alone embellished by words. The content of prayer is more important than the form it takes” (2000:161).

During the same three-week period that Daniel had been praying and fasting, the angel Gabriel and Michael, his superior, had been wrestling with “the prince of the Persian kingdom” (Dan. 10:13). Daniel’s spiritual battle was somehow connected to the bigger conflict. “Daniel’s prayer, which seemed to us so small and futile, had in fact cosmic repercussions” (Doukhan 2000:161).³⁵

Daniel’s prayer and fast led to the vision of the heavenly High Priest dressed in a linen robe with a gold belt (Dan. 10:5, 6; see also Exod. 28:4, 5, 8; Lev. 16:4, 23) whose whole being seemed to be aflame. Jesus Christ appeared to Daniel (compare with Josh. 5:13–15; Ezek. 1:26–28; Rev. 1:12–18).³⁶ While worshiping we might and should see God (Ps. 11:4, 7; 27:4, 8, 13; 63:2).

Final Victory

Daniel 12:3 underlines the fact that at the end of time there will exist people who will “lead many to righteousness” (see also Dan. 11:33). They will teach others about the true character of God in order to build a genuine relationship with Him in worship, which will be reflected in the whole ethical lifestyle of God’s followers. Daniel ends his book with critical remarks: “Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked” (Dan. 12:10). Two groups of worshipers are contrasted. On the one side are those who will let God purify them; they will grow in their relationship with Him and their worship will transform them, because God is at the center of their thinking, feeling, imagination, and all actions. On the other side are the wicked with their cold attitudes, stubbornness, selfishness, and indifference. Hill correctly observes: “More disturbing, perhaps, is the biblical pattern of the intensification of evil before it is finally defeated” (Hill 2008:210.) The first group of people is called wise in comparison to the contrasting group (Dan. 12:10b). The behavior of the wise reflects God’s given lifestyle for them (Deut. 6:4–9; 10:12–21; Rev. 14:7, 12). Michael is for them,³⁷ their names are written in the book of life (Dan. 12:1), and they wait for the resurrection to eternal life (Dan. 12:2, 13).³⁸

The book of Daniel announces that at the end of time, when everything is in turmoil and no one, humanly speaking, is for God’s oppressed people, Michael, the great heavenly prince (Dan. 12:1), will stand up for them and deliver them from the hand of their enemies, who are associated with the little horn and the king of the north. God will intervene for His people, and those who teach and lead others to

righteousness will be resurrected and rescued (Dan. 12:2, 3, 13). They will receive eternal life. This beautiful climax of the book gives the persecuted hope, strength to persevere, and courage to live faithfully.

Conclusion and Practical Applications for Mission

The concept of worship is the backbone of the book of Daniel. This is the dominant feature through the historical as well as the prophetic parts of the book in their crucial passages. Local struggles with worship point to the universal and eschatological antitypical fulfillment.

There is no explicit definition of worship in the book of Daniel. However, it becomes clear that genuine worship is not simply a liturgy, a set of rituals, or an organized program, but rather it is a joyful, respectful, and active response to God for who He is and for what He does. Worship originates in God, and it is a recognition of His worth; it is a response to seeing God in His majesty, honor, sovereignty, holiness, greatness, faithfulness, and graciousness, which evokes awe, love, respect, thankfulness, and willingness to obey in every circumstance of life. Worship is thus centered on God and must be always theocentric.

To worship God in truth is crucial (Gen. 24:27; Ps. 117:2; 138:2, 3; Isa. 25:1; compare John 4:23, 24). Whenever truth is put down, worship is distorted. Genuine and false worship are incompatible. God is true in His commitment to His people, which is expressed in His faithfulness toward His covenant, which is a legal establishment and regulation of the relationship between Himself and His people. One cannot command worship, because worship is something that comes from the heart and is voluntary. It cannot be forced. No one can worship for somebody else. Worship is a personal response to the goodness of God. Persecution or force cannot take away from people the inner liberty to worship.

God's rulership is universal, and one can worship God in any place, even in the territory of the enemy. One can stand firmly for one's own biblical convictions in a foreign country, but at the same time one needs to be polite and respectful. In the whole book of Daniel, God's people behave and react with respect even to those who oppress them.

True worshipers are persecuted when the truth of God is changed and His law is altered. Attempts to change the law, which includes the Sabbath command, means to put down worshiping the Creator God. Superficial, perverse, or syncretistic worship is judged and condemned by God, because false worship destroys the very foundation of life's principles and laws of relationship.

Issues of worship dominate in times of crisis. Worship comes to center focus and shows that it is the core matter. It is often a life-death issue. Music can play a positive or negative role in worship by leading people astray or closer to God. Worshipers are those who fear the Lord (Ps. 118:4), revere the Lord (Ps. 135:20), and approach Him in fear and joy at the same time (Ps. 2:10–12; 34:9; 67:7; 96:4).

Even though the prophetic word predicts that there will be religious persecution again, it should not lead to a pattern of fatalism or passive resignation, nor should this be understood as an indication of a deterministic mentality. No attitude of “I can do nothing” is envisioned here. God tells us these things so that we may act, stand for religious liberty, and do the maximum to change the flow of history. God does not foretell in order to provide only information. He does not want sinners to die as informed sinners (Jonah 3, 4). He speaks in advance that “His will” will be accomplished (Isa. 55:11; 40:8). He foretells so that right decisions and actions will be made (Dan. 12:3).

The God of Daniel is always on the side of the oppressed. He intervened in favor of Daniel and his three friends; He delivered the saints of the Most High from the hand of the little horn and the faithful followers of God from the power of the king of the north. What happens to them is happening to Him! Those who touch them fight against God Himself (Hag. 2:8; the Son of Man in chapter 7 is the Representative of His followers, the saints of the Most High). God is on the side of those who dare to disagree, who dare to be different by doing what is right! He intervenes in favor of His own! This God even resurrects His faithful people.

One should not play god or act as a possessor of truth. We cannot own the truth. Truth can only possess us! We can love the truth, know the truth, search for the truth, understand the truth, divide the truth, proclaim the truth, hate the truth, twist the truth, deny the truth, etc., but we cannot possess the truth! Truth (with a capital T) can only possess us, and only on the condition that we allow God to do it for and in us! His Word is Truth. Possessors of truth are very dangerous; they are exploiters and emotional abusers of others. Where there are strong fanatical religious convictions, there may also be religious intolerance! Envy and pride certainly lead to putting down freedom of conscience. However, not only wicked people persecute. The “good” people do it as well when they insist that others must do everything according to their views and when they impose on others their own understanding of truth. Persecutors think that they are the possessors of truth! This is why I am afraid of people who think they are always right in worship.

Paradoxically, persecution brings witnessing possibilities that otherwise would be impossible. Witnessing to the mighty of the earth sometimes brings new un-

expected converts to God, who in turn can be a light to many highly influential and positioned people. (See, for example, Nebuchadnezzar's conversion story and testimony in Daniel 4). Being respectful, but at the same time straightforward, is the best response to the powerful. One never knows what good fruit it may bear. In view of the importance and crucial position of worship in life, it is no wonder that God's final summary appeal to humanity is to worship the Creator God (Rev. 14:7).

Those who stand for God and His truth, those who live His law and lead others to righteousness, will be resurrected to eternal life and shine (Dan. 12:2, 3). Resurrection is the culminating hope of God's people, who then will live in God's presence forever in His kingdom (Dan. 7:26). This goal is the ultimate reward of God's faithful worshipers. Thus, the book of Daniel is not about Daniel but about the God of Daniel who invites, as the whole book attests, to worship Him in truth, love, and reverence. Those who do it are wise (Dan. 11:33-35; 12:10).

Notes

¹In English Bibles, the word "worship" usually occurs in the book of Daniel at least 11 times: Daniel 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 (twice), 18, 28 (in KJV, NKJV, NIV, NAU), and in some translations also in Daniel 2:46 (KJV), 7:14 (NKJV), and 7:27 (NIV).

²It seems that worship in the universe is as old as the creation of living beings (Jer. 17:12; Job 38:7), and on earth it is as old as humankind (Gen. 4:3-5; 8:20, 21).

³The Hebrew word '*aboda*, "service, worship" means actually doing the will and/or the work of God. To worship God means to serve Him. However, worship also points to prostrating oneself before God. For understanding of worship generally and in the Old Testament, see Balentine (1999), Best (2003), Block (2005), Bromiley (1976), Davies (1962), Hattori (1993), Hill (1993 and 1996), Holmes (1984), Martin (1988), Peterson (1992), Watts (1958), Webber (1994).

⁴See "Etymology of worship" in <http://homepage.mac.com/paulbeedle/worship.html>: "WORSHIP (n) O.E. *worðscip*, *wurðscip* (Anglian), *weorðscipe* (W. Saxon) 'condition of being worthy, honor, renown,' from *weorð* 'worthy.' Sense of 'reverence paid to a supernatural or divine being' is first recorded c.1300. The original sense is preserved in the title *worshipful* (c.1300). The verb is recorded from c.1200: . . . "-SHIP O.E. *-sciepe*, Anglian *-scip* 'state, condition of being,' from P. Gmc. *-skapaz* (cf. O.N. *-skapr*, O.Fris. *-skip*, Du. *-schap*, Ger. *-schaft*), from base *skap-* 'to create, ordain, appoint.'"

⁵Daniel, prophet of the sixth century B.C., lived firmly by biblical principles, and yet he endured two different political systems (in the Neo-Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires), survived six Babylonian kings (Nebuchadnezzar, Amel-Marduk, Neriglissar, Labashi-Marduk, Belshazzar, Nabonidus) and two Medo-Persian rulers (Darius the Mede and Cyrus). As a statesman he was a successful minister in the Babylonian royal court and a

prominent prime minister in the Medo-Persian kingdom, as well as the president of the Royal Academy. Surprisingly, as a wise man, a Jew, a foreigner, and a captive, he was the prominent counselor to many kings of different national and religious backgrounds. Life was not always easy for him, but he stayed in the court services in Babylon at least until the first year of Cyrus (Dan. 1:31), died at a ripe old age most probably in his 90s (ca. 622–530), and mostly stayed wisely out of trouble in the situations of different strict royal commands.

⁶Nebuchadnezzar also took the vessels from the Jerusalem temple of God (Dan. 1:2). The temple and the vessels were symbols for God's presence among His people. Vogel aptly explains: "Removal of the vessels indicated the absence of God and the end of the special provisions of the cult that were meant to sanctify the people and bring them closer to God" (Vogel 1999:279).

⁷"The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at the foundation of every heathen religion . . . Wherever it is held, men have no barrier against sin" (White 1898:35, 36).

⁸For example, the sexually perverse practices during the spring and fall fertility festivals (see Davidson 2007:85–97).

⁹There are six explicit passages when prayers are pointed out in the book of Daniel: (1) two times with Daniel's recorded words (Dan. 2:18–23; and 9:4–19); (2) once King Nebuchadnezzar praises God (Dan. 4:34, 37); (3) once a pagan king's worship activity is mentioned (Dan. 5:4)—Belshazzar prays to different gods; and (4) two times when Daniel's praying is singled out but without actual wording (Dan. 6:10, 11 and 10:2, 12). For a detail discussion on prayers in Daniel, see Paul B. Peterson (1998).

¹⁰The Aramaic root *sgd* ("to pay homage to" with *lamed*) occurs 12 times in the Bible, and only in Daniel 2 and 3: (1) to pay homage to God or to idols—Daniel 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 [twice], 18, 28 (in 3:12, 14, 18, 28 it is in parallel with the root *plch*); and (2) to pay homage to people—Daniel 2:46. This word expresses the idea of doing homage by prostration (like the Hebrew term *hishtachawah* or the Greek word *proskuneo*, "to prostrate oneself in reverence").

¹¹The list of eight groups is enumerated twice; see Daniel 3:2, 3. For other summary lists, see Dan. 3:4, 7, 27, 29.

¹²The measurements of the statue were 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide. Number 6 defines Babylon; it is a Babylonian number (see Stefanovic 2002:417).

¹³Four times the list of musical instruments of Nebuchadnezzar's orchestra is mentioned (Dan. 3:5, 7, 10, 15).

¹⁴The word "worship" (*sgd*) occurs 11 times in this chapter (Dan. 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15 [twice], 18, 28); the term "serve [gods]" (*plch*) is mentioned 5 times (Dan. 3:12, 14, 17, 18, 28); and the expression "fall down" (*npl*) is cited 6 times, always in association with the word "worship" (*sgd*; Dan. 3:5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15).

¹⁵The Aramaic root *plch* ("to serve [God or gods]") occurs 10 times (Dan. 3:12, 14, 17, 18, 28; 6:16, 20 [in BHS 6:17, 21]; 7:14, 27; and Ezra 7:24 ("servants"; plural participle). The

noun *polchan* (only in Ezra 7:19) means “work, divine service, worship.”

¹⁶Note the contrast the biblical text makes in playing with the word “serve” (*plch*). The three friends of Daniel do not “serve” pagan gods, but they “serve” the living God. The same verb *plch* is used in both situations in order to stress the difference in worshiping. For not serving gods, see Daniel 3:12, 14, 18, 28; and for serving God, see Daniel 3:17 and 28 (implied by contrast).

¹⁷About the possibility of worshipping the king in Babylon, see Mercer (1916).

¹⁸Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C.

¹⁹What a contrast with the behavior of God’s people of that time who were stubbornly refusing God’s repeated call for repentance and were “growing” in wickedness (for example, Joel 2:12–17; Jer. 4:1; 7:3, 4; Ezek. 14:6; 18:30, 31; 33:11, 12). Their final fate was the Babylonian exile.

²⁰For insights into King Belshazzar’s fearful reaction, see Wolters (1991).

²¹Similar royal doxologies occur in Daniel 2:47; 3:28, 29; and 4:3.

²²For the identification of the little horn, see Doukhan (2000:106–111); Shea (1992:31–66 and 2005:117–124, 177–183); and Maxwell (1981:121–141, 152–155).

²³The little horn will prosper for three and a half times (Dan. 7:25; this prophetic time period is mentioned seven times in Scripture—Dan. 7:25; 12:7; Rev. 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5—as three and a half years/times, forty-two months, or 1,260 days). The domination of the little horn during those three and a half prophetic years (Dan. 7:25) is calculated according to the prophetic chronology for a period of 1,260 years beginning in 538 C.E. and ending in 1798 C.E. For details, see Doukhan (2000:108–111) and Shea (2005:122–124).

²⁴In addition, they are twice called simply “the saints” (Dan. 7:21, 22) and they are called “the holy people” in Daniel 8:24 and 12:7. God’s faithful people are also characterized as “wise” (Dan. 11:33, 35; 12:3, 10).

²⁵Shea asserts: “Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this Hebrew word *tamid* (daily) is used as a modifier, referring to something that goes on daily, continually, or constantly. Here, however, the word is used as a noun; no word follows it for it to modify” (Shea 2005:182). See also Maxwell (1981:156–166) and Lucas (2002:216, 217).

²⁶Shea acutely explains: “The small horn now represents the heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ as requiring human or priestly activities on earth to mediate its grace to humanity. Human intermediaries have been interjected between God and the people. One of the central issues of the Reformation was a rejection of this very point. . . . Each individual may have personal access to Jesus Christ and God. This leaves no room for the mediation of priests, saints, angels, or Mary—as in the Roman system” (2005:181).

²⁷The term *dat* (“law”; in Dan. 7:25 is singular) refers to the divine or royal law/decreed and is used 14 times in the Aramaic portion of the Old Testament—Ezra 7:12, 14, 21, 25, 26 (twice), and Daniel 2:9, 13, 15; 6:6, 9, 13, 16; 7:25 (and an additional 21 times in the Biblical Hebrew). The Biblical Aramaic has several words for law/decreed/edict/prohibition: *dat*, *nishtevan* (Ezra 4:18, 23; 5:5), *gezerah* (Dan. 4:14, 21), *qeyam* (Dan. 6:8, 16), *‘esar* (Dan. 6:8,

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9, 10, 13 [twice], 14, 16), and *pitgam* (Ezra 4:17; 5:7, 11; 6:11; Dan. 3:16; 4:14), but the term *dat* is the strongest and most specific—the only one pointing to the divine law (like in Dan. 6:6 or Ezra 7:12).

²⁸The word *zimnin* (“times, appointed times”; plural form from *zeman*; the same word is also used in Hebrew) describes the specific point in time and is used 11 times (Ezra 5:3; Dan. 2:16, 21; 3:7, 8; 4:33; 6:11, 14; 7:12, 22, 25; it is also employed 4 times in the Hebrew Bible: Eccl. 3:1; Ezra 9:27, 31; Neh. 2:6) in comparison to another Aramaic word for time ‘*iddan* (“time, year”) which refers more to a season or period of time. (It appears 13 times: Dan. 2:8, 9, 21; 3:5, 15; 4:13, 20, 22, 29; 7:12, 25 [three times].)

²⁹Zdravko Stefanovic concurs: “The Semitic noun *zimnin*, ‘set times,’ is used in the Old Testament for the important days of the Hebrew calendar (Ezra 10:14; Neh. 10:34; 13:31; Esther 9:27, 31). The second noun, *dat*, ‘law,’ is in singular and should be considered the Aramaic equivalent to the Hebrew word *Torah*. . . . Therefore, the whole expression means ‘the set times regulated by the law,’ and it includes the seventh-day Sabbath” (2007:274).

³⁰KJV uses the word “end” 27 times (Dan. 1:5, 15, 18; 4:11, 22, 29, 34; 6:26; 7:26, 28; 8:17, 19 [twice]; 9:24, 26 [twice]; 11:6, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 6, 8, 9, 13 [twice]); NKJV employs this term 26 times (Dan. 1:5, 15, 18; 4:22, 29, 34; 6:26; 7:28; 8:17, 19; 9:24, 26 [twice], 27; 11:6, 13, 18, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 8, 9, 13 [twice]); and NIV, 24 times (Dan. 1:15, 18; 2:44; 4:34; 5:26; 6:26; 7:28; 8:17, 19; 9:24, 26 [twice], 27 [twice]; 11:18, 27, 35, 40, 45; 12:4, 9, 12, 13 [twice]).

³¹For the theology of divine judgment and its meaning, see Moskala 2004.

³²The Aramaic text employs the so-called “*lamed of advantage*”; i.e., divine judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, which means for their favor and advantage—*dina jehib leqadishe eljonin*.

³³About Daniel’s prayer in chapter 9, see Jones 1968; Steinmann 2008:427–442; Goldingay 1989:240–257.

³⁴It is interesting that Vogel argues that Daniel 10 alludes to the Day of Atonement. For details, see Vogel 1999:208–243.

³⁵For the identification of the prince of the Persian kingdom, historical insight, and connections to Ezra 4 and the book of Haggai, see Shea 2005:236, 237 and 1983:225–250.

³⁶For the relationship between the vision of the man in linen in Daniel 10:5, 6 and Joshua 5, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 1, see Doukhan 2000:159, 160. For the connection between Daniel 10, Ezekiel 1, and Revelation 1, consult Shea 2005:234, 235; Longman 1999:246–253; Pace 2008:309–312.

³⁷Seow underlines that Michael is with His people, because He is their great Prince and Protector. He is present during the turbulent events of world history and, finally, He intervenes on their behalf (2003:186).

³⁸Commenting on Daniel 12:2 Collins asserts: “There is virtually unanimous agreement among scholars that Daniel is referring to the actual resurrection of individuals from the dead, because of the explicit language of everlasting life” (1993:391, 392).

Chapter 3

* * *

THE TEXT OF THE SERVANT SONGS IN ISAIAH 40–55: GLEANNING MISSIOLOGICAL INSIGHT FROM THE SERVANT OF THE LORD PASSAGES

James R. Fisher

This study reviews the text of the “Servant Songs” in Isaiah 40–55 and examines key terms in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint, highlighting the role of Yahweh’s servant in relation to the nations at the ends of the earth. The study also focuses on selected missiologically related themes and relevant insights contained in these passages which serve to instruct cross-cultural missionaries.

Since the late nineteenth century, biblical scholars have identified four so-called *Servant Songs* in the latter part of the book of Isaiah¹—42:1–4²; 49:1–6³; 50:4–9⁴; and 52:13–53:12. Bernard Duhm (1847–1928), professor at the University of Basel, first called attention to these sections of Isaiah 40–55 (commonly referred to as Deutero-Isaiah) and argued that these songs were later autonomous additions (Duhm 1922).

Several items differentiate the fourth song from the first three.⁵ The fourth and most famous song introduces the servant in a new role as a vicarious, suffering substitute, which many Christian commentators identify with the Messiah.⁶ Due to space limitations and because the fourth song would merit its own specialized study, the fourth song is not included within this essay.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to review the history of the interpretation of the text of the book of Isaiah in general, it will be appropriate to briefly survey the understanding associated with the servant motif found within Isaiah's prophecy.

Introduction to the Passages

As Harrison reminds us, "Few topics in Old Testament theology have been discussed more widely than the question of the identity of the Divine Servant, and few have been less amenable to a consensus of scholarly opinion" (Harrison 1969:484).

Question of the Servant's Identity

Most Jewish commentators identify the servant in the songs with Israel, either as a nation or as a faithful minority,⁷ although some have applied it to a future Messiah. Christian scholars have proposed many options. These include Israel as a nation, a faithful minority within Israel, "the righteous," or a historical figure with suggestions that include Isaiah, Jeremiah, Eleazar (martyred scribe killed by Antiochus Epiphanes), Zerubbabel, Jehoiachin, Deuter-Isaiah, a "Second Moses" (cf. Deut. 18:15) or Cyrus.⁸ The New Testament clearly applies the passages to the Christian Messiah, and by extension to the Christian church.⁹

Based on the similar use of the term "servant" within the four songs and in other references found in Isaiah 40–55, I find it difficult to argue that the servant in the songs is to be distinguished entirely from the servant referred to elsewhere. Note for example that Isaiah 44:1–2, 21 identifies the servant as Jacob or Israel, and describes him as "chosen" and "formed in the womb." These same terms are also used when referring to the servant mentioned in the four songs (cf. "chosen" [42:1], "formed in the womb" [49:5]), an argument for viewing the songs in their larger context rather than in isolation.

However, since the servant's mission as described in Isaiah 49:5 is to "restore the tribes of Jacob" and "to bring back ... Israel," the servant clearly cannot be identified solely as a personified collective Israel whose mission is to restore itself. A deeper meaning must be implied. Delitzsch's pyramid analogy seems instructive at this point.

The idea of "the servant of Jehovah" assumed, to speak figuratively, the form of a pyramid. The base was Israel as a whole; the central section was that Israel,

which was not merely Israel according to the flesh, but according to the spirit also; the apex is the person of the Mediator of salvation springing out of Israel. And the last of the three is regarded (1) as the centre of the circle of the promised kingdom—the *second David*; (2) the centre of the circle of the people of salvation—the second Israel; (3) the centre of the circle of the human race—the second Adam (Delitzsch 1982:174).

Question of the Servant's Purpose

In addition to the debate over the servant's identity in Isaiah 40–55, another equally contentious debate continues regarding the purpose of the servant's calling and mission. Proponents in this debate focus on two points of emphasis often framed in terms of whether Israel's witness should be viewed as *active* or *passive*. By adopting one or the other of these views, one chooses to emphasize either *universalism* or *nationalism*. To phrase the question in different terms, what is the relationship between Israel's *national election* and its *world mission*? Is Israel's mission a *centripetal* force emphasizing the nation's role as a passive witness to God's blessing of His covenant people, or is it a *centrifugal* force leading to active witness, which reaches out to encompass all nations in the kingdom of God?

Or more to the point, is the servant a "missionary prophet" or is he merely an "ardent nationalist" who only offers the nations "the opportunity to view God's redemption, not the chance to participate in it" (Grisanti 1998:54)¹⁰ ?

Based on the New Testament expansion of the servant motif, it seems best to refrain from forcing a dichotomy when answering this question and to allow a *both/and* response rather than insisting on an *either/or* decision.

The Text of the Servant Songs

The decision to include Tables 1–3 quoting the full content of the first three servant songs using the original Hebrew text (BHS)¹¹ along with Greek¹² (LXX) and English¹³ (TNIV) translations is intentional and was done for the following two reasons, both of which relate closely to the key emphases of Jon Dybdahl's ministry and teaching.

Firstly, the text is included as a visual cue reminding us of the differences in the biblical text transmitted through time. Furthermore, it serves as a visible reminder of the vital importance that language plays in a missiological context. This importance was first encountered in the pre-Christian era when the need arose to

prepare a Greek translation (the Septuagint [LXX]) to meet the needs of the Jewish diaspora in the Hellenistic world. Interestingly, the LXX rendering of Isaiah 49:6 refers to Israel using the very term *disapora* (τὴν διασπορὰν τοῦ Ἰσραηλ).

Secondly, the biblical text has been reproduced as a reminder of the centrality of Scripture as a source of grace so vital to a growth in spirituality and as catalyst to the work of mission, topics about which our colleague Jon Dybdahl has written extensively (1989, 2006, 2007).

Table 1:
The First Servant Song—Isaiah 42:1–4
The Servant Chosen and Anointed

TNIV	BHS	LXX
<p>¹ “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.</p>	<p>הוּ עֲבָדִי אֲתַמְדֵּךְ בּוֹ בְּחִירִי רָצִיתָהּ נִפְשִׁי נָתַתִּי רוּחִי עָלָיו מִשְׁפָּט לְגוֹיִם יוֹצִיא: לֹא יִצְעַק וְלֹא יִשָּׂא וְלֹא יִשְׁמָעֵת בְּחוּץ קוֹלוֹ:²</p>	<p>¹ Ἰακωβ ὁ παῖς μου, ἀντιλήμψομαι αὐτοῦ, Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου, προσεδέξατο αὐτὸν ἢ ψυχὴ μου, ἔδωκα τὸ πνεῦμά μου ἐπ’ αὐτόν, κρίσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ἐξοίσει. ² οὐ κεκράζεται οὐδὲ ἀνήσει, οὐδὲ ἀκουσθήσεται ἕξω ἢ φωνῇ αὐτοῦ. ³ κάλαμον τεθλασμένον οὐ συντρίψει καὶ λίνον καπνιζόμενον οὐ σβέσει, ἀλλὰ εἰς ἀλήθειαν ἐξοίσει κρίσιν. ⁴ ἀναλάμψει καὶ οὐ θραυσθήσεται, ἕως ἂν θῆ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κρίσιν, καὶ ἐπὶ τῷ ὄνοματι αὐτοῦ ἔθνη ἔλπιουσιν.</p>
<p>² He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets.</p>	<p>קָהָה רָצוֹן לֹא יִשְׁבּוֹר וּפִשְׁתָּהּ כָּהָה לֹא יִכְבַּנָּה לְאַמַּת יוֹצִיא מִשְׁפָּט:³</p>	
<p>³ A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;</p>	<p>לֹא יִכָּהֶה וְלֹא יִרְוֶן עַד-יִשָּׂים בְּאֵרֶץ מִשְׁפָּט וּלְתוֹרָתוֹ אֵיִם יִתְחִילוּ:⁴ פ</p>	
<p>⁴ he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”</p>		

Table 2:
The Second Servant Song—Isaiah 49:1–6
The Servant Called and Commissioned

TNIV	BHS	LXX
<p>¹ Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.</p>	<p>¹ שִׁמְעוּ אִיִּים אֱלֹהֵי וְהַקְשִׁיבוּ לְאֲמִים מְרְחוֹק יְהוָה מִבְּטֶן קָרָאֵנִי מִמְעַי אִמִּי הַזְכִּיר שְׁמִי:</p>	<p>¹ Ἀκούσατέ μου, νῆσοι, καὶ προσέχετε, ἔθνη, διὰ χρόνου πολλοῦ στήσεται, λέγει κύριος. ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου ἐκάλεσεν τὸ ὄνομά μου</p>
<p>² He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver.</p>	<p>² וַיִּשֶׂם פִּי כַתְרָב חֲדָה בְּצֶל יָדוֹ הִחְבֵּיאֵנִי וַיְשִׂימֵנִי לְחֵץ בְּרוּר בְּאַשְׁפֹּתוֹ הַקְּתִירָנִי:</p>	<p>² καὶ ἔθηκεν τὸ στόμα μου ὡσεὶ μάχαιραν ὀξείαν καὶ ὑπὸ τὴν σκέπην τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἔκρυψέν με, ἔθηκεν με ὡς βέλος ἐκλεκτὸν καὶ ἐν τῇ φαρέτρᾳ αὐτοῦ ἐσέκασέν με.</p>
<p>³ He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.”</p>	<p>³ וַיֹּאמֶר לִי עַבְדִּי אַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־רַבָּךְ אֶתְפָּאֵר:</p> <p>⁴ וַאֲנִי אֲמַרְתִּי לְרִיק יַנְעִתִי לְתוֹהוּ וְהִבֵּל כְּתִי כְלִיתִי אֲכֹן מִשְׁפָּטִי אֶת־יְהוָה וּפְעֻלָּתִי אֶת־ אֱלֹהִי:</p>	<p>³ καὶ εἶπέν μοι Δοῦλός μου εἶ σύ, Ἰσραηλ, καὶ ἐν σοὶ δοξασθήσομαι.</p>
<p>⁴ But I said, “I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the LORD’s hand, and my reward is with my God.”</p>	<p>⁵ וַעֲתָה אֲמַר יְהוָה יִצְרִי מִבְּטֶן לְעֶבֶד לֹא לְשׁוֹבֵב יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יֵאָסֶף וְאֶפְבַּד בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וְאֵלֹהֵי הַיְיָ עֵזִי:</p>	<p>⁴ καὶ ἐγὼ εἶπα Κενῶς ἐκοπίασα καὶ εἰς μάταιον καὶ εἰς οὐδὲν ἔδωκα τὴν ἰσχύν μου, διὰ τοῦτο ἡ κρίσις μου παρὰ κυρίῳ, καὶ ὁ πόνος μου ἐναντίον τοῦ θεοῦ μου.</p>
<p>⁵ And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength—</p>	<p>⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר נְקַל מְהִיִּתְךָ לִי עֶבֶד לְהָקִים אֶת־שִׁבְטִי יַעֲקֹב וּנְצִירִי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהָשִׁיב וּנְתַתִּיךָ לְאֹר גּוֹיִם לְהַיְוִת יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד־קֶצֶה הָאָרֶץ: ס</p>	<p>⁵ καὶ νῦν οὕτως λέγει κύριος ὁ πλάσας με ἐκ κοιλίας δούλον ἐαυτῷ τοῦ συναγαγεῖν τὸν Ἰακωβ καὶ Ἰσραηλ πρὸς αὐτόν—συναχθήσομαι καὶ δοξασθήσομαι ἐναντίον κυρίου, καὶ ὁ θεός μου ἔσται μου ἰσχὺς—</p>
<p>⁶ he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”</p>	<p>⁶ καὶ εἶπέν μοι Μέγα σοὶ ἐστὶν τοῦ κληθῆναι σε παῖδά μου τοῦ στήσαι τὰς φυλάς Ἰακωβ καὶ τὴν διασπορὰν τοῦ Ἰσραηλ ἐπιστρέψαι, ἰδοὺ τέθεικά σε εἰς διαθήκην γένους εἰς φῶς ἔθνῶν τοῦ εἶναι σε εἰς σωτηρίαν ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς.</p>	

Table 3:
The Third Servant Song—Isaiah 50:4–9
The Servant as Committed and Undaunted Disciple

TNIV	BHS	LXX
<p>⁴ The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.</p>	<p>⁴ אֲדַנְיָ יְהוָה נָתַן לִי לְשׁוֹן לְמוֹדִים לְדַעַת לְעוֹת אֶת־יְעָף דְּבַר יַעֲרוֹ בְּבִקְרָא בְּבִקְרָא יַעֲרוֹ לִי אֲזֵן לְשִׁמְעַ כְּלִמּוֹדִים: ⁵ אֲדַנְיָ יְהוָה פָּתַח־לִי אָזְנוֹ וְאָנְכִי לֹא מָרִיתִי אַחֲזֹר לֹא נְסוּגֹתַי:</p>	<p>⁴ Κύριος διδωσίν μοι γλώσσαν παιδείας τοῦ γινῶναι ἐν καιρῷ ἢ νίκα δεῖ εἰπεῖν λόγον, ἔθηκέν μοι πρῶτί, προσέθηκέν μοι ὠτίον ἀκούειν, ⁵ καὶ ἡ παιδεία κυρίου ἀνοίγει μου τὰ ὦτα, ἐγὼ δὲ οὐκ ἀπειθῶ οὐδὲ ἀντιλέγω.</p>
<p>⁵ The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away.</p>	<p>⁶ הָיוּ נִתְּתִי לְמַכִּים וְלִחְיִי לְמַרְטִים פְּנֵי לֹא הִסְתַּרְתִּי מִכְּלִמּוֹת וְרִק: ⁷ וְאֲדַנְיָ יְהוָה יַעֲזֹר־לִי עַל־כֵּן לֹא נִכְלַמְתִּי עַל־כֵּן שָׁמַתִּי פְּנֵי כַּחֲלָמִישׁ וְאֲדַע כִּי־לֹא אֲבוֹשׁ:</p>	<p>⁶ τὸν νῶτόν μου δέδωκα εἰς μάστιγας, τὰς δὲ σιαγόνας μου εἰς ῥαπίσματα, τὸ δὲ πρόσωπόν μου οὐκ ἀπέστρεψα ἀπὸ αἰσχύνης ἐμπυσομάτων, ⁷ καὶ κύριος βοηθός μου ἐγενήθη, διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐνετράπην, ἀλλὰ ἔθηκα τὸ πρόσωπόν μου ὡς στερεὰν πέτραν καὶ ἔγγων ὅτι οὐ μὴ αἰσχυνηθῶ.</p>
<p>⁶ I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.</p>	<p>⁸ קָרוֹב מִצְדִּיקֵי מִי־רִיב אֲתִי נִעְמְדָה יַחַד מִי־בַעַל מִשְׁפָּטֵי יַגֵּשׁ אֵלַי:</p>	<p>⁸ ὅτι ἐγγίζει ὁ δικαίωσάς με, τίς ὁ κρινόμενός μοι; ἀντιστήτω μοι ἅμα, καὶ τίς ὁ κρινόμενός μοι; ἐγγισάτω μοι.</p>
<p>⁷ Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.</p>	<p>⁹ הֵן אֲדַנְיָ יְהוָה יַעֲזֹר־לִי מִי־הוּא יִרְשִׁיעֵנִי הֵן כָּל־ם כִּבְּגַד יִבְלוּ עָשׂוּ יֵאָכְלִם:</p>	<p>⁹ ἰδοὺ κύριος βοηθεῖ μοι, τίς κακώσει με; ἰδοὺ πάντες ὑμεῖς ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσεσθε, καὶ ὡς σῆς καταφάγεται ὑμᾶς.</p>
<p>⁸ He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who are my accusers? Let them confront me!</p>		
<p>⁹ It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.</p>		

Two Key Terms in the Servant Songs Servant ('Ebed)

The singular forms of this term are used 25 times in Isaiah—my servant (עבְדִי) 15 times, his servant (עבְדוֹ) four times, and servant (עֶבֶד) six times. Six instances occur within the servant songs.¹⁴ Interestingly, as Hugenberger points out, עֶבְדֵימָ, עֶבְדֵי (the plural of servants) “nowhere appears before chapter 53. Starting in 54:17 it appears eleven [sic] times to the exclusion of the singular term. In each case it refers to the people of God, including converted foreigners, as in 56:6” (1995:107 [3]).

The LXX translates the Hebrew עֶבֶד with two Greek words—παῖς (cf. 42:1) and Δοῦλός (cf. 49:3)—thus reflecting the range of possible meanings, from “child/attendant” to “slave.”

The word servant (עֶבֶד) must also be rooted in its ancient Near Eastern context. In addition to connotations of being subservient, the term also at times indicated exalted status. This is evident when we realize that the equivalent Semitic term was used on stamp seals of dignitaries. Note Figure 1, for an example, of a sixth-century BCE Ammonite seal impression of Milkom'or, servant of Ba'alyiša'. The second and third lines of the inscription contain the letters 'bd—the Ammonite equivalent of servant—in the middle of the transliteration (lmlkm 'wr // 'b // d b'lyš' where the double slashes represent the line breaks) and indicate the high rank of this official serving the Ammonite king Ba'alyiša', referred to in Jeremiah 40:14 as Baalis (Herr 1989:36–374).

Nations and Related Terms

In Isaiah 42:1, where God's servant brings justice to the nations, the term used is גוֹיִם (*gōyim* [pl.]). The same designation (גוֹי *gōy* [sg.]) is used in Genesis 12:2 to refer to Abram's promised descendants, the nascent people of Israel. The term גוֹיִם was commonly used when referring to foreign nations (בְּנֵי־הַנְּכָר [ben hannekar] cf.

Isa. 56:3). Like the Greek term ἔθνος (*ethnos*) used in the LXX, גוֹיִם came to mean heathen, pagan, or Gentile, but the term had no original pejorative meaning.

Another term related to nations used in the second song (Isa. 49:1) is לְאֻמִּים (*le'ummim*) whose basic meaning is “peoples.” As with גוֹיִם, the term לְאֻמִּים likewise may apply equally to Israel as well as to other peoples. Notice how the term is used in parallel with yet another word for *nation* (עַם—'am) in Isaiah 51:4. “Listen to me, my people (לְאֻמִּי); hear me, my nation (עַמִּי): Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations (עַמִּים—'ammim).”



Figure 1: Seal Impression of Milkom'or¹⁵ (c. 600 BCE)

Reflections on the Servant Songs as they Relate to Missiology

These reflections will focus on applications to the Christian church and the witness of its members and missionaries—heirs of Isaiah's servant legacy. The applications will arise from three motifs found in the servant songs: 1) the divine Creator/Commissioner, 2) the commissioned servant/disciple, and 3) the distant nations and their destiny.

The Divine Commissioner/Creator

The songs identify the one who gives the commission as the Sovereign LORD (Isa. 50:4) who also formed His servant while still in his mother's womb (Isa. 49:5).

In the first song (Isa. 42:1), the Commissioner introduces the servant with the Hebrew term *הִנֵּה* (*hen*—look, see, behold). This same term is used in the previous verse (Isa. 41:29) as a conclusion to a section dealing with idolaters and their idols

(introduced in Isa. 41:5-7). Thus, it appears that the juxtaposition and reiteration of the term הֵן is purposely meant to draw a sharp contrast and distinction between the one speaking to His servant on the one hand and the idols and their makers on the other hand. The futility of relying on any authority for guidance other than Yahweh is described in Isaiah 41:29 as “wind (רוּחַ—*rûah*) and confusion.” In contrast, the Commissioner makes a commitment to His servant (Isa. 42:1b): “I will put my Spirit (using the same Hebrew word רוּחִי—*rûhi*) on him.” The result envisioned is the empowerment of God’s servant to bring justice to the nations.

After the introductory הֵן (*hen*), the Commissioner continues by saying, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold” (הֵן עֲבָדִי אֶתְמַדְּבֹו—*hen ’abd i etmak bô*). This use of the verb תְּמַדְּ (tamak—uphold) denotes a figurative extension of a hand, grasping and holding up an object so as not to allow it to fall or fail. It is the same word used in Isaiah 41:8-10 where God addresses His chosen servant with the following words:

⁸But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham, my friend, ⁹I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, “You are my servant”; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. ¹⁰So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; **I will uphold you** [תְּמַדְּתִיךָ—*temaktika*] with my righteous right hand (emphasis supplied).

The certainty of having received such a commission and a confidence in God’s promise to uphold him or her is vital to the success of every Christian witness and each cross-cultural missionary. What a sense of confidence arises from being identified as a descendent (literally or spiritually) of one known as God’s “friend” and finding security in being upheld by the Lord’s hand.

The Commissioned Servant/Disciple

We have noted that the status implied by the term עֲבָד (‘*ebed*) is rich and varied. Thus, while the servant’s status may rightfully be characterized as *slave, subject, worshiper*, (in fact, the term may be used in polite self-abasement), עֲבָד (‘*ebed*) also connotes an exalted status based on a calling to represent the Sovereign LORD. Note also the following characteristics of a servant/disciple.

Teachable. In the third song (Isa. 50:4), the servant's self-description declares that he has received "an instructed tongue" (לְשׁוֹן לְמוּדִים — *lešōn limmûdim*). The Hebrew adjective לְמוּד (limmûd—taught/student/pupil [cf. LXX παιδεία—*paid-eia*—discipline/instruction]), is repeated at the end of verse four where the TNIV translates it as "one being taught."¹⁶ In fact, the LXX actually substitutes the phrase "the discipline of the Lord" (ἡ παιδεία κυρίου) for the divine name in verse five as the subject that opens the servant's ears. Thus, it is clear that the servant is one who listens daily (בְּקֶרַךְ בְּבִקְרָה—*boqer babboqer*) as a disciplined apprentice. Particularly in cross-cultural mission, this willingness to become a teachable co-seeker, a pilgrim joining other pilgrims on an open quest for understanding, is vital. This teaching has poignantly been raised by Jon Dybdahl in his book *Missions: A Two-way Street* (1986).

Undaunted. A distinctive feature of the servant in Isaiah 49 is the ability to look beyond the futility of the moment to the ultimate reward. This characteristic is emphasized by its placement at the chiasmic center of the second song¹⁷ where the servant declares, "I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God" (Isa. 49:4). Herein lies a singularly powerful source of inspiration and an invaluable resource in combating the common temptation to discouragement as well as the well-known missiological phenomenon of culture shock.

The Distant Nations and Their Destiny

When the nations were introduced in the servant songs, we noted that two different terms were used (here given in their plural forms): גּוֹיִם (*gôyîm*—nations/gentiles) and לְאֻמִּים (*le'ummim*—peoples). This latter term is qualified in Isaiah 49:1 by the phrase מְרַחֵק (merahôq—distant), i.e., "distant peoples." In addition, two other terms are used in poetic parallel—אִיִּים (*'iyyim*—islands) referring to the coastal areas of the Levant and קֵצֵה הָאָרֶץ (*qetseh ha'arets*—ends of the earth). The term "ends of the earth" signifies the extent of the known world.

Common Origin. In Isaiah 41:8–10, referring to the descendents of Abraham, God says, "I took you from the ends of the earth." Then in the second servant song (Isa. 49:6) He commissions their renewed responsibility regarding the nations, saying, "I will make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Thus, before the servant is commissioned to rise as a light to

the nations at the ends of the earth, his identity is clearly marked as being from the ends of the earth. This should remind all members of Christ's body, the church (spiritual Israel), that they, by reason of their common origin, are in solidarity with all nations of the world and in no way entitled to superiority over them.

Common Destiny. Though the "nations" were once marginalized as located at the "ends of the earth," Isaiah 56:1¹⁸ envisions a day when "salvation is close at hand" and the mission expressed in the servant songs is realized in part. The salvation promised is not just to those designated by birth as "Israel" or "Jacob."¹⁹ Rather, even the foreigners who have bound themselves to the LORD (בְּנֵי-הַנֶּזֶר הַגְּלוּהָ אֶל-יְהוָה) — *ben hannekar hannilwah el YHWH* [Isa. 56:3]) are included in the promised blessing. On what basis are they included? Their commitment is expressed by a willingness to "bind themselves to the Lord," to "love the name of the LORD," and to "keep the Sabbath" (Isa. 56:6)—reminiscent of the teachable nature of the לְמוּדִים (*lim-mûdim*—disciples) of Isaiah 50:4. And most strikingly, these foreigners themselves are also now accepted by the Lord alongside Israel/Jacob as "his servants" who hold fast to God's covenant (Isa. 56:6).

Though tempted to say "The Lord will surely exclude me..." (Isa. 56:3), they are assured of a "memorial and a name" (יָד וְשֵׁם—*yad vašem*)²⁰ that God promises them within his "temple and its walls" (בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֹמֹתַי) — *bebeiti ubehômotai* [Isa. 56:5]). These foreigners are remarkably like the ones whom God describes in the second song as putting their hope in "his teaching" (תּוֹרָתוֹ—*tôrato* [Isa. 42:4]), i.e., following "his law or instruction."

Joining with the exiles of Israel, these foreigners from the distant nations now culminate the mission assigned originally to God's servant in the four songs, and together they enjoy a common destiny portrayed in the prophet's beautiful summation.

¹⁸And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—¹⁹these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations. ²⁰The Sovereign LORD declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel: "I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered" (Isa. 56:6–8).

Conclusion

The servant songs portray in poetic language a God who is anxious that justice reach to the ends of the earth. He commissions his servant (in the Mosaic and Davidic traditions) to endure suffering, to restore Israel, and to enlighten the Gentiles. After the conclusion of the servant songs, Isaiah 56, like a powerful melodic chorus, presents the foreigners with the opportunity of themselves becoming God's servants, and promises them joy as they worship in His house of prayer. God's promise still echoes down through the centuries to our time, "I will gather still others" The mission is not yet complete.

Notes

¹All references to the English text within this study are from *Today's New International Version* (2005).

²Some scholars also include Isaiah 42:5–9 in the first song.

³Some scholars also include Isaiah 49:7–11 or 49:7–13 in the second song.

⁴Some scholars also include Isaiah 50:10, 11 in the third song.

⁵The fourth song is much longer; it contains five stanzas of three verses each in chiasmic structure with the initial and final sections emphasizing exaltation and the middle stanza pointing to a substitutionary death (Hugenberger 1995:114[10—online pagination]).

⁶The servant in the first three songs is often interpreted as referring to Israel (or at least a pious minority). By contrast, in the fourth song "the reference to the Messiah is predominant and exclusive" (*Archaeological Study Bible* 2005:1145 note on 49:1–57:21).

⁷See the Jewish Publication Society's *The Jewish Study Bible* (2004:867 note).

⁸See Harrison (1969:485 note 33) for an extensive list of proponents for these various options. For the "Second Moses" hypothesis, see Hugenberger (1995).

⁹See Matthew 12:18–21 which quotes Isaiah 49:1–4 and adds the assertion that "This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah."

¹⁰Grisanti provides a comprehensive survey of this discussion; however, his views on the eschatological role of Israel differ from the author of this chapter.

¹¹*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (abbreviated as BHS).

¹²*Septuagint* (abbreviated as LXX).

¹³*Today's New International Version* (abbreviated as TNIV).

¹⁴The singular of עֶבֶד occurs eight times in the servant songs if the songs include alternate verses (see notes 1–3); the additional instances being Isaiah 49:7 and 50:10.

¹⁵Courtesy of the Madaba Plains Project and the Institute of Archaeology, Andrews University. Drawing by Peter Erhard, 1984.

¹⁶Note the related terms לָמוּד (*limmûd*—taught/disciple); תַּלְמוּד (*talmûd*—scholar); and תַּלְמוּד (*talmûd*—Talmud/instruction/teaching).

¹⁷I would suggest that this second song (Isa. 49:1–6) contains a chiastic structure with the following elements—A: call to islands and the distant nations (verse 1); A': salvation to ends of the earth (vs. 6b); B: mentioned from birth/polished arrow/splendor displayed (vs. 1b–vs. 3); B': formed in womb/gathers Israel/honored in God's eyes (vs. 5–vs. 6a); C: (center of chiasm) true reward (vs. 4).

¹⁸Isaiah 56:1–8 is not included in the corpus of traditional Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40–55). However, the content of Isaiah 56:1–8 fits well as the response of the distant nations (as envisioned by the prophet) to the theme of the first and second servant songs.

¹⁹Of interest is the fact that the LXX of Isaiah 42:1 extrapolates and uses Ἰακωβὸς ὁ παῖς μου (Jacob my servant) and Ἰσραηλ ὁ ἐκλεκτός μου (Israel my chosen) in place of the Hebrew, which has simply עַבְדִּי (my servant) and בְּחִירִי (my chosen).

²⁰Since the foreigners are mentioned in parallel with the eunuchs, I would argue that this promise of a “memorial and a name” (יָד וְשֵׁם—*yad vašem*) applies equally to both.

Chapter 4

* * *

WONDERINGS OF A SEARCHING HEART

Delcy Kuhlman

Time

My time seems driven
I rush to finish yet another task
missing the simple joy of doing it.
What is *time* to You Eternal ONE?

Wisdom

I longed for wisdom in face of a difficult life
but every attempt to wear it
felt like putting on a dress that didn't fit.
Years, tears, prayers have passed.
Moments come when I sense it
growing within.

Tears

Expected in the face of pain-
a mother yelling at her child
a loved one lost
a relationship broken.

Happily accepted in reaction to beauty–

A rainbow

A baby's smile

A couple's embrace after sharing
communion.

Amazing when they appear unbidden
in midst of a quotidian task,

A simple bursting forth of longing for YOU.

Oh God, do YOU cry over me?

Awareness

Early morning moon

bathes the silent world with beauty

catching my breath, stirring my heart

sounding call to Intimate Presence

I'm held – wooed by LOVE.

Eastern sky brightens in approaching dawn.

Moonlight fades

“Duty” calls.

Will awareness of YOU fade into the busyness of this day?

Hide and Seek

In moments of my searching

I think I have found YOU.

Yet in some unknown way I know

YOU have found me

held me.

Wonderings

Can it be that my wonderings

are a gift from YOU, my God?

Do they help me lean toward YOU?

Do they keep me humble?

Do they simply nurture the yearning in my soul?

I love YOU – I long to love YOU more.

Chapter 5

* * *

MEDITATIONS FOR MONEY CHANGERS

Ann Gibson

This series of devotionals for business men and women was inspired by Jon Dybdahl's modeling of a contemplative lifestyle in a prayer group he led at Walla Walla University back in the 1980s. The devotionals are written to encourage people to engage in personal meditation on God's characteristics that are particularly difficult for a person in business to emulate. Each devotional includes a reflective thought, a Scripture quotation, and a hymn.

Preface

About 25 years ago, Jon Dybdahl agreed to host a faculty prayer group at Walla Walla College (now Walla Walla University) at the request of one of his colleagues in the Theology Department. At that time, unbeknownst to any of my colleagues at WWC, I was struggling with many theological and spiritual questions. When I was invited to join Jon's prayer group, it seemed impossible to say "no." After all, how could a member of the faculty at a Seventh-day Adventist faith-based college refuse to pray with one's colleagues? And so I, an accounting teacher, joined a group of five men, all from various science areas, in a prayer group, which, in retrospect, must have been put together by God Himself.

One of the first questions raised by other members in the group was whether or not prayer could even be effective in today's modern world. After we discussed

and dissected that question for several weeks, Jon made a very simple suggestion. Why didn't we try prayer? Why not pray as a group—just to see if it really worked? His willingness to let those of us who doubted express our doubts without censure, while at the same time patiently bringing us to the point where we were willing to try prayer, even experimentally, was evidence of his astonishing patience.

And so the group began to pray together. Over the next 18 months amazing things happened. There were no answers to prayer that could be put on display in a “show and tell” moment in which a lost wallet was found or the car started on a dark road, but there were changed lives that demonstrate, even today, the influence of that prayer group. One of the changes that happened to me was associated with a book that Jon recommended. That book was *Space for God*—a book designed to encourage the reader to create space for God in the midst of one's busy, hectic life, and through the creation of such space, to encounter God in a real and meaningful way.

Space for God contains meditative thoughts and quotes, along with suggested exercises designed to be used for devotional purposes. This paper is written in that same style, with meditative thoughts and quotes (but no exercises). Each meditation is offered in two sections. The first section, “Thoughts for Contemplation,” includes my reflections, as well as quotations from my favorite authors on the topic under contemplation. The second section, “Meditations for Response,” is composed of selected Scripture passages and at least one hymn. It is hoped that while reading the selected Scriptures and hymn(s), the reader may recall personal memories from the Scripture passages and “hear” the music the hymn invokes.

These meditations seek to meet the spiritual needs of business managers, accountants, and other financial experts who may struggle with how to exhibit God-like qualities in a work-world that may demand competitiveness, self-centeredness, sharp-dealing to get ahead, and at times, actions that may appear almost dishonest. The paper is also offered with grateful thanks to Jon, who exhibited in his own life space for God and space for those who followed him, even distantly, in his spiritual journey.

Introduction

Individuals who work with money are often perceived as engaging in such secular activities that it is almost impossible for them to be spiritually discerning people, except perhaps when worshiping in church. In a recent study by Nash and McLennan (2001:10) the clergy surveyed indicated that they assumed “that busi-

ness people were simply too greedy or indifferent to care about real spiritual issues.” Money has such power and fascination that it can capture a person so completely that it may seem as if the only solution is to “cast it out,” as Jesus cast out the money changers and others who made a profit from buying and selling animals for sacrifices in the temple (see Matt. 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-47; and John 2:13-16). “Meditations for Money Changers” recognizes that both historically and presently, money changers have an undesirable reputation. Today, particularly in Asia, when one goes to the money changer, one is inclined to check the exchange rates at a number of stalls or booths, just to be sure that one is not being cheated by those who deal with money.

But in fact, we are all money changers. We all exchange money for goods and services that we believe have a greater value than the money we initially hold. Unfortunately, the historical shadow still falls on those who deal with our exchanges—even when we perceive that we have gotten a fair deal. While there is no evidence that one of Jesus’ disciples was a money changer, we know that one was a tax collector—another profession that is not historically held in high regard.

But the profession does not define the person, nor does the activity require that the one who performs it be of a shady character or work in a unseemly manner. It is quite possible that just as following Jesus transformed the lives of James and John, initially called the “Sons of Thunder,” following Jesus may allow those who deal with money to reflect the characteristics of God as well as is humanly possible.

Richard Foster calls for us to take a vow that will bring money into subjection to the will of God, thus making it possible to use money without serving money (Foster 1985:7). Is this possible? Whether within one’s profession or as a human being living in today’s society, can a money changer, a business person, mirror the characteristics of God while still engaging in the activities of a money changer? Can one mirror God and handle money?

In this paper, I propose that one way to achieve what appears to be impossible is to meditate on some of the characteristics of God that are described in Scripture, and to consider what money exchanges might look like if they were enacted in harmony with these characteristics. While Scripture describes many of God’s characteristics, I have chosen to focus on five that are particularly difficult for people in business, money changers, to value, given the competitive, hard-driving environment in which they daily work. In particular, what might money changers do if their actions were driven by gratitude, generosity, justice, compassion, and contentment?

Gratitude Thoughts for Contemplation

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When he saw them he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well” (Luke 17:11-17).¹

To view life and money with gratitude is to recognize that all comes from God as a gift to us because of His goodness and mercy. The God described in Genesis 1 and 2 is a lavish God who creates with abandon and then pronounces what He has created as good and proceeds to give it to the humans He has created! Jesus described this lavish God as one who “causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Matt. 5:45). Jesus acted out this lavish gift-giving when he healed the ten lepers who could only stand at a distance and call to Him in a loud voice. He graciously healed them all. But only one expressed gratitude for what had been gifted to him. Only one returned to thank Jesus. Jesus noted both the gratitude of the one and the ingratitude of the other nine.

The story seems to imply a moment of disappointment for Jesus. He has given these men new life, and yet only one is grateful. Through creation, we have everything, including life itself, self-worth (as sons and daughters of God), a beautiful world in which to live, food, air, numerous resources, creativity, imagination, fellowship with others. Have we expressed gratitude for all that makes life both available and worthwhile?

But money changers don’t express gratitude. They have earned what they have because of their hard work, their talents, their smarts, their connections, their networking. Often those engaged in business work in environments where rich resources and talented people are expected to be available. If these necessary resources are not available, they can be purchased at a price. When such resources are expected to be present, they are often unappreciated, and sometimes even unnoticed.

But when the money changer remembers that all things come from God—one's talents, ability to work, connections, even one's life—such blessings should not be expected as if the individual has the right of ownership for whatever is required to be successful. All that one has is a gift from the original Giver. The Giver should be thanked.

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) was born in the Netherlands, where he was ordained to the priesthood and earned his doctorate in psychology. He taught at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard in addition to authoring, on average, more than a book a year, writing 40 books on spiritual life during his lifetime. He also traveled widely as a conference speaker. However, as Philip Yancey stated when writing shortly after Nouwen's death, "He had a resume to die for—which was the problem exactly. The pressing schedule and relentless competition were suffocating his own spiritual life" (Yancey 1996:80).

Seeking to recover his spiritual life, Nouwen went to South America for six months as a missionary. He wrote about his mission to Peru and Bolivia in his book entitled *Gracias!* In that book he noted:

The word that I kept hearing, wherever I went, was *Gracias!* It sounded like a refrain from a long ballad of events. *Gracias a usted, gracias a Dios, muchas gracias*—thank you, thanks be to God, many thanks! I saw thousands of poor and hungry children, I met many young men and women without money, a job, or a decent place to live. I spent long hours with sick, elderly people, and I witnessed more misery and pain than ever before in my life. But, in the midst of it all, that word lifted me again and again to a new realm of seeing was hearing: "*Gracias! Thanks!*"

In many of the families I visited nothing was certain, nothing predictable, nothing totally safe. Maybe there would be food tomorrow, maybe there would be work tomorrow, maybe there would be peace tomorrow. Maybe, maybe not. But whatever is given—money, food, work, a handshake, a smile, a good word, or an embrace—is a reason to rejoice and say *gracias*. What I claim as a right, my friends in Bolivia and Peru received as a gift . . .

And slowly I learned. I learned what I must have forgotten somewhere in my busy, well-planned, and very "useful" life. I learned that everything that is, is freely given by the God of love. All is grace. Light and water, shelter and food, work and free time, children, parents and grandparents, birth and death—it is all given to us. Why? So that we can say *gracias*, thanks: thanks to God, thanks to each other, thanks to all and everyone (Nouwen 1983:187).

G. K. Chesterton expressed this same truth (Stott 2007:43):

You say grace before meals.
All right.
But I say grace before the play and the opera,
And grace before the concert and pantomime,
And grace before I open a book,
And grace before sketching, painting,
Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.

Meditations for Response

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before him with thanksgiving
and extol him with music and song.
For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth,
and the mountain peaks belong to him.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands formed the dry land.
Come, let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.

(Ps. 95:1-7)

Be joyful always; pray continually;
give thanks in all circumstances,
for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

(1 Thess. 5:18)

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever!”
(Rev. 5:11-13)

Now Thank We All Our God

Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done, in whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mothers' arms hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God, the Father, now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns with them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart (1636)
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #559

Generosity Thoughts for Contemplation

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12-14).

Generosity never makes economic sense. There is certainly no social advantage for the one who does what Jesus urged in Luke’s story. It seems like a waste of time and resources to offer one’s banquet best to those who cannot return the favor, let alone the honor.

We can think of more biblical examples of generosity that seem so wasteful. Think of Mary, pouring expensive perfume, worth a year’s wages, over Jesus’ feet (John 12:3-5). Think of the widow, giving all she had to the temple coffers, even while knowing that the temple was famous for its corruption (Luke 21:1-4). Think of Abraham, a rich man as God had promised (Gen. 13:2), offering his nephew Lot the first choice of the land when the uncle and the nephew separated (Gen. 13:8, 9), even though Lot, as the younger one, should have deferred to his uncle.

Jesus is even more blunt in Luke 6. He suggests, “Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back” (verse 30). “Lend to [your enemies] without expecting to get anything back” (verse 35).

Jesus told a story in Matthew 20:1-16 about a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers, promising to pay those he hired a denarius for their services. He returned to the employment office later in the day and hired more workers, promising them “whatever is right.” He returned twice more at three-hour intervals, hiring more workers. And finally, he went late in the day, found more workers, and sent them into his vineyards. When the day ended and it was time to pay the workers their wages, all who had been employed received a denarius. Those who were hired at the beginning of the day complained about the landowner’s equal treatment of those employed later in the day. The landowner responded: “Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (Matt. 20:13-15).

In commenting on this story, Philip Yancey notes:

Significantly, many Christians who study this parable identify with the employees who put in a full day's work, rather than the add-ons at the end of the day. We like to think of ourselves as responsible workers, and the employer's strange behavior baffles us as it did the original hearers. We risk missing the story's point: that God dispenses gifts, not wages. None of us gets paid according to merit, for none of us comes close to satisfying God's requirement for a perfect life. If paid on the basis of fairness, we would all end up in hell (1997:61, 62).

Money changers may be generous and give to "make friends" and "have influence" or to be praised in the marketplace. Sometimes it is seen as a business necessity so that they can later brag about their own good works. Sometimes what appears to be generous behavior is really designed to control the receiver of the gift. To make the recipient of a business "gift" obligated to the giver is an old business tool. Favor for favor is the rule of the marketplace and repayment can be extracted in monetary terms, certainly, but also through more intangible means and methods.

But when the money changer seeks to mirror God, he/she recognizes that God gives as an expression of His love and His character. It is generosity expressed because of Who He is. God gives—not to control, but to bless. God has given us everything for our enjoyment. But His generous provisions are not limited to only a certain few. They are made available to all and they are given so that we might share. They are never given so that we might hoard God's rich gifts for ourselves alone.

Paul argued that everyone must work so that they "may have something to share with those in need" (Eph. 4:28). In commenting on this text, C. S. Lewis stated:

I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them . . . (But) for many of us the great obstacle to charity lies not in our luxurious living or desire for more money, but in our fear—fear of insecurity (1971:77, 78).

Paul directly addresses this fear in 1 Timothy 6:17, where he speaks to those who are rich. Paul urges them not to “put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” Our wealth is to be shared because our trust is in God—not in our riches.

But beware! Our human generosity may not always be blessed by God. Richard Foster reminds us that:

We may take money and use it to help people, but if it has within it the demon seed of greed, we will put people into our debt in ruinous ways. And when greed is tied to giving, it is particularly destructive because it appears to be good, so much like an angel of light. When we give out of a spirit of greed, an all-pervasive attitude of paternalism poisons the entire enterprise. When greed motivates our giving, we are still trying to profit from the transaction. That is why the apostle Paul says that we can give away everything but if we lack love we “gain nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3) (1985:13, 14).

Meditations for Response

I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.
They are always generous and lend freely;
their children will be blessed. (Ps. 37:25, 26)

Good will come to him who is generous and lends freely,
who conducts his affairs with justice.
Surely he will never be shaken;
a righteous man will be remembered forever.
He will have no fear of bad news;
his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord
His heart is secure, he will have no fear;
in the end he will look in triumph on his foes.
He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor,
his righteousness endures forever;
his horn will be lifted high in honor. (Ps. 112:5-9)

Give, and it will be given to you.
A good measure, pressed down,
shaken together and running over,
will be poured into your lap.
For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
(Luke 6:38)

Let Your Heart Be Broken

Let your heart be broken for a world in need;
Feed the mouths that hunger, soothe the wounds that bleed,
Give the cup of water and the loaf of bread—
Be the hands of Jesus, serving in His stead.

Here on earth applying principles of love,
Visible expression—God still rules above—
Living illustration of the Living Word
To the minds of all who've never seen or heard.

Blest to be a blessing, privileged to care,
Challenged by the need—apparent everywhere.
Where mankind is wanting, fill the vacant place.
Be the means through which the Lord reveals His grace.

Add to your believing deeds that prove it true,
Knowing Christ as Savior, make Him Master, too
Follow in His footsteps, go where He has trod;
In the world's great trouble, risk yourself for God.

Let your heart be tender and your vision clear;
See mankind as God sees, serve Him far and near.
Let your heart be broken by a brother's pain;
Share your rich resources, give and give again.

Bryan Jeffery Leech (1975)
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #575

Justice Thoughts for Contemplation

Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, “Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.” Then the one inside answers, “Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.” I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs

Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Luke 11:5-13).

Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
or the strong man boast of his strength
or the rich man boast of his riches,
but let him who boasts boast about this:
That he understands and knows me,
that I am the Lord who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on the earth,
for in these things I delight, declares the Lord (Jer. 9:23, 24).

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

Money changers understand justice. Justice (*mispat* in Hebrew) is respect for law and order that must reign in an orderly society. Business people understand this quality of justice—the need to protect the rights of all and to decide issues in terms of the law. God manifests *mispat* when He punishes the wicked. What does the law require? That is the money changer’s natural answer to questions of justice.

But when Jeremiah described God, he stated that God exercises justice *and* righteousness (Jer. 9:23, 24). Coupling justice with righteousness is not a common money changer response to situations requiring justice. But it is God’s response.

Coupling justice with righteousness (*tsedeqah* in Hebrew) demonstrates that God is not only concerned with everyone enjoying the rights that strict justice or

the law recognizes, but also the rights that are not granted. These are the rights of the weak, the poor, the widows, the orphans, whose voices are not heard in legislative assemblies or even courts of justice. These people often live beyond the protection of the laws designed to shield the advantages of the rich and powerful. *Tsedeqah* is the quality of those who empathize with the weak of society.

Job describes this coupling when he “put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban” as he sat at the city gate:

Whoever heard me spoke well of me
and those who saw me commended me,
because I rescued the poor who cried for help,
and the fatherless who had none to assist him.
The man who was dying blessed me;
I made the widow’s heart sing. . . .
I was eyes to the blind
and feet to the lame.
I was a father to the needy;
I took up the case of the stranger.
I broke the fangs of the wicked
and snatched the victims from their teeth.

(Job 29:7-17)

What actions might money changers undertake if they sought to make those who come in contact with them “sing for joy” (Job 29:13 KJV)? What changes in business practices are needed to ensure that justice is coupled with righteousness in the marketplace of the 21st century? How does a business person of today mirror Job’s description of his clothing being bound up with righteousness and justice as he or she sits at their cherry desks in their skyscraper executive suites at the top of a building in one of the major cities of the world? Does Scripture shed light on how to emulate Job today?

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Administer true justice;
show mercy and compassion to one another.
Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor.
In your hearts do not think evil of each other.

(Zech. 7:9, 10)

The Lord executes justice for the fatherless and the widow,
and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.

(Deut. 10:18)

Do not have two differing weights in your bag—
one heavy, one light. Do not have two differing
measures in your house—one large, one small.
You must have accurate and honest weights
and measures, so that you may live long in the land
the Lord your God is giving you.
For the Lord your God detests anyone
who does these things, anyone who deals dishonestly.

(Deut. 25:13-16)

The righteous hate what is false,
but the wicked bring shame and disgrace.
Righteousness guards the man of integrity,
but wickedness overthrows the sinner.

(Prov. 13:5, 6)

The righteous care about justice for the poor,
but the wicked have no such concern.

(Prov. 29:7)

The texts above insist that justice and righteousness must dominate the life of the believer, and that justice requires an openness to care economically for those who cannot demand their own way in society. But I would suggest that affirming human value above economic value also requires an understanding of our role individually before God in work-related matters.

God created humans, placed them in the Garden of Eden, and instructed them to work the Garden as representatives of God and to act as stewards over God's creation. Also at creation, mankind was given the Sabbath. Through this gift of holy time, mankind was taught that they were to dominate their work, not be ruled by it. One's attitude toward work must be such that it can be interrupted for a totally different and indispensable experience—the experience of communion with God, the experience of worship. It must also be interrupted for communion with others—to

strengthen one's relationships with those whom God has brought into our lives, thus inviting us to care for them as we care for ourselves (1 Tim. 5:8).

The Sabbath is the concrete expression of Jesus' statement: Man cannot live by bread alone (Matt. 4:4). The Sabbath condemns work-a-holism. No one can be totally obsessed with his or her work and live. Even the most successful person will eventually wither away if he or she spends all their existence on the horizontal level. To work according to God's will, to bring justice and compassion to the marketplace, one must inject the vertical dimension into one's life. The labor of the week must lead to the joyfulness of the Sabbath. Only then can the money changer have the power to follow God's pattern and couple justice and righteousness (*mispāt* and *tsedeqah*) when dealing with others.

Included in the meditations below is a Sabbath hymn, "The Sun Rolls Down," which was sung every Friday night at the beginning of sundown vespers at Atlantic Union College in South Lancaster, Massachusetts, where I was raised. For me this hymn speaks of the joy of the coming Sabbath.

Meditations for Response

For the Lord is righteous,
he loves justice;
upright men will see his face.

(Ps. 11:7)

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe him
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will call for help, and he will say: Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.
The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.
You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

(Isa. 58:6-11)

For I, the Lord, love justice;
I hate robbery and iniquity.
In my faithfulness I will reward them
and make an everlasting covenant with them.
Their descendants will be known among the nations
and their offspring among the peoples.
All who see them will acknowledge
that they are a people the Lord has blessed.

(Isa. 61:8)

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness
and who seek the Lord;
Listen to me, my people;
hear me, my nation:
The law will go out from me;
my justice will become a light to the nations.
My righteousness draws near speedily,
my salvation is on the way,
and my arm will bring justice to the nations.
The ransomed of the Lord will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads,
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

(Selections from Isa. 51)

The Sun Rolls Down

The sun rolls down the distant west,
Soft twilight steals abroad
To welcome in the day of rest,
The Sabbath of the Lord.

This holy day let us begin
With songs of praise to God,
Who pardons all our guilt and sin,
Through Jesus' precious blood.

Anonymous
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal (1941 edition) #59

Be Thou My Vision

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me save that Thou art,
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, be Thou my true word;
I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise;
Thou my inheritance, now and always;
Thou and Thou only, be first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, when vict'ry is won
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall
Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Eighth Century, Irish
Translated by Mary Byrne (1905)
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #547

Compassion Thoughts for Contemplation

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men."

So he got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick, Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:11-24).

Money changers understand compassion. They may even practice compassion at times, but when they do, they usually practice it in terms of helping someone they see in trouble. In their book, *Compassion*, Nouwen, McNeill, and Morrison describe this common view of compassion:

[We seek to show compassion by being] kind and gentle to those who get hurt by competition. A miner who gets caught underground evokes compassion; a student who breaks down under the pressure of exams evokes compassion; a mother on welfare who does not have enough food and clothes for her children evokes compassion; an elderly woman who is dying alone in the anonymity of a big city evokes compassion. But our primary frame of reference remains competition. After all, we need coal and intellectuals, and all systems have their shortcomings! (1982:7).

But in Exodus, God described His character to Moses as one of compassion and graciousness. “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, ‘The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin’”(Exod. 34:6, 7).

The word compassion is translated from the Hebrew word, *rachum*: the womb, the seat of feelings. It reveals God’s capacity to empathize with the sufferings of others. It is the spirit of Jesus, weeping over the fate of doomed Jerusalem, or His feeling of compassion for the multitude that had not eaten for a whole day (Matt. 14:13-21).

The (English) word *compassion* is derived from the Latin words *pati* and *cum*, which together mean “to suffer with.” Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human (Nouwen, McNeill, & Morrison 1982:4).

God paired compassion and graciousness when He described himself to Moses. The Hebrew word for gracious is *chanun*, which portrays God as seeking to help those in need. It is the spirit that drove the father of the prodigal son to run to meet his son who was coming home.

But the compassion that God asks us to demonstrate is not compassion based solely on a desire to help those who suffer, although certainly helping those who experience the rough edges of business competition is a worthy cause. If we seek to reflect the compassion of God through our actions, we must remember that God calls himself Immanuel—God with us (Matt. 1:23). We must be willing to become one with those whose place in society means they have no power to speak for themselves. God showed us the ultimate meaning of compassion by becoming human and living life on this earth. “By calling him Immanuel, we recognize that he has committed himself to live in solidarity with us, to share our joys and pains, to defend and protect us, and to suffer all of life with us” (Nouwen, McNeill, & Morrison, 1982:15).

Meditations for Response

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God....
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,
who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:1, 14)

Praise the Lord, O my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagles.
(Ps. 103:1-5)

As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
As for man, his days are like grass,
he flourishes like a flower of the field;
the wind blows over it and it is gone,
and its place remembers it no more.
But from everlasting to everlasting
the Lord's love is with those who fear him,
and his righteousness with their children's children—
with those who keep his covenant
and remember to obey his precepts.
(Ps. 103:13-18)

He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does the Lord require of you?
To act justly (*mishpat*) and to love mercy (*hesed*)
and to walk humbly with your God.

(Micah 6:8)

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

Refrain:

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided,
Great is Thy faithfulness! Lord unto me!

Thomas O. Chisholm (1923)
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #100

Contentment Thoughts for Contemplation

The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops." Then he said, "This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God

Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?"

Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! Seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

(Luke 12:16-34)

Money changers see contentment as "having enough"—which is actually impossible to determine, as evidenced by the parable of the foolish rich man who tore down his barns to make way for bigger barns to hold all his wealth. But the world in which the money changer lives deals with the currencies of competition and power, and both are framed in the context of the quantity of goods and the money that one holds. However, Jesus insisted that we cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13) because He understood the power that money has over us. It wins our hearts and our allegiance—the very things that we owe to God. In the parable of the sower, Jesus described the seed that fell among the thorns as "the

man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful” (Matt. 13:22). Thus Jesus urges His disciples not to worry about the things that money can buy—food, clothes, homes. Instead He urges total reliance on God, for where our treasure is, our heart will be. God measures contentment in terms of trust.

Trusting God does not mean that we or God are unaware of our physical needs. When the Israelites were hungry God sent “thin flakes like frost,” which Moses explained was the bread that God had sent to them for food. The Israelites were told to gather as much of this manna as was needed—sufficient for the number of people in their tent. But they were also told not to hoard the manna. They were not to keep any of it until morning (Ex. 16:14-19).

However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell On the sixth day they gathered twice as much—two omers for each person—and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, “This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.”

(Ex. 16:20-23)

We know the story. Over Sabbath the manna did not spoil, as it did on other days, because no manna fell from heaven on Sabbath. Thus the people were reminded weekly not to hoard more than they needed, but to trust God for all that they needed, every day.

Perhaps the greatest biblical injunction to contentment are God’s commands regarding the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25), which provided for slaves to be freed, debts cancelled, and the land restored to the original owner every 50 years. Such a plan flies directly in the face of defining contentment in terms of “having enough.” Through this plan, God gave the poor a new beginning and reminded the wealthy that their trust was to be in God, not in their wealth. It was also a forced reminder that we should be generous, not hoarding what we have for ourselves, for all things really belong to God, the most generous giver of all, and one in whom we can find the fullest contentment.

Paul says it best in Hebrews 13:5, 6: “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said: Never will I leave you; Never will I forsake you.”

Meditations for Response

Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.
The Sovereign Lord is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to go on the heights.

(Hab. 3:17-19)

I am not saying this because I am in need,
for I have learned to be content
whatever the circumstances.
I know what it is to be in need
and I know what it is to have plenty.
I have learned the secret of being content
in any and every situation, whether
well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.
I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

(Phil. 4:11-13)

But godliness with contentment is great gain.
For we brought nothing into the world,
and we can take nothing out of it.
But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.
People who want to get rich fall into temptation
and a trap and into many foolish
and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.
For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.
Some people, eager for money,
have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

(1 Tim. 6:6-10)

It Is Well With My Soul

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll—
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

My sin—O the joy of this glorious thought—
My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.

And, Lord, haste the day, when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll:
The trump shall re-sound and the Lord shall descend,
“Even so” it is well with my soul.

Horatio G. Spafford (1876)
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #530

Like A River Glorious

Like a river glorious is God’s perfect peace,
Over all victorious in its bright increase;
Perfect, yet it floweth, fuller every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth deeper all the way.

Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.

Every joy or testing comes from God above,
Given to His children as an act of love;
We may trust Him fully all for us to do—
Those who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.

Refrain:

Trusting in Jehovah, hearts are fully blest—
Finding, as He promised, perfect peace and rest.

Frances R. Havergal (1836-1879)
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #74

O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee

Oh Master, let me walk with thee
In lowly paths of service free.
Tell me Thy secret, help me bear
The strain of toil, the fret of care.

Help me the slow of heart to move
By some clear winning word of love;
Teach me the wayward feet to stay,
And guide them in the homeward way.

Teach me thy patience; still with Thee
In closer, dearer company,
In work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
In trust that triumphs over wrong.

In hope that sends a shining ray
Far down the future's broadening way;
In peace that only Thou canst give,
With Thee, O Master, let me live.

Washington Gladden (1879)
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #574

Notes

¹All Scripture quotations (unless noted otherwise) are from the *New International Version Study Bible* (1985).

Chapter 6

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LIVING WITH A PASSION FOR THE PRESENCE OF GOD: A CALL FOR AUTHENTIC BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

S. Joseph Kidder

This paper proposes a biblical model of spirituality based on the life of the early church recorded in Acts 2:42-47. There are five major components to this model. First, Jesus Christ is the center. Second, this life must be empowered and energized by the Holy Spirit. Third, the growth of the Christian life is driven by consistent practice of the spiritual disciplines. Fourth, this life is lived in balanced relationships with God and with others. And finally, this life is lived in the context of community and love.

Introduction

What is spirituality? What does a spiritual person look like? What do we need to do to be spiritual or more spiritual? What do we do in order to grow spiritually? Is there a biblical model of spirituality? What are the components of this model?

Spirituality is a hot topic in the Christian community today (Mulholland 2000:9). People have a profound interest in and curiosity about spirituality and the deep mysteries of God. Bookstores devote several sections to books on subjects related to spirituality. People are seeking God. People are hungry for God. What is more, God is actively seeking each one of us. And God is unwilling to let us be

satisfied with less than the true life for which we were made. Christian spiritual formation is the overall process by which people seek God, come to know God in Christ, develop and mature as disciples of Jesus, and live expanding lives of love and service in the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet as I survey the literature, though I see many definitions of spirituality and discussion of its various aspects, there are hardly any models that I can see, understand, and grasp—or that we are able to implement in our lives. The aim of this chapter is to propose a biblical model based on the life of the early church as recorded in Acts 2:42-47. First I will demonstrate the qualifications of Acts 2:42-47 as the basis for such a model. Then I will explore lessons on spirituality drawn from this text. Finally, I will construct a model of Christian spirituality based on this text and the lessons drawn from it.

There are five major components to this model of spirituality. First, Jesus Christ is at the center. Second, this life must be empowered and energized by the Holy Spirit. Third, the growth of the Christian life is driven by consistent practice of the spiritual disciplines. Fourth, this life is lived in balanced relationships with God, with others, with self, and with time and resources for the glory of God. And finally, this life is lived in the context of community and love. At its core and heart, spiritual life is a partnership with God, lived to honor Him and make a difference in the world.

Life in community is the primary context for our spiritual growth, the expression of the body of Christ. Within this community, people experience spiritual growth by nurturing personal attentiveness to God and encouraging spiritual companionship in relationship with others, based on love and common purpose and cause. This model is balanced in its various aspects of relationship with God and relationship with others. It is balanced in connecting with God in the disciplines and living a holy and attractive life in the world. This life is radical and revolutionary, marked and stamped by the character of Christ and His power.

I will start by expelling popular myths about spiritual formation, and then develop the biblical model from the book of Acts about how a spiritual person looks like.

Myths and Misconceptions

Before the process of building a new model of spirituality, we must take the time to deconstruct our misconceptions, the shadowy ideas about spirituality that we rarely articulate but unknowingly accept. Here are some common myths about spirituality:

The goodness myth: if you are good, you are spiritual.

The knowledge myth: if you know your Bible, you are spiritual.

The church attendance myth: if you go to church, you are spiritual.

The church leader myth: if you are a church leader, you are spiritual.

The soul winner myth: if you win converts to the faith, you are spiritual.

The lifestyle myth: if you have a careful lifestyle, you are spiritual.

The poverty myth: if you are poor, you are spiritual.

The giving myth: if you are financially generous, you are spiritual.

The prayer myth: if you pray eloquently, you are spiritual.

None of these statements are trustworthy indicators of spirituality, because spirituality is more about the *being* than the *doing*. It includes behavior, but it is much larger than that. Spirituality is not morality; it is not good or pious behavior or sinless perfection. Humanitarian people may do these things, but that does not necessarily make them spiritual. Spiritual people live to obey God and show their love for Him in their holy living, but this kind of life is the product of living in a state of love and worship to God—something beyond mere good behavior.

Spirituality is not doctrinal purity or biblical knowledge or spiritual disciplines. Having a vast biblical knowledge is not what makes a person spiritual; the devil knows a lot about the Bible. Many people that I have known over the years were very knowledgeable about the Bible, but they were difficult to live with and showed very little of the Spirit of God in them.

Spirituality is not church membership or position in the church. Holding a membership in a church or even being a leader in the church does not mean you are spiritual; the membership of Ananias and Sapphira did not save them when their connection with Christ was severed (Acts 5:1–12). Many of us have had the unfortunate experience of meeting church members and leaders who were completely void of true spirituality.

Spirituality is not lifestyle—diet, dress, or exercise. Dress code and diet are not the substance of Christian spirituality, nor can spirituality be equated with an interest in healthy living. Many, many secular people today are interested in these things, but they are not spiritual. In the powerful words of Romans 14:17, Paul tells us that “the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (NIV).

Spirituality is not the ability to perform signs and wonders and miracles or to speak in tongues. We have examples in the Bible of people who performed miracles but were not spiritual or even Christian. The magicians of Egypt performed mira-

cles at the command of Pharaoh (Ex. 7:10, 11, 22; 8:6, 7), and Simon the magician performed many miracles in the name of profit (Acts 8:9–11, 19).

Spirituality is not temperament or friendliness or kindness or sternness or gloominess or seriousness or sincerity. Being nice does not mean the individual is spiritual, nor does being kind or having a stern face or being sincere. History has been host to many that did much evil in the world because of misplaced zeal.

Spirituality is not marital status, parental status, or age, or gender, or race. Neither gender is more spiritual than the other. Being single like Paul or married like Peter cannot make you spiritual. Being young like Timothy or old like Abraham cannot produce a spiritual life. You could be any of the above and still not be spiritual. A spiritual person may be of any age or be of either gender, and a person of any status may still not be spiritual or belong to God.

Being spiritual is about the condition of a heart that is fully devoted to God. Spirituality is about being connected with God and aware of His presence continually; being guided, led, empowered and energized by the Holy Spirit; and constantly striving to please, serve, and glorify Jesus Christ. We see all these ingredients present in the model highlighted in Acts 2. We now turn to the book of Acts to examine a holistic model of spirituality that is centered in Jesus and directed and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The Early Church as a Picture of Spiritual Life

In the literature there are many good definitions of spirituality, but unfortunately there is hardly any development of a compelling biblical, practical, and holistic model of spirituality. It is the aim of this paper to develop such a model from the practices of the early New Testament church as recorded in the book of Acts, particularly Acts 2:42-47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (NIV).

The life, passion, and devotion of the New Testament church are powerful il-

illustrations of how each one of us should live as fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. This example recommends itself as the basis of a model of spirituality for the following reasons:

It Is Scriptural

Any attempt to develop a model of spirituality must be biblically sound and have the practical elements that would make it useful for others to live by. In vivid detail, Acts 2 gives us an image of Christian living—an example endorsed by the inspired word of God and one based not on conjecture but on a historical reality. Furthermore, this Acts 2 life made an enormous impact on the world, and it supported the astonishing growth of the Christian community in its first years. Thus the Acts 2 spirituality is validated by its positive inclusion in the Bible and by its magnificent effectiveness as a witness to the world. Finally, this picture in Acts 2 has reflections of Jesus' own practices as recorded in the Gospels, from studying the Bible to prayer to ministry to evangelism—these were spiritual practices centered in Jesus' example of connectedness with the Father.

It Is Holy Spirit-directed and -empowered

The early church was born out of a radical transformation that took place after the Holy Spirit descended upon them. It was when they “were filled with the Holy Spirit” that the unremarkable disciples began to preach “as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). Furthermore, those that responded to this proclaimed Gospel received “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Any model of Christian spirituality must account for the Spirit of Christ who, as demonstrated in Acts 2, is the source of direction and power for holy living (Bontrager and Showalter 1986:20, 21).

It Is Holistic

The picture of the church that we have in the book of Acts speaks to a holistic spirituality addressing the totality of the experience of the believer. Any model of spirituality must be holistic because spirituality is about the whole of life and the whole person. Just as sinfulness touches every aspect of our person, so does positive spiritual living. Spirituality is never about going to church once or twice a week or reading the Bible occasionally or praying from time to time. It permeates everything we do and say and think. It is what defines us and sets us apart.

These early Christians lived their lives in the context of the will of God and according to His ideals, core values, purpose, and worldview. They studied the Bible daily, and they lived a life of connectedness with God with intimacy and joy. Spirituality affected their perspective on life, giving, ministry, and evangelism. They performed miracles and made a lasting impact on the world.

It Connects the Individual Experience with the Corporate Life

As part of the holistic and balanced portrait of spirituality we find in Acts 2 is a powerful description of the connection between the individual believer's experience and the corporate Christian life. In this holistic model we see that the believers had a powerful connection with God and also a strong and intentional bond with fellow believers and with their community, neighbors, and associates. Their lives were so desirable that they held the favor of all the people and "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42).

If our spirituality is singly focused on a relationship with God we become monks. Yet if our attention is only on our human relationships we become social workers. True and authentic spirituality nurtures a vertical relationship with God and horizontal relationships with others. Jesus admonishes us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all soul and with your entire mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30, 31).

Dallas Willard reminds us that spiritual growth and our desire to become like Jesus "never occurs without intense and well-informed action on our part. This [action] in turn cannot be reliably sustained outside of a like-minded fellowship [church]" (Willard 1994:225).

It Connects with our Imagination and our Practical Experience

Finally, it is helpful for the present endeavor that Acts 2 is accessible—we can see it and be inspired to live it. It is easy to understand since many components are present in one place. In the Acts 2 church we see their passion for God and their devotion to His cause. We are inspired by their love for Him and their experience of His power and grace.

I have shared the experience of the early church with thousands of people all over the world. As I start my presentations, I often ask the people to describe to me their dream church, and almost always they describe to me the church in the book of Acts. God has created us with the desire to live this wonderful life that is described in His Word. He created us to live for His glory in the context of community and service; we all long for joy and power, and that is what we have here.

Acts 2 not only captures our holy imagination, but it also speaks intelligently to the issue of practical application. Illustrated in Acts 2 is true Christian commitment, a resolution to live wholeheartedly for God and the reorientation of the life to get close to Him by the practice of the spiritual disciplines. In this passage we find the highest concentration of the spiritual disciplines anywhere in Scripture. There are at least 14 disciplines mentioned in the brief passage of Acts 2:42-47, listed below.

Prayer	Unity
Bible Study	Joy
Fellowship	Worship
Praise	Giving
Church Attendance	Obedience
Ministry	Simplicity
Evangelism	The Lord's Supper

The Lessons We Learn

The church was born out of personal responses to Peter's sermonic appeal to put Jesus as Christ, Savior, and Lord, and out of an empowerment by the Holy Spirit to live holy lives. "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38). Of course, everything in Acts up to this point has laid the foundation for the centrality of Christ and the empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit. There are ten lessons to be learned from this picture of spirituality of the New Testament church.

The Early Christians Were Committed to Live for Jesus

These first believers had an intense passion for God. Their souls were preoccupied with God, His Kingdom, His purpose, His creation, His people, and His vision for the world. Out of love for Him they traveled the world to tell people about Him. Acts 2 records their commitment to learn more about Jesus through study, to be connected to Him through prayer, and to tell the world about Him through evangelism and ministry. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). What comes after chapter 2 tells of their unwavering commitment to live or die for Jesus. This radical devotion manifested itself in their religious observance, but also in their time, their living, and their giving (Kistemaker 1995:110-116).

This Life of Spirituality Can be Achieved Only by the Power of the Holy Spirit

The vibrant church we read about in the book of Acts is a far cry from the rag-tag band of disciples we find in the Gospels. In the last week of the life of Christ it seemed that everything that Jesus did had failed, and failed miserably. By Thursday and Friday of that week, one of the disciples had denied Jesus, others had abandoned Him, and some had even run away from Him (Mark 14:50–52; Luke 22:54–60). But this same group of people later turned the world upside down by their witness and boldness. This transformational difference that changed the disciples was not due to some seminar they took in leadership or evangelism or some sort of self-improvement course; it was due to the presence of the transformational power of the Holy Spirit. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8).

Ellen G. White explains this incredible change that the Holy Spirit produces in the individual. “The Christian’s life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit” (White 1940:172). The Scriptures testify, too, that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God” (2 Cor. 5:17, 18a).

The Holy Spirit gave the church the power to live in the kingdom of God while they were still here on this earth. They had a taste of eternity in their hearts. In the same manner, God’s grace will move upon us as it did on the early church and

enable us to live the life of Jesus with effectiveness and grace. The greatest need of the church today is not more programs or techniques or books or seminars; the greatest need of the church today is to be filled, guided, moved, and controlled by the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament Church Was Committed to the Disciplines of the Christian Life

Christian disciplines are spiritual practices that facilitate growth. As noted above, the list recorded by Acts includes Bible study, prayer, ministry, evangelism, fellowship, giving and sharing, worship, praise, joy, and simplicity. It was extremely important for this church to practice these spiritual disciplines in order for them to advance in the Christian experience both individually and corporately (Calhoun 2005:36-40). Though not all the disciplines are recorded here, this passage has a higher concentration of spiritual disciplines than any other place in the Bible. For the sake of space, we will highlight some of the important ones.

It Was a Learning Church

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). They persisted in listening to the apostles teaching the Word of God. They had an intense passion to learn everything they could about God and His ways. White tells us, “Let nothing, however dear, however loved, absorb your mind and affections, diverting you from the study of God’s word or from earnest prayer. Watch unto prayer” (White 1944:53). Not only did they have a passion to learn, but they also had a profound passion to travel the world to preach and tell the world about the risen Savior.

One of the most compelling challenges the church faces today is lack of biblical understanding and application. Because the riches of Christ are inexhaustible, we should ever be learning more and more about Him (Eph. 1:17-19). We should advance in Christian knowledge and growth daily (2 Cor. 3:17, 18). We must penetrate more deeply into the wisdom and the grace of God. Again, White challenges us to constantly and daily have “a fresh revelation of Christ, a daily experience that harmonizes with His teaching. High and holy attainments are within our reach. Continual progress in knowledge and virtue is God’s purpose for us” (White 1942:503). Gaertner stress that the Apostles’ teaching provided the foundation for their faith. This teaching was Christ-centered yet relevant to life and godly living (Gaertner 1993:82, 83).

It Was a Praying Church

There are numerous references to prayer in the book of Acts; it might as well be called the book of Prayer. Early believers prayed when things were going well and when the situations looked grim (Acts 4:23-31; 12:5, 12). They prayed when they had crises and when they had praises. They lived lives of connectedness with God. They truly believed that the power is in God and the way to release it is in prayer. “They devoted themselves . . . to prayer” (Acts 2:42).

A life filled with prayer is a life filled with joy and strength. “But prayer will be no task to the soul that loves God; it will be a pleasure, a source of strength. Our hearts will be stayed on God and we shall say by our daily life, ‘Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world’” (White 1884:306).

And Jesus makes it clear that without a connection to Him, we can do nothing. He said, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4, 5), but with Him we can do great things for the kingdom of God. Prayer such as that to which the early believers devoted themselves connects the soul to God and has a vivifying influence.

Prayer was essential to the life of the community. They depended upon God and sought His direction and power. They did not work by feelings or intuition, but by actively submitting themselves to God’s will and purpose (Bock 2007:151).

It Was a Fellowshiping Church

“They devoted themselves . . . to the fellowship” (Acts 2:42). They met to worship and fellowship every day of the week. They had the quality of togetherness and love. It was a dream church of community, healing, and love. No one told them that they needed each other, but they knew it was true. Their fellowship together was an outgrowth of their attachment to Christ. The early believers had common hope, faith, love, struggle, goals, and destiny, and that was the basis of their fellowship—and it should be ours.

Biblical fellowship is always born of and nurtured by mutual fellowship with God. I have discovered that my bonds to some people are based on mutual interest, while my bonds with my brothers and sisters in the Lord are based on our love and commitment to Jesus. Authentic brotherhood and fellowship are found only in Christ (Eph. 2:14; Gal. 3:26–28). I find fellowship to be irresistible and meaningful with people who seek to grow into Christlikeness. When this takes place, we

discover that our health and growth are linked to our involvement with the community (Dodd 1979:3).

We can belong to lots of things, but I see the church of Jesus Christ as an extended family beyond any of that. When our lives comes unglued and the effects of this culture absolutely destroy us, where can we go to find forgiveness and understanding? To a group of people who will come around us in a nonjudgmental fashion and simply say, “We love you. We’ll help you.” I believe in the church of Jesus Christ because it is a place where I can find community, healing, and love (Kidder 2009:90–100).

Going to church is not identical to having biblical fellowship. Our fellowship with others is grounded in our fellowship with God. “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete” (1 John 1:3, 4).

Jesus is the heart and breath and foundation of our Christian fellowship. There is no true fellowship without Christ’s Spirit in us and between us. Jesus is what we have in common (Ogilvie 1983:74, 75).

It Was a Sharing Church

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need” (Acts 2:44, 45). From their sacred fellowship flowed a supernatural generosity. They gave of their passion and resources to everyone as there was a need. They never looked at their resources as their own. They loved each other to the point of selling their possessions and sharing everything with each other (Barrett 2002:33).

Fellowship is more than what we share in together; it is also what we share out together. *Koinonia* in the New Testament concerns not only what we possess but what we do together, not only our common inheritance but also our common service. Luke uses the word *koinonoi* to describe the business relationship between two pairs of brothers, James and John, Andrew and Simon. They were “partners,” he says. They were colleagues, engaged together in the same fishing trade (Luke 5:10). Spirituality is being like Christ, which means living in self-giving love. Spiritual life is not about “me” but about the world God loves. As we are conformed to Christ, we embody more of God’s love for others. The fruits of spiritual formation include compassion, patience, truthfulness, and reconciliation. (Paul lists the fruit of the spirit in Gal. 5:22, 23.) Transformed persons are leaven for transforming the world. A real Christian cannot bear to have too much when others have too little.

It Was a Worshiping Church

To worship God is to honor Him and give reverence to Him as divine power. To worship God is to regard Him with great or extravagant respect. To worship is to adore, respect, and esteem God as the source of life and the ruler of the universe (Rev. 4:8–11). To worship is to act as an inferior before a superior. When I worship God, I am saying by my actions, “God, You are better than I am. You are bigger than I am. You are more than I am.” That was the experience of the early church. God was everything to them.

The worship of this Acts 2 community manifested itself in praise and thanksgiving (Acts 2: 47). Worship also led them to meet together with joy and simplicity. They were able to say like David, we were “glad when they said unto [us], let us go to the house of the Lord” (Ps. 100 and 122:1). This worship led them to give generously of their time, talents, position, and even their lives. They experienced what true worship is all about—having God sitting on His throne in the center of the universe and also the throne that stands in the center of the heart.

Praise had been an outward sign of the indwelling of the Spirit when He filled them. When the Holy Spirit fills us with the things of God, there will be a spirit of worship and praise and a life filled with joy (Ogilvie 1983:75).

It Was an Obedient Church

Doing the will of God was primary for them. They obeyed Jesus and lived a life of faithfulness to Him. The early church had a 100 percent commitment to Jesus Christ. They devoted themselves to living for Jesus all the time, at all costs, under all circumstances. Their lives were about loving God with all their hearts, minds, bodies, and souls. They had a heart for God. Having a heart for God leads us to a life of harmony with His will and a life of love for His presence.

It Was a Joyful Church

It is no surprise that this church was born the same day the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus’ followers. To be filled with the Spirit of God is to be filled with joy. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and longsuffering” (Gal. 5:26). When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, He fills us with joy in spite of our circumstances, difficulties, and problems. Why is it that so many Christians lack this ingredient in their lives? For them, happiness depends on what is happening. If

things go right, they are happy. If things go poorly, they feel out of control and sad. However, true joy is the byproduct of the Holy Spirit, and we have it when we ask the Lord to fill us with His presence. Despite all the difficulties that they faced, the first Christians were filled with joy (Bruce 1988:81). The Jews persecuted them and the Romans killed them, but they had joy just the same because the Holy Spirit was living in them.

The Early Church Lived a Balanced Life

A simple reading of Acts 2:42-47 demonstrates a rare balance in all areas of life. As will be explored in more detail below, the spirituality of the believers in Acts 2 was balanced between both the individual life and the corporate experience, focused on both the love for God and love for others, and both theological knowledge and devotional and ethical practices.

In our Christian walk, often we tend to be strong in one discipline and weak in another. For instance, I love to pray and have fellowship with other believers, but I am not as strong in Scripture reading or sacrificial giving. I often ask the Lord to strengthen my strong practices and give me the desire to grow in my area of weakness. The Acts 2 picture of spirituality teaches us to worship God on the one hand and yet be involved in touching the lives of other people on the other hand. We need to read the Bible, pray, worship, and praise God, but we also need to do ministry and evangelism. A balanced life is about giving of our time to know and glorify God and also about giving of our passions and resources.

Spiritual Formation Has Two Faces, the Individual Life and the Corporate Experience

Any credible model of spirituality must include the development of the personal spiritual life in the context of community. There are many things we need to do to grow spiritually, but our effort is incomplete unless there is an intentional effort to live among and contribute to the lives of others. What we read in Acts 2 is that this community was composed of people who had made an individual decision for Christ and who also fully participated in life together: studying, praying, sharing, worshipping. This is what Jesus started, and this is what the church continued to do.

Healthy Spirituality Includes Theological Knowledge, Devotional Life, and Ethical Responsibility in the World

Theology is not primarily about learning but about living what we learn. “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching,” (Acts 2:42) but then they devoted themselves to obedience and ministry and love. Often we mistake theology for doctrine, which is the study of God. Yet theology is also about a life of devotion and love for God. Furthermore, theology is about our responsibility in the world toward others. Theology is about loving God and loving others with all of our hearts and souls (Mark 12:30, 31).

Christian Spirituality Is about a Love Relationship with God that Leads to Loving Relationships with Others

Jesus lived in two wonderful relationships all the time. He had a vertical relationship with the Father and horizontal relationship with others. Also not to be overlooked is the fact that Jesus did most of His living in community. The New Testament church also lived in two clear relationships: love for God and love and unity with each other. Their example of spirituality stresses that a strong relationship with God will always motivate us to live for His glory, and living for His glory means embracing others with His love. The closer we are drawn to Jesus, the more fully will we love others (Col. 3:12-15).

It was to the name of Christ that these first disciples responded (Acts 2:36-38), but it was to the number of the church that they were added, and within that body they demonstrated a love for all within and without the bounds of their fellowship. Sadly, the church today is fragmented and in need of this love for God that leads to love for others. Perhaps we cannot perceive it clearly, but we need each other. We cannot make it without one another. We need to pray for each other and lift up one another in prayer and encouragement and love. In the New Testament there are 52 “one anothers”—exhortations to pray for one another, love one another, forgive one another, etc. (Gal. 5:13, 6:2; Eph. 4:32, 5:19-21; Phil. 2:1-4; etc.).

The New Testament Church Was a United Church

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46). Living harmoniously in vertical and horizontal relationships, the early church was a

united church. The unity that marks Christian community cannot rise out of mere tolerance, compromise, or concession. It rises only out of people who are bonded by their love for God and their intense worship of and devotion to Him (Kidder 2009:93–97). They are fellow worshipers who are seeking to be changed into God’s image. As God is changing me, I find tremendous compatibility with others who are also being changed.

Our faith and love for Jesus are the basis for our unity (Col. 3:10–17). Without them, everything else is merely an exercise in human relations and will not rise to the splendor of biblical community. Jesus prayed that all His followers would find unity together, but even His prayer makes it clear that there is only one road to unity: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one” (John 17:22). We are united together when we are united in Christ. Community is the result of intimacy, nurtured by an environment of grace, love, and mutual understanding. Scripture links our spiritual health to community involvement with other believers.

Resources and Time Belong Not to Us, But to the Lord

Living with a passion for the presence of God gives us a different perspective on possession and material goods (Acts 2:44, 45; 2 Peter 3:10–13). All the things that the first Christians owned in life belonged to Jesus and were used to His glory and honor. They sold their possessions and gave to others as there were needs (Acts 4:32–37). They gave not grudgingly or reluctantly. They gave generously and in joy and love for the advancement of the cause of the kingdom of God and the betterment of other people and the world.

Many years ago when I was taking engineering at Walla Walla College, a friend and I got stumped working on a problem for a class. After several minutes of not being able to do anything, I started to daydream about my future as an engineer, making a lot of money, accumulating a lot of toys, living in a mansion, and driving the latest BMW. My dream was ruined by my friend who showed me a passage in the Scripture that he was reading. He made me read 2 Peter 3:13–16, which says everything we have and accumulate in this life—houses, cars, boats, portfolio—someday will go up in smoke. The only lasting thing we will have is our relationship with God and others.

The early Christians’ connectedness with God also led them to view time as a gift from God to be used for His service and ministry. Our time does not belong to us but to Him. The reason we have a shortage of volunteers today is because we are

more interested in the “me” culture than in Jesus and what He considers to be important. I know from personal experience that I have time for everything for which I have interest and passion. May all of us take our cue from the early Christians and devote our time to Him.

Life in Jesus Is a Very Attractive Life

“. . . Enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). The first believers had an intentional connectedness with the outside community. By their attractive lifestyle, they enjoyed the favor of all the people. Life in Jesus leads to favor with other people and attracts them to the community of faith to experience what the believer experiences. Even those who would not accept the Christian message could not find fault with Christian living. The development of a healthy, holistic Christian spirituality is square one for effective mission. Wise evangelists place Christ at the center of their lives and allow Him to be the attractive force that draws others.

As we look at the life of the early church, where do you see yourself? The question to ask yourself is: Are you spiritually healthy or just spiritually busy? Doing many spiritual things is not necessarily a sign of spiritual maturity. Growth is measured more by change and passion for God. I pray that we will live this life depending on Jesus and guided by His Spirit and power.

A Compelling Model

The life and example of the early church is a picture of the Lordship of Christ, ruling over every area of life—religious, secular, emotional, and physical. It is the integration and balance of the individual and the corporate, the theological and the practical (devotional/ethical), the internal and the external, God and others, but always with Jesus in the center. In Acts 2:36 Peter presents Jesus, Lord and Christ, as the thing that the people must respond to. “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God had made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (NKJV). The life we see in Acts 2:42-47 is a response to Jesus as Lord; that made all the difference.

This model recognizes Jesus as the center of life, a life energized and empowered, ruled and guided by the Holy Spirit, a life balanced in its approach and incorporating the spiritual disciplines as tools of spiritual growth. In this model we see Jesus as the organizing principle, the Holy Spirit as the effective power, and spiritual

disciplines as tools of growth. It is about a life balanced under the Lordship of Christ and Spirit.

As mentioned earlier, a careful look at the experience of the early church in Acts 2:42-47 reveals that relationships undergirded their spirituality. Their spirituality nurtured four major relationships: a relationship with God, relationships with others, a relationship to self, and a relationship with resources and time in the context of God and His will.

A Relationship with God

Not only did the first converts worship and praise God, pray and study the Bible, but they did all of that with the utmost devotion and commitment. God was the Center of their lives and they did everything to demonstrate that He was. Today our relationship with God manifests itself in various ways, including the disciplines of worship, praise, prayer, and Bible study.

Relationships with Others

When the flame of the Spirit descended upon the gathered disciples, it turned their attention outward to the crowd. And when 3,000 were added to their number that day, the believers continued to foster fellowship as a spiritual practice. (It is listed along with the apostles' teaching and prayer.) Our relationships with others are manifested in our commitment to love and honor them, to hear them and serve them. Some disciplines helpful for developing health in this area of spirituality are fellowship, evangelism, ministry, encouragement, and love.

A Relationship with Self

Starting with the initial repentance and including everything that came after, the character of the early church was predicated on the grace of God and individual choice. In biblical spirituality, personal choice plays a crucial role. As the early converts responded to Peter's call and then chose to devote themselves to the Christian way, so also is our spirituality partially dependent upon our choice. Our relationships with God and others stem from our relationship with ourselves, a relationship that is about the commitment we make to live totally and wholeheartedly for the glory of God. It is also about allowing God to change us into His image (2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Rom. 12:1, 2). Some of the ways that this relationship manifests itself in

our lives include obedience, changing of heart and mind, guidance, and personal growth.

A Relationship with Resources

As an outgrowth of their relationships with God, others, and themselves, the early Christians had a radical relationship to resources, giving everything they owned and spending all that they were for the Kingdom. They gave because they loved God; they gave radically because they loved radically (2 Cor. 8:1-15). A fundamental component in spirituality is a dedication of the entire life to God. “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:1-2a, NIV). From this flows a change in how we relate to what we used to call our own: time, talents, money, possessions, and bodies. The wise use of resources, regular giving, and healthful living are demonstrations of a healthy relationship with resources.

The Jesus-centered Life

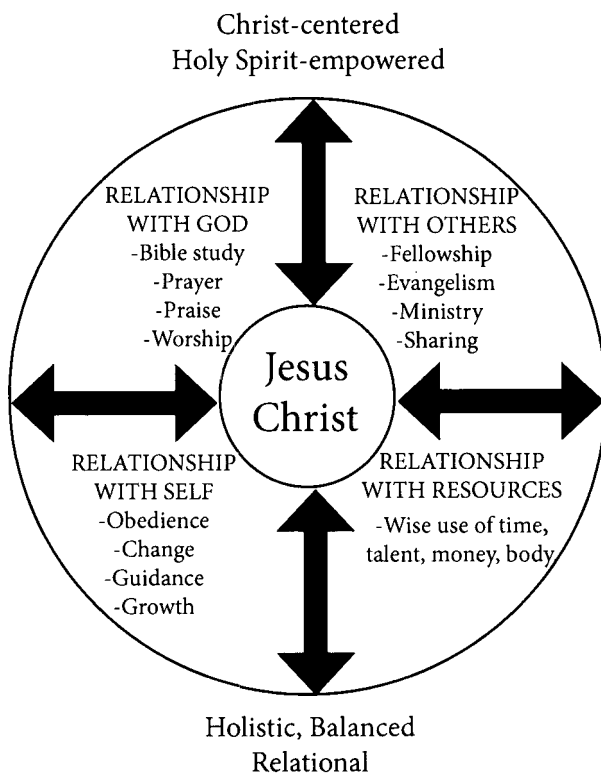
Now I want to put the concept discussed in this paper into a conceptual model that is easy to see and understand. I call this model *The Jesus-centered Life*. There are four major ingredients that drive this model: the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38), the empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 2:38), balanced and holistic living, and community and relational life (Acts 2:42-47).

Most of us live a fragmented life. We have our church life, our home life, and our devotional life (if we have it at all), but the three are left unconnected to each other—or connected with each other in only a weak way. We have our work and our entertainment, but we are not sure how they can be spiritual in nature. We compartmentalize our lives until our living looks like a string of unrelated activities: church, family, work, rest, entertainment, devotion, recreation, service, etc.

But the life God wants us to live has Jesus as the center, and everything goes back to Him and comes from Him. The organizing principle of this life is Jesus, and the empowering agent is the Holy Spirit. That means that my work, my church life, my devotions, and my family all belong to Him and are centered in Him. In this life there is the recognition that it is impossible to live it without the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

But how does that look? I like to use the illustration of the wheel; Jesus is the center of that wheel, my life is the outer rim, the Spirit is the spokes. In this wheel there are four quadrants, each of them representing the four areas of relationship: relationship with God, with others, with self, and with resources. My life is centered on Jesus. Everything I do, I do it for His glory with an eye for service, ministry, and evangelism. This model is Christ-centered, Holy Spirit-empowered, and balanced in its relational aspects.

Life Center is Jesus Christ Model



How does this model work? In one of the churches I pastored was an engineer who loved God and served Him passionately. James worked for a very large corporation with over 100 people under his charge, and he was also very active in the life of the church and the community. He preached often, did Bible studies, and went

on mission trips. Seeing his love and passionate service for God, people often said to him, "James, you need to be a pastor." His answer was, "I am already a pastor who is being paid by the marketplace instead of by the church." He continued, "No pastor is allowed to be here, but I am here every day. When my employees are hurting, I hurt with them. When they are rejoicing, I rejoice with them. I pray for them on a rotation basis and invite them over to my home." He concluded by saying, "I am a disciple of Jesus Christ disguised as an engineer." If you looked at that church where James was a member, you would see 20 engineers who came to the Lord as the result of the ministry of one man.

Imagine what God can do with your life if you are fully committed to Him and have centered your life on Him. Remember that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ disguised as a nurse or a teacher, a physician or even a pastor.

We may summarize the Jesus-centered Life Model of Spirituality as being about living with passion for the presence of God, experiencing His power and grace continually, and rearranging the priorities of our lives so as to reflect His love, vision, core values, and worldview. Living with a passion for the presence of God changes how we relate to people, to ourselves, and to time, possessions, pleasure, problems, and life.

Challenges and Possibilities

Though the model we see in the New Testament church of such an authentic and vibrant community of faith may be rare today, it is what our hearts desire. What culture, busyness, and institutional priorities have destroyed can be regained by hungry people who are caught up with the wonder of the Savior. They love Him more than life and worship Him with all their being and thus desire to be with each other. The model of spirituality that I propose in this paper is about loving and experiencing God, knowing Him intimately, and living for Him passionately. It involves the enjoyment of His grace, love, and presence. Spirituality is an encounter with God that changes the entire being and make it more and more like Jesus.

If the church is to become the community of God's people and the hope of the world, it means much more than singing the same hymns, praying the same prayers, partaking of the same Lord's Supper, and joining in the same services. It will involve the full commitment of our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and of all that we have, the willingness to be led and energized by the power and the presence of the Spirit of God, and our involvement in a meaningful way in the lives of others. It is only as we lose our lives that we find them, bringing the life of Jesus to others.

Chapter 7

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GUIDANCE THROUGH GOD-GIVEN DREAMS AND VISIONS

Bruce L. Bauer

This article stresses that God still gives guidance to modern people through dreams and visions. The dream and vision narratives in Scripture are listed and categorized as to their purpose and Job 33:14–18 is used as a basis for why dreams and visions are still given to individuals.

Protestants believe strongly in the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, but in Scripture God communicated His will and guided people in at least 20 various ways (Serns 2008:3). Every Christmas we read the Christmas story describing how God's Spirit "intervened twice in the events leading up to the birth of Jesus, first to invest Mary with the Christ child, and then, in what must have been an extraordinarily delicate mission, to persuade Joseph to play faithful husband and rescind his divorce proceedings" (Sanneh 1989:1195). Later in the same story God sent a dream to warn the wise men not to return to Jerusalem but to go directly home. Again, in the same narrative (Matt. 1, 2) Joseph had a dream that sent the family (in obedience) to Egypt, where later he had two more dreams that guided him in knowing when to return home and where to settle.

Joel 2:28, 29 says, "Then, after doing all these things, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will dream dreams, and your young men

will see visions. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on servants—men and women alike” (*New Living Translation*). Peter repeated this promise in Acts 2:17, 18, reminding us that dreams and visions will continue to occur as evidences to people living in the last days of earth’s history. For more than 150 years, Adventists have been proclaiming a message for the last days, but Adventists in the West are often quite skeptical of people who talk about dreams and visions.

When people in the West have a dream or encounter God through a vision, they are more often than not afraid to share the dream for fear that their brothers or sisters in Christ will laugh at them. As a result, many God-given dreams and visions are never shared with the larger body of Christ, and thus the body is deprived of the reinforcement of the biblical principle that God continues to guide and direct His people through dreams and visions. I also wonder how many times warnings and messages of encouragement have been ignored and dismissed because of Western innate skepticism?

I agree that not all dreams and visions are from God, and also that not everyone who shares what they believe are God-given dreams or visions speak words from God. Even admitting these weaknesses, it is still a sorry reality that the body of Christ is hindered from sensing the guidance and help God offers Western Christians by not being more open and accepting of dreams and visions as a means of guidance and encouragement.

This short article will begin by listing the dream and vision narratives in Scripture, will reflect on the various reasons for those dreams and visions, will list several relevant concepts in the writings of Ellen White, and then in conclusion will share a couple of stories that illustrate that God still blesses modern people by giving them dreams and visions. It is my hope that Seventh-day Adventists, especially in the West, would become more open to the possibility that God continues to guide and direct today through God-given dreams and visions.

Definitions

Webster’s New World Dictionary defines a dream as “a sequence of sensations, images, thoughts, etc. passing through a sleeping person’s mind” (1984 s.v. dream). A vision is defined as “something supposedly seen by other than normal sight; something perceived in a dream, trance, etc. or supernaturally revealed, as to a prophet” (1984 s.v. vision). Dreams are usually thought of as taking place while a person sleeps, whereas a vision could take place while a person is awake. However, some visions in Scripture specifically state that they took place in the night (Breslin & Jones 2004:13).

Dream Narratives in Scripture

The New International Bible Concordance lists 108 references to dreams. This paper will only look at the narratives and not individual references to dreams. Joseph and Daniel are the two Bible figures who have by far the most references, with Joseph being associated with 22 of those references and Daniel having a connection with an additional 26 (Goodrick & Kohlenberger 1981:226). Notice the purpose for the following narratives:

TEXT	STORY	PURPOSE
Gen. 20:3, 6	Abimelech takes Sarah	Guidance & warning not to sin
Gen. 28:12	Jacob and the stairway to heaven	Promise of protection & blessing
Gen. 31:10, 11, 34	Jacob cheated by Laban	Encouragement & warning
Gen. 37	Joseph's two dreams	Foretelling the future
Gen. 40	Pharaoh's cupbearer & baker	Foretelling the future
Gen. 41	Pharaoh's dream of cows & grain	Foretelling & warning of famine
Judg. 7:13, 15	Midianite soldier's dream	Encouragement to Gideon
Dan. 2	Nebuchadnezzar's image	Foretelling the future
Dan. 4	Nebuchadnezzar's tree	Warning against pride
Dan. 7	Four beasts	Foretelling the future
Matt. 1:20	Joseph engagement to Mary	Encouragement to marry Mary
Matt. 2:12	Wise men told to return home	Guidance & warning not to return to Herod
Matt. 2:13	Joseph told to flee to Egypt	Guidance & warning about Herod's intention
Matt. 2:19	Joseph instructed to return home	Guidance
Matt. 2:22	Joseph warned to leave Galilee	Guidance
Matt. 27:19	Pilate's wife warns Pilate	Guidance

It is interesting to note that of the 16 references listed above, most of them have an element of guidance wherein God showed people what to do or how to respond to local situations. Eleven of the 16 God-given dream stories consist of information that had only local significance and meaning, with no universal application. Perhaps there are two principles to be learned from the God-given dream stories: listen to what God is saying to you personally, but do not automatically think that the message has universal application.

Vision Narratives in Scripture

In addition to dreams, *The New International Bible Concordance* lists 106 references to visions (Goodrick & Kohlenberger 1981:979, 980). Again, I will only make reference in this paper to the narrative stories. It is interesting to note that while Joseph and Daniel had the most references to dreams, only Daniel also had visions; with 26 visions, Daniel leads all other Bible characters in the number of visions mentioned in connection with his life and work. The apostle Paul had the largest number of visions of anyone else in the New Testament with six references.

TEXT	STORY	PURPOSE
Gen. 15:1	Abram promised protection & heir	Encouragement & guidance
Gen. 46:2	Jacob encouraged to go to Egypt	Encouragement & foretelling the future
1 Sam. 3:15	Samuel given a message for Eli	Warning of coming destruction to Eli's sons
Isa. 1:1; 21:2; 22:1	Isaiah received messages through visions	Warning & guidance of Israel & Judah
Eze. 8:4	Ezekiel shown the detestable sins of Judah	Warning of destruction to come
Eze. 11:24	Ezekiel told that Israel would return	Warning & encouragement for exiled Israel
Eze. 43:3	Ezekiel sees the Lord's glory return	Encouragement for God's remnant
Dan. 2:19, 45	Meaning of the image revealed	Encouragement & guidance
Dan. 7:2, 7, 13	Vision of the four beasts & the Son of Man	Foretelling the future
Dan. 8:1, 2, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 26, 27	Vision of the ram & goat, the 2,300 evenings & mornings & the explanation	Foretelling the future to give guidance to God's people
Dan. 9:21, 23, 24	Meaning of vision of Dan. 8 revealed	Foretelling future events
Dan. 10 & 11	Vision of the kings of the south & north	Foretelling future events
Obad. 1:1	Edom's destruction foretold	Foretelling coming destruction
Micah 1:1	Visions of Samaria & Jerusalem	Warning of coming destruction
Nahum 1:1	Nahum's visions	Warnings for Nineveh
Zech. 1:8	Zechariah's visions	Encouraged people to continue rebuilding the temple in the face of opposition
Luke 1:22	Zachariah's vision about his son, John	Foretelling John's birth
Acts 9:10, 12	Ananias & Saul have a vision	Guidance & direction for Ananias & Saul
Acts 10:3, 17, 19; 11:5	Peter & Cornelius receive guidance through separate visions	Guidance & direction for Cornelius & Peter
Acts 16:9, 10	Paul receives a call to go to Macedonia	Guidance in ministry
Acts 18:9	Paul encouraged to speak out in Corinth	Encouragement to be bold in witness
Rev. 9:17	John receives information about the future	Foretelling future events

Visions seem to be more closely associated with the prophetic function of giving warnings and foretelling future events. Only Daniel's two dreams in Daniel 2 and 7 had a universal application, but when God wanted to share the meaning of the dreams in those chapters He gave Daniel a vision to explain the meaning of the dreams. Again, many of the vision narratives listed above were only for personal guidance for a local situation and did not have universal application.

Purposes for Dreams and Visions

In Numbers 12:6 God says, "If there were prophets among you, I, the Lord, would reveal myself in visions. I would speak to them in dreams" (NLT). As indicated in the dream and vision narratives above, God used both dreams and visions to communicate messages to His prophets. However, not everyone who claims to have received a dream or vision they believe is from the Lord is a prophet, nor are they necessarily to be followed or believed. "Suppose there are prophets among you or those who dream dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles, and the predicted signs and miracles occur. If they then say, 'Come, let us worship other gods'—gods you have not known before—do not listen to them. The Lord your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul. Serve only the Lord your God and fear him alone. Obey his commands, listen to his voice, and cling to him" (Deut. 13:1-4 NLT).

Several good principles are listed in this text that should guide the body of Christ in testing anyone's message: never worship other gods, serve only the Lord, obey His commands, listen to His voice, and cling to Him. Any message coming from an individual who has had a dream or a vision should never disagree with anything in God's Word. Another problem often associated with dreams and visions is that too often in the history of God's people kooks and deluded people have come along claiming to have a message from the Lord that they insist has universal application and was not sent just for personal encouragement and guidance. It is beyond the scope of this paper to list the various ways to test a prophet's message, but there are excellent resources available. Rene Noorbergen in his book *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* has a useful list of tests to determine whether a prophet speaks words from God or not (Noorbergen 1972:20, 21). In the recent publication *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* there are additional resources in the chapter entitled "The Gift of Prophecy" that suggest ways to test a claimed prophetic gift (Ministerial Association 2005). Angel Rodríguez recently published an article entitled "Prophets, True and False" that would also be helpful (Rodríguez 2009).

Since this paper's focus is on the dreams and visions God sends to individuals to guide and encourage them in their personal lives, I will look at Job 33:14-18 for biblical principles to help in understanding God's purposes for sending dreams and visions that are not for the church in general and that do not have universal application. Job lists four specific reasons why God sends dreams and visions: "For God does speak—now one way, now another—though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, *to turn man from wrongdoings, and keep them from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit [death], his life from perishing from the sword*" [italics supplied] (Job 33:14-18 NIV). I believe that there are additional reasons and purposes for dreams and visions that are not listed in this passage, but I will only look at the four purposes listed here.

This passage suggests that God gives dreams and visions to (1) help people turn from doing wrong, (2) keep people from pride, (3) point people in the right direction, and (4) protect people from death. Most of the dreams and visions in both the Old and New Testaments serve one or more of these purposes, as seen in the following biblical examples.

Help People Turn from Doing Wrong

There are several examples of God sending dreams or visions to keep people from sinning or doing wrong. The first example in Scripture takes place when King Abimelech sees Sarah's beauty and, after being told that she is Abram's sister, takes her to his palace. God sent a very pointed dream to Abimelech telling him that he was "a dead man, for that woman you have taken is already married" (Gen. 20:3 NLT). He responds rapidly and in obedience returns Sarah without sleeping with her.

Laban had a history of cheating people, so when Jacob left secretly with Laban's daughters he was upset. The narrative implies that he planned to pursue Jacob with the intent to do harm, but God sent him a warning in a dream not to harm Jacob (Gen. 31:29).

In Saul's vision on the road to Damascus, God intervened in such a way that Saul not only turned from his quest to destroy the Christians in that city, but the encounter also resulted in the persecutor becoming one of the most powerful missionaries for the new faith (Acts 9:1-9).

Keep People from Pride

Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4:10-18 about an enormous tree that a holy messenger commands to be cut down, coupled with the warning "so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes" (Dan. 4:17), was intended to turn Nebuchadnezzar from his pride and boasting. Daniel, in his interpretation of the dream, appeals to the king to "renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue" (Dan. 4:27). However, just 12 months after the warning Nebuchadnezzar boasts, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Dan. 4:30).

Point People in the Right Direction

God often sends dreams and visions to protect people from the pit—to keep them from making mistakes or to point them in the right direction. The story of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10:1-8 illustrates this purpose. Cornelius received a vision to move him along in his understanding of God. He was given very exact directions of what he was to do. Cornelius did not just brush them aside as having no meaning for him; rather, he followed the directions and sent two of his servants 30 miles south to Joppa where Peter was staying.

Peter also needed to be pointed in the right direction in order to overcome his ethnic pride. The vision was graphic and disgusting, and it went against every eating habit Peter had carefully followed all his life. However, God was not talking about food; He was sending a message about attitudes toward people. Peter clearly understood that God wanted Jews and Gentiles to have equal access to the Good News with no more separation, no divisions, and no classes of believers. This vision was a turning point in the church.

There is another interesting lesson in this story. Cornelius received a vision of an angel, but a dream or a vision is rarely enough to bring a person to salvation or to give them all the knowledge they need. In Cornelius' case he had to take the initiative, send for Peter, and gather his family to hear the message; only then did he have enough information to respond to the call of God on his life. Those who receive dreams and visions are almost always required to take additional personal initiatives in order to hear the rest of the story (Breslin & Jones 2004:35).

Protect People from Death

Pharaoh's dream about the coming famine in Genesis 41:14-24 illustrates another reason for God-given dreams—God has compassion on His creation and continues to interact and guide in the affairs of this world. When God gave the Magi a dream warning them not to return to Jerusalem but to return directly home, God was protecting the baby Jesus from the wicked designs of King Herod. Joseph also received a dream in connection with that story and as a result fled to safety in Egypt (Matt. 2:1-18).

I have often asked the question as to whether or not I would have acted in obedience to the dreams of warning that demanded action. Would I have married my pregnant girlfriend, who was obviously not pregnant by me, on the basis of a dream—even a God-given dream? Would I have changed my travel plans on the basis of a dream as did the wise men? Would I take my family to a foreign country to escape danger—all because of a warning in a dream? Would I have returned home and moved to a new location based on dream information? These are the types of questions that trouble me, for it seems that most Western Christians would not think it prudent to act on the basis of a dream.

Ellen White on Dreams and Visions

Seventh-day Adventists have readily accepted that Ellen White received instructions and messages from God through visions and dreams. In addition to the references to how God gave her warnings and counsels for the young Adventist Church, she also has listed a few principles that should guide other people in deciding whether or not a dream or vision is from God.

Guiding Principles

God-given dreams are used by God as a medium of communication (White 1958a:683), and the meaning and message of the dreams are “proofs of their genuineness” (White 1948:570). However, many dreams are from natural causes and have nothing to do with a message from God (White 1948:569). There are also false dreams and visions that are inspired by Satan (White 1948:569) that need to be tested by the teachings and principles of God's Word. If any message that comes through a dream or a vision opposes anything in God's Word, it is not a God-given dream or vision (White 1958b:98). “I would say to our dear brethren who have

been so eager to accept everything that came in the form of visions and dreams, Beware that you be not ensnared. Read the warnings that have been given by the world's Redeemer to His disciples to be given again by them to the world. The Word of God is solid rock, and we may plant our feet securely upon it. . . . Take heed. . . . for delusions and deceptions will come . . . as we near the end" (White 1980:952).

Narratives

Ellen White also shares several narratives that illustrate that God sends dreams and visions to encourage and guide His people. John Huss, when imprisoned, had a dream that encouraged him that even if his work was destroyed there would be many more people that would lift up the name of Jesus (White 1911:108). William Miller received a dream that showed him that many who professed to follow the truth were in danger of being lost—that they only looked like genuine believers (White 1945:81-83). John Matteson had a dream that showed that, in spite of the attempts of those opposed to the work of James and Ellen White, God would help them withstand the attacks, and in the end they would even give a stronger witness to the truth (White 1948:597, 598). J. N. Loughborough, when faced with a decision, prayed and asked God for guidance. In response God sent him a dream showing him what to do in that situation (White 1948:601, 602).

In spite of the fact that the Bible lists many dream narratives showing that God guides and directs through dreams and visions, many Christians, especially Westerners, are skeptical of people who even talk about God giving them a dream. It seems that the effects of the enlightenment, a strong belief in the scientific method, and a denial of revealed knowledge from a personal God leave some Western Christians with a very deistic perspective of God—they believe that God is there, but He is distant and does not interact with His creation.

Stories of God-given Dreams

My own family has been blessed by receiving God's guidance through dreams and visions that impacted our family in two ways: by pointing them in the right direction and protecting my grandmother from death. My grandmother, Alexandria Gruzensky, was born in the Ukraine, came to America when she was a young girl, and settled with many other Russian-speaking immigrants in North Dakota. Shortly after marrying and moving to a homestead in Grassy Butte, North Dakota, she had a dream in which she saw two men walking up the road from the south.

The dream communicated the message that they had milk to drink and it was very good.

The next morning when she told her husband the dream, he just laughed at her and told her she had eaten something that caused her to dream. However, later that day she was sitting in the front room of the house sewing a dress for my mother when she looked down the road and saw the same two men she had seen the previous night in her dream. Quickly she went out and told her husband that the same two men she had seen in her dream were walking up the road. Grandpa went out to meet them, wondering why they had come. The two men, Elder Litveneko and Elder Burley, were two Russian Adventist pastors who had arrived at the local train station with a tent, chairs, pulpit, and a pump organ to hold meetings among the Russian-speaking people in the area. My grandpa took his truck into town the next day and picked up the supplies. Both my grandparents attended the meetings and were baptized in 1918 with 20 others, becoming the first Adventist group in North Dakota west of the Missouri River (Gruzensky 2008).

Several years later Grandma had another significant vision. After the birth of her fifth child, Grandma's health was very poor. There was not a lot of medical care in that part of the state, so Grandma prayed earnestly that she would have good health to raise her family. One night as she lay sleeping she was awakened. There at the foot of her bed stood a man. He pointed at her and said, "Lady, if you don't stop eating meat, you're going to die."

Grandma was scared and did not sleep any more that night. While laying there thinking about what had happened, she decided never to eat meat again. She cooked meat for her family, but never ate any herself (Gruzensky 2008). It is interesting that all five of her children adopted a vegetarian lifestyle. As for Grandma—she lived to be 98, and her children are all in their 80s and 90s.

In 2008 Pastor Joshua Ayinla from Nigeria shared a story with me about when God gave him a warning for his landlord. Joshua works in a place dominated by Muslims, and he lives in a courtyard where only his family is Christian. One night Joshua dreamed that his Muslim landlord and ten of his close associates planned to travel to an important meeting, but on the way they were in a terrible accident and everyone on the bus was killed. Joshua was afraid to say anything, so he let it go. However, the next night he had the same dream, so in the morning after praying about it he went to tell the landlord what he had dreamed. To his amazement the Muslim was very accepting of the fact that God would send him a warning through a dream; he told Joshua that yes, he had been planning to go on such a trip, but because of the dream he would not go. The landlord then tried to convince his friends

to also cancel their plans, but they refused. Tragically, all of them were killed in an accident just as predicted in the dream. The landlord was so grateful that God would warn him and save his life that he and his entire family started attending the local Seventh-day Adventist Church (Ayinla 2008).

During the past several months I have given mission talks about how God is sending dreams and visions to many people in areas of the world largely untouched by Christian mission. At the end of the presentation I often ask if anybody in the audience feels they have received a God-given dream, and usually about 10 percent of the people raise their hands. However, when I ask how many of them have ever shared their dream experience with the people in their local church, usually only about one in ten indicate that they have. This means that the local body of believers is not being blessed by local narratives that illustrate the personal, caring nature of our God. It is my hope that Adventists would become more accepting of the possibility of God's guidance through God-given dreams and visions and that Adventists would be less skeptical of those blessed with such guidance.

Section 2

THEOLOGICAL ENCOUNTERS

encountering
GOD IN LIFE AND MISSION

Chapter 8

* * *

MISSION AS REDEMPTION AND RESTORATION: SPIRITUALITY AND CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL WELFARE, RELIEF, AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

Wagner Kuhn

In disobedience, Adam and Eve separated themselves from God. They became refugees in need of relief, which was immediately provided. Instead of abandoning His children, God provided many instructions so they could still live a normal and productive life. The Sabbath, the Year of Jubilee, and the concept of *Shalom* are some of the principles and themes in the Old Testament that most integrally encompass holistic development. But the coming Messiah is the One who brings final and complete healing and redemption.

Introduction

The creation of this world established the beginning of history for the created beings (for humans, animals, and nature). Consequently, it was also the beginning of God's direct relationship with His created world. Moreover, the reality and the fact that the creation took place and that "it was very good" (Gen. 1:31) "is an expression of God's sovereignty and grace, his wisdom and power, and his perfection" (Glasser 1989:39). But sin entered into what was very good, and the perfect spiritual, moral, social, and physical dimensions of the created order, of man and woman, were corrupted and distorted by it. Humans separated themselves from their Cre-

ator God. However, He took the initiative and set out on a mission to redeem and restore humanity (Hugues 2008:17–19; Kuhn 2005:7–9; White 1890:46–48).

Creation and Wholeness: Spirituality of Order, Harmony, and Perfection

Accordingly, God’s plan for the salvation of humankind, which not only included the redemption of His children but also the care and maintenance of His creation, attests to the loving character of God. By creating a perfect, whole, and harmonious environment for all, and at the same time providing a way out for the problem of sin, God clearly demonstrated that He was in control of everything from the beginning of human history, and that this history started out on footing that was “very good.”

After God had finished His work of creation, He declared that “it was very good” (Gen. 1:31), certainly implying that it was perfect, whole, and in harmony with His creative spirit and will. Not only did God create everything perfect and whole, but it was also done with great order and harmony. Order and harmony revealed the great wisdom and power of the Creator God, and at the same time pointed to a God who is directly opposed to chaos or disorder.

Furthermore, man and woman were created in the image of God, in the likeness of their Creator, meaning that they were able to understand and love God and live in harmony and obedience to His will. Thus the first man and woman, perfect and pure in their physical, mental, and spiritual health, were full of life and joy and beauty. It was a perfect and wholesome creation that in all aspects reflected the image of God. This image of God in humanity allowed mankind to be God’s representative and at the same time to be rulers over the created animals and all nature (see Gen. 1 and 2; Ps. 8:6–8; 33:6, 9; 104:5; Job 38:1–41) (Carriker 1992:16–20; White 1890:44–51; Glasser 1989:39–42).

God’s will as revealed in creation also allowed for human beings’ free will—the ability to choose. Without this possibility, human beings could not render perfect obedience in love toward the Creator God. Freedom of choice, which is the ability to decide willingly whether to serve God voluntarily or not, is part of the image of God that the human race received in Adam and Eve. Thus, the obedience that comes from freedom of choice allows for the development of character and for an ever-growing appreciation and gratitude for God’s eternal love. In this respect it is said that:

Our first parents, though created innocent and holy, were not placed beyond the possibility of wrong doing. God made them free moral agents, capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience. They were to enjoy communion with God and with the holy angels; but before they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested. At the very beginning of man's existence a check was placed upon the desire for self-indulgence, the fatal passion that lay at the foundation of Satan's fall. The tree of knowledge, which stood near the tree of life in the midst of the garden, was to be a test of the obedience, faith and love of our first parents (White 1890:48, 49).

As seen above, Adam and Eve were to be tested, and if approved by remaining loyal and obedient to God, the history of the human race would have been very different. The fall of our first parents forever changed the plans of God (Myers 1999:27–30) and required a dimension of God's eternal love that humanity will never be able to comprehend fully (Christ's death). God is so preoccupied with His children that from the beginning He had an emergency relief plan that would be acted upon as needed.

The Fall and Emergency Relief: Spirituality Demands a Rescue Plan

After Adam and Eve yielded to temptation and fell, the image of God in them was immediately corrupted by sin. The fall affected all creation and affected all aspects of humans' life (physical, mental, social, and spiritual). Man and woman realized they were naked, and because they were afraid and ashamed of their nakedness (sin), they hid from their Lord and God.

God's immediate response to the problem of sin that affected Adam and Eve was a question: "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). This denotes that God is the one in search after the fallen human race. When there was no hope for our first parents, God took the initiative to come and search for them. He called Adam and asked, "Where are you?" implying that Adam and Eve were lost, separated from the normal communion and relationship with the Creator.

By an act of disobedience, Adam and Eve separated themselves from God. They became, in a sense, refugees—displaced within their own home and the first Internally Displaced People (IDP) or refugees by their own choice. The Garden of Eden

could no longer be their home and the place where they had a direct communion with God. They had to be expelled from paradise and suffer the consequences of their own choices. They were exposed to the condition of refugees—people without a house, without a home.

Before expelling them out of paradise, God came to their rescue and provided them with garments of skin to relieve them of their shame and nakedness (Gen. 3:21). It was also a way to protect them physically from the elements of nature and from the thorns and thistles that the ground would produce. This aspect of God's response (relief) demonstrated that God was interested in the whole life of His first two children. He was concerned about the desperation and fear of Adam and Eve. He covered their nakedness and shame (spiritual and mental/moral anguish) and their physical bodies to protect them against the harm of the outside creation.

One can understand the vulnerability of our first parents when comparing them to refugees or Internally Displaced People (IDP). When separated from their own home, individuals or families of refugees and IDP not only lose their belongings, a source for their immediate needs (food, water, and shelter), and their homeland, they lose their identity, their freedom, and their meaning and spiritual connection with life. They are afraid, sad, destitute, alienated, and in despair. If they could, they would hide in order not to show their vulnerability and "nakedness."

As God is the One who seeks and calls for His children, He not only rescued Adam and Eve and protected them by providing garments of animal skin, He also promised to provide a way out—the plan of salvation. It was both a physical and a spiritual protection. The protection was physical because God provided our first parents with garments of skin (even though an innocent animal had to die to provide protection for their bodies), and it was spiritual and moral protection because Jesus Himself would put enmity between the serpent and the woman and, in the plenitude of time, God would send His Son to die for their (our) sins. It was the first time in the history of humanity that relief was needed and thus immediately provided. This relief was an emergency relief, but it would last forever. It was and still is based on God's eternal promise (Gen. 3:15).

Spirituality of Being and Doing: Social Welfare Relief and Development Concepts

God did not abandon His children because they disobeyed Him. Instead, He provided many instructions for them so that they could still live a somewhat nor-

mal and productive life. These instructions, if followed, would bring healthy lives to individuals, and peace and prosperity to their communities. They would also maintain a balanced and productive environment. The human race would enjoy the favor and blessings of God, as well as the proper relationship with each other and with the created order.

These many laws and regulations provided by God were intended to protect the children of God from the harsh realities of a fallen world. Mostly, the laws concerned social welfare, proper use of money, health and diet, justice for the oppressed and vulnerable, purification, sacrifice and offerings, priests and worship, judgments and government, marriage and sexual concerns, and concepts such as the Sabbath and year of Jubilee. For this study I will not describe in detail all of these laws and regulations. I will list most of these instructions and comment on them briefly. Accordingly, it is the poor and the oppressed who receive the most attention in the Old Testament account.

In the Pentateuch

The Pentateuch presents most of the laws and regulations regarding the proper relationship between God and His people, between people and people, and between people and nature or the environment. There are some other provisions and instructions given by God that are not part of a normal pre-given regulation; for example, the famine that was to come over Egypt (Gen. 41:25–36) is a case in question. Not only did God allow Pharaoh to know beforehand (through Joseph), He also allowed Joseph to be in charge of this major relief enterprise (Gen. 41:41–57) that followed, which prevented a major crisis of catastrophic proportions in the Ancient Near East.

The first major law given by God to His people the Israelites was the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments—Exod. 20:3–17). It clearly states the relationship for people living in connection with God and each other.

Among others, the widows, the orphans, the poor, the strangers, and the needy have a special place in God's instructions and regulations in the Pentateuch.² The concern (found in the laws and regulations of the Bible) for them is quite unique. Jon Dybdahl notes the following: "Hammurabi's code and other ancient Near Eastern codes have almost no concern for the disadvantaged in society. Non-Israelite laws for the most part safeguard the interest of the upper class—the land-owner and slave master. Human life is cheap, and property is highly valued. Many offenses involving only property impose the death penalty on violators. Israel's laws care for the disadvantaged and value human life over possessions" (1994:202).³

I have listed several passages that point out this truth and show how God intended the poor and all who are miserable and destitute to be treated and cared for.⁴ Alongside, there are also other major social concerns in the Pentateuch that corroborate to the understanding of God's care and provision for all his children.⁵ "The vulnerable are to be protected and the poor to be provided for in a way that preserves their dignity" as God's provision is not to be considered "something to be left to the charitable whims of the rich and powerful, but is more a matter of human rights" (Hugues 2008:82).

It is important to note that many of the texts that refer to relief programs and welfare systems in the Pentateuch are also quoted or paraphrased in the Historical Books, the Psalms, and the Prophets, and in the New Testament as well.

In the Historical Books, in the Psalms, and in the Prophets

Following the pattern of the Pentateuch, the poor, the widow, the stranger, and the fatherless have a special place in the Historical Books, notably and most frequently in the Psalms and the Prophets. John R. W. Stott comments that "God is represented as coming to them [poor, oppressed, orphan, widow, sick, stranger, and so on] and making their cause his own, in keeping with his characteristic that 'he raises the poor from the dust'" (1990:234).

Below are several biblical texts that contain the instructions on how God wanted His children to be treated, especially the fatherless, the widow, the sick, the oppressed, the stranger, and the poor:

1. "He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with the princes and has them inherit a throne of honor" (1 Sam. 2:8; see also Ps. 113:7-9).⁶ This dust can mean many things: oppression, poverty, hunger, thirst, injustice, sicknesses, helplessness, torture, lack of dignity and respect, and so on. God is a God who is preoccupied with the fatherless, the poor, the widow, the weak, and the needy, and His interest and care for them all will not go unnoticed.
2. "Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food⁷ and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them" (Neh. 8:10).

3. "Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow's heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth" (Job 29:12-17).⁸ The biblical message is clear in regard to the care and justice that must be rendered to the poor and to all of those that desperately need our help.
4. "Blessed is he who has regard for the weak [poor];⁹ the Lord delivers him in times of trouble" (Ps. 41:1). Note that the psalter is the hymnbook of the helpless, and it is also in this inspired hymnbook "that we listen to their expressions of dependence upon God, and God's promise to come to their aid" (Stott 1990:237).
5. "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (Ps. 68:5; see also Ps. 82:2-4 and 112:4-9).
6. "The Lord watches the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked" (Ps. 146:9).
7. "A poor man's field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away" (Prov. 13:23; see also Prov. 22:22, 23).
8. "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God" (Prov. 14:31). God is dishonored when the poor are oppressed and mistreated (see also Prov. 22:2).
9. "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done" (Prov. 19:17). God is honored when the poor are helped, and He rewards and blesses those who care for the poor (see also Prov. 22:9 and 29:7).
10. "Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you" (Prov. 23:10, 11; see also Prov. 22:16 and 23:21).
11. "She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy" (Prov. 31:20). The wise woman is also portrayed as one who cares for the poor and needy.
12. "Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow" (Isa. 1:17). To do right, to seek justice, and to defend and encourage the widow and the fatherless is a commandment from God that must be put into practice by all who profess to be His followers (see also Isa. 1:23).

13. “Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless” (Isa. 10:1, 2).¹⁰
14. “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?” (Isa. 58:6, 7); “If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed” (Isa. 58:9b, 10).¹¹
15. “If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers forever and ever” (Jer. 7:5–7). God’s abundant blessings can only be bestowed upon His children when the poor, widow, alien, orphan, and the oppressed of society are treated justly and cared for (see also Jer. 22:3, 16; 49:11).
16. “He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked” (Eze. 18:7; see also Eze. 18:16).¹²
17. “This is what the Lord Almighty says: Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other” (Zech. 7:9, 10).
18. “So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty” (Mal. 3:5).¹³

The prophets were quite outspoken in regard to the laws and regulations dealing with relief and social welfare in the Old Testament (Hoppe 2004:42-103).

They not only urged the people and their leaders to “seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow,” and conversely forbade them to “oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor,” but were fierce in their condemnation of all injustice.

Elijah rebuked King Ahab for murdering Naboth and stealing his vineyard. Amos fulminated against the rulers of Israel because in return for bribes they trampled on the heads of the poor, crushed the needy, and denied justice to the oppressed, instead of letting “justice roll on like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream” (Stott 1990:236).

Accordingly, the egalitarian structure and society of Israel “exalted labor, denounced idleness, enjoined fathers to train their sons to acquire skills with their hands, further human reciprocity, justice, and an active concern for one’s neighbor,” and notably “it respected the dignity of both men and women, the bearers of the divine image” (Glasser 1989:78).

Moreover, worship and obedience to God are directly related to justice and philanthropy to each other. They go hand-in-hand in the same way that justice and mercy to one’s neighbor are related to walking humbly before God (see Stott 1997:384). All instructions and regulations for the well-being and fair treatment of the poor, alien, orphan, widow, and vulnerable had their origins in God, the One who cares for His children and shows compassion and mercy to whomsoever needs Him (Wright 1991:146–160). Stated in other words as to echo the biblical message, “to speak about poverty is to touch the Heart of God” (Domeris 2007:8).

Oftentimes a question is asked: How can the poor, homeless, and unemployed be helped in order to secure the blessings of God’s providence and to live the life He intended humans to live? Here is a statement that provides light into the subject:

If men would give more heed to the teachings of God’s Word, they would find a solution of these problems that perplex them. Much might be learned from the Old Testament in regard to the labor question and the relief of the poor.

In God’s plan for Israel every family had a home on the land, with sufficient ground for tilling. Thus were provided both the means and the incentive for a useful, industrious, and self-supporting life. And no devising of men has ever improved upon that plan. To the world’s departure from it is owing, to a large degree, the poverty and wretchedness that exist today (White 1905:183, 184).

The lessons and instructions of the Bible help us to understand the intention of God in regard to the needy. God wants us to be in connection with His word so that we can be His instruments of mercy and love to those who are suffering. Moreover, “it is God’s purpose that the rich and the poor shall be closely bound together by the ties of sympathy and helpfulness” (White 1905:193). This together-

ness will prove to be a blessing to both of these groups. It will help the poor as well as the rich in understanding God's plan of salvation, and a life of benevolence will reveal spiritual truths than can be understood in the midst of distress and suffering. Accordingly, "real charity helps men to help themselves. If one comes to our door and asks for food, we should not turn him away hungry; his poverty may be the result of misfortune. But true beneficence means more than mere gifts. It means a genuine interest in the welfare of others. We should seek to understand the needs of the poor and distressed, and to give them the help that will benefit them the most. To give thought and time and personal effort costs far more than merely to give money. But it is the truest charity" (White 1905:195).

Thus, it is only by our love and service for His needy children that we can prove the genuineness of our love for Him (White 1905:205). True mission service comes from our true love for our Savior, as being is oftentimes more important than giving or just doing good deeds for the needy or the poor.¹⁴

Healing and Transforming through Relief and Development: Spirituality and Restoration of Redemptive Principles in the Old Testament

The Sabbath, the Year of Jubilee, and the concept of *Shalom* are the principles and themes in the Old Testament that most integrally encompass holistic development.

The Sabbath was made for humankind to allow for a holistic development that includes a close relationship with the Creator. The Sabbath provides the opportunity for this relationship to develop. It is also the Sabbath-day that allows for human beings to rest, a weekly rest that everyone needs so much.

The biblical year of Jubilee, after seven Sabbatical years, was a year in which debts were cancelled (Deut. 15:1–11), property was returned, people were freed, and also the land could rest (Lev. 25). It was intrinsically connected with holistic development in the sense that all aspects of life—social, judicial, economic, environmental, physical, and spiritual—are connected. This connection can touch human beings in the sense that they can develop and be fully free to work with each other, live in harmony with each other, and develop their character as God would want them to develop.

There can only be true holistic development where there is *shalom*. *Shalom* encompasses all attributes that bring balance and meaning to human life. It is a gift from God; therefore, it is for the good of all men and women. Let us briefly explore

these three concepts and principles and see how they help us understand what God intended for His children through this true model of development.

The Sabbath

Of the two divine institutions given to the human race in creation—Sabbath and marriage—the Sabbath is firmly grounded in Creation and also linked with redemption (Gen. 2:1–3; Exod. 20:8–11; 31:12–17). The Sabbath is an agent of rest from all activities and has the ability to confront man's religions and to bring balance to social relationships. As a perpetual sign and covenant, the Sabbath's nature is universal and serves all mankind—it is concerned with worship of God and also with human needs and emotions (rest, joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment).¹⁵ The Sabbath is also linked with Creation, redemption, and sanctification as the human race receives renewed life from its Creator from Sabbath to Sabbath (Hasel 1982:21–23). God saw that all He had done was “very good”—meaning that He was pleased with the work of His hands and with the gift (Sabbath) He had given to all mankind as a sign and memorial of His whole creation.

The Sabbath is important for humanity because it clearly testifies that God is the Creator of the universe (in opposition to atheism) and that He has blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. As a loving God, He gives the Sabbath to all, without regard to race, gender, social status, and so on. All receive the same gift and can enjoy it equally. It is given to all with no strings attached, week after week. The Sabbath is like a much-needed medicine that is given by God to His children to be a cure, a blessing, a constant reminder of who is our Creator, who is our God and Maker, and who is our Restorer and Savior.

Sabbath was also given to provide a better (or a proper) relationship between man, woman, and God—with family and community. To worship God individually, as family, and as community or nation on the seventh-day Sabbath is a declaration of our faith and obedience to God, and at the same time is a human acceptance and expression of the desire to be healed, restored, and renewed weekly by our Creator (Bradford 1999:57; Holmes 1984:27–37).

The Sabbath points to both work and rest—work as God's care and rest as God's care. In the fourth commandment, the six days of work and the seventh-day Sabbath of rest are spoken together, implying that the Sabbath rest should be on the seventh day and that it should be an acknowledgement of God as Creator of the world.¹⁶ Accordingly “it is divine concern for human well-being” and wholesome-

ness that “led God to ordain the pattern of six days for work and the seventh for rest” (Bacchiocchi 1994:91). The Sabbath rest is also important because when “God rested at the end of Creation week, he exemplified for us what ‘sabbath’ should mean. In addition, the fourth commandment requires us to honour the sabbath. Observation of the sabbath may take many forms; however, it should fulfil the purposes of worship, rest, and recreation. More thought is needed, to develop ways in which Christians in differing cultures should observe the sabbath, for the sabbath is for creation” (Samuel & Sugden 1999:356).

Sabbath is also considered as freedom from work and freedom for God. Freedom from work is meant in the sense that “the Sabbath rest teaches that the chief end of life is not, as advocated by Marxism, to work to transform nature, but to rest to enjoy God’s presence and creation” (Bacchiocchi 1994:93). Freedom for God is used in the sense that human beings are invited to respond to God’s love by making themselves totally available to Him and dependent upon Him. Therefore “the pattern of six days for work and the seventh for rest, which God established at creation through His personal participation, constitutes a sublime revelation and reminder of His concern for man’s physical, social and spiritual well-being” (Bacchiocchi 1994:98).¹⁷

The Sabbath is important and should be kept sacred weekly by human beings in honor of God (worship) and in caring for their health. In addition, God provided a rest for the land each seventh year. Although the land does not have a soul or a body, it needs rest to continue to provide for the children that inhabit it and eat from it. Here is a special provision from God—the land must rest on the seventh year. This is not only because the land (soil) needs rest; the command to rest is an all-encompassing instruction from God. It is related to feeding the poor and food for the beasts of the field. God is not only concerned about His children; He also worries about the poor, the animals of the field, and the land itself. This instruction was not only related to the farming of the fields, but also to the olive trees and the vineyard.¹⁸ God’s instructions provided for the balance of the environment as well as for the subsistence of the poor and the animals of the field.

The Year of Jubilee

The principle of the Sabbath and the concept of the Fallow Year, in which the land rested every seventh year, are both directly linked with the year of the Jubilee (Lowery 2000; Bergsma 2007). These are all connected with each other and are laws and principles that God designed in order to care for, heal, maintain, and develop

human beings. It is part of the holistic “gospel” in the Old Testament message—a message that in this regard is quite humanitarian as well as developmental in its nature, form, and application.

It is interesting to note that in Exodus 20 all humans and animals are to rest on the seventh day. In Exodus 23 God commands the people of Israel to let the land rest as well, meaning that the land is to be left unused (unplanted and unplowed), and the reason is “that the poor and the wild animals may eat what is left.” And it “implies, I believe, that the owners may also gather food from it” (Dybdahl 1994:204). In Leviticus 25:1–7 and Deuteronomy 15:1–3 and 31:10, this command is further developed in an expanded form: the seventh year is a year of rest for the land and a year of release from debts (Dybdahl 1994:204; Wright 2006:290–296).¹⁹

The year of Jubilee (fiftieth year) was to be a holy year similar to the other seven sabbatical years. In it the debtors were released from their debts, inheritances and properties were restored, slaves were set free, and liberty was to be proclaimed. It was a liberty from the alienation brought upon people through the loss of land. Notably “in an agricultural society, land is the primary means people have for achieving status and earning a living. Sometimes, however, a landowner must mortgage or lease his property in order to settle a debt. In Israel society this was done by the debtor turning his land over to the creditor. However, to keep land within the family, every fifty years all such leased land reverted to the original owner or his heirs. This helped prevent people from falling into perpetual poverty through loss of their livelihood” (Dybdahl 1994:204).

Accordingly, the year of Jubilee would give everyone a new start economically (Dybdahl 1994:205, Hoff 1983:178–193) as well as socially, as this principle was supposed to eliminate the differences and distinctions between the rich and the poor and other weak and vulnerable people. Thus, the Jubilee symbolizes redemption and restoration for the whole person, and it should transform the whole community and society.

Leviticus 25 is also a chapter that declares the sovereignty of God and spells out the legal provisions of the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–22). God is the sovereign, royal, and true Owner of the land, and whatever He declares about it has lasting validity.²⁰ The land belongs to God and He can distribute it to all. Moreover,

The Jubilee laws are significant in that, in the very midst of the holiness Code with its emphasis on cultic matters, these laws bear witness to the continuing power of the image of God as sovereign over Israel, and to the fact that such an image of God has ethical consequences. To confess God as sovereign includes

caring for the poor and granting freedom to those trapped in a continuous cycle of indebtedness. God's sovereignty is presented as a fact bearing on people's daily life and structuring their relationships with one another and with the rest of the created order (Ringe 1985:28).

Thus the Jubilee was a year in which liberty would be proclaimed to all. God was in control, caring and providing for His people, and their lives were worth more than the possessions or property anyone should have. This high view of how valuable the whole person is, even the most degraded person, made property less valued and important (Sider 1997:94).

The year of Jubilee also pointed toward a time when the Messiah would come and His very presence would make the Sabbath rest totally meaningful. The Creator God would be with His people and they would have the joy and satisfaction of relating to Him face to face—communion with God, Immanuel. His presence would bring healing and salvation to the individual and justice and peace to the nation (God's community). Accordingly, and when practiced, these holistic instructions and methods of God can restore dignity and respect in the life of the individual and consequently transform the whole community (Kinsler & Kinsler 1999:154–163). Health and peace, justice and love, will be the inevitable results of a transformed community.

The Concept of *Shalom*²¹

The results of a transformed community, one that has experienced love and justice, will certainly be health and peace, which in its very essence is *shalom*. In reality, *shalom* relates to all aspects of the human existence—relationships, health, justice, love, welfare, development, religious life, work, and so on. It is an all-encompassing concept, and it reaches all aspects of life: the physical, the social, the mental and intellectual, the moral, and the spiritual, which is our connection with God. In fact, because *shalom* is a gift from God, human beings cannot experience *shalom* without being connected to God, with each other, and with the created order, and “this *shalom*, which implies strength of body, is conceived as the result of an intellectual and spiritual process” (Doukhan 2001:13).

Shalom is probably one of the best concepts or principles for holistic ministries in any given context. It also means wholeness, and it relates to the well-being of humans in the most basic and physical part of us—the human body. Whatever is connected with the human body has to do with its health aspect; thus, in this sense, *shalom* also means health. There are several passages in the Old Testament that have this connotation where *shalom* is equated with health.²²

Moreover, for a community to be transformed and developed into the image of God, there must be justice and love. The results of righteousness will be *shalom* (Isa. 32:17). As *shalom* is a holistic and all encompassing concept, it is also a very difficult principle to put into practice. It requires the efforts of all and in all the dimensions of life. It requires the presence of the God of *shalom* (Prov. 16:7 and Ps. 4:8).

Shalom is also achieved through reconciliation, and it can only be gained through the presence and work of the Prince of Peace [*shalom*] of Isaiah 9:6. Further, it is this very Prince of Peace that commends His people to hope for *shalom*, because *shalom* is also the hope in the coming Messiah, who will bring the kingdom of God (Duchrow & Liedke 1989:112–144). When the Messiah brings this *shalom*, then “the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them” (Isa. 11:6).²³ Only the Messiah can establish perfect *shalom* for God’s family.

The Messianic Hope

Although the laws and regulations that were established by God to protect the poor, widow, orphan, alien, oppressed, and weak were essentially good and if put to practice would yield good results, it seems that very few people or rulers implemented them. This is one of the reasons the people of Israel went into captivity many times. They did not follow God’s instruction and did not live in relationship with Him. There was only one hope for them—the coming of the Messiah.

Somehow this hope in the coming Messiah motivated many Israelites to love and obey God’s commandments, and in faith they waited in the hope that the promises of God were true and would soon be fulfilled. This prompted many to act justly, to show mercy to the needy, to feed the poor, and to heal the wounds of the oppressed, the widow, and the orphan. An example is Job, whose own words declared: “Whoever heard me spoke well of me, and those who saw me commended me, because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him. The man who was dying blessed me; I made the widow’s heart sing. I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger. I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth” (Job 29:12–17).

Job was certainly living the principles of holistic ministries, because his hope and love was devoted to God and he was living out in his own life the principles of the kingdom of God. He “was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1).

Another example of the Messianic hope in action is found in the accounts of Nehemiah. He helped the poor (Neh. 5) and also implemented a great relief and development work by rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2–3; 6–7; and 12). Ruth and Esther are also examples of noble character. Ruth was determined to stay with her mother-in-law because she was convinced that the God of Naomi would take care of them. God used Ruth, a widow like Naomi, to help in that situation (Ruth 1:16, 17). Esther also took care of the people of Israel when a death decree was passed and they were in great danger. She appealed to the king for justice, and because of her courage her people were spared (Esther 3–7).

The Messianic hope is not something of the past, nor was or is it something only for the Jews. Major world religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism share this hope—a common hope in the kingdom of God (Milavec 2007:117). It is a hope of a humanity that cries for a better world, a world in which the creator God reigns supreme, and where peace and health, justice and love abound.²⁴

Summary

When Adam and Eve yielded to temptation and fell, the image of God in them was obviously and immediately altered by sin. The fall affected all creation and all aspects of man's life (physical, mental, social, and spiritual). Man and woman realized they were naked, and because they were afraid and ashamed of their nakedness (sin), they hid from their Lord and God. And it seems that humanity continued to hide from God throughout history.

The laws and regulations provided by God in the Old Testament were spiritual in nature but intended to relieve the children of God from the harsh realities of a fallen world in a direct way. It is the poor, orphan, widow, weak, sick, alien, and the oppressed who receive the most attention in the Old Testament account. It seems that poverty touches the heart of God.

The Sabbath and the concept of the Fallow Year, in which the land rested every seventh year, are both directly linked with the year of the Jubilee. These are all connected with each other and are principles that God designed in order to save, care for, heal, maintain, and transform human beings. It is part of a holistic “gospel” in the Old Testament message—a message that in this regard is quite spiritual, humanitarian as well as developmental in its application and form.

The year of Jubilee pointed toward a time when the Messiah, the Creator God, would be with His people and they would have the joy and satisfaction of relating to Him face to face—communion with God, Immanuel. His presence would bring

healing and salvation to the person, and justice and peace to the nation. These holistic principles of God can restore dignity and respect in the life of the individual and consequently transform the whole community.

The hope and trust in the coming Messiah and the *shalom* that He would bring provided a motive for many Israelites to serve God and to help, heal, feed, and clothe His children—the poor, sick, stranger, widow, weak, and orphan. This hope continues to be a motivation for us today, as we live in the reality of God’s kingdom and in the certainty of His second coming. To mend the broken hearts and heal the wounds of those who suffer is a mandate that must be carried forward. We are part of His already-established kingdom, and as we transform individuals and communities with His holistic gospel we announce His kingdom to come.

Notes

¹This article is dedicated to my professor and colleague, Dr. Jon Dybdahl. His career as a missionary, his expertise in Old Testament studies, his passion and involvement in teaching missions and spiritual formation, and his scholarship in missiology, in my view, make Dr. Jon Dybdahl a real mentor and role model for students, missionaries, and scholars alike.

²See Christopher J. H. Wright (1991:170–172). It is a major reference in regard to the laws on charity and social welfare, especially for those most vulnerable—the poor, the widow, the stranger, the weak, the Levite, the alien and immigrant, the orphan, and the worker—as well as for the newlyweds and the ones who mourn, and even God’s animals and the fruit trees (all creation). See also Leslie J. Hoppe (2004:17–41).

³For a fuller treatment of this topic, see Dybdahl (1994:197–206).

⁴“Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt” (Exod. 22:21; see also Exod. 23:9); “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan” (Exod. 22:22; see also Deut. 10:17–19; 26:12–13); “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest” (Exod. 22:25); “Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits” (Exod. 23:6); “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest your crops, but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove” (Exod. 23:10–11; see also Lev. 19:9–15; Deut. 14:28, 29; 15:7–11; 24:14, 15, 19–22); “If the man is poor, do not go to sleep with his pledge in your possession” (Deut. 24:12; see also Lev. 25:25–28, 35–43; Deut. 24:13–21); “Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge” (Deut. 24:17; see also Lev. 19:33, 34; Deut. 24:18–21; 26:12, 13); “Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow” (Deut. 27:19; see also Lev. 19:13–15).

⁵ Social Concerns in the Old Testament. Personhood: everyone's person is to be secure (Exod. 20:13; Exod. 21:16–21, 26–31; Lev. 19:14; Deut. 5:17; 24:7; 27:18. False accusation: everyone is to be secure against slander and false accusation (Exod. 20:16; Exod. 23:1–3; Lev. 19:16; Deut. 5:20; 19:15–21). Women: no woman is to be taken advantage of within her subordinate status in society (Exod. 21:7–11, 20, 26–32; 22:16, 17; Deut. 21:10–14; 22:13–30; 24:1–5). Punishment: punishment for wrongdoing shall not be excessive so that the culprit is dehumanized (Deut. 25:1–5). Dignity: every Israelite's dignity and right to be God's freedman and servant are to be honored and safeguarded (Exod. 21:2, 5, 6; Lev. 25; Deut. 15:12–18). Inheritance: every Israelite's inheritance in the promised land is to be secure (Lev. 25; Num. 27:5–7; 36:1–9; Deut. 25:5–10). Property: everyone's property is to be secure (Exod. 20:15; Exod. 21:33–36; 22:1–15; 23:4, 5; Lev. 19:35, 36; Deut. 5:19; 22:1–4; 25:13–15). Fruit of labor: everyone is to receive the fruit of his labors (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14; 25:4). Fruit of the ground: everyone is to share the fruit of the ground (Exod. 23:10, 11; Lev. 19:9, 10; 23:22; 25:3–55; Deut. 14:28, 29; 24:19–21). Rest on Sabbath: everyone, down to the humblest servant and the resident alien, is to share in the weekly rest of God's Sabbath (Exod. 20:8, 11; Exod. 23:12; Deut. 5:12–15). Marriage: the marriage relationship is to be kept inviolate (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18; see also Lev. 18:6–23; 20:10–21; Deut. 22:13–30). Exploitation: no one, however disabled, impoverished or powerless, is to be oppressed or exploited (Exod. 22:21–27; Lev. 19:14, 33, 34; 25:35, 36; Deut. 23:19; 24:6, 12–15, 17; 27:18). Fair trial: every person is to have free access to the courts and is to be afforded a fair trial (Exod. 23:6, 8; Lev. 19:15; Deut. 1:17; 10:17, 18; 16:18–20; 17:8–13; 19:15–21). Social order: every person's God-given place in the social order is to be honored (Exod. 20:12; 21:15, 17; 22:28; Lev. 19:3, 32; 20:9; Deut. 5:16; 17:8–13; 21:15–21; 27:16). Law: no one shall be above the law, not even the king (Deut. 17:18–20). Animals: concern for the welfare of other creatures is to be extended to the animal world (Exod. 23:5, 11; Lev. 25:7; Deut. 22:4, 6, 7; 25:4).

⁶Again, Stott argues that God “takes pity on the barren woman (whose childlessness was regarded as a disgrace) and makes her a joyful mother. That is the kind of God He is” (1990:232, 233).

⁷The *King James Version* (KJV) renders Nehemiah 8:10 as follows: “...and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared.” It is possible that “whom” means the poor, who apparently had no food to prepare and/or to eat.

⁸See also Job 31:13–23 for another manner in which Job describes this subject. Not only had the children of Israel special protection, but also, as Glasser comments, the “non-Israelites who placed themselves under Israel's protection had certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities, and were classified with widows, fatherless children, and the needy” (Glasser 1989:78).

⁹“Weak” is also translated as “poor” in the *King James Version* (KJV).

¹⁰There is a beautiful promise from God to the widows in Isaiah 54:4, 5: “Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.

For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.”

¹¹See also Jeremiah 5:27, 28. The instructions given to Israel commanded that God’s people were “not to harden their hearts or close their hands against their poor brother or sister, but to be generous in maintaining those who could not maintain themselves, by taking them into their home and feeding them without charge (see Deut. 14:29; 15:7; and Lev. 25:35; 26:12). Their regular tithes were also to be used to support the Levites, the aliens, the orphans and the widows. In particular, the support and relief of the poor were the obligations of the extended family towards its own members” (Stott 1990:234, 235). Glasser states that “widows were regarded as helpless, needy persons, unable to protect or provide for themselves. They were to be given special consideration and treated with justice.” Moreover, “since their rights were often overlooked or denied, God made them His particular concern” (1989:78).

¹² See more details for this reference in Ezekiel 16:49 and Daniel 4:27.

¹³“For in you the fatherless find compassion” (Hos. 14:3).

¹⁴The message of the Old Testament is a call to ethical lifestyle. It has to do with following God’s principles through living a life of helping those in need. See Moskala (2008:58).

¹⁵Sabbath as an expression of worship—as a time of pausing and a time of silence in relation to the sublime, which is eternal—urges us to move beyond ourselves and brings us into closer relationship with God. This idea is further developed by Abraham J. Heschel (1993:73–76); for him the Sabbath is spirit in the form of time. Jacques B. Doukhan adds that there is more to the Sabbath than the mere existential experience; the reference to the past and to the future conveyed by the Sabbath is vital, not only because it gives the Sabbath its historic meaning but also because it resituates the religious person in the historical perspective, namely, between creation and re-creation (1991:163).

¹⁶For further study on the implications of working and resting as referred to in the Law, see Calum M. Carmichael (1992:62–65, 204–208).

¹⁷See also Jacques Ellul (1989:165). The Sabbath is to be marked by two attitudes: freedom and joy. It is a day of great freedom and great joy—freedom because the people of God are whole, renewed, and forgiven, and joy because they worship God the Creator and Savior, free from all cares and problems that the world imposes on them.

¹⁸See some other interesting comments of Carmichael (1992:204–208). An example is Joseph’s agricultural policy in Egypt whereby, during the seven years of plenty, a fifth of the grain in each year had to be set aside for the coming years of want. After the famine Joseph instituted a comparable, permanent agricultural policy in Egypt (see 1992:205).

¹⁹George V. Pixley adds that although the sabbatical year is strictly limited to allowing the land to lie fallow (unplanted/unplowed/unused), which has to do with agricultural practices, the emphasis here is on social advantages: a fallow field will be accessible to the poor and to grazing animals. It is also important to note that Deuteronomy 15:1–15 is related to the releasing or condoning of debts in the sabbatical year (1987:182, 183).

²⁰For more details of this subject, see Sharon H. Ringe (1985:16–32). Ringe discusses

the Jubilee having the central point of the chapter situated in Leviticus 25:10, which reads: "Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan."

²¹See Bradshaw (1993:5–19), Doukhan (2001:12–14), and Eric Ram (1995:79–99). Doukhan describes in detail the meaning of the word *shalom* from a biblical/Hebrew perspective. Bradshaw sees *shalom* as a way to bridge relief and development work with evangelism or the preaching of the good news. Ram comments that the word for "health" in Hebrew is *shalom*; the same word also means peace, welfare, well-being, and harmony. Health is total. It is personal well-being. It is social harmony and justice. It is walking humbly with God. *Shalom* is the work of righteousness (right relationships), as the prophet Isaiah says (Isa. 32:16).

²²Some examples given by Doukhan (2001:12–14) are the following: "there is no health [*shalom*] in my body" (Ps. 38:3); Jacob's reference to Laban inquiring about his health in Genesis 29:6; Proverbs 3:2 speaks about long life and peace (*shalom*); and Proverbs 3:8, which says: "This will bring health [*shalom*] to your body and nourishment to your bones."

²³See Doukhan (2001:14). In this article the author comments that even the natural order will be affected by the presence of *shalom*.

²⁴Wilbert R. Shenk aptly comments that "the mission of the triune God is to establish God's reign throughout the whole of creation. This is being realized through God's redemptive mission. The character of the mission of God is defined by the ministry of God's messiah, Jesus the servant, whose servanthood was empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is by the Spirit that the church is endowed with spiritual gifts and empowered for ministry as the messianic community. God's redemptive mission will be consummated in the eschaton, but in the interim the promise of the eschaton infuses the messianic community with hope and power as it continues its witness amid oppression and suffering. The interaction of these elements represents the mission dynamic that is the basis of the vocation of the disciples of Jesus Christ in the world" (1999:19).

Chapter 9

* * *

A MEDITATION ON THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING

Bruce C. Moyer

Suffering is a given in this life. Misery is an option. This meditation reflects on the universality of suffering, explores biblical and theological pictures of that reality and moves to ask questions of proper response. While we cannot answer the question of why, we can explore the question of how we should respond. The best answer may be found in community.

A group of Indian pastors once challenged a western missionary by saying, “You Americans are utterly unequipped for life in the real world You think that life is supposed to be pleasant: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and all that stuff. When it’s not, you think something is wrong that you need to fix. Once fixed, you can get back to a normal state—pleasant. On the contrary, we think that life is hard. We know we will suffer. Our challenge is to learn how to trust God in the midst of suffering, find his purposes through it, and still have the courage and hope to change it.”

Much of this attitude can be the result of our highly cognitive approach to life. The truth is that human suffering is primarily an experiential reality, not a rational-cognitive one. Suffering is not merely the result of faulty ideas that can be corrected. The reasons for suffering do not consist of perplexing rational constructs, which if analyzed carefully can be sorted out and satisfactorily answered. The reality of suf-

fering refuses to fit inside the box of cognitive consistency, however much we feel we need to put it there.

The reality of the genocide in Rwanda was among the fastest, largest, and most sadistic waves of homicidal cruelty ever to wash over the human race. Many causes led to this tragedy: historical factors, political power plays, cultural differences, ethnic hatreds, and social injustices. These causes could be analyzed, dissected, and explained. But such explanations pale when juxtaposed with the actual suffering of over a million people. The explanations are inadequate in the face of the crisis of faith that this experience provokes.

The western response to the 2004 tsunami that devastated Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and other countries in Southeast Asia was to analyze the earthquake, send funds and relief, and propose early warning devices for the future. These addressed the physical needs but did little to alleviate the emotional devastation left in the wake of the deadly waters.

Welcome to the real world of sin and sinfulness, where all problems cannot be solved by pills, and solutions do not come in two hours, with time for commercials. Others' realities are now ours: Bosnia, Albania, Vietnam, Chechnya, Northern Ireland, Hiroshima, and Auschwitz. "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamenting and weeping bitterly: it is Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they are no more" (Matt. 2:18).

For the first time in years, the United States has experienced the realities of suffering, the realities of most of the world. We must admit that we are not a "suffering people," at least not the "official" U.S. The reality is that we are rich, beautiful, pampered, and largely unaware of the rest of the world. One indicator of our isolation from the sufferings of the rest of the world is seen in the varying but consistently small number of congressmen who do not have a passport and have never been outside of the U.S. (Sariolghalam 2001:5; Naim 1997–1998:38).

Another indicator is the degree to which we deny death and suffering. We cover over our cemeteries with pleasant lawns without tombstones, as if death did not exist. This strikes many of us when we experience our first funeral outside of our culture. I remember well my own extreme discomfort at the first African funeral I attended. It seemed terribly final.

One of the major criticisms I hear outside North America is that we have only just now joined the suffering world and we cannot stop complaining about it or recognize our own complicity in the sufferings of so many others.

Where is God in the Midst of Suffering?

Shortly after the event, a well-known evangelist was asked where God was on September 11. He embarrassingly replied that he did not know. He did not have the answer to the question. The answer was terribly weak and ill-informed. The question was even more terribly insensitive and self-centered.

One might just as well ask, “Where was God in Rwanda? Where was God at Bhopal? Where was God in the killing fields of Cambodia and in Bosnia? Where is God in Israel and Palestine?”

Where is God whenever and wherever there is suffering? The answer is that God is there, in the midst of the suffering, weeping with Rachel, sobbing with all who suffer. God is part and parcel of the lot of all His children. He participates in all of our lives. It is not just white privileged Americans who are God’s children.

GODISNOWHERE: How you separate and understand this series of letters depends so much on your perspective, your history, and your culture. And this provides part of the answer to the related question: “What is God’s response to the suffering of his children?”

We cannot bear to say “God is nowhere.” As Christians we affirm at the very outset that God is. To answer “nowhere” would strip us naked, theologically and emotionally. We must affirm, GOD IS NOW HERE!

God is always in the *HERE* of His suffering children. This is the meaning of the incarnation. It was not only in the life and death of Jesus; it is in all the suffering of all the world. Jesus (Emmanuel = God with us) is only part of the promise, “I will be with you until the end” (Matt. 28:20).

Is There a Purpose to Suffering?

The apostle Paul tells us, “Not only so, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character hope. And hope does not disappoint us” (Rom. 5:3-5 NJB). He also says that “the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Rom. 8:16, 17 NJB).

The generally unasked question is, what does it mean to “share in his sufferings?” We do not share the cross, but do we have a non-redemptive part in sharing His sufferings for the world, His agony of love for a world that is indifferent in re-

sponse? Do we dare to pray to be able to share that suffering? While our sufferings have nothing to do with our personal salvation, or the salvation of the world, is there some mystical blessing to be experienced by this solidarity with Christ in His sufferings? The apostle Paul seemed to think so when he said, “It makes me happy to be suffering for you now, and in my own body to make up all the hardships that still have to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church” (Col. 1:24 NJB).

Is it possible that our solidarity with Jesus, our participation in His sufferings, may not only deepen our own ability to understand our Savior but may increase the final joy when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21 TNIV)? Is this participation in the sufferings of Jesus, also part of our fellowship with one another—our participation in the Body of Christ?

According to victims of personal tragedy, sorrow and grief are isolating forces. They separate us from one another and leave us feeling terribly lonely. It is obvious that Christ’s followers are not immune to suffering, but they have the comfort of community. In our life together that Christ makes possible, no one is to suffer alone. Paul describes the mutual experience of suffering and comfort among Christians in another letter he wrote to Christians in Greece: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows We know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort” (2 Cor. 1:3–7 TNIV).

And in speaking of this unique community that is the “church,” Paul says, “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Cor. 12:26 NJB). The gospel tells us that Jesus is Emmanuel, “God with us” (Matt. 1:21–23). The cross tells us that God is now here! The community of faith is one of the means of God being present, “now here.” As God was in Christ, so we are ambassadors of Christ (2 Cor. 5:19, 20). God is in this world in the person of His church, through His Body.

There Is a Purpose to Suffering

Jesus opened a unique window on the reality of suffering in the ninth chapter of John’s gospel. The blind man, Jesus told His disciples, was not born blind because of either his own or his parents’ sins, but rather “he was born blind that the works

of God might be revealed in him” (John 9:3 NJB). The “why” question, Jesus states, is irrelevant. What matters is our response. In the midst of the apparent biblical silence concerning the “why” questions, and in the face of the complexities and perplexities regarding the connection between human sin and suffering, the Bible is crystal clear on two issues: First, God has come to engage the globe and to redeem it from its groaning (Rom. 8:18–22). Second, the followers of Jesus are called to be participants in this divine redemption project (Matt. 28:19, 20). We are called to be instruments of healing (1 Cor. 5:17–21), whether that healing be deserved or undeserved. We are called to engage where there is evidence of the presence and work of demonic forces or evil social structures (Matt. 25:31–46). We are called to engage physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering, whether it has been caused by the sinful actions of others, ourselves, natural disasters, microscopic viruses, or economic and cultural dislocation (Matt. 10:6–8).

The human condition, with its attendant suffering, is the object of God’s redeeming love. Scripture is clear on this: “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). “I have given you as a light to the nations that salvation may come to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6 NJB). “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18 NJB). “I have come that you may have life, and that you have it in its fullness” (John 10:10). “God so loved the world . . .” (John 3:16 TNIV).

At the core of the New Testament teaching about God’s engagement of the world is the inauguration of the kingdom of God in the life and teaching ministry of Jesus. This becomes specific at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry when He cites (Isaiah 61:1, 2 TNIV) “The spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, To let the oppressed go free.” And, at the conclusion of this reading He applies this to Himself (Luke 4:17–21).

His demon exorcisms are signs that the reign of evil is being broken: “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:20 TNIV). Jesus’ parables illustrate what the reign of God looks like when it engages broken humanity: Lost people are found, welcomed back, and reinstated (Luke 15). Beaten-down people are restored and nursed back to health (Luke 11). The marginalized (poor, crippled, blind, lame) are invited to the banquet (Luke 14:15f.). Suffering is alleviated (Matt. 25:31–46). Compassion is extended to the have-nots (Luke 16:19–31).

This is not a “pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by” kingdom. It is a real-time break-

through of a new principle of life—a revolutionary new way of living, characterized by servanthood rather than triumphalism, characterized by the transforming activity of love, compassion, kindness, gentleness, grace, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It is incarnational; it is “God with us, Emmanuel.” In Jesus, God’s empathy for the creation’s “groaning in travail” takes the form of suffering with us and for us. The Word becomes flesh and lives among us. He becomes “like us in every respect” (Heb. 2:17 NJB), “sharing the globe’s suffering” (Heb. 2:18; 5:8) to transform human suffering and ultimately heal us and the world itself.

It is incarnational, and we are part of that incarnation (2 Cor. 5:18–21), being with the suffering people. When we are present with others in their suffering, or when others are present with us in our suffering, healing comes into that suffering—even though there is no cure and even when the suffering continues unabated. Perhaps one of the most important lessons to learn is that suffering is a given. Misery, however, is an option.

Four Books

In times of disaster, the ancient rabbis restricted Jews to reading only three books in the Scriptures: Job, Jeremiah, and Lamentations (*Mishnah Taan* 30b and *Taan* 4:6). The book of Job is the earliest literature that asks the question, “Where is God when there is suffering?” Job was the greatest of all the Sons of the East (Job 1:1–3), yet in one day Job suffered the loss of his wealth and all his children. In one more day Job was stuck with malignant ulcers from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. He took a piece of broken pottery and sat in the ashes, scraping himself. To make matters worse, his wife offered no support at all. According to the conventional wisdom of the time, Job was obviously an industrial-strength sinner, and his “friends” came to comfort him with this news of God’s rejection. When Job finally spoke out, it was not in patience but in anger and despair. He vented his outrage at God.

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said, “May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’ That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. That night—may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it. May

those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes. If only my anguish could be weighed and all my misery be placed on the scales! It would surely outweigh the sand of the seas—no wonder my words have been impetuous. The arrows of the Almighty are in me, my spirit drinks in their poison; God's terrors are marshaled against me" (Job 6:1–4 NIV; see also 3:1–10; 6:1–4).

Job was justifiably troubled and anguished. Where was God in all of his sufferings? Why was He silent? Why had He deserted His friend? And in the end, when God replies, He offers no real comfort, no assurance. Job must suffer the fate of all humanity, its pain, its misery, its suffering, and its mystery. It is a part of life that is unavoidable. The only answer comes in clinging to God in faith.

Jeremiah alone could see what no one else wanted to admit. His world, the world of all his people, was coming to an end. The country was being devastated, and its people were being enslaved. There was no alternative, no plan B. The best the nation could do would be to surrender and hope for very limited mercy at the hands of a sixth-century BC Osama bin Laden.

Conventional wisdom interpreted this event as the death of God. The Jewish leaders and the people could not accept the reality that their city would be destroyed, that their king's sons would be murdered in front of him before he was blinded. They could not accept the fact that the women would be raped and the men killed or enslaved. Where was God in all of this? Had He ever really existed? To their minds, it was written, GOD IS NOWHERE!

Jeremiah's Book of Lamentations recorded his bitter sorrow. I invite you to read his lament over the destruction of sixth-century BC Jerusalem in the light of Cambodia, Beirut, Sarajevo, New York City, Kabul, and Gaza. But to these three books I would suggest a fourth, the Book of Psalms. Perhaps if anything has enabled the Jewish people to survive the sufferings that have been theirs since the destruction of Jerusalem, it is their ability to be honest with God in their sufferings. Read Psalm 109:1–15, 30, and 31, and read Psalm 102:1–14, 18–22.

It is their ability to challenge God aloud without shame: "Wake, Lord! Why are you asleep? Why do you turn your face away?" (Ps. 44:23–26 NJB). They could vent their anger in exile (Ps. 137:1–9) and in defeat (Ps. 88:1–14; Ps. 69:21–36).

Perhaps this reveals an inherent Christian problem. Perhaps we feel that we must be victorious at all times, even when we are not. Perhaps we feel we must

be polite to God, no matter how we feel. How often do we give an honest answer to “How are you?” How often can we admit sin and weakness in our family? Like death, we pretend it is not there. We have few, if any, sins and even less sinfulness to openly admit.

We feel we must be “nice” to God. We must be polite to Him at all times; we must address Him with polite language, as if we must always praise Him. We cannot complain. Certainly we cannot express anger toward God. Do we feel that God is very fragile or temperamental and might become angry with us and leave us? So, deep in our hearts, but far from our lips on September 11 was the question, “Where was God? How could He let this happen?”

Perhaps it is necessary to complain—to shout out our anger and suffering that God can hear. Only when we confront the depths of our feelings can God heal them. This is the answer to Job as well, and Job knew it. The answer of the book of Job to the question of suffering is that there is no answer. “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, naked I shall return again. Yahweh gave; Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh” (Job 1:21 TNIV). What Job does affirm (in the absence of an answer) is the justice, goodness, and wisdom of God. And He challenges us, to use the words of Paul, to “live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). The promise of these books is that, as the result of trusting, the faithful will know—in the midst of their suffering, and through their suffering—the grace, love, compassion and healing of their God. “I know,” Job tells us, “that my redeemer lives . . . after the body has been destroyed, we shall see God” (Job 19:25, 26 TNIV).

Some Biblical Principles of Suffering

Suffering is a given due to the presence of sin. God is not responsible for sin, but God is working toward the final elimination of all sin and suffering. Being a Christian does not remove one from suffering; actually, it should make us more sensitive to it. One of the purposes of the Christian community is to share together and thus mitigate the effects of suffering through mutual comforting. God suffers as well—in the midst of His world, in the midst of His children—and He experiences our collective sufferings. Our part in incarnational mission and ministry is to do the same—in the midst of His world, in the midst of His children, to share the collective sufferings.

Sin and suffering have no reason. They are random. They were not meant to be. They are reminders to us of how far we are from home and, hopefully, make us all the more homesick. “In this world you shall have hardship,” Jesus tells us, “but

be courageous, I have conquered the world” (John 16: 33). “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

In the darkest days of World War II, many of the greatest Jewish minds were gathered in the death camps of the Third Reich. One night, in the midst of this genocide, one Jew rose to make a formal accusation against God. He said that God was guilty of genocide, of killing His own children. The accusation was taken seriously, as it was intended. A rabbinical court was established with prosecution and defense. For weeks the trial went on, night after night with all the intensity that the occasion and location could produce. Eventually the rabbis adjourned to discuss the matter and issue their verdict.

On the appointed night all the prisoners gathered in solemn assembly to hear the verdict. The rabbis took their places and the chief rabbi rose to declare, “We find God guilty as accused!” There was a deep silence, and then a lone voice asked, “Now what do we do?” “Now,” another voice answered, “we pray!” The reality was clear, we are told by Eli Wiesel (cited in Leventhal 2005), a death camp survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner. We can be a believer *with* God. We can be a believer *against* God. But we cannot be a believer *without* God.

Chapter 10

* * *

IDENTITY IN CHRIST: TOWARD A BIBLICAL VIEW OF GENDER RELATIONSHIPS

Cheryl Brown Doss

Gender is a foundational aspect of personal identity and deeply affects a person's Christian identity. Disrupted gender relationships underlie many of the most divisive issues in Christianity. This article surveys the biblical record for principles to guide Christian gender relationships. The Indo-European myth is applied to traditional gender relationships in the West and the good news of Christian identity in Christ emphasized.

Nothing is more basic to an individual's identity than gender. One trip to a delivery room will reveal the importance of gender distinctions. After ascertaining if the baby is healthy (i.e., able to live), the first question will be, "Is it a boy or a girl?" At that point cultural gender norms take over—pink or blue name bracelets and blankets announce the baby's sex, an appropriate-to-gender name is given, and subconscious adjustments in care-giving patterns occur. While the sex of the baby is biologically determined, gender is a culturally defined identity and set of behaviors based upon a person's sex. Gender identity and relationships vary somewhat around the world and across time but, whether in the forefront of social comment or merely as background noise, they impact almost every facet of human life.

In the last century, human sexuality and gender relationships have become a focus of debate. From the feminist revolution of the 1960s, to the Promise Keep-

ers of the 1990s, to the recent news that women now make up nearly half of the workforce in America (Gibbs 2009:25), gender issues have frequently generated “sustained media attention” (Wilcox 2004:2). Many of the most divisive issues in Christian circles today arise from disrupted gender relationships: abortion, homosexuality, promiscuity, family abuse, divorce, women’s ordination, the use and abuse of power and authority, to name a few. Why is the relationship between the genders so important and so divisive? How have patterns of gender relationships developed in the “Christian” West? What does the Bible say about gender relationships? How do gender relationships impact a person’s relationship with God? What good news about gender relationships does Christianity offer to people everywhere?

Male and Female He Created Them

Genesis 1 and 2 provide the beginning point for a biblical view of gender. The Creator God is speaking the world into existence. Air, light, land, heavenly bodies, sea creatures, birds, and land animals have sprung into being by divine command. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:26, 27).¹

At the apex of creation God creates humankind (*ha’adam*) in His image. The plurality of God is reflected in the plurality of humanity (“our image . . . let them”). Right here we get a hint at the oneness and unity expected of the two halves of humanity and also of the fundamental nature of gender identity. God *created* sexual distinctions from the beginning. Their sexuality allowed them to fulfill their assigned work of multiplying and together ruling (*radah*) over the earth (Gen. 1:28). In these verses there is nothing to suggest any kind of innate superiority or inferiority of either male or female. Both are created in God’s image, both are given dominion, and both stand in the same relationship to the Creator. Together they are accounted “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Their sexuality, their relationship to each other and to God, is a part of the sublime goodness of God’s good creation.

The re-telling of the creation of *ha’adam* in Genesis 2 gives new insight into the manner of creation and also raises questions as to the relationship of male and female. Some have postulated that *ha’adam*, “the man,” was initially androgynous, “a sexually undifferentiated earth creature” (Trible 1978:80). However, the same word *ha’adam* is used to refer to the man before and after the creation of the woman.

There is no indication that his essential nature was in any way affected by the loss of a rib (Haerich 1995:100).

“The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7). As an integral part of the creation of plants and animals, the Creator formed (*yatsar*) the man from the earth and placed him in a garden. The garden contained all that the man needed, including two trees of central importance: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, of which he was warned not to eat. After naming the animals, the man had found “no suitable helper (*‘ezer kenegdo*)” (Gen. 2:20) so God, seeing that it was not good for man to be alone, put him into a deep sleep. Taking one of the man’s ribs (literally, “part of the man’s side”) God made (*banah*) the woman. When God presented the woman to the man, his exclamation of joy lights the pages of Scripture: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’ (*‘ishah*) for she was taken out of man (*‘ish*)” (Gen. 2:23). Performing the first wedding ceremony, God joined the man and woman. Scripture tells us that “for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Gen. 2:24, 25).

Some have seen in this more detailed description of the creation of humanity a God-ordained hierarchy of male over female. Because the man was created first and the woman made out of him to be his helper, woman is thought to have been created intrinsically inferior, subordinate, and dependent on the man. However, if the creation order were from superior to inferior, then man would be inferior to the animals who were created before him. In fact, the creation order is from inferior to superior, with the woman being the final act of creation. Rather than hierarchy, the text seems to be emphasizing that both man and woman were made by God, without human help, of the same substance, with the rib a material symbol of that sameness.

The word translated “helper” (*‘ezer*) is frequently used in Scripture to refer to God as Israel’s helper, obviously not an inferior helper (for example, Ex. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26; Ps. 33:20, 70:5, 115:9, 10 among others). The word usually translated “suitable” (*kenegdo*) refers to a counterpart or one of equal power (Davidson 1988:16). Therefore, there is no suggestion of inferiority in designating the woman as the man’s helper but rather a description of a relationship of equality and interdependence.

Though woman “came out” of man, man “came out” of the ground, obviously showing that no inferiority of woman to man or man to the ground is implied in the story; it is merely explaining how God created each. The Hebrew word used for

man's creation (*yatsar*) is the same word used for the forming of the animals, while the word used for the woman's creation (*banah*) has an aesthetic component implying something that is architecturally designed (Davidson 2000a). Taken together, the foregoing makes one begin to wonder why male superiority has traditionally been found in the text instead of female superiority.

An indication of the real reason for the details of the story in Genesis 2 can be found in the final two verses of the chapter. The writer sums up the story with the beautiful picture of a "naked and unashamed" unity that can only be described as "one flesh." God created two beings in such close harmony that they reflect the image of the Trinity in some intrinsic way. The openness and transparency of two souls in perfect relationship to each other and to their God is the culmination and hermeneutical key to understanding the creation story. By reading into the story hierarchy or subordination, the point and beauty of the account is sadly diminished. In God's good and perfect creation there is no need of power and control over another, for how can there be hierarchy in *one*?

And He Shall Rule Over You

The harmony and oneness of Genesis 2 is abruptly broken in Genesis 3. Encountering a deceptive serpent in the forbidden tree, the woman, desiring to be like God, took the fruit and shared it with her husband. After eating, they saw themselves as naked, not only in the sense of having no clothes, but also as being shamefully exposed (Davidson 2000a). When God comes to question them, the breakdown of relationship is immediately apparent. First of all, the man and woman hide from God. Then, when God asks them why they hid, the man blames the woman and the woman the serpent for their sin. Particularly poignant is the man's blaming of his wife and by extension the God who created her ("The woman you put here with me . . ." Gen. 3:12). A breakdown in the gender relationship is a part of the breakdown in the divine/human relationship.

After questioning the man and woman, God speaks to each participant in the drama in turn. First the serpent is cursed and enmity is pronounced between it and the woman. Interestingly, the promise of future suffering and eventual victory is addressed to the woman alone. Differing views concerning the nature of the judgment on the woman have been forwarded. Davidson lists five possible variations ranging from a prescriptive reinforcement of intrinsic Edenic hierarchy to a merely descriptive statement of the effects of sin on gender relationships (Davidson 1988:124-126). The Bible does not call God's statement to the woman a curse, as it

does His pronouncement against the serpent, although the nature of the text does suggest a judgment scene (1988:123).

The woman's judgment is in two parts: her pain (literally "painful toil," the same word used in Gen. 3:17) in childbearing will be greatly increased and her relationship with her husband will be changed. "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule (*mashal*) over you" (Gen. 3:16). The meaning of that short sentence is a matter of vigorous debate. For centuries it was understood to be a punishment against the woman for bringing sin into the world. She would suffer in childbirth yet have sexual desire for her husband. Furthermore, she was divinely placed under her husband's rulership. Some commentators adhere to an intrinsic subjugation ("man-rule") of women.

Since woman has come out from man, it would be normal that she has a tendency toward man. However, her being deceived by the serpent brings her into a greater subjection to her husband. . . . Woman becomes more dependent upon man, who becomes a fulfillment of her desire. The one great desire of woman is motherhood in a marital situation. . . . The condition is not simply man telling woman what she can and cannot do. It is a dominion that affects the very core and character of woman. It may strike fear within her. It may bring her great delight. Some may rebel against this man-rule mystery within them (Haun 1984:169).

Luther believed that while men and women were originally created equal, the Fall so warped human nature that God instituted hierarchy within marriage to maintain good government in the family as well as in the church and society (Kvam, Scheering, & Ziegler 1999:253). Calvin, however, saw a God-ordained patriarchy before the Fall that continued in the political and family realms but not in the theological realm. In special cases women might preach or teach in the church (1999:255). Although starting from different positions on Edenic gender relationships, Calvin and Luther both end in the same place, claiming biblical support for the subordination of women to men.

In more recent times biblical scholars have provided other possible constructions of the text. Kaiser claims that the Hebrew word usually translated "desire" would be better rendered "turning" (Kaiser 1983:205). In addition, the use of the imperfect verb "will rule" indicates a descriptive rather than a prescriptive statement. Thus, we have "You are turning away to your husband and he will rule over you"—a descriptive statement of the result of her turning away from dependence on God (1983:206). "And he shall rule over you" is seen by Tribble as a condemna-

tion of male supremacy since such a position perverts the good creation in both the man and the woman. All human relationships—to God, to the earth, to animals, to each other—have been corrupted and await the healing that only grace can provide (Trible 1999:436). The Hebrew word “rule” (*mashal*) can be translated “to be like,” suggesting a continuing equality of male and female, although this construction is faulted by Davidson on lexical, grammatical, and contextual grounds (Davidson 1988:127). Fritz Guy believes the descriptive nature of the text is obvious (Guy 1995:147), while Davidson asserts that the language and the “legal trial setting” require a prescriptive punishment (Davidson 2000b).

The fact that there is heated debate over the prescriptive or descriptive nature of Genesis 3:16 is a sad commentary on the state of gender relationships in Christianity. Perhaps it says a great deal more about us than it does about God’s intent for humanity or the biblical story itself. Why is there no such heated debate over God’s judgments in verse 14 (“you will crawl on your belly and . . . eat dust”) or verse 17 (“through painful toil you will eat”)? Why do we not worry about the snake who does not eat dirt and, indeed, the many species who refuse even to live in the dirt, preferring trees or water? Why do we not worry about the men who do not till the soil for their food nor even break a sweat at their daily work? Are these statements prescriptive or descriptive or neither?

Perhaps God is not here giving a prescriptive “should” or a descriptive “will be” but an ontological “is.” These divine judgments do not have to be humanly enforced, and they apply to both sexes (Jacobs 2007:67, 68). Death is a given, whether after Adam’s 900 years or our less than 90 years. Women eat by the sweat of their brows and die just as men do. Men suffer because of broken gender relationships and family difficulties just as women do. These are ontological changes that result from sin, not from God’s will for humanity. On earth the results of sin may never be erased—that doesn’t mean they should be embraced. People can justifiably endeavor to ameliorate the results of sin through the power of the Seed of the woman.

Just as the Christian church has not ascribed great significance to the exact details of Genesis 3:14 or 3:17 but looked instead at the intent of the story, so must we focus on the intent of the entire passage as it details the sorry, fallen state of life on this earth following sin. The distortion of the gender relationship detailed in Genesis 3:16 has brought untold sorrow and pain to both men and women throughout the ages.

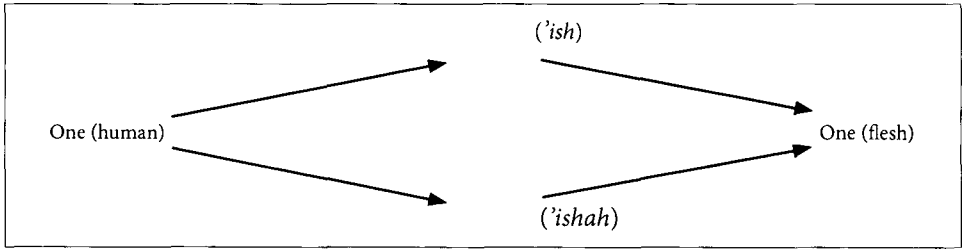
Biblical Principles from Creation

What biblical principles for gender relationships today can be drawn from the first three chapters of Genesis? A wide range of understandings have been forwarded by evangelical theologians. Perhaps it would be helpful to look at the central message of each of the chapters based upon their literary structure.

Chapter 1 tells the creation story in spare, sequential language. Each day is begun with God speaking and ends with the diurnal rotation of night and day. Davidson suggests that the poetic structure of Genesis 1 is a synthetic parallelism emphasizing God’s creative power culminating in the Sabbath—a palace in time (Davidson 2000).

Introduction (Gen. 1:1)	
(Gen. 1:2) <i>tohu</i> (unformed)	<i>bohu</i> (unfilled)
(Gen. 1:3ff) Forming	Filling
a. light	a. ¹ luminaries
b. sky and waters separated	b. ² inhabitants of sky and water
c. dry land and vegetation	c. ³ inhabitants of land: animals and man
Conclusion (Gen. 2:2-3)	
The Sabbath—formed by God and filled with His presence	

The literary structure of chapter 2 is an *inclusio* device—a ring construction that places the central concerns at the beginning and end of a passage (Trible 1999:432). The passage begins with God creating the earthling (*adam*) from the dust of the earth (*ha’adam*). The one human is sexually undifferentiated in the passage until verse 23. His gender is incidental until the story provides us with the human need for companionship. The circle of the story then branches to include male (*ish*) and female (*’ishah*), resolving in the final verses that reiterate the continuing oneness of humanity. Thus, we see the emphasis of the narrator on “. . . the incompleteness of Creation in aloneness, and the completion of Creation in wholeness” (1995:106).



A third literary structure, a chiasm, is utilized in chapter 3 (Davidson 2000). The center of the chiasm provides the main purpose of the story: the promise of eventual victory by the Seed of the woman over the seed of the serpent (the *proto-evangelium*). All the rest of the sorry story finds its point and promise in the hope of a Redeemer.

Chiastic Structure of Genesis 3

- F¹ - The woman enticed to become like God, “knowing good and evil (3:1-5)
- F² - The man and woman saw that they were naked (3:6, 7)
- F³ - God walked through the garden and called to the man (3:8, 9)
- F⁴ - “The Lord God called to the man, and said to him. . .” (3:9-12)
- F⁵ - “The Lord God said to the woman. . .” (3:13)
- F⁶ - “The Lord God said to the serpent. . .” (3:14, 15)
- F^{5'} - “To the woman he said. . .” (3:16)
- F^{4'} - “And to Adam he said. . .” (3:17-19)
- F^{3'} - “Adam called his wife Eve.” (3:20)
- F^{2'} - God made garments for Adam and Eve (3:21)
- F^{1'} - Man driven from the garden, lest he become like God, “knowing good and evil” (3:22-24)

A look at the literary structure suggests that in none of these stories is human government or power distribution a main concern of the writer. Rather, one is impressed with the majestic themes portrayed—God’s creative power visible in time and space, God’s creation of humanity as intrinsically relational, and God’s

redemptive and restorative power in the midst of human failure and sorrow. Ultimately, human well-being in gender relationships depends upon our coming into the fullness of relationship with God and with each other in the re-creation provided through the Seed of the woman.

Jesus Christ *the* Normative Model

Whatever we believe about God's intent in Genesis 3, history is certainly replete with the domination of women by men and women's effort to control men. The brokenness of gender relationships has played a large part in the drama of human history. Rape, seduction, adultery, polygamy, manipulation, incest, lust, and fear are constants in the longest war in history—the war between the sexes. Society groans under the sins of broken relationships, and individuals are scarred for life by the evils of subjugation, perversion, and addiction. But the God who made male and female seeks to redeem their brokenness. Through the normative model of Jesus Christ and the great principles implicit in biblical Christianity, divine reconciliation is provided to men and women everywhere as they relinquish their weapons in the war between the sexes.

The Old Testament provides a mixed picture of the value of women in the Jewish economy (Jacobs 2007:17). The ideal wife of Proverbs 31 initiated tasks as diverse from home duties as purchasing real estate and running a business. Prominent women are mentioned as prophetesses and participants in public worship (Ex. 15:20; 1 Chron. 25; 2 Chron. 34:22; 2 Kings 22:14). The abuse of women, especially in the areas of polygamy and prostitution, is also chronicled, often without explicitly negative comment (Gen. 4:19; 19:8). Yet, in the whole of the Old Testament generally, women are portrayed as sharing in the image of God, responsible to Him and to the community, equally participating in the joys and trials of life (Kaiser 1983:208).

However, as Jewish society came under the Hellenistic culture of the Greeks during the inter-testamental period, attitudes toward women deteriorated (Haerich 1995:107). The Greeks viewed women as intrinsically inferior—Plato said a woman is a man who has been punished (quoted in Doss & Doss 1994:50). Philo, the first-century Jewish philosopher, stated that women are more deceptive and less honorable than men. Since woman is the source of man's troubles and of death, her subordination to him is required (Kvam, Scheering, & Ziegler 1999:41). The morning prayers of Jewish men began to include thanksgiving for not being born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman (Mollenkott 1977:11).

Into this unequal patriarchy Jesus stepped to proclaim good news to the captives and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). In Jesus' life we see a continuous uplifting of women and undermining of structures supporting female inequality. Although women in that era were not taught the law, Jesus commended Mary for learning at His feet instead of doing women's work (Luke 10:38-41). Many women were His disciples (Luke 8:1-3) and He openly revealed His Messiahship to an outcast Samaritan woman (John 4:5-26). Jesus struck a blow against the double standard in marriage by promoting monogamy and rejecting divorce (Mark 10:2-10; Matt. 19:3-9). When confronted with the woman caught in adultery, Jesus protected and forgave her, confounding the hypocrites who accused her (John 8:2-11).

During a time when women's value lay in their maternal and wifely roles, Jesus responded to the woman that called out, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" with an egalitarian reply, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (Luke 11:27, 28). Even though in Jesus' day no woman could give legal testimony, after His resurrection He first appeared to women and sent them as His witnesses (John 20:11-18; Matt. 28:9, 10; Mark 16:9-11). Jesus' life and ministry to the marginalized and outcast provides a model of reconciling love, breaking down the divisions of class, status, ethnicity, and gender (Van Leeuwen et al. 1993:9).

Rules of Action

Soon after Jesus' return to heaven, the disciples were gathered together in an upper room praying when the Holy Spirit was poured out with power. Scripture is clear that both men and women were present, so it is not surprising that Peter would quote Joel's prophecy in his Pentecostal sermon. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (Acts 2:17, 18). The gifts of God's Spirit are to be given not by status, race, or gender but by membership in His body. Those who are of no repute, God chooses as His witnesses (1 Cor. 1:27-29). For identity in Christ means, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one" (Gal. 3:28). Through Christ, the Seed of the woman, humanity is restored to that Edenic oneness with God and each other promised so long ago to the fallen man and woman in the garden.

The epistles of the New Testament clearly teach that the gifts and functions of the body of Christ are not given according to gender, rather that the Spirit “. . . gives them to each one, just as he determines” (1 Cor. 12:11). In the early church women were deacons (Rom. 16:1, 2), listed among the “prominent” apostles (Rom. 16:7), among those who prophesied (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 21:9), as well as church leaders and missionaries (Acts 18:24-26; Rom. 16:3-5; Philem. 2; Col. 4:15). The priesthood of all believers demanded a removal of those distinctions that divide and demean, thus subverting the hierarchical structures endemic in society. Without resort to class warfare or explicit rejection of the status quo, social inequalities were transformed by the gospel into a trajectory of change resulting in mutual reciprocity and interdependent equality of all people (Van Leeuwen et al. 1993:11).

What, then, are we to do with those passages in the New Testament that suggest a continued patriarchy in the family and hierarchy in society? Nowhere in the New Testament is it explicitly stated that slaves should be freed or oppressive governments rejected or that men and women are equal in being and function. In fact, some passages are often thought specifically to demand the subjection of women to men as Paul addresses rules of action to the early church. Four of those passages are discussed below.

1 Corinthians 11: 3-16

In this passage Paul addresses the Corinthian church concerning worship practices. Unresolved disagreement revolves around the word “head” (*kephale*) in verse 3. Obviously “head” is used here metaphorically. Contemporary Greek sources in Paul’s time used *kephale* in several ways metaphorically but rarely to mean authority or ruler (Mickleson 1986:100). The most common metaphorical use is “source” or “source of life” as in Ephesians 4:15 where Christ is described as the “source of life” (*kephale*) for all Christians (Prinz-McMillan 1995:201). 1 Corinthians 11:3 becomes a paean to the interconnectedness of life in God when rendered, “Now I want you to realize that the life source of every man is Christ, and the life source of the woman is man [from the rib], and the life source of Christ [in the incarnation] is God.” Then Paul in verse 12 reinforces verse 3 as rendered above. “For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”

Other commentators believe Paul is here using the word *kephale* (head) in the Hebrew sense to mean authority but point out that the authority is being exercised to combat heresy (Richardson 1998:319). The passage is best understood as a refutation of incipient Gnosticism in the church (Kroeger & Kroeger 1992:60). Gnostic

myths often perpetrated variations of pagan myths in which the female was the primal life source. Thus, Paul is refuting this heresy by reaffirming the biblical creation account that woman came from man not man from the woman (1 Cor. 11:8).

Paul's discussion about head coverings has received numerous interpretations (Evans 1983:90). Bilezikian sees Paul dealing with worship practices in which men stand bareheaded before God representing divine glory and human dignity, while women represent authentic humanity with covered heads (Bilezikian 1985:135). Sometimes such interpretations seem to strain the text, but again it becomes simple and clear when seen in terms of combating Gnostic heresy. Gnostics taught that the material world was evil and salvation required the elimination of female sexuality (Kroeger & Kroeger 1992:173). Paul is, therefore, affirming women as women. They should worship as women, with the head coverings customary of women. A woman's head covering (hair or veil) symbolized her identity/authority (*exousia*) as a woman before the watching angels and in relationship to her husband (Evans 1983:91).

Paul concludes his remarks by appealing to common sense and custom. Men and women stand in relationship to each other, to God, and to society. Following customary hair styles affirms the value of each gender as both distinct and inter-related. Nature itself supports the importance of gender differentiation that originated in Eden. A woman's physical gifts are for her benefit and need not be given up as Gnosticism demanded. Such doctrine brings contention, but in the churches of God these practices are not to be admitted.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35

Paul is dealing here with orderly worship, prophesying, and speaking in tongues in the Corinthian church. In 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, Paul exhorts the believers to speak only to strengthen the church, to remain quiet if there is no one to interpret, and to defer to others in an orderly manner because God is a God of order. Abruptly, he inserts a command for women to remain silent and in submission and to ask any questions they have to their husbands at home. Again numerous interpretations have been advanced to explain these verses (Evans 1983:96).

Traditionally it was supposed that Paul was simply forbidding women to speak in church, even though in 1 Corinthians 11:5 their praying and prophesying is taken for granted. A total prohibition would also mean the rest of chapter 14 does not apply to women either. Since this is unlikely, modern scholars have generally assumed that Paul is not requiring absolute silence but prohibiting a certain type of

behavior, such as speaking in a way that violates the husband's headship or contradicts his prophesying (Davidson 1998:277). Others believe Paul is trying to maintain decorum appropriate to that society by preventing unrestrained babbling that would bring disrepute on Christian worship (Prinz-McMillan 1995:208). Still others focus on 1 Corinthians 14:35 and see interruption as the key, perhaps because wives were calling to husbands across the room or having loud conversations between themselves (Evans 1983:98).

Bilezikian suggests a novel interpretation that sees verses 34 and 35 as a quotation (perhaps from a Corinthian letter) that Paul then repudiates in verse 36. Thus, Paul quotes a prohibition brought in by Judaizers that are seeking to dominate the worship services by excluding women using Jewish norms. Paul then rebukes the prohibition as against the egalitarian message God has sent through him (Bilezikian 1985:152). In this case the law mentioned in verse 34 would be Jewish oral law. In other instances Paul did quote from the Corinthian's letter (as in 6:12 and 13) and then offer rebuttal. However, this would be a very long quotation that was misunderstood from early times (Evans 1983:100). While this interpretation is appealing, it cannot ultimately be proven true. Rather, the contradictory nature of the passage makes it seem best to see its focus to be on the principles of order and propriety in worship rather than on rules for male/female relationships.

Ephesians 5:21-33

In this oft-quoted passage that is part of Paul's "household codes," the apostle is describing the husband/wife relationship and comparing it to Christ's relationship to the church. Verse 21 is the hinge between the first part of the chapter that gives exhortations to all Christians and the second part that speaks directly to wives and husbands (Bilezikian 1985:153). The mutual submission of verse 21 can only be understood as a preferring and a deferring to the other without rank or hierarchy. In verse 22 the verb is left out, linking it to the previous verse and showing that a wife's submission is a particular aspect of the mutual submission enjoined of all believers. Such submission can only be given, not taken (Evans 1983:74). Again Paul uses *kephale* (head as source of life) in the husband and wife relationship, comparing it to Christ's relationship to the church. Clearly Paul's focus is on Christ's self-sacrificing love for the church, thus limiting the husband's headship to a particular kind. Paul could have pointed to Christ's rulership but did not, instead pointing to the church as Christ's body and He its source of life, and calling for a similar relationship between husbands and wives (Prinz-McMillan 1995:210).

The head/body relationship is one of reciprocity (Bilezikian 1985:161), which is reinforced in verse 24 by the connecting “but.” “But as the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be subject in everything to their husbands.” Some versions, deferring to the interpretation involving rulership, leave out the “but” (*alla*), yet it helps to make clear what the apostle is saying (Evans 1983:75). While the husband is the head of the wife and must serve her as Christ serves the church, he cannot be her Savior as Christ is of the church. Nevertheless (“but”), the wife (as enjoined in verse 21) still must be submissive to her husband in everything as befits Christians.

The husband’s love for his wife must mirror Christ’s love for the church (verses 25-30). This is how the husband fulfills the submission of verse 21 (Evans 1983:75). The analogy of Christ and the church with the husband/wife relationship can be carried too far, thus Paul concludes that there is a mystery here. Referring to Genesis 2:24, Paul says husbands and wives should be one flesh, submitting to each other in love and respect.

Does this passage support a headship of husband over wife in marriage? Again, such a conclusion would seem to say more about us than about the passage. Rather, it seems that Paul is requiring the same thing from both husband and wife—servanthood. Should a Christian wife submit to her husband? Absolutely. Should a Christian husband love his wife sacrificially? Certainly. Does this mean that a wife does not need to love or a husband to submit? Of course not. Edenic oneness can only occur in a marriage based on mutual submission to each other and to Christ (verse 31). That this can occur in a sin-sick world is indeed a mystery of grace.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

Paul in First Timothy gives his younger associate advice on how to have a well-ordered church. Men are admonished to pray with holy hands uplifted and women are advised to dress modestly. In verses 11 and 12 Paul says women must learn in silence and he permits no women to teach or have authority over men. In many settings these verses have been used to deny women virtually any voice or position in the church. Basing their convictions on these verses, some have even gone so far as to tell Christian women that they should not hold any position or job that requires them to exercise any kind of authority over men (Kroeger & Kroeger 1992:11).

The word used for “silence” in verse 11 is the same word translated “quietness” in verse 2. Many scholars believe quietness would be a better translation in verse 11 also. Paul then is not enjoining absolute silence on women but asking them to learn peaceably (Evans 1983:101).

The word for authority has a number of possible meanings, which include “author” or “originator.” Paul may again be combating proto-Gnostic beliefs that man originated from woman, a view that is supported by his reference to the Genesis creation story in the next verse (Kroeger & Kroeger 1992:101). The passage then becomes, “I permit no woman to teach that she is the originator of man. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Paul then goes on to point out that Eve was deceived in the beginning, perhaps intimating that women should beware of being deceived again.

Since the woman, singular, is mentioned, some have thought that Paul is referring to a particular woman dominating and disrupting the church (Prinz-McMillan 1995:212). Davidson believes Paul is speaking only to husbands and wives, not men and women in general, and thereby reinforcing the headship of the husband and wifely submission (Davidson 1998:280). Evans points out, however, that Paul specifically gave wives certain types of authority over their husbands (1 Cor. 7:4), suggesting that the authority Paul is discussing is directly tied to teaching authority (Evans 1983:103). Several authors conclude that the teaching prohibited here is that of the unlearned usurping authority (as translated in the KJV). Women must first learn in submission before presuming to teach (1983:101). Thus, the content and manner of the teaching is what is under discussion (Kroeger & Kroeger 1992:79).

Of particular concern is verse 15, which seems to suggest women will be saved through bearing children. Some have taken this to refer to The Child who alone can save. Others believe it means that women, although sinful, will be spared in their childbearing (Evans 1983:107). If one believes Paul is dealing with incipient Gnosticism, he could be validating the childbearing role and affirming femininity against the Gnostic anti-procreation teachings (Kroeger & Kroeger 1992:175). Prinz-McMillan believes the intent of the passage is to deal with an abuse of power, whether by men who use force or by women who use dress or sexuality (Prinz-McMillan 1995:215).

Yarbrough believes the “historic” interpretation of this passage should be allowed to stand because, he asserts, the Bible clearly teaches that certain offices and responsibilities belong only to men (Yarbrough 2005:146). Bacchiocchi calls for Seventh-day Adventists also to maintain the historically rigid separation of gender roles and distinctions (Bacchiocchi 1995:66). Both believe this honors God and is true to the scriptural mandate found in 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

This is not an easy passage to interpret. Seeing it as attacking proto-Gnostic heresies provides the clearest solution for those who believe Paul is unlikely to be reversing himself on the priesthood of all believers and the giftedness of the

Spirit. The intent of all the Pauline passages under discussion is to provide order and decorum among Christians. Especially is Paul concerned with orderly worship. Sometimes he addresses men directly and sometimes he addresses women directly, but generally the admonitions refer to universal principles of peace, deference, submission, teachability, quietness, and unity. These principles apply to all people, regardless of rank or sex. The entire trajectory of the Bible is toward a unity that embraces the “other” as brother and sister, children of the same God who created humanity in His image, not toward a mandate for hierarchy and division.

The Ethics of Gender Relationships

In 1989 the Michigan Department of Education issued the report of a study done on the effects of gender role socialization on children’s perceptions. School children were asked to imagine what it would be like if they awoke tomorrow to find that they had become the opposite sex. Most of the little boys were horrified. A number said they would kill themselves, often in horrible ways. Others focused on what they would lose, such as opportunities to play sports or do certain kinds of jobs. The little girls did not say they didn’t like being girls but dwelt on all they could do and the responsibilities they could avoid if they were boys. They could hunt and fish with their dads, play sports, sit around, drink beer, and burp! These elementary-aged children were already well-aware of the greater value and privilege males have in our society (Office for Sex Equality in Education 1989). While much about gender relationships have changed in the last 20 years, women’s roles are still undervalued and underpaid (Gibbs 2009:26).

Because men and male roles have greater value, women are more likely to be “allowed” to wear male clothing or function in male roles than men are to wear female clothing and function in female roles. For a man to do so would be demeaning, associating him with the less valued group (Van Leeuwen et al. 1993:229). Christians have justified this thinking on the basis of maintaining sexual distinctions but may be, in fact, reinforcing the inequality and hierarchical atmosphere many of us take for granted in gender relationships.

Since the Bible clearly teaches that men and women are equally made in the image of God, where does this emphasis on male superiority in our society come from? The missionary anthropologist, Paul Hiebert, asserts that Western society is still shaped by the pagan Indo-European myths believed by our ancestors (Hiebert 1994:204). Our fairy tales, business policies, sports events, videos, and politics re-

main strongly influenced by these ancient beliefs. The cosmic battle between good and evil is at the center of the Indo-European myth. Creation stories from numerous Middle Eastern and European cultures attest to this concern (Leeming & Leeming 1994:23, 41, 106). Beliefs based upon these myths have forged a worldview that influences Western assumptions, values, and thinking categories, but one that is generally outside of our conscious awareness. Hiebert lists four worldview themes resulting from the Indo-European myth: eternal coexistence of good and evil, order and control, the battle in the cosmos, victory as the goal (Hiebert 1994:204-207).

In the Indo-European myth, good and evil are coexistent and equally super-human. People are but pawns in the clash between these great powers. To achieve order and freedom, control must be gained by one or the other power. Evil results in chaos and enslavement. Good and bad are sharply divided. The good must be seen as all good and the bad as all bad. Thus we have the Western habit of seeing the world in sharp contrasts, necessarily opposites: good *or* bad, large *or* small, right *or* wrong, male *or* female, order *or* chaos.

Order is the greatest concern, with chaos ever-threatening. For order to succeed, someone must be in control, thus hierarchy becomes essential. Order may be established by force, if necessary, and maintained by obedience. The battle is the main story. Have you noticed how movies always end when the battle is over? Romantic stories conclude after the man “wins” the woman: “And they lived happily ever after.” There’s no more story until the next battle. The contestants in the battle must be equal for it to be “fair,” and the good guy can use every evil trick to win once the bad guy has used it first. The victor is usually male and often young. Only after the battle can there be any concern for peace, love, or righteousness. Victory is all important because “success is proof that one is right” (Hiebert 1994:207).

Although good may win for a time, its victory is never final because both sides are locked in a never-ending cosmic struggle. Good and evil become two sides of the same coin. The kingdom of peace and justice becomes secondary to order, which must be maintained by any means. The battle becomes the whole story. Sports events testify to our fascination with the battle and willingness to see it over and over. In politics, enemies have to be identified or manufactured for a candidate to “win” an office successfully. Our vocabulary is filled with battle language. Our theories and philosophies, from communism to capitalism, from evolution to Freudian psychology, are built upon images of warfare and winning.

In gender relationships this worldview requires that masculinity and femininity be complete opposites. Order must be maintained through dominance hierarchy, even if relationships suffer. Those in power maintain dominance by promoting

a worldview that ensures that everyone sees the world as they see it. In the United States, to question whether marketplace capitalism is ethical or warfare to promote “democracy” is justified pegs one as unrealistic and unpatriotic.

In Christianity we see the same sort of thinking when discussing gender issues. While Yarbrough eloquently decries the abuse of women by men in the home and church, he maintains that “male headship in home and church” brings great blessings (Yarbrough 1995:122). Davidson believes the husband’s headship was prescribed by God to provide for order in the family (Davidson 1998:267). Both authors want to see this hierarchy as necessary and a blessing, but are they merely reflecting the influence of the Indo-European worldview upon Christianity’s view of gender relationships? Could these arguments actually help to justify much of the misery and abuse in the family? Do they subvert the good news that in Christ the walls of separation have been torn down? Such thinking is built upon a battle motif where winning is the goal and hierarchical order is paramount. Throughout millennia, hierarchy and gender subjugation has not resulted in peace or harmony in the family. Even in those eras and places in which women were completely dependent and hierarchical order was maintained by law and custom, relationships in the family suffered. The battle never ended. Justice and kindness were sacrificed for order. The ends justified the means.

Conclusion

Such dominating attitudes are not God’s way. In fact, such lack of consideration hinders the spiritual life (1 Pet. 3:7). The Bible points Christians toward *shalom* that is “dwelling in peace in all relationships” (Van Leeuwen et al. 1993:27). *Shalom* requires social justice for all people. *Shalom* requires listening, learning, and growing together. *Shalom* allows for a “win-win” empowerment of the other. Power can be viewed relationally. Marriage can be seen as a non-power-based relationship. The Creation story teaches us that male and female are not “opposite” but “alike.” No longer can Christianity condone a “war between the sexes.” Neither can that war be “won” by one half of the equation maintaining a hierarchy that gives order a higher priority than loving relationships.

While the Bible has undoubtedly shaped gender relationships in powerful ways, “not even the appeal to ‘biblical principles’ has been successful in the constructive resolution of female-male dynamics, specifically as these challenges relate to leadership and relational equality” (Jacobs 2007:15). Christianity has too long condoned neglect of the family, idolization of occupation and leisure activities, un-

fair distribution of labor and family responsibilities, failure to love and empower, as well as moral double standards and blindness to physical and sexual abuse. The dominant sex has abused while the dominated sex has submitted to abuse, often justifying their actions and reactions upon a supposed biblical order. It simply isn't possible to maintain gender hierarchy and the structures that support it without also supporting the attitudes that lead to oppression and gender warfare. Sadly, as women have made progress toward legal equality and economic independence, their new-found freedoms appear to be a factor in increased divorce rates, single parenthood, and promiscuity (Coltrane & Adams 2008:208). The biblical ideal of a man and a woman reflecting the Trinity in a life-long, one flesh relationship is too often unrealized in the Christian world.

Rather than blindly accepting cultural attitudes of hierarchy and warfare, Christians need to look at the great themes of the Bible and see that the battle between good and evil has been won at the cross. There is no place in Christianity for power-seeking or power-hoarding. Christ emptied Himself and became our example of self-sacrificing love, the submission of the powerful to the powerless. Mutual submission in gender relationships requires a voluntary release of power that results in a mutual empowerment. Nothing in the Bible requires hierarchy based upon gender. In fact, the good news of the gospel is that our identity is in Christ, who came to restore us, male and female, to the wholeness of Eden. The kingdom of heaven has come and we, by faith, can live in it.

Note

¹The *New International Version* of the Bible was used throughout this chapter.

Chapter 11

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THE HERMENEUTICAL CHALLENGE OF DISPENSATIONALISM FOR MISSION THEOLOGY

Cristian Dumitrescu

Mission theology or mission theologies? The answer to this question depends on the Christian background of the respondent. There is a renewed interest in an in-depth analysis of the biblical basis of missionary theology and practice today. However, the conclusions are not always supported by the biblical text, and very few scholars challenge their presuppositions. Definitions of mission vary according to contexts and needs, and the result is an array of theologies that contradict each other. This paper surveys different mission theologies and analyzes Dispensationalism and the effect of its presuppositions on the biblical text and the ensuing theology and mission based on it.

Mission theology is not an easy field, especially in the Old Testament. Each theologian works with a particular set of hermeneutical assumptions that usually lie hidden behind the conclusions. Rodger Bassham defines mission theology as “those theological presuppositions, statements, and principles which critically reflect upon and explicate God’s purpose for the church in relation to the world” (Bassham 1979:7). The text of the Old Testament is interpreted according to a person’s particular set of assumptions, and frequently the result is a large array of opinions that most of the time contradict each other and distort the text to support the predetermined conclusions. Are Seventh-day Adventists simply accepting these

conclusions and the resulting mission theology, or are they checking these assumptions? What is the impact of each hermeneutical approach on mission theology and what are the implications?

A quick survey of mission theology literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (with a focus on the Old Testament) reveals the variety of opinions expressed by the authors and the development of hermeneutical awareness. Recently, a renewed interest has been observed for discovering the assumptions on which mission theologies are built (Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983; DuBose 1983; Legrand 1990; Filbeck 1994; Kaiser 2000; Bauckham 2003; Okoye 2006; Wright 2006; www.gocn.org). This article will look at the different theological understandings on five major issues in mission theology: how mission is defined, how the unity of the Bible is affected, the tension between universalism and election, the relationship between centripetal and centrifugal mission, and the points of departure in mission theology, as well as the main hermeneutical system of interpretation.

The Definition of Mission

The problem starts with the way mission is defined and understood. Mission can be described as exclusively God's cosmic attribute or dimension, *missio Dei* (Peters 1972), or as the action of sending (Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983; DuBose 1983), while other authors believe mission refers to people's duty to join in God's mission (Rowley 1939; Okoye 2006).

Today, the general agreement seems to be that *missio Dei* is the root of all mission in Scripture. However, there is no unified understanding of what *missio Dei* is or what it implies. As J. Andrew Kirk has observed, "Legitimately and illegitimately the *missio Dei* has been used to advance all kinds of missiological agendas" (Kirk 2000:25). The very term *missio Dei* has a problematic history. The concept started to be crafted at the demise of the Colonial mission era, and it was widely embraced by ecumenical theology. Thus, the responsibility for mission was no longer seen as a simple obedience toward the Great Commission but as belonging to the Trinitarian God. Christian missionaries were no longer able to work in politically independent countries, and their conscience was liberated by placing the responsibility on God's shoulders. On the other hand, mission became no longer merely the preaching of the gospel by evangelistic methods, but it also included social and economical involvement (see Bosch 1991:389–393; Moreau 2000:631–633; Corrie 2007:232–234). As a result, the meaning of the term "mission" itself has changed together with the new hermeneutic.

Mission was sometimes described as the bridge between universalism and particularism (Carver 1909), and other times as being completely different than universalism (DuBose 1983). In certain theologies mission requires openness to God's variation in history, *Heilsgeschichte* (Martin-Achard 1959; Blauw 1962; Peters 1972; Bauckham 2003), while in others its Trinitarian aspect is emphasized (Carver 1909; Peters 1972). The variety of definitions for mission continues with the glory of God (DeRidder 1975), a hermeneutical key to understand the Bible in the shape of an "envelope" (Kaiser 2000), and even violence and conquest as mission (Carver 1909; Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983). Francis DuBose concludes that, although the Scriptures are considered verbally inspired and used extensively, local contexts play the major role in defining mission. To defend the assumptions, "the [traditional] approach has been essentially proof texting without a clear, consistent hermeneutic" (DuBose 1983:16). The preferred assumptions led certain theologians to declare that the Bible does not define mission at all (Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001).

The Unity of the Bible and the Relationship between Testaments

From a historical perspective, although the early church believed in the unity of Scripture, the Jewish-Christian tensions reflected on how the Testaments were perceived, and soon the New Testament was attributed to the Christian church, while the Old Testament was relegated to the Jewish community. Defining the doctrines on the basis of the New Testament became the church's mission. Not long afterward, Marcion of Sinope completely eliminated the Old Testament as well as some parts of the New Testament. The church rejected Marcion's position and reacted against his radical stance, but the balance of the Scripture was not regained.

The Middle Ages noticed a slightly altered position, with the New Testament being considered perfect, while the Old Testament was imperfect. The mission of the church took the shape of Crusades. Although the main issue of the Reformation was the return to the authority and role of the Bible, the belief in the superiority of the New Testament did not disappear. For example, Luther assigned grace to the New Testament, while the Law belonged to the Old. The Council of Trent complicated the issues by adding the written tradition to the canonical text, bringing the authority of the church into the equation of who defines doctrine and mission.

Historical criticism widened the gap between the Testaments on a historical rather than a theological basis: the Old Testament belonged to God the Father and contained the history of theocracy, while the New Testament was the time of Jesus

Christ. Baker suggests that the idea of evolution entered theology under the developmental approach to the Testaments. The concept of “progressive revelation” was born and became accepted as normative for covenant theologians. Although the Old Testament contained indispensable and permanently valid truth, it was considered only the “essential preparation” for the New Testament which was “better” (Rowley 1944:79).

Today, although most authors claim to see the Bible as a unit, there is an array of understandings behind such a statement. David L. Baker shows that the unity of the Bible has always been a point of contention between authors and scholars (Baker 1991). For conservative evangelical authors, the Scripture is inerrant and prescriptive of mission (Peters 1972; Filbeck 1994). Other theologians see the Bible as descriptive of mission or the result of it (DuBose 1983). There are still authors who believe that the New Testament is superior to the Old and use the New Testament as an interpretive lens for the Old (Peters 1972; Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983; Bosch 1991; Filbeck 1994; Glasser 2003; Wright 2006) because they believe there is no real gospel before the cross (Peters 1972) or that the Old Testament is incomplete (Rowley 1939; Glasser 2003). Certain scholars believe there is a progression in Israel’s understanding of mission in the Old Testament (Rowley 1939; Rétif & Lamarche 1966; Peters 1972; Filbeck 1994; Glasser 2003), while others insist there is no such development, the Great Commission being the inauguration of a completely new era of mission (Wright 2006). There are authors who believe Israel had a missionary role (Beeby 1999, Wright 2006), while others deny it, insisting that only the New Testament church had such a missionary nature (Blauw 1962).

Different assumptions lead scholars to see unity and continuity between the Testaments (Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983; DuBose 1983), others see complementarity (Legrand 1990) or discontinuity (Bauckham 2003; Glasser 2003). Certain authors believe that there is a gap between the Old Testament’s idealism and the actual life of Israel, while others consider that the Old Testament contains the clearly explicit model of mission entrusted to Israel. There are those who claim that the Bible reveals a dynamic unity (Beeby 1999), while others insist that there are clear distinctions that need to be preserved to be faithful to God’s revelation. And there are people who believe the Bible includes the deutero-canonical books, in addition to the canonical ones (Okoye 2006).

The Tensions between Universalism and Particularism (Election)

Israel is generally presented as the chosen one, singled out among the nations. But there are those who claim that the Old Testament presents a sweeping universalism that includes other nations as well. Between the extremely exclusivistic particularism and the uncritical universality, one can discover nuances such as a surviving particularism, necessary during the Babylonian exile (Rowley 1939); an inclusivistic particularism that allowed helping other nations, but insisted that salvation remained only through Israel (Goerner 1944); election for service by covenant (Senior & Stuhlmueller 1983); God's universalism (Bosch 1991); and universality.

Universalism and particularism (election) are usually seen in tension (Rétif & Lamarche 1966; Okoye 2006), while others present them in balance (Legrand 1990; Wright 2006). There are those who insist election does not imply mission (Martin-Achard 1959; Okoye 2006), but others claim that universalism is also different than mission (one requires conversion, the other not) (Martin-Achard 1959; Blauw 1962; DuBose 1983; Bauckham 2003). The same difference is applied to universality (no sending) and mission (sending) (Peters 1972). There are theologians who say that the Old Testament's universalism is fulfilled only in the New Testament, while others believe that election is the binding factor that unites the two Testaments (DeRidder 1975). The presuppositions allow certain scholars to see a passive universalism in the Old Testament, while others argue for a sending universalism (Kaiser 2000). And, certainly, there are those who argue for a progressive movement from particular to universal, and from one to many (Bauckham 2003).

The Centrifugal-Centripetal Mission Balance

In terms of centrifugal vs. centripetal mission, opinions range from no mission for Israel in the Old Testament, to a completely centripetal mission (Peters 1972; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001; Bauckham 2003; Wright 2006), to a progressive understanding of mission (DeRidder 1975), to an introductory phase to the New Testament's mission (Goerner 1944), to a position of tension between centripetal and centrifugal mission that appears in completely different passages of the Old Testament (Filbeck 1994), to a balance between the two (DuBose 1983; Legrand 1990; Burnett; Kaiser 2000), and finally to a centrifugal mission planned by God but which Israel failed to implement (Peters 1972).

Certain presuppositions require that Israel was simply supposed to exist (Martin-Achard 1959), to be present (Wright 2006), to be an ethical model (Carver 1909)—or that it was not expected to go anywhere in a centrifugal sense. For some, the Old Testament is not even a Christian book, and its meaning is incomplete (Blauw 1962; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001; Glasser 2003). Others interpret the centrifugal passages found in the Old Testament as eschatological prophecies, never intended to be fulfilled by Israel (Martin-Achard 1959; Blauw 1962; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001; Glasser 2003; Wright 2006). Most scholars conclude that God intended two different and separate phases of mission: a centripetal one for Israel in the Old Testament, and a centrifugal mission for the church in the New Testament (Bosch 1991; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001; Bauckham 2003; Wright 2006). Very few accept that there are centrifugal currents in the Old Testament, for the momentum is still overwhelmingly centripetal (Senior & Stuhlmüller 1983).

Hermeneutical presuppositions lead authors to accept the Old Testament as missionary, claiming it has its own missionary interpretation, different than the New (DeRidder 1975; Filbeck 1994). On the other hand, theologians believe that the New Testament's mission cannot be understood without the Old Testament; however, they do not take the Old as containing a valid model for mission, treating it only as a background for New Testament's mission (Burnett 1996; Bauckham 2003; Glasser 2003). Such a view insists that the New Testament decides the validity of the Old Testament's mission (Bosch 1991). There are also those who believe that centrifugal mission was implicit in the Old Testament, but explicit in the New (Filbeck 1994). Some blame Israel for losing interest in centrifugal mission (Filbeck 1994), while others consider the whole centrifugal-centripetal model a failure for the unity of Scripture (DuBose 1983).

Mission Theology Points of Departure

Different hermeneutical assumptions have an impact on the various points of departure chosen for mission in the Old Testament. Most authors believe that Genesis 12 is the beginning of God's missionary model (Legrand 1990; Filbeck 1994; Beeby 1999; Bauckham 2003; Wright 2006). For others the covenant with Noah is a better choice (Glasser 2003), while for some authors God's mission began in Genesis 3 after the Fall (DuBose 1983). There are those who believe that the Exodus is God's true missionary model, and thus Moses becomes the first missionary (Glasser 2003; Okoye 2006). A few indicate that God's mission began in Genesis 1 at Creation (Burnett; Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001), while others suggest that

God's mission started even before Creation (Köstenberger & O'Brien 2001).

The difficulty of reading the Old Testament in its own right is clearly seen in these missiological works. Although the end of the 20th century saw a new interest in the Old Testament, the difficulty has not disappeared. Religious and confessional traditions play a huge role in the way the Old Testament is approached. Different hermeneutical approaches were used to identify the kind of mission found there. From a backward reading of the Old Testament with a New Testament hermeneutic, to a complete disregard of the Old Testament in terms of mission, to an evolutionary reading of the same Testament—all assume certain presuppositions that inform each hermeneutical approach. But what are those presuppositions that are responsible for such a variety of views on mission theology in the Old Testament?

Dispensationalism

Common to most of the works of mission theology are the assumptions provided by either dispensationalism or covenant theology. Dispensationalism assumes from the start “a verbal, plenary view of the inspiration of Scripture.” Based on such an approach, it is also assumed that the Scripture calls for distinctions: “The material of the Old Testament is distinguished from that of the New” (Ryrie 1965:10, 15).¹

If for the covenant theologian the dispensations (or time periods) are stages in the revelation of the covenant of grace, for the dispensationalist they are “distinguishtly different administrations of God in directing the affairs of the world” (1965:16, 25). Ryrie, one of the fathers of modern dispensationalism, believes that only this view does justice to the proper concept of the progress of revelation. Although admitting that covenant theology does include in its system different modes of administration of the covenant of grace and that there is at least an appearance of an idea of progressiveness in revelation, he accuses covenant theology of extreme rigidity. Ryrie also assumes that only “dispensationalism claims to employ principles of literal, plain or normal, interpretation consistently,” and that this is the only valid hermeneutical principle (Ryrie 1965:19, 20).² One has to be a dispensationalist if one employs the plain interpretation consistently. “No study which denies or ignores the doctrine of dispensations is true Bible synthesis” (Stam 1951:12). Another unproved claim is that dispensationalism offers “a satisfying philosophy of history” (Ryrie 1965:21). In the end, the whole construct of dispensationalism seems to be based on the dispensationalist's *feeling* of what is consistently literal (see Ryrie 1965:154).

A dispensationalist believes that “we are in a better position to understand [what a dispensation is] than the writers of the New Testament themselves” (Ryrie 1965:199). Ryrie claims that only dispensationalism sees the right balance between the “unity, the variety, and the progressiveness of this purpose of God for the world” (Ryrie 1995:95). In his view certain regulations are changed or annulled by God, or new, fresh principles not valid before are introduced. It is not difficult to see where the different types of mission assigned to the two Testaments come from.

Bass identifies the tendency of dispensationalism “to be separatistic in spirit and practice” (Bass 1960:19). The essence of dispensationalism is that it keeps Israel and the Church distinct, based on a literal interpretation of Scripture, claiming that God has two separate purposes for them that remain distinct even for eternity. “Face-value understanding incorporates distinction; distinctions lead to dispensations. Normal interpretation leads to clear distinction between words, concepts, peoples, and economies. This consistent hermeneutical principle is the basis of dispensationalism,” states Ryrie (1965:97, 98).³

Based on such a clear distinction between Israel and the Church, both Ryrie and Stam believe that the commission in Matthew 10:5–10 (to avoid going to the Gentiles) belongs to the Jewish era, while the commission in Matthew 28:19, 20 belongs to the Church.⁴ For Ryrie salvation is the same in different dispensations, but grace is given in different measures in each one. Grace and law are antithetical in his view, which he claims is shared by “all.”⁵ He sees the Mosaic period and the period of grace and truth through Jesus Christ as antithetical. The Church and Israel are antithetical. The New Testament is seen as superior to the Old as the Church is superior to Israel. Only after the cross are Gentiles accepted into the body of Christ (the Church), a “mystery” that was not “active” during the Old Testament times.⁶ As a result, there is no centrifugal mission in the Old Testament since there is no possibility for the Gentiles to be saved in the same way as believers in the New Testament.⁷ The Church has a distinct time in history, which does not cover the time of Israel, for the church began its existence only at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given.

Dispensationalism assumes that Israel was called as a nation for a national purpose beside the spiritual work of salvation, and that the Church could not fulfill the national purposes of Israel, thus it is not able to be a continuation of Israel. As a result, the Church and Israel have different assignments, different missions. They do not constitute one people of God but peoples of God. Ryrie calls these distinctions “obvious and necessary,” even if they result in a dichotomy (Ryrie 1995:140, 141, 143). The assumption is more important than a sound exegesis.

The dispensationalists have a particular understanding of progressive revelation. Their belief implies that a dispensation is only an incomplete stage in the progress of revelation. Judgment and condemnation, as found in the Old Testament, is not salvation, they say. "Progressive revelation views the Bible not as a textbook on theology but as the continually unfolding revelation of God given by various means throughout the successive ages" (Ryrie 1965:35, 36). The emphasis is on *successive* and *progressive*. Any later stage is superior to the previous ones. This is the root of supersessionism.

However, dispensationalism does not emphasize distinction alone. It claims to combine unity with diversity. The unifying principle of dispensationalism is "doxological, or the glory of God, and the dispensations reveal the glory of God as He manifests His character in the differing stewardships given to man" (Ryrie 1965:102, 103).

In terms of eschatology, dispensationalism is a system of interpretation, not only an outline of events. The hermeneutical principle claimed is literalism applied consistently (consistent literalism), especially to prophecies.⁸ As a result, the Old Testament prophecies made to Abraham and David must be fulfilled only during the millennium, in order to keep Israel and the Church distinct. Although God's promise of land to Abraham (the so-called Palestinian covenant) takes place in Genesis 12 (and is associated with Deut. 30:3), dispensationalists prefer to use the subsequent repetition of the covenant in Genesis 15 to avoid any conditionality attached to the promise. It seems to be better to keep God responsible for a unilateral promise than to admit any failure on Israel's part (see Master 1994:95, 96).

Conclusion

The dispensationalist assumptions do not come out of the biblical text, and therefore they distort the text when applied to it. The hermeneutics of their system originated primarily in a religious experience, not in the canonical text. Therefore, the dispensations they create do not preserve the unity of the text or of God's purposes. By starting mission only with Abraham, the result creates the so-called "primeval" history (Gen. 1-11). Dispensationalism claims that because humans failed, God had to institute a new method of dealing with man, so He called Abraham. The idea of God's failure during the primeval history implies that "little is said about God's dealings with man before Abraham" (Fuller 1957:204). It is also dispensationalism that later creates the premise for universalism (salvation of everyone, both Israel and the Church).

The Abrahamic Covenant becomes basic to dispensationalism, being considered “key” to the entire Old Testament reaching for fulfillment in the New. Although a progressive dispensationalist, Saucy believes that “only with the call of Abraham does God step into human history to initiate his own kingdom program of salvation” (Saucy 1993:40). He also considers that the root of all salvation is contained in the divine-human relationship paradigm of the Abrahamic Covenant, which is considered “foundational and comprehensive in nature” (1993:41, 49). Although Genesis 1-11 might seem unimportant for mission theology, Lucien Legrand’s advice is timely: “We must begin at the beginning. We must take account of the Old Testament, in spite of its apparently limited missionary perspectives. We may actually discover new perspectives there” (Legrand 1990:1).

The issue posed by dispensational hermeneutics is separation versus integration. The main assumption of dispensationalism is that 2 Timothy 2:15 calls for a sharp division of the different parts of the Bible. Although it is true that the Bible contains divisions or paradoxical elements, dispensationalism sets them in opposition and presents them as conflicting. The opposition between law and grace, between Israel and the Church, between centrifugal and centripetal mission are such examples. However, “genuine biblical revelation is developmental; one stage unfolds naturally from another as the unfolding of the blossom of a flower” (Gerstner 1982:2).⁹

Such a sharp division is also applied to the people of God in different dispensations. According to dispensational hermeneutics, Old Testament saints cannot be compared with New Testament Christians. The latter are born-again through the Holy Spirit, while the Old Testament people are saved like Paul before his conversion by his obedience to the law. This sharp distinction applies to the missionary method and theology of the different dispensations. As a result, the centrifugal mission found in the New Testament *has to be* absent from the Old Testament. In Gerstner’s words, “this division between the Old Testament people of God and the New Testament people of God is far-reaching” (1982:7).

Dispensationalists believe that the New Testament Christian is in “living union with Christ,” while the Old Testament saint is not. In fact, there are three categories of people recognized by dispensationalists: Jews, Gentiles, and Christians. The Jews are the descendants of Abraham, inheriting the earthly promises but lacking regeneration or adoption (although Abraham was the channel for these).¹⁰ The Gentiles never had any acceptable relationship with God. The Christians come from these two categories, but are born again and thus members of the body of Christ. The sharp separation between Israel and the Church is maintained by dispensationalists

not only on this earth but also in the heavenly kingdom.¹¹

The issue of predestination, another strong point of Dispensationalism, reflects on the concept of election. Since Israel was elected without conditions, there is no falling from God's plan, dispensationalists say. But they confuse unconditional election with unconditional salvation, claiming that Israel will be saved no matter what it does or how it lives. This is in sharp contrast with the claim that the Old Testament saints had to obey the law perfectly to be saved.

In conclusion, dispensationalism divides rather than unites. It divides the people of God, the way of salvation, and the missionary methods used by God's people in each period. Even the future of saved people is divided; the Christian Gentiles will be in heaven, while Israel will be fully restored on this earth. Based on such hermeneutics we end up with a divided God, or even with two gods.

Finally, dispensationalism's hermeneutic is inadequate because it fails to demonstrate the unity of the Bible. In Fuller's words, "The great test of the adequacy of a hermeneutic and its resulting system of Biblical interpretation is whether it can demonstrate the unity of the Bible If it be the Word of God, its various teachings should all form a coherent unity. This presupposition of the Bible's unity provides a test for the validity of a system of interpretation: if the system is not able to demonstrate the Bible's unity, it must be an inadequate system (Fuller 1957:180). Based on faulty assumptions, dispensationalist hermeneutics has to be avoided, as well as any Old Testament mission theology built on it.

Notes

¹Ryrie claims, "There is no interpreter of the Bible who does not recognize the need for certain basic distinctions in the Scriptures" (1995:16). There are three major branches of dispensationalism recognized today: classical dispensationalism, revised dispensationalism, and progressive dispensationalism. The latter two are degrees of departure from classical dispensationalism and attempt to avoid its extreme stance. Although they share most dispensational assumptions, they are rejected by classical dispensationalists (see Bigalke 2005). This article will mainly analyze classical dispensationalism, with occasional references to the revised and progressive dispensationalism.

²However, it is difficult for dispensationalists to apply their "literal" principle consistently. For example, dispensationalists reject any conditionalism in God's promise to Abraham because this would affect the whole prophetic interpretive scheme, making it impossible for Israel to claim the land of the actual political state today. Renald E. Showers insists that forever has to be taken at its face value, otherwise it will not mean forever (Showers 1990:60). However, when referring to the permanent existence of the nation of Israel, he

argues that “destroy” in Deuteronomy 4:26 cannot really mean destroy (or put out of existence) because this would allow the possibility that Israel would no longer be a nation (1990:70). They propose that “destroy” in this case means “sent out of the land.” On the other hand, Ryrie claims that once the literal meaning of a word is not used, all objectivity is lost (1995:82). Robert L. Saucy, who is considered the “father” of progressive dispensationalism tries to distance this from the strict literalistic interpretation by using a “complementary hermeneutic,” and he adopts a mediating position between dispensationalist and non-dispensationalist interpretation (Saucy 1993:27).

³Progressive dispensationalism “sees a historical unity of God’s kingdom program of salvation, yet allows distinctions especially as regards Israel” (Saucy 1993:29). It even allows for a distinction between presuppositions and preunderstandings, the latter ones being open to change (Blaising & Bock 1993:59-62).

⁴Ryrie concludes that “anyone who attempts to interpret plainly this commission, which forbade the disciples to go to the Gentiles, and the commission that commands the same group to go to the Gentiles (Matt. 28:19, 20) either (1) gives up in confusion or (2) resorts to spiritualizing one of the passages or (3) recognizes a dispensational distinction” (1995:20). John A. Martin prefers to believe that “although some of the commands of Jesus were abrogated later in the book [the gospel of Matthew], the commands given in the sermon [on the mount] appear to have a timeless quality” (Martin 1992:261).

⁵Stam offers a more flexible approach: “While the principles of God never change, His dispensations, His dealings with men, do change from time to time. This includes even the terms of acceptance with God (blood sacrifices, circumcision, obedience to the law, etc.). . . . While God refuses works for salvation today, He required them under other dispensations. This was not, as we have explained, because works in themselves could ever save, but because they were the necessary expression of faith when so required” (Stam 1951:28, 29).

⁶In Ryrie’s words, “the Body of Christ could not have been constituted until after the death of Christ, and the time of the revelation of that truth does not affect the institution of it. The Old Testament does predict Gentile blessing for the millennial period (Isa. 2:1-4; 61:5, 6), but the specific blessings do not include equality in the Body of Christ. . . . The equality is the point of the mystery revealed to the apostles and prophets in New Testament times” (1995:124, 125). He also claims that the people living in Old Testament times could not be indwelt by Christ or the Spirit. John N. Darby, the founder of Dispensationalism, writing on the relationship between Gentiles and prophecy in prophetic interpretation, concludes that when the prophet addresses Israel the reader should interpret the prophecy literally, while when the Gentiles are addressed the symbolic meaning should be chosen (Darby 1962:35).

⁷Based on the assumption of progressive revelation, Stam considers that those who lived in Old Testament times could not be saved “by looking forward in faith to His finished work It is evident, then, that the saints of past ages were not all saved by believing the same things, for God did not reveal the same things to them all. Indeed, even the stated

terms of salvation were changed from time to time” (Stam 1951:34, 40). Walvoord circumvents the Gentiles, claiming that “Scripture revelation concerns itself primarily with the place of Israel and the Church, and therefore does not deal in detail with the place of Gentile saints in the Old Testament” (quoted in Fuller 1957:206). Another variant is that the nations are simply the means by which God fulfills His purposes for His two peoples, the Jews and the Church (Fuller 1957:45).

⁸Cyrus I. Scofield states that in prophetic passages “we reach the ground of absolute literalness. Figures are often found in the prophecies, but the figure invariably has a literal fulfillment. Not one instance exists of a ‘spiritual’ or figurative fulfillment of prophecy Jerusalem is always Jerusalem, Israel always Israel, Zion always Zion Prophecies may never be spiritualized, but are always literal” (1959:45, 46).

⁹Gerstner asks a pertinent question: “Is it the literalistic tendency that produces this divided Scripture, or is it the belief in a divided Scripture that drive the dispensationalist to ultra-literalism at some point?” He thinks it is the latter (1982:5).

¹⁰Jesus rejects this distinction in John 8:39, 56.

¹¹Robertson believes that this basic dualism, “the hallmark of dispensational teaching . . . arises from a metaphysical rather than a hermeneutical presupposition A form of Platonism actually permeates the hermeneutical roots of dispensationalism” (1980:213, 214). He insists that the separation or partitioning must be done on a temporal and not on a metaphysical basis.

Chapter 12

* * *

ARE ALL TRUTHS *TRUTH* ? SOME THOUGHTS ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF BELIEFS

Reinder Bruinsma

This essay focuses on the question of whether all doctrines are of equal importance. It seeks preliminary answers within the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It argues that doctrinal change, shifting of emphases, and categorizing of beliefs throughout Adventist history suggest that looking for truly “fundamental” beliefs is anchored in the Adventist tradition and remains legitimate and useful from pastoral and evangelistic perspectives.

On May 20, 2004, Albert Mohler, Jr., the President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, posted an article on his website entitled “A Call for Theological Triage and Christian Maturity” (Mohler 2004). The word *triage* comes from the French word “to sort” and is mainly used in the medical sphere. In times of war, or when catastrophe strikes, it must be determined who requires priority medical care. Not all wounds are of equal seriousness. In a similar way, Mohler argues, Christians must determine “a scale of theological urgency.” He suggests there are “first-level theological issues” that include doctrines that are “central and essential to the Christian faith.” Those who deny these doctrines would cease to be Christians. Then there are second-degree doctrinal issues. They too are important, but in a different way. They mark Christians as belonging to a particular

denomination. A denial of these doctrines would make it difficult, at the very least, to remain within the faith community that accepts these doctrines as important. Thirdly, there are theological positions over which even members of one congregation or a particular denomination may disagree, without jeopardizing their fellowship. Mohler contends that such a “triage” is important since it will help us to avoid fighting over third-level issues as if they were first-order doctrines, while on the other hand it also sends a strong signal that certain first-order doctrines should not be treated as if they belong in the second or third order. It would seem that this issue has significant implications for the way in which a church community proclaims its message, in particular in the emphasis particular facets of their teachings receive.

Mohler’s statement has been reprinted in several places and has caused considerable discussion on the internet. He was, however, not the first person to raise the issue, nor will he be the last. The question as to what are “essential” or “first-order” doctrines comes in many variations: What is the *core* of the Christian faith? What are the *key doctrines* of the church I belong to? There are many different answers. Michael Maneval, a correspondent for a local paper in Ridgeway, Pennsylvania, claimed that the Church of the Nazarene has, in fact, only *two* core doctrines: justification and sanctification (Maneval 2005). In a recent book Darren C. Marks, professor of theology and Jewish studies at Huron University, distinguishes *seven* key doctrines (Marks 2009). Rose Publishing, a firm that specializes in Christian educational materials, advertises a series of pamphlets in which *fourteen* “basic doctrines” of the Christian faith are explained (Geisler n.d.). R. C. Sproul seems to employ the term “essential” more loosely, if we consider his book covering no fewer than “100 key doctrines” (Sproul 1992).

Why Have Doctrines?

When speaking about doctrine, many wonder why we need doctrines. Doctrines and dogmas¹ are associated with theology and with a purely intellectual approach to religion. Why, many would say, is it not enough to have “simple” child-like faith? Faith and doctrine, however, may at times be in tension with each other, but they are not opposites. Doctrine—or theology—results from faith and then nurtures faith. Faith, according to the famous dictum of medieval theologian St. Anselm, “seeks to understand itself.”² This “seeking to understand” is not just an individual quest for truth; it takes place in the context of a community. The community of believers naturally wants to put what it believes in some kind of sys-

tematic order as it searches for the implications of its faith, in theory and practice. Most Christians would say that the doctrines they believe in are based on the Bible. However, “the community’s understanding of the Bible” always happens “within the dynamic context of its concrete historical development” and is not just a “summary of diligent biblical exegesis” (Rice 1991:89-92). It is one of the positive aspects of postmodernism that it has made us more aware of the fact that Bible reading does not happen in a vacuum, but usually within a community, with its own presuppositions, its own specific use of language and symbols, and its own traditions.

Doctrines are important for the nurture of the faith of the individual believer, though, admittedly, how doctrine interacts with individual faith varies greatly from person to person. Doctrine plays also a vital role in apologetics: in its defense of the faith and its rejection of ideas that find no support in Scripture. Grammar is not the same as language, but grammar gives structure to language and so enables communication—in particular about more complicated issues. In a similar manner doctrine may be considered as the *grammar* of faith (Jones 2002). It provides the structure for religious discourse.³ George Lindbeck, who taught religion at Yale University (and became well known as a champion for a post-liberal approach to religion and theology), stressed that, unless we acquire language of some kind, we cannot “actualize our capacities for thought, action and feeling.” Therefore, “to become religious involves becoming skilled in the language, the symbol system of a given religion” (Lindbeck 1984:34).

The postmodern camp fiercely objects to the emphasis doctrine places on the propositional content of the Christian faith and untiringly stresses the priority of experience over intellectual assent to doctrines. When everything is said and done, the postmodern person claims, all truths remains relative. Many theologians have argued, however, (and I believe justifiably so) that logic demands that we reject complete relativity and that we accept that not everything can be true at the same time. At the very least, some propositions must be false if they flatly contradict other propositions; they cannot all be true simultaneously (Plantinga 2000:422-457). It must be admitted that, for many Christians—Adventists most definitely included—the rational element has often tended to overshadow the experiential and relational aspects of religion fully. Yet religion that goes to the other extreme and over-emphasizes experience, to the detriment of all propositional content, must remain shallow and ultimately unsatisfactory. There must be both a *what* and a *how* to our religion, a cognitive and an affective dimension, resulting in a synthesis between knowing and feeling (Groothuis 2000:83-110; Bruinsma 2006: 37-42).

Doctrine and truth are related concepts. Doctrines are, it is commonly stat-

ed—in any case by most in the conservative and the evangelical camps—an attempt to translate Truth into human language. This imposes many limitations, even if the Holy Spirit is recognized as a major player in the process. For it will always remain impossible to express fully the divine in human categories, concepts, symbols, and language.

Postmodern thinking presents a number of major challenges, not in the least because it has made it increasingly difficult to convince thoroughly postmodern people that there is indeed Absolute Truth. But it has, I believe, done us a great service in making us more aware of the issues surrounding our human *understanding* of eternal Truth. While as conservative Christians we must insist on rejecting the postmodern view that there is no Absolute Truth, and must continue to protest against the idea that we must be content with each having our own individual set of “truths,” and while we will not agree with the suggestion that truth is utterly relative, many of us must, I believe, learn to admit that, while Truth is complete and perfect and does not change, our *understanding* of the Truth will change as the world and the conditions around us change. And while we will not accept the postmodern verdict that Christian language—and thus also doctrinal language—can never be more than a human expression of time-conditioned ideas about things “above,” many of us may need to consider that there may not be as many absolute certainties and “truths” as we once believed there were. (For a fuller discussion of the issue, see e.g., Phillips & Okholm 1995; Wells 1993; Middleton 1995; Groothuis 2000; Bruinsma 2006.)

Statements of Belief

The traditional “main line” denominations have at times been criticized by newcomers on the religious scene that they have fossilized their beliefs into an unchanging belief system that will not allow for any creative renewal on the basis of new insights into biblical truth. Some of these new denominations, in particular those that were part of the 19th-century “restorationist” movement (Knoll 1992: 237, 238; Knight 2000:30-32), of which some denominations are a contemporary reminder, were characterized by the urge to renew “simple” New Testament Christianity. Several important leaders of early Adventism came to their new faith with this background, and strongly opposed the creation of a “creed” for their own movement. They felt that accepting a creed would, in fact, be a step towards apostasy. It would, they contended, easily lead to spiritual tyranny and hinder any further advancement in the understanding of the truth (Knight 2000:22).

But although the Adventist Church still maintains that it has no creed other than the Bible,⁴ it has developed, as time has gone by, a rather elaborate formulation of its main doctrines. The first version of an official statement of Adventists beliefs was adopted in 1872 and consisted of 25 articles. The intention of that summary of beliefs was not “to secure uniformity” but rather “to meet inquiries” and “to remove erroneous impressions” (Schwartz & Greenleaf 2000:161; Land 1986:231-237). The revised statement issued in 1931 had 22 articles (Land 1986:237-241).⁵ This statement stood until 1980 when the church adopted a new, often more detailed, wording for the basic teachings of the church in 27 “Fundamental Beliefs,” to which a 28th article was added in 2005. The preamble indicates that the text of the statement could be subject to further change. A revision of these beliefs “may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word” (*Church Manual* 2005:9). But those who have observed how complex the process was that preceded the 2005 addition of the section on “growing in Christ”—which mainly addressed pastoral needs in some areas of the world, without actually adding any doctrinal content that was not already implicit in the 1980 version—will realize that significant revisions (or reductions) are not likely in the foreseeable future.

A few words need to be inserted at this point about the nature of doctrinal change, as this is relevant with regard to the question of whether and/or how we may be able to differentiate between major doctrines and less important doctrines. The process of determining what is “fundamental” and what is not, is not a new trend invented by contemporary liberally-inclined church members who have been infected by postmodern ideas of deconstructionism and are now in search of “the core of Adventism.”

Change in doctrine, or “development of doctrine” as others prefer to say, has been and is a constant feature of the Christian church. The many volumes written about the history of dogma testify to this. There is a great variety of theories about the way in which doctrinal development takes place. Some argue that later doctrinal development only makes explicit what was already implicit in early Christian teachings, while others allow for more “real” change.⁶ An analysis of doctrinal change in the course of Adventist history would show that it has mainly been of a particular type. Adventists have not so much initiated new doctrines as they have seen themselves as God’s instrument in the re-discovery of New Testament truth. Subsequently, they have, however, also seen the need to change particular emphases in the way in which they expressed their doctrinal views, in order to restore bal-

ance and defend their fully Christian identity. But even though it must be admitted that change comes in different forms, and that gradual developments differ from sudden, radical changes whereby previously held beliefs are henceforth denied or totally “new” doctrinal convictions are adopted, a development or a different emphasis does constitute a change, which over time may have a significant impact.

Among early authors who went to great lengths to provide historical credentials for “new” Adventist doctrinal insights were John N. Andrews and Uriah Smith with their well-researched books on the Sabbath (Andrews 1862) and conditional immortality (Smith 1861). Later, LeRoy E. Froom left as his *magnum opus* his 4-volume *Prophetic Faith of our Fathers*, in an attempt to show how the “new” prophetic understandings of Adventism were mainly re-discoveries of interpretations that were held by many theologians and church leaders in centuries gone by (Froom 1950:1946). This, he maintained was also true of the Adventist re-discovery of a number of foundational Christian doctrines, such as the Trinity and the full deity and eternity of Christ, to which he referred as “eternal verities” (Froom 1971:33ff). The publication of the rather controversial book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Knight 2003) offers further proof of the felt need to clarify some Adventist beliefs and to show that these beliefs, in fact, conformed to orthodox Christian dogma. Even today, however, many believe that it did much more than this, i.e., that it signified a real substantial dogmatic re-orientation (Knight 2003: xiii-xxxvi).

The Pillars of Our Faith

There is no doubt that there has been change in Adventists beliefs and in the manner in which these have been expressed in print and otherwise. This change has often been gradual and seldom assumed the form of a direct denial of a conviction that was previously held. Yet George Knight is right when he opens the first chapter of his book on the development of Adventist beliefs with the statement that most of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church would not be able to join the church today if they had to agree to its current theology (Knight 2000:17). The same author affirms that “the history of Adventist theology is one of ongoing transformation” (Knight 2000:12). In other words, doctrinal change is not a matter of imagination but has been real. Another factor to be noted is the insistence by the Adventist “pioneers” (Ellen White most definitely among them) on the dynamic nature of “present truth” that is recognized in the distinct possibility of “new light.” Even today the Adventist Church has a process to study seriously any “new light”

that might emerge. These facts are important to keep in mind as we discuss the matter of differentiating between various strands of doctrine, and it helps us not to take immediate recourse to stressing the dangers of relativism and subjectivism if people are looking for the “core” of Adventist teachings.

It cannot be denied that Adventists have, from the very beginning of their movement, understood certain biblical truths as more prominent than others. The 1872 statement of beliefs stated that the intent was to highlight “the *more prominent* features” of the faith [italics supplied](Land 1986:231). The fact that to early Adventists some teachings were of special importance and apparently ranked over other doctrines is probably best illustrated by referring to some statements made by Ellen White. She often referred to the “pillars of truth” and to the “landmarks” of our faith. Although her application of these terms was rather fluid, it is clear that she did not regard all doctrines as having equal importance. The messages of “the three angels” held a unique status; they were, in her mind, at the very basis of the self-understanding of the Adventist Church (White 1958:104-107). Thus she wrote: “The theme of *the greatest importance* is the third angel’s message, embracing the messages of the first and the second angels” [italics supplied](White 1946:29). The theology of the heavenly sanctuary and its “cleansing” was also a “landmark” truth (White 1946:30). In *The Great Controversy* Ellen White stated: “The scripture which above all others had been both the foundation and the *central pillar* of the advent faith was the declaration: ‘Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.’ Daniel 8:14” [italics supplied](White 1911:409). In addition, she identified the Sabbath and the “non-immortality of the wicked” as “landmarks” (White 1946: 30, 31). The perpetuity of the divine law was clearly a cardinal element in Adventist teachings. This was also true for Ellen White, but as time went by she did her utmost to help restore the lost balance between law and gospel. In a sermon during the watershed Minneapolis General Conference in 1888, she criticized her fellow believers as follows: “The third angel’s message is the proclamation of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ. The commandments of God have been proclaimed, but the faith of Jesus Christ has not been proclaimed as of *equal importance*, the law and the gospel going hand in hand” [italics supplied](Ellen White, *Manuscript* 24, November or December 1888. Quoted in Knight 1987:40).

These quotes from a primary spokesperson for early Adventism, to which many more could be added, illustrate that early Adventists did consider some doctrines as more essential than others. It is quite evident, however, that this judgment was not primarily based on careful theological analysis, but had to do with how

they perceived their mission: to preach those truths that had been obscured by traditional religion and were now being rediscovered. It should, of course, be noted that this preaching took place when they could assume that most people in their audience subscribed to the basic Christian teachings of conservative Protestantism, and that, as a result, these doctrines were not highlighted.

The realization that other elements of the Christian message that were part of the orthodox Christian tradition must not be neglected, while the specifically Adventist doctrines were emphasized, emerged gradually, but increasingly strongly, as the denomination further developed. This also can aptly be illustrated by referring to the writings of Ellen White. As she matured in her thinking, her emphases changed significantly. A quote from 1893 may serve as a fitting example: “Christ and his character and work, is the *center* and circumference of all truth, He is the chain upon which the jewels of doctrine are linked” (Webster 1984:150).⁷

Which Fundamentals Are Truly Fundamental?

Do these doctrinal developments and statements about “more important” (and thus, by implication, also less important) beliefs in earlier Adventism suggest that any present attempts to distinguish between essential fundamentals⁸ and more peripheral fundamentals would fit into the Adventist tradition? Or is the very concept of a “peripheral fundamental” an oxymoron? In reply to this, it might, first of all, be argued that any attempt to compile a list of *fundamental* beliefs requires a process of evaluation; some doctrines rather than some others are eventually included. It also demands that the “fundamentals” that are selected are put in a particular order, at least partly determined by their relative importance.⁹

The fact that not all of the 28 Fundamental Beliefs carry equal weight seems to be confirmed by the fact that the prescribed statement of “commitment” to which baptismal candidates are expected to give their assent offers a summary of just 13 doctrines, which are expressed much more concisely than in the corresponding wording for these particular doctrines found in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 34, 35). The 13-point “Baptismal Vow” closely reflects the statement of commitment. Interestingly, a much shorter “alternative vow” is also considered acceptable. This alternative vow contains a reference to “the teachings of the Bible as expressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs,” whereas in the regular vow no such reference is deemed necessary, even though it is not as complete as the full text of the 28 Fundamentals. Can the list to which baptismal candidates give their assent perhaps be considered as more “fundamental”

than “the 28”?

Opinion of church members regarding the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs differs greatly. I have found that there are church members who hold a very “high” view of the Fundamental Beliefs and who regard each line or even each word as semi-inspired. It is an attitude that borders on what one might call “fundamentolatry.”¹⁰ On the other hand there is, I believe, a widespread sentiment that the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is too detailed (Ball 2009:67) and strangely mixes lifestyle standards with doctrinal issues.

Some other aspects also suggest that not all doctrines listed in the “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs” are of equal weight, if not in theory then at least in praxis. For instance, an Adventist pastor who has doubts about the doctrine of the Trinity (number 2) or about the full divinity of Christ, or who holds a “low” view of the inspiration of Ellen White (number 18), probably runs a smaller employment risk than one who does not abstain from tobacco (number 22). Yet few would, I hope, argue that smoking is a more serious theological problem than a denial of the Trinity or of the godhead of Christ. Anecdotal evidence suggests that disagreeing with some aspects of the Adventist end-time scenario that are not mentioned in the *Statement* may well pose a greater occupational hazard for pastors than expressing doubt about some articles that are included in the *Statement*! No doubt some would argue that what happens in a disciplinary process is bound to be influenced by many other, often non-doctrinal, considerations. But do the examples given not suggest that some views that are outside the official Statement may be considered as more “fundamental” than those that are actually listed?

How Do We Proceed?

If there are grounds for entertaining the premise that some doctrines are more important than others, how can we then get beyond our individual preferences and beyond a fairly general sense that not everything can be equally important? Can we establish some sound criteria by which we may establish a hierarchy of doctrine in Adventist theology?

Whatever model we develop, one foundational fact is clearly provided by Scripture in an *ipsissimum verbum* of Christ, as reported in John 14:6. Christ declared that He is the Truth, i.e., that all Truth radiates from Him. Every doctrine that claims to be “truth” must therefore be related to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Christ is the center. He gives the foundation to any truly Christian “system” of “fundamental” truths. This is what the gospel—the good news—is all about. “It

is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). “Salvation is found in no one else,” but Christ (Acts 4:12). Denial of this foundational truth determines whether one is part of God’s camp or not. Again we can quote a word from Christ’s own lips that confirms this: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. But whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). The “knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” is crucial, and believers must make sure that it is not “ineffective and unproductive” (2 Peter 1:8). John uses even stronger language: Everyone “who denies that Jesus is the Christ” is labeled “antichrist” (1 John 2:22). George Knight underlines the importance of this point of departure by stating that “a relationship with Jesus and an understanding of the cross of Christ and other central elements of the plan of salvation informs a person’s understanding of doctrine” (Knight 2001:5-7). Fittingly he refers to a statement made by Ellen White, in which she states that “the plan of redemption” is the central theme of the Bible. When “viewed in relation to the grand central thought . . . every topic has a new significance” (White 1952:125).

Although this consideration is a solid point of departure, more needs to be said. For what will be the next step in this process of performing a doctrinal triage? How to establish a proper methodology is beyond the scope of this chapter but must be an urgent topic for discussion among Adventist theologians. Some initial suggestions may, however, be helpful in starting this further discussion.

A Two-, Three- or Four-Tiered Doctrinal Edifice?

The first question that the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* deals with is: “What doctrines do Seventh-day Adventists hold in common with Christians in general, and in what aspects of Christian thought do they differ?” In the reply three categories of doctrines are distinguished: (1) doctrines the Adventists have “in common with conservative Christians and the historic Protestant creeds”; (2) “certain controversial doctrines that we share with some but not with all conservative Christians”; and (3) “a few doctrines [that] are distinctive with us” (Knight 2003:21-24). The total number of doctrines listed in these three categories is 36. This reminds us of Albert Mohler, whom we met in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, and who, likewise, suggested three different doctrinal layers.

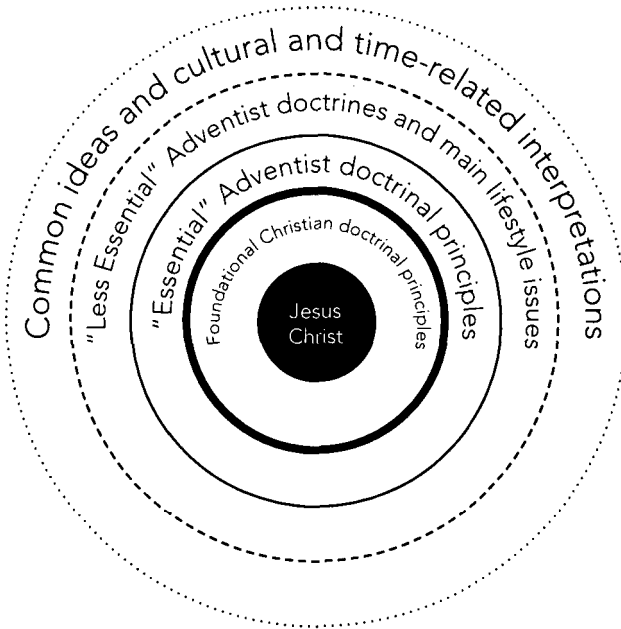
A similar approach has been suggested by Robert C. Greer in his widely acclaimed book *Mapping Postmodernism: A Survey of Christian Options* (Greer 2003). He pleads for a two-tiered system. (1) In the “Top Tier” we should place “those ar-

ticles that establish the parameters of orthodoxy”: those doctrines that correspond “to the creeds of the early church that have historically defined orthodoxy.” (2) In the “Bottom Tier” we may place those doctrines that correspond “to the particular distinctives of individual ecclesial bodies” (Greer 2003:172ff).

Although this type of classification may be helpful in clarifying what is, and what is not, unique to the community to which one belongs, it does not offer us much assistance for determining which Adventist doctrines may be more fundamental than others. The adaptation offered by Woodrow Whidden may be useful in taking us a step forward (Whidden 1997:77-88). He suggests, much in line with Greer and others, that we must distinguish between doctrines that reflect the common orthodox Christian heritage from those that are “Adventist.” He correctly, I think, observes that the first category cannot be limited to the *early* Christian Creeds that “have historically defined orthodoxy” (Greer) or that we have “in common with conservative Christians and the historic Protestant creeds” (QOD), but must also be informed by some Wesleyan/ Arminian strands. Then there are *Adventist* doctrines that Whidden calls “essential”: those elements that form the “essential framework of Adventist theological discourse.” He further suggests that some Adventist doctrines may rather be seen as “processive” issues or may be considered as “non-essential” (Whidden 1997:80).¹¹ Knight, in contrast to Whidden, is of the opinion that lifestyle issues must also fit somewhere into this classification of truth (Knight 2001:5-7).

I would like to propose a model in which elements of both Knight and Whidden are combined. Graphically it would look more like a few concentric circles than like a pyramid or stack of building blocks. In his article that I have referred to several times, George Knight depicts a “hub-in-a-wheel” model to illustrate what he wants to say. The cross of Christ stands at the center, the various doctrines serve as spokes, and lifestyle issues form the rim of the wheel of Truth (Knight 2001:7). My model is similar but makes, I believe, a few points somewhat clearer, even though I also want to stress the distinction between foundational Christian and specifically Adventist doctrines.

Let me suggest some examples of doctrines and views for each category. In category 1 I would situate, for example: God as Trinity; the triune God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe; salvation and eternal life and judgment through Jesus Christ; the active presence of the Holy Spirit; the inspiration of the Scriptures; a revealed moral code; the main phases of the salvific process; and a call to preach the gospel. In category 2 a number of Adventist “essentials” would find their place, such as the seventh-day Sabbath, the imminent premillennial return of Christ, baptism



by immersion, the belief in Christ’s high priestly ministry, man’s call to be stewards, man’s conditional immortality, and the continuation of spiritual gifts. Category 3 would, in my view, be the location for such Adventist teachings as specific applications of the historicist interpretation of prophecy, tithing, specific health laws, the time aspect of the high priestly ministry (“1844”), and, possibly, footwashing, etc. In the last concentric circle (4) I would tend to place certain traditional prophetic interpretations, specific issues surrounding the inspiration of Ellen White,¹² the ideas of what is allowed or not allowed on the Sabbath, styles of worship, and the specifics about the wearing of jewelry, etc.

A Few Final Remarks

I realize that suggesting a model such as this will not be welcomed by all Adventists. Some will probably be totally opposed to it, or will react even more strongly. I realize, in particular, that mentioning examples of what should be placed in each category could prove to be an exercise that is extremely hazardous for my denominational comfort. As mentioned above, a proper methodology would need to be developed to guide us in working out the details of such a ranking of doctrinal

beliefs. But there is little doubt that many in the church would welcome a discussion such as this and long for an honest debate about what truly belongs to the core of Adventism and what is not “essential” in quite the same way.

In this discussion a few things must, I believe, be kept in mind:

- All doctrinal principles and specific doctrines, wherever they are placed in this model, must in some way clearly relate to the Center: Jesus Christ. Doctrinal *truth* only becomes *Truth* when it is connected with the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The lines between the categories will not always be totally clear. For that reason some of them have been drawn as dotted lines. There will, of necessity, remain some difference of opinion about certain beliefs, as to whether they should be just above or just under the line. The crucial question is: Can we point to a few key doctrines that, without any doubt, solidly belong in each category? The process of answering this question can be immensely productive for us as individual believers as well as for the community to which we belong. If there is a “core” of beliefs, these doctrines would be part of the first two categories.
- The fact that foundational *Christian* doctrines are separated from *Adventist* “essential” doctrines is very intentional. It would not be helpful to try to put these under one heading, even though they, of course, interrelate in many ways. It is not, for instance, helpful to compare the relative weight of the Sabbath with that of the doctrine of the Trinity, and then ask ourselves which of the two is most important. It would in many ways be a matter of comparing apples with pears. The Seventh-day Adventist identity is determined by a firm commitment to both categories. The fact that we are *Christians* first, and, as Christians, have also chosen to be *Adventists*, entitles us to be called *Adventist Christians* (Ball 2009). Ensuring that prime attention be paid to the foundational Christian elements will be a constant reminder that in our day and age we cannot take it for granted that both the audiences in our church and outside the church bring these doctrines along when they begin to consider the Adventist version of Christianity.
- The label “less essential” exactly means that. It should *not* be understood as “not foundational” or “not essential” or “unimportant.”
- Admittedly, any process of classifying doctrine is a subjective undertaking. This model is no exception. Mistakes can be made. However, it is not *totally* subjective and need not be a sure recipe for disaster. There is guidance through the inspired Word and through the living Spirit. We need to remember that, as long as we are imperfect humans, any theological activity will remain subjec-

tive and, in a sense, risky. Yet, apparently, this is how God has in His providence and wisdom determined that we should operate, considering the fact that He has not done this job for us, and has not seen it as propitious to arrange for an inspired “Statement of Fundamental Beliefs” or for a list of core doctrines as part of the Bible. Formulating doctrinal statements is a human assignment that calls for much humility, study, and prayer. But it not an assignment that should simply be shunned as too dangerous and as leading to a moribund “slippery slope.” It is an assignment that is never fully completed.

- Some readers may in the latter part of this essay have missed a reference to the “three angels’ messages.” Is Revelation 14:6-14 not an “essential” Adventist doctrine? I believe the answer must be “no.” These texts are indeed seminal for our Adventist self-understanding, and they lead to a particular emphasis on a number of “essential” doctrines, such as those of creation, the Sabbath, the judgment, and salvation for those who choose it. Thus, these verses from the Bible are “essential” in the sense that they lead to a renewed emphasis on a number of foundational Christian doctrines, but they should not in themselves be referred to as a “doctrine.”
- It took Adventists more than a century to arrive at the current summary of “Fundamental Beliefs.” It was an organic process that involved the entire community and was not without pain. Doctrinal development takes time. Similarly, it is not to be expected that arriving at a consensus of what constitutes the core of Adventist beliefs can happen overnight. It will require patience . . . and tolerance!
- In the unlikely case that any time soon the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is to be substantially revised, the new text should, I believe, be limited to these doctrines that are “foundational Christian” and “essential Adventist.” And hopefully, those who would be involved in the actual drafting of a new text, will take heed of the words of Robert Greer:

. . . doctrinal statements . . . should not be too comprehensive. When a doctrinal statement is too comprehensive, it (a) runs the risk of becoming dangerously seductive, since it offers a finality of Christian thought that for some people is attractive and comforting; (b) eliminates the need to think critically; (c) mutes the Holy Spirit, who may wish to speak afresh from Scripture to a given individual or community; and (d) breeds triumphalism, which discourages rather than encourages theological conversation across denominational or ecclesiastical boundaries (Greer 2003:174).

Implications

It is impossible within the limitations of this chapter to discuss in any detail the implication of a project as we discussed above. Some might warn that promoting such an endeavor will only cause disunity and will lead the church away from its focus on the church's mission. And, undoubtedly, there are serious dangers, and one must seek to do it in responsible and sensitive ways. But not attempting it carries its own risks and may, in the long term, be even deadlier for the life and wellbeing of the church.

It is no secret that many church members are, in actual fact, operating with a limited set of beliefs that they consider “fundamental,” with a list that is usually quite a bit shorter than the official statement with which they are supposed to agree. Others are asking for help in their search for the essence—the core—of Adventist beliefs and find it difficult to accept that 28 complex theological paragraphs can all be equally “fundamental.” They are not led by a desire to have an “easier” faith, but they are searching for a faith that can be expressed in more relevant terms.

A continuing individual and corporate search for the “foundational” and “essential” elements in Adventist Christianity will also be an important element in promoting and safeguarding responsible evangelism, assuring that it does not major in minors. And, it will be of great importance in the pastoral duties as well as in the preaching of our ministers. Hopefully, these aspects can be treated in some depth at some future occasion. In the meantime, the question of whether all *truths* are *Truth* in the very same way will not go away.

Notes

¹Although often used (almost) as synonyms, the two terms do, in fact, both reflect the topic of our present discussion. “Doctrines” is a wider term referring to the systematized understanding of the Christian faith, which is useful in the processes of instruction, discipline, propaganda, and controversy. “Dogma” usually has a more specific reference to the “basic, axiomatic” principles that form the foundation of all further doctrinal reflection. See the article “Doctrine and Dogma” in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Online): <http://www.britanica.com/EBchecked/topic/167440/doctrine>. In this essay we will use the term “doctrine,” even in cases where some would use its more restricted corollary “dogma.”

²In Latin: *Fides quaerens intellectum*.

³It is not within the scope of this short essay to discuss the philosophical problem of the nature of language, such as whether members of a community merely play a “language game,” with their language meaning anything they intend it to mean, or as a vehicle to

provide information about some objective entity to which it refers. The latter view is the underlying assumption in this chapter. For a fuller discussion, see e.g., Murphy, especially the chapter “Description or Expression: How can we speak about God?” (Murphy 1996:36-61).

⁴See the preamble to the “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists.” This statement is found in many Adventist publications, e.g., in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (2005:9-19).

⁵The text differed significantly from the 1872 document, for instance, in its clear enunciation of the doctrines of the Trinity, the full divinity of Christ, and the personhood of the Holy Spirit.

⁶For a concise discussion of these theories, see Pöhler (1999).

⁷Ellen G. White, “Contemplate Christ’s Perfection, not Man’s Imperfection,” *Review and Herald*, August 15, 1893. Quoted in Webster (1984:150).

⁸The use of the term “fundamental(s)” may not be entirely fortuitous, as it is so closely associated with the rather loaded term “fundamentalism.” Most Adventists would object to being classified as fundamentalists, but it must be recognized that, when the fundamentalist movement began with the publication of the *Fundamentals* (a series of pamphlets written in reaction to rampant modernism), there was widespread sympathy for this new current. Adventists in the earlier part of the 20th century often applied the term “fundamentalists” to themselves, and many embraced the concepts of verbal inspiration and inerrancy, which became standard fare among fundamentalists. See Reinder Bruinsma (2002:24–36).

⁹Whether the order in which the current “Fundamental Beliefs” are given is the best possible order and whether they are presented in the best possible wording is debatable. George R. Knight is not convinced that this is the case. See his article “Twenty-seven Fundamentals in Search of a Theology,” *Ministry* (2001:5–7).

¹⁰A neologism inspired by the term *bibliolatry*, which refers to a worship of the Scriptures.

¹¹One may question whether the distinction between “important” and “less important” is fully synonymous with the difference between “essential” and “non-essential.” The latter distinction may be a bit sharper, but each set of terms points to a difference in ranking, where those points that are considered “important” or “essential” play a more prominent role than those considered “less important” or “non-essential,” especially “less essential.”

¹²That fact that Ellen White refers to her own writings as a “lesser” light that directs people to the “greater” light (the Bible) provides the justification to place particular views about her inspiration in this category (White 2006:30).

Chapter 13

* * *

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION, THE GREAT COMMISSIONS, AND ADVENTIST MISSION IN A “GREEK” WORLD

George R. Knight

Biblical apostolic succession is being faithful to the teaching of the apostles rather than being in a line of successive ordinations. There are five missionary commissions in the New Testament, three in the gospels and Acts, and two in the book of Revelation. The first three have been promoted by the Christian church in general, while the last two have been largely the domain of Adventism. To be faithful to its commission in a world filled with “Greek” (i.e., non-Christian) perspectives, the Adventist church must be faithful to all of the mission mandates.

Apostolic Succession

Apostolic succession and mission have been united from the birth of Christianity. That reality is central to any valid missiology.

But, we need to ask, “What is apostolic succession?” and “Is it central to mission?” Apostolic succession in the minds of most people is rooted in Roman Catholic theology. Thus the recently updated *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that “in order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them ‘their own position

of teaching authority” (*Catechism* 1995: para. 77). Of course, this line of thought runs, it was Christ Himself who began the chain of authority when He ordained His apostles and appointed, according to one interpretation of Matthew 16:17–19, Peter to be their chief bishop. “Therefore ecclesiastical authority rests upon the apostolic succession (*successio apostolica*), upon the uninterrupted communication by imposition of hands of that commission which the apostles received from Christ. This apostolic commission, as passed on from bishop to bishop right down to our own day, is, if we regard its inmost nature, nothing else than the messianic authority of Jesus.” Thus it is that behind the ecclesiastical authority of the Roman Catholic church “stands Jesus Himself” (Adam 1954:21).

Such is the teaching of the Roman Church. However, that teaching did not develop in a vacuum. To the contrary, it was stimulated by missiological necessity, especially as the infant Christian church faced the intellectual complexities of the Greek world. Thus “as the young Church progressively detached itself from Judaism and entered the mainstream of Graeco-Roman civilization, it confronted the challenge of communicating the message of Jesus across diverse social, intellectual, and cultural lines” (McBrien 1981:611). But that was not an easy task since that world teemed with ideas in opposition to the Judeo-Christian heritage. How to protect the apostolic deposit became the challenge.

The task was compounded by the fact that Greek ideas early on invaded the church itself in such forms as Gnosticism (salvation through knowledge available only to the elite), Adoptionism (Jesus was not truly divine), and Docetism (Jesus only seemed to be human). Some of these movements even had their own gospels and acts of the various apostles. To protect itself from false writings and teachings, “the Church was compelled to establish the *canon*, or list, of Sacred Scripture as the sole norm of faith and to underscore the role of the bishops, standing in *apostolic succession* to the Apostles, as official interpreters or guarantors of the apostolic tradition” (McBrien 1981:611).

Thus the mission of passing on the “genuine” Christian message became the foundation of Catholicism’s understanding of apostolic succession. And that goal was good in itself. But what if some of the bishops went astray—as they inevitably did. That problem led to the development of the concept of a supreme bishop located in Rome who would in the line of Peter be the final authoritative teacher of theology. But what if the Bishop of Rome went off the track—as Martin Luther and others would eventually assert.

The problem centered on the fact that “the longer the succession list of bishops, the more tenuous the claim to untainted apostolic succession” (Clowney 1995:76).

Interestingly enough, it is a leading Roman Catholic theologian who has most adequately challenged the traditional understanding of apostolic succession. Hans Küng in the late 1960s, when he was still under the favor of the Roman Church, noted that the apostles whom the Lord commissioned “cannot be replaced or represented by successors.” Thus “the Church of subsequent generations . . . could only preach anew the tradition of the original apostolic witness,” which has come down to us in the writings of the New Testament. As a result, the church is apostolic only when it is in “agreement with the witness of the apostles” and continues in the ministry of the apostles in service (Küng 1976:456–459).

More specifically, Küng points out that the Church does not hear its Lord and his message by direct inspiration, but only through the witness of the apostles He who does not hear the apostles, does not hear the Lord. There is no route to the Lord which bypasses the apostles. The Church can only know him through their witness. . . .

The Church has been given this apostolic witness not in any abstract or indeterminate way, but in concrete historical form. The living witness of the apostles is handed down to us in the writings of the New Testament, which in turn rest on the writings of the Old Testament. The New Testament is the original, fundamental witness of the apostles, valid for the Church in all ages (Küng 1976:458).

An older, thoroughly chastised Küng is still of the same opinion, writing that “exegetically, historically and theologically the notion of a direct and exclusive apostolic succession of the bishops stands on feet of clay” (Küng 2007:149). With that conclusion, Küng has come into essential agreement with such Protestant theologians as G. C. Berkouwer, who points out that ecclesiastical authority in the view of the Reformation “stood in an absolutely dependant relation to the Word of God which alone made it possible for the church to exist” (Berkouwer 1958:17). Nathaniel Micklem makes the same point when he writes that “our protest is not against that which episcopacy represents, but only against that view which would make Word and Sacrament contingent upon the office, not the office on the Word” (in Bloesch 2002:40). It is from that framework that Donald Bloesch concludes that “the real apostolic succession consists in a reaffirmation of the teaching and doctrine of the apostles” (Bloesch 2002:103).

That conclusion is in harmony with the teaching of several New Testament authors. Thus Jude appeals to his readers “to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (verse 3, RSV). “The faith” in that context refers to

the apostles' preaching and teaching that formed the foundation of all valid Christianity. John lines up with Jude when he repeatedly, in the face of heresies rooted in Greek philosophy, tells his readers to go back to "the beginning" to discover theological truth (1 John 1:1; 2:7, 24; 3:11). "The beginning" in John's usage refers to the apostolic teaching (especially on the divinity and incarnation of Christ), which his readers had heard at the time of their conversions through himself, Paul, and their apostolic associates. Thus John "believes that the church is accountable to the historic revelation given in Jesus Christ and passed down through the apostles" (Burge 1997:593). Similar thoughts regarding apostolic authority can be found in such Pauline letters as those to Timothy and Titus.

It should be noted that all of the above New Testament documents are from the latter part of the apostolic period. There is a good reason for that. As the church moved further into the Greek world it increasingly had to deal with subtle Greek ideas in its confrontation with nonbelievers. In that mission-related confrontation it was only natural that some espousing Greek philosophic concepts would find their way into the church, and even into its leadership. Teaching what later became full blown Gnosticism, Docetism, and other non-biblical theories, such converts began to spread them as "enlightened" and "advanced" theologies. It is in the face of such threats to Christian doctrine that Paul, John, Jude, and others took an ever firmer stand against the false teachers and their "new light" as the apostles set forth the biblical concept of what we might call biblical apostolic succession. For them, "Christian apostolic tradition is normative for the people of God. Apostolic teaching, not whatever be the current theological fashion, is the hallmark of authentic Christianity" (Green 1987:171, 172).

Having noted that teachings on biblical apostolic succession are most pronounced in the later New Testament documents, I should point out that the idea was inherent from the earliest ones even though it was not so fully developed. Thus, in what is probably his earliest letter, Paul emphasized that he had been "approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel" (1 Thess. 2:4, RSV) and that his presentation was not the words of humans but "the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13). He went so far in Galatians as to twice pronounce a curse on those teaching some other gospel (Gal. 1:8, 9). Beyond that, such letters as those to the Colossians and the Corinthians find Paul pitting his apostolic authority against those who were teaching ideas that would later develop into Gnosticism.

It is important at this point to note that biblical apostolic succession is not only related to belief but also to the mission of the church in spreading that belief. With that truth in mind, Jürgen Moltmann writes that "the apostolic succession is, in fact

and in truth, the evangelical succession, the continuing and unadulterated proclamation of the gospel of the risen Christ” (in Bloesch 2002:103). Thus “the church is apostolic because it is founded on apostolic teaching, and also because of its charge to carry out the Great Commission” (Clowney 1995:77; cf. Küng 1976:459, 460). That thought brings us to the Bible’s mission mandates.

The Great Commissions

The perceptive reader will have noted that, whereas most writers speak in terms of the Great Commission, I have used a plural for commission, thereby indicating that there is more than one mission mandate in the New Testament. They can be listed as follows:

1. Matthew 28:18–20 (cf. Mark 16:15, 16)—the charge to the disciples to take Jesus’ teachings to all the world.
2. Acts 1:8 (cf. Luke 24:46–49)—the command of Christ to the disciples to be witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth after they received the power of the Spirit.
3. Matthew 24:14—the mission mandate is implied in this statement in which Christ indicates that the end of earthly history will not come until the gospel message has been preached to all the world.
4. Revelation 10:11—the command to the embittered ones of verses 8–10 to take their prophetic message to “many peoples and nations and tongues, and kings” (RSV).
5. Revelation 14:6—the command to preach the “eternal gospel . . . to every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (RSV).

There are several things that should be noted about these mandates. First, numbers 1 and 2 appear to focus on Jesus’ teachings while on earth, including his salvific work. That is, they mandate what we might think of as a general evangelical message. By way of contrast, numbers 4 and 5 are treated in an apocalyptic context, with number 5 functioning as an echo of number 4. But it is more than a mere echo since it is contexted in the midst of an eschatological message to be sounded immediately before the Second Advent (Rev. 14:14–20). Number 3 stands alone in the fact that it alludes to no specific message outside of the reference to the preaching of “the gospel of the kingdom,” which must be given to all the world before the Second Coming.

A second thing to note is that numbers 1, 2, and 3 have been widely adopted by Christians of all stripes and that they stimulated the great missionary movements of the first century and of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By way of contrast, the apocalyptic mission mandates have largely been ignored by most churches. On the other hand, they early on became central to Seventh-day Adventist missiology (see Damsteeg 1977; Knight 1993; Knight 2007:111–136).

It was the neglect of the apocalyptic mandates (numbers 4 and 5) that set the stage for Adventist mission. By the mid- to late-nineteenth century the Seventh-day Adventist Church saw itself as having a unique mission to both other Christian churches and to the unchurched. On the basis of Revelation 10:11 and 14:6 they came to see themselves as a people called out to preach the everlasting gospel to all the world. That everlasting gospel in the context of the book of Revelation, they were quick to note, included more than the death and resurrection of Christ. After all, those events took place 2,000 years ago; yet the suffering still goes on as the souls under the altar continue to cry, “how long, O Lord” before you make things right (Rev. 6:10). The focal point of the everlasting gospel in the book of Revelation is the second advent of Christ, at which time the full fruits of Christ’s atoning work and resurrection will be reaped (Rev. 19; 14:14–20).

But before that event, and leading up to it, the Bible sets forth a progressive series of three messages that begins with the everlasting gospel and a judgment hour proclamation (Rev. 14:6, 7), continues with a declaration regarding the fall of Babylon (verse 8), and climaxes with a people who patiently wait for Jesus to come, keep all of God’s commandments, and have faith in Jesus (verse 12). The Second Advent is pictured as immediately following those messages (verses 14–20).

Regarding the context of the Revelation 14:6 mandate, early Adventists were quick to pick up on the allusions to the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary being opened at the end of time (Rev. 11:19). They also noted that the “ark of the covenant” that contained the Ten Commandments was featured in that opening and that the keeping of those commandments would be an identifying feature of God’s people at the end of time (Rev. 12:17; 14:12). In addition, they noted that there would be a conflict over God’s commandments at the end of time (Rev. 12:17; 13; 14:13). Beyond those insights, Joseph Bates indicated in the 1840s that the point at issue was not merely the commandments in general, but the one that referred to the worship of the Creator God (Rev. 14:7), an allusion to the Sabbath command of the Decalogue (Bates 1847:iii–iv, 56–60; Knight 2004:107–151). They soon concluded from the book of Revelation that at the end of time worship would

be the central issue, that people would either be worshipping the Creator God of the Sabbath (Rev. 14:7) or the apocalyptic beast (Rev. 14:9). They came to see that the apocalyptic message of Revelation could not be ignored; the church at the end of time had a mission mandate (Rev. 14:6; 10:11) to take the message of Revelation 12:17–14:12 to the ends of the earth before the coming of Jesus in the clouds (Rev. 14:14–20).

Thus in the light of both the truth of biblical apostolic succession and all the mission mandates of the Bible, they became convicted of their mission in the world—a mission that not only proclaimed the evangelical truths of the general mission mandates but also the special apocalyptic truths of Revelation’s commissions. (See Knight 2008:28–51 for a fuller development of the Adventist imperative.)

Adventist Mission in a “Greek” World

“Greeks” are everywhere. They always have been. Their ideas are omnipresent, invading even the church throughout history.

In this essay I am using the word “Greeks” to refer to those whose intellectual/theological message is in essential conflict with the apostolic message of the New Testament. It was in the face of such divergent concepts that such apostles as John, Jude, and Paul developed the biblical doctrine of apostolic succession.

The message of the “Greeks,” of course, dominates the intellectual realm of the non-Christian world. But it also has never ceased to invade the domain of the church from its earliest days. As a result, the most energetic apostolic pronouncements of authority in the New Testament centered on the basic issues of the Christian faith. For John these issues were the actual incarnation of Christ in a human body and that Jesus was indeed the Christ (1 John 4:2; 5:1; 2:22), two topics impacted by the anti-materialistic bias of Greek thought. To lose the essential facts of the incarnation, John argued, would undermine not only the foundation of Christian ethics, as set forth by Jesus, but also the value of His “atoning sacrifice” (1 John 2:1, 2, NIV) and the forgiveness that flows out of it (1 John 1:9). To Jude the threat was related to “our common salvation” (Jude 3), while Paul often highlighted issues related to his gospel (Gal. 1:8–9; Rom. 16:17), which focused on the substitutionary death of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–4; Gal. 3:10–13; 2 Cor. 5:21), His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14, 19), the blessed hope of the Second Advent (Titus 2:13), and the experience of salvation represented by such metaphors as “justification,” “redemption,” and “reconciliation” (Rom. 3:24, 25; Col. 1:20).

From the apostolic perspective, those were truths worth fighting for. Christ and

the central issues of the gospel formed the core of the theological deposit that must be passed on through biblical apostolic succession. By way of contrast, the Greek world of every age leaves Christ and the gospel out or seeks to interpret them in ways that are more agreeable to a non-Christian worldview. As those perspectives sought their “missionary” entrance into the first-century church through its own membership, even the gentle John thundered that those deceivers were antichrist (i.e., against Christ) and that the faithful members should not forward their mission by offering them hospitality or even greeting them as brothers and sisters (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7–11). From the point of view of the apostolic authors of the New Testament the realities of Christ and the core of the gospel were so important that they could not be denied.

Unfortunately, the “Greeks” and their ways were not overcome in the first century. They are still with us today, both inside and outside the church. It is to the “Greeks” that the apostolic message still must go. However, just as in the days of the apostles, the “Greeks” are not always passively waiting to be converted. Rather, they are often desirous to invade the citadel of Christianity with their pleasing and enlightened ideas.

Just who are the “Greeks” of the twenty-first century, and what are they teaching? They come in two basic flavors: religious and secular. But the ideas of both flavors are intent on transforming Christianity.

On the secular front are the rationalistic ideas of modernism and the currently popular edicts of postmodernism with its aversion to absolute Truth. Diverse as they are, the insights of modernism and postmodernism are both replays of the syncretistic temptation of the first century that sought to unite Christianity to Greek philosophical insights. And we might as well face it—the intellectual respectability of modernism and the “truthless Christianity” of postmodernism that downplays the importance of revealed doctrine and the ethical imperatives of God’s law are more attractive and acceptable to many (even in the church) than a religion with the intellectual and moral substance outlined by the New Testament writers.

While the threat to apostolic Christianity on the secular front is serious and pervasive, the threat on the religious front is just as momentous and even more subtle. Leading liberal Christian thinkers in the late nineteenth century developed the concept that all of the world’s great religions shared a common center and were headed in the same direction, but that Christianity had merely evolved further toward maturity than the others (see Clarke 1913:29–31, 492–493, 507–509). That perspective in one form or another has been widely accepted since that time.

But that generous assessment would be challenged in the next few decades by

many Christians, including the Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer. Kraemer titled one of his books *Why Christianity of All Religions?* In it he challenged the perspective that viewed all religions as revelations of God. While recognizing the positive contributions of the world religions, Kraemer points out that the liberals have basically confused a consideration of truth with “bigheartedness.” For him the real problem is that the full force of the question of truth is bypassed (Kraemer 1962:39).

He goes on to note that “the absolutely distinctive and peculiar and unique element in Christianity is Christ” and not some set of doctrines. But if that is true, one might be led to inquire if the distinctive fact in Buddhism is not Buddha or in Islam the fact of Mohammad? The question, he admits, sounds plausible, but the answer is a definite no.

“Buddhism,” Kraemer asserts, “is a ‘way’ of release from life which consists essentially of suffering, change and impermanence. This way has been discovered and promulgated by the Buddha. He is, as it were, the first successful Pathfinder. His followers can learn the way from him, but the goal they must reach under their own steam” (Kraemer 1962:80–82).

Meanwhile, Islam calls individuals to penitence, conversion, and an unconditional submission to Allah, the One and the Almighty. Mohammad is the envoy of Allah, and as such he occupies a position of prominence in Islam. According to the *Koran*, Mohammad is a “‘Messenger’ or ‘Bearer’ of the revelation ‘sent down’ to him, and not a part of the Revelation, let alone the Revelation itself.” On the other hand, continues Kraemer, the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ is that He is Himself the Revelation of God in His own Person and the substance of that Revelation. His position is quite distinct from that of Buddha, Mohammad, or Confucius. He places Himself before the world as *the Truth, the Way, the Life* (Kraemer 1962:82, 83).

In the light of Christ, Kraemer asserts, all other religions, in their deepest and most essential aspects, are in error, even if they may be noble but misguided attempts to answer the question of meaning on their own terms. Non-Christian religions are found to be self-redemptive and self-justifying. They fail at the very point that Christ highlighted. They fail adequately to account for individual human nature—“[its] greatness and [its] wretchedness, [its] reaching out toward the highest and [its] satanic devilishness, [its] place half-way between angel and ape.” In the process, they are misleading in terms of the magnitude of sin and the essential element needed in solution to the sin problem—the sacrifice of Christ and the saving gift of grace (Kraemer 1962:94, 99).

Those thoughts bring us back to the apostolic world with its “Greek” threats

to Christianity. The postmodern fear of asserting claims of absolute Truth and the New Age mentality that suggests that all religions lead to the same place are attitudes that have shipwrecked much of modern Christianity. We see their results reflected by such insightful books as Dean Kelley's *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing* and Thomas Reeves' *The Empty Church: The Suicide of Liberal Christianity*.

The apostles held that some biblical teachings are nonnegotiable. Among them are the facts of the incarnation of Christ as a historic reality and the need to accept Jesus' teachings and those of His apostles as the foundation of Christian faith and practice. Without those two foundational premises there can be no Christianity or Christian mission to others. To give up those teachings or to soft pedal them in cross-religious or cross-philosophical dialogue, John and the other apostles would undoubtedly hold if they were alive today, would be a betrayal of Christianity and an acceptance of the doctrinal platform of the antichrist.

What we are dealing with are the truths of apostolic succession and the Great Commissions in a "Greek" world. But here, it must be pointed out, if there is to be an Adventist mission to that world, then *all* of the Great Commissions must be taken into account. To merely focus on the great core of Christianity set forth in the first 26 books of the New Testament while neglecting the apocalyptic heart of the book of Revelation and its final two mission mandates would be a misguided attempt that would more closely resemble a "Greek" invasion than an Adventist mission to a "Greek" world as Seventh-day Adventists seek to follow in the succession of the apostles in obedience to *all* of the Great Commissions.

Section 3

MISSION ENCOUNTERS

encountering
GOD IN LIFE AND MISSION

Chapter 14

* * *

MISSION ON AUTOPILOT: THE UNTOLD STORY

G.T. Ng

Once upon a time the Seventh-day Adventist Church was about mission. As the church grew and diverse entities developed, mission appeared to lose its intentionality and attention. Today mission appears to be running by default, without a strategic focus. Church leadership is aware that mission is too critical to be relegated to autopilot, and steps are being taken to remedy the situation.

Report Card

The church has come a long way. From a tiny group of 3,500 believers in 1863 when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally organized, it has grown to 15.7 million baptized members in 2007 (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2007:4).¹ We rejoice in the more than 1 million accessions every year (2007:4).² In 2007 it was the sixth time in the history of the church when more than a million people joined the Adventist communion annually (2007:2). We take pride in having established work in 201 of the 230 countries and areas recognized by the United Nations (2007:77). We delight in the 64,000 organized churches, 571 local conferences and missions, and 103 unions in 13 divisions (2007:4). In terms of institutions, we thank God for the 168 hospitals and 433 clinics spanning the

globe, not to mention the 62 publishing houses and 7,300 schools with 1.5 million students (2007:6).

Indeed, the church has brought the Three Angels' Messages to the world on a scale never before imagined. Every day in 2007, 2,849 believers joined the church and almost 6 new churches were established (2007:2). That the church has grown exponentially is nothing short of amazing. The faithfulness of our members who had contributed \$2.7 billion in tithes and offerings (2007:2, 4)³ is no less remarkable.

Yet beneath this seemingly rosy picture of progress lurks a troubling reality of imbalanced development in mission: rapid expansion in some areas and lamentable non-growth or decline in others. Looming large on the horizon is the 10/40 Window, where two thirds of the world's populations live. Yet the church has scarcely made headway in this vast region.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of uneven growth in the global church. First, we will examine the current situation in mission. Second, we will examine selected church-sponsored programs to ascertain how well they measure up to meeting the formidable challenges of the 10/40 Window. Third, we will analyze the data collected and conclude with some recommendations.

Mission Assessment

Performance assessment is done in the following five areas: accession trends, membership distribution, population per member ratio, membership per million population ratio, and the 10/40 Window.

Accession Trends

Accession means baptism plus profession of faith. A careful perusal of the accession figures reveals evidences of uneven growth. On one hand we have had huge accessions in Latin American and the African continents. In 2007, the accessions in the South American Division (SAD) and Inter-American Division (IAD) represented 22 and 19 percent of the total world accessions, while East-Central Africa (ECD) and Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Divisions (SID) chalked up 18 and 14 percent respectively. Hence these four divisions combined were responsible for 73 percent of the total world accessions.

At the other end of the spectrum were the 9 divisions with low accessions (Table 1). These divisions accounted for 27 percent of world accessions. The 3 Eu-

ropean divisions combined represented 1.5 percent of accessions as a percentage of the total accessions, reflecting a difficult continent where the gospel has had limited impact.

In broad strokes, figures in 2007 accessions indicate rapid growth in Latin America and Africa, and slow growth in Europe and the South Pacific.

Table 1
Accessions As Percentage of World Total (2007)

South American	21.8%
Inter-American	19.2%
East-Central Africa	17.6%
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean	14.0%
Southern Asia	9.8%
Southern Asia-Pacific	5.8%
West-Central Africa	3.9%
North American	3.6%
Northern Asia-Pacific	1.9%
South Pacific	1.0%
Euro-Asia	0.6%
Euro-Africa	0.5%
Trans-European	0.4%

Membership Distribution

Another way of considering uneven growth is examining world membership distribution. Perhaps not surprisingly, the same demographics in accessions are also reflected in membership distribution. Increase in accessions moved in tandem with a rise in membership. Thus we see heavy concentration of membership in Latin America and Africa, and much smaller membership in Europe, the South Pacific, and some parts of Asia (Table 2). Suffice it to say that large accessions engender expansion of membership, and large membership in turn spurs further increase in accessions.

Thus membership distribution in the world divisions is regrettably disproportionate, with African divisions (except WAD) and Latin American divisions accounting for 8 million members, or 64 percent of world membership. Membership in the European continent accounts for about 2.6 percent of world membership.

Table 2
Church Membership by World Divisions (2007)

DIVISION	MEMBERSHIP	% OF WORLD MEMBERSHIP
Inter-American (IAD)	2,968,485	18.96
East-Central Africa (ECD)	2,617,706	16.72
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean (SID)	2,283,279	14.58
Southern Asia (SUD)	2,187,125	13.97
Southern Asia-Pacific (SSD)	1,345,615	8.59
North American (NAD)	1,062,189	6.78
Southern Asia-Pacific (SSD)	902,394	5.76
West Central-Africa (WAD)	798,494	5.10
Northern Asia-Pacific (NSD)	590,684	3.77
South Pacific (SPD)	399,979	2.55
Euro-Africa (EUD)	176,047	1.12
Euro-Asia (ESD)	137,676	0.88
Trans-European (TED)	107,050	0.68

Population Per Member Ratio

The third way of examining uneven growth is to look at the population per member ratio. Back in 2007, the church had a population per member ratio of one for every 423 persons on planet earth (2007:2). This figure, while heartening, masks the huge disparity between both ends of the spectrum. On one hand are countries with a low population per member ratio, and on the other hand are countries with an exceedingly high population per member ratio.

The top ten countries with the lowest population per member ratios are comprised of Pitcairn (1:2), Montserrat (1:5), Grenada (1:8), Saint Vincent and Grenadines (1:8), Belize (1:10), Dominica (1:11), Antigua and Barbuda (1:11), Saint Lucia (1:12), Jamaica (1:12), and Cayman Islands (1:12) (2007:78-80).

At the other end of the scale are countries with a high population per member ratio. The top 20 countries in this category include Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Morocco, Iran, Algeria, Turkey, Bhutan, Djibouti, Comoros, Mauritania, Western Sahara, Tunisia, Brunei, Maldives, Iraq, Egypt, and the Channel Islands (Table 3). Seven of these countries are located in EUD and six in TED territories. Thus the two European divisions shoulder the lion's share (65 percent)

of these countries with few or no Adventist membership. These divisions not only have to contend with secular Europe, but also with the huge Muslim population in their backyards.

Table 3
Population Per Member Ratio (2007)

COUNTRY	POPULATION PER MEMBER RATIO	DIVISION	MEMBERSHIP
Saudi Arabia	1:27,601,000	TED	0
Yemen	1:22,389,000	TED	0
Syria	1:19,929,000	TED	0
Somalia	1:9,119,000	ECD	0
Afghanistan	1:6,378,000	EUD	4
Morocco	1:6,342,20	EUD	4
Iran	1:2,848,320	EUD	24
Algeria	1:1,003,059	EUD	33
Turkey	1:986,227	EUD	74
Bhutan	1:896,000	SUD	0
Djibouti	1:833,000	ECD	0
Comoros	1:711,000	SID	0
Mauritania	1:624,800	WAD	4
Western Sahara	1:480,000	EUD	0
Tunisia	1:428,042	EUD	23
Brunei	1:372,000	SSD	0
Maldives	1:304,000	SUD	0
Iraq	1:167,590	TED	172
Egypt	1:99,080	TED	740
Channel Islands	1:88,000	TED	0

Membership per Million Population Ratio

The fourth way of appraising mission trends is to examine the membership per million population ratio. Membership alone is not necessarily a precise gauge of the depth of mission penetration. The membership per million population ratio may be a more accurate measurement of the extent of mission challenge.

In 2007, there was only one Adventist for every 1 million Turkish population

(Table 4). In Iran there were none. In Egypt the ratio was 10 Adventists to 1 million Egyptians, and in Pakistan 67. These three countries at the bottom of the scale are Islamic countries. Again, these figures are a grim and painful reminder that the church is confronted with the colossal responsibility of reaching the Muslim world for Christ.

Table 4
Membership per Million Population (2007)

COUNTRY	POPULATION ESTIMATE	CHURCH MEMBERSHIP	MEMBERSHIP PER MILLION POPULATION	DIVISION
China	1,317,955,000	360,822	274	NSD
India	1,131,883,000	1,339,606	1,184	SUD
United States	302,201,000	1,000,578	3,311	NAD
Indonesia	231,627,000	190,405	822	SSD
Brazil	189,335,000	1,331,282	7,031	SAD
Pakistan	169,271,000	11,396	67	TED
Bangladesh	149,002,000	27,196	183	SSD
Nigeria	144,430,000	257,943	1,786	WAD
Russian Federation	141,681,000	51,875	366	ESD
Japan	127,730,000	15,213	119	NSD
Mexico	106,535,000	597,540	5,609	IAD
Philippines	88,706,000	571,653	6,444	SSD
Vietnam	85,134,000	9,077	107	SSD
Germany	82,254,000	35,925	437	EUD
Ethiopia	77,127,000	163,524	2,129	ECD
Turkey	77,127,000	74	1	EUD
Egypt	73,418,000	740	10	TED
Iran	71,208,000	24	0	EUD
Thailand	65,706,000	12,083	184	SSD
Congo, Dem. Rep.	62,636,000	507,790	8,107	ECD

Of the top 20 most populous countries in the world, 5 are located in the SSD, 3 in EUD, 2 in TED, 1 in NSD, and 1 in SUD. Probably the most difficult division in the world in terms of reaching large populations is NSD with China and its vast population of 1.3 billion. SUD is not far behind with its Indian population of 1.1 billion.

In short, NSD, SUD, SSD, EUD, and TED have the unenviable task of working in large populations with small membership in their territories. Whether division human and financial resources are aligned in direct proportion to the extent of the enormous task remains to be seen.

10/40 Window

The fifth way of assessing the missionary enterprise of the church is to examine it from the 10/40 Window arena. The 10/40 Window is a term generally believed to have been coined and popularized in 1990 by Luis Bush, International Director of the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement. The Window is the rectangular area stretching across northern Africa and Asia, between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. The makeup of the countries within the rectangle has changed through the years. Bush's original list encompasses 59 nations. Subsequent lists vary from 52 to 62 to 69 countries. Some argue that although geographically within the 10/40 perimeter, the Philippines, Portugal, and South Korea as Christian countries should be excluded, and nations such as Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan should be included.

The 10/40 Window, as defined in this paper, encompasses the following 65 nations: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Brunei, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, China, Djibouti, East Timor, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauritania, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Western Sahara, and Yemen.

TED tops the list with 16 countries in the 10/40 Window (Table 5), followed by SSD (11 countries), and EUD (8 countries). IAD, NAD, SAD, SID, and SPD do not have countries in the 10/40 Window.

Seventh-day Adventist membership in these 10/40 Window countries is small or even non-existent. Open evangelism in some of these countries is either fraught with danger or impossible because of government restrictions and persecution. Though access is restricted to foreigners, some Global Mission (GM) pioneers are working among the indigenous populace.

Table 5
Distribution of 10/40 Window Countries in World Divisions (2007)

Trans-European Division (TED)	16	Albania, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
West-Central Africa Division (WAD)	11	Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal
Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD)	11	Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam
Euro-Africa Division (EUD)	8	Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara
Euro-Asia Division (ESD)	6	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD)	5	China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, Taiwan
East-Central Africa Division (ECD)	4	Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia
Southern Asia Division (SUD)	4	Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal
Inter-American Division (IAD)	0	
North American Division (NAD)	0	
South American Division (SAD)	0	
Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID)	0	
South Pacific Division (SPD)	0	

These sobering figures show that the Great Commission, by no stretch of the imagination, could be described as near completion in the 10/40 Window. Those divisions in the Window are confronted with huge challenges perhaps unimaginable to people elsewhere. They will certainly need more funds, trained personnel, and other provisions to work in such forbidding and at times inhospitable conditions.

Adventist Response

We have taken a quick survey of the church's state of affairs by examining five aspects of the 2007 statistical reports: accession rate, membership distribution, population per member ratio, membership per million population, and the 10/40 Window. We have become somberly aware that the growth of the church has been noticeably disproportionate: phenomenal in some areas and sluggish in others. How should the church address the considerable disparity of growth in different parts of the world? Have the current church-sponsored mission programs helped rectify the situation, or have they contributed to the growth imbalance?

To answer these questions truthfully and objectively, we draw upon the 10/40 Window as an assessment tool. Granted, the 10/40 Window is not the only benchmark to measure effectiveness. However, as far as mission is concerned, there is perhaps nothing more urgent and challenging than the 10/40 Window, which is largely untouched by the gospel.

The following programs are evaluated according to the footprints they have impacted on the 10/40 Window:

- Inter-Division Employee (IDE)
- Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS)
- Global Mission (GM) Pioneers
- General Conference (GC) Staff Evangelism
- ShareHim

Inter-Division Employee (IDE)

The Inter-Division Employee (IDE) program has been the cornerstone of the international mission of the church. Typically IDE appointees go to mission service for five years. They serve on the front line of evangelism. Many work in institutions as administrators, professors, or physicians. Mission advances were due in no small measure to the pioneering spirit of the early IDEs.

During the flourishing years of the 1970s, we had more than 1,500 IDEs.⁴ The number has since steadily declined. As of 2008, 919 IDEs were sent around the globe, costing the church more than \$21 million per annum,⁵ or about 16.5 percent of the GC world budget. The North American Division (NAD) was the principal contributor of IDEs. It supplied almost half of all missionaries.⁶ The trend had since waned. In 2008 NAD sent out 33 percent of all missionaries. SSD was the largest consumer of IDEs, taking in 19 percent of all IDEs.⁷

Table 6 shows a telling picture of the state of mission in 2008. IDEs were deployed in 63 percent of the 10/40 Window countries. Two countries (North Korea and China) were access-restricted countries. Countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Israel, UAE, East Timor, and Pakistan have open access, yet church membership remained relatively small.

Table 6
Inter-Division Employee (Ide) in 10/40 Window (2008)

DIVISION	COUNTRIES WITH IDEs	COUNTRIES WITH NO IDEs
TED (16) ^a	Albania, Egypt, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, UAE	Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia
WAD (11)	Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal	Benin, Guinea, Mali
SSD (11)	Bangladesh, Cambodia, East Timor, Sri Lanka, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam	Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia
EUD (8)	Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Tunisia, Turkey	Morocco, Libya, Western Sahara
ESD (6)	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan
NSD (5)	Japan, Mongolia, Taiwan	North Korea, China (except Hong Kong)
ECD (4)	Djibouti, Ethiopia	Eritrea, Somalia
SUD (4)	India, Nepal	Bhutan, Maldives

Not all IDEs work in a “mission field” in the traditional understanding of the term. Many of them work in the GC Headquarters as well as in GC institutions. In fact, these two groups of IDEs represented 19 percent of all IDEs in 2008.⁹

Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS)

The AVS volunteers are short-term missionaries. Typically they serve from a month to a year. Many extend their stay in the mission field after their initial term has expired. In 2008, the church was blessed with 755 volunteers.

The USA, with its renowned culture of volunteerism, was the largest contributor of volunteers in 2008, sending a whopping 476 (63%) volunteers to virtually every continent on earth. Other contributors of volunteers included South Africa (6%), Australia (5%), Canada (3%), and Argentina (2%).

The largest consumer of volunteers was South Korea. With its large network of English language institutes, the country understandably has an insatiable appetite for more volunteer teachers. Not surprisingly, in 2008 the country absorbed 195, or 26 percent of all volunteers. Volunteers were also very much in demand in Micronesia (6%), Taiwan (5%), Marshall Islands (4%), and Guam (4%). Most schools in Guam and Micronesia have been dependent on volunteer teachers for years.

What was the distribution of volunteers in the 10/40 Window? Most volunteers served wherever they were needed. Of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window, volunteers appeared in 22 of them, or about 34 percent (Table 7).

Many volunteers were institutional workers serving in the Adventist school system. Some schools offered volunteers free housing and utilities, round-trip airfare, and a generous stipend. The enormous difference between remunerations of volunteers working in institutions and non-institutions has effectively blurred the line between volunteerism and livelihood. If individuals “volunteer” to work in Korea or Taiwan where life is relatively cushy, who would volunteer in Jordan, Bhutan, or East Timor? How then would the people from the 10/40 Window countries ever hope to hear the gospel?

Global Mission Pioneers

The Global Mission (GM) pioneer program is part of the GC Office of Adventist Mission. GM pioneers are nationals working in their own contexts in unentered territories without having to adapt to a new culture or learn a new language. GM projects are jointly selected by the local mission/conference in consultation with union and division. Funding is shared among the GC, division, union, and conference. The total costs of 2008 GM projects amounted to almost \$15 million, to which the GC contributed \$5.1 million (Table 8).

Table 7
Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS) in 10/40 Window (2008)

DIVISION	COUNTRIES WITH VOLUNTEERS	COUNTRIES WITH NO VOLUNTEERS
TED (16)	Egypt, Kuwait, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates	Albania, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen
WAD (11)	Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Senegal	Benin, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger
SSD (11)	Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand	Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam
EUD (8)	Afghanistan	Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara
ESD (6)	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan	Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
NSD (5)	China, Japan, Mongolia, Taiwan	North Korea
ECD (4)	Djibouti	Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia
SUD (4)	India, Nepal	Bhutan, Maldives

General Conference Staff Evangelism

While hundreds of IDE, AVS, and GM pioneers are busy serving the world church, GC personnel are also involved in short-term missions. Special funding of \$100,000 has been set aside for this purpose, and GC workers are encouraged to participate. The idea is to conduct reaping campaigns somewhere in the world field, with special funding ranging from \$1,500 to \$10,000 according to the size and nature of the meetings. The funds do not cover travel, per diem, and accommodation costs, which would come from travel budgets of travelling staff. The GC staff evangelism fund stipulates one third of the GC subsidy must be budgeted for adequate follow-up and funding of facilities (Table 9).

Table 8
Global Mission (GM) Pioneers In 10/40 Window (2008)

DIVISION	COUNTRIES WITH GM PIONEERS	COUNTRIES WITH NO GM PIONEERS
TED (16)	Albania, Israel, Pakistan, Sudan	Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
WAD (11)	Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria	Senegal
SSD (11)	Bangladesh, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam	Brunei
EUD (8)	Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey	Afghanistan, Western Sahara
ESD (6)	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan	Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan
NSD (5)	China, Japan, Mongolia, Taiwan	North Korea
ECD (4)	Djibouti, Ethiopia	Eritrea, Somalia
SUD (4)	India, Bhutan	Maldives, Nepal

From 2005 to 2009, GC personnel conducted reaping campaigns in 36 countries. Indonesia appears to be the destination of choice with 20 visits (Table 10), followed by the Philippines with 17 visits, and USA and India with 11 visits each. The rest of the tally includes Ghana (5 times), Mexico (4x), Zambia (4x), Brazil (3x), Mozambique (2x), New Zealand (2x), Tanzania (2x), Hungary (2x), Croatia (2x), Kyrgyzstan (2x), Nigeria (2x), and Australia, Angola, Belgium, Burundi, Bulgaria, Egypt, Kenya, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Peru, Russia, Romania, Samoa, Singapore, Tahiti, Ukraine, UK, and Yugoslavia with one visit each.

What was the distribution of GC evangelists in the 10/40 Window? Out of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window, GC personnel selected only 7 countries (11%) where they conducted reaping campaigns in the past 5 years (Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Nigeria). In other words, the places they went tended to cluster around countries where the work had been well established, and very few went to difficult countries. Basically GC personnel went wherever they wanted to go or requested to go. Participating in evangelism is a laudable endeavor. But going to countries where membership is small, workers are few, resources are meager, and the going is tough is even more commendable.

Table 9
General Conference Staff Evangelism and 10/40 Window (2005-2009)

DIVISION	COUNTRIES WITH GC REAPING CAMPAIGNS	COUNTRIES WITH NO GC REAPING CAMPAIGNS
TED (16)	Egypt (1 time)	Albania, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
WAD (11)	Nigeria (2 times)	Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal
SSD (11)	Indonesia (20 times); Malaysia (3 times)	Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam
EUD (8)		Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara
ESD (6)	Kyrgyzstan (2 times)	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
NSD (5)	Mongolia (1 time)	China, Japan, North Korea, Taiwan
ECD (4)		Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia
SUD (4)	India (11 times)	Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal
<p>Non-10/40 Window countries where GC staff conducted reaping campaigns between 2005 and 2009: Philippines (17 times), USA (11x), Ghana (5x), Mexico (4x), Zambia (4x), Brazil (3x), Mozambique (2x), New Zealand (2x), Tanzania (2x), Hungary (2x), Croatia (2x).</p> <p>The following were countries where GC staff conducted a reaping campaign once: Australia, Angola, Belgium, Burundi, Bulgaria, Egypt, Kenya, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Peru, Russia, Romania, Samoa, Singapore, Tahiti, Ukraine, UK, and Yugoslavia.</p>		

ShareHim

Various divisions adopt diverse approaches to lay training. The 1000 Missionary Movement was born in SSD and later adopted by other divisions. Peru's renowned small group ministry model has been much emulated beyond the boundaries of the union. NSD's special brand of HisHands Mission Movement has successfully inspired many young people to be home missionaries. The list goes on. Perhaps one of the largest short-term mission programs is ShareHim,¹⁰ a ministry of the Carolina Conference in partnership with The Quiet Hour and Amazing Facts. ShareHim (formerly Global Evangelism) has adopted "Experience God's Power through Witnessing" as its motto. Each year it organizes and sends evangelistic teams around the world. Besides its global outreach, it also trains members

and pastors to do evangelism in the US (Table 10).

How conspicuous were ShareHim volunteers in the 10/40 Window? A study of their 2003 to 2008 records suggests that volunteers under their banner conducted meetings in 11 (17%) of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window (Table 10). India stood head and shoulder above others with about 270 campaigns. Malaysia was a distant runner-up with 68 campaigns, followed by 41 in Benin, 33 in Mongolia, and 32 in Indonesia. Other nations included Ethiopia (31), Nigeria (18), Guinea-Bissau (12), China (11), Taiwan (3), and Kazakhstan (1).

Table 10
ShareHim in 10/40 Window (2003-2008)

DIVISION	COUNTRIES WITH SHAREHIM VOLUNTEERS	COUNTRIES WITH NO SHAREHIM VOLUNTEERS
TED (16)		Albania, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
WAD (11)	Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria	Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal
SSD (11)	Indonesia, Malaysia	Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam
EUD (8)		Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara
ESD (6)	Kazakhstan	Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
NSD (5)	China, Mongolia, Taiwan	Japan, North Korea
ECD (4)	Ethiopia	Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia
SUD (4)	India	Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal

Analysis of Statistics

The church is serious about the Great Commission. Leadership has frequently and adroitly communicated to the church about mission being its sole *raison d'être*. Through the media and pulpit, the message appears to be getting through to membership about the importance of “finishing the work.” Huge resources have been committed. A relentless push for evangelism is becoming a way of life. New work has started in previously unentered areas. Churches are being established in far-

flung corners of the earth. Given our puny size and limited resources, we praise the Lord for these breathtaking achievements thus far.

The success story is somehow belied by a troubling trend of disproportionate growth. It is well-documented that Latin America and the Africa continent have been engines of growth for years. The two continents represent 73 percent of world membership. On the other hand, the European continent accounts for about 2.6 percent of world membership. In terms of accessions, the three European divisions make up of only 1.5 percent of world accessions.

The same trend of disproportionate growth is also noted in the population per member ratio. While Latin America and Africa generally have low ratios, elsewhere the ratios are incredibly high. For example in Jamaica or Saint Lucia, the population per membership ratio is 1 to 12. But in Turkey it is 1 to 986,227, and in Mauritania 1 to 624,800. The colossal disparity is a cause for concern.

The phenomenon of uneven growth extends to the 10/40 Window as well. The European divisions are located in or near the Window, with 30 out of the 65 countries in their territories. Along with WAD, SSD, ESC, and ECD, all these divisions face the mammoth task of reaching the 3.2 billion people (two thirds of world population) living in the Window. On top of that, NSD, SSD, and SUD have the additional challenge of working in some of the most populous nations on earth, many of them having humongous cities of more than 10 million people.

The trend of uneven growth can become an intra-division situation as well. In TED, membership in the country of Sudan is growing in leaps and bounds, averaging a 6.8 percent growth rate from 2003 to 2007, and outperforming the world average of 3.97 percent in the same period. Yet, the rapid expansion emblematic of Sudan is atypical in the rest of the division. Another case in point is the SSD, where the Philippines and Indonesia have been engines of growth. The membership in these two countries amounts to about 84 percent of the total division membership, and the remaining 16 percent are distributed in 16 10/40 Window countries, where growth rates are almost infinitesimal.

Analysis of Adventist Response

How did the church tackle the situation of uneven growth? There have been numerous responses from official quarters, as well as supporting ministries, to fulfill the Great Commission. Formally we have the IDE program for cross-cultural ministry, the AVS program for short-term mission, and GM pioneers for unentered territories. These formal programs are augmented by many supporting ministries

as well as short-term mission projects sponsored by conferences and institutions.

In terms of mission footprint on the 10/40 Window, the IDE program probably has the best record. In 2008, they were touching lives in 63 percent of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window. AVS missionaries covered about 34 percent, GM pioneers 63 percent, GC staff 11 percent, and ShareHim 17 percent (Table 11).

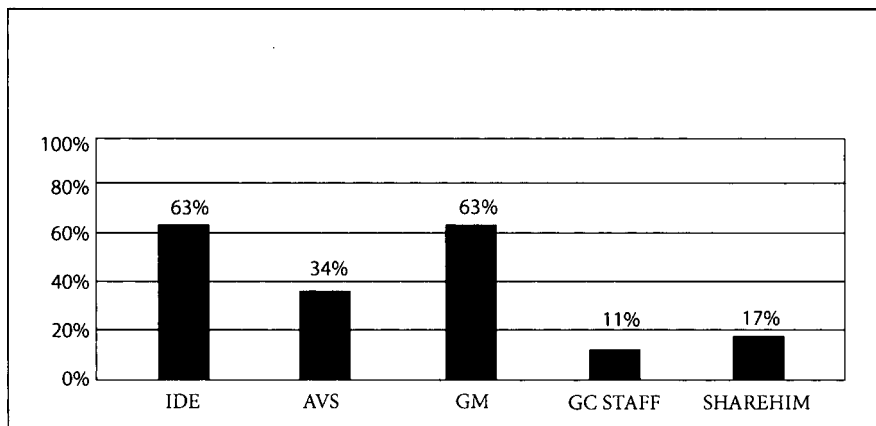
What do we make of this footprint assessment? We can probably draw several conclusions. One telling revelation is that as a church we have not been doing as well as we could in the 10/40 Window. Somehow in the multiplicity of tasks and priorities, as well as financial and personnel constraints, the Window is in increasing danger of being overlooked or forgotten. This apparent neglect surfaces time and again in our study. Three significant trends are noted: a shift from frontline mission to institution, from proactive to reactive, and from pioneer mission to mission of least resistance.

A Shift from Frontline Mission to Institution

There has been a notable shift from frontline mission to institution maintenance. In 2008 we sent out 755 IDEs, of which 424 (or 56%) were institutional missionaries working in ADRA, GCAS, as well as in educational and medical institutions. Ten years ago, institutional IDEs accounted for only 45 percent of the total IDEs. A similar trend is noted in the AVS program. Volunteers in Korea, Taiwan, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Guam represented 45 percent of all volunteers. Almost all of them worked in educational institutions.

The shift of sending more missionaries to institutions than to frontline evangelism comes about perhaps not by design but by default. The early Adventist mission movement, beginning in the 1890s through to the 1930s, concentrated almost exclusively on foreign mission. The work rapidly expanded from its home base in North America to Europe, Asia, and Africa. Whenever missionaries were sent, they were sent to foreign lands to establish mission stations. As membership expanded, missionaries invariably established medical, educational, and publishing institutions. So the shift from frontline mission to institution is indicative of a maturing church in foreign mission and is not necessarily a negative development and should not constitute a scathing rebuke to the church's missionary programs. Be that as it may, is it possible that the large deployment of missionaries to institutions has been done at the expense of the 10/40 Window, whose critical significance has not diminished and whose massive needs are ever present? Should national workers take on greater responsibilities in institutions, thus freeing foreign missionaries to work in more critical areas?

Table 11
Footprints on 10/40 Window Countries in 2008



A Shift from Proactive to Reactive

Most calls for long-term and short-term missionaries are generated from divisions, which in turn respond to requests coming from subsidiary organizations. The GC screens the calls and provides partial funding. As a rule, the GC doesn't initiate calls, even though it finances most of the IDE budgets. Invariably these calls derive from the needs of existing ministries and institutions and are seldom related to frontline mission. Few missionaries are sent for strategic reasons. Granted, in recent years we did send missionaries to Yemen, Mauritania, and Syria. But such initiatives are few and far between compared with mission in the '60s and '70s.

The current situation is reminiscent of the time of Judges when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6). With good intentions, every entity does what it thinks is best in the interest of mission. Redundancy of similar efforts is not uncommon. Except for GM pioneers, the current scenario of calling missionaries and fulfilling those calls appears largely reactive rather than proactive, which is a far cry from the heyday of the single-mindedness of the Foreign Mission Board. Created in 1889, the Board was tasked with a strategic function "for the management of the foreign mission work" of the church (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1889:141, 142).

As the work expanded and matured, it was easy to lose its strategic focus. To be strategic is to behave like a chess player, planning several moves in advance and

anticipating possible countermoves. This is different from the myopic player, who looks ahead only one step at a time and responds to one opposing move at a time. Could it be that the lack of zeal for a renewed strategic focus on the 10/40 Window is not so much due to the absence of resolve and knowhow but rather to the absence of a structure or mechanism to bring about that focus?

A Shift from Pioneer Mission to Mission of Least Resistance

According to Ohm's law, an electrical current takes the path of least resistance. Recent mission endeavors have tended to follow the same law. Whatever is most economical, wherever is most responsive, whenever is most convenient, that's where we consign resources. We continue doing what we are used to doing with little or no evaluation.

This study has repeatedly shown that the church is predisposed to spending time and resources in areas where the work has already been well established. A case in point is the GC staff evangelism program where 17 evangelistic meetings were conducted in the Philippines by GC personnel from 2005 to 2009. The Share-Him program mobilized roughly 295 teams to conduct similar reaping campaigns in the same country within the same time frame. But the question is, why the Philippines of all countries? Why would this Christian country need foreign help when it has a membership of close to 600,000 Adventists, 6,200 churches, 10 hospitals, 6 colleges and universities, 1 publishing house, and 3,500 literature evangelists?

Besides the Philippines, other favorite destinations of these short-term missionaries include Sabah and Sarawak, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. Sabah and Sarawak already have large Adventist membership. Jamaica and Saint Lucia have some of the lowest population per member ratios in the world.

Granted, GC personnel and ShareHim evangelists, as well as many conference-sponsored mission teams, are not necessarily tasked to reach the 10/40 Window. Some of these groups make it clear that their aim is to train and motivate Western lay people for evangelism and not to reach the unreached. Their aspiration is well taken. But could the resources spent on these "easy" places be redirected somewhere else in the world where the going is "harder" and the level of gospel penetration minimal or even non-existent? Can we live with less glamorous results or is the numbers game more important?

This research study has a sense of *déjà vu* about it—the same old patterns appearing with new names. Once upon a time the old name was Burma. The early

leadership subscribed to the theory of least resistance by concentrating on the ethnic minorities who were more responsive to the gospel. The outcome a generation later is that we have a membership of almost 26,000 in 2007, most of whom are ethnic minorities who make up less than 10 percent of the general population. By concentrating evangelism on the minorities, we excluded ourselves from focusing on the Burmans, Burma's main ethnic group, which constitutes 68 percent of the population. Today millions of Burmans live in huge cities along the central valley, stretching from Rangoon in the south all the way to Mandalay in the north, and we have less than 100 Burman Adventist believers.

The almost same episode was replicated in Taiwan, where missionaries found the 9 indigenous tribes to be much more responsive to the gospel than ethnic Chinese. Most tribal people lived in the mountains, and the Han Chinese preferred the plains. The perpetuation of the mission of least resistance resulted in huge indigenous membership and much smaller ethnic Chinese membership. This imbalance in membership is also reflected in ministry. Today we have a dearth of ethnic Chinese pastors and overabundant minority pastors. The conundrum deepens when ethnic Chinese churches refuse to accept indigenous pastors and indigenous pastors refuse to pastor ethnic Chinese churches.

The same can be said of following the path of least resistance by working almost exclusively in rural areas. It is no wonder that today we are a church of villages and islands. Cities are languishing for lack of attention. Yet population growth in cities is fast outpacing that of rural areas.

Mission taking the path of least resistance is fine as long as it doesn't exclude itself from reaching other more onerous groups. We should by all means watch for open doors and receptive groups and move ahead with them, but we cannot forget the difficult. It may have been more expensive and arduous to win the Burmans in Burma and the Han Chinese in Taiwan, but these people groups deserve the right to hear the gospel and be called children of the living God (Rom. 9:25, 26).

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper we have outlined the admirable accomplishments of the world church. We have analyzed statistical trends from 2003 to 2007 in terms of accession, membership, population per member ratio, membership per million population ratio, and the 10/40 Window. We have enumerated the Adventist response to mission in the 10/40 Window through the IDE, AVS, GM, GC, and ShareHim venues.

The study highlights two disquieting trends in mission: disproportionate growth in the world field and near negligence of the 10/40 Window. Mission as we know it today is being defined by the reality of huge disparity in the distribution of resources. Making the situation even more untenable is the lack of coordination and leadership in mission to correct the current autopilot syndrome. Mission appears to be running by default without a coordinating body to oversee the strategic interests of mission. Which entity is responsible for mission? Some might answer “Adventist Mission.” After all, it has the right name. A closer scrutiny, however, reveals that other entities are also inextricably involved. Presidential is a stake holder in mission by way of its association with the IDE Budget Oversight Committee (IDEBOC), a committee that allocates and keeps track of IDE budgets around the world. Secretariat is in partnership with mission by virtue of its role in identifying, recruiting, training, and sending missionaries. Treasury works through the Financial Planning and Budgeting (FP&B) Committee as well as with Secretariat in the financial aspects of mission through the Interdivision Employee Remuneration and Allowances Committee. The Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, as well as Adventist Mission, oversee and promote the 13th Sabbath mission projects. World divisions identify mission projects and request funding from the GC. Media ministries such as Hope TV and Adventist World Radio contribute much through the airwaves and cables. Supporting ministries are at the forefront. Each of these entities works almost independently, with separate silos and agendas raising funds for their causes. So which agency is really responsible for mission? When everyone is responsible, nobody really is.

To remedy the current state of affairs, it seems imperative that the church provides strategic directions. In warfare, mission command and control is critical to provide purpose and direction. The church needs a mission command and control to provide global leadership in redressing imbalance in mission, identifying human and financial resources, channeling these resources to unreached areas, starting new initiatives, and realigning territories if necessary.

The church has not been known for taking challenges lying down. It always rises to the occasion, no matter how difficult the task may be. The church leadership is aware that mission is too critical to be relegated to autopilot. It is convinced of the urgent necessity to give coordination and attention to mission and to assume a global leadership role commensurate with the immensity of the task remaining. To streamline operations, steps are being taken to merge IDE functions in the GC secretariat and TRIPS. Three mission-related committees are being eliminated in favor of a more centrally coordinated committee. On top of that, a high-powered

strategic planning and budgeting body is being established to give strategic direction to mission. That body is chaired by Presidential, and members include leaders in Secretariat, Treasury, and Adventist Mission.

We are hopeful that as the result of these significant changes, mission under the Lord's guidance will again find its focus and direction to move forward valiantly until "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14).

Notes

¹The 2007 edition of the Annual Statistical Report has been used for this article.

²Accessions are defined as additions to the church by baptisms and profession of faith.

³Each day in 2007, members contributed \$7.3 million to the mission of the church.

⁴There were 1,561 IDEs in 1979. The highest ever recorded figure was in 1983 with 1,584 IDEs.

⁵In 1999, the cost was \$16.1 million per annum. The annual IDE cost excludes costs to divisions and the GC.

⁶NAD contributed 48% of all IDEs in 1999.

⁷The percentage declined a decade ago. In 1999, 22% of IDEs served in SSD.

⁸The figure denotes the number of 10/40 Window countries in the division.

⁹As of 2008, the total number of IDEs serving in GC headquarters were 119 and in GC institutions 56. They included ADRA-Africa (5), Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (27), Adventist University of Africa (6), GC Auditing Services (6), HIV/AIDS (2), and Adventist World Radio (10).

¹⁰ShareHim has as its objective "to develop in Seventh-day Adventist members and pastors in the 'first world' a renewed ownership of this Movement's Message and Mission as well as confidence that God will work through each to achieve His objectives by making public evangelism a lifestyle for each congregation."

¹¹SSD 2007 membership was 902,394. The combined membership of the three Philippine unions was 571,653 and the combined membership of the two Indonesian unions was 190,405.

Chapter 15

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MAXIMIZING THE MISSIONAL VALUE OF SHORT-TERM MISSION

Gorden R. Doss

American Christians have an obligation to maximize the value of their missional engagement abroad. Short-term mission (STM) is a significant, though controversial, element of that engagement. To be effective, STM must rest upon appropriate assumptions. This paper discusses three assumptions or starting points: defining the primary purpose of STM, being prepared to relate to wealth and power imbalance in STM, and the necessity of thorough training for STM.

Introduction

Short-term mission (STM) has become an important part of American Christianity's continued missional engagement with the rest of the world. Authors like Philip Jenkins (2002), Robert Wuthnow (2009), and Mark Noll (2009) have documented the fact that the majority of Christians now reside in the global south instead of in Europe and America. Yet, as Wuthnow and Noll emphasize as important themes in their books, America continues to exert significant influence on global Christianity through a variety of modes of engagement. One of those modes is STM, which carries over a million Americans abroad each year, spending \$1 to 2 billion. Of this number, two-thirds travel for 14 days or less (Priest, Dischinger, Rasmussen, & Brown 2006:432).

The nature of America's continued mission engagement with the world has produced what Wuthnow calls a "huge debate" in leadership and missiological circles (Wuthnow 2009:8). What is the character or missional quality of that engagement? What will be the consequences, both intended and unintended, of the different methods being used? Wuthnow found that most Americans somewhat naively assume that the outcomes of American Christian interaction abroad are wholly beneficial to everyone involved (2009:8).

In contrast to the "celebratory rhetoric" in America about STM, Gary Corwin believes that its inherent limitations cause it to produce results that "seem to be less than meets the eye" (Corwin 2008:144). Comments Gene Daniels, "The dark little secret" that missionaries and indigenous people who host STM groups are reluctant to articulate is that "the average short-term missionary takes far more than he or she gives. The time invested to host the person, the resources he or she drains from the church's world mission budget, the problems the person sometimes causes . . . all-too-often . . . cost more than whatever benefit the visitor brings to the field" (Daniels 2008:152).

To the critics of STM comes the reminder that only God knows the ultimate outcomes of various mission strategies and methods. To those who naively assume that STM produces only positive outcomes comes a reminder of the painful lessons of mission history. Even the casual observer can see that some STM does not deserve to be called "mission." Attaching the word "mission" to something does not necessarily make it worthy or effective. However, maximizing the missional quality of STM requires great care and planning. Best practices will maximize positive intended outcomes and diminish potentially negative unintended outcomes.

I need to disclose my biases and perspective. I grew up with missionary parents in Malawi, served there 16 years as an adult, and now teach mission in a seminary. My experience and observation lead me to favor STM lasting three months or more. The Adventist student missionary model, where students spend 9 to 12 months, represents STM at its best. When short-termers stay for several months, fill well-defined roles, and get beyond the honeymoon-tourist-spectator phase, I have observed them making excellent contributions, even among some less receptive peoples.

Best practices for STM must rest upon appropriate assumptions about mission in general and STM in specific. This paper discusses three of those assumptions or starting points: defining the primary purpose of STM, being prepared to relate to wealth and power imbalance in STM, and the necessity of thorough training for STM.

Primary Purpose of Short-Term Mission

To maximize the missional quality of STM requires paying attention to the primary purpose or benefits of STM. Some potential benefits are similar for both STM travelers and their hosts. These could include broadening global perspectives, developing appreciation for other cultures, developing inter-cultural skills, having good fellowship, developing long-term trans-cultural relationships, experiencing spiritual renewal, deepening commitment to Christian mission, etc. Some potential benefits are different for the two groups. The pilgrimage character of STM gives the guests a heightened sense of drama and awareness that can facilitate dramatic learning. Travelers often observe suffering and poverty in a new way. The hosts typically receive material benefits for personal and ministry needs. This list of potential benefits could be expanded.

Unhealthy, mixed motivations are possible for both hosts and guests. For STM travelers, there can be a “naughty little secret” (my term, complementing Daniel’s “dark little secret”) that involves the good feeling one gets from making a contribution to the STM fund that partially fulfills one’s stewardship commitments, counts as an IRS tax deduction, gives one the feeling of “doing real missions,” gives an intense spiritual experience, and gives the family an exotic overseas vacation—all in one. The “naughty little secret” can link up with the “trickle-down theory of STM” (my term), which states that any money spent for mission trip expenses is fully justified by contributions made on the trip to the hosts and by the increased support for world missions and humanitarian service that STM generates down the line. Unfortunately, research indicates that STM does not generate the increased support assumed by the “trickle-down theory of STM” (Priest, Dischinger, Rasmussen, & Brown 2006:435).

STM hosts can also succumb to unhealthy motivations. Believers in developing countries can view visitors as mere money carriers and use them opportunistically in a way that is unhealthy both to themselves as individuals and to the local church. Relationships built on phony, manipulative friendliness are unhealthy. When local congregations become dependent on American donations, their long-term congregational development is hindered.

Paul discussed mixed motivations for preaching Christ and concluded that “the important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached” (Phil. 1:18, NIV). The history of Christian mission documents an abundance of mixed motivations. Thus, STM must not be held to a perfectionist standard. Yet, seeking good motivation for every type of Christian service is

a requirement because growth in Christ includes the purification of motives and because motivation shapes service.

I will not try to parse the multi-layered, unhealthy purposes and motivations that are possible for everyone involved with STM. Rather, I will address the issue broadly by asking this question: Is the main purpose of STM to benefit the travelers or the hosts? The easy answer is “both,” but in my observation the *de facto* answer for too many Americans is “travelers.” Many specific issues of motivation will be addressed by answering this question.

One mission pastor told me that because of the recognized ambiguous outcomes¹ of STM for the hosts, his large church had decided to be honest and forthright by defining the benefits for the travelers as primary. His goal was to give every visitor an STM “experience,” not necessarily at the expense of the hosts, but with the recognition that the visitors might benefit most. One long-term medical missionary reflected the same perspective by telling me that he was a missionary primarily for the blessings he received from the experience. I hasten to add that both the mission pastor and the missionary were very caring people. The fact that the mission pastor and the long-term missionary shared a similar view suggests that the question of motivation involves basic theological assumptions.

Is it theologically acceptable to make the blessings for the one who goes on a mission trip primary? I think not. However blessed the experience of performing any Christian service may be for the one serving, the primary purpose has to be to benefit those served. Surely the whole “divine drama” of God’s mission (See Moreau, Corwin, & McGee 2004:28ff), with the incarnation at its center, supports this assertion. Paul’s epistles record many blessed experiences he had along with the hardships. However, it is unimaginable that having a “good experience” was the primary purpose, either for himself or his team. Training a missionary team was an important element of Paul’s strategy, but his primary focus was on non-believers and believers in the churches he planted. Our missional context is obviously different from Paul’s, but I believe he demonstrated principles we should follow.

If, as research suggests, the long-term effects of the STM “good experience” for the visitor are less positive and long lasting than is often assumed,² making the visitor’s benefit primary is wrong for pragmatic reasons in addition to theological reasons. Could making a “good experience” for the traveler the primary purpose of STM be the reflection of a narcissistic culture? Wuthnow critiques American Christianity for its “consumerist mentality” that makes the church member a “religious consumer” of ecclesial products, incentives, and experiences (Wuthnow 2009:15, 16). Does STM fall under this critique when having a “good experience” is the primary purpose?

I submit that the primary purpose for STM must be that “Christ is preached” effectively to the hosts and their community through a variety of contextually appropriate modes of wholistic service. Assessing effectiveness is more challenging than simply counting people who come forward at a meeting or are baptized. The valid benefits for the travelers must be seen as secondary gifts of grace for which thanks is given, much as preachers give thanks when preaching is a blessing to themselves. Appropriate attention should be paid to maximizing these secondary gifts in quality and duration through pre-trip training and post-trip debriefing with the STM team and their home church, as we shall see below.

Making service to the hosts primary gives STM a biblical focus that can shape decisions about particular issues. A cluster of important questions are implied that STM planners need to ask about the hosts:

- How is God working among and through the people we wish to visit?
- How can we best join and enhance their ministry?
- What needs have been identified by the hosts?
- Which of those needs can our group address, at least in part?
- What human and material resources are available to enhance the hosts’ ministry and address their needs?
- How can trip expenditures reflect the primary focus on service to the hosts?
- How many people with what skills are needed to achieve the trip goals for the hosts?
- What training and preparation does the team need to fulfill the trip goals for the hosts?
- How can we prepare to initiate (or enhance) a long-term partnership if the hosts want to form such a partnership?

Making benefits for the travelers secondary (though important) implies another set of questions:

- What are the trip goals for the travelers and how can they be achieved?
- What human and material resources are needed to achieve the trip goals for the travelers?
- How can expenditures reflect the secondary focus on the traveling team?
- What training and preparation does the team need to fulfill trip goals for themselves?

Some individual questions for the traveler are brought into focus by making the hosts primary:

- Do I sense an authentic call from God to serve in STM?

- Will my contribution to this trip be greater if I go or if I stay home and give support with an offering?
- If I go, what contribution to the trip goals for the host and the team can I make?
- What do I need to do to prepare myself for effective service to the hosts and my team?
- What do I need to do to facilitate my personal trip goals?

I think that the group and individual reflection suggested above would produce STM teams that were smaller, more focused and more effective in the field. Sending churches could move away from simply trying to get as many members as possible onto the airplane. The logistical burden of hosting STM teams would be decreased. In summary, the missional value of STM is enhanced when its primary purpose is service to the hosts.

Wealth and Power Imbalance in Short-Term Mission

To maximize the missional quality of STM, the travelers need to be prepared to serve in a truly Christian way in the context of a wealth and power imbalance. Most STM trips bring relatively wealthy people into contact with people who are less materially wealthy. In this kind of encounter, there are inherent power and wealth imbalances. Teenage visitors often have more pocket money than their adult hosts earn in months, to say nothing of adult visitors. American teams, with their good clothing, computers, cameras, I-Pods, and sound equipment simply “reek” of riches that local people can only dream about. This makes today’s STM travelers susceptible to some of the same pitfalls of the colonial era when missionaries controlled everything and locals sometimes merely went along because of their powerlessness.

Even though partnership is an oft-stated goal and theme for STM, Corwin suggests that it is generally more of a “power trip” than a partnership (Corwin 2008:144). Edwin Zehner (2006:512) critiques the “Delta Force” model, and Hunter Farrell (2007:69) critiques the “Paratrooper Incursion” model, both of which view the STM trip as a military-like operation of spiritual power projection. Oscar Muriu (2009), a pastor in Nairobi, says that Kenyans know when it’s summer in America because the color of Nairobi’s streets changes as STM groups appear in full tourist regalia.

Relationships are unavoidably warped in different ways when there is a wealth and power gap. If you are from America (or another wealthy country), put yourself

into the picture by visualizing how you would respond if you lived in a declining town in rural America and Bill Gates and a group of wealthy friends came to spend two weeks working with your church. The more wealthy tend to view themselves and their contributions more favorably than can be justified, and the less wealthy tend to be more agreeable and less critical than can be justified. The valid desire for a new church building can cause a local pastor to support almost any suggestion made by the STM team, while the STM team may think that every idea they express is contextually appropriate because the pastor never disagrees.

Recently, a multicultural STM group arrived at a Christian university in Africa with plans to hold a week of revival meetings and do some construction work. When the university provost asked who was to be the revival speaker, he was shocked to discover that the speaker had a gold earring and hairdo that were strictly forbidden on his campus and by the local Christian community. Using his best diplomacy, he told the group that no one looking like that could preach on his campus. The group responded that unless “pastor earring” was allowed to preach, they would take their donation and themselves back home. Much conflict ensued, with frantic calls to denominational executives and board members. In the end, the provost preached the revival and the donation was received. Had the provost been weak-kneed, the STM group would have presented a very negative view of Christianity in the local context.

The reality of relational warping caused by wealth and power imbalance places the obligation upon the travelers to be what Jonathan Bonk calls the “righteous rich”³ and to practice what Miriam Adeney calls “godly tourism” (Adeney 2006:464). Human encounters involve the exchange of both material and non-material assets (such as friendship, loyalty, esteem, and reputation), sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously. Healthy encounters bring roughly equal benefits to the parties, while unhealthy encounters exploit one or both parties. Both parties can be exploited when they use each other to achieve material or non-material ends. In a worst case scenario, STM visitors use hosts as ecclesial “Disney employees” to give them a spiritual-cultural-missional high while the hosts say and do almost anything to milk dollars from the visitors.

When Americans visit the developing world, they are usually in a “power-up” position in both material and non-material capital. The material advantage comes from their obvious wealth, while the non-material advantage comes from being seen as more modern, sophisticated, educated, and socially/politically powerful. The obligation for Christians on the “power-up” side is to make every possible effort to ensure that those on the “power-down” side receive equitable benefits from

the encounter, even if not all of their issues and needs can be resolved.

Adeney has noted that STM involves several kinds of encounter or exchange (Adeney 2006:464-472). First, there is a physical encounter. Tourists consume local resources and place a burden on the local economy, ecology, and infrastructure without necessarily benefitting the local people. An ethical physical encounter will bring at least as much good to the hosts as the visitors receive. “Godly tourists” will intentionally seek to benefit local people by directing spending toward local businesses and minimizing their “footprint” on the ecology and infrastructure as much as possible.

Second, there is a cultural encounter. The temptation to feel culturally superior can be overwhelming for visitors from wealthy, powerful countries. A STM “power trip” can bring a team of task-oriented bulldozers (human and sometimes mechanical) into a community in a way that is culturally disorienting and disruptive. Completion of the task can completely eclipse relationship-building activities. One church-building team virtually refused to interact with the locals as they sought to complete the task on time. The training for one group of student evangelists included instructions to stay in the hotel room each day studying the evening’s sermon instead of associating with the people. Effective STM tourists will show respect for the local culture for both theological and practical reasons. Theologically, God’s “cultural mandate” allows all peoples to create and maintain their cultures, and ethical visitors will show respect, even if locals may seem “backward” to them. For purely practical reasons, visitors must work cooperatively and respectfully within local cultural norms so that whatever initiatives they make will be sustainable when they are gone.

Third, STM involves a spiritual encounter. Effective visitors will respect the fact that the spiritual environment of the hosts may be quite different from their own. Worship, music, and preaching styles may be very different. The utilization of spiritual gifts also differs between cultures. If local patterns are not respected, the character and quality of worship in the host church can be so changed that it bears no relationship to regular life and worship. Visitors should arrive as spiritual seekers and learners, willing to be served spiritually and willing to have their service shaped by the local spiritual environment. Visitors should not be the only ones singing, preaching, and witnessing during the visit.

In encounters where power and wealth are imbalanced, it is important that the assessment of the exchange be accurate and that it include both material and non-material assets. Unless care is taken, visitors could make an inaccurate assessment of the net material benefits they bring to their hosts. Visitor travel expense should

not be counted as a contribution to the hosts—because it is not. The full cost of hosting the STM team, including hidden costs, needs to be assessed. Muriu (2009) says that his own church often provides a “reverse subsidy” to visiting groups, of which the visitors are oblivious. In other words, hosting STM teams is a net expense for his church. Those of us who have organized any kind of conference know that there are always expenses of which many attendees are unaware. Ethical STM teams will ensure that their hosting organizations do not suffer a net financial loss. This will require tact and diplomacy because accepting hospitality is part of being a good visitor, especially in places like Africa where showing hospitality is a strong traditional value. Making sure that hosts don’t suffer a net loss is the lowest, minimal standard. If benefits for the host are defined as primary, perhaps STM groups should set a higher standard. Is it too radical to suggest that material benefits for the hosts should exceed what the visitors spend on themselves?

Non-material assets must also be included in the assessment of an encounter. One of the issues for STM visitors from the West is that our culture predisposes us to undervalue the non-material assets that are part of human encounters. When seen in their true scale, the non-material gifts host communities give to their STM guests are to be greatly valued. These gifts can include a warm welcome, personal time and energy needed to facilitate the visit, patience with cultural unfamiliarity, forgiveness for cultural blunders, advocacy with immigration or police authorities or business people, protection from thieves, providing the general social guidance needed to negotiate an unfamiliar culture, loyal support of visitors’ ministries, and accepting their suggestions. In Africa, hospitality is such a strong value that hosts often super-extend themselves in non-material ways to make visitors welcome.

On the other side of the encounter, the visitors also convey important non-material gifts. The hosts often receive enormous social capital in their communities by receiving American guests, who are often given celebrity status. Being the intermediaries for the celebrities elevates the status of the hosts. When genuine friendships are established, they carry great significance for “power-down” hosts. Such social capital can enhance mission and ministry in the local community.

Understanding the importance of the mutual non-material exchange may be most important for Westerners. The hosts stand to benefit greatly from the fellowship and relational dimensions of STM, which travelers sometimes undervalue because of their task-oriented, materialistic approach. Material gifts are valued, but the gift of true friendship and the building of long-term relationships are greatly treasured. The travelers often benefit more than they realize from the generous non-material benevolence of the hosts. Ethical travelers will value and intentionally facilitate a generous and equitable non-material exchange.

Training for Short-Term Mission

The missional value of STM can be maximized through good pre-trip training and post-trip debriefing for STM travelers.⁴ To state the point negatively, failure to adequately prepare a team before the trip and then debrief them afterwards significantly decreases positive outcomes, especially for the very short trips of 14 days or less (see Priest 2008; Livermore 2006). Many anecdotes are heard of STM groups whose missional contribution is greatly diminished because not even the most elementary principles are taught.

The years of pre-flight and post-flight work done by astronauts are a helpful analogy for STM. Astronauts spend such brief periods in the alien environment of space that they need extensive pre-flight training to function effectively and interpret what they experience. When they return, extensive work is needed to interpret and apply their data.

Long-term missionaries typically receive elaborate pre-field training and post-field debriefing. When they arrive in the field they are immersed in the local culture and learn the language over a period of many years. Yet, their service remains very challenging and complex as they seek to cross cultural and religious barriers effectively.

The STM traveler is very much like the astronaut and very different from the long-term missionary. Depending on the destination, a sizeable part of the trip is spent on travel, logistics, and having fun. These non-ministry or non-people-engaged days can easily consume half of the time on shorter trips. The challenge is immense for cultural outsiders to make effective engagement during the brief, intense people-engaged days.

STM travelers often go with high expectations of having a “whole life-changing experience” and of “doing real mission” in the “real mission field.” On a trip of 14 days or less, the only way to even approach fulfilling such expectations is through excellent pre-trip training and post-trip debriefing. Without such training, the travelers will not step onto the plane with even the most basic concepts about Christian mission in place; they will not be prepared to observe and interpret accurately what they see and experience; they will not be able to relate to the hosts and minister among them effectively; and, finally, once back home they won’t be able to retain and apply the lessons of the trip to their long-term lives. In summary, the benefits for both hosts and travelers will be greatly reduced, rendering the high cost of STM unjustifiable.

At the minimum, pre-trip training should probably include the following:

- Overview of Christian mission, past and present.
- Introduction to the concept of culture and cross-cultural missions.
- Basic skills of being a good learner and guest in a cross-cultural setting.
- Introduction to the host people and the progress of Christian missions among them.
- Guidelines for appropriate dress and behavior among the host people.
- Guidelines for personal safety and health on the trip.
- Development of trip goals for the hosts and the travelers through interaction with the hosts.
- Development of individual trip goals.

Post-trip debriefing needs to include the following:

- A narrative review of the trip, including high points and low points, to see how God worked in and through the hosts and the travelers.
- Assessment of team goals and their achievement, with a cataloguing of valuable lessons learned for the benefit of future trips.
- Assessment and sharing of individuals goals and their achievement, with planning for the implementation of valuable lessons learned.
- Application of valuable lessons learned to individual and corporate plans for service in the local church and community.

Conclusion

As the American church seeks to remain engaged effectively with global mission, we must invest our God-given human and material resources wisely and strategically. Some activities that may be acceptable in and of themselves may not be effective when assessed for their contribution to extending God's kingdom. Health-care workers in emergency rooms use triage to distribute resources to the most needy patients. In the same way, the church must use its perennially limited resources wisely to facilitate the best possible engagement in global mission.

Notes

¹Such as the fact that church buildings can sometimes be built for one-tenth the cost by local peoples as compared with American teams.

²See Priest, Dischinger, Rasmussen, & Brown 2006:435–445, and other articles in *Mis-*

siology, October 2006, for a summary of research findings. See also articles in Priest 2008, especially Ver Beek (475 ff.), Park (531 ff.), and Decker (559 ff.).

³From a personal conversation. See also Bonk 1991.

⁴Ideally, the host church will also receive training and orientation, but time limitations do not allow discussion of that element.

Chapter 16

* * *

CROSSING CULTURAL BARRIERS IN NORTH AMERICA WITHOUT COMPROMISING CULTURAL IDENTITIES

Larry R. Evans

Inherent within the commission to proclaim the gospel to every “nation, tribe, language and people” are cultural boundaries that can serve as obstacles and/or conduits for sharing. This paper shares insights learned from the implementation of a multicultural approach of which reaching out to the Native American Indians of North America was a part. Vital to the success that was achieved was the respect given to the cultural traditions that identified each people group. The validity of the approach is solidified 25 years after its implementation.

The Church has an almost impossible task. It has been given a commission to proclaim the eternal gospel “to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev. 14:6; Matt. 28:18-20). Each of these four categories has boundaries that can hinder and even halt efforts to proclaim the gospel effectively. On the other hand, these same factors can prove to be the very avenues by which the gospel can rapidly be communicated. Critical questions must be asked: How is the Church to decide what approach to take? Can one method be effective for all cultural groups? What roles should Church administration take and not take? How should the Church go about initiating and developing indigenous leadership? How is this leadership to develop a new community of believers without jeopardizing either the integrity of the gos-

pel or the unity with the larger Church? To provide a framework for answering these and other questions, we shall explore the role of inculturation as it relates to cross-cultural ministry. We will then review a model that was effectively used to reach out to the Native Americans in North America.

The Question

Basic to any Christian mission endeavor is the need to solicit a response to the question Jesus asked of His own disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:16). This question is pivotal for it provides the theological framework for mission and ministry, yet planning must not be done in isolation of the culture of the people to be reached. The success of mission often relies on the effective interplay of the worldviews of the ones “proclaiming” and the ones who will be “receiving.” Understanding one’s own culture and that of others is a critical first step toward an effective ministry. Donald A. McGavran noted, “A veil that hides church growth effectively is the ethnocentricity of missionaries, or, more simply, their cultural overhang. Individuals naturally tend to see everything in their own cultural frame of reference” (1990:59). It is no wonder that Christ was effective. He “mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (White 1942:143; see also Heb. 4:14-16). With this perspective He was able to tear “away the wall of partition, the dividing prejudice of nationality” and taught a love for all of the human family (White 1950:823). The power of His example, however, was not limited to what He said but was enriched by how He intuitively listened to and observed those whom He sought to disciple.

Setting Aside Time for Listening and Observing

It wasn’t until after Jesus spent three years with His disciples that He asked them who they thought He was. Then He listened. When the answer came, Jesus confirmed not only its validity but its source, and He did so in the presence of all the disciples (Matt. 16:13-20). It was a teaching moment and one which the disciples would long remember. Jesus had come with the full authority as the Son of God. He also came as a missionary to a foreign culture. His “mingling” among the people acquainted Him with their griefs and their values (Isa. 53:4). He observed firsthand their physical and spiritual needs. It was a time for them to come to grips

with the reality of who He really was—the promised Messiah with a unique mission that He wanted to share with them.

Peter's answer to Christ's question indicated that he was beginning to understand the work of Christ, which transcended his own cultural expectations. The question asked by Jesus was not a "pass or fail" test on some man-made continuum of faith development. Jesus was introducing a radical reformation with regard to God's mission. He was establishing the foundation for a new ministry that would flourish after His own death. He wasn't listening for "right" answers as much as looking for changes in the hearts of His disciples. It was there, in the heart, that mission was to be born. Only then could the broader implications of the mission for which He was seeking to prepare the disciples be comprehended. It was important for Jesus to know that Peter had now come to the point where he was listening to the "Father in heaven."¹ Jesus knew from His own experience that it was in communion with heaven that mission would receive the needed depth and power to be completed. It was a progressive experience for Peter and a platform on which greater insights could be built.

Each day with Jesus deepened their understanding of what it meant to be a disciple—and each day challenged their own worldview. With Peter's confession of faith, Jesus knew His mission was on track. His "converts" were now listening in new ways—albeit not consistently, as it would soon be shown. Right answers alone were not enough. Communion with heaven by His disciples was critical for the difficult days ahead (Matt. 26:36-46).²

Mission is never complete when doctrinal formulas are simply repeated but only when those insights lead to a dynamic connection with heaven and it is worked out in multiple forms of witness and fellowship with one another (Acts 2:43-47). Fernando Cervantes warns of the danger of dependence on doctrinal formulas when he says there is a "fundamental inadequacy of any analysis of religious interaction which centres upon the notion of conversion, especially if this notion is understood merely as the result of the presentation and acceptance of a doctrine" (Cervantes 1999:276).³ Furthermore, the failure of the teacher to understand and appropriately relate to the culture of the student is a primary obstacle to internalizing principles. Indeed, culture is the context of mission. Thus, to ignore its importance or to fail to grasp its significance can create unfortunate barriers to appropriate internalization. On the other hand, when understood and used as a channel of communication, culture can also be the very means for the rapid and expansive spread of the gospel. While the message must not be compromised, neither must its cultural medium be ignored. This brings us to a vital crossroads—the intersection of culture and mission.

Value of Inculturation

Mission takes place when there is an encounter between the gospel and people. Such encounters, however, are often complicated when values of one culture are used to interpret the principles of the gospel to another. At that point, culture becomes a distracter. How culture is seen by those being sent is critical for determining what approach is to be taken.

Missiologist J.H. Bavinck clearly supports this principle. He wrote,

The first question that I ought to ask is: to whom am I bringing the gospel? It is perfectly clear that I speak to a child differently than I speak to an adult, that I tell a child a Bible story differently than to an adult. It is perfectly obvious that the person to whom I speak influences the manner in which I speak. The content of God's Word itself teaches us that I must seriously consider the person to whom I would direct myself. Under no circumstances may I present the Word of God in general, abstract timeless formulas addressed to no one. As an ambassador of the living Christ I must direct myself to the living people and I must earnestly consider them as persons, in all their circumstances, and in all their traits of character (Bavinck 1960:82, 83).

In fairly recent times, the word "inculturation" has been coined to describe the dynamic meeting of the gospel and peoples. Peelman portrays it as being

much more than an ethnic, linguistic, geographical or social affair. It is basically a spiritual adventure that calls for the fundamental attitudes of listening, dialogue, research, active presence and careful discernment. It is also a complex anthropological and theological process which is truly *christological* in its very core The mystery of inculturation is nothing other than the extraordinary power of the gospel (the living word of a living God) acting upon a culture from within and producing within that culture responses of faith which often exceed our expectations and predictions (Peelman 1995:91, 92).

This approach to mission has not always been understood. Eddie Gibbs does emphasize the need to adapt the communication of the message, but he also stresses the need to not compromise the truth. He wrote, ". . . revelation in Scripture is 'receptor-oriented', not in the sense of affirming the hearers by telling them only what they want to hear, but by speaking specifically to their situation so that they cannot miss what they need to hear" (Gibbs 1981:101). Walter Douglas, however, reminds us of a persistent dilemma when he said, "For a long time the church has

claimed the right to address the world through its missionary and evangelistic outreach, both at home and abroad, because of its conviction that man needs God. But the problem for the church today lies precisely in the fact that the secular world denies its need of God, and the religious world denies its need of the Christian God” (Douglas 1980:51). It is precisely this double challenge that makes mission so daunting.

Gottfried Oosterwal suggests that part of the problem is that the Church has been locked into a paradigm of the past, which has clearly been “church-centered and message-oriented” (Oosterwal 2005:60). The tried and tested Euro-American missiological methods produced, as should be expected, Euro-American converts “irrespective of the cultural conditions that shaped people’s lives and needs and ways of thinking” (Oosterwal 2005:60). Today, however, a sudden paradigm shift seems to be taking place that reflects “a whole new way of thinking about the role of culture in Adventist theology and mission” (Oosterwal 2005:61). The new paradigm for mission, whether it be at home or abroad, does not abandon the role of the local church, the global Church or the content of the message. However, what is receiving greater emphasis now is “inculturation.” Of special interest is the process by which the gospel is assimilated into the traditional culture with its practices and values where possible.⁴ This has given mission a much broader base on which to make disciples—disciples who become witnesses to others within their own culture. The need for cross-cultural ministry is great, but it does have some formidable barriers.

Crossing Cultural Barriers

With scores of unreached people groups it is necessary to cross cultural lines in order to launch a mission to reach newly recognized or isolated population segments. Jon L. Dybdahl reminds us that “about 40 percent of the world’s population cannot hear the gospel unless someone is willing to move across cultures to reach them” (Dybdahl 1999:23). The pragmatic truth is clear: “People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers” (McGavran 1990:163). Dayton and Fraser describe just how tightly knit these cultural groups can be.

We may say that a “people” is a collection of humans who see themselves (or are seen by others) as culturally distinct from other groups. They share certain cultural traits such as language, religion, values, and often a common history. Usually there is a degree of pride associated with the life-style of the group.

Members feel that their way of life is right for them and is better than the customs and ideas held by other groups. Usually they wish to cultivate the cultural elements which they see as important and to pass them on to the next generation. Normally they marry others of the same group (outside those kinspersons with whom marriage would be considered incest) (Dayton & Fraser 1980:132).

Being transparent is a prerequisite if a cross-cultural ministry is to be successful. Covey wasn't speaking of cross-cultural ministry when he declared that effective people must seek first to understand before seeking to be understood (Covey 1989:239), but it is a universal principle that also applies to mission. Culture, in its broad sense, is not the enemy of mission but rather its conduit. The offense of the cross creates its own barriers. Cross-cultural ministry must not add unnecessary cultural hindrances in the process of witness. Cross-cultural ministry is most effective if it reaches some with the claims of the gospel and leads to a life so transformed that converts become emissaries to others within their own culture. They become the bridge of real hope for the rapid growth of the gospel within their own culture.

By contrast, however, McGavran observes that a by-product of some missiological strategies is a phenomenon that "halts" the progress of would-be-mission endeavors. He refers to this "halting" factor in the context of "redemption and lift" (see McGavran 1990:209-220). In brief, this principle states that Christianity always results, over time, in bettering the believer's social standing. It often takes more than one generation, but those congregations that started out successfully reaching the poor ultimately become more affluent and successful. Economic improvement comes about as individuals practice principles of Christian stewardship. Such individuals often improve their lot in life.

Unfortunately, many times "the lift" removes them from their own culture, and the influence they have on family and friends, whom they could have reached with the gospel, is eroded. Receiving advanced education is one way this can be brought about, though education of itself is not the problem. It can "lift" converts out of their long-established cultural roots, causing them to become more identified with a new lifestyle and its corresponding values.

Denominational structures and subsidies, innocently created to help, can unwittingly fuel a dependency on a well-meaning but intrusive culture with its own lifting influence. Individuals and whole groups of indigenous converts can become minimally effective as witnesses to their culture. As we shall see in the following case review, such factors have played a role with the mission work among North American Indians.

A Case Review: Reaching Out to Native Americans

Henry David Thoreau once wrote, “If you have built castles in the air your work need not be lost: that is where they should be. Now put the foundation under them” (Thoreau cit. Hock 1999:195). The following review of one mission strategy in the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists will attempt to do just that—illustrate how basic mission principles can be applied within the setting of the North American Division. The case briefly describes the need, the development and implementation of a unique mission structure, and the results of these endeavors 25 years after they were initiated.

Brief Historical Perspective

The European colonization of the Americas introduced the “new frontier” to a new culture. It came packaged with an urban mindset that had little appreciation for the rural lifestyle so prevalent in this developing land. Attitudes of superiority led to projections of condescension. Conflicts were bound to result, and they did. This led to a disregard and open ridicule of many cultural traditions and beliefs cherished by the inhabitants of the land. The result was chaos, alienation, and strife, accompanied by cultural wars that often led to death. The agrarian tribes were labeled as being uncivilized by the former urban dwellers and were dubbed as “savages.” Ultimately the indigenous people were displaced to reservations so that the newcomers might retain their culture in a land they now claimed as their own.

When the Amerindians were forced into reservations by governmental forces, it was with a partial hope that the “savages” would eventually assimilate to the “white man’s” culture. Success was defined as civilizing these uneducated natives, which, of course, meant that to “fit in,” Native Americans would need to modify or abandon their own culture significantly. Add to this missionaries, who came and introduced the concept of proselytization. This was new to the people who were anything but unreligious. David Murray describes the phenomena well when he wrote,

Primitive religions saw the gods at work in nature as an integral part of it, and therefore saw them as capable of being induced to make things happen. In contrast, the Judeo-Christian God was even seen as absolute, sovereign and outside of, and prior to, nature. Apart from the problematic instance of mira-

cles, the rule was that God was not to be influenced directly, but that his will was sovereign and independent. While a spell would claim to effect a change in nature, a prayer was altogether more indirect (Murray 1999:50).

Both Christianity and primitive religions were naturally religious, but the starting points were vastly different and the differences were seen as having little common ground. There were some beliefs that were held in common, but prejudices made “hearing” other perspectives nearly impossible. Tribal groups often referred to their God as the “Creator,” while Christians referred to theirs as “Lord.” When Biblical references to slave and master were linked with the use of “Lord,” it spoke volumes to the Native Americans who were at the time under siege by foreigners invading their homeland with strange, controlling customs and beliefs.

Native Americans, on the other hand, saw a special relationship between the created and the ever-present God. For them such a concept fostered a strong emphasis on equality and community, which was in contrast to the rising “rugged individualism” demonstrated by many land-hungry homesteaders.

This contrast in perspectives and beliefs could only lay the foundation for distrust that would affect generations to come. However, as one futurist said, “The future is not about logic and reason. It’s about imagination, hope and belief” (Hock 1999:152). A desire to understand, however, is critical. As could be expected, a lack of understanding or appreciation of basic core values threatened the very basis for hope and belief. While these were never completely eradicated by the invasion of European foreigners, the Native American population in the emerging United States would not be the same again. What was needed was a thoughtful building on elements of truth found in Native religious beliefs. Instead of enduring repudiation of their God, they needed to hear their concept of a Creator expanded by the personalized Bible story of the Creator and His love.

Is it possible to alleviate the hurt that has inflicted so many generations of Native Americans? We think so—at least to some degree. We have come to this conclusion based on the positive response seen after allowing and promoting inculturation to take place. However, any progress in this can only come after we have gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of the people and their culture.

It happened when we began visiting Amerindian gatherings with an Indian colleague. He provided us with personal interpretations of tribal customs and shared his own historical perspectives. This “tutoring” by him and our encounters with his people proved to be invaluable enrichment opportunities that went beyond what history books could teach. Experiencing in person these tribal celebrations brought

a new appreciation for this often misunderstood and disenfranchised people. We would never say we became one of them—our time with them was too limited—but in many ways we transitioned from being teachers to being learners. This process became possible when I undertook a new ministry role.

I was appointed as the Special Assistant to the President of the Oregon Conference in 1984, with one of my assignments being the Multicultural Director. I knew very little about Native Americans. Nor did I understand the significant diversity that exists among the many tribes that still maintain their identity. I did know we had a number of Indian reservations in Oregon, and I knew from some study of history that the treatment of the Amerindians had similarities to that of the African-American slaves. I did not grasp at the beginning of my work how real and lasting their prejudices are and how history has dwarfed the hopes and aspirations of many. I had much to learn, and not all the lessons that needed to be acquired would be pleasant ones.

Fortunately, the seminary had ingrained into my psyche the principles of an “incarnational ministry” approach in which I would try to identify, as much as possible, with each group for whom I would offer some kind of ministry. I was not always successful, but more often than not my blunders were forgiven in light of the attempts to listen for understanding—an empathic understanding.⁵

Looking back, it was clearly an administrative assignment that would entail aspects of a cross-cultural mission work. I spoke only one language and had never traveled outside of North America. A liability? Perhaps, in some ways. But a recognized ignorance also brings an openness to hearing and a desire to search for understanding before prescribing remedies to meet existing problems. It was a huge learning curve, filled with many chances to be simultaneously exposed to the needs and opportunities of many cultures. At that time there were only three or four ordained Amerindian pastors working for Native Americans in the North American Division. Monumental work had been done by Leroy Moore, who himself was part Native American. Diligent work had been done, but the work was slow. The time had come to implement principles that Elder Moore had advocated, with little support from administrative leaders.

Development of a New Mission Structure

I may have been given the title of Director for Multicultural Ministries, but I benefited from the experience of the president, Dr. Don Jacobsen, and a retired

worker who had served as the president of two different world divisions—Elder Roger Wilcox, under whom Moore initially served. I had also been heavily influenced by the work of a missiologist, Dr. Donald A. McGavran, the founder of the Church Growth Movement, and his colleague, Dr. C. Peter Wagner, a teacher of mine when I attended Fuller Theological Seminary as part of my doctoral program.

The various missiological principles espoused by this experience and teaching made an indelible impression in my thinking. It seemed that our first task in Oregon was to identify the major people groups within the Conference. We had chosen not to call the new structure for mission Multilingual Ministries but rather Multicultural Ministries. It appeared to us that culture rather than language was a better defining term. Culture was more encompassing and provided a different platform for our work. Little did we realize at the outset just how important the concept behind this name would eventually become, as far as strategic planning was concerned.

After performing our demographic analysis of the conference, we decided to focus our thrust on six broad mission groupings: African-American, Asian, Deaf, Hispanic, Native American, and Slavic. The question remained as to how we would approach the unique needs of each group without compromising the cultural identity, the collective corporate unity, or the content of “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 14:6, 7). We were, after all, one organizational body called the Oregon Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

Ultimately we decided to form a task force group for each of the six groups. Each group would be composed of pastors for that particular group and/or knowledgeable and representative church members. As the Multicultural Director I would serve as the chair of each task force with Roger Wilcox as the secretary.

The purpose of each task force was really two-fold. First, we sought to identify the geographical concentrations as well as the unique needs and challenges of each specific group. Second, we sought to discover unreached or unfilled needs that we could meet. There were obviously many needs, physical and financial, that we could not meet, but there were some we could.

We were intentional about identifying with the people we wanted to help. We asked many questions, which resulted in actual tours of demographic centers for each group. We discovered that there was little Adventist literature available, in many cases. We also learned that, in most cases, there were no pertinent evangelistic resources geared for these cultures. Clearly they were disadvantaged, yet growth was expected on the same scale as other groups. Little had we realized what these deficiencies meant for training, nurture, and pastoral formation.

The model was not yet complete. If we simply developed six different task force groups enriched by finances, personnel, and other resources, we could easily become splintered or fragmented and lose the spirit of a unified mission movement within the conference. We needed to be intentional about holding the different groups together and leading them to be supportive of one another's successes. At other times, it meant witnessing their discouragement caused by resistance or other mission hardships. It was then that we saw the need for the Multicultural Commission.

This Commission was composed of representatives of each task force. The conference president served as chair and I, as the chair of each task force, served as the secretary, bringing to the Commission ministry needs and mission opportunities determined by each task force. As the needs and opportunities of each group were presented, it was gratifying to see members from the different task force groups show strong support for the proposed ministries of groups other than their own. A mission spirit, shown by the desire to share resources, prevailed, despite the fact that these resources were limited.

With the conference president as chair, immediate attention was often given to these "minority" needs, which was much appreciated. Priorities were set and new mission frontiers were identified and entered. Cultural differences and even prejudices were realities, but they did not paralyze the efforts to strategize for mission. On occasion prejudices did emerge, but when they did they were dealt with.

In an effort to establish mutual acceptance and transparency among the different task force groups, quarterly multicultural banquets were held.⁶ Each task force group provided food characteristic of its culture. Prejudicial issues were raised and the hurtful consequences shared. Understanding for each other rose, and while prejudice was not erased, it was better understood for what it was. Foundations for acceptance were established but, most importantly, mission prevailed. The following graphic illustrates the structural formation of the Multicultural Commission with its corresponding ministry task force groups. The circle model rather than the typical hierarchical model was used to illustrate communication and relationships for all task force groups (see Figure 1).

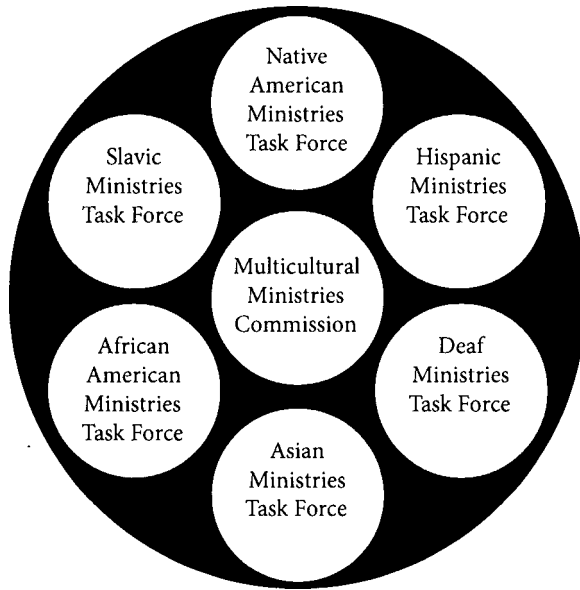


Figure 1. Multicultural Commission

Toward the Development of a Ministry Strategy for Native Americans

After doing a thorough demographic study, the Native American Ministries Task Force recognized the need to identify a spokesperson and leader for the Native Americans. Elder Monte Church, a Mohican, was pastoring an Anglo church when we asked him to join the task force. At that time in the North American Division there were 231 official Native American/Canadian members and only four ordained Native American ministers who were directly serving Native Americans. There had been others who, for various reasons, had left that work and were assimilated into other lines of ministry. Many times Native American church members were “lifted” out of their own culture in order to fit into the more predominant ones, making it difficult to witness to their own people.

As the task force faced the impact of this trend and the desperate need for training more Native American pastors, a bold plan was conceived. Recognizing the dynamics of the “redemption and lift” principle at work, the task force proposed

that a two-year associate degree program in theology be developed. The curriculum would be culturally relevant to the Native American culture. Later on, with additional education, the associate degree could be turned into a four-year baccalaureate degree. We felt that this approach would attract candidates for Native American ministry and provide them with practical tools for ministry to their own people.

Careful consideration was given to the college where this would be based. I flew to Canadian Union College and met with the academic leaders of the school where the reception for the proposed indigenous theological course and curriculum was positive. An associate degree program that could later be linked to a full baccalaureate degree was eventually developed.

The interest among Native Americans was immediate. Next came organizational restructuring. The task force suggested to the North Pacific Union that the North American Division be divided into three regions, with one being the northwest including Alaska and western Canada.⁷ This meant that a unique “boundary” arrangement would need to be accepted by the North Pacific Union and the Canadian Union. The concept was readily agreed upon by the respective administrations. It was a working arrangement that did not necessitate a change in union boundaries.

Once in place, evangelism took on a uniquely Native American approach. It respected and did not criticize or ignore local cultures. While some cultural traditions could not be combined with Christianity, others were—providing many meaningful talking points. Those traditions that could not be integrated because of their incompatibility with the Scripture were not treated in a condescending manner. However, where necessary, a clear break with tradition was made in ways that did not compromise cultural identities. At times making such distinctions was not easy, and lines sometimes became blurred. Every attempt was made to make change by affirming what could be agreed upon, and in those areas where change had to be made it was done by asserting positive values. The development of a video series featuring Monte Church in regional Native American attire helped convey the evangelistic message of the gospel in the context of Native American culture. For the first time, many could hear the gospel in idioms they could understand without the need for interpretation.

The response was positive. Tangible proof of a new day for Native American evangelism could now be seen by the laity. The word and enthusiasm quickly spread. Native Americans, far and wide, saw possibilities where they had not seen them before. Mission talk and action resulted. Twenty-five years later Monte

Church described the feeling of many when he wrote,

I don't think the "heart" of the program's results were fully grasped by the conference administration or the effect it had on those of us who are ethnic outreach workers. It was incredibly thrilling to us because we felt like this was the first time conference administration took to heart the burden for our people like we have.

It made not only me but several of the others feel like you were finally listening. Especially thrilling was that you realized the need for different approaches other than the conventional Anglo way of doing outreach. It made me feel like finally I had been given the longer tether to do things I so longed to do and "knew" would work! It made us feel like finally we were accepted as a "bona fide" part of the conference's over all total program—that we were as important as the rest of the field.

The best thing you guys did was ask "us" how to do outreach without pushing an agenda on us. I believe the Holy Spirit has people in waiting to do effective outreach work beyond our comprehension if they feel they have the permission to do so or given the gift of confidence and liberty to move out and do it. It also taught a simple principle—you can start anything but we all "must" work together to maintain it over time.⁸

Today, 25 years later, Native American membership has grown from 231 to 5,661.⁹ For the past six years there has been an average of 2.9 baptisms per Sabbath. Seven chiefs of major tribes are now Seventh-day Adventists. Forty-seven churches in the United States and Canada have a membership with at least 50 percent who are Native Americans. Currently there are 43 pastors serving Native American churches, many of which are linked with Anglo churches. Tithe is rising slowly. The work hasn't been without its challenges, but giant steps have and are being taken to reach a people that had been hurt by a displacement so many decades ago.

Conclusion

Jesus modeled effective cross-cultural ministry, and He did so without compromising either His mission or the cultural identities of those for whom He ministered. He did not compromise truth but neither did He ignore cultural traditions or settings. He was moved by His love and compassion for the very people He came to save. He understood their culture and He keenly listened to their stories as expressions of spiritual hunger. Such an approach provided the platform for trust and ultimately for truth itself. These spiritual encounters laid the building blocks

for empowering others to share the good news they had experienced. From His example we learn that truth transcends cultural orientations, while methodologies need to be flexible and sensitive to individuals and their worldviews. In the case of the Native North American work, an administrative approach that was informed by indigenous concerns and a willingness to allow these concerns to develop into contextualized evangelistic strategies moved the work for these people into a new era. Success came by asking how the gospel was understood, if at all, and then, how it might be shared. Understanding preceded methodology. It soon became obvious that the very ones who have the keys to the unreached cultures are those who are most closely identified with them—those living within the targeted culture. The process we followed is reflected in figure 2.

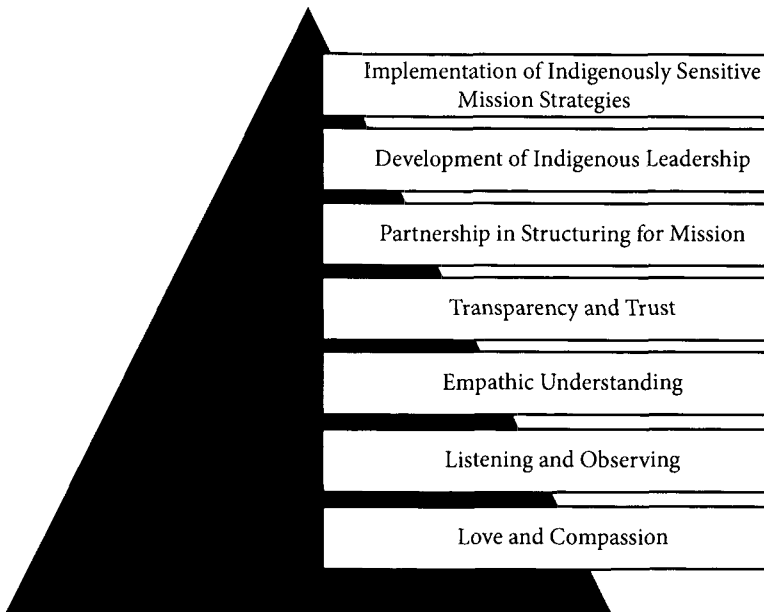


Figure 2. Multicultural Ministry Process

As participants in Christ’s ministry, we must carry with us not only love and compassion but also a keen understanding of those for whom we minister. Cross-cultural missionaries in North America, if they are to be authentic and effective, must listen to the indigenous people as they tell their stories reflecting their interpretations of history, cultural sensitivities, and perspectives regarding the mean-

ing of life and its values. Transparency yields trust, a critical element in building a lasting work for any people. Strategic planning must be informed by the ones most closely associated with the culture; otherwise it will be perceived as a foreign attempt to simply proselytize. Vital to cross-cultural ministry is the development of local leaders, but they must be trained with principles that are relevant to their own cultural group. To ignore the cultural heritage in this training, however, is to lift future leaders out of their own culture and lessen their effectiveness among their own people.

It is true that “the Church has an almost impossible task.” However, a partial answer to such a challenge is the recognition that it is possible to cross cultural boundaries without compromising either cultural identities or the claims of the gospel. It becomes possible because the One who gave the commission is the One who modeled it and who will complete it. As His disciples, we are participants with Him in His mission and seek His wisdom and an understanding of the people who encompass “every nation, tribe, language and people.”

Notes

¹“Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven’” (Matt. 16:17).

²The Gethsemane experience clearly shows Christ’s own need of prayer and His recognition of the disciples’ need as well.

³“Conversion” as used by Cervantes, seems to imply a superficial acceptance of the claims of the gospel, but in this paper conversion refers to a radical reorientation in one’s values and personal orientation.

⁴The 2009 Annual Council of Seventh-day Adventists addressed the issue of contextualizing the Church’s mission in a voted document entitled “Roadmap for Mission.” This statement of mission supports the need of “contextualizing” mission approaches to reach multitudes of different cultures. “Our mission remains unchanged wherever we find ourselves in the world. How we fulfill it—how we go about it—however, takes a variety of forms depending on difference in culture and conditions in society.” The statement makes it clear that biblical truth remains authoritative, recognizing that “the nurture and spiritual growth of new believers must be accomplished on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority” (“Roadmap for Mission,” Annual Council of Seventh-day Adventists, October 9-4, 2009, Silver Spring, Maryland).

⁵This kind of understanding can only come from what Covey calls “empathic listening.” “The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with someone; it’s that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually” (Covey 1989:240).

⁶These were not simple fellowship dinners. Every effort was made by my assistant, Estelle Birch, to demonstrate that ministry being done for these minority groups deserved special attention. These were true banquets, featuring special food from each cultural group. They became a point of bonding among the various cultural groups.

⁷The first regional leader was Elder Monte Church. Eventually a second leader, Robert Burnette, was asked to lead the eastern region. The three of us traveled together as we viewed and strategized the work in the northwest.

⁸Church, Monte. Email to Larry Evans, July 28, 2009. Comments made remind us of the insights shared by Roland Allen: "We have been anxious to do something for them. And we have done much. We have done everything for them. We have taught them, baptized them, shepherded them. We have managed their funds, ordered their services, built their churches, provided their teachers. We have nursed them, fed them, doctored them. We have trained them, and even ordained some of them. We have done everything for them, but very little with them. We have done everything for them except give place to them. We have treated them as 'dear children,' but not as 'brethren'" (Allen 1966:143).

⁹Sixteen percent of this figure, according to Monte Church, represents existing members who identified themselves as Native Americans once a specific ministry for them had been implemented and maintained. The decadal growth rate (DGR) for the 25-year period is 279.2 percent, which according to the scale designed by Fuller Theological Seminary is bordering on "Outstanding."

Chapter 17

* * *

AMERICANS TALK ABOUT GOD, CHURCH, AND PRAYER

Paul Dybdahl

This article begins by reporting on data collected from approximately 400 personal interviews conducted over the past five years in Walla Walla, WA. These doorstep interviews centered around four simple questions which attempted to uncover attitudes and beliefs about *God*, *church*, and *prayer*. After reporting on the data, the article will attempt to interpret the patterns of responses that emerged and suggest how these responses might provide insight for those wishing to reach North Americans with the gospel.

Not long after beginning my job as a senior pastor, I held a series of public meetings at my church. As a part of the advertised program, I promised to provide a “Bible answer” to written questions that had been submitted by the audience. As the supposed expert, I was concerned that the audience would overwhelm me with tricky theological issues that I could not answer. I secretly suspected that my training had not adequately prepared me for the challenge that awaited.

I soon discovered that I was correct—and yet surprised at the same time. I was right in that my theological training indeed had *not* prepared me for the questions I received. The surprise was in the nature of questions I faced. Instead of grilling me on the issues I had studied and written about during my theological education, the

audience asked questions about things such as dinosaurs, demons, and whether or not their pets would be with them in heaven. I realized that I was out of the touch with the issues with which many struggled. I came to them with carefully prepared lectures on prophecy, and they wanted to know about pets. We spoke the same language and lived in the same town, but, in many ways, I was not familiar with the world in which they lived.

David J. Hesselgrave has referred to this lack of understanding between people as the challenge of the “last few feet” of missions. In introducing this challenge, Hesselgrave describes how missionaries often focus on the great distances they must travel in bringing the gospel to others. Once they have arrived in a distant land and even learned the foreign language spoken there, they may be shocked to find that as they stand face to face with the intended recipients of their message, they are unable to communicate effectively across the barrier of the last few feet. According to Hesselgrave, the communicator of the gospel now “must learn, before they can teach. They must listen, before they can speak. They not only need to know the message for the world, but they also need to know the world in which the message must be communicated” (Hesselgrave 2009:426, 427).

As North American Christians attempt to share the gospel in North America, they need not travel great distances with their message and generally will not need to learn a foreign language. The challenge of “the last few feet,” however, remains. Sadly, Christian communicators have not always listened before speaking. As a result, they misjudge their audience and lose their effectiveness.

Overcoming the Challenge of the “Last Few Feet”

At first glance, it appears that overcoming the challenge of the “last few feet” in North America should not be difficult. From the very beginning, the citizens of the United States have been studied by academics who wanted to understand American beliefs and values better. One of the first was J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur (1735-1813), a French immigrant who argued that, despite their regional differences, Americans exhibited a distinctive national identity that was different from their old-world cultures. Crèvecoeur’s work was followed by other notable social commentators such as Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932), and Erich Fromm (1900-1980). These key figures have been joined by a host of others from a variety of disciplines, each offering an interpretation of American character and culture (Wilkinson 1992:2–12).¹

In recent years, this interest in North American culture has waxed rather than waned. Today, an attempt to describe North Americans is challenged not by the dearth of resources but rather by the sheer volume and variety of studies on the subject.

There are, however, a number of problems that surface in many of these attempts to describe the basic mind-set of contemporary Americans. One of the most astonishing weaknesses is highlighted by Rupert Wilkinson, who is himself a noted social commentator. According to Wilkinson, many authors and so-called “experts” on American culture do not pay adequate attention to actual survey data of Americans. Wilkinson writes, “Exaggerations can easily occur in literature that by and large does not rely on survey data, either from interviews or from questionnaires.” He continues, “Taken as a whole, modern writing on American character should be regarded as something between social science and social fiction. It proves nothing conclusively; it illuminates much” (Wilkinson 1992:13, 14).

While I have no dreams of becoming the next Gallup or Barna, Wilkinson’s observation led me to make a decision several years ago. In my efforts to understand Americans better, I decided I would listen to the experts, pay close attention to actual survey data, *and* I would also ask my own questions of the people in my community.

So, in the spring of 2003, I began the process of interviewing residents of Walla Walla, WA, in an attempt to understand their views of God, church, and prayer better. In this paper, I will summarize the data collected from these interviews and then conclude by highlighting those parts of the survey data that may be especially helpful for Christians who want more effectively to bridge the gap of the “last few feet” of witnessing in America.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted with the assistance of students in RELP336 *Church and Personal Ministry*, a class I teach at Walla Walla University (WWU).² This class is specifically designed for theology majors who are preparing for some form of professional ministry. As noted previously, the first interviews were conducted in 2003 and have been conducted at least once³ each year through 2008.

The community under study is Walla Walla, a town in southeast Washington with a population of just over 31,000. Median household income in the city is \$31,855, which means it is just below the average national income. Approximately 80 percent of the residents are White, while 17 percent are Hispanic or Latino (Of-

fice of Financial Management State of Washington 2009).

The interview itself is probably best described as a “doorstep interview” and is actually quite simple to administer. The details are as follows:

Based upon the number of interviewers available, an appropriate, middle income residential neighborhood in Walla Walla is selected as the interview territory. In class, I provide interviewers with basic training for conducting their interviews.

The survey is conducted on a Sunday, beginning at 10:30 a.m. and lasting until 12:30 p.m. This time period was selected in an attempt specifically to hear the opinions of those who do not regularly attend church. Students conduct the interviews in groups of two, while I typically conduct my interviews alone.

Interviewers knock on the door of each home in the selected territory. When someone answers, interviewers identify themselves by first name and clarify their affiliation with WWU. Interviewers explain the purpose of the visit and ask permission to proceed. Approximately 70 percent of those who answer the door agree to respond to the questions, and the interview begins.

The four questions are as follows:

1. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word *church*?
2. What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you hear the word *God*?
3. Research shows that most Americans believe in God but don't attend church. In your opinion, *what is the main reason most Americans do not attend church regularly*?
4. If you could request something from God, knowing God would give it to you, *what would you ask for*?

When the response(s) to each question are written down, the interviewer expresses thanks, and moves on to the next house. An interview may be completed in about a minute, or it may take over an hour.

Since 2003 approximately 400 such interviews have been conducted, with the responses to each question carefully recorded. The total number of responses to each question varies, since some interviewees prefer to answer some but not all of the questions.

There are a number of limitations that are apparent in this study. First, the time during which the survey was conducted excludes most church attenders. Second, the interviews were conducted in English, which leads to a lack of representation primarily from Spanish-speaking residents. Third, there were a wide variety of interviewers, which led to a lack of consistency when recording responses. Fourth, the results of the survey are tabulated and presented in a simple ranking of popularity. There has not been any detailed statistical analysis done on the data. Finally, I will sometimes use the data to describe Americans in general, even though the survey was conducted in a single community in the Pacific Northwest. I do so, recognizing that other regions and communities may not respond in precisely the same way to the interview questions. However, a comparison between the results of this survey and other published research on North Americans shows remarkable agreement (Stark 2008).

Findings

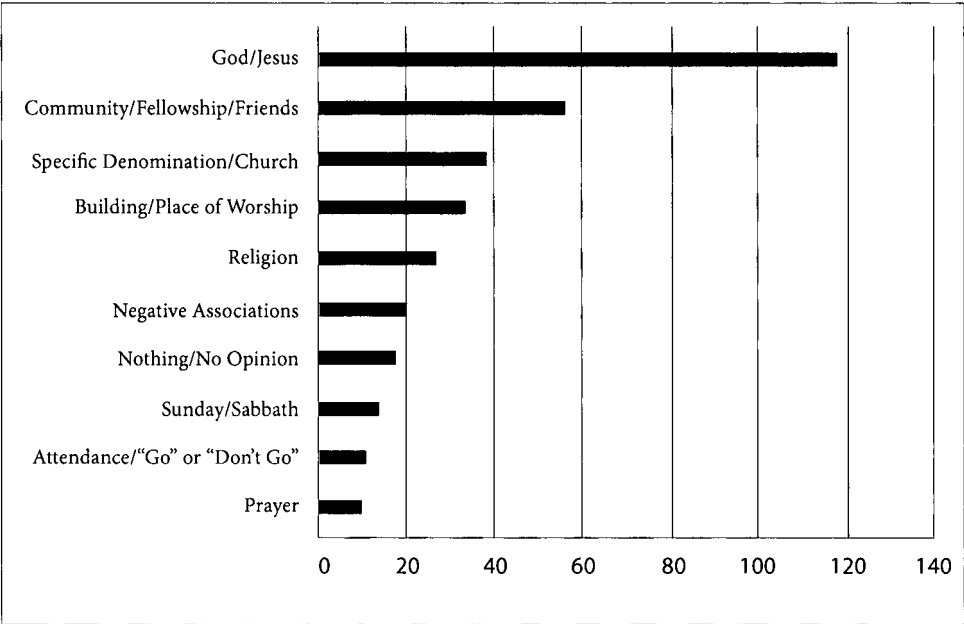


Figure 1. First Thought: "Church"
Total Number of Responses = 395

This first graph (Figure 1) lists the top ten responses to the question, “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *church*?”

Explanations/Observations

1. Responses that did not make the top ten list but that were mentioned more than twice were as follows, in order of their popularity: *worship, pastor/priest, faith, boring, teaching/learning, happy, negative thoughts, and serving*.
2. Of the ten categories of responses in the graph, the “Negative Associations” grouping contains the widest variety of responses. For example, responses such as *fake, prison, shackled minds, evil, politics, bad, cult, and controversy* all were mentioned only once, but each was considered a part of this category. In creating such a large category, I may have unnecessarily emphasized this portion of the data. Overall, one can see that the responses were largely positive—or, at worst, neutral.
3. It was interesting to me to see how few overtly doctrinal terms were associated with *church*. When most people think of *church*, they apparently do not think much about specific beliefs.
4. If one were to provide a single sentence summary of this data, the sentence might be this: When Walla Wallans think of *church*, they think of *God* and of a *place* where they interact with *friends and family*.

The next graph (Figure 2) lists the top ten responses to the question, “What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word *God*?”

Explanations/Observations

1. Responses that did not make the top ten list but that were mentioned more than twice were as follows (in order from most frequently to least frequently mentioned): *faith/belief, friend, good(ness), salvation, peace, prayer, people, and mystery*. The category “Jesus/Lord/Holy Spirit” included other responses such as *trinity*, but the vast majority of responses were *Jesus, Christ, or Jesus Christ*.
2. There were only ten responses that could be seen as negative toward the concept of God. They included: *guilt, not real, death*, and single answers of *opinion, bad, and false*. In a sense, *guilt* may be more about the person’s sense of failure rather than a criticism of the concept of God. If one also

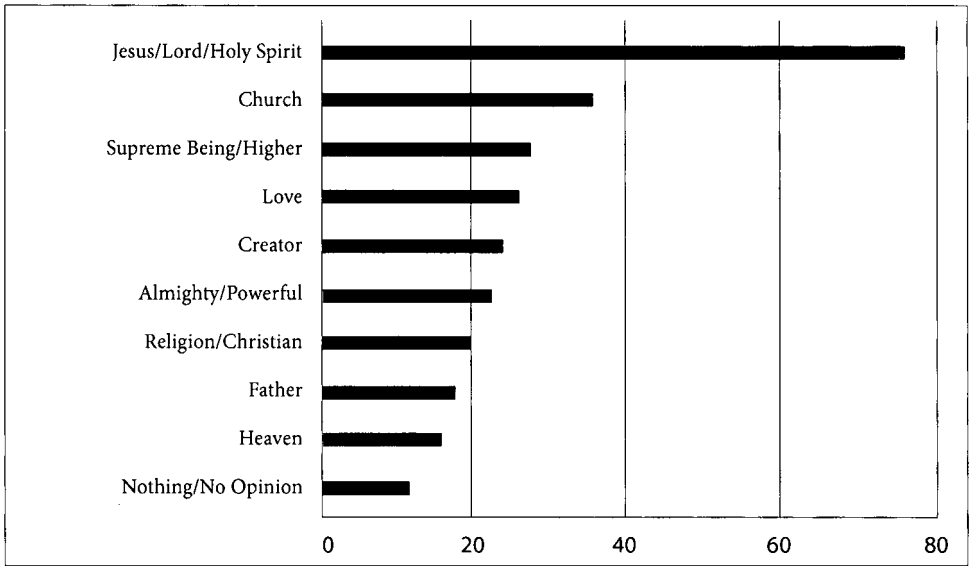


Figure 2. First Thought: “God”

Total Responses = 391

interprets *opinion* as a statement reflecting tolerance rather than disbelief, then, out of nearly 400 responses, only six seem overtly negative.

3. God is generally thought of in positive terms, the most common being rather traditional associations such as *love*, *creator*, and *powerful*.
4. A single sentence summary of this data might be: When Walla Wallans think of *God*, they tend to think of *Jesus* and *church*.

The following graph (Figure 3) lists the top ten responses to the question, “Research shows that most Americans believe in God but do not attend church on a regular basis. In your opinion, *what is the main reason most Americans do not attend church regularly?*”

Explanations/Observations

1. Responses that did not make the top ten list but that were mentioned more than twice were as follows (in order from most frequently to least frequently mentioned): *church lacks relevance*, *can't find the right one*, *can connect with God without church*, *church is too structured*, *fear of commitment*, *health problems*, *personal choice*, *people are too self-sufficient*, and *the church wants money*.

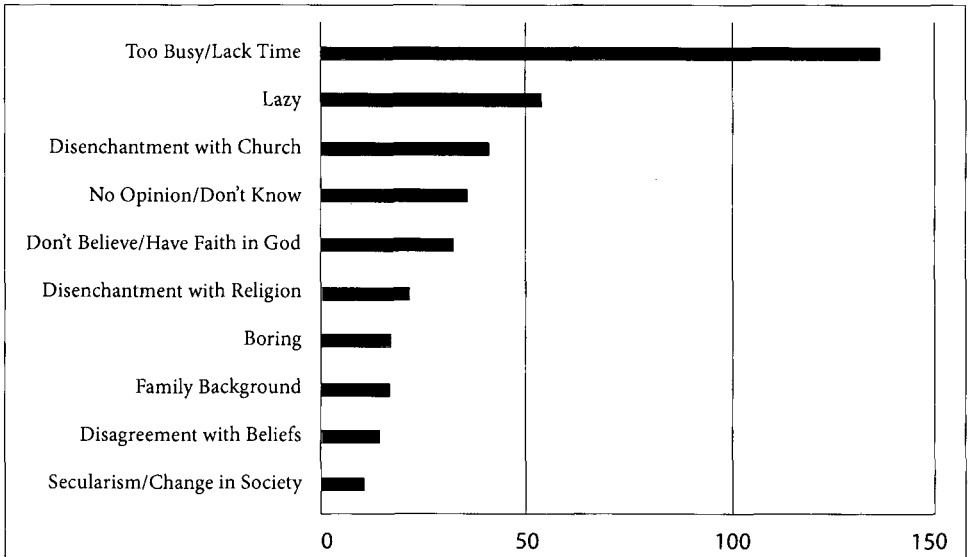


Figure 3. Why Americans Don't Attend Church
 Total Responses = 43

2. The “Disenchantment with Church People” grouping was dominated by statements describing church goers as *judgmental* and *hypocritical*.
3. There seemed to be relatively few respondents who mentioned specific doctrinal disagreement as a reason why Americans stayed away from church. Among those who did, some felt the church was too conservative, others that it was too liberal.
4. Who do Walla Wallans see as responsible for lack of church attendance in America? Do they blame the church/religion/the people in the church? Or do they place greater blame on non-attenders? Based on my interpretation of the data, it is an almost even split.
5. A single sentence summary of this data might be: Walla Wallans think Americans do *not go to church* because they are either *too busy* or *too lazy*.

The following graph (Figure 4) lists the top ten responses to the question, “If you could request something from God, knowing God would give it to you, *what would you ask for?*”

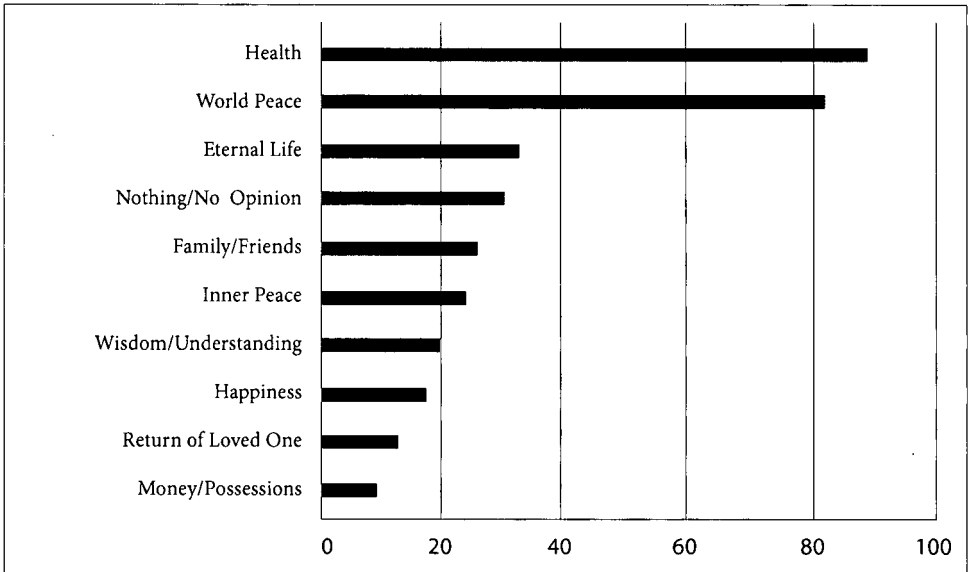


Figure 4. One Request of God
 Total Responses = 423

Explanations/Observations

1. Responses that did not make the top ten list but that were mentioned more than twice were as follows, in order of their popularity: *safety/protection, love, better life, the marriage relationship, end of pain/death, to be a better person, stronger faith, and relaxation.*
2. I would only classify three requests as punitive or mean-spirited: *to get rid of Muslims, to wipe organized religion off the face of the earth, and to keep solicitors away.*
3. The vast majority of requests (267) were for the benefit of the respondent. Less than half of that number (102) were for more abstract, global realities such as *world peace or no pollution.* Finally, only 30 requests were directly for other people.
4. Of the personal petitions that were not a part of the top ten list, about half were requests for God to provide some needed personal quality such as *patience, purity, or kindness.* The other half were for help with achieving some personal need such as *to get good grades, to stop smoking, or for sobriety.*

5. Many of answers given to this question were extremely personal. For example, there were requests *to be a better parent*, specific requests for a *spouse*, or *for healing*. One person wanted God to *send me neither to heaven or hell—just let me sleep forever*.
6. A single sentence summary of this data might be: Walla Wallans want God to give them *good health* and a *peaceful world*.

Observations and Applications

There are a number of conclusions one might draw from the data that has already been presented. Several, I believe, warrant special attention.

American Religiosity

One of the key discoveries arising from this survey is that Christian communicators should not underestimate American religiosity. While there has been a great deal of talk about the two threats of postmodernism and secularism, actual conversation with Americans seems to suggest a different reality. While it is clear that Americans may be less tied to a specific denomination (or even a specific religion) than in the past, they remain surprisingly religious.⁴

Even though the majority of the interviews involved those who were not attending church on a Sunday morning, the interview questions assumed this high degree of religiosity from Walla Wallans. Respondents did nothing to challenge or change that assumption. In fact, this was a source of some discouragement to the students who conducted the interviews. Many of them expected (and some even hoped) to face exciting debates as they interacted with hostile, unchurched people. Instead, they met people who, for the most part, were clearly religious—and therefore somewhat less exciting. I remember one student's bitter remark that he had not met a single atheist the entire day.

This belief that Americans are generally hostile to religion often makes Christians hesitant even to try to bridge the "last few feet." Those who are brave enough to attempt this sort of witness may prepare for confrontation, debate, and struggle. This misconception colors much of Christian witness in America today. If we believe we are coming to a fight, we prepare differently than if we realize we are going to be involved in friendly, respectful conversation. After many hours of door-to-door work, I am convinced that most Americans would respond more positively to a conversation about religion rather than an argument over religion. After all, religion is something in which they are interested.

Association of Church with Fellowship

This survey is also helpful in clarifying what Americans think about church. There may be a tendency for some churchgoers to see excellent doctrinal teaching as the key element of their church. Is it true, however, that correct doctrine is what people expect or desire in a given church? This survey suggests that those who are not regular church attenders do not focus so much on church as a place of religious teaching. Instead, church is viewed as a place of social fellowship. It is less of a school and more of a community. It is more about people than it is about specific doctrines. For a church to advertise itself based on its teachings, may not be the best way to proceed in North America.

Traditional Notions of God

Walla Wallans feel less positive about church than they do about God. Previous research from Barna reveals this same fact (Barna 2008). Even though God and church are closely connected in many minds, God clearly has the better reputation. Of the nearly 400 responses recorded in this survey, less than 2 percent had overtly negative associations with the word God.

As the graph illustrated, the top ten word associations with God were not only largely positive but they were also quite traditional. Overwhelmingly, people thought of Jesus when they heard the word God. Other dominant descriptors (all part of the top eight responses) were Supreme Being, Love, Creator, Almighty/Powerful, and Father.

In spite of this, some Christians in America assume that those around them are in fact predominantly secular, uninterested, and even antagonistic toward the idea of God. Many churchgoers, for example, would probably be surprised that the average American ranks “having a close relationship with God” as more desirable for their future than “having a comfortable lifestyle,” “having a college degree,” “earning a high salary,” or “gaining fame and recognition” (Barna 2008). In short, most Americans think highly of God—and desire a closer relationship with Him in the future. Christian witnesses should be mindful of this fact as they attempt to bridge the last few feet.

Americans and Busy-ness

Interviewees think that the main reason Americans do not attend church is because they are too busy. Many of those who provided this explanation did so with

a straight face—and with “morning hair”—while still in their pajamas at around noon on a Sunday. Almost without exception, the sound of a television could be heard in the background. In other words, respondents suggested that being too busy is what kept Americans from church, yet those who provided this response did not appear to be too busy.

Instead of arguing over the accuracy of the response, however, it seems that the issue of poor church attendance is not generally perceived to be a problem with the church. It is not primarily seen as resulting from disagreement over beliefs or even negative views of the people in the church. Instead, it seems to be that people feel they are too busy (or they are too lazy) to attend.

Those interested in “reaching” Americans should listen. Inviting seekers to become a part of a local church should involve addressing the issue of time. I am not suggesting a “drive through” church service or “fast food” religion. However, churches must be mindful of the sense of busy-ness that many Americans live with. Instead scolding people for not coming to church or making them feel guilty for lack of attendance at prayer meeting, churches should deal with the issue in a more positive way. It may be wise, for example, for churches to offer services at a variety of times—and perhaps even for different durations—throughout the week. The beginning and ending times of church activities should be clearly communicated and then respected. Also, simply acknowledging the challenge of managing time would resonate positively with many. It should go without saying that when people are present for church services or other related activities, the time should be used wisely.

Americans and Loneliness

Many scholars have noted the sense of isolation and loneliness experienced by many Americans. This survey provided anecdotal evidence that this is indeed the case. While the interview was intended to be brief, there were many occasions when the conversation continued for over 20 minutes. On several occasions, it continued for more than an hour. Many seemed starved for attention and desperate for someone who would listen to them.

Once again, the wise missionary will take note. Before approaching people with the answers, it is crucial to listen. Crossing the last few feet may depend more on our willingness to listen than the excellence of our words. It may well be that we can influence people more with our ears than with our mouths.

Americans and Openness and Trust

Walla Wallans are perhaps too trusting. Interviewers identified themselves as students at WWU and carried paperwork which demonstrated their affiliation with the school. In all the years of conducting interviews, no one ever asked to see proof that the student really was a WWU student. Time after time, interviewers were invited into homes. On one occasion, a woman shouted to the interviewers from her position in the bathroom. From that location, she agreed to answer the survey questions. She also asked the two interviewers to return later when she was dressed so that they could pray for her sick mother who was in a back bedroom. On numerous occasions, male students, working in groups of two, would be invited into the home of a single female or senior citizen. Over and over again, I was shocked at the degree of unearned trust that was given to interviewers.

This openness and trust was also demonstrated in the willingness to share the details of their personal lives. The last interview question in particular led to some very frank confessions. People talked candidly about such things as the need for forgiveness, hopes for reconciliation with estranged spouses and with God, and the need for freedom from addictions. If it seemed appropriate, interviewers would offer to pray about those issues with the one who had shared the need. As they listened and as they prayed, it was not uncommon for people to weep. For me, this openness and willingness to share emotional and spiritual intimacy with strangers at the front door is perhaps the most valuable discovery of the research. It leads me to suspect that a very inexpensive, simple ministry of door-to-door visiting, listening, and prayer would be an effective evangelistic outreach in many American communities.

Conclusion

While the challenge of the “last few feet” in North American remains, the fact that the audience thinks highly of God and is open to conversation suggests that these few feet can be bridged. Instead of trying to close the gap with a barrage of words, I hope that Christians will approach others with humility and a listening ear. As we do so, we will discover that God has already been at work all around us. We are not surrounded by enemies, but by those who, in their own way, are already reaching out to God. Let us rejoice in that truth and then encourage one another as we travel “the Way” (Acts 24:14) together.

Notes

¹Wilkinson's book provides a helpful survey of some of the main works in this area.

²Walla Walla University is affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church and is located in College Place, WA. It was founded in 1892 and has a current enrollment of approximately 1,800 students. WWU maintains satellite campuses in Anacortes, WA, Portland, OR, and Billings and Missoula, MT and offers six bachelor's degrees in 36 areas of study, seven master's degrees, and an associate of science degree. For more information, see <http://www.wallawalla.edu>

³In 2007 the class was taught twice, so the data from that year comes from two separate days of interviews, once in the fall and once in the spring.

⁴A review of Stark's *What Americans Really Believe* demonstrates this fact.

Chapter 18

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THE URBAN CHURCH IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

Kleber De Oliveira Gonçalves

As the world is moved by waves of urbanization, globalization, and postmodernism, it becomes imperative to discern the reality of contemporary urban life in discussing the implications of these forces for the advance of the church's mission in the urban centers of the world. In this context, the church must understand its role and responsibility in facing the challenges posed by an increasingly urbanized and postmodernizing world.

Introduction

While the contemporary Western world faces one of the greatest paradigm shifts in its history—the cultural shift from the modern worldview to a postmodern condition—it continues its move towards the city. According to the most recent data from the United Nations World Urbanization Prospects, at the end of 2008, for the first time in history, the proportion of the population living in urban areas reached 50 percent (United Nations 2008).

This inevitable trend calls for a radical re-evaluation of the task of the Christian church, particularly associated with the issues involved in urban mission. In this new reality, the church in the West must recognize its role and responsibility in facing the threats and opportunities presented by the emergence of a postmodernizing urban society.

This essay is divided into two parts: in the first, I situate the postmodern condition within the context of urbanization and examine the relationship between these two developing movements. In the second, I explore selected issues in the relationship between the Christian church, urban mission, and the postmodern outlook.

Urbanization and the Postmodern Condition

In the twentieth century, the phenomenon of urbanization became truly global in scope and significance. While there was tremendous urban growth in Europe and North America in the first half of the twentieth century, after 1950 these areas began to slow their growth rate. The urban explosion shifted to the Third World, where the most dramatic urban growth has taken place over the last few decades. Urban historian Samuel Hays puts it this way: "By the late twentieth century, it has become obvious that we live in an urbanized society, not just in individual cities; in our society, almost every feature of modern life flows from the way in which an agglomeration of cities, coming together from earlier more separate origins, constitutes a new comprehensive social order" (Hays 1993:22).

Megacities such as Tokyo, São Paulo, Mexico City, Shanghai, Bombay, and Buenos Aires are rapidly becoming the world's largest cities, and the centers of new networks of global economic and technological significance.¹ Their massive numerical size, while remarkable, does not represent their true importance. Rather, urban sociologist Castells observes that "their power lies in the fact that they signify the nodes of the global economy, concentrating the directional, productive, and managerial functions all over the planet; the control of the media, the real politics of power, and the symbolic capacity to create and diffuse meanings. . . . Megacities cannot only be seen in terms of their size, but as a function of their gravitational power towards major regions of the world" (Castells 1996:403, 404).

Several factors are responsible for the rapid urban explosion and the emergence of the post-industrial urban period. These include the unmatched population growth rate of the period (Palen 2002:285, 286); the rural-urban migratory patterns around the globe (Kane & Peterson 1995); the phenomenon of globalization, particularly in the less developed countries (Sassen 1999); and the leading edge of the information revolution (Drucker 1999).

From this new reality, especially in the Western context, come two questions: How and where does the postmodern condition fit into this picture? Because of its intrinsic association with the modern era, which in turn is fundamentally connected with the process of urbanization, it becomes appropriate to locate the emergence

of the postmodern condition within the urban context initially having the modern period as the frame of reference.

Modernity and Urbanization

The modern period, and consequently the modern worldview, had its foundations in the Enlightenment assumption that the structures of the natural and social worlds could be discovered and controlled by reason and science. Through the discovery and development of technologically useful knowledge, it was thought that nature could finally be dominated, leading to social improvements and inevitable progress. New applications of science-based technologies paved the way for the Industrial Revolution and the introduction of processes of mass production and consumption, which led to an unprecedented urban growth.² Consequently, along with these scientific and technological developments, Featherstone points out that “the expansion of industrial capitalism, state administration, and the development of citizenship rights were seen as convincing evidence of the fundamental superiority and universal applicability of the project of modernity” (Featherstone 1995:72).

The logic of the modern era was undoubtedly complex and diverse; nevertheless, in the nineteenth century the world experienced profound changes that had begun approximately three hundred years earlier (Taylor 1996:260-263). The immense and varied changes brought about by modernity seemed to focus inevitably on the city, resulting in a parallel expansion of massive urban agglomerations and the complex forms of modern urban life associated with them (Engels 1968). “Modern city life,” asserts sociologist David Clarke, “must have seemed nothing less than a fundamental and unnatural mutation of the human species” (Clarke 1997:222).

In accordance with the modern worldview, however, early modern urban planners held utopian attitudes and a belief in a future in which social problems could be controlled and humanity liberated from the constraints of scarcity and greed (Beauregard 1989). Modern architects, for their part, sought to design urban centers that would promote industrial efficiency as well as standardized housing capable of being mass produced (Goodchild 1990). Modern urban planning and development focused, therefore, on the functionally efficient architectonic “international style.”³

Regarding the complex and restless association of modernity with the experience of unparalleled urban growth and its implications, Harvey points out that “the pressing need to confront the psychological, sociological, technical, organizational, and political problems of massive urbanization was one of the seed-beds in which

modernist movements flourished” (Harvey 1989:25). Undeniably, modernism was very much an urban phenomenon and vice versa.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the growth of urbanization and the solidification of the modern worldview developed as parallel movements. At the same time, however, the incipient forms of the postmodern outlook had already flourished among intellectuals who began to challenge the faith in optimism, progress, and the pursuit of objective knowledge and science, characteristic of the modern worldview.⁴

It seems that the modern paradigm, under which cities developed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has gone as far as it could go. Modernity is, under current conditions, unable to deal effectively with urban growth and its demands⁵ as the level of city systems has increased and become interconnected into worldwide systems (Robins 1993). It is this seemingly “dark” side of modernity to which postmodernism reacts. In this context, the urbanization of the Western world maintained its strength throughout the last five decades, with two added crucial characteristics: (1) the global integration of urban centers of the post-industrial period, and (2) the rise of postmodernism.

Urbanization, Globalization, and Postmodernism

In the pursuit to attract international capital in order to compete with other urban centers, the processes of urbanization and globalization have become evident facts of contemporary life.⁶ Although scholars still seek a clearer understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of the process of making a city truly “global” (Sassen 2000b), it is impossible to conceive of globalization without urbanization. Furthermore, parallel with (and to a large extent interacting with) these developments is the rise and establishment of the postmodern condition and its intrinsic association with the Western urban socio-cultural context. Iain Chambers notes that “postmodernism, whatever form its intellectualizing might take, has been fundamentally anticipated in the [Western] metropolitan cultures of the last twenty years: among the electronic signifiers of cinema, television and video, in recording studios and record players, in fashion and youth styles, in all those sounds, images and diverse histories that are daily mixed, recycled and ‘scratched’ together on that giant screen which is the contemporary city” (Chambers 1987:5).

Nonetheless, most scholars who address the issues of urbanization, particularly globalization, agree that even though the postmodern paradigm had its origin as an essentially Western phenomenon, postmodernity is actually becoming a glob-

al trend. This has occurred especially because of the strong support postmodern thought receives from academic circles, and the long history of Western educational and structural systems being rapidly assimilated throughout the world. It is likely that the cultural turmoil taking place in the West will echo around the globe within two or three decades (Featherstone 1995). Consequently, the forces of urbanization, globalization, and postmodernization complement each other in their conceptual aspects in what has been labeled the postmodern city (Boyer 1998).

Rather than regarding urbanization as a mere outcome of modernity, it may be equally reasonable to see postmodernity as an outcome of urbanization, and globalization as one of the channels through which postmodern elements are conveyed around the world. The centralizing power of urbanization makes the urban context the locus of the postmodern condition.⁷ As Erwin McManus insightfully points out, “if postmodernism were an artist, her canvas would be the city” (McManus 1999).

Thus, the connection between the establishment of the contemporary postmodern condition and urban development becomes noticeable. From the urban mission perspective, however, these new realities bring immense challenges to the gospel proclamation in an emergent postmodern condition, which the church cannot simply ignore.

Urban Mission and the Postmodern Condition

Before the issues and missiological implications associated with urban mission and postmodernism are discussed, it becomes essential to reflect on the role of the church in the urban context. It is beyond the scope of this essay to develop the biblical concept of the church and/or to engage in a contemporary ecclesiological analysis. Here, therefore, I address the place and role of the church in urban mission.

Church and Mission

The relationship between church and mission has, for a long time, been one of the most critical missiological issues (Bosch 1991:368). Several significant shifts in missionary thinking have impacted the way the church engages and perceives its mission. During the twentieth century, the world missionary conferences were fundamental to ecclesiological reflections on mission. At the 1910 Edinburgh conference, the main focus was the lack of missionary engagement by the West, while

the relationship between church and mission was hardly addressed. Eighteen years later, at the Jerusalem meeting of the IMC (1928), for the first time, the relationship between church and mission was recognized as intrinsically present and in need of further analysis. Nevertheless, only at the Willingen conference of 1952 was there a perceptible but subtle move from a church-centered mission to a mission-centered church, with God's initiative as the foundation of mission (Goodall 1953:188-191). Bosch points out that "Willingen began to flesh out a new model. It recognized that the church could be neither the starting point nor the goal of mission; . . . both [mission and church] should, rather, be taken up into the *missio Dei*, which now became the overarching concept. The *missio Dei* institutes the *missiones ecclesiae*. The church changes from being the sender to being the one sent" (Bosch 1991:370).

As a direct result of this missiological shift, mission is now seen as belonging to the Triune God (Kenneson 2002:76; Van Gelder 2000:30); and the church—the apostolic community—is understood to be not the *goal* of mission, but the primary *instrument* in the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 (Mackay 1953). Bosch, in turn, affirms that "mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *mission Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another 'movement:' Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world" (Bosch 1991:390). Therefore, "mission is not merely an activity of the church. Rather, mission is the result of God's initiative, rooted in God's purpose to restore and heal creation" (Guder 1998:4); where the church's call and legacy "is that it is a divinely called and sent community" (Hunsberger 2002:98).

In this emerging ecclesiology, the nature and vocation of the church are seen as essentially missional (cf. Blauw 1962). In other words, the church was called into existence for mission, in which the church is the means, not the end, of God's purpose. Therefore, because the church and mission are intrinsically related, a church without mission is as contradictory as a mission without the church (Braaten 1977). Emil Brunner concurs: "The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning. Where there is no mission, there is no Church; and where there is neither Church nor mission, there is no faith" (Brunner 1965:108). Consequently, the missiological understanding of the church—together with the ecclesiastical understanding of mission—carries profound consequences for the urban mission of the church.

The Urban Church as Urban Mission

Urbanization is the new way of life and the new frontier for missions. The process of urbanization has increasingly disturbed the church, which in many ways has been slow in reacting to its challenges. Harvie Conn asks: “How can we recruit personnel for reaching our urban generations when the rural and suburban areas have nurtured their visions of the church?” (Conn 1987:17). Nevertheless, on the shoulders of the urban church is the responsibility to carry God’s salvific mission to the cities of the world.

Contextual Urban Mission

The local church is sent within the context of a culture and should always be contextual. As the body of Christ, the church is called to engage in discipling the nations, which requires an understandable communication of the gospel in every context (1 Cor. 12:12-27, Matt. 24:14; 28:19). Jim Kitchens notes that, “it has been always the task of the church to translate the gospel into thought forms and patterns of speech that can be understood by ordinary people and that will draw them to God. . . . not only preserving the core of the good news but also presenting that good news in . . . intelligible [ways]” (Kitchens 2003:30). Hiebert and Tiénoú affirm that missiologists “assume that all people live in different historical and sociocultural settings, and that the gospel must be known to them in the particularity of these contexts. The task of the mission theologian is to translate and communicate the gospel in the language and culture of real people in the particularity of their lives, so that it may transform them and their cultures into what God intends for them to be” (Hiebert & Tiénoú 2002:93).

For instance, the early church followed this calling to engage people where they were. Intentional or not, the early church was contextual. Snyder asserts, “When we look at the earliest Christian communities, we do not see a group of people alienated from their cultural context, but rather a group rooted in a specific culture” (Snyder 1983:117). According to this model, the church ought to develop a contextual identification with the culture it is sent to serve. And in the context of urban mission, “urban churches are a significant part of the body of Christ” (Harper 1999:1), as they must learn to be incarnationally present.

Incarnational Urban Mission

The church engaged in mission is also an incarnational church. Following the example of Christ who was sent, and in obedience came into the world as the one who “became flesh and dwelt among us”⁸ (John 1:14), the church must accept the call to fulfill its particular mission in all cultural circumstances. Van Gelder points out that “just as the Word became flesh, so also the church is enfleshed in human cultures as the body of Christ” (2000:119). Describing the incarnational experience of Christ, Perkins asserts that “Jesus is our model. . . . He didn’t commute to earth one day a week and shoot back up to heaven. He left His throne and became one of us so that we might see the life of God revealed in Him” (Perkins 1982:88).

In a fellowship of believers, “where two or three come together” in Christ’s name (Matt. 18:20), the incarnational characteristic of the church takes form in the unity with the person and purposes of Jesus Christ for His church. A key element of incarnational mission, therefore, is “this identification, of being present with people” (Tiersma 1994:9), as Christ exemplified in His relationship with human beings.

What kind of church should a church in the city be? Robert Linthicum addresses this question suggesting three possibilities for the urban church: the church in, to, or with the city. In the first, the church perceives itself in the city, but does not particularly identify with its community. In the second, the church sees itself as a church to the city, but in this case the church decides what is best for its community. The third approach is the church with the city, meaning a church that incarnates itself in that particular community (Linthicum 1991b:8, 9). Within this perspective, the church represents the physical presence of Christ and, being enfleshed within a cultural condition, is incarnational in every particular setting to witness and make disciples for God’s kingdom. Therefore, urban churches have the prime responsibility of presenting the practical aspects of the incarnational example of Christ, rooted in His unconditional love for city dwellers.

Primary Agent of Urban Mission

Because the church is contextual and incarnational, it has the clear responsibility to engage in every contextual and cultural circumstance, which intrinsically includes the urban centers of the world. Furthermore, “Scripture stresses that the city is central to God’s plan of transformation and redemption of humanity and is therefore the locus of God’s salvation of humanity” (Linthicum 1991a:80).

Undoubtedly, God is interested in the cities of the world, as was distinctly dis-

played in Paul's theology and strategy, which was developed in the context of urban mission to some of the greatest cities of the Greco-Roman world (Ortiz 2002). Greenway and Monsma affirm that "from the hour of his conversion . . . until the last we hear about Paul . . . , a consistent picture is given of a missionary focusing his main efforts on cities" (Greenway & Monsma 2000:38). Following Paul's example, the book of Acts records that the Pauline missionaries would go first to the urban Jewish synagogues and then, if necessary, would expand their efforts to the homes of individuals such as Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:12-14), Jason in Thessalonica (17:1-5), and Priscilla and Aquilla in Corinth (18:1-4).⁹

No other mission agent is more apt to take up the challenge of the urban context than the urban church (Gordon 1999). The urban church is called—contextually and incarnationally—to evangelize and to be a witness to all city dwellers. The primary agency of urban mission, therefore, is the local urban church.¹⁰ Within this missiological perspective, the urban church has the responsibility to make disciples in the different urban socio-cultural contexts, which certainly include those nurtured by the postmodern condition.

In his first letter to the church of Corinth, Paul wrote: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you" (1 Cor. 9:22, 23). In following Paul's example for reaching the unreached, how can the urban church be relevant to the postmodern mind and at the same time maintain its biblical faithfulness in the middle of the contemporary modern-postmodern paradigm shift?

Urban Mission in the Midst of a Paradigm Shift

Communicating the unchanging gospel to a rapidly changing world has always been a difficult task for the church. This difficulty is even more prominent in an urbanized, postmodernizing Western world where the church has lost its long-enjoyed social position of authority and power. Leonard Sweet points out that "Western Christianity went to sleep in a modern world governed by the gods of reason and observation," but in the past few decades, he adds, it has increasingly been awakened by "a postmodern world open to revelation and hungry for experience" (Sweet 2000:29).

It is valid to emphasize, however, that the emergence of the postmodern condition does not mean the annihilation of the modern worldview. Ruth Tucker asserts that "modernity is not dead and postmodernism has not taken its place" (Tucker 2002:16). Bosch, in turn, wisely puts forward: "For the most part we are, at the mo-

ment, thinking and working in terms of two paradigms” (Bosch 1991:349). Nevertheless, in most cases, urban churches still think of mission in a way still largely rooted in the modern paradigm and have been unable to effectively relate with the postmodern condition. As a result, ineffectiveness will most certainly characterize urban mission if the church fails to understand, in the existence of these overlapping paradigms, how modernity has shaped and postmodernity defied the mission of the urban church.

Urban Mission: Shaped by the Modern Era

Since most Christian denominations developed within Enlightenment assumptions and those that existed before the Enlightenment have also been deeply affected by these assumptions (McGrath 2001), many urban churches are now struggling to survive in the face of the postmodern challenges. The status of urban mission is now confronted by an emerging culture that identifies the Christian church as a worthless institution, a profit-making business, or a group of extremists who do not accept differences and are utterly intolerant of any thought that does not follow the church’s own traditions.

The impact of modernity on the church, thus, has had inevitable consequences. The church in many ways has simply followed the course and pace of the modern era. As the world became modern, so did the church. Peter Berger says that “the Christian church contributed to the rise of the modern world; the modern world, in turn, has undermined the Christian church” (Berger 1973:132). Enlightenment values, such as individualism, dualism, and scientific empiricism, have for some time been clearly identified in the church (Kimball 2003). Nineteenth-century optimism and belief in progress have further stimulated the growth of these modern values in the Western church.¹¹

As a result, the church increasingly lost its uniqueness as a sent missionary community. In modern times, mission became only one of the many facets of the church, not the reason for its existence. Guder notes that “neither the structures nor the theology of our established Western traditional churches is missional” (1998:5). They have been largely shaped by the legacy of modernity. Thus, modernity paved the way for the individualization of the church and its mission. Ortiz, in turn, adds: “In the nineteenth century, mission was understood primarily as the calling of individuals who were motivated by God to participate in ‘foreign’ missions. Individuals, rather than the church as a whole, awakened to the call of the mission frontier. The individual was called and sent, and that led to a mission focus on saving individual souls” (Ortiz 2002:47).

As a direct result of this approach, “the individualism of modernity has led to a view of evangelism that focuses almost exclusively on the individual and a view of Christian morality that concentrates on ‘personal’ sins rather than structural evil” (Murphy 1999:101). The impact of modernity upon urban mission was further felt in the growing Christian dualism that would look for individual conversions in the city, but completely turn its back on urban agglomerations. Thus, questions of social structures were reduced to individualistic dimensions, and the church found itself more comfortable with welfare rather than social justice. As a direct result of this position, the anti-urban attitude would eventually isolate evangelism from social transformation (Claerbaut 1983). Furthermore, this anti-urbanism led to a revival of the back-to-nature movement, in which “virtue was to be sought in the wilderness, nature unsullied by urban traces” (Conn & Ortiz 2001:58).

Urban Mission: Defied by the Postmodern Condition

Shaped by the modern worldview, therefore, the church has now been further ostracized by the postmodern condition. One of the central reasons postmodernism has defied the mission of the urban church is that the postmodern ethos exposes and repudiates the modern values that have shaped the church.¹²

On the other hand, the urban church needs the necessary awareness and sensitivity neither to buy uncritically into the postmodern ethos nor continue to be captured in the modern trap. To accept uncritically postmodern concepts is to open the door to syncretism. To disregard the postmodern condition as a real socio-cultural trend is to close the door to emerging postmodern generations. Robert Warren suggests that the church needs to be “bi-lingual, able to relate to those who belong to the [modern worldview], as well as to those who live in the new [postmodern condition]” (Warren 1995:7). To ignore cultural changes that involve lucid and decisive thinking about its methods and role in an increasingly urban society is too risky for the church. “Christians must,” therefore, “engage contemporary culture if they wish to know how to make the good news of Jesus relevant to people in that culture. By engaging critically, Christians will also identify those elements in postmodern culture that run counter to the claims of Christ” (Tomlinson 2003:19). Pointing out the challenges the church faces, Walbert Bühlmann writes that “each culture is challenged and stimulated by facing new situations and is kept alive by this continual process. Harsh climate, overpopulation, class struggle and religious divisions demand a response. But each challenge presents us with the Sphinx’s demand: ‘Answer or be devoured.’ *Those who neither answer nor react appropriately*

will perish. Thus there are cultures which disappear and others which survive, stagnant churches and self-renewing churches. *The Church is not exempt from this historical law* [italics supplied]" (Bühlmann 1978:96).

It is not an easy task for urban ministries to identify and react effectively to postmodernism. The postmodern condition forces the urban church to re-examine its priorities and mission. The postmodern outlook "strikes to the very core of our being and requires that, once again, we open ourselves to God's transformation. If we are not willing to do so, we risk becoming isolated from the culture in which we live, inviting stagnation and further decline" (Hudson 2004:16, 17).

How will the urban church react in face of the postmodern condition? Will it be stagnant or vibrant? Will it be intentionally contextual and incarnational, or will it only minister from the outside? Will it become, like the apostolic church, a sent community, or will it remain inwardly focused? How can the church be contextual to the postmodern condition without being contaminated by it?

Postmodern Urban Mission Contextualization

One of the most critical issues in urban mission to a relativistic, postmodernizing society is contextualization. Kraft describes the essence of contextualization as "the implementation of biblical Christianity in culturally appropriate ways" (Kraft 2002:134). But in a cultural condition that refuses any objective, all-encompassing truth, some questions arise. First, how does one maintain cultural relevance and at the same time biblical faithfulness in contextualizing the gospel to the postmodern mind?

Genuine contextualization is only feasible if the foundations of its relevance are established upon an unchanging and everlasting truth. But perceptions of relevance greatly differ from one generation to another. What might have been considered very relevant to the modern worldview can be looked at in quite a different way by the postmodern mind. In an attempt to offer a solution to mission contextualization for different generations in the same cultural circumstance, Kraft advocates what he calls "continuous contextualization" as a practical way to deal with the issue. His approach seems to be particularly significant for postmodern urban mission contextualization. Kraft notes that continuous contextualization "would involve continuous, generation-by-generation reevaluation of church customs and experimenting in one generation with approaches that might well be abandoned in another. This is necessary because the issues are different for each generation, especially in view of the rapid pace of culture change" (Kraft 2002:135).

A second question is: By what standards should urban mission to a postmodern condition be contextualized? Contextualization without a firm foundation and accountability to objective truth will eventually lead to relativism and syncretism. Here the process of postmodern urban mission contextualization must be established upon “God’s Word and be guided by the call of Christ to evangelize and build believers into strong communities of faith” (Gilliland 1993:15). However, it is the responsibility of the urban church to “translate,” and not “transform,” the gospel to the postmodern mind. James E. White states that “every generation must ‘translate’ the Gospel into its unique cultural context. This is very different than ‘transforming’ the message of the Gospel, however, into something that was never intended by the biblical witness. Transformation of the message must be avoided at all costs. Translation, however, is necessary for a winsome and compelling presentation of the Gospel of Christ” (White 2001:177).

The urban church, then, must be able to discern between the elements of the Christian faith, which are biblical and timeless, and those which are culturally bound and subject to adjustment. For Christian mission, Jesus Christ as revealed through the Scriptures is the prime authority for faith and practice. Rose Dowsett supports this position, affirming that “it is the Scripture, pondered together by the believing community, through which we must evaluate every part of culture” (Dowsett 2000:456).

In an emergent postmodern condition, therefore, forms and methods must be adapted so that the urban church will not lose its potential for reaching postmodern generations. While the message is timeless, the method is not, and contextualization should be used as the tool to transform and renew, not the Gospel, but any given cultural worldview (Tebbe 1999), including the urban, postmodern mind-set.

Postmodernism calls the urban church to embrace the paradoxical tension of being authoritative and contextualized—to continually evaluate mission strategies and practices for their cultural relevance and biblical integrity. Here, it is fundamental to distinguish between postmodern churches and postmodern-sensitive churches.

Postmodern vs. Postmodern-Sensitive Churches

It is crucial for the urban church that seeks to reach postmoderns to become sensitive to the postmodern condition, but at the same time it must remain faithful to the biblical essence of the Christian faith.¹³ By postmodern-sensitive churches, I mean churches that are conscious of the issues and willing to communicate the gos-

pel in ways that are relevant to the postmodern condition, without losing their biblical foundations. On the other hand, postmodern churches—even though they are also sensitive to the postmodern culture—fail to distinguish critically the aspects of postmodernism that are contrary to the biblical perspective. In other words, to become a postmodern-sensitive church does not necessarily mean becoming postmodern. Insightfully, Sweet asserts, “Christians must say yes to the moment God has given them. . . . But saying yes to the moment does not mean one lets the moment define the yes” (Sweet 2000:46).

As a Christian community, the urban church can embrace some, but not all, of the elements of the postmodern condition.¹⁴ For instance, postmodernism asserts that we cannot fully comprehend truth, because of our limitations as human beings. This is an element that can be accepted. On the other hand, some postmoderns go to the extreme of affirming that there is no absolute truth, denying the existence of God’s Story, the Christian metanarrative. In this regard, as Christians we cannot agree, since we believe there is absolute truth in Jesus Christ, and God is actively present in history. Another example is found in the postmodern desire for community and tolerance towards diversity. This fits well with the biblical concept of a local church. But postmodernism comes up short when it asserts that all points of view are of equal value. Thus, when the postmodern condition and the Christian worldview come in conflict, the postmodern-sensitive church should clearly and openly communicate what it believes and the reasons for these beliefs. Never before has the urban church confronted such a challenge; at the same time, never has it faced such an opportunity for making disciples in a confused and divided society.

Conclusion

From a rural beginning, the world has become an urban environment. At the dawn of the modern period of world history, cities came to play a major role in the profound cultural, social, economic, and political transformations that brought into being today’s industrialized and urbanized societies. Concomitantly, during the late part of the twentieth century the postmodern condition found in the urbanized and globalized context of the contemporary Western world a safe haven to emerge and expand. In this context, the combined forces of urbanization, globalization, and postmodernism pose serious challenges to urban mission.

However, rather than regarding contemporary urbanization as a mere product of modernity, this essay suggests that it may be equally logical to see postmodernism as an outcome of urbanization, and globalization as one of the main chan-

nels through which the postmodern outlook has been conveyed around the world. Thus, the centralizing power of urbanization, added to the pervasive impact of globalization, makes the urban context the locus of the postmodern condition.

As a direct result of the missiological shift from a church-centered mission to a mission-centered church, and taking into consideration the context of urbanization, the local urban church is called not to be the goal, but the primary agency in the *missio Dei*. As an apostolic community, the local urban church ought to fulfill the Great Commission—contextually and incarnationally—to an increasingly urbanized and postmodernizing Western society. But to live this experience, the urban church must recognize that to be faithful to God’s calling in fulfilling His mission to urbanized and postmodernizing societies, it must put aside the false security of modernity and at the same time avoid the pitfalls of postmodernity. Therefore, to reach the postmodern condition with the gospel, the local urban church must recover its uniqueness and identity as an apostolic community, recognizing that its responsibility to communicate effectively with postmodern generations. However, this will be possible only after the urban church intentionally considers the postmodern condition as an emergent urban mission field.

Notes

¹Megacities are urban agglomerations with a population of 10 or more million residents. In 1950, only one city had more than 10 million inhabitants. By 2025, 27 cities are projected to hold over 10 million people; all but four will be in less developed countries. See United Nations (2008).

²Frey and Zimmer cite three factors as essential for urban growth during the industrial revolution: (1) mechanization in rural areas, which increased agricultural production, thus creating the surplus needed to sustain large populations; (2) the development of mass production in manufacturing; and (3) the sophistication of transportation and communication systems, caused in part by the creation of the steam engine and the railway system (Frey & Zimmer 2001:15).

³The practice of city planning reflected both the best and the worst of the modern project. Its highest ideals were the belief in emancipation and progress through rational planning. But these same ideals could be used to justify the destruction of communities in order to develop urban landscapes. See Jencks (1992:31-37).

⁴For more information on the conceptual aspects of the modern worldview, see Gonçalves (2005:34-54).

⁵The most visible implications of unexpected urban growth are extreme pressure of urban sectors (i.e., infrastructure, economy, education, and public health) and unbalanced

urban growth. As a direct result of unbalanced urban growth, the phenomenon of primate-cities may occur. The term primate-city was coined by Mark Jefferson in reference to demographic, economic, social, and political dominance of a city over all others in a given country. The primate-city phenomenon is typical of less developed countries but also exists in more developed parts of the world (e.g., Austria, Ireland, and Portugal). For further details, see Jefferson (1939:226-232). See also Sassen (2000:34-41).

⁶According to the United Nations, the competition between urban centers is characterized by their offer of attractive financial incentives in addition to essential practical ones, such as well-functioning infrastructure and urban services, communication systems, efficient transport, sufficient housing, and access to educational and recreational facilities. However, in this process the riches are passed from one wealthy hand to another, and poverty is left behind. This is essentially the reality in the less developed countries in the world. See UNCHS (2001).

⁷Paul Hiebert points out the centralizing power of the cities as a primary characteristic of urban societies, affirming that cities “attract power, wealth, knowledge, and expertise . . . [They are] the centers of government, banking, business, industry, marketing, learning, art, transportation, and religion” (Hiebert & Meneses 1995:265-267). See also Dear (2000:317, 318).

⁸Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references used in this essay are from the New King James Version (NKJV).

⁹For further details, see Meeks (1983:26). Del Birkey, in turn, points out that “it is reasonable to assume that when Paul began missionary work in a city, his primary objective was to win a household first. This then became the nucleus as well as the center for the advancement of the gospel in that area” (Birkey 1988:60).

¹⁰In theory, much has been said about the local church as the primary agent of mission. But in practical terms, as Tim Chester points out, “the mission agency and the missionary are still viewed as the primary agents of mission” (Chester 2001:18). For further details, see Bosch (1991:378). See also Lee (1990:69-72) and Maling (1990:73-77).

¹¹Because of the urban mission emphasis of this study, I do not intend to deal with all the implications of the modern worldview upon the church. For further details on this issue, see Shenk (1995, 1996) and Wells (1994:17-31, 205-213).

¹²For an outstanding ecclesiological analysis of the impact of modernity upon the Western church, see Campbell (1999).

¹³Van Gelder points out that “the challenge before the church is to maintain a firm commitment to God’s revelation within Scripture as being authoritative for all of life, while also recognizing the mediated and perspectival character of this revelation within culture and through culture” (Van Gelder 2002:501). See also McAlister (2000:371-373).

¹⁴For more information on the conceptual aspects of the postmodern conditions, see Gonçalves (2005:96-117).

Chapter 19

* * *

SHALL THOU REINCARNATE OR NOT? A QUEST FOR SPIRITUALITY AMONG CZECH “IRRELIGIOUS” PEOPLE

Petr Činčala

In-depth interviews with seven respondents provide insights into an alternative spirituality that has blossomed in post-communist Czech Republic. This article describes, analyzes, and assesses the qualitative data from a missional perspective to find out if the alternative spirituality is indeed not compatible with Biblical spirituality; yet, this spirituality has a number of common elements that may lead to find mutual understanding.

Czech Religious Context

An article titled “Shall Thou Reincarnate or Not?” appeared in the Czech atheist newspaper *Mladá fronta Dnes* on Tuesday, March 10, 2009. The article was describing a dilemma the communist Chinese government faces presently with the 14th Dalai Lama, who is aging in exile. Because the Chinese want to continue to control Tibet, they need to have the process of the new Dalai Lama’s reincarnation under control. The Chinese government has even issued a “decree regulating the process of reincarnation.”

The Czech Republic used to be a very religious country. Reformation movements took place generation after generation, from the Hussites in the fifteenth century to the Moravian brethren in the seventeenth century. Currently the Czech Republic belongs among the most secularized European countries (Hamplova 2008:703). Despite the recent missionary fervor, the church has not been growing. It might seem as though spiritual power has been in exile, as we have often heard of miracles and numerous baptisms taking place in some remote places. One naturally wonders what is happening. How long can the atheism continue to last? What happens next? Are the Czech Christians prepared to deal with it?

The Czech population is indeed not interested in traditional religion or in church Christianity (Hamplova 2008:712). However, people do not seem to have definite answers. To describe the relationship of young people to the church, Martinek uses a scale from 1 to 10, 1 meaning active members of the Church and 10 meaning confirmed atheists. In between there are various degrees of belonging. Some people are partially identified with the church, others are unchurched Christians, etc. (Martinek 2006:81, 82). In other words, spirituality and religiosity is quite a complex issue in the Czech Republic. Some people claim to be atheists, and yet they believe in the supernatural (Sak 2000:106, 107). Sociologists speak of “world-view schizophrenia” (Martinek 2006:79).

Low church religiosity does not mean the Czech people are not interested in spirituality. Recent surveys indicate a significant number of Czechs are interested in alternative spirituality (Hamplova 2008:704). It is even suggested that the Czech society should not be called secular but rather unchurched (Hamplova 2008:712).

This trend may not be unique in the Czech Republic, as Thompson points out in her book about spirituality: “Older patterns of religious life may seem antiquated and inadequate. For the first time, people are separating their spirituality from religion. ‘Institutional religion’ has become a negative phrase. . . . People find it natural to devise private belief systems that are independent of historical faith communities of traditions. Many seekers consider themselves ‘spiritual’ but not ‘religious’” (Thompson 1995:1, 2). As Jon Dybdahl said in one of his lectures on spirituality: “The question is not anymore whether or not one has spirituality. The question is ‘What kind of spirituality?’”

Christian Concepts of Spirituality

Let’s first briefly review what Christian scholars say about spirituality. Christian authors have been dealing with this issue for some time. Based on my literature review, there exist at least three kinds or models of spirituality:

Model A

A classic work on Christian spirituality is Foster's book *Celebration of Discipline*. Foster listed a number of inward, outward, and corporate "spiritual disciplines," which help people to live spiritual lives (Foster 1988). A decade later other authors provided slightly modified lists of spiritual disciplines (Thompson 1995; Ortberg 1997; Whitney 1997). This concept of Christian spiritual life may leave some people with the impression that it is about things to do. If you do this exercise, you will be spiritual. Do this and don't do that. This is a task-oriented spirituality based on effort and duty.

Model B

In this model we are told that there is no universal prescription for spiritual life that applies to everyone alike. Different people may choose to walk their own spiritual paths. There have been various spiritual streams throughout history, and they all come from the Bible (Foster 1998). There are a number of spiritual styles and colors available (Thomas 2000; Schwarz 2009) so that Christians can connect with God naturally (or according to their own preferences).

Model C

Still later we are reminded that spirituality is not a matter of things to do. It is not a matter of intellect alone but also a matter of heart. Our hearts are longing for something deeper; our hearts are hungry for God (Dybdahl 2008). Recent research has pointed this out based on new discoveries in neuropsychology on how mind and heart work together. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to elaborate more on this issue; however, it has important implications for spirituality. A healthy connection with God requires emotional health (i.e., healing). Our emotional side is perhaps more important for our spiritual life than our rational side. As the Rockeys explain: "Our feelings dictate our beliefs (the way we think), which then dictate our behaviors. Believe it or not, our feelings are stronger drivers for our behavior than is our logic!" (Rockey & Rockey 2008:174).

How does the emerging alternative spirituality of Czech atheists fit into these models? The purpose of this study is to describe, analyze, and assess the spirituality of the Czech "irreligious" people. This study is limited by a narrow sample of Czech people and cannot be generalized; it serves as a case study. I will focus on qualitative research in an attempt to take a fresh look into areas that are concealed for passers-by.

Research Methodology

For the last four years I have been involved in starting a community mission project, which means meeting secular people every day. It has been a privilege to develop friendships with a number of people who slowly became part of “our” community. We have been working, eating, singing, walking, and talking together.

Because I am part of a religious organization of which many of these people have been suspicious, it has been difficult to reach them with the good news. People are open to community but slow to study the Bible and learn about the Christian God. It is not because they are not open to learn, but perhaps because God first wants me to learn something from them, as my friend Samir argues (Selmanovic 2009:15-19). The invitation to participate in this project gave me a great opportunity to do just that.

To explore the spirituality of a few un-churched Czech people, seven different people were approached in the Generations Center in Liberec, Czech Republic, between April 10, 2009, and August 15, 2009, and all agreed to an in-depth interview. The interview with each participant lasted from 1 to 3 hours. Those people were selected as a convenience sample.

No participant was officially religious or belonged to an organized religion. Of the four religious groupings—Catholic, Protestant, atheist, and other (Cincala 2002:156)—the seven participants categorized themselves either as atheist or other. All of them grew up in atheistic families. However, each of the participants confirmed their spiritual interest. They acquired spiritual knowledge either through reading books, attending seminars dealing with some aspects of spirituality, or encountering some kind of spiritual guru.

Introducing Research Participants

To help understand the spirituality of the respondents, “faith labels” have been created to describe how these people will be identified.

New Spirituality

She is a highly educated woman (university professor) in her 50s. Her grandfather was an evangelical pastor, and her dad was a communist who actually believed in communism. She identified, for example, with a series of books from Neale Donald Walsch called *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue*. She stated:

“Spirituality is something that helps me find answers about who I am, where I am coming from, where I go, and why—by heart, by something else than rationality, rather by feeling.”

Herbal Cleansing

He is a man in his late 50s who has been dealing with extracts from herbs and healthy nutrition. He was brought up as an atheist. As a result of being raised in the communist regime, he has been resistant toward the church and has looked for alternatives such as Buddhism. Recently he started to inquire into spirituality through herbs. He explained: “People who are cleansed by the herbs are spiritually transformed I do not belong to any organized group, but through a healthy lifestyle I meet with people who see they should eat healthy. They are different; you can talk with them about something like there is energy here, *chakras*, and when you meet such a person, you are pleased.”

Healing Energies

She is in her 40s, a herb woman. She grew up in a communist family that was deeply convinced the teaching was true. Then she realized it was not so true and started to search. Although she initially believed in God as a person and in Jesus Christ, she found the Bible and Christianity too difficult to understand and sought for “more understandable ways” (reading other books and attending various lectures). Not long ago she found something she considers the ultimate answer for herself. Several times she mentioned experiencing a huge energy, which she gradually has not been afraid to call God’s providence (regardless of what people think about her). She described in detail the teaching about *chakras*—energy centers in each human. Now she is a deeply spiritual person, working with healing energies for herself and for others: “It is amazing; the time is coming when spirituality will be interconnected. Even scientists are able to measure energy; even doctors are leaning toward alternative medicine and nature.”

Mystic Searching

She is in her 30s working in a forest company. Although she grew up as an atheist, she seeks to experience something supernatural. She is open to faith, but more through experience and feelings than through dogmas. She has been influ-

enced a great deal by the works of well-known Czech mystics and yogi authors Eduard Tomáš and his wife Míla. She does not want to be indoctrinated but waits to experience spirituality from within. She reads books and acquires information, as she explains: “Through reading I receive some information about spirituality. . . . I read it and see how it impresses me. This is feeling information. . . . I would like to obtain information about God through me. I read about it; I like it very much, and I expect to experience something more.”

Positive Thinking

She is in her early 30s and at home with her toddler. About 11 years ago, her former boyfriend led her to positive thinking. She studied books such as *Heal Your Body*, *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind*, and *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Since that period she has learned to meditate and repeat incantations every morning and evening. She says: “If I do not pray, my day is not good.” She has great testimonies about what has happened in her life as a result of prayers (repeated spells).

Yoga

He is in his mid-30s and works as physiotherapist and masseur. Shortly after the Velvet Revolution he came in touch with books from Květoslav Minařík and learned about the spiritual teaching of yoga and how to self-discipline himself: “I see Buddhism, yoga, and mysticism very equally; they help people to grow.”

Esotericism

He is in his 60s. He is employed as an assistant in a transportation company. He was enrolled in yoga by his wife 25 years ago (during the communist regime), and that was his start. There he learned that “one has to follow certain rules to grow.” Ten years later he moved toward esotericism: “Esotericism is everything. Everything relates to everything. . . . Esotericism is an occult discipline.” This respondent described himself as a rather extreme follower. His disciplined lifestyle caused him to live alone, in isolation.

Data Analysis

Each interview followed a simple question guideline. After an introduction, participants were asked to share how they connect with the spiritual realm and how they nurture their spirituality. Then they were asked to respond to a list of words related to their spiritual life. The idea was for them to talk about what they believed and what they didn't. The list of words contained terms such as: reincarnation;¹ horoscopes;² healer;³ *chakras*;⁴ *karma*;⁵ *reiki*;⁶ meditation;⁷ divine in human; source of life, energy, love; sin; death; resurrection; hell; purgatory; harmony of body, spirit, and soul.⁸

Thus, the following concepts emerged based on the interviews as relevant to the respondents who depicted them and elaborated on them: (1) Higher Energy—God; (2) *Chakras*; (3) *Reiki*; (4) Healers; (5) Horoscopes; (6) Meditation; (7) Self-discipline; (8) Serving Others; (9) Reincarnation and *Karma*.

Table 1 shows these terms linked to the respondents. If a term is not marked by an X, the respondents either did not believe or agree with that term or they simply did not work with it. Interestingly, the respondents work with 5 to 7 of these spiritual concepts on average. Let's take a closer look at these terms.

Table 1
Cross-analysis of the collected data

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Respondent 1	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
Respondent 2		X				X			X
Respondent 3	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Respondent 4	X	X	X			X			X
Respondent 5	X				X	X			X
Respondent 6	X			X		X	X	X	X
Respondent 7	X	X		X	X	X	X		X

Higher Energy—God

Six out of seven respondents placed significant emphasis on supernatural energy, higher energy, or God. One respondent described God as a creative power, which gives meaning to everything. "God is not an imaginary power. His presence is in everything."⁹ Another respondent spoke of God as of light: "tremendous power which created everything here."¹⁰

Although respondents spoke about God's will, about encountering God's sovereignty, His endless intelligence, a source, they did not seem to consider God as a being, a person. One respondent noted that God "is not a being, I would say because I do not understand how such a being could be in each one of us and in everything. Yet, God is in every person, animal, in everything God is source—all around."¹¹

Most of the respondents would agree there is God inside of us. "I believe we all have a bit of divine in us—that does not mean we are gods, but we have a tiny bit."¹² Surprisingly, the qualitative research indicates that this does not seem to refer to heroism of humans, to their good skills, or to their ego. This notion refers more to God as a higher power, almost as the Christian God, only it is not a being, and one does not have to seek from without (in cathedrals, in the Scriptures) but from within. A person who discovers God from within is challenged to "work up to the unity with God. Unity with God is not a matter of course; it is the brightest goal."¹³ Unity with God refers to proprieties such as humbleness, sacrificial service, justice, perfection, etc.

Chakras

Three respondents work with these "energetic centers in the body," and one respondent senses a need to "wake them up" in order to have spiritual experiences.¹⁴ Lower *chakras* are of an earthly nature, such as clarifying our relationships with our parents, setting a right relationship with our spouse, sexual life, work life, and at another level, our personality. The fourth *chakra* connects with the heart and involves managing the emotions. To connect with the fifth *chakra* means to choose polite and nice words, not to hurt anybody. The sixth *chakra* allows a connection with our inner space and with information from our previous lives. The seventh *chakra* means connecting with the highest spiritual wisdom through spirit and soul all the way up to God's wisdom. An atheist who refuses God cannot work with *chakras* at all.¹⁵ "*Chakras* are supposed to work all at once; I would like to develop them all; they are interconnected. They should be balanced—that's optimal."¹⁶

Reiki

Whereas *chakras* work with energy from within, *reiki* works with outer energy, and not all want to cross the line to work with an energy from outside.¹⁷ In our study only two respondents out of seven identified with *reiki*. Others are either

afraid, do not have good experiences, or are not interested. *Reiki* works with energy that can heal. “A person who is attuned into *reiki* can warm other persons through touch and supply energy.”¹⁸ Such persons can help others—supply energy, “unblock negative blocks, and heal mentally as well as physically.”¹⁹

Healers

These are people who know how to work with energy and use it to help other people. There are a number of people who do this officially and have a trade certificate to do this, and there are others who do this unofficially in their leisure time. In both cases, it might be a good source of income. Such people provide counseling, help people with everyday issues and relational problems, use alternative medicine to cure illnesses, or simply bring about a self-curing process in their clients. Although respondents are aware of the fact that not all healers can help and “some cheat,”²⁰ four respondents approve of healers and recommend them to others.

Horoscopes

Since 1989, horoscopes have become a part of societal culture in the Czech Republic. Newspapers, magazines, TV, and radio stations speak of horoscopes. It is beyond this study to examine how seriously people take their horoscopes in general. “I acknowledge astrological horoscopes . . . It is possible to use them as guide and motivation. It helped me in times I needed it,” said one respondent.²¹ “I feel it works. People are born in certain disposition of stars, and it influences them,” said another respondent.²² The most radical interviewee in spiritual matters explained: “Horoscopes are like business cards of people. Horoscopes describe powers which a person gets for this life. . . . Horoscopes tell us how we are alike. Horoscopes convey dispositions one has when he/she is born in some sign.”²³ Four respondents did not work with horoscopes or believe in them.

Meditation

All respondents confirmed the fact that they are learning and practicing meditation. Various techniques of meditation are used to “quiet down.”²⁴ “If I do not incant, my day is not good. . . . I repeat statements such as ‘I believe in power much more powerful and stronger than me.’ It strengthens all cells of my body,” stated a proponent of positive thinking.²⁵ When speaking about meditation, some respon-

dents also used the term “prayer.” In relationship to meditation, two respondents mentioned reaching an alpha state of mind.²⁶ The alpha state of mind is an altered state of consciousness.²⁷

Self-discipline

Four respondents out of seven mentioned this concept. Although self-discipline goes logically along with belief in reincarnation, not all respondents believing in reincarnation listed self-discipline as part of their spiritual practice. Self-discipline is meant for growth and perfection. For some it includes a healthy lifestyle and nutrition, and for others it takes different means. “Unity with God does not happen by itself; it is possible to achieve through focused work on my spirituality. Most of the time, however, persons cannot manage such task in one human life.” “One has to ‘eat humble pie’ and start from within. If I work on myself, I shine. People notice how I act, how my family is, and that is my task.”²⁹ Self-discipline leads to serving others.

Serving Others

Interestingly, all who place emphasis on self-discipline are also intentionally engaged in serving others (with the exception of respondent 7, who claims to love other people but is a loner by his nature). Serving others (i.e., doing good deeds, caring for and loving others) is considered a part of spirituality. “My spirituality involves work for others.... A path of love for people is very important.”³⁰ For “love is God.”³¹

Reincarnation and *Karma*

Research conducted in 1995 by IBS in the Czech Republic stated that 27 percent of Czechs believe in some way in reincarnation (Novotný & Vojtíšek 1995:39). There is no study available giving the latest figures about the percentage of Czechs believing in reincarnation. However, experience suggests that the percentage has grown rather than declined. Dealing with the spirituality of Czech youth, Martinek claims the most important spiritual question they are interested in is the question about the afterlife (Martinek 2006:79).

All respondents in our study believe in reincarnation. “After death the physical body falls off, and soul flies up high, recovers, and then during the time of conception goes back into . . .”³² Why is this belief so attractive for participants?

- It provides an explanation for things “we would otherwise not be able to explain.”³³
- It is said to be “the only possibility how God can be just and righteous.”³⁴
- It gives people some hope: “I believe in reincarnation When my dad died, it encouraged me that he will come back. I even saw him in one child.”³⁵
- It may open a way to connect with God because “*karma* is the only barrier of our connection with God.”³⁶ Another respondent explains it more: “*Karma* is heavy baggage you carry from a past life, and you have to empty it in this life.”³⁷
- It may bring motivation for living a better life: “I like the fear of being reincarnated into something you do not want to be—that brings you up; if you are killer, you become a dog.”³⁸

Missiological Assessment

When respondents were asked to relate to Christian terms such as “resurrection” or “sin,” they did not have much to say. Such terms are foreign to them. On the other hand, some of the respondents did not hesitate to use Christian terminology (such as God, grace, providence, expiation, law, transgression) but with meanings other than Biblical. The interviews indicated exposure of the respondents to church and the Christian faith. However, they were all resistant to and reserved about the Christian faith for one reason or another. One respondent had a bad experience with church in childhood; another did not see spirituality in churches; others did not understand dogma, blamed the church for forcing people into faith, criticized the church for mixing pagan customs with Christianity, and refused rational and intellectual approach to faith. The church and Christian faith in general were not perceived as plausible for any of the respondents.

Yet, they have been open to be part of our community center, developing relationships with Christians and doing things together. Two have participated in the Gospel Choir, two were involved in health programs, one has been volunteering, and one has attended the Family Center. Relationships and meaningful involvement in service are important to them. One said: “I don’t see spirituality in churches. I see that in the Dalai Lama and other lamas in Nepal who teach runaway children.”³⁹ One described how she was scared of the Seventh-day Adventist church as a sect, but when she realized through the internet that Health Expos, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Country Life Restaurants, Gospel Choirs, and Com-

munity Centers are connected with that church, she said in positive amazement: “Wow, they are everywhere, and they do not force anybody.”⁴⁰

Throughout the interviews one could notice that spirituality for the respondents is a matter of heart and feeling. Things may not need to make sense to them intellectually, but they must make sense emotionally. In this case, model C of Christian spirituality described earlier applies. However, their spirituality is deaf to Christian dogmas, proof texts, and rational arguing. They are receptive to experience, intuition, and supernatural power. (Would the Holy Spirit work with that?)

The spirituality of the respondents was not based on a uniform to-do list. It may have involved common disciplines, but it was subjective and personalized, it evolved over time based on their preferences, and it fit their needs as a result of trial and error. (This aspect somewhat reflects Christian spirituality model B described earlier.)

Although such spirituality is open to logic and wisdom, the authority of God’s Word has not been taken into account, and God is not viewed as a being/persona. Such “believers” have written off church, and the proclamation of the Gospel alone will not help to restore their trust. Only God knows whether such “believers” are reachable for God’s kingdom. They may not accept the “Truth,” but would they accept Christ? Only time will show if our mission and working together opened the door of their hearts for the Gospel.

Conclusion

This study was intended to provide a glimpse into the spirituality of a few Czech unchurched people, former and present atheists. We described, analyzed, and assessed the spirituality of selected individuals. We realized spirituality is present and blossoming in the stream of secular society. Unfortunately, that kind of spirituality is not acceptable for Christians, and from a human point of view, it is impossible to stop or change it (even a decree regulating the process of reincarnation could not prevent the spreading of that kind of spirituality).

This kind of spirituality is not Biblical; however, there are common denominators with Christian spirituality. Spirituality means connecting with God (god) and higher power; to be free from evil character, from unhealthy emotions, and from material burdens; to live selflessly, serve those in need, follow God’s will, and love others. Spirituality is a life-long process of growth and healing. It provides an explanation about life and death, good and evil, and hope for justice and the ultimate solution of evil.

The challenges remain in both Christian and secular spiritual camps: seeking secular people and being able to connect their spiritual experience with a loving God, their Creator, and to accept the authority of His Word. Christians must allow God's transforming power to change their lives into selfless ministry for the sake of this lost world.

Notes

¹Reincarnation is a religious belief that some essential part of a living being survives physical death to be reborn in a new body. See "Reincarnation," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reincarnation> (accessed February 19, 2010).

²Astrological horoscopes refer to the astrologer's interpretation of events based on the position of sun, moon, and planets, or based on calendar significance of events. Thus, horoscopes allow one to understand what is happening and what is to come. See "Horoscopes," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horoscope> (accessed February 19, 2010).

³Healers have become common in post-communist Czech society. They work with alternative medicine, and provide counseling or healing cures to people. People learn about healers through word of mouth or through the web. A list of official healers in Prague, for example, is available at: <http://prirodni-leciva.cz/seznam-lecitelu-praha/m-208/> (accessed February 19, 2010).

⁴*Chakras* are believed to be energy centers located in the human body. There are seven major *chakras* or wheels of light. See "*Chakras*," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakra> (accessed February 19, 2010).

⁵*Karma* is a concept explaining causality of actions and reactions related to reincarnated lives. See "*Karma in Hinduism*," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma_in_Hinduism (accessed February 19, 2010).

⁶*Reiki* is a spiritual practice that comes from belief that there is universal spiritual energy that can be used for healing on physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual levels. Anyone can access this energy by means of the attunement process carried out by a Reiki Master. See "Reiki," <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reiki> (accessed February 19, 2010).

⁷Meditation in this study refers to Eastern techniques such as Buddhist meditation. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation#Buddhism> (accessed February 19, 2010).

⁸The non-Christian concepts were selected based on preliminary research of the Czech spiritual market.

⁹Respondent 7, August 15, 2009.

¹⁰Respondent 3, April 14, 2009.

¹¹Respondent 4, May 7, 2009.

¹²Respondent 1, April 12, 2009.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Respondent 4, May 7, 2009.

¹⁵Respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

¹⁶Respondent 1, April 12, 2009.

¹⁷Respondent 2, April 18, 2009.

¹⁸Respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

¹⁹Respondent 4, May 7, 2009.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

²²Respondent 5, May 12, 2009.

²³Respondent 7, August 15, 2009.

²⁴Respondent 6, May 15, 2009.

²⁵Respondent 5, May 12, 2009.

²⁶Respondent 2, April 18, 2009; respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

²⁷For more about this term, see "Altered state of mind," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altered_state_of_consciousness (accessed February 19, 2010).

²⁸Respondent 1, April 12, 2009.

²⁹Respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

³⁰Respondent 6, May 15, 2009.

³¹Respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

³²Respondent 1, April 12, 2009.

³³Respondent 6, May 15, 2009.

³⁴Respondent 7, August 15, 2009.

³⁵Respondent 5, May 12, 2009.

³⁶Respondent 7, August 15, 2009.

³⁷Respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

³⁸Respondent 2, April 18, 2009.

³⁹Respondent 3, April 24, 2009.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Chapter 20

* * *

ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD: MISSION IN POST-APOCALYPTIC SOCIETY

Yuri N. Drumi

This article includes a missiological reflection on some of the missionary activities that the author, students, and a senior pastor engaged in at the Zaoksky Theological Seminary Church during 2008 and 2009. The reflection is presented as a case study that discusses what is involved and what it means to do God's mission in a post-apocalyptic culture.

Introduction

Have you ever thought about where the edge of the world is? The question arises when you read in Acts 1:8 about the gospel going to “earth’s remotest end” (*The New Jerusalem Bible*). If the earth is spherical, where is this “remotest end”? A Russian classical writer, Nicolai S. Leskov (1831-1895), wrote *skaz*, a tale within a tale in 1875, called *On the Edge of the World* (1992) that was based on the true story of a Russian missionary bishop’s trip to the far reaches of Eastern Siberia. Conventional wisdom may see Siberia as earth’s remotest end, but there is no need today to go that far. Although geography matters, missiology will provide the answer about the location of this end.

On the Outskirts of Russian Life

A traveler heading some 50 kilometers southeast from Zaoksky Theological Seminary—the flagship of Adventist theological education in Russia—will find two villages near each other, Dmitrovskoye and Mirofino. If not distracted by the bumps in the road, the observant traveler can see remnants of the Soviet imperial might and dream. A rusty iron monument depicts the hammer and sickle along with other faded symbols of Soviet life. Towering above the roadside, its foundation is overgrown with high grass in summer and covered with deep snow in winter. In each village there are perhaps a hundred houses. Built in the era of “developed socialism” (the concept emerged in the offices of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the late 1960s), these houses were inhabited by *kolkhozniki*, state-owned farmers who toiled in the fields on the state’s land. The collective farms no longer exist, and the inhabitants are no longer state-owned farmers; however, neither are they free entrepreneurs managing to cultivate the land. Rather, they are survivors of the social experiments carried out within the Russian nation.

There are two public buildings in Dmitrovskoye: an Old Russian Orthodox church under reconstruction (after many decades of desolation and abuse by the state) and *dom kultury*, House of Culture, the Soviet version of a spiritual and cultural center created by the Soviet state to compete with and fight the “patriarchal prejudices” of the old era. Money was collected from the villagers to pay for workers to lay gas pipes to bring more efficient heat to the houses of Dmitrovskoye. In spring 2009, however, the district administration announced that only the Orthodox church and *dom kultury* would have gas. Others, if they wanted it, would have to pay in addition.

As in Dmitrovskoye, there are only two public buildings in Mirofino: an elementary school and a concrete building with thick bars on the windows. This structure is divided into two unequal halves. In the left wing, behind a black iron door, there is small grocery store; in the right wing there is a pub owned by a former policeman. (He kindly agreed to rent this room for evangelistic meetings.) Behind this building the traveler can see a row of two-storied structures with apartments for former *kolkhozniki* and some refugees from restless Caucasus. One of the apartment buildings is called *Chechnya*, a gloomy reminder of the war-torn republic in the North Caucasus region of Russia. *Chechnya* is half inhabited and half desolate. The windows of the deserted apartments seem to stare emptily like the eye sockets of a skull. The local people say that about two dozen people have been murdered in that building within the last six years.

In front of the grocery store there is a pavilion, a favorite place for the local drunkards. Here they share vodka, snacks, and gloomy feelings about their fate. In the 1970s, about 30 meters from the pavilion, a memorial was raised depicting the face of a Russian soldier. Traditionally such places have served as centers for the “patriotic education” of Soviet children. Erected in memory of the Mirotino villagers who had been killed in World War II, the monument is now rickety and overgrown with weeds. The face of the soldier has been deformed by unknown people for unknown reasons. A significant shift in the basic values of the Mirotino inhabitants must have taken place for an object of honor and memory to be desecrated in such a way. Perhaps the following parallel is justified: Just as the making of Russian society into a Soviet society was accompanied by the destruction of all tsarist symbols, so too the making of Soviet society into a post-Soviet society is a painful process of cultural transformations accompanied by irrational and aggressive outbursts.

Sharing the Word of God with the inhabitants of Dmitrovksoye and Mirotino has opened the doors of their unpretentious dwellings. The housing conditions in both villages could suggest a plot for a good anthropological story. The inhabitants’ mentality is reflected in the objects they adore and use to decorate their rooms. One evening, a small group of our students were invited by a 82-year-old lady to share tea in her house. In the right corner of the room, where a pious *babushka* would normally have an icon, the visitors saw two red diplomas that had been issued by the *kolkhoz* (collective farm) leaders. One diploma had been presented to the hostess and the other to her husband, now deceased. The diplomas read: “Presented to the best cattle farm worker for the best showing in socialist competition.” Above this text there is another inscription: “Glory to Lenin’s Party.” This was a typical technique used by the communists to motivate people for bigger production as well as to make them feel worthy and accepted. In the left corner of the room, above the television set, we saw a picture of Generalissimo Stalin and next to him an icon of Virgin Mary. What kind of religion is it? It is precisely this kind of religion that has had significant influence on the present-day culture of Russia, including mass media, social life, politics, and education. However, to understand the darkest side of the Mirotino and Dmitrovskoye villagers you must listen to their stories.¹

Their Stories

K., a 13-year-old girl, and her cousin A., a 12-year-old girl, both live with their *babushka*. The father and mother of A. were murdered about six years ago. The

mother of K. got divorced and married a veteran of the Chechen war. One day, intoxicated and out of control, he closed the two girls in the storeroom of his Moscow apartment. The girls found themselves in a dark prison, without food and water. They knocked on the walls and were heard, but no one helped. Three days later they were eventually delivered from their home prison by the officers of the Ministry for Emergency Situations. The girls spent three months in a rehabilitation program in order to stabilize their nervous systems. Regardless of medical intervention and signs of improvement with her health, K. made two attempts to commit suicide. Fortunately, the amount of pills she deliberately ingested did not kill her. The girls became interested in what they heard from their grandma and others who went to the pub to listen to the visiting preachers. Attracted by what they saw and heard, both girls were baptized in June 2009 and joined Zaoksky Theological Seminary church.

N. was born 65 years ago into a dysfunctional family with many children. By the time he turned 13, he had committed a serious crime and was imprisoned for the first time. This was just the beginning of a long journey involving some 39 years of imprisonments, releases, new crimes, interrogations, courts, further imprisonments, and continuing in a vicious cycle. During his last term of imprisonment, N. found salvation. Later, in 2006, he and his wife became the first converts in Mirofino and were baptized into the Adventist church. Unfortunately, N. could not enjoy life to the full. A man without passport or pension, he was also struck by sarcoma. Being bedridden, he would sing Christian songs and listen as his wife read to him from the Bible. N. died in agony and was buried in August 2009. His wife keeps going to the pub where the Mirofino believers get together every Sabbath. She told me once, "My husband's spirit does not show up, and thanks to Jesus I live without any fear."

M., a 15-year-old girl, was listening to the *Voice of Hope*, an Adventist radio program broadcast from Tula. She became interested in the truths she heard and began to study Bible lessons mailed by the broadcast office. When she heard about the Christmas program to be held in Zaoksky for the children of the nearby orphanages, she determined to be there. At the same time, her address was sent to the Seminary church pastor, who later visited her. All these circumstances eventually resulted in her baptism in June 2009. But this is not the whole story. M.'s 49-year-old mother L., got divorced 13 years ago, and her ex-husband married G., a lady living in the same village. Four children were born into this new family, three girls and one boy. G. and her children began reading an Adventist newspaper distributed in the village by the Seminary's students. In February 2009 G. attended an evangelistic

program held in the village and accepted Jesus and the basic truths of Adventism. She was baptized in April 2009. L., the ex-wife, joined the church, too. Today both ladies and their children are in the same company of Adventist believers. Hopefully, the spiritual bond between them (as well as among their children) will become a more significant factor in their relationships than the somewhat messy situations they went through before their conversion.

These painful episodes in the personal stories shared by the villagers of Dmitrovskoye and Mirotino make one think about God's mission and ours being carried out in a post-apocalyptic culture.² How should the Russian Adventist communities respond to the challenges seen in every corner of their traumatized culture?

God's Mission and Ours

In my dissertation (defended March 2008 at Andrews University) I dealt extensively with the issue of mission in post-Soviet culture. The method of socio-textual interaction, utilized throughout my study, set forth a certain conception of Christian mission based on a commitment to liberation, healing, and transformation as envisioned in the Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus (Luke 4:16-21). At the heart of this approach to mission lies the Lukan imagery of a God who has compassion on "the poor" (the traumatized), who enters their dysfunctional *oikos*, casts out its demons, and calls humans to join *Familia Dei*.

Immediately after I finished my research, my family and I went back to Russia to resume our responsibilities. Some new responsibilities were added later. Today, nearly two years later, my personal involvement in various mission activities, as well as that of some of my colleagues, supports the following thoughts as to what Seventh-day Adventist mission in post-Marxist Russia should be.

First, the mission experiences in Dmitrovskoye and Mirotino have clearly evidenced that only the good news about God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth is able to liberate the Russian *oikos* that was attacked and plundered by Satan. It is important to understand, however, that the content of Jesus *evangel* is not metaphysics but God as Father. The image and experience of God as a compassionate and forgiving Father does have healing effects on the spiritual, moral, and socio-psychological scars caused by the Soviet era and post-Soviet developments.

Second, the good news of Jesus must be understood in terms of God's story lived out by His followers within the culture to which they belong. A missionary must become a character within that story. This is something achieved by entering human households and extending God's invitation to everyone who is in there.

There is no such thing as “mission” if there is no entering into the drama of human existence marked by alienation from God, breaking off social relations, and destroying life and its meaning. Thus, reading Jesus’ story can and should be accompanied by writing the story’s continuation in the pages of real life.

Third, crossing the barriers from dogma to trauma is a ubiquitous challenge for the Adventist community in Russia, which has been traditionally characterized by strong eschatological-apocalyptic expectations. Christopher Wright is correct, when he says that God’s mission is not so much about a ticking clock for the end times as it is about loving one’s neighbor as yourself (Wright 2006). God as Father does not so much favor speculations about the end-time (Acts 1:7) as He prompts the disciples to be faithful witnesses “to earth’s remotest end” (Acts 1:8). This witness is possible only if it is supported by practical deeds of social concern and responsibility. Food, shelter, clothes, human touch, visitation of the sick, taking care of the dying, protecting children, widows, and the disadvantaged—all that and much more are to be part and parcel of Adventist mission in present-day Russian villages with their countless homes and households.

Conclusion

Ideologies come and go. Some of them have been sent to the dustbin of history, others show vitality and keep playing games on the chessboard of human lives. But people remain, with wounds and scars in their minds and hearts. Their existence is in time and space. Therefore, history and geography matter. But neither is infinite or endless. Both have their “ends,” and both “ends” end in God, who is love. This love is eternal and lasts forever.

The question asked in the beginning of this short reflection—“Where is the edge of the world?”—is reminiscent of another question: “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). The latter question is pending a clear answer from every generation of Jesus’ followers. A lesson learned from a missiology for post-apocalyptic Russia is simple: only love begets love and calls forth healing and restoration.

Notes

¹For obvious reasons I have abbreviated the names of those who shared their stories.

²There are reasons to believe that the Russian people must live in the context of post-apocalyptic culture. As I pointed out in my book, “the term ‘post-apocalyptic’ does not mean that the apocalyptic prophecies of Daniel, Jesus, and Paul have been fully fulfilled.

Rather, speaking from the local cultural perspective, I want to emphasize the scale of the drama that befell Russia under the duress of Communism. In its extreme sufferings, the Russian nation experienced a time of trouble that may certainly be qualified as apocalyptic by its nature” (Drumi 2008:133).

Chapter 21

* * *

MISSION TO THE JEWS: A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST PRIORITY

Jacques B. Doukhan

History, theology, ethics, and prophecy make the “Mission to the Jews” a priority for Seventh-day Adventists. After developing these four reasons and explaining their priorities, this paper draws practical lessons on how this mission should be conducted and concludes with the observation of a mysterious link between the Advent Hope and this particular mission.

Introduction

A few years ago as I was reading a report urging for mission to the world, I was very surprised to discover that among the many nations, cultures, and even obscure tribes that were listed, the Jews had been completely forgotten.¹ Besides the possible distraction and absentmindedness of this author’s report, there may be some good reasons explaining this strange omission, ranging from the frustrations and the challenges of this particular mission to the conscious or unconscious anti-Semitic prejudices that sometimes prevent Christians from even considering Jews in their plans for sharing their good testimony of salvation. In this essay, however, instead of analyzing those negative reasons, I intend to address the problem positively. I will examine some of the reasons why the Jews, perhaps more than any

other culture, tribe, and nation, not only should have been remembered in this call for mission, but deserved, in fact, a special mention.

Since the term “mission”² describes the Christian operation of “witnessing to Christ vis-à-vis other faiths” (Croner 1982:2), and considering the unique connections between the Seventh-day Adventist message and the Jewish faith,³ the Seventh-day Adventist mission to the Jews is bound to be different in nature from other Christian testimonies to the Jews. The scope of this study will, therefore, essentially concern the Seventh-day Adventist mission, although many of its observations and lessons may be valuable for other Christians. Also, the Jews with whom this paper is concerned are Jews who clearly identify themselves as Jews, whether they are religious or secular, reform, conservative, or orthodox—Jews who relate in one way or another to the values of Jewish culture and traditions and identify themselves with the suffering and the historical destiny of the Jewish people, whether in diaspora or in Israel.

A Historical Reason: The Jews the First Missionaries

The first and immediate observation concerns a fact of history. The Jews were the first missionaries of history. They were the first to reach out to the nations to testify to the universal God of creation, to the personal God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the God of Israel.

Many Christians forget that the mission to the world did not start in New Testament times and indeed prevailed in the Old Testament. Abraham witnessed to his contemporaries in exile while still in Haran (Gen. 12:5)⁴ and to his neighbors when he lived in Canaan (Gen. 14:18–24; 20:17, 18). His spiritual influence also extended to the nations of the future, as is indicated in the meaning of his new name Abraham, “father of many nations” (Gen. 17:5), and in the promise this new name implied: he would be a blessing to many nations. In fact, the repetition (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 26:4; 28:14) and the solemnity of the formula that expresses this promise suggest that the blessing of the nations through Abraham implies more than the idea of a simple influence, but rather a cause-effect relationship and the affirmation of the universal mission of Israel (see Jacob 1958:217–223). Joseph testified to his God in Potiphar’s house (Gen. 39:9), as well as in prison (Gen 40:8), and even before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:39). Moses himself was a missionary,⁵ not only among his own people (Exod. 3) but also to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians (Exod. 5–11). Indeed, many people from other nations responded to the testimony of Israel and joined them in worshipping the same God: Egyptians (Exod. 12:38, 39), Midianites

(Exod. 18:1), Cushites (Num. 12:1), Canaanites (Josh. 2:1), Persians (Esther 9:27), and Arameans (Job 1:1). Besides these corporate movements, extraordinary examples such as the queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10) and the commander of the Syrian armies, Naaman (2 Kings 5), are striking illustrations of how pagans responded to the Israelites' missionary testimonies. It has even been observed that "the large population of the twelve tribes even before the monarchy (possibly a quarter of a million), makes it necessary to assume that a considerable part of the population in Palestine was converted to Yahwism during the Conquest, since it is biologically impossible that they all should have been lineal descendants of the group who emerged from Egyptian slave-labor camps under the leadership of Moses" (Mendenhall 1962:405). Among the prophets, Jonah's proclamation to the Ninevites represents one of the most eloquent testimonies of the universal mission of Israel. We should also note the powerful testimony of Daniel and his friends to the kings of Babylon and to the Chaldeans (Dan. 1:9–21; 2:20–22, 28–30; 3:17, 26–30; 5:13–29; 6:3, 22–28), which resulted in Nebuchadnezzar's spectacular conversion (Dan. 3:28; 4:1–3, 34–37). And this is not to mention the numerous oracles and appeals the prophets from Amos on launched to the nations (Joel 3; Amos 1:3–15; 2:1–3; Nah. 2, 3; Zeph. 2, etc.). The book of Isaiah refers to the conversion of foreign peoples (Isa. 56:3) and contemplates with other prophets a future conversion of the pagan nations (Isa. 45:14; 49:6; 55:5; 60:6, 10–14; cf. Mic. 4:1–5; Jer. 3:17; Zech. 2:11; 8:20–23; 14:16–21; Hag. 2:6 ff.).

After the Old Testament period, the missionary activities of Judaism are also well attested and knew great success in the Hellenistic world, with which Judaism was in close touch. The statement of the New Testament that the Pharisees would "travel land and sea to win one proselyte" (Matt. 23:15) suggests extensive and vigorous missionary activities during the period of the Second Temple.⁶ According to the ancient rabbis, the missionary outreach was in fact considered as the divine purpose for the dispersion of the Jewish people (*Pesah* 87b). The Jewish missionary zeal was then so efficient that Flavius Josephus reports that there was no city anywhere in the world into which Jewish observances of the Jewish religion had not penetrated (see *Against Apion* 2:40). He goes so far as to remark that in Damascus "almost all the women were converted to the Jewish religion" (see *The Jewish War* 2. 20. 2). Among notable converts Josephus mentions Queen Helena and her son King Izates of Adiabene (see *Antiquities of the Jews* 20. 2. 1–4) and Fulvia, the wife of a Roman senator (see *Antiquities of the Jews* 18. 81–84). Rabbinic literature records many converts in Babylonia (see *Qidushhin* 73a) and refers to great scholars such as R. Aqiva, R. Meir, and even Aquila (Onkelos) the author of the *Targum on the Pentateuch* as famous proselytes (Werblowsky & Wigoder 1997:550). Jewish

mission was not confined, however, to the Hellenistic world and its immediate geographical environment; rather, it extended itself as far as Asia and Africa.⁷ Martin Cohen's description of the success of the Jewish mission makes that point clearly: "By the end of the first century C.E. the Pharisees had converted significant numbers of non-Jews throughout the Western world to Israel's faith. Jewish communities, including proselytes, could be found in many places from the Euphrates Valley westward throughout the Roman world. The Jews of Egypt alone numbered a million. With nearly seven million, the Jews formed ten percent of the total population of the Roman Empire. The size of the Jewish population was further augmented by 'God fearers' who were on the road to proselytization" (Cohen 1982:57).

It is not surprising, then, that the early Christians regarded from the very beginning the proclamation of the Gospel to the nations of the world as an important religious obligation. This mission was in no way a new Christian invention. In Walter Kaiser's words: "The case for evangelizing the Gentiles had not been a recently devised switch in the plan of God, but had always been the long-term commitment of the Living God who was a missionary God" (Kaiser 2000:82).

In New Testament times, in connection to the Pharisaic movement, the Jewish character of that mission became even more obvious. As Eugene Fisher points out, the very notion of a "mandate for a mission to the Gentiles" was indeed "another debt of the early Church to Pharisaic Judaism, which was actively reaching out, with a good deal of success" (Fisher 1982:14). The first Christian missionaries, the twelve apostles, the 70 disciples, Paul, Barnabas, and all the others, were all Jewish, and as such they received and carried the mission to the Gentiles.

Whether in ancient Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, or in New Testament times, Jews were indeed the first missionaries to the world. It is from the Jews first that the Gentiles heard about the real God and about Jesus. The lesson from this historical observation should be in the least a sense of debt and gratitude. This recognition of debt was precisely Paul's argument to call the Gentiles to support the Jews materially: "They are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things" (Rom. 15:27). Would it not be logical then, since mission came first from the Jews, to expect that mission should consequently first return to its originator, the Jews?

A Theological Reason: The Jews the First Recipients of the Truth

The Jews were not merely those who first spoke to the world about the divine truth. They were the first to testify to the Truth, simply because they were the first

who heard about it. The theological reason is in fact the reason for the historical reason. This basic premise was first enunciated by Jesus himself, when he spoke to the Gentile woman: "Salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22, NIV). Jesus did not mean here that the Jews were the agents of salvation, those who produced the salvation of the world. The context of their conversation, which was about true worship (John 4:19–24), suggests that Jesus referred to the Jews as witnesses of God: "We worship what we do know," while "You [Gentiles] worship what you do not know" (John 4:22). The statement "salvation is from the Jews" is an affirmation of the special historic function and mission of the Jews as the first recipients and hence witnesses of God's salvation in the world—first through their own history from the event of the Exodus to the prophets, and second through the incarnation of God in the flesh of the Messiah, Jesus the Jew. This theological basis for the Jew as the first witness is again repeated by Peter. "To you, first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him" (Acts 3:26). The reason for that preeminence of the Jews is given in the previous verse and concerns their historical testimony of the divine truth as Jews: "You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers" (Acts 3: 25). But it is the Apostle Paul who most emphatically developed this theology of Israel as the prime witness: "Israelites to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen" (Rom. 9:4, 5).

We could paraphrase what the apostle says in the following terms: the Israelites, whom Paul calls "my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3), have been the physical recipients and witnesses of God's revelation through the prophetic word, the Holy Scriptures (Old and New Testaments), through the Torah, through the sanctuary service, and through the fulfilment of God's promises and blessings; furthermore, they had the firsthand experience of God's salvation in their own history and through the incarnation of the Messiah.

Now, for some Christian theologians this concrete evidence of the Jews as the Chosen people, and the primary recipients of God's visitation on earth, "shows the impossibility of a Christian mission to the Jews" (Rendtorff 1982:24).⁸ In fact the New Testament Scriptures testify that it is quite the contrary. From that observation, the early Christians inferred, indeed, the missiological lesson that the Jews should be the first to hear the Gospel.⁹ Because "salvation comes from the Jews," salvation should therefore go first to the Jews: "for the Jew first" (Rom. 1:16). Jesus had already pointed to this principle in his response to the Hellenic woman: "Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw

it to the little dogs” (Mark 7:27). The priority of the Jews over the Gentiles in the Christian mission was in fact implicitly affirmed in Jesus’ commission to the twelve, in such exclusive terms that it may even suggest that for some time the Christian mission was aimed only at the Jews:¹⁰ “Do not visit pagan territory and do not enter a Samaritan town. Go instead after the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:6; cf. Matt. 15:24). Indeed, this is what they did. They went first to the Jews. After the crucifixion and the first Christian Pentecost, the first Christian missionaries addressed their message to their fellow Jews (Acts 2:14, 22, 29, 36, 47). Even after the baptism of Cornelius, Stephen traveled everywhere “preaching the word to no one but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). While the universal significance of the Good News of the Kingdom for all humanity is clear in the New Testament (see 1 Tim. 2:4, 5; cf. Heb. 8:6; Matt. 20:28; Gal. 1:4), the priority of the Jews in that proclamation was not only given as a principle, but also applied in the practical exercise of this mission. And even for Paul, “the apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13), the conversion of the Jews, which he identifies as “the natural branches” of the olive tree (Rom. 11:24), remained a matter of greater importance (Rom. 9:2; 10:1).

Now, if for the early Christians, including the New Testament apostles, the recognition (even after the crucifixion of Jesus) of the theological preeminence of the Jews, as the first witnesses of God and His Torah, led to the necessity of the priority of the mission to the Jews, why should it be otherwise today?¹¹

An Ethical Reason: The Jews the First Victims of Christianity

There is a consensus among the historians of anti-Semitism that the Christian hatred toward the Jews began in the fourth century (see Simon 1986:263; cf. Frend 1984:640), especially in the wake of the Christian rejection of the Torah and, more precisely, the abandonment of the “Jewish” seventh-day Sabbath (see Wilson 1989:80; cf. Arad 2001). On the other hand, it is interesting that the history of the mission to the Jews reflects this turning point in the history of Jewish-Christian relations. It is significant, indeed, that while the mission to the Jews was very successful in the beginning, resulting in hundreds of thousands of Jewish “conversions,” from the fourth century on this movement of conversions stopped suddenly, dramatically, and definitively (see Stark 1996:49; cf. Doukhan 2002a:28–32). Although the scope of this paper does not allow a detailed exposition of that history, it is enough to note at least the connection between the two events and infer from it an important lesson regarding to the mission to the Jews. The failure of the

mission to the Jews was directly related to the emerging Christian anti-Semitism and the Christian rejection of the Torah and the Sabbath. In the process of time, the mission to the Jews became even more difficult as the Church's rejection of its Jewish heritage gave birth to the idea that the Church had now replaced Israel of old and that the old covenant of ancient Israel had now been replaced by the new covenant.¹² Thus, the Hebrew Scriptures, the *Tanakh*, now dismissed as the obsolete and irrelevant Old Testament, was replaced by the Christian New Testament; the seventh-day Sabbath celebrating God's gift of physical creation, of nature, and of the flesh was replaced by the Christian Sunday, celebrating spiritual salvation and the deliverance from that creation. The emphasis on Torah, which was given to Israel as a way of life and was associated with the values of justice and righteousness, was replaced by the emphasis on grace, which was associated with the values of love and faith.

Some Christians went even so far as to proclaim that the God of the Old Testament, *YHWH*, the carnal God of the Jews, had now been replaced by Jesus, the spiritual God of the Christians.¹³ It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the theological issues involved in those theories, but rather to discuss the missiological implications of that movement. It is indeed clear that replacement theology or supercessionism made the mission to the Jews more difficult, because the Church now situated itself not just in contrast or in opposition to Israel but in its place. Before the Jews were simply not allowed to think as Jews; only their theology was threatened. Now, they were not allowed to exist as Jews; their physical existence was threatened. In the beginning, the Jewish negative response to the Christian mission was limited to theological arguments: the Jews were refusing to hear the Christian message, for this would have required them to abandon the fundamental values and truths given by God, namely the Torah and the Sabbath, and to join another religion that promoted values and truths in conflict to their revelation. Now, confronted with replacement theology, their conversion would mean joining the ranks of the enemy, the very one who was claiming their own seat. Unfortunately, the history did not stop there.¹⁴ What was in the first five centuries essentially limited to a mere rhetorical exercise from the pulpit and the apologetic writings degenerated during the Middle Ages into violence and persecution and all kinds of discriminatory measures—and all this was accompanied and fueled by the teaching of contempt with its myths of the malicious Jew associated with money and the Devil. Then the racist theories of the nineteenth century gave scientific credit to the traditional Christian idea of the inferiority, malevolence, and singularity of the Jew.¹⁵ It is not exaggerating to say that Christianity had paved the way to the twentieth century event of the Holocaust.¹⁶

Now, the setting of the Christian mission to the Jews against this painful and shameful history is an awful irony. Indeed 2000 years of Christian anti-Semitism and horrible crimes, paired with the Christian rejection of the “inspired and revealed” truths of the Torah and the Sabbath, have prevented the Jews from taking seriously the Christian testimony, making Paul’s frustrated question right to the point: “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom. 10:14 NKJV).

It is this acute awareness of this Christian iniquity that has led many Christian theologians and Church leaders to come to the conclusion that the mission to the Jews should be understood in fundamentally different terms than any other mission. Speaking of the Church’s relation and mission to the Jews in comparison to other religions in general, Owen C. Thomas comments: “Its relation [the Church] to Judaism was so unique that it can hardly be taken as a type of its relation to any other religion Moreover, the terrible and shameful history of Christian treatment of the Jews has rendered it useless as a model . . . in the moral sense” (Thomas 1969:12 ff.). A resolution about the Christian mission to the Jews passed by the Synod of the Protestant Church of the Rhineland is even clearer: “The church may not express its witness toward the Jewish people as it does its mission to the peoples of the world” (Croner 1985:208).

A growing number of Christian theologians are beginning to recognize the uniqueness of the Christian mission to the Jews precisely because of their specific testimony to what has been rejected by the Church, namely the Torah.¹⁷ It is argued that the conversion of the Jews into traditional Christianity should be approached differently, otherwise it would deprive the world of this witness, and even affect the quality of the mission of the Church. Thus Eugene Fisher questions even the appropriateness of the mission to the Jews on this basis: “The Church’s essential mission in and to the world would be crippled without a living Jewish witness to the truth of God’s Torah” (Fisher 1982:26). Other Christian theologians are simply reluctant in engaging in the mission to the Jews because of the Christian guilt in the Jewish-Christian history, especially in the wake of post-Holocaust reflection. The position is clearly stated by Gregory Baum: “After Auschwitz the Christian Churches no longer wish to convert the Jews After Auschwitz and the participation of the nations, it is the Christian world that is in need of conversion” (Baum 1977:113).

Baum is right in his assessment; after Auschwitz, the Church, more than ever needs to repent, that is, not only to review her relations to the Jewish people, and her behavior toward them, but also to revisit her ways of thinking insofar as they

potentially lead to the anti-Semitic iniquity. But does that mean that the Church has to abandon her mission to share the Gospel with the Jews, those who were the first ones to hear that Gospel and the first ones for whom the Gospel was originally designed? Ironically, this response to Christian guilt leads to the same effect as 2,000 years of Christian anti-Semitism, the very cause for the Christian guilt, as once again it keeps the Jews outside of the blessing of the Gospel. Would it not be more logical, on the contrary, that in order to repair the damage and expiate for that iniquity that kept the Jews from hearing the Gospel, the Church should make that testimony a priority of the Church's mission?

A Prophetic Reason: The Jews the Only Specific Mission of Prophecy

Biblical prophecy brings a very bold vision on the horizons of time. Several texts report the universalistic vision of peoples coming out of all nations of the world and responding to God's appeal at the end of time. Prophet Micah describes all the nations flowing to the mountain of the Lord (Mic. 4:1-5; Isa. 25:6). Isaiah 11 embraces the whole earth, from Egypt, the South, to Assyria, the North: "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord" (Isa. 11:9), and "the Gentiles shall seek Him" (Isa. 11:10). Isaiah 25, like Micah 4, has "all people" (Isa. 25:6), "all nations" (Isa. 25:7) come to worship the Lord and be comforted by Him (Isa. 25:8). The same vision is given in Jeremiah of the nations who gather to worship the Lord (Jer. 3:17) and "all the nations of the earth who shall hear all the good" (Jer. 33:9). Zechariah 2:11 speaks of the day when "many nations shall be joined to the Lord . . . and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst" (cf. Zech. 8:20-23). Later the prophet envisages a cosmic Feast of Tabernacles when "everyone who is left of all the nations" will come "to worship the King, the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 14:16).

It is on the basis of this hope that Paul could dream of the universal salvation of the world¹⁸ and speak of "all Israel," which would include all the saved ones, from the Jewish people to the nations of the world (Rom. 11:24, 25; see Doukhan 2004a:71). It is the same universalistic hope that is heard in the book of Revelation, where the eschatological vision of salvation is preceded by the call of the angel "to every nation, tribe, tongue and people" (Rev. 14:6).

In addition to that eschatological prophecy, which embraces all the nations, the Bible has a special regard for the Jewish people. Whether this mission is included or not in the inclusive apocalyptic vision is not clear. Yet, what is clear is that this is the only specific mission that receives the particular focus of biblical prophecy.

The key text that testifies to that prophetic voice is noted by the prophet Hosea: “For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice . . . or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days” (Hos. 3:4, 5 NKJV).

A number of clues from within the text suggest that it refers to the eschatological future:

1. This prophecy follows chronologically another previous prophecy (Hos. 2:14–25) that has been applied to the first coming of Jesus by the New Testament (Rom. 9:24–26; 1 Pet. 2:10; see Doukhan 2004a:100–101).
2. The theme of “David their king” implies a messianic future when Israel will be ruled by David, the ideal king of Israel. Note that the same theme is used in the parallel text of Ezek. 37:22, 24, ending with the eschatological vision of the everlasting kingdom: “My servant David shall be their prince forever” (Ezek. 37:25), and “a covenant of peace . . . an everlasting covenant” when [God’s] tabernacle also shall be with them (Ezek. 37:26, 27; cf. Rev. 21:3), and “[God’s] sanctuary in their midst forevermore” (Ezek. 37:26 NKJV).
3. The phrase “in the latter days” (*be’acharit ha-yyamim*) is technical terminology that normally applies to the end of time (see Isa. 2:2, 3; Gen. 49:1; Dan. 10:14), “i.e., the eschatological age of the Messiah, when Israel would be expected to return wholeheartedly to Yahweh and his Messiah” (see Pfandl 1992:160–162).

This would mean, then, that the end of time should be marked by a positive response among the Jews to the Messiah Jesus, David their king. It is noteworthy that this prophetic interpretation of Hosea 3:4, 5, has been endorsed by Ellen White, who, speaking of the Jews at the end of time, comments:

Until the end of time, they were to be “wanderers among the nations.” But through Hosea was given a prophecy that set before them the privilege of having a part in the final restoration that is to be made to the people of God at the close of earth’s history, when Christ shall appear as King of kings and Lord of lords In symbolic language Hosea set before the ten tribes God’s plan of restoring to every penitent soul who would unite with His church on earth, the blessings granted Israel in the days of their loyalty to Him in the Promised Land In the last days of this earth’s history, God’s covenant with His commandment-keeping people is to be renewed (White 1943:298, 299).

In other passages Ellen White repeats the same eschatological prophecy and insists on the success of the mission to the Jews: “There will be many converted

from among the Jews, and these converts will aid in preparing the day of the Lord A nation shall be born in a day There are among the Jews many who will be converted, and through whom we shall see the salvation of God go forth as a lamp that burneth Many of the Jewish people will by faith receive Christ as their redeemer” (White 1970:579).

If we follow Paul’s reasoning, this special mission may even have an impact on the mission to the Gentiles: “Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches to the Gentiles, how much more their fullness” (Rom. 11:12). “For if their being cast away is reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead” (Rom. 11:15). Paul’s point is clear, as James Dunn explains in his commentary: “Israel’s rejection brought benefit to the rest of humankind; Israel’s acceptance will bring still more benefit to humankind Israel’s future conversion does not mean that the benefits which have accrued to the Gentiles will be withdrawn; on the contrary, Gentiles will enjoy still greater benefits along with Israel” (Dunn 1988:668).

It is interesting that Ellen White resonates with Paul and recognizes also that the mission to the Jews will have a great repercussion on the mission to the Gentiles: “These converts will aid in preparing the way of the Lord, and making straight in the desert a highway for our God. Converted Jews are to have an important part to act in the great preparations to be made in the future to receive Christ, our Prince. A nation shall be born in a day. How? By men whom God has appointed being converted to the truth” (White 1970:579). “There are Jews everywhere There are among them many who will come to the light, and will proclaim the immutability of the law of God with wonderful power” (White 1970:578).

Indeed there is no other specific group of people on which prophecy has granted such a particular consideration. The mission to the Jews is indeed the only specific mission that has ever been mentioned in prophecy.

Is it not intriguing, then, that with all these prophetic warnings and all these recommendations from Ellen White, most Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, have neglected or even rejected the mission to the Jews? At the least, is it not troubling that, in spite of the fact that the mission to the Jews was recorded as the only specific mission of prophecy, with even an impact on all the other missions, the mission to the Jews has remained a small part of the “global mission” strategy, lost among all the other missions?

Practical Applications

The most fundamental practical application of this particular accent on the priority and singularity of the mission to the Jews will be difficult, yet necessary: it is the recognition of the unique place and even the priority of that mission in regard to other missions. Bearing in mind this principle, we should, now, explore the tracks suggested through the lessons understood in the four previous sections:

Historical Lesson

The historical lesson, which reminds us that the Jews were the first witnesses of God and that Christianity was originally Jewish, suggests that the mission to the Jews should not attempt to turn the Jews into Gentiles in order to make them Christians. The Jews should be able to receive the Gospel as Jews, without having to deny their Jewish identity. It is not necessary for the Jews to leave their cultural, religious, and sociological milieu to adopt values and truths that are a natural part of their Jewish heritage. This is why it is recommended that, as far as possible, this testimony be carried by authentic Jews—that is, Jews who grew up as Jews and really experienced anti-Semitism and the Jewish life, and not comedians who would play the role of Jews and project an immediate message of fakeness and deception. If this Jewish (-Christian) messenger is not available, then the other Christian messenger should reach out to the Jew with respect and honesty, remaining him/herself without trying to turn the Jew into someone like him/herself.

Another implication from the historical fact that the early Christians were first recruited from within the Jewish community concerns the method that was used by the Jewish Christians to convince their Jewish brothers and sisters. The discussion was taking place within the same Jewish family of faith, with the same history and tradition and the same reference to the Hebrew Scriptures (later called Old Testament by the Christians). It is not surprising then that the main argument that was used by these early witnesses to the Messiah Jesus to other Jews was taken from the biblical proof of the Messianic prophecies (see Rydelnik 2008:261–291; cf. Doukhan forthcoming). The practical application from this usage of the Messianic prophecies is then very simple and fundamental: more than any other mission, the mission to the Jews makes the duty of learning absolutely imperative,¹⁹ not only because learning is regarded with high value by the Jews, whether they are secular or religious, but also because of the object of this learning: the Scriptures. It is highly recommended that this biblical evidence be carefully studied and examined along

with the Jewish counter-argument (see, for instance, Rabbi Singer 2001) and with some knowledge of Jewish tradition.²⁰

Theological Lesson

The theological lesson reminds us that the Jews were the first recipients of God's revelation and remain the actual witnesses of the Torah; the application of this understanding will then be to conduct the mission to the Jews with the acute awareness and positive appreciation of this debt. Anyone engaged in witnessing to the Jews should do it with a disposition to learn from the Jews, even on matters related to their own Christian truth. Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, have a lot to learn from the Jews on important and vital topics pertaining to God's revelation.²¹ This attitude of humility and sincere desire to learn from the Jews should not be confused with the missionary strategies of contextualization. The purpose of contextualization is to learn other cultures in order to make other people understand the Christian message, and thus adapt their language accordingly. As far as the mission to the Jews is concerned, this learning from the Jews is not just a smart means of communication to serve the purpose of conversion, although this knowledge may be helpful for the mission; it is also valuable knowledge for the benefit of the Christian. On the other hand, the application of contextualization in the creation of "messianic synagogues" should be conducted with wisdom and lucidity, and with a strong and clear affirmation of theological identity to avoid the risks of deceitfulness or confusion.²² This type of congregation may seem deceitful²³ to the Jews if it presents itself as a Jewish congregation. Indeed the people present themselves as Jewish, wearing *kippas* and *tallith*, blowing *shofar* and behaving as if they were Jewish, when in fact only a few of them, and sometimes none of them, are Jewish. There is here an ethical issue to be considered. These practices may also become deceitful to the bearers of the mission, who deceive themselves and others in the church by making people believe through the multiplication of Jewish-Christian congregations that the mission is successful, when in fact these congregations are in reality often composed of Adventist Christians who are already church members, thus representing a mere shift of church members from one congregation to another. Furthermore, that these worship services may also end up being a pale caricature of the Jewish original, thus becoming repulsive to the Jews whose synagogues perform better and more authentically. These congregations may even become theologically confusing, as their theology is often unclear, being more concerned with keeping the traditional Jewish or messianic forms of

worship than with expressing the serious contents of the new truth (see Doukhan 2009). The proponents of that mission should courageously and wisely confront these real problems and explore new creative tracks without falling into these traps.

Thus, because of their close theological and liturgical connection with Jewish and messianic traditions, Jewish-Adventists in particular who are engaged in the mission to the Jews should, perhaps more than for any other mission, maintain a clear theological and prophetic awareness. Otherwise they will run the risk of losing the very reason for their mission and ultimately join the messianic movement or convert to Judaism.

Ethical Lesson

The ethical lesson comes from the voice of history to teach us that the failure of the Christian mission to the Jews is essentially due to the Church's iniquity: (1) the Church's anti-Judaism expressed through her rejection of the law of God and the Sabbath; and (2) the Church's anti-Semitism expressed through the teaching of contempt, climaxing in the Holocaust. Learning from this observation, the mission to the Jews should not only be accompanied by sincere love toward the Jewish friend, but also should engage in fighting any form of anti-Semitism in the Church, whether of a religious and theological nature, or of a racist and psychological nature, or even of a political nature concerning, for instance, the State of Israel. Another implication from the Jewish-Christian failure should be to work at recovering the old values and truths that have been lost or rejected in Christianity and are still valid as God's revelation—namely the law of God and the truth and life of the Sabbath. In fact this reconciliation, which is the object of Malachi's prophecy and is implied in the Apocalyptic vision of the two witnesses (see Doukhan 2002b:94–100), could play an important role in the mission to the Jews, and could even have an unexpected impact on the mission to the nations and the other Christians. It is my personal and tested experience that the presentation of the “Jewish-Christian Drama,” showing that the rejection of the Torah and the Sabbath by the Christians has led to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, has been fruitful in bringing some Jews to reconsider the Jewish value of the Gospel while helping some Christians to reconsider their relationship to the Torah and the Sabbath.²⁴ This oblique method of using the historical and ethical argument of the Jewish-Christian separation to deliver the Seventh-day Adventist message will certainly not hurt the Jews while it will loosen the legalistic character that generally turns off the other Christians. By gaining the Jews, we will in the same process win the Christians, and by repair-

ing the breach we will play “a part in the final restoration that is to be made to the people of God at the close of earth’s history” (White 1943:298).

Prophetic Lesson

The prophetic lesson conveys an unusual argument in the context of a rational discourse. The first application of this supernatural reference concerns our good will and our responsibility in this work, and it is an express invitation to engage in this mission even if we think that it is worthless or even if we doubt its efficiency. Interestingly, Paul provides us with a rationale to convince the skeptical or to encourage the negligent. From the fact that the Jews are “the natural branches,” Paul concludes that their reinsertion into the original olive tree will be all the more dramatic and all the more expected, for “how much more will these . . . be grafted into their own olive tree?” (Rom. 11:24). The prospect of success for this mission is therefore an incentive to approach it with a special sense of urgency and interest. This is actually the view that Ellen White draws from her reading of Romans 11: “The work for the Jews as outlined in the eleventh chapter of Romans, is a work that is to be treated with special wisdom” (White 1958b:1079). “Let there be special efforts made for the enlightenment of the Jews” (White 1981:138). “In the closing proclamation of the gospel . . . God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth” (White 1911:137, 138). Yet if we still question the validity, the priority, and even the reasonableness of that adventure, the fact that this particular mission is the specific object of prophetic attention suggests also that this event will take place regardless of our rational or emotional resistance. This mission is not just a matter of technical or financial preparation. It is essentially on our part a matter of faith; we have the inspired assurance from above that “the predictions of prophecy will be fulfilled” (White 1946:579).

Conclusion

Throughout this essay we have collected specific reasons pertaining to history, theology, ethics, and prophecy showing why the mission to the Jews should be taken as a priority for Christians in general. From these lessons we have, then, been able to infer practical applications on how the mission to the Jews should be conducted as a priority. All these lessons and applications, however, were justified from the perspective of the Jewish reality. The mission to the Jews should be viewed

and implemented as a priority because of who the Jews are: the first missionaries to the world; the first recipient of God's revelation; the first victims of the Christians; and the only specific concern of eschatological prophecy. Yet, for Seventh-day Adventists there is a supplementary reason for that priority, which is found this time not in the Jewish reality but instead in the Seventh-day Adventist reality, because of who the Seventh-day Adventists are. Indeed the Seventh-day Adventist movement testifies among the other Christians to a special and even unique connection to the Jews:

1. The Seventh-day Adventist faith situates itself not only historically in connection to the Reform movement but also wishes to pursue further in the same direction toward repentance and return to the original sources of Christianity. By doing that Seventh-day Adventists identify themselves as a movement of going out from the historical and traditional Church, an entity that has been perceived and denounced as Babylon (see *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* 1988:163–168). Although Seventh-day Adventism originates within the Christian cradle and has inherited many of the Christian-Gentile cultural reflexes, it aims at discovering the original truth, which was before the Church became a powerful political institution and before she separated from her Jewish roots. Interestingly, in the process of that movement of disconnection and going out from the traditional and historical Church, the Seventh-day Adventist movement transcends the constraints and the iniquities associated with the Christian identification and thus draws nearer to the Jews.

2. Seventh-day Adventists have indeed discovered and embraced truths and values that were absent in traditional Christianity but were an inherent part of the Jewish heritage and thinking: (a) the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (beginning and ending at sunset like the Jews), while other Christians keep Sunday as the day of the Lord; (b) the yes to Creation and the emphasis on physical health and the unity of the human person, while other Christians emphasize salvation as a deliverance from the evil flesh and matter; (c) the adoption of the same dietary laws as the Jews and the choice to eat Kosher, while other Christians have no religious restrictions whatsoever when it comes to food; (d) the reverence for the Hebrew Scriptures and the respect for the law of God revealed at Sinai, while other Christians have rejected the law of Sinai and dismissed the Old Testament or lowered it at the expense of or in opposition to the New Testament; (e) the reference to the Jewish Day of Atonement (*Kippur*) as a part of their theological reflection on the cosmic redemption of humankind.

All these characteristic features that distinguish the Seventh-day Adventists

within Christianity are instead shared with the Jews. What separates them from the traditional Christian community is what relates them to the Jewish community.

3. Thus the Seventh-day Adventist mission to continue the work of the Reformation to bring to the Christians what they had missed for centuries is associated with a renewed connection to the Jewish people. Seventh-day Adventists occupy, therefore, a unique position in the mission to the world. Being related to both the Christians and the Jews, the Seventh-day Adventist movement is well placed to witness to both the Jews and the Christians and in the same process may be able to repair the breach and work on the reconciliation between the two witnessing voices. It is interesting and certainly significant that this extraordinary vision of the great shalom is consistent with the very mission entrusted to the Elijah of the last days, an eschatological figure with whom the Seventh-day Adventists have identified themselves (see White 1958a:1184): “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers” (Mal. 4:5, 6).

Beyond the prophet’s call for the ultimate reconciliation between generations, the fathers and the children, the eschatological vision may well indeed also hint at the reconciliation between the Jews (the fathers or the first witnesses of God’s Word) and the Christians (the children or their spiritual heirs), the two historical witnesses of God who have been so long separated and in conflict with each other. This reconciliation of the two testimonies would be given, then, as the one that will happen “before the coming of the day of the Lord,” just as it was to be for the eschatological mission to the Jews. The hope of Christ’s advent so fundamental for Seventh-day Adventists is then mysteriously associated to the mission to the Jews. Wouldn’t this be enough to make the mission to the Jews a Seventh-day Adventist priority?

Notes

¹In his “Introduction” to the collective *To the Jew First*, Mitch Glaser makes the same observation for the Church at large when he says, “Jewish evangelism has become the ‘great omission’ of the Great Commission” (Bock & Glaser 2008:16).

²The word “mission” comes from the Latin *missio*, meaning “act of being sent,” from the verb *mittere*, meaning “to send.” Although the verb “to send” and the idea of “mission” have an OT and NT history (see Kaiser [2000:11, 12]; cf. Larkin & Williams, eds. [1998]) in referring to the commission of God’s people to the world, the term “mission” was used for

the first time in the plural form “missions” by the Jesuits in the sixteenth century. The singular form was adopted in 1950 on the occasion of the International Missionary Council.

³On the connections between the Seventh-day Adventist faith and the Jewish faith, see Doukhan, ed. (2004b).

⁴The Hebrew word *nefesh* (“souls, people”) that is used to designate the people Abram acquired in Haran cannot refer to children, since Sarah was still barren then, or to slaves, since the Hebrew uses another word (*‘bd*). This word should therefore refer to proselytes (see Cassuto [1961, 1964:320]; cf. Sifrei on Deut. 6:5).

⁵On Moses as a missionary model, see Rowley (1955).

⁶The important presence of proselytes around the synagogues and Jewish communities is also attested in Acts 2:11; 6:5; 13:43.

⁷See, for instance, the Bene Israel in India and the Falashas in Ethiopia who testify to the early Jewish mission in those continents and trace themselves as far as to the times of Solomon’s trade with their countries (see *Encyclopedia Judaica* [1971:Vol. 6, 1146 and Vol. 4, 494]).

⁸Although this view has become increasingly popular in a post-Holocaust reflection, it is, of course, not shared by all Protestants or Catholics (see Baumann [1977:17–39]; cf. the 1967 report of the World Council of Churches, the so-called “Bristol Paper” quoted in Croner & Klenicki, eds. [1979:81]).

⁹Contra a number of theologians who infer from the theological preeminence of the Jews the idea that they do not need to receive the universal message of the Gospel, which was only designed for the Gentiles, see especially Stendahl (1981:7–9).

¹⁰For the controversial character of the missions to the Gentiles, even after the resurrection of Jesus, see Acts 8:14, 15; 11:1–18.

¹¹The pertinence of this question holds even more significantly for the Christians, who in the wake of the Reform movements returned to the validity of the testimony of Scriptures, and hence reconsidered their theological obligation to the Jewish people. On this, see Newman (1925).

¹²On the history and the meaning of “replacement theology,” see Doukhan (2002a:55–70); cf. Doukhan (2004a:11–42).

¹³See especially Marcion’s Antithesis. On the influence of Marcionism on Christian theology, see Hasel (1972:120, 121); cf. Buber (1996:154, 155).

¹⁴On the history of anti-Semitism, see Poliakov (1965–1986); cf. Doukhan (2004a:91–96).

¹⁵On the origins of racial anti-Semitism, see Mosse (1985).

¹⁶On the connection between the Holocaust and Christian anti-Semitism, see Littel (1986:2, 30); cf. Saperstein (1989:38–42) and Doukhan (2004a:50–53).

¹⁷Cf. Pope Innocent III’s similar argument to the Count of Nevers that the Jews “ought not to be slain, lest the Christian people forget divine Law” (Synan 1965:226).

¹⁸On the OT basis for Paul’s universalistic mission, see Kaiser (2000:75–82).

¹⁹This recommendation is all the more necessary because those who have been at-

tracted by this ministry have often been recruited from among the mystics or they are extremists or of the Evangelical type who, under the pretext of relying on the Holy Spirit, have generally been anti-academic and anti-intellectual and therefore reluctant to engage in the discipline of learning.

²⁰See Doukhan (forthcoming). Cf. the Bible correspondence course *Shema Israel* written by Doukhan (2003) and operated by the Voice of Prophecy. Note that this requirement holds not only in connection to the religious Jew, but also to the secular Jew. For paradoxically, when the secular Jew is confronted with the truth of the Gospel, his/her first reaction is to come back to his/her Jewish roots to check the validity of the Christian argument, and in the process of their quest, often consult the rabbinic authorities.

²¹On what Christians can learn from the Jews, see Wilson (1989) and Doukhan (2002a:90–94); cf. DeRidder (1982:109–112).

²²For a sample of liturgies for these worship services, see Doukhan (2007).

²³On the deceitfulness and controversial character of these missionary strategies, see Polish (1982:162, 163).

²⁴See my public presentations in 1979 and 1993 in France (Arles, Nice, Marseilles, Annecy, Angers, and Paris) and Switzerland (Geneva) with my series on “Israel or the Challenge of God,” and 1997 in Australia (Melbourne) with my series on “The Jewish-Christian Drama” (unfortunately without follow-up on the ground). Cf. the same approach in Doukhan (1981 [French ed. (1977)]); (2002a); and the two journals *Shabbat Shalom* and *L’Olivier*, edited by Jacques Doukhan (unfortunately poorly promoted).

Chapter 22

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HENRI MONNIER AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ADVENTIST CHURCH IN RWANDA

Russell L. Staples

A partial account of the establishment and rapid growth of the Adventist Church in Rwanda is told by concentrating on the life and work of Henri Monnier, who became its most influential leader. It is an inspiring real-life story of total missionary commitment, of culture and language learning, of difficulties overcome, of relationships with other missionary groups, of strong leadership, and also of human tragedy.

God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform, and the growth of the Adventist church in the small Central Africa country of Rwanda has been one of the most remarkable developments in the history of Adventist missions. There are few places on earth where the enthusiasm of the laymen for spreading the gospel overflowed all bounds and growth was so rapid; in fact, concern over the care of the new converts was so great that responsible church administrators advised the local leaders to slow down the movement. It seemed as if a flood tide had been loosed and everybody wanted to become a Christian, and yet there was nothing shallow or superficial about the movement. This is precisely what took place in Rwanda in the '30s and early '40s. David Barrett reports:

Adventists came in 1919 although they were unable to establish themselves prior to 1921. Nevertheless progress was rapid thereafter, and the Adventist community is now second in size only to the Catholic Church.

Newer missions have been established . . . but all remain small. Except for Adventists who are found in all parts of the country, Protestantism is characterized by a regional orientation . . . Church statistics 1970: Catholic 1,684,095, Adventist 200,000, Anglican 161,899. Population 3,679,000 (Barrett 1982:589, 590).

The major features of the establishment and growth of the Adventist Church in Rwanda are described here by relating the remarkable life story of Henri Monnier, who entered Rwanda with D. E. Delhove in 1919. Justification for this approach is found in the fact that by the mid '30s Adventists were often called *Abanyere*, meaning "the people of Munyeri"—the Kinyarwanda pronunciation of Monnier. In addition, Monnier was given the name *Rukandirangabo* meaning "the mighty one—the shield bearer." However, this is certainly not meant to imply that Monnier worked alone. Delhove was the effective leader of the Adventist missionary venture into Rwanda, and in due course a growing number of very dedicated missionaries joined them.

Henri Monnier, 1896-1944, was born in Pieterlen (Berne, Switzerland) to parents who had become Adventists in 1890. According to an older brother, Vital, his father Henry Monnier was "an elder in the church and had a remarkable gift of speech: a trait that Henri inherited" (Monnier 1981). The family moved to Chaux-de-Fonds a few years after Henri was born, and he attended the small Adventist school at Tramelan. His father specialized in manufacturing luminous watch and clock dials. Henri went to England in 1915 to escape the draft, sold watches, established a dial manufacturing business, and married an English lady, Winifred Maddams, who had formerly been an officer in the Salvation Army. According to Vital, Henri did not attend Stanborough Missionary College and had no more than eight years of education. He was an enthusiastic Adventist; after he met Delhove, much to the surprise of his family, he sold his prosperous business and prepared to accompany Delhove to Africa on missionary service.

David Ellie Delhove, 1882-1947, operated a shoe manufacturing business in Belgium and became an Adventist in 1906 under the ministry of Elder J. Curdy. After study at Watford College and Caterham Sanitarium in England, he was called to assist A. A. Carscallen at Kamagambo in Kenya. Leaving his wife and two little daughters behind, he left for Africa in 1913. War broke out before his family could

join him, and when conscripted for military service in the Belgian army he decided to accept a non-combatant role in Africa rather than return to Belgium. He served as an intelligence scout for the Belgian command and travelled widely in Rwanda and the Eastern Belgian Congo. He thus became well acquainted with the country of Rwanda and its peoples and with several of the Belgian authorities (Delhove 1984:5–9). He was granted a military furlough to Belgium in 1918, was reunited with his family, and then went to England where he studied pharmacy and established a relationship with the Monniers. The burden of his heart was to return to Africa as a missionary to the people he had come to love. He shared this passion with the Monniers, and they decided to accompany him to Africa.

Rwanda: the Missions Background

Before telling their story it is necessary to present a brief political and religious history of the country they were about to enter. The 1884 “Scramble for Africa” Conference at Berlin dealt with both political and missionary issues. Germany, which exercised colonial authority in neighboring Tanganyika, was accorded responsibility for Rwanda. On the missions side, recognized Mission Societies were accorded liberty to establish stations and erect buildings in the African colonies (Neill 1987:359). The Roman Catholic White Fathers, who had suffered severe losses during the civil war between the British and French religio/political factions in Uganda, entered Rwanda in 1890 with the hope of establishing a state church (Linden 1977:30–33). However, to their dismay, Dr. Kandt, the German Resident, invited the Lutheran *Bethel bei Bielefeld* Mission to commence service in the country. Under the direction of Ernst Johanssen they entered in 1907 and established several stations (Linden 1977:73–75, 88 fns. 7 & 8). Then the calamity of World War I struck. Belgian military rule was established in 1916, and the Bethel missionaries were forced to depart. This is when Delhove, a Belgian citizen, entered the service of the Belgian command and travelled widely in Rwanda (Delhove 1984:7–9).

The Delhove and Monnier families embarked for Africa in March 1919. After their sea voyage to the Belgian Congo, a long trip up the Congo River, long journeys on foot and then over lakes Tanganyika and Kivu, they landed at Kibuye in Rwanda five months after their departure from England. Rubengera, one of the former Bethel stations, was only four miles away. A section of the station was used as a military post, but Delhove, who had established positive relationships with the Belgian authorities during the war, obtained permission to occupy several of the buildings temporarily. They went there without delay—and none too soon, for

Winifred gave birth to a baby girl named Olive on August 24. A month later Clara, the third Delhove daughter, was born (Delhove 1984:14–19).

Getting Established

Delhove and Monnier paid a visit to General Brassel, the Belgian Resident, at Kigali. Inasmuch as the German missionaries had been denied permission to return, they were granted permission to occupy the Bethel stations. The Delhoves settled in at Kirinda, while the Monniers remained at Rubengera but also commenced work at Remera (Twagirayesu 1982:72f).

Then tragedy struck. Mrs. Monnier, who had not been well since the birth of Olive, passed away and was buried at Kirinda. Mama Delhove took care of little Olive, and Monnier moved to Remera. He and Delhove, anticipating permanent residence at these stations, set about restoring the buildings and gardens and establishing positive relationships with the Christians at these places. But after about 20 months they experienced a disconcerting blow. They were informed that the Bethel sites had been granted to the Presbyterian *Societe Belge de Missions Protestantes au Congo* (SBMPC) (Twagirayesu 1982:76f). However, they were granted permission to search for suitable sites and relocate. Although much hard work repairing the buildings and planting groves of timber and fruit trees was lost, they had established relationships with a number of the former Bethel converts, who then travelled with them and formed their first corps of teachers and workers. This group of workers contributed much to the establishment and development of the church. Several of them later returned to visit their families and friends at these subsequent Presbyterian stations, and led them to join the Adventist Church. A few became assistants to Monnier in his translation work.

In 1921 the Delhoves established a mission station at Gitwe, which in due course became the center of the work in Rwanda. A. A. Matter, a former Swiss missionary from Kenya, joined the group, and he accompanied Monnier to establish a station in the eastern section of the country. But they were now to suffer a third setback. After serious work establishing a station, Kabangiri, near Lake Mohasi, they were advised that the eastern section of the country had been granted to the British for the construction of the Cape to Cairo railway and they had to relocate.

After a prolonged search they found a suitable site at Rwankeri, in the northwest of the country at an elevation of about 7,600 feet in full sight of Mt. Karisimbi, and they moved there with several Rwandese co-workers. Monnier set up residence in a small pole-and-thatch hut and they commenced erecting the mission buildings.

The Matters left on furlough shortly after the transition, and Monnier remained there alone for two full years. It was doubtless during those early years of solitude, when in grief at his loss and in devotion to his task, that he identified with the local people and learned to speak Kinyarwanda as if it were his mother tongue. There was much work to do, and he took the physical duties of establishing a mission seriously. Men who were with him during those early years at Rwankeri speak with respect and awe about the way he made bricks with his own hands and stayed up at night when they were firing the kilns. They also describe the way he taught them to lay the bricks, saw and smooth wood, and make doors and windows. However, it was difficult living alone, and his health suffered. Delhove, on a visit from Gitwe, strongly advised him to leave on furlough, take a course on tropical medicine, find a wife, and not fail to return.

Monnier left for Switzerland soon after the Matters returned, and he fulfilled all of these recommendations. He married Olga Pavlov, a nurse and Bible worker who had been born in St. Petersburg, Russia, but had moved to Switzerland. He earned a diploma in tropical medicine, which qualified him to receive free medicine for the mission from the Belgian administration. He returned to Rwanda with his new bride toward the end of 1924. Witnesses describe the joy and happiness with which they were welcomed at the mission. There was a grand celebration at which they “sang and sang and danced and danced.”

The Matters had made many improvements at the mission and expanded its work. Miss Marie Matter, a pharmacist who had accompanied her brother on a self-supporting basis, had opened a small clinic. Her work was highly effective in breaking down barriers and in strengthening the bond with the local population.

The team settled down to serious business—erecting more buildings, preparing teachers, opening a school and four out-schools with five African teachers, and commencing evangelistic and translating work. In a letter to his brother Vital in November 1924 Monnier described how busy he was during the day and how his nights were spent translating the Book of Acts. He concentrated on Acts because, at Kirinda, they had found a Kinyarwanda translation of the four Gospels made by the Bethel missionaries.

The Gitwe Years

Delhove was called to establish a new mission in Burundi in mid 1925, and the Monniers were transferred to Gitwe where he directed the work until the Delhoves returned in mid-1928. Several important developments took place during these three years.

First, in 1925 H. E. Guillebaud, a Cambridge-educated linguist, arrived at Kabale with a commission from the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) to translate the Bible into Kinyarwanda. Both Delhove and Monnier had established positive relationships with the SBMPC and CMS missionaries and visited them during their travels (Twagirayesu 1982:108f). Guillebaud, upon making contact with the Protestant missionaries and informing them of his mission, invited Monnier to join the translation group because of his mastery of Kinyarwanda.

Secondly, Monnier was invited to teach the young Tutsi at the court of Musinga, the Tutsi Mwami, at Nyanza. The religio/political situation in Rwanda was extremely complex at this time. The Belgian authorities had established a system of indirect rule and placed pressure on the Mwami to execute their policies. The White Fathers, who had established many stations and converted many Hutus, but had failed to reach the Tutsi, were also placing much pressure on the Mwami to support their work. In reaction to these pressures, the Mwami turned to the Protestants. Inasmuch as Gitwe was the station closest to Nyanza, Monnier was invited to teach the essentials of Christianity to the young members at the court. Once a week, for much of his time at Gitwe, Monnier rode to Nyanza on his small motorcycle and conducted classes. At the outset only the group at the court attended, but in due course the surrounding chiefs and others joined them. The Mwami often attended, and at times more than 200 were present. Geoffrey Homes, of the CMS, reported: "We need a worker at Nyanza. Thus far only an Adventist European visits once or twice a week" (Homes 1927:22). Later the CMS missionaries were also invited to the court (Linden 1977:167,185). Monnier established a positive relationship with the Mwami and his son, Rudahigwa, who was appointed to replace his father in 1931. We do not know if there were any direct conversions of the court group—group pressure would certainly have prevented individual conversions—but many of the others who attended joined Bible study classes. We wish we knew much more about these visits and what Monnier taught. It is well known that he kept a diary, but unfortunately this has been lost.

As a result of these visits the Catholics took the Protestants seriously, and the stage was set for considerable Catholic/Protestant tension. To curb Protestant expansion, the Vicar Apostolic ordered the erection of temporary structures within the areas that had been assigned to the Protestant missions (Linden 1977:168). In due course Monnier, along with members of the other Mission Societies, contacted the Belgian administration, staunchly protesting these incursions into their designated territory. Linden refers to these incursions as the "defiantly planted flags of the religious scramble" (Linden 1977:168).

Monnier gained other benefits from his connection with the Mwami court. While living alone at Rwankeri he had learned to speak the local dialect, but was now accorded the opportunity of learning the official court Kinyarwanda. This made him of inestimable value to the translation committee. Secondly, discussion with the young men at the court gave him the opportunity of deepening his understanding of the Banyarwanda culture and religion. We can almost observe his understanding of the traditional culture and religion growing as we read the articles he wrote for church papers. Writing from Gitwe, he describes some features of the traditional religion: "With these people everything that happens is supernatural. Therefore they must do their utmost to gain the favor of the gods that cause 'bad luck.' There is a true God they believe, but they do not care much about Him, for He in His goodness will not do them much harm. There is a world of bad spirits . . . whom we may rightly call their god . . . that can harm them. It is composed of their people who have passed away . . . they must make sacrifices to appease the wrath of any bad spirit" (Monnier 1926:12).

And we catch a glimpse of his effort to create a Christian community that could provide social and moral support for new Christians in the event of their no longer being welcome in the communities of their birth: "A little church has been organized . . . Surrendering is not a light matter. It means the sacrifice of old friends, an old association must pass to make room for a new class of people, all striving together for eternal life. No more pagan fears, no more mystical worship . . . Jesus is all to them" (Monnier 1926:12). All of this equipped him to communicate the gospel in ways that engaged the local consciousness.

Bible Translation

A conference on the translation of the Scriptures, presided over by the Rev. Roome of the British and Foreign Bible Society, met at Kirinda April 11–20, 1927. The participants were H. Guillebaud of the CMS, E. Durand, J. Honore, and A. Lestrade of the SBPMC, and H. Monnier. Monnier and Mrs. Guillebaud functioned as joint secretaries. Guillebaud reported: "We began with the *orthography*...how the native sounds should be written . . . Then we discussed *transliteration* . . . words for which there is no Kinyarwanda equivalent . . . Then came a list of *religious terms* such as words for God, the Holy Spirit, angel, demon . . . So far I have simply summarized what we discussed but to give any idea of the wonderful working of God in this conference there is more to be said . . . A feeling of real mutual regard and friendship sprang up" (Guillebaud 1927:18–21).

It is wonderful that Monnier, with a limited formal education and without knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, functioned so well with this highly educated group. Bible translation subsequently became a major part of his missionary service, and I marvel that he managed to fulfill his designated translation assignments in addition to the missionary responsibilities of erecting buildings, directing the mission and its workers, teaching classes, writing course outlines, and organizing evangelistic bands.

Monnier was ordained at a conference at Gendia Mission in the Congo on January 24, 1928. In August of that year he attended the Missions Council at Marienhöhe in Germany, attended by leaders from the General Conference and missionaries from other parts of Africa, the Far East, and Persia. This was an enriching experience during which he gained a wider view of the outreach and methodology of Adventist Missions (Bartlett 1928:5, 6).

Return to Rwankeri

The Delhoves returned to Gitwe in 1928 and the Monniers moved back to Rwankeri, where he worked for the remainder of his missionary service. The Adventist church in Rwanda was granted *Personnalite Civile* by a royal proclamation on July 18, 1928. The legal representatives of the mission listed in the document were D. E. Delhove, A. A. Matter, H. Monnier, and M. Duploux (Coronet 2005:255). This was encouraging and gave them a new confidence in dealing with the authorities and other mission bodies.

The work of the church had expanded considerably by 1929. C. W. Bozarth, who had recently been appointed Superintendent of the Rwanda mission, reported on his first visit to Rwanda that there were now six missionary families, 68 local workers, and 31 village schools centered around three mission stations with an enrollment of 2,417. "At Rwankeri: 'Every Sabbath about 1,500 attend . . . services and the influence of the mission has gone out many miles in every direction . . . A spirit of evangelism is getting hold of our European and native workers. The month of July of each year is given over to evangelistic work . . . We are looking forward to a great harvest of souls'" (Bozarth 1929:20, 21).

However, there was another great setback. There was a dreadful famine in 1928 and 1929. More than 35,000 died and 70,000 emigrated to Uganda (Linden 1977:168). Apparently the Tutsi chiefs hoarded their own food supplies and denied the Hutu workers access to these resources. As tension and opposition to the chiefs rose, the Belgians encouraged the Mwami to visit the provinces and drum

up support. The Mwami crossed the Nyabarongo River in 1929 “in defiance of the tradition of the ‘Yuhi’ kings” and received a warm welcome (Linden 1977:170). Monnier went to welcome him. A few years later, after Musinga had been deposed and Rudahigwa had been elected as Mwami, Musinga also went north and, inasmuch as he had known Monnier well in earlier days, visited Rwankeri. He spent the night and ate with the mission group there, even though he was a Catholic. Both of these visits added impetus to the strong Adventist movement and boosted the standing of Rwankeri and its programs of education and evangelism in the community. Monnier described the situation at Rwankeri in 1930 as follows: “We are surrounded by Catholics In a territory where we have only two European families they have between seventy and eighty priests We have strong opposition and many obstacles. The Northern section of Ruandadid not show any advance until 1929 . . . but the spiritual life has become brighter and there is ground for sound hopes Remember this field in your prayers” (Monnier 1930:5, 6).

More on Bible Translation

At the same time Monnier was heavily involved with Mose Segatwa in Bible translation and attended several more conferences. Guillebaud reported the following regarding the ongoing translation work:

M. Monnier of the Seventh-day Adventists has been here twice for short visits and has given me a number of criticisms of the translation of the Gospels. Some of these, which affect not only the Gospels but numerous passages in the Acts and Epistles as well, seem to Samsoni and me to be entirely right and I am most anxious to adopt them. But M. Honorez does not agree at present and at his suggestion there is going to be a conference between him and Monnier and myself at Kabale . . . to discuss these matters (Guillebaud 1930:16–19).

A year later he wrote:

As regards the Gospels, I am delighted to be able to tell you that M. Monnier . . . has just bought 500 more copies and that there is good hope that their station may buy yet another 500. We were led to spend a night at his station, Rwankeri on our way from Shira to Gahini (Guillebaud 1931:6–9).

In his farewell letter written in April 1932, Guillebaud wrote:

Dear Friends of Ruanda: What great cause there is for thankfulness in the cooperation and friendly attitude of M. Honorez of the Belgian Mission and M. Monnier of the Seventh-day Adventist. As I look back to the atmosphere of opposition and suspicion that prevailed up to the time of the Kirinda conference in April 1927, and during the first days of the conference itself, I cannot but feel lost in wondering praise when I consider the last few years and the present position. M. Monnier has been and is most appreciative of the translation work and most generous in waiving his objections where we disagree in order that there should be no hindrance to the translation (Guillebaud 1932:35–38).

A. C. Stanley Smith was appointed to carry on Guillebaud's work of translating the Bible. The Old Testament, Joshua to Malachi, with the exception of the Psalms, was still to be translated and he maintained the relationship with Monnier. He spent a weekend at Rwankeri and preached a Sabbath sermon on Hebrews 11. In 1957, when the entire Kinyarwanda Bible was published, the names of both of the Adventists involved in the translation process, H. Monnier and A. L. Hands, were entered in the flyleaf along with the other translators. In addition, a commemorative plaque was presented to Mrs. Monnier, in recognition of the outstanding contributions of her husband, by W. J. Bradnock, Secretary for Translations, of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Revival and Growth

From this time forward, employing a three-phase strategy—health care, education, and community evangelism—the church began to grow rapidly. As education came to be more appreciated the school system expanded, and these became centers of evangelism. Sheets of handwritten hymns were shared, and the children learned to sing gospel hymns enthusiastically. Sabbath was opened and closed and church services were conducted at the schools by the teachers.

Monnier produced a series of sermon notes and a baptismal manual the teachers could follow. This was also the time of the East African Revival and, as there was a general turning toward Christianity, Adventists maximized the opportunity. Preachers and teachers and groups of enthusiastic laypeople were organized into groups and went out to assigned areas for a month or longer and engaged the community in inspiring meetings and Bible study. Monnier was active in organizing

and directing these groups. These revival meetings led to a wide expansion of the church that, while more rapid in the Rwankeri area, also took place around Gitwe and in Rwanda generally. Hutu and Tutsi were united in enthusiastic response to the gospel and to an underlying feeling that the Adventists were teaching and practicing the true gospel. The success and enthusiasm of these revival meetings evoked considerable, and sometimes vigorous, opposition by Catholic clergy and chiefs. Bozarth reported:

All of the chiefs if they wish to remain chiefs must become Roman Catholics. One of the chiefs . . . had called for a school. Then when the school was opened . . . the White Father himself came right on to the hill and told the people that if they attended our school a great famine would come on them. The chief then being frightened turned on us . . . and threatened to burn the hut of the natives who took care of our blackboard and slates unless they also turned on us. He threatened to punish all the scholars who attended our school (Bozarth 1933:5–7).

Monnier was active in opposing and reporting improper incursions into the schools and revival services. On one occasion, in response to continuous serious conflict at Rambura in the Rwankeri district, the Belgian Resident came in person from Kigali to settle the matter. Lining up Monnier and the priest Vitalox and their supporters before him, the Resident said, “I have come to let you know the view of the Belgian government on such matters. We give freedom to every denomination. Each of you is free to choose the faith you belong to.” Then he addressed Monnier and Vitalox in turn and commanded each not to intrude on each other’s territory (Interview with Pastor Nsengiyumva). Both the CMS and SBMPC had similar difficulties with the Fathers.

Because he was not at all reluctant to interact with the chiefs and White Fathers on the many occasions when they obstructed the functions of both schools and revival meetings, Monnier was given the name *Rukandirangabo*. But there were additional reasons for the attribution of this name to Monnier. Society in Rwanda was organized along the lines of a semi-feudal system called *Ubugake*, in which the ordinary people provided labor for the chiefs. At times of stress, such as that produced by a drought or when for other reasons the days of labor demanded by the chiefs was increased, life was very difficult for the peasants. Under such circumstances Monnier was found to be the great protector of the people. He appealed directly to the chiefs when defending the rights of the ordinary people, and if unsuccessful he appealed to the Belgian administrators to restore the generally

accepted order. Hence he was called *Rukandirangabo*, “the mighty man, the protector, the shield bearer.”

The socio/religious status accorded Monnier added to the appeal and vibrancy of the revival. As the years passed, the number of the month-long July revival meetings increased along with the breadth of their outreach. Enthusiastic singing added to the attraction of the revival meetings. The Kinyarwanda hymnbook of popular gospel hymns, many of them translated by Monnier, was published in 1932.

For the remainder of the '30s, and well into the next decade, the church continued to expand rapidly. This is revealed in reports published in denominational papers by church leaders who visited the area. Bozarth describes his visit to one of these new districts:

A week ago it was my privilege to visit with Elder Monnier a new interest in a district where our work has never touched before. On Sabbath there were 1,200 people out to services. Between five and six hundred of these are now members of our Bible classes. Five months ago there was not a single Adventist in this district During our special evangelistic month some teachers with a few volunteer Missionary Volunteer members went into this district They met determined opposition. Several times their meetings were entirely broken up and many of the interested ones persecuted.

Never have I seen people so eager to accept and follow the truth In the Rwankeri district alone there will be over 600 additions to the Bible classes for the last quarter of the year (Bozarth 1933:5).

Fifteen months later, A. F. Tarr, secretary of the Division, reported on a visit to the area:

On the Sabbath morning at Rwankeri we found gathered together for Sabbath school and church a vast congregation of 7,157—the largest gathering that has ever assembled on any of our stations in Africa The missionary volunteers have in a most remarkable way contributed to the upbuilding of the work. So much so that the result of their labors has caused Brother Monnier great perplexity. He said “The workers are unable to care for the large flock of new believers, and funds are not available to add to the force We have had great increases in souls with a budget cut year after year.” With an earnestness which cut to the quick, Brother Monnier stated: “I am not here to beg . . . but I cannot carry on the work with our actual budget” (Tarr 1934:13, 14).

This was during the great depression and additional funds were not available, but the work continued unabated. Many of the volunteers were so enthusiastic that they neglected their gardens and concentrated on the ingathering of souls. Monnier feared that if there was another famine thousands would be utterly destitute.

J. F. Wright, president of the Africa Division, described the Sabbath morning service at the campmeeting at Rwankeri in August 1935:

Following breakfast Elder Evans and the writer stood . . . to watch the people as they came from the hills and the valleys As we used binoculars, we could see them coming from everywhere. They literally came by the hundreds . . . in one company . . . more than a thousand.

There is no question but that Elder Evans spoke to at least 18,000 people that morning I presume there has never been such a large gathering in the history of our work We were pleased also to see a number of chiefs present, who, prior to this time had been very bitter in their opposition toward us. Now some of them are becoming very friendly and they are offering to let us open schools in their districts On Sunday morning 145 were baptized after having been very carefully examined (Wright 1935:5, 6).

Five years later Elder Wright reported:

The next week-end brought us to Rwankeri. Here we found Elder Monnier with his usual smile . . . strong plans were already formulated for the camp-meeting. Now talk about a very vivid thrill! Well we were given it here when almost 20,000 people came to the services on Sabbath. It is difficult . . . for anyone to visualize such a mighty concourse of people at a religious service.

A letter just received from Elder Monnier reveals "that during July and August of this year 257 companies composed of our workers, and 1,458 lay-members, or Missionary Volunteers were out in the field." Their goal in soul winning was to win just over 3,500 souls to Christ during this six-to-eight-week period God is doing great things around the Rwankeri Mission (Wright 1940:2, 3).

The revival continued, and the church expanded and grew across Rwanda. We have told the story of the church in the Rwankeri area for two reasons. First, because there is more direct information about growth in this area. Second, because of the concentration on the mission experience of Monnier, one of the very dedicated and effective missionaries who lived and shared the gospel of our gracious Lord in Rwanda.

Monnier's Final Days in Rwanda

There was a tragic change in the life story of the Monnier family during the next few years. The revival, the increase in numbers attending Bible classes, and the growth and spread of the Church continued unabated. Then World War II broke out. In late 1939 Monnier's wife and family returned to Switzerland, but he felt that he could not leave his coworkers and the work that was progressing so rapidly, so he remained in Rwanda. In 1941 he obtained a *visa de retour* and joined his family in Switzerland. However, upon submitting papers for his return after a brief visit home he was advised by the Belgian authorities that he was denied permission to return to Rwanda. Upon pursuit of the matter, both personally and by church officials, Governor Ryckmans advised that the administrators would be very happy to have Monnier return but not before the end of the war. When pressed for a reason, he advised that it was well known that Monnier was a pacifist and that in the event of a German attempt to enter and take control of Rwanda he would effectively oppose conscription into the army. His influence was so great and widespread that the Belgian authorities felt it unwise to admit him while this threat continued. Thus he was denied permission to return. These were very sad and discouraging days for Monnier. He was offered a pastoral ministry in Switzerland, but he could not settle down, and friends there said he seemed sad and discouraged. He was also offered other missionary positions in Africa but he declined—his heart was in Rwanda.

Monnier's love for the Lord, his sense of responsibility to continue His work, and his burden to give direction and meaning to the lives of the many who had responded to the Gospel dominated his thoughts. How could his commission to fulfill the work of God be put aside so simply by earthly political judgment? God's work could not be left half done. After giving the matter much thought and prayer, he decided to return to Rwanda.

From one point of view this may be regarded as a rash decision; however, it is more fittingly recognized as an outworking of his overwhelming commitment to the Divine commission that inspired and gave direction to his life. He travelled through the Congo and arrived at Rwankeri in 1942. When the locals heard that Monnier was back, there was enormous rejoicing. Thousands came to meet him. There were services with joyful singing to welcome and celebrate his return.

Much to his surprise, Governor Ryckmans heard that Monnier was back at Rwankeri. He contacted J. R. Campbell, superintendent of the Congo Mission, and requested him to transfer Monnier to the Gitwe mission, where he might be less influential. Monnier could remain there for a short period while he completed his

assigned translation responsibilities, but he was not to return to Rwankeri or to preach. These were very difficult and discouraging days for Monnier. He translated *Steps to Christ* and some Old Testament books, and despite the restriction he did conduct some local services. But locals report he was not the vibrant, glowing Monnier of former days.

To relieve the situation, Elder Neal Wilson, then President of the Middle East Union, invited Monnier to accept the position of superintendent of the Turkish Mission. Because of the war, he proceeded directly to Lebanon without returning to Europe for his family. He arrived in Beirut in March 1944. Tragically, he died of typhoid fever on December 1, 1944 at the age of 48. It is troubling to contemplate this tragic loss of *Rukandirangabo*, one of Africa's and the Adventist Church's very great missionaries. But we rejoice in the wonderfully fruitful witness of his life and believe that all things will be made plain to us in the Kingdom of grace.

Section 4

RELIGION ENCOUNTERS

encountering
GOD IN LIFE AND MISSION

Chapter 23

* * *

WHO ARE WE? REFLECTIONS ON THE ADVENTIST IDEALITY IN RELATION TO MISSION

Jerald Whitehouse

How Adventists perceive themselves is critical to the accomplishment of the mission of the movement. While traditional forms of outreach have primarily been crafted in the Christian context it is important to rethink the Adventist identity, and therefore its mission, as it interfaces with the other monotheistic faith traditions and the non-monotheistic traditions. An incarnational witness to a diversity of peoples requires a clear sense of identity coupled with a clarity of proclamation and embodiment of the core message about God's way of winning the cosmic conflict.

It is in honor of Jon Dybdahl's focus on the relationship of theology and missiology and a resultant interest in the Adventist identity as a world religion (Dybdahl 2005:1-19) that this paper is prepared. During my years of international work in various capacities, and most recently as Director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations, these two issues have surfaced repeatedly as crucial to our conduct of mission, particularly among the non-Christian world faiths.

That the Adventist identity is in regular need of review should not come as a surprise. George Knight has raised the issue in various ways in several publications (Knight 2000, 1995).¹ His most recent work, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the*

Neutering of Adventism, turns the spotlight directly on the question of identity and purpose for the movement. He writes:

If Seventh-day Adventist institutions are Christian only in the sense that they have Jesus and the evangelical gospel, then any good evangelical school will do Why have a Seventh-day Adventist church? What function or use does it have? Is it important or even necessary? Is it merely another denomination that turns out to be a bit stranger than some of the others because of its “hang-up” with the seventh day and certain dietary issues? . . . Why did those early Adventists sacrifice their means and their children to mission? Only because of a deep conviction that they had a message right out of the heart of the book of Revelation that all the world needed to hear before Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven (Knight 2008:11, 12, 15). It became strong by proclaiming that it had a prophetic message for our time. And it is that message repackaged for the twenty-first century that will give Adventism strength in both the present and the future (Knight 2008:19).

While the recent review of *Questions on Doctrines* in the anniversary weekends held at Andrews University and Loma Linda University may have appeared to be focused primarily on certain key doctrinal issues, the issue of Adventist identity is core to the overall discussions. The direction set by *Questions on Doctrines* in relation to the evangelical world certainly has its strong points in terms of an acceptance within the Christian world and a resultant internal security. But one is left to ask some probing questions regarding the source of our identity and security as it relates to human structures versus a sense of who we are based in the Biblical narrative, the unique Adventist understanding of the cosmic conflict and God’s purposes and methods in solving the rebellion in the universe.

James Nix attempts to remind us of our unique prophetic movement identity in his recent article in *Adventist World*, “A Unique Prophetic Movement” (Nix 2009). He helpfully reemphasizes the three defining characteristics of God’s end time “Prophetic Movement”:

1. Prophetic roots or history predicted in Revelation 10. The historical application of Revelation 10:10, 11 as the great disappointment of 1844 and the subsequent rise of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the sense of urgency of the “Midnight Cry.”
2. Prophetic identity defined in Revelation 12. They keep the commandments of God, including the Sabbath, and have the “testimony of Jesus.”

3. Prophetic message and mission given in Revelation 14. The proclamation of the everlasting gospel, with the unique urgency of the setting of the end-time judgment and the calling out of God's people from Babylon, has driven Adventist evangelism for more than a century and a half (Nix 2009).

Nix is to be commended for his contribution in reminding us of this unique end-time mission for Adventism. We need all the Biblically-based understanding we can muster to remind us of our unique identity and mission in these turbulent times, particularly as we face more squarely the mission among the non-Christian faith traditions.

A brief review of Adventist evangelistic methods throughout our history reveals a focus on doctrinal correctness (as based on Scripture and in contrast to the incorrect understanding in other Biblical faith traditions) and, consequently, an emphasis on the Seventh-day Adventist Church being the true church in these end times, using the arguments outlined by Nix as noted above.² While there have been some efforts on the part of a few—particularly in reaching the postmodern mind to focus less on “the truth” and more on “practical godliness” and the life of faith—this general approach, one would have to admit, still dominates Adventist evangelism globally.

The greatest challenges we face in mission today, however, are in the areas of the postmodern mind and the large world faith traditions of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Within these arenas, the arguments for “correct doctrine” based on Scripture simply bear no weight. Truth claims are merely to the postmodern an evidence of religious arrogance. In Islam, since the basis of the truth claims by Adventists is what Muslims consider a corrupted Bible, the claims also are irrelevant. Also, the average Muslim could care less about whether one Christian denomination out of the many is “true” or not, since in his/her understanding they are all in denial of true faith. To the Hindu or Buddhist, “true doctrine” or “true church” are simply irrelevant matters. So, in the face of these other large faith traditions, the traditional evangelistic approach has not proved helpful. Our evangelism has been crafted to provide Biblical support in response to issues unique to the Christian context.

In my years of interfacing with the Muslim world, I have come to summarize the issues we must address in our relations with the Muslim world with five basic questions:

1. Who are we?
2. Who are they?
3. Is there any evidence of God's activity among them? (This should give us a hint of where to begin.)
4. What do we have to offer? (We must be able to encapsulate this in a few sentences at most.)
5. When Muslims embrace saving faith, what should it look like? More like us or more like them?

This paper confines itself to the first question. The other four questions are covered in other publications available from the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations.

So, who are we? Clarity on this point is critical for the future of the church and for our effectiveness in mission. While not denying the importance of the three points that Nix reiterates, further study of Revelation may yield helpful insights to the issues in the cosmic conflict as the end nears and to the central issues that God's people in these last days must uphold before the world.

While this paper takes a more missiological view, rather than dealing with details of the theological issues, it will address what I consider to be core issues relating to our identity and mission. Knight moves us in the direction of the cosmic conflict as being a crucial Adventist identity and mission issue with these thoughts from the concluding chapter in *A Search for Identity*:

But the genius of Seventh-day Adventism does not lie so much in those doctrines that make it distinctive or in those beliefs that it shares with other Christians. Rather it is a combination of both sets of understandings within the framework of the great controversy theme found in the apocalyptic core of the book of Revelation running from Revelation 11:19 through the end of chapter 14. It is that prophetic insight that distinguishes Seventh-day Adventists from other Adventists, other sabbatarians, and all other Christians. The great controversy theology (first worked out by Bates in the mid-1840s) has led Seventh-day Adventism to see itself as a prophetic people. That understanding has driven Adventists to the far corners of the earth as they have sought to sound the messages of the three angels before the great harvest day. *When that vision is lost, Seventh-day Adventism will have lost its genius. It will have become merely another somewhat harmless denomination with some rather peculiar doctrines instead of being a dynamic movement of prophecy.* [italics added] (Knight 2000:203, 204).

The issues in the cosmic conflict have become clearer down through history as God's faithful have grown in their understanding. The incarnation, life, and death of Jesus were a shocking revelation to the onlooking universe of how God intended to solve the problem of the rebellion of Satan, the angels he deceived, and his followers on planet earth.

Would He come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity? Would He send fire or flood to destroy them? All heaven waited the bidding of their Commander to pour out the vials of wrath upon a rebellious world. One word from Him, one sign, and the world would have been destroyed. The worlds unfallen would have said, "Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because Thou hast exterminated rebellion" (White 1902:546).

With intense interest the unfallen worlds had watched to see Jehovah arise, and sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. And if God should do this, Satan was ready to carry out his plan for securing to himself the allegiance of heavenly beings. He had declared that the principles of God's government make forgiveness impossible. Had the world been destroyed, he would have claimed that his accusations were proved true. He was ready to cast blame upon God, and to spread his rebellion to the worlds above. But instead of destroying the world, God sent His Son to save it. . . . And when the fullness of the time had come the Deity was glorified by pouring upon the world a flood of healing grace that was never to be obstructed or withdrawn till the plan of salvation would be fulfilled (White 1940:37).

Thompson nicely outlines this progression in understanding of the issues in the cosmic conflict (Thompson 1989). It would seem, therefore, that God's people in the last days of this earth's history ought to be more focused and articulate in their proclamation of God's purposes and methods of ending the problem of sin than at any time in earth's history.

The book of Revelation has been used for identifying the key characteristics of God's last-day people. But in our focus on identifying the characters in the play, could it be we have missed the driving themes that must be made clear before the world? That the cosmic conflict is central in the book of Revelation requires little argument. Revelation 12 forms the center of the book; in fact, a considerable number of scholars would agree that chapter 12 is not only the center but can be understood as the beginning or at least the grand overview of the primary theme of the narrative reviewed in the earlier chapters and that it certainly frames the later chapters as well.³

In the conflict there are two opposing powers. God is not the only actor in the drama outlined in Revelation. Anton Vogtle notes that “God is not the only one who is at work in this world—as the apocalypse makes so abundantly clear” (Vogtle 1976:383). As one struggles to understand the source of the powers depicted in Revelation this point is of ultimate importance. The demonic power is clearly at work as the devastation increases in the succeeding cycles of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls (Tonstad 2010a:23). In contrast to this is the picture of the one worthy on the winning side, as “a lamb that was slaughtered.” Richard Bauckham sees this as critical to our understanding of God’s way of governing: “When the slaughtered Lamb is seen in the midst of the divine throne in heaven ([Rev.] 5:6, cf. 7:17), the meaning is that Christ’s sacrificial death belongs *to the way God rules the world* [italics supplied]” (Bauckham 1993a:64).

It would seem that there would be no more important understanding than to get correctly the *message* of how God acts in solving the problem of sin, the *method* He uses in winning the conflict. This would be far more important than truth claims by an earthly institution. God wins the conflict by the non-use of force. It is the *slaughtered* Lamb who is worthy to open the book, who is worthy to receive honor and power and glory, who is triumphant in the end. He comes again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, precisely *because* He was slaughtered; He embodies and demonstrates in human form the very mind and character of the Creator in the way He intends to triumph over the rebellion in the universe.

Ellen White describes the crisis in the government of God and how God has chosen to solve the crisis:

A crisis had arrived in the government of God. The earth was filled with transgression. The voices of those who had been sacrificed to human envy and hatred were crying beneath the altar for retribution. All heaven was prepared at the word of God to move to the help of his elect. One word from him, and the bolts of heaven would have fallen upon the earth, filling it with fire and flame. God had but to speak, and there would have been thundering and lightnings and earthquakes and destruction. The heavenly intelligences were prepared for a fearful manifestation of Almighty power. Every move was watched with intense anxiety. The exercise of justice was expected. The angels looked for God to punish the inhabitants of the earth. But “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” “I will send my beloved Son,” he said. “It may be they will reverence him” (White 1900:449).

And further, in another article entitled “God Made Manifest in Christ,” Ellen White reminds us:

Christ came to save fallen man, and Satan with fiercest wrath met him on the field of conflict; for the enemy knew that when divine strength was added to human weakness, man was armed with power and intelligence, and could break away from the captivity in which he had bound him. Satan sought to intercept every ray of light from the throne of God. He sought to cast his shadow across the earth, that men might lose the true views of God’s character, and that the knowledge of God might become extinct in the earth. He had caused truth of vital importance to be so mingled with error that it had lost its significance. The law of Jehovah was burdened with needless exactions and traditions, and God was represented as severe, exacting, revengeful, and arbitrary. He was pictured as one who could take pleasure in the sufferings of his creatures. The very attributes that belonged to the character of Satan, the evil one represented as belonging to the character of God. Jesus came to teach men of the Father, to correctly represent him before the fallen children of earth. Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work. The only way in which he could set and keep men right was to make himself visible and familiar to their eyes. That men might have salvation he came directly to man, and became a partaker of his nature When the object of his mission was attained—the revelation of God to the world—the Son of God announced that his work was accomplished, and that the character of the Father was made manifest to men (White 1890:33).

God’s non-use of force and His sacrificing of Himself are central to His identity and to how He will win the conflict. The ending of the book of Revelation is the end of evil, the end of the use of force. It is a picture of complete healing.

There are critical implications for both the identity and mission of God’s people in the last days in understanding God’s way of solving the rebellion in the universe. “The reason why, in the final period of world history, God will not deliver his faithful people by the slaughter of their enemies, as he did in the days of Moses, Elijah and Esther, but instead will allow them to be slaughtered by their enemies, is that this is the way the nations will be brought to repentance and faith, and the sovereignty over them transferred from the beast to the kingdom of God” (Bauckham 1993b:283).

But there are further important points to note in Revelation regarding the witness of His people. Revelation 11:1, 2 shows that the purposes of God are immea-

surable. John is commanded to not measure certain sacred space since it will be bigger and larger than can be measured. God’s plan cannot be numbered. It is far bigger than our ability to measure. The Old Testament antecedent for this passage is Zechariah 2:3–5, which expands on the picture by noting that we cannot put walls around it—“there will be no walls”—but “I will be a wall of fire around it” (Tonstad 2010b). The witness of God’s way of ending the problem of sin, which will be demonstrated and proclaimed through His “prophetic movement” (His people), will be the *Ecclesia sans Frontiers!* It will be larger than we can number. God Himself will be the wall of fire around it. It will be a diverse group of faithful witnesses among all peoples, unified by the message and mission that is revealed in the Apocalypse.

In understanding further the nature of the witness of God’s last day people, Tonstad has noted the parallel between the experience of the witnesses in Revelation 11 and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Tonstad 2010c).

JESUS	CHURCH (End-Time Prophetic Movement)
Witness	Witness (Rev. 11:3–6)
Death (apparent defeat)	Death—apparent defeat (Rev. 11:7–10)
Resurrection	Resurrection (Rev. 11:11)
Ascension	Ascension (Rev. 11:12)

Source: Tonstad (2010d).

The witness is not only the *proclamation* of the understanding of God’s way of solving the problem of rebellion and ending the demonic reign of destruction but, perhaps even more importantly, it is the *embodiment* of God’s way of winning the conflict—by proclamation of God’s way of winning, but also by the witnesses’ sacrifice of themselves in serving the needs of all peoples. This is the essence of the witness of God’s last-day people.

Such a witness, while a defeat from a human point of view, will be the very means of victory: “And the rest feared and gave glory to the God of heaven” (Rev. 11:13). “There should be no doubt that the end of [Revelation] 11:13 refers to genuine repentance and worship of God by the pagan world which is symbolized by the great city. The expression corresponds closely to the positive response that is invited by the angel in 14:7” (Bauckham 1993b:278).

In summary, it is the *content* of the witness rather than *claims* that will result in triumph in the conflict. The Catholic church *claims* to be the true church through apostolic succession. Protestant *claims* rest on various scriptural founda-

tions. Seventh-day Adventist *claims*, while helpful and important in giving a certain prophetic identity, fall short if not backed up with a clear *embodiment* and *proclamation* of the truth about God's way of solving the cosmic conflict. The Lamb is worthy, precisely because He was slaughtered. The embodiment of such a witness as Jesus provided in life and death will be the true testimony as to the divine source of any faith group. When John's disciples came to Jesus asking if He was in fact the looked-for Messiah, the evidence of His divinity was not in His claims but in the nature of His ministry. The evidence for His divinity was seen in its adaptation to the needs of suffering humanity. His glory was shown in His condescension to our low estate (White 1940:217).

This brief study has highlighted the key issues in the question of this paper, "Who are we?" They form the basis for our identity as God's end-time movement. They frame the kind of witness that God's people will embody and proclaim in these last days. A look at the recent discussion of the theme of the remnant, which has endeavored to wrestle with some of these same issues, may also be helpful. Since it is critical to the issue of the identity and purpose of God's end-time people, it will be important to provide a summary of important points.

Angel Rodriguez clarifies that the Biblical understanding of the remnant carries no hint of exclusivity. Rather, the "eschatological remnant," God's end-time remnant, will also share certain commonalities with an "invisible body of believers" among other "Christian and non-Christian faith traditions" (Rodriguez 2009a:221-223). But first Rodriguez lays a helpful foundation for the Adventist understanding of ecclesiology. "Adventist ecclesiology looks outward, seeking to establish a point of contact with the fragmented world of Christianity as well as with non-Christian religions, but at the same time it looks inward by attempting to nurture unity within itself while fulfilling its mission. In pursuing that double task, the Adventist movement reveals its distinctive identity which directly contributes to the global unity of the movement" (Rodriguez 2009a:218).

He then proceeds to clarify the wider scope of that basic understanding:

Adventists differ from those ecclesiological opinions [referring to the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant ecclesiologies], affirming that *the fullness of the church of Christ does not reside in any particular ecclesiastical organization*. This is not a denial of the value of ecclesiastical organization, but rather an affirmation that the church is not by definition a hierarchical structure. This conviction is part of the outcome of an ecclesiology that is firmly rooted in the conviction that the church is constituted by those who have accepted Christ as Savior and Lord. . . .

This understanding of the church does not exclude the usefulness of organizational structures, but it describes the church, to be sure, as much more than an institutional phenomenon. It is fundamentally a community of believers. This notion is further clarified by establishing a distinction between a “universal church” and “a remnant.” This distinction is extremely important for the formulation and comprehension of an Adventist ecclesiology. How do we understand this “universal church”? We have stated that it “is composed of all who truly believe in Christ.” This definition is a practical rejection of denominationalism in that the church itself is described as transcending denominational borders. The “universal church” is not embodied in any particular Christian organization, but it is diffused throughout the Christian world. We could state that, in a sense, the “universal church” is a church in exile, in Babylon, scattered throughout the religious world.

Once we define the *universal church* as being “composed of all who truly believe in Christ,” we are basically claiming that it is invisible. At present its members are spread throughout the different Christian and even non-Christian communities, making it practically impossible to differentiate from others within those communities. It exists under unusual circumstances, under the direct and exclusive leadership of the Spirit. The “universal church,” as we are defining it here, is what Jesus was referring to when He said: “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also” (John 10:16). In the book of Revelation, it is designated as “My (God’s) people” who are still in Babylon (Rodriguez 2009a:218-220).

This provides the basis for some new thinking in mission to the essentially untouched “non-Christian” faith traditions. Since my focus as Director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations has been the interface of the church with the Muslim world, I will make some more specific applications based on the above themes relative to our relations with the Muslim world.

When one reviews the history of the Christian apostasy, it serves to remind us that God’s people of true faith have always been a minority remnant with a mission focus rather than a mainline Christian church. Further, because of the sordid history of actions taken in the name of “Christianity,” the following points are suggested:

- In interfacing with Islam, it is more effective if we recapture the motif of Adventism as an end-time prophetic movement with a global mandate to prepare people for the coming of Jesus—to proclaim and to warn of the Day of Judgment, leading to true worship of the Creator God, to acceptance of His provision of salvation, and to the embodiment of the mission of Jesus, which is revelatory of God’s way of winning the conflict.

- It is a prophetic role within the global end-time purposes of God for all peoples—calling a remnant as a witness among all peoples. The invisible dimension of the remnant is bigger than the church that has the prophetic mission.
- This larger invisible body of faithful believers (referred to by Rodriguez as the “universal church”) is identified by “kingdom” markers first and foremost.
- As in early Christianity, changed lives are a key marker of God’s end-time faithful, because of an inner faith identity as a “kingdom person.”
- Introducing the Muslim into a deeper faith as a kingdom member should be the number one focus.
- Church identity, while desirable, is not the end, but rather, where possible, the means to the end of kingdom discipleship. Where a particular “church” identity—because of an environment hostile to all that church implies—becomes an insurmountable obstacle to kingdom discipling, an appropriate fellowship of faith (“community of believers”) should be formed that provides the necessary nurture, fellowship, and outreach.
- These communities of believers, while invisible (to the visible church) at this time, are part of God’s “universal church” as defined by Rodriguez.

Because of this, it seems more in harmony with our role in history to conceive of ourselves as an end-time movement rather than a Christian denomination. We have been called due to the failure of the Roman and Orthodox churches, the incompleteness of the Protestant reformation (including current evangelical churches), and the global purpose to reach beyond the Christian world. Operating with a Christian denomination identity works well when our interface is primarily to the Christian arena—or perhaps the animist, since animism is not so much a defined “religion” (religious system) as it is a world view. But if you move out of that arena into the highly-defined faith systems of Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism (or in the case of Islam, into a high-identity faith system with similar universal mission objectives as Christianity), you find it very difficult to avoid confrontational and forceful or offensive witness at worst and insurmountable barriers to faith sharing at best.

Since Muslims also have a belief in the last day (Day of Judgment) and the coming of Jesus (*Isa el Masih*), our Advent message provides a natural point of contact. Adventism was ordained by God first and foremost as a spiritual movement to warn people of the Day of Judgment and of the soon return of Jesus—to prepare

a people for His coming. This message was proclaimed across North America, Europe, Central Asia (in Islamic countries), and South America in the late 1700s and early 1800s. It then became established in the Seventh-day Adventist movement beginning in the mid-1800s. Adventism was intended to be a spiritual movement calling people of all faith systems to be ready for the soon return of Jesus. We need to recapture this early understanding of the God-intended role of this movement. This movement is not just within Christianity; it is not just a Christian denomination reaching other Christians. Rather, it is a worldwide movement spanning all peoples and faiths, calling them to join with God's end-time people in preparation for His coming.

This view of ourselves is essential as we approach the Muslim. In the Muslim world today, there is an increasing distrust of the Western Christian world. Muslims are looking for a stronger faith, a hope—but they will not accept it if it is presented to them in a way that demands that they reject Islam and their spiritual heritage and “crossover” to Christianity. Many Muslims want to follow Jesus, but don't want to join “Christianity” (read “Christendom”). Therefore, it is important that Adventists present themselves as unique—that they see themselves as calling Muslims to be ready for the coming of Jesus, calling them to a deeper faith and spirituality. All the Biblical truths that we hold dear will be dealt with in time. Here we are talking about our basic approach and the understanding of our role and mission in these last days.

Interestingly, Islam's original quarrel with Christianity was not directed to those groups that were endeavoring to hold on to a pure Biblical faith, but rather to the various teachings of the mainline churches of Rome and Byzantium. Today Adventists stand apart from most other Christian groups with our unique heritage that allows us to fulfill our role as an end-time spiritual movement, thus allowing us to develop a unique relation with the Muslim people.

But the question inevitably arises, how will the “universal church” (the invisible people of God among other faith traditions) and the “eschatological remnant” be brought together? “Even among non-Christian religions, there are people who are faithful to the light they have received from God, are being transformed by the power of the Spirit in their hearts, and are part of God's children” (Rodriguez 2009a:223).⁴

But how will this invisible dimension of the remnant eventually relate with the “eschatological remnant?”

It is true that in the Bible the term “remnant” is applied to the remnant of the nations that will join God's remnant people at the eschatological consummation.

We also found that Ellen G. White appears to use the true “remnant” to refer to true believers outside the Adventist church (Rodriguez 2009b:181-199). If we were to accept that suggestion, it would have to be carefully nuanced. The universal church would be a “remnant” only in the sense that they are the few faithful ones who are still living in exile, in Babylon. At the present time they are not clearly identifiable as an ecclesiastical unit. *They are not yet part of the visible end-time faithful eschatological remnant of Rev. 12:17* (Rodriguez 2009b:223, 224).

The end-time remnant is a divine project in progress and will reach its ultimate expression shortly before the end of the cosmic conflict. Through their mission God is reaching out to His people around the world, gathering the fullness of His remnant (Rev. 14:6) and calling God’s people to come out of Babylon (18:4). It would appear that it is God’s intention to merge the ‘universal church’ into the end-time eschatological faithful remnant. That remnant is already here as a historical reality, but its fullness is coming into being and will be revealed when the rest of God’s people will come out of Babylon, particularly at the close of the cosmic conflict. During the final days of earth’s history, true Christians of every denominational background, as well as many from non-Christian religions who found in Christ their Savior, will find themselves involved in a common experience of marginalization and persecution (Rev. 22:17). In that setting, “Adventists expect that their past experience and their understanding of the Scriptures will make an essential contribution to the understanding of other Christians as well as themselves.” At that moment the eschatological expectation of the visible unity and oneness of the fullness of the church of Christ will be a reality in ways that at the present time we can hardly appreciate (Rodriguez 2009b:225).

It is important for us to humbly recognize that this merging of the “universal church” and the “eschatological remnant” is *at this time beyond our appreciation*. It is important, therefore, that as we carefully nurture the development of the “universal church,” the invisible faithful followers of God, we allow the Spirit to lead as to the time of the merger as part of the final acts in the culmination of the conflict. This is primarily God’s doing and not ours.

Conclusion

God’s people in the end of time constitute a prophetic movement with a unique message about God’s way of solving the problem of rebellion in the universe that

has caused so much pain and suffering. The book of Revelation portrays the cosmic conflict and the method of God in winning the conflict through the non-use of force. It ends with the end of sin, evil, forcing of conscience, and death—and with the complete healing of the earth and the entire universe and the exaltation of the Lamb as King of kings and Lord of lords. He alone is worthy to receive such honor, because He is the Lamb that was slaughtered. This is how God chooses to govern his universe, in clear contrast to the strategy of the evil one.

In our interface with the world, and particularly the non-Christian world, it is this incarnational witness as an end-time spiritual movement, embodying the ministry of Jesus, that will find resonance in the hearts of many Muslims and those of other faith traditions. While, because of various constraints, they may need to remain in the “universal (invisible) church” for a time, God will bring them together with His eschatological remnant as one of the final acts as the cosmic conflict comes to an end. We must humbly rely on the leading of the Holy Spirit, both to lead them in faith development and as to when they can link with the visible remnant. Perhaps the mutual experiencing of marginalization and persecution from their respective faith communities will precipitate the opportunity to encourage each other more openly in faith in the last episodes of the conflict before the coming of Jesus.

“It is when the church embraces the gospel selflessly that it bears the heart of God and becomes real to the world. And when it is real, the church makes God believable” (Smith 2002:5).

Notes

¹George Knight (2000) reviews the development of Adventist theology in terms of a search for identity as a prophetic movement arising out of the disappointment of the Advent Movement in 1844. In his book *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom* (1995) he primarily looks at structural issues, which certainly have direct implications as to the foundation of Adventist identity and the fulfillment of the mission purposes of the prophetic movement.

²While I have not surveyed all evangelistic materials used widely in the church’s outreach, commonly used materials such as the “Share Him International” Campaign Sermon Topics (http://www.global-evangelism.org/php/info_guestteams/Sermon_Topics.pdf) the “New Beginnings Sermon Series,” and “Discovery Bible Studies” (http://studies.itiswritten.com/new_beginnings/international_languages/English.php) are commonly used materials following this basic approach.

³Non-SDA scholars who support chapter 12 as the center include, among others Abir (1995), and Collins (2001).

⁴Here Rodriguez also footnotes Ellen White's writing: "Among earth's inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven, which appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine forth when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people. In heathen Africa, in the Catholic lands of Europe, and of South America, in China, in India, in the islands of the sea, and in all the dark corners of the earth, God has in reserve a firmament of chosen ones that will yet shine forth amidst the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law. Even now they are appearing in every nation, among every tongue and people, and in the hour of deepest apostasy, when Satan's supreme effort is made to cause 'all both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond,' to receive, under penalty of death, the sign of allegiance to a false rest day, these faithful ones, 'blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke,' will 'shine as lights in the world' (Rev. 13:16; Phil. 2:15). The darker the night, the more brilliantly will they shine" (White 1917:188, 189).

Chapter 24

* * *

COMPARISON OF BIBLICAL AND BUDDHIST MEDITATION WITH REFLECTIONS ON MISSION

Scott Griswold

Meditation, as described in the Bible, is the focus of the mind primarily upon God's law, His character, and His actions. Where Buddhist meditation focuses on morality or compassion it is similar to Biblical meditation; however, primarily Buddhist meditation attempts to reach enlightenment and escape suffering through special insight. The Bible instead offers salvation by faith in God's grace through Jesus. Christians can effectively use Biblical meditation both to strengthen themselves spiritually and as an interesting program for reaching out to Buddhists.

Meditation has been practiced in various forms in different religions for thousands of years. In the last few decades many in the west have experimented with forms new to them. Even many professing Christians are now using different types of eastern meditation. Often people are confused as to the similarities or differences between the meditation spoken of in the Bible and that practiced in eastern religions such as Buddhism. This article will briefly examine meditation as described in the Bible and as practiced by Theravāda Buddhism. Comparisons will be made between the two. Finally, some practical conclusions will be drawn concerning Christian ministry among Buddhists.

Biblical Meditation

Presently, even among Christians, there are many diverse ideas regarding meditation. A definition simply cannot be given that would satisfy everyone. For the purpose of the present discussion, we will examine significant Bible passages that use words translated into the English word “meditation.” This will help us arrive at a description of what we’ll call “Biblical meditation.”

In Psalm 1 the word “meditate” (*hagah*) is used in verse 2: “In His law he meditates day and night.” The focus of the meditation is clearly on God’s law (*torah*). Whether God’s law refers to the Ten Commandments, the entire writings of Moses, or more likely any declaration from God, this meditation is definitely focused on logical and understandable content (Gaebelein 1991:54). Biblical meditation engages the mind. In Psalm 1:2 the attitude of the one meditating is also revealed: “His delight is in the law of the Lord.” There is an eager desiring for truth. Biblical meditation engages the heart. The same Psalm also shows a specific preparation necessary for meditation. The person meditating neither “walks in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful” (Ps. 1:1). This direct contrast with meditation shows that to focus on God’s Word requires a turning from ungodly thoughts, actions, and words. Biblical meditation engages the life. The type of meditation described in Psalm 1 is challenging. It calls for the devotion of the mind, heart, and life. Is it worth it? God descriptively gave encouragement to engage in such meditation by inspiring the writer of that Psalm to write down some of the benefits of meditation. The person who meditates will be spiritually strong, prosperous, and enduring.

Another Biblical passage gives a similar emphasis regarding meditation. Joshua was told by the Angel of the Lord, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Josh. 1:8). The focus of meditation is on the law of God, involving the mind. The purpose of meditation is “that you may observe to do,” involving the life in obedient action. The benefits of meditation are prosperity and success. The passage in Joshua gives further insight into the “day and night” of Psalm 1. Here it’s fascinating to note that meditation can be continuous, even for a busy soldier. Biblical meditation is not merely something that can be done in quiet and solitude. “It is the reflection on the Word of God in the course of daily activities (Josh. 1:8). Regardless of the time of day or the context, the godly respond to life in accordance with God’s word” (Gaebelein 1991:55).

The Psalmist, David, found something else on which to meditate besides the law of God. “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” (Ps. 63:6). The focus of Biblical meditation in this passage is God Himself. Psalm 63 explains how to enjoy such meditation. Verse 1 speaks of a deep longing for God, inferring that God is like water, the one thing needful and satisfying to a person’s soul. The people meditating can focus on how God meets their needs, such as being their protector: “In the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice” (Ps. 63:7). Verse 2 tells that David looked for God in the sanctuary in order to see His power and His glory. This implies that before meditating, a person should study to understand God’s Word. In this instance, he may need to study the Biblical sanctuary to understand its meaning and purpose. Then it would be a place for fruitful meditation. Verses 3 to 5 describe David’s joy that overflowed into singing. Most people think of meditation as something done very quietly. Both Hebrew words that are translated into the English word “meditation” can be used to describe verbal activity, including muttering, speaking, or praying (Strong 1990:32, 115). There seems to be a parallelism between the phrases “words of my mouth” and “meditation of my heart” in places like Psalm 5:1, 19:14, and 49:3. The type of Biblical meditation described in Psalm 63 can therefore be connected to singing reflectively on the characteristics of God. In verses 7 and 8 David pictured himself in the shadow of God’s wings, knowing how God had helped him in the past. He saw himself following closely behind God, going where God led. He also envisioned God’s right hand underneath him, holding him up. Those are wonderful pictures of a mighty and loving God. This shows valid use of imagination in Biblical meditation.

Another Psalm writer, Asaph, spoke of meditation as something he did when he was discouraged (Ps. 77:3-6). The word for meditate is actually translated as “complaint” in verse 3 and in several other places in the Old Testament. Asaph asked questions (Ps. 77:7-9). He then moved his focus to God’s actions: “I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds” (verse 12). This shows the direction that Biblical meditation takes—from the human condition to the reality of God. An essential part of Biblical meditation is remembering God’s mighty actions in behalf of Israel. “I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands. I spread out my hands to You” (Ps. 143:5). People can do the same thing today both by meditating on Biblical stories and by reflecting on what God has done for them personally.

Psalm 119 speaks frequently of meditation. The Psalmist gives the same emphasis focusing on God’s law and God’s acts (Ps. 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). However, it places this meditation in close connection to a very specific purpose.

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word” and “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:9-11). Biblical meditation is intended to cleanse the mind, heart, and life.

The New Testament gives very little emphasis to the word meditation (*metanoia*). Of three texts that have a form of this word, 1 Timothy 4:15 is especially helpful. (The others are Mark 13:11 and Acts 4:25.) The focus is similar to the Old Testament, with Paul encouraging Timothy to meditate on what Paul has taught him in order to help himself and those he teaches. He says, “meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Tim. 4:15). Again this Biblical meditation combines mind, heart, and life.

From these passages we can conclude that Biblical meditation is primarily thinking about something deeply or reflectively. We can find other places where the Bible talks about such things without using the word meditation. Jesus called people to “consider” the birds and the lilies of the field to learn lessons about trusting God. Solomon counseled people to consider the ant to learn lessons from it (Prov. 6:6). His book Ecclesiastes is a fascinating example of meditating on the passing vanities of the world, in the context of belief in God. Paul captures the importance of using the mind to focus on things of excellence: “I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse” (Phil. 4:8 *The Message*).

Though Christians would define meditation in various ways, those who examine the Biblical evidence typically recognize the elements described above. McAlpine says, “Meditation is the devotional practice of pondering the words of a verse or verses of Scripture with a receptive heart. Through meditating, we allow the Holy Spirit to take the written Word and apply it as the living Word into our inner being. As divine truth is imparted to us, it inevitably brings forth a response to God” (McAlpine 2004:30).

McAlpine summarizes the areas of focus for Biblical meditation as the Word of God, God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ; the work of God; and the creation (2004:57-60). “Since the Bible, in part or as a whole, was generally not available to God’s people, they memorized and ‘pondered’ the word (Ps. 119:11), the perfections of the Lord (Ps. 63:6), and his mighty acts (Ps. 77:12; 143:5). The one who meditates *continually* reflects God’s word in life. H. Ringgren writes that study and practice blend into one: ‘The zealous study of the law which results in being filled with the will of Yahweh and the doing of his commandments’” (Gaebelein 1991:55).

In summary, Biblical meditation is a thoughtful focus on God’s Word and His

law, God's character and His actions, and nature, in a way that leads to a positive impact on a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions. On a practical level it may be helpful to contrast Biblical meditation with other spiritual disciplines spoken of in the Bible. Meditation is not reading the Bible, though reading the Bible is an excellent beginning for meditation. Meditation is not Bible study, though Bible study will improve quality meditation. Meditation is not memorizing Scripture, but Scripture memorization will empower a person to meditate anywhere. Meditation is not prayer, but meditation done well will inspire heartfelt prayer. Since the very word meditation can be translated speaking or singing, can we really make such strong distinctions? Perhaps not. However, it is important to do so simply to remind ourselves not to read, study, memorize, or pray without reflective thinking that leads to positive change. Biblical meditation can aid the other disciplines so that God's Word penetrates the mind, heart, and life.

Buddhist Meditation

There are many kinds of meditation in various religions and there is also a wide diversity of meditation within Buddhism. Typically people picture someone sitting cross-legged, focused on breath, a visual object, a phrase, or a word. Such meditation may be described as follows: "Tranquil Meditation is concerned with the concentration of one's mind on a suitable meditation object for a reasonable length of time so as not to cause the mind to wander or to roam about. This will bring about subtle peacefulness and pleasantness or happiness, which is far superior to that which can be experienced from watching movies, or seeking other worldly sensual pleasures" (Ussivakulp 1996:6).

Usually people think of meditation as something that brings them peace. Gach explains, "A common Buddhist image of the mind is of a monkey swinging from branch to branch, from a smell to a sight, from mental remorse to emotional rehearsal, etc. . . . Basic meditation, then, is the opposite of all that: stopping and being still" (Gach 2002:174). Buddhist meditation incorporates these ideas, but goes beyond them to what Buddhists consider a deeper level. "Insight Meditation is considered to be the unique characteristic of Buddhist Advanced Science" (Ussivakulp 1996:73). "Insight Meditation subtly and wisely eliminates mental suffering by Direct Awareness of physical and mental phenomena as they really are at the present moment without relying on thoughts and imagination. As a result, full awareness and realization of the reality of life is achieved" (1996:74).

This article cannot provide an adequate summary of various meditation forms

considered Buddhist. Instead we will just take a brief look at the main Theravāda Buddhist approaches to meditation. This will be done by examining meditation's role in the Eightfold Path to enlightenment. The Eightfold Path is the fourth of Buddhism's Four Noble Truths. Buddha taught that the Path is the way to reach enlightenment and be free from suffering. Meditation is a major part of the Path.

The Eightfold Path can be divided as follows: (1) Right Understanding, (2) Right Thought, (3) Right Speech, (4) Right Action, (5) Right Livelihood, (6) Right Effort, (7) Right Mindfulness, and (8) Right Concentration (Piyadassi 1964:78). Right Effort, the sixth part of the Path, is the use of a kind of meditation with determined effort to control unhealthy thoughts and to choose wholesome thoughts. It is "persevering endeavour (a) to prevent the arising of evil and unwholesome thoughts that have not yet arisen in a man's mind, (b) to discard such evil thoughts already arisen, (c) to produce and develop wholesome thoughts not yet arisen and (d) to promote and maintain the good thoughts already present" (1964:84).

Right Mindfulness, the seventh part, is meditation that focuses awareness on four areas described as activities of the body, feelings or sensations, activities of the mind, and mental objects" (1964:84). Much can be learned about these four areas in the discourse attributed to the Buddha called "The Foundations of Mindfulness" (Nyanaponika 1962:117-132). If a person is doing a contemplation of the body, he may focus on his breathing or his present posture. He might meditate on the four primary elements of earth, water, fire, and air or even on a corpse (there are nine specific cemetery contemplations). He may practice mindfulness by focusing very carefully on whatever task he is doing, whether sweeping or chewing his food. He's learning to be aware. To be "awake" is what "Buddha" means. In the contemplation of feeling, the one meditating attempts simply to note various feelings of pain, pleasantness, or neutrality, etc. He observes how these feelings come and go. In the contemplation of the mind, a person looks at anything the mind is doing, such as thoughts of hate, distraction, or concentration. There is a careful noting of how thoughts come and go.

Lastly, is the contemplation of mind-objects. This is rather complicated as there are many such things to meditate on. Negative mind-objects are wrong ways of thinking or acting that prevent enlightenment. Positive mind-objects are right concepts regarding the path to enlightenment.¹ These areas of mindfulness are extremely important to Buddhism.² "Meditation is the life-blood of Buddhism, as heedlessness is of death" (Piyadassi 1964:181). "Mindfulness has to be applied to all—the world within and without—always, everywhere during our waking life" (1964:186).

In all of this the one meditating is seeking simply to be mindful of what is happening, simply observing. “Independent he dwells, clinging to nothing in the world.” Buddha’s discourse states that the purpose of right mindfulness is “for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentations, for the destroying of pain and grief, for reaching the right path, for the realization of *Nibbana*” (Nyanaponika 1962:117).

Finally, the eighth factor in the Eight-fold Noble Path, namely Right Concentration “is the intensified steadiness of the mind comparable to the unflickering flame of a lamp in a windless place. It is concentration that fixes the mind right and causes it to be unmoved and undisturbed” (Piyadassi 1964:84).

The meditation involved in Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration is intended to lead to Right Thought and Right Understanding. Right Thought is focused on moral qualities, especially compassion and renunciation. Right Understanding is the enlightened thinking that recognizes ultimate reality. Obviously Buddhist meditation goes far beyond breathing exercises, relaxation techniques, or the contemplation of morality. Meditation is intended to move a person to the Buddhist beliefs that everything is impermanent and that there is no real “self.” These concepts must be grasped to reach enlightenment.³

Much more could be said regarding Zen Buddhism, tantric practices in Tibetan Buddhism, and other forms. There are forms of meditation that seek to empty the mind of all thoughts (Smithson 2006). Some actually seek to visualize demons or move to become companions of spirits (Gross & Muck 2003:24, 25).

Contrast of Biblical and Buddhist Meditation

Similarities between Biblical and Buddhist meditation primarily exist in the area of morality and compassion. Both include forms of meditation to focus thinking away from what is impure to what is right and good. However, even in areas of morality, Buddhist and Biblical meditation are different. Buddhist morality is focused on interaction with humans and personal purity of thought, not on a connection with a personal God. Buddhism in the Theravada tradition has no room for an ultimate God in its meditation. The focus is one’s own efforts alone. Biblical meditation, on the other hand, moves people toward God, with the focus of meditation often being directly on God’s character and actions.

Even the Biblical emphasis of meditation on the law is closely tied to a relationship with God, since the first four of the Ten Commandments are concerned with how to worship and honor God. Throughout the Bible, morality is concerned with

one's relationship to God as well as people and personal holiness. Theravāda Buddhist teaching may encourage people to meditate on the Buddha statue in various positions for the purpose of helping people to follow Buddha's example. Christians do the same with Jesus' life or characteristics of God. However, typical Buddhist teaching does not encourage praying to the Buddha, whereas Biblical meditation often leads to prayerful dependence on God for mercy and transformation.

For example, Psalm 39 begins with insights similar to Buddhist thinking. Verse 3 speaks of the Psalmist meditating, followed by verses 4 to 6 speaking of the impermanence of life with every person at his best state being but vapor. However, the meditation ends with a different conclusion than Buddhism. "My hope is in You (God). Deliver me from all my transgressions" (Ps. 39:8).

Because Buddhism and Christianity have a different view of reality, the focus of meditation is also sometimes different. Buddhism teaches that there is no self, no real, lasting person, just aggregates coming together for a short time. Christianity teaches that God made humans from the dust and gave them life. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, humans can have an eternal soul. When a Buddhist meditates on his body, the purpose is merely to become aware of his breathing, discomfort, or pleasure. He notes the coming and passing of those feelings and experiences, primarily observing that nothing lasts. Biblical meditation would not stop with such observations of the natural world, but would look beyond them to the spiritual realities revealed by God in His Word. He might observe the body and move to thankfulness to God for the special design and abilities God has created. He might observe impermanence and be thankful to God for the promise of eternal life.

Buddhists and Christians may both meditate on the hurtfulness of desires and the impermanence of the world. The conclusion will be different. Buddhists meditation is used to detach from everything in the world and all desires, both "good" and "bad." It is to break free from the illusions or delusions of life. Biblical meditation leads to a turning from selfishness and the hurtful things in the world to pure and joyful relationships in the present along with spiritual and concrete pleasures of an eternal heaven. Some Buddhist meditation focuses on non-duality, the idea that good and evil are all part of the same reality and should be accepted. The Bible teaches a clear distinction between good and evil and the future hope of the entire elimination of evil. Biblical meditation therefore emphasizes turning from evil toward good.

Beyond differences in morality and reality, the ultimate goals of meditation in Buddhism and Biblical Christianity are entirely different. Buddhism teaches that

through meditation one can gain enlightenment and thus be able to escape the cycle of suffering and enter *Nirvana* (emptiness or a different state of unexplainable bliss). The Bible teaches that the end of suffering and eternal life are gifts from God, received by faith. Biblical meditation is not to be used to reach those goals. Biblical meditation is intended to help a person grow further in moral holiness, compassionate relationships, and intimacy with God. Christians see meditation as a spiritual exercise that can aid them in receiving what God has already given them in Christ. They do not meditate in order to be saved, but as a faith-filled step to further receive God's blessings.

From this we can conclude that Buddhist meditation in its full form is clearly the offer of a different way to be saved from suffering than what the Bible teaches. The Bible clearly says that salvation is possible only through Jesus. Buddhist meditation at its core disagrees.

Further exploration of the teachings of Zen Buddhism and tantric practices in Tibetan Buddhism need to be examined in light of Jesus' cautions regarding the emptying of the mind (Luke 11:24-26) and empty repetition (Matt. 6:7, 8).

Beyond Meditation

Some who compare these two kinds of meditation may assume that Buddhist meditation has much more to offer than Biblical meditation does. Truly Buddhist meditation is much more complex and varied than Biblical meditation. However, there is a very specific reason for this. Buddhism offers escape from all suffering through a path that is highly focused on meditation. The Bible offers escape from all suffering and an eternity with God through a very different means, namely the death, resurrection, and intercession of Jesus Christ.

The Buddhist path is based on self-effort. The Biblical path is based on God's power and mercy received through faith. Biblical meditation focuses on morality and God, leading to faith and prayer. It is not expected to be a method for reaching salvation. Buddhists meditate on morality with the belief that self-effort is sufficient. Of that necessity there must be much in their forms of meditation. Christians meditate on morality and on the ability of God to change their hearts and actions. Christians move to prayer as more effective for change than meditation. Buddhists meditate on the impermanence of life as a method to break free from suffering. Christians recognize their impermanence, their nothingness apart from God, but meditate on God's immutability, His immortality, and His gift of eternal life through Jesus. This leads to faith and salvation.

Implications for Ministry

An understanding of the differences between Biblical and Buddhist meditation has significant implications for Christian ministry among Buddhists. First, Biblical meditation, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, can powerfully impact the character of the Christian witness, transforming his/her ways of interacting. Buddhists will be more attracted to the Christian whose life reflects the morality of the law and the purity of God's character. Truth spoken will be much more credible coming from a life that exemplifies the same.

Secondly, Biblical meditation is an excellent activity through which Christians can make contact with Buddhists. Because of Buddhists' interest in meditation, they can be invited to various experiences of Biblical meditation. Through these experiences they can know about the areas of commonality in morality and personal purity, leading them to respect Biblical Christianity more deeply. They will also see the limits of Biblical meditation and have an opportunity to learn what the Biblical path of salvation offers, namely the reality of God, His grace through Jesus, and how it is received through faith. The Appendix shows specific ways that Biblical meditation can facilitate these first two points.

Thirdly, an understanding of the differences in the goals and concepts behind Biblical and Buddhist meditation will lead a Christian to recognize God's clear call for Christians to share the gospel with Buddhists. Buddhism teaches salvation through self-effort, which the Bible declares as futile and impossible. Love compels the Christian to share salvation by grace through faith with those who are practicing meditation to escape suffering and death.

Conclusion

Biblical meditation is primarily concerned with reflecting on God and His laws for the purpose of doing what is right and moving into a deeper faith relationship with God. Buddhist meditation covers many areas, including growth in morality and purity, but it is ultimately most interested in breaking through to enlightened insights that are intended to free a person from the cycle of suffering with the end result of entering *Nirvana*.

Buddhist and Biblical meditation, while similar in some basic respects of morality, are connected to completely different goals and concepts regarding reality and salvation. Buddhism sees meditation as an essential part of the path for escaping suffering, while the Biblical teaching turns to God's gracious act through Christ for salvation.

Christians may use Biblical meditation to help them in their mission among Buddhists by experiencing greater personal transformation through it. They may also find it useful to invite Buddhists to participate in various forms of Biblical meditation that will lead them closer to an experience of faith in the Savior God. An understanding of the differences in meditation can motivate a Christian to share the gospel with Buddhists.

Appendix

Biblical meditation has much to offer the Christian for personal growth. In turn, it is a useful means of ministry among Buddhists. Let's examine some specific applications in the areas of family, church, workplace, and recreation.

First, Biblical meditation can enhance the Christian family. God's Word has counsel for every aspect of family relationships. By meditating on Biblical stories or texts and applying them to their lives, family members will grow in their ability to love one another. For example, a father may lead his family in worship, telling the story of Jesus and the leper. He vividly describes the difficulties and ugliness of the leper's situation. He pictures Jesus' tender compassion, reaching out to touch the hurting man. Then the father asks his family to think about times when they were disgusted by some action of a family member, perhaps a brother who was selfish or a child who was naughty. He asks them to picture how Jesus would treat that person and how they should also. They discuss what has been meaningful to them in the meditation. He leads them in prayer, asking God to make their hearts more loving like Jesus.

Once a Christian family is growing through such Biblical meditation, they can use something similar to help the Buddhist families that they know, whether one-to-one or in small groups. The Christian father may learn that his Buddhist friend is struggling in his marriage. He gives him a paper with the words, "Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it" (Eph. 5:28, 29a).

He tells how meditating on this scripture helped him think about his wife's feelings. He wouldn't hit himself, so why would he hit her? Instead he learned to speak to his wife in the tone he wishes she would speak to him. The Christian then invites his Buddhist friend to carry this scripture with him, meditating on its meaning and applying it to his life. Later he tells him how he prays and asks God to fill him with patience and kindness. The whole Christian family might invite

their Buddhist friends to a one-time experience of “Biblical Meditation for Family Wholeness,” with the hope that it will become a weekly event. The first meditation could focus on moral stories like the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son, while later introducing concepts about prayer and God’s power. Such experiences need to be field-tested to see the level of impact this approach would have compared to traditional Bible studies.

Second, Biblical meditation can improve the Church and its outreach. Many times programs in churches are so filled with activity that there is no time to think, meditate, and process the information that is shared. Much helpful counsel is lost because of this. Church leaders can use Biblical meditation to help members retain and use what they hear. After any sermon or Bible study class, the leader can give a moment of silence for the students to think about what’s been taught. A preacher might say, “The Bible teaches us to ‘speak the truth in love’ (Eph. 4:15). What would ‘speaking the truth in love’ look like with a church member that you don’t get along with?” A children’s teacher might ask her students to think about how they can practice the commandment to “Honor thy father and thy mother” in the following week. Questions with time for reflection can become a powerful moment of meditation.

Before the congregation sings a song, the leader might direct them in a short Biblical meditation with a comment like, “Think about the difficulties you experienced this week and how Jesus can be like a mighty rock and a shade in a weary land for you today.” This kind of Biblical meditation helps church members apply God’s Word to their lives and moves the church to be a place of compassion and spiritual depth that will attract a thoughtful Buddhist. The Buddhist temple is often a quiet place with space and time for reflection. Christian worship may attract more Buddhists if the members take time to “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10).

A specific example of Biblical meditation that is worth further study is the prayer retreat center that is operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Korea. It is mostly Christians who come and spend a week there at a time. Much of the time is spent meditating on the life of Jesus, especially His last days and His death. The results are usually a time of intense conviction of sin and sincere repentance. It is difficult to know the actual impact this makes on their future witness to Buddhists, but it is interesting to know that quite a number of Buddhists have also attended and some have given their lives to God through the experience of Biblical meditation.

Third, Biblical meditation also has the dramatic ability to impact the Christian in his or her workplace through the application of Biblical principles. Christians can meditate on such Biblical stories as Daniel working for Nebuchadnezzar and Joseph serving in Egypt. They can ponder such texts as “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Col. 3:23). Meditating first on the scripture, and then meditating on that scripture applied to their work, will give God the opportunity to bring greater honesty, generosity, purity, justice, and helpfulness into the work arena where Buddhists can see it.

Then in turn, Christians will be able to share an effective method of life-transformation for the Buddhists with whom they work. For example, stress is a serious problem for many people. They need peace in dealing with high expectations, financial difficulties, and interpersonal problems. Whether one-to-one or in a small group, Christians can lead a meditation that focuses on scriptures and on God that will bring peace in the midst of stress. Interpersonal skills can also be improved through a Biblical meditation on the Beatitudes, Proverbs, and other pertinent scriptures applied to relationships. Cultural qualities such as materialism and harmful entertainment can be challenged and replaced through careful reflection on Jesus’ parables.

Fourth, Biblical meditation even has potential to help Christians and Buddhists in the area of recreation. The Christian can be refreshed through meditation in nature. Research regarding time spent outside in natural beauty has shown significant benefits both for physical health and emotional wellbeing. It also can impact one’s relationship with God. Creation is filled with evidence of His existence and His loving care, which upon reflection brings hope, purpose, and joy. In our experience in Thailand, we have discovered that Buddhists often find it easier to first learn about Christian principles and God in the familiar setting of nature rather than in church. Many Buddhist young people have opened their hearts in prayer for the first time on a retreat to the beach or the mountains. Meditation in nature initially feels more comfortable than Bible study. In time, both complement each other.

Here is an example similar to what we have tried. A Christian invites his Buddhist colleague to take a break from his hectic schedule to enjoy a “day of peace.” On a Saturday, the two men bring their families to a quiet place in nature. The Christian leads the group in discovering interesting things in the woods. They examine trees, leaves, flowers, and signs of animals. After discussing how green leaves take in carbon dioxide and given back oxygen, he asks, “What does this teach us about how we should respond when a person says something unkind to us?” As they look at a stagnant pond he asks, “What’s the difference between this water

and a clean, flowing stream? What can we learn about selfishness and generosity from this?" Together the families enjoy discovering that nature is amazingly full of lessons. They take time to be quiet, just observing nature or thinking about what needs to improve in their own lives. At the right time the Christian leads them to ponder the concept that such intricate design in nature must have a Designer and that there surely must be a Teacher behind all the lessons. He shares with them his belief in the Creator God and the help this reality brings to his life. When he feels they are ready, He shows them what the Bible says about these various topics.

In summary, Biblical meditation impacts Christians to make them a more Christ-like witness and appears to be an effective form of outreach to Buddhists. Much more field-testing and research needs to be attempted in the use of Biblical meditation to impact Christians and their outreach to Buddhists and others. More DVD and audio resources can also be developed. This could be done in a style that includes meditation, Bible stories, modern testimonies, or scenes of nature combined with scriptures and songs. The important part is asking thoughtful questions, followed by moments of quiet in which truth leads the one meditating to experiencing God's principles, His presence, and His peace.

Notes

¹Mind objects include the five hindrances, which are sense-desire, anger, sloth and torpor, agitation and worry, and doubt. There are also the five aggregates of clinging, which are ways of thinking about "reality" in a way that keeps a person from being enlightened. These are material form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. Next there are the six internal and six external sense-bases, namely sight, sounds, smells, flavors, tactual objects, and mind-objects. All of these have "fetters" or temptations attached to them that help keep a person tied to the suffering in this world. Finally, mind-objects include the seven factors of Enlightenment and the Four Noble Truths (Nyanaponika 1962:123-125).

²"All the implications of the Buddha's healing message as well as the core of his mind-doctrine are included in the admonition 'Be mindful!' Mindfulness, then, is the unailing master key for knowing the mind, and is thus the starting point; the perfect tool for shaping the mind, and is thus the focal point; the lofty manifestation of the achieved freedom of the mind, and is thus the culminating point. Therefore the 'Foundations of Mindfulness' (Satipaththana) have rightly been declared by the Buddha as the 'Only Way'" (Nyanaponika 1962:23, 24).

³"Stimulation automatically generates feelings, either of attraction or repulsion. Depending on the intensity of the stimuli, some degree of desire or craving then arises, a desire to move towards the object for greater or repeated stimulation or to move away from it to

reduce distress or pain. The commands are coded into the system: 'if pleasurable, prolong it, if unpleasant, make it go away.'

"Either way, moment by moment, people are inextricably tied to plans to change the way things are and thus, moment by moment, generating a new sense of self through these acts. Never satisfied with the way things are, one lives out life with a sense of incompleteness, a lack of peace, all arising out of this perceived sense of 'I.' It is a simple, meaningless and futile process. Like waves in the ocean, the mind moves towards or away from stimuli.

"Realizing the futility of this process, the Buddhist who meditates chooses to cultivate a healthy desire to get off this merry-go-round brought on by relishing and clinging to desire. When a moment of arising desire is coolly noted by the detached, meditating mind, there comes a special moment of opportunity. The meditator cultivates the skill of learning to focus on letting go or releasing the accurately seen sense of wanting as soon as it appears in consciousness. Thus, instead of moving towards the desire, the mediator chooses to remain stable, not attaching to the new input. The desire, seen for what it is, fades and the mind quickly returns to a state of equanimity—and through cultivation—bliss.

"As arising desires are not picked up and indulged, not actualized into new 'selves,' the whole world of subject and object slowly dissipates. Buddhism teaches that what remains after cultivation of this unattached knowing is true reality, the bare knowing of the sensory input of the body. This peaceful, unconditioned sense of being brings strength and stability to the mind. Eventually, the meditator loses all sense of self, and one day crosses a final barrier into a state of unbroken peace and bliss, into Nirvana or Nibbana, the final, full death of the self" (VanLeit n.d.:47).

Chapter 25

* * *

CHRIST AND KARMA: MISSION IN THE LAND OF THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM

Siroj Sorajjakool

“The depth of soul of the East is challenged to engage in a serious dialogue with the Word of God. Jesus refused to be treated superficially”
(Kosuke Koyama 1980:14).

The meaning of a word is determined by its context, and this has significant implications for mission work, especially among people from other faith traditions. How does a Buddhist come to understand Christ within the Buddhist circular cosmology of the cycle of birth and rebirth through the law of *karma*? Does the word “Christ” carry the same meaning when spoken within a worldview that emphasizes *karma* formation? This chapter looks at the possibility of helping Buddhists come to a better understanding of who Jesus is within the context of Theravāda Buddhists’ understanding of *karma* formation.

Introduction

I had the privilege of living next door to Jon Dybdahl for a year while we worked together pioneering academic work at Mission College in Thailand. While serving as Director of Thailand Adventist Seminary and as the senior pastor of

Muak Lek Seventh-day Adventist Church, I experienced one of my most meaningful pastoral experiences primarily because of Jon's contextual contribution, vision, and support of the church work. Not only was he fluent in the Thai language, he was also in tune with the local culture. Many former students and colleagues still remember our unique church experience during this period. Members removed their shoes as they entered the place of worship. Straw mats were spread out across the entire floor, and we sat on them. There were neither chairs nor pews. We dressed simply and most women wore sarongs to church. The musical selections were typically Thai, and many were composed by locals. Sermons were carefully designed, using cultural contexts and local terms.

Some missionaries and locals who had been raised in the Adventist Church their entire lives were not fully comfortable with this practical contextualization. It made me realize the need to step away from our familiar comfort zones (religious as well as cultural) and learn to enter a totally different way of seeing and being in order to communicate more effectively.

Once while teaching world religions to a group of approximately 40 Buddhist students, I asked them to respond to my questions without reflection. "Do you believe in Ganesha (the elephant god in Hinduism)?" They shook their heads. "Do you believe in the goddess Kali (another Hindu god with six arms)?" They said they did not. "Do you believe that Jesus walked on the water?" They responded, "No." "Do you believe that on the day Buddha was born he walked eight steps?" Without any hesitation they responded in the affirmative. Upon further reflection, they came to the realization that these are all stories of miracles, and the only difference was their familiarity with the story of Buddha. This experience makes me think of the importance of being aware of our assumptions and the need to move beyond our sense of comfort.

Through the years I have had many conversations with Jon and have learned the significance of the place of worldview in missiology. It is interesting how we use words to communicate but often don't realize that words have to be located. A mis-located word misrepresents the message. Wittgenstein taught us well when he pointed out that in any language game, without knowing the game, the words have no meaning.

As a Thai who grew up in a Buddhist country, I was often fascinated by well-intentioned missionaries who came in to proclaim the gospel by promising eternal life through Jesus Christ, not realizing that eternal life, within the Buddhist worldview, is not something to be desired. In fact, to want eternal life is to be stuck within the cycle of birth and rebirth resulting from sinful desire. Another good example

is the word “love” when employed within a different worldview. When Christians talk about the love of God, we imply strong attachment to a person: love that will ultimately bring people to eternal life. But in Buddhism, compassion is the promotion of detachment, an attempt to help one realize that the ultimate goal is to find freedom by being unattached to people and the things of this world.

Being Christian, in a cross-cultural setting, is not about acquiring and generously utilizing Christian vocabulary such as Jesus Christ, God, prophets, the gospel, Sabbath, baptism, and numerous other words. The meaning of a word is determined by its context. Placing a name, such as Jesus Christ, within the framework of Buddhist cosmology does not fully and symbolically convey the true meaning of Christ. It is important when ministering within an inter-religious context that worldviews be addressed.

On a number of occasions while counseling couples, I have seen the importance of the hermeneutical function of assumption. What we assume colors everything we see and determines the ways in which we respond to situations or comments. I remember one couple in particular who fought from the beginning right to the very end of the session. Before leaving the session, I asked if they would give each other a hug. They embraced one another. By the next session, all conversation was constructive and nurturing. The thing that changed was the realization for both that they were loved. When this basic assumption changed, it turned their conversation in a positive direction.

Assumptions play a significant role in communication. The meaning of the word is determined to a large extent by its very context (Wittgenstein 1953). The word “Christ” can take on a different meaning when presented in a different context. And so a missionary may think that he or she is preaching the gospel when in fact the meaning may be far from what the gospel really means within a Judeo-Christian worldview. If we do not take assumptions into consideration, the message we intend to communicate may be lost in translation, metaphorically speaking. Carl Jung, by showing the similarity between primitive and civilized societies, helps us understand the importance of assumptions.

As a matter of fact, primitive man is no more logical or illogical than we are. His presuppositions are not the same as ours, and that is what distinguishes him from us. His thinking and his conduct are based on assumptions other than our own. To all that is in any way out of the ordinary and that therefore disturbs, frightens or astonishes him, he ascribes what we should call a supernatural origin. For him, of course, these things are not supernatural; on the contrary, they belong to his world of experience (Jung 1933:127).

So what are the philosophical and metaphysical assumptions we need to understand to communicate better with Buddhists?

Theravāda Buddhism¹

What philosophical and metaphysical assumptions do Buddhists embrace of which we should be aware of, in order to communicate more effectively? In this section I will outline the basic theological understanding of Theravāda Buddhism, drawing mostly from the writings of George Grimm, a Buddhist scholar.

Buddhism emerged from the struggle with the issue of human suffering and ways out of this suffering. Upon seeing old, sick, and dying people, Gotama pledged to find a way out of this human predicament. Hence, the core of Buddhism teaches that to be is to suffer (Matthews 1999:136). It is the fundamental reality of human beings; therefore, all of life should be the path toward the cessation of suffering. If to be is to suffer, suffering ceases in the attempt to not be. In the Buddhist worldview, time is not linear but cyclical. In this cyclical time exist four basic elements: earth, water, fire, and air (Grimm 1958:207). Together with these elements there also exists an impersonal law—the law of *karma* or the law of causality (Grimm 1958:194, 195). Under certain conditions, through the law of *karma*, various elements come together and form different objects such as plants, animals, and human beings—all depending upon its cause. Everything that exists in this world is a combination of two or more of these basic elements. These the Buddha calls *sankharas*, which literally means “to make” or “to put together” (Grimm 1958:207). How things come together is explained through the Buddhist understanding of the law of *karma*: “this law of *karma* is nothing more than the law of causality, not only in its formal meaning, as the law of cause and effect, but also in its material significance, according to which a certain quite definite effect always follows upon a certain definite cause” (Grimm 1958:195).

Since everything is a “production,” there will always remain the possibility of dissolution, or returning to the basic elements. “All productions are transitory, all productions cause Suffering” (Grimm 1958:208). The Buddha says, “Transient, monks, are the productions (*sankharas*), unsteady are the productions, troublesome are the productions” (cited by Grimm 1958:208). The whole world is nothing but a process of production and dissolution in accordance with the law of causality. It is made up of the basic elements and one day will return to its basic elements—earth, water, wind, and fire.

Corporeality and Mentality (Personality)

This concept applies to human beings as well. Under certain conditions, in accord with the law of causality, the four basic elements come together and form a person. Hence, a person is but a “putting together” of earth, water, wind, and fire. Human beings, therefore, are basically matter.

If a person is merely matter, what then leads to the formation of personality that enables him or her to have well-organized contact with the external world? The answer to this question is rather complicated. First, we need to have an understanding of the law of causality. This law does not control the physical world alone; its realm also includes the moral aspect. The ability to see causality within morality only comes when we look within ourselves and discover that “all becoming proceeds from grasping” (Grimm 1958:175), or the will to live. This will to live leads to the “putting together” of basic elements for contact to take place. The Buddha states, “If, Ananda, you were asked: ‘Is contact due to a particular cause?’ you should say: ‘It is.’ And to the question: ‘From what cause is contact?’ you should say ‘Nama-rupa (corporeality and mentality) is the cause of contact’” (cited by Grimm 1958:81).

The will for contact or *tanha* (desire) (Matthews 1999:137), leads to the formation of a person. A person, according to the Buddha, is but an aggregate of corporeality and mentality (*nama-rupa*). In fact, he or she is merely a name form given to a grouping of the five aggregates that are constantly changing—always becoming and never “being.” These five aggregates, or *khandhas*, are corporeality, sensation, perception, mental formation, and consciousness.²

Reality and the True Self

Personality (corporeality and mentality) is the apparatus that makes contact between the self and the external world possible. At the same time, it is precisely through these that suffering also arises, since the world and the personality are nothing but productions that inevitably have to face dissolution—all is transient, all is arising and passing away. “Because all existence is will, everything that is in harmony with this will is happiness, and everything hindering it is suffering” (Grimm 1958:39). We “will” for contact, and through this “will” personality is developed, whereby contact is made possible. But because both the world and personality are impermanent, it becomes a hindrance and hence we suffer (Grimm 1958:39).

Is the world of evolution and dissolution the only reality? Is personality my

true self? If so, there would be no way out of the problem of suffering. Suffering and human beings would coexist for eternity. But to the Buddha there is a way out from suffering, because he was awakened to another reality beyond the world of evolution and dissolution, beyond impermanent personality. He was awakened to the supreme reality: “We really all have a lasting divination or presentiment that also under this reality in which we live and are there lies hidden a second and different reality. It is the thing-in-itself” (Grimm 1958:25, 26).

What is the nature of this reality the Buddha discovered? “There is,” says Buddha, “a not-born, a not-become, a not-created, a not-formed” (cited by Grimm 1958:380). This concept of reality is further explained in Udana 1 VIII, 1: There is a yonder realm where neither earth is nor water, neither fire nor air, neither the boundless realm of space nor the boundless realm of consciousness, neither this world nor another, neither moon nor sun. This is called neither coming nor going nor standing, neither origination nor annihilation. Without support, without beginning, without foundation is this. This same is the end of suffering (cited by Grimm 1958:380).

If there is another reality behind this phenomenal world that cannot be categorized under transitoriness, then there is hope for deliverance from suffering, since all suffering has its root in transitoriness. How does one come to understand this possibility?

“I am: that is the most certain axiom there is” (Grimm 1958:112). This is so because every perception is effected through me and therefore presupposes me as the perceiving subject. Yet the predicate “am” may not be applicable to my essence. Does this “am” refer to my corporeal form together with my consciousness, sensation, and perception, or does it refer to another reality that transcends the empirical, transitory world? What is the true essence of a person?

What I perceive originating and perishing cannot be myself. What I perceive originating and perishing must, logically speaking, be something different from me. For if I am identical with the object, with its disappearance I also should have ceased to exist—but there I am; I am still there after the thing disappeared. “It is precisely its disappearance that causes me astonishment, surprise and—pain” (Grimm 1958:115). I am because I suffer. I suffer because I perceive and experience transitoriness. To experience suffering presupposes that “I” must exist since experience cannot stand alone. At the same time, to experience transitoriness means that I am not participating in this incessant change. To experience transitoriness I and that which is transitory cannot be one and the same or else no such experience can arise. Thus I cannot be identical with the cause of my pain. Hence the cause of my

pain does not belong to my essence. Further, since pain is conditional, it is not part of my essence (Grimm 1958:115).

The Buddha said “*Sabbe dhamma anatta*: all things are not the I” (cited by Grimm 1958:138). Through the indirect approach to the question of humans’ true essence, the Buddha discovers “what am I not?” The world, my personality, and my will do not belong to my true essence. They have nothing to do with my true “me.” But if we are not the world and neither personality nor will, there is almost nothing left, and one is immediately confronted with the question: what am I then? What can my essence be if it has nothing to do with the empirical world, nor my corporeal organism, nor my consciousness, nor my sensation, nor my perception, nor my cognition, nor my will? What am I?

Since we have been stripped of all these and “still we are,” what shall I then be? We want to be something and not nothing. But the opposite of nothing is everything. What is this everything? “The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and flavors, the body and objects of touch, thinking and ideas, this, ye monks, is called Everything” (cited by Grimm 1958:133). But from the above argument Grimm concludes that this “Everything” cannot be your essence. “But behind all this, that is, behind Everything, there is only Nothing. Consequently you are not Something, but you are indeed—Nothing” (Grimm 1958:133). This is called *anatta* or the doctrine of no-self as the essential core of Buddhism (Ellwood & McGraw 1999:132, 133).

Christ and Karma: The Place of Worldview

Therefore, it is important to understand that at the core of Buddhism is the problem of suffering. To be is to suffer (*dukkha*). The way out of suffering is to realize that it is desire (*tanha*) that leads to being. And this desire is perpetuated by ignorance (*avidya*) when we do not understand that the true essence of us is *anatta* (no-self). This thing called “I” is nothing but a “putting-together” that arises because of the desire to be. But there really is no “I.” Hence, to grasp this understanding of the doctrine of “no-self” is the solution to the problem of suffering.

In a Judeo-Christian worldview, we see suffering as the result of sin and acknowledge Christ as the only source of salvation. It is through the sacrifice of Christ that we are forgiven, and the way out of suffering is through acceptance of Jesus Christ. Often missionaries come to Thailand with a passion to bring the message of hope and forgiveness, wanting to see many converts receive Christ in their lives and obtain hope for salvation.

I once mentioned the term “forgiveness” to a missionary who had studied Buddhism thoroughly, and his immediate response was, “There is nothing to talk about. There is no forgiveness in Buddhism.” There is a Thai expression, “*Tam dee dai dee. Tam chua dai chua,*” which can be translated, “You reap what you sow.” This is the law of *karma*. It is also interesting to note that there is no word for forgiveness in the Thai language. When I have wronged someone, I will say, “Give ‘me’ punishment.” And the person may respond, “Your punishment has been lifted.” But there is a much deeper meaning to punishment within Buddhist metaphysics. To be, in essence, is to be punished under the law of *karma*. It is the punishment of the will or desire to be, to live, or to have. The punishment already takes place in the fact that one exists and in this existence there is inevitable suffering. So in a sense suffering is the result of punishment. And within this cosmology, the only way out is to not-be.

So for Christ to forgive in order that one will continue to be, to exist (and not just to continue existence but to go on forever) runs contradictory to the very essence of Buddhism itself. Promoting eternal life through Jesus Christ, in Buddhist cosmology, is like suggesting that Christianity encourages attachment and desire, which in Buddhism is considered sinful. On occasion I have teased some of my missionary friends by saying that perhaps if one wants to live for eternity, one should convert to Buddhism and keep sinning. This way, one will live forever through the cycle of life unended. And if a Buddhist wants to achieve *Nirvana*, he or she should become a Christian and keep sinning. This way, one will die and never be reborn again. This is ironic unless we understand the worldviews and cosmologies that dictate how certain words are being used.

The challenge in communicating Christ is to ask how someone can best understand the gospel in relation to the problem of suffering within the worldview that holds firmly to the concept of *karma* formation. What does the gospel have to say about suffering in relation to attachment and the will to live? Heaven is not a simple solution to the problem of human suffering, and perhaps the gospel has a much more profound answer to the problem of human suffering than paradise. The challenge in presenting Christ to Buddhists is to explore the possibility of the coexistence of being and suffering through a sense of meaning. What is it about the gospel that makes it possible “to be” even in the midst of suffering?³

What often sustains a person through suffering may not be hope for the total elimination of suffering. Working for a number of years with people who struggle with pain at both emotional and physical levels, I have come to realize that it is not only the presence of suffering that affects one’s sense of meaning. Suffering in itself

is not the fundamental basis of humanity's struggle. Struggles are manageable when there is meaning in our suffering. It is rather the lack of meaning that makes suffering unbearable. For this reason we might hear people with terminal illness say, "There must be a reason why I have cancer."

While meaning may be conceptualized cognitively, often a deep sense of meaning does not emerge from a well-thought-out theory about life, but rather from a deep existential perspective. It is not strictly because of intellectual knowledge that there is meaning in my struggles with life. Rather, it is realizing at the existential level that meaning does exist. And this deep sense of meaning often emerges from knowing that one is loved. Love offers a deep sense of existential meaning that transcends intellectual conceptualization. Love gives meaning when our theories are falling apart and our theology is in chaos; we remain sustained because we know that love exists, because we experience love, and because through this love we come in touch with the sweetness of our very existence. Through love emerges the polarity of life that entices us toward living, the polarity of sadness and joy, life and death, tears and laughter, pain and comfort, disturbance and peace. Love is an invitation to a life worth living even in the midst of its complexity.

Hence, the gospel message can affect the fundamentals of Buddhist cosmology when the seed of existential love is planted. To love is to plow the land and loosen the soil for the seed to be planted. It does not just change someone's vocabulary, literal location of worship, or external religious rituals. It changes that person's reality. What makes Buddhism Buddhism is the path toward non-being as a way out of suffering. But if a Buddhist finally realizes the sweetness of life even in the midst of pain, his or her fundamental belief has changed. Jesus has become a force that alters the former reality through the presence of love.

Communicating Christ

As a guest lecturer in one of my classes, Charles Kraft told a story from his mission work in Nigeria.⁴ The members asked if he would preach, and he indicated that he would like to hear them preach. They were astonished. They asked if he could teach them the Bible. He responded, "No." They were confused, so he made a deal with them that if they would offer their interpretation of the texts, he would offer his as well. Then they asked if they could come to his house for Bible study. He said that he would rather go to their homes. They were not used to this, because in the past missionaries did not have Bible studies in members' homes. He then drew a

chart that showed that since God is relational, relationship is primary in God's plan to communicate the gospel. "The gospel," writes Saphir Athyal from Union Biblical Seminary in Maharashtra, India "is actualized when it is heard and appropriated. It never is an abstract truth, but a message that takes concrete forms and continues to have a 'dialogue' with the believers in their daily practical situations" (1980:68).

This applies especially well within the context of Thai Buddhism. After spending a number of years in northern Thailand, Kosuke Koyama wrote: "Theology in Action" is a "neighbour-logical" concept. It means "to engage in theology together with one's neighbours." It is a humble attempt. It hopes to contribute to the ministry of the church. . . . We who engage in "neighbour-logical" theology acknowledge, with humility, our spiritual and mental limitations. The reality of one's neighbors—all that they are and all that they do—must become a motivating force for our theological engagement (Koyama 1979:53).

In Buddhist cosmology, the path that one has to choose under the law of *karma* is between being (leading to pain and suffering) and non-being (peace and tranquility). Is it possible that through Christ another possibility is being offered, a place where being can gain a sense of meaning even in the presence of suffering, a sweetness of life even in the face of its complexity? I believe this is our calling, to interject meaning into life through compassion and love. When love is experienced, meaning emerges. With meaning, being becomes a possibility. Through our engagement of love and service in the reality of our neighbors, their worldview is changed at an existential level. This is the change that makes it possible for one to be touched by grace, because the experience of grace overrides the existential grip of one's belief in *karma*. This is conversion at the existential level. It may not look externally orthodox but, internally, it is theologically valid. When Jon addressed missionaries to Thailand and other Buddhist countries, I often heard his passionate statement: "Grace makes all the difference." I totally agree. And its impact can be very significant when communicated at the symbolic level through our active engagement in the everyday complexity of their lives, and not necessarily through our traditional use of arguments about the Sabbath, or the accuracy of the Bible to predict the future, or our generous use of Christian vocabulary.

While Professor Kraft and I dined in a Thai restaurant one evening, he expressed his concern regarding ways the church often engages in mission work without really getting into the actual lives of the congregation, and the importance of engaging in this process in order to understand and impact worldviews. A couple of days later he mailed me his book *Communicating Jesus' Way* (1999). What really captured my attention was the chapter on "Christian Communication" where he

points out that the message is far more than a verbal message. It is a “person message.” He writes:

God himself is the message, and we are to respond to a person to properly attach meaning to that message. At the purely human level, we do the same thing with messages of love, care, concern, sympathy and the like—we respond not simply to words but to the person who does the deed. The ultimate Christian message then, is a person. And anything that reduces that message to mere words stimulates in the receptor meanings unworthy of the message. Our message is a message of life and only life can properly convey it. Thus only if that message is actually conveyed by life can it be properly understood (Kraft 1999:97).

After traveling and researching the work of the Adventist Church among Buddhists in Thailand for the past 75 years, Yvonne Terry captured the core missiological approach in her own words:

Compassion is sharing in suffering, being sympathetic, tender, and responsive. It is being “nailed down.” It is acting to share and to help. It is the involvement of ordinary individuals. It is the freedom to see others for who they are, and the intrinsic worth in that “who.” It is choosing to actively love people through service. It is realizing the impact one person can make on another’s life, and sensing the worth of that life. It is working toward the possibilities that exist for the impact just one person can make when they are supported by the strength of a Savior, whether in a good or bad situation, whether alone or collectively (Terry 1994:237, 238).

Notes

¹Theravāda Buddhism is one of the most orthodox of all Buddhist schools. Theravādins admit the human character of Buddha, who possessed human foibles; e.g., he was impatient with some of the *bhikkhus* (Buddhist monks) who made noise like fishermen in the fish market, so he dismissed them. He was subject to human weakness when, at the age of 80, he complained that his back was in pain. There is recognition of the human characteristics of Buddha.

The main ethical teaching in this tradition is to “abstain from all evil, accumulate all goods and purify one’s mind” by practicing *sila* (discipline that is divided into the order of ordinary man and that of monks), *samadhi* (meditation—gaining insight into the real nature of things), and *prajna* (which helps one understand the four Noble Truths and the law of dependent origination). *Nirvana* is a state free from passion, ill-will, and delusion, and

arahat is the person who reaches the state of dispassionateness or *nirvana* (the end of future birth, one who will no longer return to worldly life) (Ellwood & McGraw 1999:134-143).

²Through the will for contact there first develops corporeality (*rupa*), which can be divided into two basic groups: the underived group (earth, water, fire, and wind) and the derived group (sense organs such as eyes, ears, nose, and sensations, and physical sense objects such as form, sound, odor, and taste). Once the physical sense organs are formed, consciousness arises. Consciousness is something that cannot stand on its own. It is an effect of the interlocking of the activities of the senses and external form. The Buddha divides consciousness into six types (*viññānas*): visual, auditory, olfactory, mouth, body, and mental consciousness (Grimm 1958:71). After consciousness, the next thing that arises is sensation, emerging from seeing, thinking, smelling, and hearing. This sensation or feeling is divided by the Buddha into five groups, namely, bodily agreeable feeling (*sukha*), bodily painful feeling (*dukkha*), mentally agreeable feeling (*somanassa*), mentally painful feeling (*domanassa*), and indifferent feeling (*upekkha*). From sensation arises perception, and perception is primarily the perception of form, sound, odor, taste, and bodily impressions (Grimm 1958:73-74).

³For a detailed analysis of the relationship between the Buddhist concept of *anatta* (no-self) and Christian mission, see de Silva (1980:220-238).

⁴This story is also mentioned in his book (Kraft 2005:7).

Chapter 26

* * *

SALVATION IN BUDDHISM

Rudi Maier

Buddhism developed out of Hinduism in the sixth century BC. For a Buddhist, salvation is reaching *Nirvāna*. To reach *Nirvāna* one must follow the Noble Eightfold Path. In this way salvation is through what a Buddhist does. It is through human works. This chapter will describe the various stages and actions that the Buddha showed his followers. It will conclude with a short overview of what ways this form of salvation differs from the Christian one. The unstated challenge of this topic is for Christians to learn to understand first such a different religious system before approaching it with the “simple” gospel, which in most cases is not only impossible for them to understand but also irrelevant to their worldview.

Introduction

In religion,¹ salvation is the concept that God or another Higher Power “saves” humanity from spiritual death or eternal damnation by providing for them an eternal life (or some form of afterlife). Salvation has been termed the major theme of the Bible (Selman & Manser 2002: “Salvation”). The theological study of salvation is called soteriology.² Salvation may also refer to “deliverance” or “redemption” from actual trouble or threatening danger, such as sin and its effects (Morris 1993:784; Grudem 1994:580). By its very nature, salvation must answer to the plight of hu-

manity as it actually is, offering individuals forgiveness, redemption from the slavery of sin, reconciliation from alienation, and “renewal for a marred image of God” (Stagg 1962:80).

World religions share the notion that humanity needs salvation from its present condition since humanity has “lost” its purpose of existence. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the three monotheistic religions of the world—regard salvation as liberation from the bondage of sin and re-establishing a personal communion with God (Valea 2009; Barrett, Kurian, & Johnson 2001). Judaism suggests collective salvation for the people of Israel (Brodbeck 2007:1672). In Christianity Jesus is the source of salvation and faith in His saving power is stressed (John 3:14–22) (Frankiel 1985), whereas Islam emphasizes submission to Allah.³

Eastern religions claim that salvation can be attained by using only inner human resources such as meditation, accumulation of wisdom, asceticism, rituals, or good deeds. They tend to stress self-help through individual discipline and practice, sometimes over the course of many lifetimes—though Mahāyāna Buddhism and some forms of Hinduism suggest that humans can be saved only through the grace and intervention of divine external personal agents (certain *buddhas*, a *bodhisattvas*,⁴ an *avatar* or *avatāra*,⁵ etc.).

Author Ernest Valea suggests three areas as important when analyzing the meaning of salvation to a particular religion:

- the resources needed for attaining salvation,
- the actual method of getting saved, and
- the meaning of being saved (Valea 2009).

This chapter will explore how Buddhism understands this concept of salvation.⁶ Such an exploration is significant not only for those who work with Buddhists as missionaries, but also for those who live in western countries where Buddhism has influenced many New Age beliefs (Lewis & Petersen 2005:101–349; Eck 2001:142–221).

Origins of Buddhism

Buddhism originated in northern India and evolved from the teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama (or Siddhāttha Gotama), who was born in the fifth century BCE⁷ in the city of Lumbini in the Indian state of Kapilavastu, now part of Nepal. According to Buddhist tradition, the birth of Siddhārtha Gautama was accompanied

by many unusual events.⁸ The famous hermit seer Asita predicted that Siddhārta would either become a great king or a great religious monk.⁹ His father wanted him to become a great king, so he took precautions to ensure that his son would not be influenced in the direction of religion (Herold 1922:8–11; Narada 1992:9–12).¹⁰

In spite of his father's efforts, after Siddhārta was married to his cousin and had a son, he was exposed to "four great sights" that altered the course of his life. After encountering an old man, an ill man, a corpse, and an ascetic, Gautama was convinced that suffering lay at the end of all existence. Shortly after that experience, according to Buddhist texts, at the age of 29, he renounced his princely titles, abandoned his life of comfort and ease, said good bye to his wife Yaśodharā and child Rahula, and became a spiritual seeker in the hope of comprehending the truth of the world around him. Gautama first devoted himself to the study of traditional religious teachings and practiced the most extreme forms of self-denial by depriving himself of all human comfort, living on a grain of rice per day. But even after living in self-mortification for six years he found no answers; he finally gave up the extreme practices of ascetism and accepted a bowl of rice (Amore & Ching 2007:381–89).

At the age of 35, after he had gained back his strength, while meditating for many days beneath a sacred fig tree, he finally attained full enlightenment by understanding how to be free from suffering. He became an *arahat* (or *ariya-puggala*, a "Noble One"),¹¹ which marked the end of his attachments (Nārada 1980:1–45; Nyānatiloka 1980:23–26). After his spiritual awakening, the Buddha began a teaching career motivated by his great compassion for living beings. He attracted a band of five followers, who formed with him the *sangha* or first Buddhist order.

In a deer park in the small town of Sarnath, outside modern Banaras, the Buddha delivered his first sermon (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, "Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth" or "Foundation of the Kingdom of the Norm")¹² seven weeks after attaining enlightenment (Piyadassi 1999),¹³ in which he outlined four inter-related spiritual truths, often called the Four Noble Truths (Gyatso 2007), which summarize the causes of suffering and how to end suffering by following the Eight-fold Path (Nārada 1980:74–99; Amore & Ching 2002: 210–218).

He spent the rest of his life teaching the *Dhamma* (Pali) or *Dharma* (Sanskrit),¹⁴ travelling throughout the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent. He died from food poisoning at the age of 80 in Kushinagar, India. It was at this stage that he finally achieved the release from the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) (Keown & Prebish 2004:267; Skilton 1997:25; Armstrong 2001:187; see also *Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta*, translated by Story 1988).¹⁵

According to the Pāli¹⁶ Buddhist scriptures, the Four Noble Truths (or The Four Truths of the Noble One) were the first teachings of Gautama Buddha after attaining enlightenment. Escape from suffering is possible for those who accept and follow these Four Noble Truths (*Cattāri Ariyasaccāni*)¹⁷ which are traditionally summed up as follows: (1) life is basically suffering, or dissatisfaction (*dukkha*); (2) the origin or arising of that suffering (*samudaya*) lies in craving or grasping; (3) the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering is possible through the cessation of craving; and (4) the way (*magga*) to cease craving and so attain escape from continual rebirth is by following Buddhist practice, known as the Noble Eightfold Path (Nanayakkara 2000:262–264).

Over the course of its 2,500-year history, Buddhism has experienced many schisms and modifications. There are currently three major branches of Buddhism: the Theravāda (“Doctrine of the Elders”),¹⁸ the Mahāyāna (“Great Vehicle”),¹⁹ and the Vajrayāna (“Diamond Vehicle,” often simply called “Tibetan Buddhism”) traditions,²⁰ as well as many sects and groups within each of these branches.

Theravāda Buddhism was one of the many schools that started shortly after the death of the Buddha. It did not become popular until the third century BCE, when the Indian emperor King Aśoka (or Ashoka) made Theravāda Buddhism the official religion of his empire.²¹ In the same era, King Aśoka sent missionaries, including his own son, Arahat Mahinda, to Sri Lanka and other Southeast Asian countries. During the Muslim invasion of northern India around 1000 AD, Buddhism began to die out in India but started to flourish in other Southeast Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and Laos (Lynn De Silva, 1974:16, 17).

While Buddhism remains most popular within Asia, all branches are now found throughout the world. As Buddhism has spread from its roots in India to virtually every corner of the world, it has adopted and adapted local practices and beliefs. Various sources put the number of Buddhists in the world at between 230 million and 500 million (Adherents.com 2005; US Department of State 2004; Garfinkel 2005: 88–109; Maps of World 2009).

The Buddhist canon consists of a vast corpus of texts that cover philosophical, devotional, and monastic matters. Each of the major divisions of Buddhism has its own distinct version of what it considers to be canonical scriptures (McDermott 1984:22–39).²² The Buddha did not write down his teachings and rules of discipline. At the first council (543/2 BCE), two of Buddha’s travelling companions, Ananda and Upali, recited the *sutras* (discourses on the doctrines) and *vinaya* (the monastic rules). Later another disciple recited the systematic treaties. In the first century CE, Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka wrote down the texts on palm leaves (Nigosian 2008:179; Amore & Ching 2002:220; Lily de Silva 2007:26–39; Warder 2000).

Salvation in Buddhism Hindu Roots²³

Adherents of Hinduism (Warrier 2005:134), Buddhism, Jainism (Salter 2005:174; Narayanan 2002:164–166, 176, 177) and Sikhism (Shackle 2005:218, 219; Oxtoby 2002a:139–141) do not believe in salvation in the sense understood by most Westerners. They do not focus on Hell or Heaven as the end of a soteriological choice, but on knowledge (King 2005:149, 153). They believe in reincarnation (Buddhism rebirth) after death.²⁴ According to this belief, one's actions or *karma* allow one to be reborn as a higher or lower being. If one is evil and has a multitude of bad actions, one is likely to be reborn as a lower being. If one has a multitude of good actions or *karma*, one is likely to be reborn as a higher being, perhaps a human with higher status or in a higher caste (Padmasiri De Silva 1998:41; King 1999:67, 123, 124, 172, 173). In fact, “birth and death are not the predestined fate of a living being but a ‘corollary of action’ (*karma*), as it has been called by some. One who acts must sooner or later reap the effect; while experiencing an effect, one is sowing seeds anew, thus causing the next wave of life to be high or low according to the nature of one's preceding actions” (Takakusu 1978:37).

Eventually, however, one is able to escape from *samsāra*, the cycle of death and rebirth, through the attainment of the highest spiritual state.²⁵ This state is called *moksha* (or *mukti*)²⁶ in Hinduism, and often is called *Nirvāna* (*Nibbāna*) in Buddhism. This state is not one of individual happiness but often a merging of oneself with collective existence (Dharmasiri 1986:19, 20). *Nirvāna* in the *sutras* is never conceived of as a place (such as one might conceive heaven), but rather it is the antinomy of *samsāra*, which itself is synonymous with ignorance (*avidyā*, Pāli *avijjā*). This said, “the liberated mind (*citta*) that no longer clings’ means *Nibbāna*” (*Majjhima Nikaya* 2-Att. 4.68; Nanamoli & Bodhi 1995). Liberation, therefore, in Buddhism is seen as an end to suffering, rebirth, and ignorance (Dhammavihari 2003:160–166) as well as the attainment of “Happiness, Moral Perfection, Realization and Freedom” (Lily De Silva 1987:29).

Buddhism is actually a protest or radical movement directed against the halloved ritualism and sacrificial religion cultivated by the Brahmins in Hinduism (Mutsuddi 195?; Amore & Ching 2002:201–203; Lynn De Silva 1980:11–13). As a substitute, it offers a system of moral training and mental discipline leading to ultimate *Nirvāna*. Siddharta Gautama, who discovered the means by which deliverance from suffering can be achieved, is no longer accessible; the Buddha is neither a “Savior” in the Judeo-Christian sense or a “*deva*” (god) in the Hindu-Buddhist

sense, nor is he alive. However, he did show the way. In this sense, the Buddha is not the agent of salvation, but Buddhism as a salvation religion is concerned with his way, i.e., his message of salvation (*dhamma*) (Rahula 1978). “As a message [the *dhamma*’s] basic intent does not seem to have been to present a doctrinal or philosophical system as such, but rather to convert the hearers to a radically new mode of life, to lead people, in other words, to enter into the Path through which salvation could actually be experienced” (Reynolds 1972:16).²⁷

The Buddha should not be seen as a god, because the Buddha cannot help anyone to attain *Nirvāna*. He is not a liberator, but rather the pointer of the way to liberation. When it comes to the matter of salvation, every person is on his or her own. Nonetheless, on a practical level, many laypeople consider and exalt the Buddha as a spiritual being, and they worship him, pray to him, and expect to receive blessings from him. What makes the historical Buddha so special is his life example. He left everything that he had—his life of ease and comfort, his family and loved ones—and completely renounced worldly life in the search for truth. He completely detached himself from what he believed to be the cause of suffering. It is in this sense that Buddhists take refuge in him and observe his *dharma* and follow his way of liberation from suffering.

Theravāda Buddhism is basically a religion without god. It does not believe in a supreme being, although it does recognize many gods as higher beings. However, when it comes to the issue of salvation, the gods cannot help because they are beings subjected to suffering and the *karmic* system of *samsara*, the endless cycle of rebirth (Küng 1993:303). These higher beings are in need of liberation themselves (Deming 2005:39). In Theravāda Buddhism, man must save himself.²⁸ The last words of the Buddha before he died were a clear indication that his disciples could no longer depend on him: “Behold, O monks, this is my last advice to you. All component things in the world are changeable. They are not lasting. Work hard to gain your own salvation” (Walsh 1995:231).

For Buddhists, religion is purely a matter of understanding and practicing the message. In that sense, personal ethics are an important part of Buddhist doctrine (Dharmasiri 1986:15–30; Premasiri 2000:149–158).

Buddhism’s Central Concern

Unlike many other religions, Buddhism is not concerned with the problems of the immortality of the soul (Pyysiäinen 2003: *Dhammapada* 1992:1.1–3; Dharmika 2009). There is no consistent notion of the afterlife, such as heaven and hell.²⁹

Buddhism does not hinge upon the concept of a Creator God but upon the personal practice of ethics, meditation, and wisdom (Sayādaw 1983).³⁰ A story is told in the *Culamalunkya Sutta* that one day Malunkyaputte, one of the disciples of the Buddha, complained to the master that he had no answers to many of the important questions of life. The Buddha, as so often happened, replied with a story:

A man is wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison. His friends and relatives brought a surgeon to him. The man said, "I will not let the surgeon pull out this arrow until I know whether the man who wounded me was a noble, a brahman, a merchant or a worker. I will not let the surgeon pull out the arrow until I know the name and clan of the man who wounded me . . . until I know whether he was tall or short or of middle height . . . until I know whether the bow that wounded me was a longbow or crossbow . . . until I know whether the crossbowstring that wounded me was fibre or reed or sinew or bark . . ." All this would not be known to the man, and he would die (cited in Harris 2005:198; *Malunkyaputta Sutta* 2005).

The point of the story is that those who insist on knowing the answers to speculative questions about the nature of reality will die before they know the answers (see also Nithiyanandam 2002a:vii for a similar story). The Buddha is far more concerned that they live a holy life that leads to the cessation to suffering. In fact, the Buddha avoided discussing any purely theoretical or metaphysical issues, as well as questions concerning himself. The Buddha was a practical philosopher who concerned himself completely with knowing the cause of suffering and achieving *Nirvāna* by extinguishing the flame of desire. For him, metaphysical questions offered few benefits and did not have anything to do with the fundamentals of religion. The Buddha's teaching is predominately practical in nature. Its chief purpose is to enlighten people about the problem of suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation (Spiro 1982:36; Gunaratna 2008:3–5; Nithiyanandam 2003a). It is, thus, human suffering that has determined the soteriological goal of Buddhism, which is characterized as how to obtain release from human suffering itself.³¹ In that way "Buddhism is less a set of beliefs than a path, leading from suffering to the cessation of suffering, from ignorance to compassion and wisdom" (Harris 2005:198). Therefore, deliverance from suffering (*dukkha*) is the ultimate goal of Buddhism and the *Leitmotiv* of Theravāda Buddhism.

Unlike some salvation religions (Christianity, for example), in which sin is the primary concern, the primary concern of Buddhism is not with sin, but with

suffering. This is not . . . because sin does not exist in Buddhism. Lying, stealing, killing, and so on—all these and more are Buddhist sins [they are known as demerits or *akusala*³²]. The difference is that although Buddhism recognized the existence of sin, unlike Christianity it does not see it as inevitable. All human beings have the capacity to become saints (*arahants*), and thus sinless. For Buddhism, it is not sin but suffering that is inevitable. Just as Christianity teaches that any being, however pure, remains in the sight of God a miserable sinner, so Buddhism teaches that any being (even a god), however blissful, cannot escape suffering (Spiro 1982:38, 39).

Since suffering is a fact of life, the aim has been to search for ways and means by which suffering may be overcome (Pandit 2004).

The Four Noble Truths and How to Overcome Suffering

Buddhism began as a way to address the suffering that exists in the world, and it was not overly-focused on ultimate salvation. That said, however, there was a clear doctrine of salvation in the Buddha's teachings: Salvation in early Buddhism was *Nirvāna*, the extinguishing of the *karma* that constitutes the self. *Nirvāna* is not a place or a state, but the end of rebirth.

Significantly, the Buddha said little about *Nirvāna*, because he felt that the alleviation of suffering was far more important, and that focusing on the goal of ultimate salvation would only lead to more attachments, and therefore more suffering. Rather than focus on *Nirvāna* as a goal, lay Buddhists were encouraged to give donations of goods, services, or money to monks or monasteries; to chant or copy *sutras*; and to engage in other activities to gain merit that could lead to a more desirable rebirth. This would bring them closer to enlightenment. The Buddha developed his thesis in four parts, enunciating in each part a principle, which he called a Noble Truth³³ (Nanayakkara 2000:262–264; Story 1968). The Four Noble Truths outline Buddhist soteriology: they describe suffering (*dukkha*) and its causes, the possibility of its cessation, and the way to its cessation, that is, the Noble Eightfold Path (Nithiyanandam 2002b:355–389).

All Life is Suffering (The First Noble Truth)

The first Noble Truth (*Dukkha-ariya sacca*) is generally translated as “Noble Truth of Suffering” and has been interpreted to state that suffering is a universal

fact (or that life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain [Humphreys 1978 (1951)]). Because of this emphasis, Westerners especially have regarded Buddhism as pessimistic. But *dukkha* is a highly philosophical term (Nanayakara 1979:696; see also Rahula 1978:16, 17).

According to the Buddha, whatever life we lead, it has the nature of some aspect of suffering (*dukkha*).³⁴ Even our present so-called happiness is only transitory in nature. That is, we can only find temporary happiness and pleasure in life (*Mahāvagga* I:9). At first glance this seems exceedingly depressing and negative. However, even when you really feel fulfilled there will be that subtle, all-pervasive undercurrent of tension—the realization that no matter how great the moment of joy may be, it is going to end. No matter how much we have gained, we will lose some of it or will spend the rest of our days guarding what we have gotten or scheming how to get more. Ultimately we are going to die and lose everything.³⁵ Because of that, life is transitory.³⁶

It is true that the Pali word for *dukkha* in the ordinary sense means “suffering,” “pain,” “sorrow,” and “misery” (Keown 2003:81), “but the term *dukkha* as the First Noble Truth, which represents the Buddha’s view of life and the world, has a deeper philosophical meaning and connotes enormously wider senses . . . such as ‘imperfection,’ ‘impermanence,’ ‘emptiness,’ ‘insubstantiality’” (Rahula 1978:17).³⁷ When the Buddha declares that all life is *dukkha*, he does not mean that all life is suffering and nothing less, but “refers to the unsatisfactory nature and the insecurity of all conditional phenomena, which on account of their impermanence, are all liable to suffering” (Nyānatiloka 1980:65). Buddhism in this sense is seen as neither pessimistic nor optimistic but teaches that truth lies midway between both of them in real life. The Buddha does not deny that there is happiness in life. In the *Anguttara-nikāya*,³⁸ one of the early discourses of the Buddha in the Pali canon, he mentions a number of happinesses (*sukhāni*), such as the happiness of family life and the happiness of a life as a recluse, the happiness of sensual pleasures and the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of attachment as well as detachment (Devamitta 1929:49). All of them are included in *dukkha*, because they are all impermanent (*dukkha*) and subject to change (Ratnam & Rao 2003:56–58).

The Arising of *Dukkha* (The Second Noble Truth)

The Second Noble Truth (*dukkha-samudaya-ariyasacca*) deals with the arising or origin of *dukkha* (called *sumudaya*). The best known definition of the Second Truth can be found in the *Mahāvagga* (of the *Vinaya Pittaka*, “The Book of

the Discipline”): “It is this ‘thirst’ (craving, *tanhā*³⁹) which produces re-existence and re-becoming, and which is bound up with passionate greed, and which finds fresh delight now here and now there, namely, (1) thirst for sense-pleasure (*kāma-tanhā*), (2) thirst for existence and becoming (*bhava-tanhā*) and (3) thirst for non-existence (self-annihilation, *vibhava-tanhā*)” (cited in Rahula 1978:29; see also the *Samyutta-nikāya* V:421; *Digha Nikaya* 22; Bodhi 2000:1843–47; Nyānatiloke 1980:218). “According to the Buddha’s analysis, all the troubles and strife in the world, from little personal quarrels in families to great wars between nations and countries, arise out of this selfish ‘thirst.’” (*Majjhima-nikāya* [PTS edition], cited in Rahula 1978:30). “Here the term ‘thirst’ includes not only desire for, and attachment to, sense pleasures, wealth and power, but also desire for, and attachment to, ideas and ideals, views, opinions, theories, conceptions and beliefs (*dhamma-tanhā*)” (Rahula 1978:30).

The End of Suffering (The Third Noble Truth)

Since the Buddhist concept of suffering arises from a person’s clinging desire (Pali *tanhā*, Sanskrit *samudaya* or *trishna*) to that which is inevitably impermanent, changing, and perishable, there is a need to end that craving (*nirodha*) and free oneself from all desire (Burton 2004:22). The Third Noble Truth deals with the elimination or cessation of the root of *dukkha*, which we have seen earlier is “thirst” (*tanhā*).⁴⁰ This is achieved by eliminating all delusion, thereby reaching a liberated state of Enlightenment (*bodhi*)⁴¹ and *Nirvāna* (*Nirvāna* is the more popular Sanskrit term of the Pali term of *Nibbāna*).

What is *Nirvāna*? Extensive descriptions and definitions have been proposed, but most of them have been more confusing than clarifying.⁴² The reason for that is simple, according to Buddhist scholars such as Rahula (1978:35): “human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality.”

Nibbāna is the ultimate goal of Buddhism. It amounts to perfect happiness, the liberation from the cyclic process of *dukkha*. In early Buddhism it was considered the highest goal, which every individual ought to attain sooner or later.⁴³ This ultimate goal is without dispute (Vajiraāna 1971). However, others have perceived *Nibbāna* differently. One interpretation sees *Nibbāna* as a transcendental reality beyond any form of conceptualization or logical thinking. “It is a metaphysical reality, something absolute, eternal and un compounded, a noumenal behind the phenomenal” (Premasiri n.d.:3). Others have interpreted *Nibbāna* to mean the “extinction of life, an escape from the cycle of suffering which in the ultimate analysis is equiva-

lent to eternal death” (ibid.). Because of this, many scholars have voiced the opinion that Buddhism is an “otherworldly,” a “life-denying,” and a “salvation religion” that has nothing to do with this world (Story 1971; Coomaraswamy n.d:48).⁴⁴

To call the Buddhist ideal of *Nibbāna* a concept that is lacking in social and worldly concerns is only true if by “social and worldly concerns” one understands the involvement in acts of wickedness, greed, and folly. Buddhism concentrates on man’s character traits, according to which a morally good person is a person whose mind feels social concern and will do what is right as a matter of course (Aronson 1980, especially chapter 6).

The Buddha instructed the first 60 of his disciples who had attained *Nibbāna* with the following words: “Go ye forth and wander for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain and the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way” (*Vinaya* 1:21).

A person whose noble mind is free from sensuous intoxication and negligent behavior, reflecting patience and gentle demeanor, and restraining himself from evil, plays a vital part in society by giving it moral direction and guidance (*Dīghā-Nikāya* 3.191).

The Buddha did not claim that he invented the Eightfold Path. He himself called it *purānam añjasam* (“the ancient path”), trodden by other wise people before him. In a very fitting figure of speech, the Buddha said: “Just as if Brethren, a man faring through the forest, through the great woods, should see an ancient path, an ancient road traversed by men of former days. And he were to go along it, and going along it, he should see an ancient city, an ancient prince’s domain, wherein dwelt men of former days, having gardens, groves, pools, foundations of walls, a goodly spot . . . Even so have I, brethren, seen an ancient road traversed by the rightly Enlightened Ones of former times” (cited in Weeraratne 1990:46). In other words, *Nirvāna* and the Path that leads to its realization have always been there, but were covered by the veil of ignorance. The Buddha merely re-discovered *Nirvāna* as he ventured on the Path. He was the pioneer (the *ādimapurisa*).⁴⁵ Having walked and discovered the goal and the path, the Buddha now used his experience to show how others may follow that same Path and reach the identical goal he had reached (Weeraratne 1990:46).

The Way (*Magga*) Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (The Fourth Noble Truth)

Reaching this liberated state (that is the cessation of *dukkha*) is achieved by following the Eightfold Path (*Ariya-Atthangika-Magga*) laid out by the Buddha in his Fourth Noble Truth (Nithyanandam 2002b:391–466). This way is also known as the “Middle Path” (*Majjhima Patipada*),⁴⁶ because it avoids two extremes. This is in clear contrast with the Buddha’s own experience and misconceptions which were current during his own quest for truth. In the first discourse after his Enlightenment (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*—“Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion”) he explained to the five disciples who had deserted him when he abandoned the path of self-mortification that there are two extreme courses to avoid. On the one hand is that of sensual indulgence, which is “base, low, vulgar, impure and unprofitable,” and on the other hand the practice of extreme physical asceticism, which is “painful, impure, vain and unprofitable” (*Samyutta Nikaya* 56:11). In contrast to these extremes stands the “middle way discovered by [the Buddha, that] avoids both these extremes; it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to *Nibbāna*. And what is that middle way? It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. That is the middle way discovered by a Perfect One, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to peace, to direct acquaintance, to discovery, to *Nibbāna*” (*Samyutta Nikaya* 56:11).

This Middle Path is composed of eight categories or divisions (Ledi et al. 1998; Nyānatiloka 1968; Piyadassi 1979) and there are three themes into which the Path is divided: good moral conduct (Understanding, Thought, Speech); meditation and mental development (Action, Livelihood, Effort); and wisdom or insight (Mindfulness and Concentration) (see Table 1). Each section starts with the word *samyak* (in Sanskrit) or *sammā* (in Pali) meaning “thoroughly, properly or rightly” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:695, 696; Nyanatiloka 1980:110), most often translated as “right” in English.⁴⁷

The practice of these eight factors aims to promote and perfect the three essentials of Buddhist discipline: Wisdom (*Paññā*), made up of right view and right intention; Ethical Conduct (*Śīla*), made up of right speech, right action, and right livelihood; and Concentration (*Samādhi*), made up of right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. These three groups represent three stages of training: higher moral discipline, higher consciousness, and higher wisdom. In fact, the whole of the Buddha’s teaching is summarized in this Path.

Table 1:
Three Stages of the Middle Path

Headings	Duties or Principles of Conduct
Wisdom or Enlightenment (<i>Paññā</i>)	1. Right View (<i>sammā ditthi</i>): Right Understanding (the Four Noble Truths) 2. Right Thought (<i>sammā sankappa</i>): Freedom from all ill will, lust, cruelty, and untruthfulness
Ethical and Virtuous Conduct (<i>Śīla</i>)	3. Right Speech (<i>sammā vaca</i>): Abstaining from untruthfulness, tale-bearing, harsh language, and vain talk 4. Right Action (<i>sammā kamanta</i>): Abstaining from killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct 5. Right Livelihood (<i>sammā ajiva</i>): Earning a living in a way not harmful to any living thing
Concentration (<i>Samādhi</i>)	6. Right Effort (<i>sammā vayama</i>): Avoiding evil thoughts and overcoming them; arousing good thoughts and maintaining them 7. Right Mindfulness (<i>sammā sati</i>): Paying vigilant attention to every state of the body, feelings, and mind 8. Right Concentration (<i>sammā samadhi</i>): Concentrating on a single object so as to induce certain states of consciousness in deep meditation

Source: Adapted from Lynn De Silva (1980:53); Saddhatissa (1971:71ff); Weeraratne (1991).

Wisdom or Enlightenment (*Paññā*)

Paññā shouldn't be translated only as "wisdom," but also as "understanding," "discernment," "cognitive acuity," or "know-how" (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989: 390; Conze 1967:53–55; see *Dhammapada* 256-258, 268, 269). "*Paññā* as realization or pure thought is an understanding that goes beyond the range of ordinary empirical

knowledge (*nāna*). One of the limitations of commonsense, everyday knowledge, is that, although it contributes to salvation, it still does not free one from *upadhika* ('showing attachment to rebirth')" (Matthews 1983:107). In a sense *paññā* provides a sense of direction to see things as they really are. *Paññā* is the wisdom that is able to extinguish afflictions and bring about enlightenment. It "sees the true nature of reality with an experience that is far more profound than seeing painfulness, ignorance, or craving through ordinary knowledge (*nāna*), . . . although it is causally related to that kind of knowledge. Wisdom proceeds beyond the skin of things, penetrating the genesis of becoming, providing the individual with more than just general understanding of how ignorance and craving block insight into momentariness of the phenomenal world. It constitutes a whole 'diagnosis of spiritual illness,' to use the language of Caroline Rhys Davids" (C. Rhys Davids 1931:55, cited in Matthews 1983:107).

"It is by means of this cognition that one reaches the last stage of the Buddhist Path, the stage of *paññā*, Wisdom. 'Wisdom' for Buddhism refers to a very specific form of knowledge, viz. knowledge by means of which salvation can be achieved; and this knowledge is not intellectual—no amount of intellectual knowledge can lead to Deliverance—but intuitive" (Spiro 1982:52; Premasiri 2004:290–296). The two factors of Right Thought and Right Understanding contribute to such wisdom.

Right View—Since the Buddhist way of life begins with the mind and ends with the mind transcended, the first requirement is to uproot ignorance. This training in wisdom is designed to awaken the human faculty to penetrative understanding that sees things "as they really are," that is the nature of existence as presented in the Four Noble Truths (Story [1968] 1983). The Buddha explained it this way: "What is Right Understanding? Truly, it is to understand suffering, the cause of suffering, the existence of suffering and the way to its extinction" (*Digha Nikāya* 22). This understanding is more than knowledge (which is usually an accumulation of memory and an intellectual understanding of an issue based on available data), but it is deep understanding called "penetration" (*pativedha*) (Nyānatiloka 1980:173), which is "seeing a thing in its true nature, without name and label. Right view is the cognitive aspect of wisdom. This penetration is possible only when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation" (Rahula 1978:49; see also Nanamoli & Bodhi 1991). This shows that Buddhism relies more upon an attempt to understand the world than simply to have faith in scriptures or revelations (Anālayo 2006:675–679).

Right Thought can also be known as "right intention"⁴⁸ that is free from greed and lust, free from ill-will, hatred, cruelty and violence in this world (Nyānatiloka

1980:110). Right Thought is directed toward the renunciation of these worldly things and a greater commitment to the spiritual path leading to *Nibbāna*. While right view refers to the cognitive aspect of wisdom, right intention refers to the ability to make conscious choices or decisions. Right intention can be described best as *commitment* to ethical and mental self-improvement. It is significant that right intention is the second category in the path, “between right view and the triad of moral factors that begins with right speech, because the mind’s intentional function forms the crucial link connecting our cognitive perspective with our modes of active engagement in the world. On the one side actions always point back to the thoughts from which they spring. Thought is the forerunner of action, directing body and speech, stirring them into activity, using them as its instruments for expressing its aims and ideals” (Bodhi 1994).

Ethical and Virtuous Conduct (*Śīla*)

Though the principles laid down in this section restrain immoral actions and promote good conduct, their ultimate purpose is not so much ethical as spiritual. Ethical conduct is not prescribed merely as guides to action, but primarily as aids to *moral discipline* and mental purification (Premasiri 2007:122). As a necessary measure for human well-being, ethics has its own justification in the Buddhas teaching, and its importance cannot be underrated. But in the special context of the Noble Eightfold Path, ethical principles are subordinate to the path’s governing goal: final deliverance from suffering.⁴⁹ “The English word ‘morality’ and its derivatives suggest a sense of obligation and constraint quite foreign to the Buddhist conception of *sīla*; this connotation probably enters from the theistic background to Western ethics. Buddhism, with its non-theistic framework, grounds its ethics, not on the notion of obedience, but on that of harmony. In fact, the commentaries explain the word *sīla* by another word, *samadhana*, meaning ‘harmony’ or ‘coordination’” (Bodhi 1994). To achieve and reach this “harmony,” three important factors in the Noble Eightfold Path must be practiced: namely, right speech, right action and right occupation or right livelihood.

These three path factors may be treated together, as collectively they make up the second of the three divisions of the path, the division of moral discipline (*śīla*).

The Buddha divides **right speech** into four components: abstaining from false speech (*Anguttara Nikaya* 10:176), abstaining from slanderous speech (Majjhima Nikaya 61 [*Ambalattika-rahulovada Sutta*]), abstaining from harsh speech (*Anguttara Nikaya* 10:176), and abstaining from idle chatter (Nyānatiloka 1968: 50, 51).

“When one abstains from these forms of wrong and harmful speech one naturally has to speak the truth, has to use words that are friendly and benevolent, pleasant and gentle, meaningful and useful. One should not speak carelessly: speech should be at the right time and place. If one cannot say something useful, one should keep ‘noble silence’” (Rahula 1978:47).

Right Action—Sometimes *samma kammanta* is also translated as “right conduct, right behaviour” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:695). This second ethical principle refers to deeds that involve bodily actions. The Buddha mentions three components of right action: abstaining from taking life (*panatipata veramani*), abstaining from taking what is not given (*adinnadana veramani*), and abstaining from unlawful sexual misconduct (*kamesu miccha-cara veramani*). The canon states: “And what is right action? Abstaining from taking life, from stealing, & from sexual misconduct: This is called right action” (*Saccavibhanga Sutta*).

“Abstaining from taking life” has a wider application than simply refraining from killing other human beings. The precept forbids killing any sentient or conscious being. A “sentient being” (*pani satta*) is a living being endowed with mind or consciousness; for practical purposes, this means human beings, animals, and insects. Plants are not considered to be sentient beings.

The second ethical principle also forbids taking what is not given—which includes stealing, robbery, fraud, deceitfulness, and dishonesty—and sexual misconduct. Positively formulated, right action means to act kindly and compassionately, to be honest, to respect the belongings of others, and to keep sexual relationships harmless to others (McCleary 2007:55, 56).

For the lay followers of the Buddha, the explanation is more elaborate:

And how is one made impure in three ways by bodily action? There is the case where a certain person takes life, is a hunter, bloody-handed, devoted to killing & slaying, showing no mercy to living beings. He takes what is not given. He takes, in the manner of a thief, things in a village or a wilderness that belong to others and have not been given by them. He engages in sensual misconduct. He gets sexually involved with those who are protected by their mothers, their fathers, their brothers, their sisters, their relatives, or their *Dhamma*; those with husbands, those who entail punishments, or even those crowned with flowers by another man. This is how one is made impure in three ways by bodily action (*Cunda Kammaraputta Sutta* [AN 10.176]).

In other words, unwholesome actions lead to unsound states of mind, while wholesome actions lead to sound states of mind.

Right Livelihood (or right occupation⁵¹) is about avoiding certain occupations that may not cause one to be directly involved in transgressions against some aspect of the Eightfold Path, but that would implicate someone indirectly in such transgression. Right livelihood means that one should earn one's living in a righteous way and that wealth should be gained legally and peacefully (Weeraratne 2006:679–681). The Buddha mentions four specific activities that harm other beings and that should be avoided for this reason: (1) dealing in weapons, (2) dealing in living beings (including raising animals for slaughter as well as slave trade and prostitution), (3) working in meat production and butchery, and (4) selling intoxicants and poisons, such as alcohol and drugs. ⁵²Furthermore, any other occupation that would violate the principles of right speech and right action should be avoided. “For a genuine Buddhist, then, one's everyday activities, by way of thought, word, and deed, are more important than anything else in life” (Bogoda 1994).

“These three factors (Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood) of the Eightfold Path constitute Ethical Conduct. It should be realized that the Buddhist ethical and moral conduct aims at promoting a happy and harmonious life both for the individual and for society. This moral conduct is considered as the dispensable foundation for all higher spiritual attainments. No spiritual development is possible without this moral basis” (Rahula 1972:47).

Concentration (*Samādhi*)

Samādhi is usually translated as “concentration” and represents a mental quality or state of mind, covering not only the concept of tranquility but also the development of insight (Anālayo 2006: 250–256). Since the Nirvānic goal is the release from the cycle of births and death or *samsāra*, this is achieved through the perfection of wisdom (*pañña* or *ñāna*), which gives an insight into the real nature of life (which is generated through *samādhi* or perfect concentration) (Dhirasekera 1979:208, 209). It is at this stage of mental discipline, generally called trance or contemplation, that “passionate desires and unwholesome thoughts like sensuous lust, ill-will, languor, worry, restlessness, and skeptical doubt are discarded, and feelings of joy and happiness are maintained, along with certain mental activities” (Rahula 1978:48, 49). This training of the mind is done through right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

Right Effort—This category deals with avoiding or eliminating evil and unwholesome things from your life, and with developing and maintaining through your own effort wholesome things, such as good conduct and a clean mind (Nyana-

tiloka 1980:111). Right effort is all about attitude—trying to eliminate any evil that has already developed, trying to prevent evil that might develop, trying to maintain any good that has already developed, and trying to promote any good that might yet develop (Story 1968:62). The basic idea is to keep you pointed in the right direction by focusing upon the principles of fostering good and opposing evil, regardless of what form they might take. Right effort can be seen as a prerequisite for the other principles of the path. Without effort, which is in itself an act of will, nothing can be achieved, whereas misguided effort distracts the mind from its task, and confusion will be the consequence (McCleary 2007:55, 56).

Right Mindfulness is a principle of staying aware of what you are doing at all times. (*Sati* can also be translated as “awareness” in the sense of a mental quality).⁵³ Make yourself aware of your deeds, words, and thoughts so that you can be free of desire and sorrow. By staying mindful of body, feelings, and mind, it is easier to keep doing what is right and avoid doing what is wrong (Anālayo 2007a:7–12).

Right mindfulness is the mental ability to see things as they are, with clear consciousness. Right mindfulness is anchored in clear perception, and it penetrates impressions without getting carried away. Right mindfulness enables us to be aware of the process of conceptualization in a way that we actively observe and control the way our thoughts go. The Buddha has further described this as the “four foundations of mindfulness” (*cattaro satipatthana*): (1) contemplation of the body, (2) contemplation of feeling (repulsive, attractive, or neutral), (3) contemplation of the state of mind, and (4) contemplation of the phenomena (Anālayo 2007a:11, 12; Bodhi 1994).⁵⁴ The Buddha says that the four foundations of mindfulness form “the only way that leads to the attainment of purity, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the end of pain and grief, to the entering upon the right path and the realization of *Nibbāna*” (*Maha-satipatthana Sutta* [*Digha Nikaya* 22]). They are called “the only way” (*ekayano maggo*), not for the purpose of setting forth a narrow dogmatism, but to indicate that the attainment of liberation can only come from a deep level of contemplation, practiced through “right mindfulness” (Bodhi 1994).

Right Meditation: *Sammā samādhi* can also be translated as “right concentration” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:685; Nyanatiloka 1980:191), that is, training your mind to focus on a single object without wavering. Concentration in this context can be described as one-pointedness of mind, meaning a state where all mental faculties are unified and directed onto one particular object. Right concentration for the purpose of the Eightfold Path means “wholesome concentration,” i.e., concentration on wholesome thoughts and actions (Vajirañana 1975).⁵⁵ The Buddhist

method of choice to develop right concentration is through the practice of meditation. Right meditation is about training the mind to improve both mental and spiritual discipline. Only by attaining an ability to focus on a single object can a person also attain the sufficient calm and peace necessary for enlightenment (Sayādaw 2007; Coleman 2008: 8, 9).

Summary of Salvation in Buddhism

“These eight factors summarize the Buddha's teaching and its practice. They are the very heart of the Buddha-*Dhamma*. It is not enough to know and admire the *Dhamma*; it must be practiced in daily life, for the difficulty of knowing what is right is nothing compared to the difficulty of putting it into practice. We really know something only when we do it repeatedly, when we make it part of our nature. The practical side of the *Dhamma* is the threefold training in morality, concentration, and wisdom, which collectively constitute the Noble Eightfold Path, the ‘middle way’ discovered by the Blessed One for the realization of *Nibbāna*” (Bogoda 1994).

Following the Noble Eightfold Path requires that a person do this list of eight things. Salvation is through what a Buddhist does. It is achieved through human works. Following this Path is a way of life that must be followed and practiced by each individual. “It is self-discipline in body, word and mind, self-development and self-purification. It has nothing to do with belief, prayer, worship or ceremony. In that sense, it has nothing which popularly can be called ‘religious’” (Rahula 1978:49, 50).

Original and Theravāda teaching indicate that a Buddhist can for the most part help his fellow man only by showing him an example of dedication to meditation and self-denial. Mahāyāna teaching emphasizes “compassion,” which involves aiding people in all areas of their lives, even though such aid does not lead directly toward *Nirvāna*. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, salvation does not depend solely upon one's own effort. Good merit can be transferred from one person to others. No one can exist by himself physically and spiritually. Mahāyānists regard the egoistic approach to salvation as unrealistic, impossible, and unethical (Cho 2000:81–84). They call themselves Mahāyāna because they see their path as “larger and superior,” and they refer to Theravādan Buddhists as Hinayana, that is the “narrow and inferior path.” Instead of seeking *Nirvāna* just for oneself in order to become an *arhat*, the disciple of Mahāyāna Buddhism aims to become a *bodhisattva*, a celestial being that postpones his own entrance into *parinirvāna* (final extinction) to help other humans attain it. He swears not to enter *Nirvāna* until he fulfills this noble mission.

Here is a part of a *bodhisattva's* vow:

I would rather take all this suffering on myself than to allow sentient beings to fall into hell. I should be a hostage to those perilous places—hells, animal realms, the nether world—as a ransom to rescue all sentient beings in states of woe and enable them to gain liberation.

I vow to protect all sentient beings and never abandon them. What I say is sincerely true, without falsehood. Why? Because I have set my mind on enlightenment in order to liberate all sentient beings; I do not seek the unexcelled Way for my own sake (*Garland Sutra* 23).

The *bodhisattva* beings help humans work out their liberation. Therefore, a *bodhisattva* (“Buddha-to-be”) rather than an *arahat* becomes the ideal one who seeks to achieve the religious discipline. The *bodhisattva* beings help humans work out their salvation. In the process of obtaining this goal, one realizes that all beings can benefit each other because they all depend upon each other. Salvation depends on the help of others. A good teacher can assist students on the path of salvation (Amore & Ching 2002:243–247; Cheng 1996:61).⁵⁶

Another savior concept that has been developed in all three stands of Buddhism is the concept of the future Buddha, who at this time is living in the *Tusita* (“joyful”) *deva*-world (*Mahavamsa* XXXII:72) and will return sometime from between 500 to many millions of years after the death of the Siddhartha Gautama or the historical Buddha. This future Buddha, or *Maitreya* (“loving and kindly one”),⁵⁷ will put salvation more easily within the grasp of the people (Nanayakkara 2002:674, 675; Arthur 1997:43–57).

Christianity and Buddhism Contrasted

At the end of such a long discussion on salvation in Buddhism it is very tempting to try to determine which religion—Buddhism or Christianity—is a “better” option for salvation. The fact that I am writing and living as a Christian is an indication which option I have chosen as my own solution to life. A far more important and significant question in the context of this book on missions should be how to build a bridge to make salvation attractive and understandable to Buddhists. Dean Halverson in his book *The Compact Guide to World Religions* (1996) has contrasted Buddhism and Christianity to show some of the large intellectual and spiritual differences and, therefore, barriers that exist between both systems—in regard to God, humanity, the problem (of sin); the solution and the means to solve this problem; and the final outcome (see Table 2). The most striking difference is that in

**Table 2:
Buddhism and Christianity Contrasted**

	THERAVĀDA BUDDHISM	MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHISM	CHRISTIANITY
GOD	<i>Nirvāna</i> , an abstract Void.	<i>Nirvāna</i> , an abstract Void, but also an undifferentiated Buddha essence.	A personal God who is self-existent and changeless.
HUMANITY	An impermanent collection of aggregates.	An impermanent collection of aggregates. For some, personal existence continues for a while in the Pure Land.	Made in God's image. Personal existence has value.
THE PROBLEM	We suffer because we desire that which is temporary, which causes us to continue in the illusion of the existence of the individual self.	Same as Theravāda Buddhism.	We suffer because of the consequences of our sin. But we also suffer because, being made in God's image, we are fulfilled only when we are in relationship with our Creator God. Even though we are most fulfilled when in relationship with God, we have rebelled against Him, and are thus alienated from Him.
THE SOLUTION	To cease all desire in order to realize the nonexistence of the self, thus finding permanence.	To become aware of the Buddha-nature within.	To be forgiven by and reconciled with God. We find permanence in the immutability of God.
THE MEANS	<i>Self-reliance</i> . We must follow the Middle Path and accrue karmic merit.	<i>Self-reliance</i> . The means vary from that of following the Eight-fold Path, to emptying the mind, to accruing merit by performing rituals, to realizing the Buddha-nature within, to depending on the merit of a <i>bodhisattva</i> .	<i>Reliance on God</i> . We must repent of our sins and trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ.
THE OUTCOME	To enter <i>Nirvāna</i> where the "ego" is extinguished.	The outcome varies from that of returning as a <i>bodhisattva</i> in order to guide others, to entering <i>Nirvāna</i> , to living in a Pure Land from which one can enter <i>nirvāna</i> .	Our existence as individuals survives death, and we are fulfilled as we are in eternal fellowship with a loving and personal God.

Source: Halverson 1996:61.

Buddhism human beings are “on their own.” There is no power beyond themselves, and *Nirvāna* is the “end” for Buddhists. In contrast, heaven is the beginning of something more glorious for Christians.

Buddha and Jesus

The founder of Buddhism clearly had a beginning and an end. The Siddharta Gautma was born as a prince into a wealthy Hindu family. Though he achieved his “Great Enlightenment” through meditation and became “The Enlightened One” (or the Buddha), he finally reached his end; he is no longer alive. Unlike the Buddha, Jesus is the “The Ancient of Days,” who has no beginning or ending, one who is the truth and does not need further Enlightenment (Col. 1:15–20; John 1:9–14, 17; 17:3; John 20:31; Rom.1:4; Jude 1:25; Heb. 13:8; Rev. 22:13). Because of His special relationship to God (John 3:16; 6:44; 14:6, 9), reconciliation between God and man can be achieved through Him.⁵⁸ Jesus can claim to “be *the way*” by which salvation and eternal life can be received (John 14:6; 5:35), whereas the Buddha merely claimed to point to the way by which we could escape suffering.

Salvation Contrasted

In Theravāda Buddhism “salvation” is only available to monks. A layperson needs to be reborn in a future life as a monk (*bhikkhu*) to be able to attain *Nirvāna*. But such a life is a constant struggle against evil and evil desires, a battle that has to be fought alone (because the Buddha merely showed the way).

In Christianity salvation is not reliance on one’s own strength but has been achieved through Christ’s own sacrifice (when He died on the cross) on our behalf. This salvation is free and it is a gift of God for all. Salvation does not result from anything that an individual does or can do; we simply receive it by trusting in what Christ has already done for us (John 3:16; Gal. 3:28; 4:7; Eph. 4:3; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12).

There is no division in who is able to gain salvation in Christianity. Salvation is available to everyone. It does not exclude certain groups or sects. In fact, believing in Christ unifies us into a body that functions under the authority of Jesus Christ and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. As people surrender their lives to Jesus, there is no longer the need to fight the battle against darkness alone; we can trust in His power. It is this assurance that can bring hope and light into the lives of many Buddhists who are often in constant fear, not only of the future but especially of the

present. It is often the fear of the *devas* or local gods⁵⁹ that will lead people in Buddhist countries to turn to magic (*hūniyamism*),⁶⁰ astrology, and demon worship.

Because of that, many Buddhists turn to what is commonly called “Folk Religion.”⁶¹ In such a setting people are less involved in discovering the ultimate truths and reaching *Nirvāna*; instead they are concerned with solving the problems of everyday life, such as sickness, business deals, or simply getting enough food for the family. For example, “to solve problems like these, the peoples of the Tibetan Buddhist world rely on the shamanistic and animistic beliefs of their remote ancestors. These beliefs, mixed with some of the simpler teachings of Buddhism, make up the everyday religion of most people in the Tibetan Buddhist world” (Tsering 1988:102, 103).

Conclusion

There is an interesting story being told in the Buddhist literature that might help Christians to convey their understanding of salvation to Buddhists and to illustrate the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice for His people:

Prince Mahanama, of the Shakya clan and a cousin of the Buddha, had great faith in the teachings of the Buddha and was one of the most faithful followers. At the time a violent king named Virudaka of Kosala conquered the Shakya clan. Prince Mahanama went to the King and sought the lives of his people, but the King would not listen to him. He then proposed that the King let as many prisoners escape as could run away while he himself remained underwater in the nearby pond. To this the King assented, thinking that the time would be very short for him to be able to stay underwater.

The gate of the castle was opened as Mahanama dived into the water and the people rushed for safety. But Mahanama did not come up, sacrificing his life for the lives of his people by tying his hair to the underwater root of a willow tree (*The Teaching of Buddha* 1966: 254, 255, cited in Halverson 1996:66, 67).

This simple story conveys a number of images that can illustrate to Buddhists (from their own literature) the significance of Christ’s sacrificial death.

All of us are *enslaved*—perhaps not to a wicked king, but we are in bondage to sin (John 8:34; Rom. 6: 6, 16). Through of the death of Mahanama all the members of the Shakya clan were freed from bondage of the wicked king; correspondingly, Christ *died to free all* of humanity from the bondage of sin (Matt. 20:28, Rom. 5:18, 19). Mahanama voluntarily died because he was *motivated by love* for his people;

Christ also freely gave up His life *out of love* for all humanity (John 10:11–18; 13:1, 24). Salvation is not something we can earn, but it is free for the taking. Freedom from bondage for the Shakya clan was gained by simply running from the kingdom of the wicked king. People can receive the *gift* of salvation by placing their faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:20–24; Eph. 2:8, 9) (Halverson 1996:67). Salvation does not depend on our human efforts of doing good works (such as rituals and merit-making in order to achieve “good *karma*” [Oxtoby 2002b:232, 233]). In fact, “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6).

The reason that as Christians we can face the future with confidence is the fact that Jesus, our Savior, is alive. His remains are not housed in a grave or a temple (such as the “Temple of the Tooth” in Kandy, Sri Lanka, where people come to “worship” the tooth of the Buddha). Christ’s tomb is empty, whereas the Buddha and other religious founders are dead. Because Jesus is alive we have hope not only for the future but for our daily living as well.

Notes

¹While religion is difficult to define (see Deming 2005:12–17; McCutcheon 2005:10–13; Nigosian 2008:2–5), the standard model of religion as used in religious studies was defined by Geertz ([1966] 1973:87–125). While theology attempts to understand the intentions of a supernatural force (such as deities), religious studies try to study human religious behavior and belief from outside any particular religious viewpoint. Religious studies draw upon multiple disciplines and their methodologies include anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and history of religion. For an influential critique of Geertz’s model, see Asad ([1982] 1993:27–54).

²The more universal religious significance of the word is reflected in its etymological roots, as derived from the Greek *sōtērion* “salvation” (from *sōtēr* “savior, preserver” and *logos* “study” or “word”). (Merriam-Webster 2009).

³Parwaz. “Islam a Challenge to Religion,” chapter 9 (Salvation). <http://www.tolueislam.com/Parwez/ICR/ICR.htm> (accessed January 12, 2010). See also <http://www.islamawareness.net/Salvation/salvation1.html> (accessed October 20, 2009). The Qur’an states that those who act righteously (fulfill the five activities required of a Muslim) will enter heaven (Qur’an 4.60, 11.108, 41.160, 57.1). According to interpreters of the Qur’an, those who attained sanctification while on earth may enter the ultimate level of heaven—paradise. Those who are not perfected, but are without serious moral faults, enter an intermediate stage without suffering where they undergo final purification (salvation without damnation) (McCleary 2007:49–74; Watt 1963:191–204; see also Miller 1980; Cragg 1980; Anees 2006;

Crollius 1980; Marantika 1992:228–242; Hermansen 2008:318–322).

⁴*Bodhisattva* means either “enlightened (*bodhi*) existence (*sattva*)” or “enlightenment-being.” Another translation is “Wisdom-Being” (Coomaraswamy 1975:225). It is the name given to anyone who, motivated by great compassion, has generated bodhicitta, which is a spontaneous wish to postpone Buddhahood for the benefit of all living beings (Gyatso 1995; Conze 1953:34ff; Robinson & Johnson 1982:78–83).

⁵In Hinduism, *Avatar* are those who “descend” (viz., from heaven to earth), usually implying a deliberate descent from higher spiritual realms to lower realms of existence for special purposes, often translated into English as “incarnation” (O’Flaherty 1980:57–89, 139ff.; Matchett 2001; Saraswati 2001).

⁶I will be dealing mainly with the traditional form of Buddhism, also known as Theravāda Buddhism, although in the conclusion I will discuss briefly how Mahāyāna Buddhism relates to the issue of salvation as well.

⁷Some scholars have argued for the fourth century BCE. For a review of the various theories of the dating of the life of the Buddha, see Singh (1961:359–363).

⁸For example, shortly before his birth his mother, queen Mahāmāyā (Karunaratna 2002:442–447) dreamed that a white elephant with six tusks entered the right side of her womb. It was told that she gave a painless birth to Siddhārta in a grove of blooming trees.

⁹This dual prediction was repeated by eight Brahmins at the naming ceremony five days after his birth.

¹⁰Herold’s book is a biography of Buddha retold in a simple and engaging style. It strings together a coherent narrative arc from several classic Buddhist texts, particularly the *Buddhacharita* of Asvaghosa, the *Lalita-Vistara*, and the *Jataka* stories.

¹¹He became “The Buddha,” the “Awakened or Enlightened One.” See Griffiths (1994:60–66) for a list of other titles and epithets for the Buddha (see also *Encyclopædia Britannica* 2010 for more on his title of *ariya-puggala*).

¹²Found in the *Sanyutta-Nikaya* LVI, chapter 2 (see Nārada 1971:29–34).

¹³Also available in another English translation by Thanissaro (1993). In Theravāda Buddhism it is the Buddha’s first sermon, which was given to the five ascetics with whom he had practiced austerities.

¹⁴Etymologically the word derives from the Sanskrit root *dhr* meaning to “bear” or “support” and has a number of meanings (see Keown 2003:74; Rhys Davids & Stede 1989: 334–39). “In the earliest Buddhist traditions . . . *Dhamma* refers, first and foremost, to the sacred reality which the Buddha has discovered at the point of Enlightenment. In this context it is recognized both as the Law which regulates and governs the totality of existence and, at the same time, as the Truth which enables men to break free from limitations which existence imposes. *Dhamma*, in other words, was taken to be the source both of order in the world and salvation from it” (Reynolds 1972:15; see also Geaves 2006:21).

¹⁵It is very difficult to verify the actual historical nature of the Buddha and the way his experiences were remembered and recorded by his followers. For a general discussion of

the historicity of religious founders, see Wach (1944) and Leeuw (1963:650–654). For an attempt to reconstruct Buddha's life, see Thomas (1927), Bareau (1963), as well as LaMotte (1958 [1988, English translation]:713–751) and Frauwallner (1956) who used a text-critical approach in the reconstruction of a bibliography of the Buddha.

¹⁶Pali is the scriptural and liturgical language of Theravāda Buddhism. Although now a dead language, it is one of the most important languages for the preservation of the teachings of the Buddha (*Dhamma*). It was introduced in Sri Lanka by Buddhist monks for the formal writing down of the *Dhamma* in the first century BCE (Jayawickrama 2004:265–278).

¹⁷Strictly speaking, “truths” is the right translation for the Pali word *sacca* (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:668), but realistically the translation should have been “realities.” The Buddha discovered the reality of how to escape *samsara* and not merely the truth about it.

¹⁸Theravāda, literally “the Teaching of the Elders” or “the Ancient Teaching,” is the oldest surviving Buddhist school. It was founded in India. It is relatively conservative and generally closest to early Buddhism (Crim 1989; Witanachchi 2008:312–324). The tradition of the Theravāda Buddhists is sometimes referred to as Hinayāna (“Lesser Vehicle” or even “Inferior Vehicle”), in which the Buddha is understood as a man who achieved enlightenment (Karunaratne, Upali 2000:453–455).

¹⁹Although the Mahāyāna movement traces its origin to Gautama Buddha, scholars believe that it originated in India in the first century CE or the first century BCE (Buswell 2004:293; Ray 1994:404). Mahāyāna Buddhism often treats the Buddha as a superhuman and fills the universe with a pantheon of enlightened figures (*bodhisattvas*) who help others achieve enlightenment (Williams 2005a:190–92; Marasinghe 2002:517, 550).

²⁰*Vajrayāna* is also known as Tantric Buddhism (Kariyawasam 2008:254–262). The distinctive feature of Vajrayāna Buddhism is ritual, which is used as a substitute or alternative for the earlier abstract meditations (Warder 2000:466; Hawkins 1999:24, Williams 2005a:193, 194). In Japan Vajrayāna Buddhism is known as Shingon (Pye 2005:410–20).

²¹For two standard editions on the life of King Aśoka, see Goghale (1948) and McKeon (1958). See also Tapas (1998). Later Aśoka became idealized through legends and fables (Eggermont 1956:169ff; Dutt 1966; Strong 1983).

²²The *Tripitaka* is the Sanskrit term used by Westerners for a Buddhist canon of scriptures. Asian Buddhists of the Theravāda Buddhist School use the term *Tipitaka* to refer to the Pali Canon. Originally Buddha's teachings were not written, and they were circulated orally for numerous centuries. They were finally written down in two traditions—the Pali canon of the Theravāda tradition and the Sanskrit canon of the Northern Mahāyāna tradition. The Pali canon consists of the three following baskets or works: The *Sutra Pitaka* contains the sermons of the Buddha, the *Vinaya Pitaka* describes the codes of monastic discipline and the origin of the Sangha, while the *Abhidharma Pitaka* consists of educational treatises on Buddhist philosophy and psychology (Webb 1975; Nyanatiloka 1957, 1980; Karunaratne, et al. 1961).

Other Buddhist schools use other terms for their own collection of scriptures, such as Kangyur (Tibetan Buddhism) (Stein 1972; Tucci 1970; Bowker 1997) and *Dà Zàng Jīng* or *Ta-ts'ang-ching* or “Great Scripture Store” (Far East Mahāyāna Buddhism) (BDEA 2008).

For a more detailed description of Buddhist canonical sources, see Conze (1979), Maier (1999:523–26), Guruge (1984:112–135), Williams (2005b:194–198).

²³Gethin 1998:xv; *Encyclopædia Britannica* 2009a; 2009b; Warder 2000:32.

²⁴There are many references to rebirth in the early Buddhist scriptures. These are some of the more important: *Mahakammavibhanga Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 136); *Upali Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 56); *Kukkuravatika Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 57); *Moliyasivaka Sutta* (*Samyutta Nikaya* 36.21); *Sankha Sutta* (*Samyutta Nikaya* 42.8). See translations by Nanamoli & Bodhi (1995); Rhys Davids & Woodward (1917–30); Matthews (1986:125); Story (1975); and Nagapriya (2004).

²⁵*Samsāra* is the endless cycle of suffering caused by birth, death, and rebirth (i.e., reincarnation). See “*Assu Sutta: Tears* (SN 15.3)” (2006); “*Samyutta Nikaya: (The Grouped Discourses)*” (2006); Keown (2003:248; Geaves (2006:65).

²⁶*Moksha* (or *mukti*) is the liberation from *samsāra*, the cycle of death and rebirth or reincarnation and all of the suffering and limitations of worldly existence, after realization of God (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2009c; King 1999:28, 29, 45, 183–86).

²⁷John S. Strong (1995) entitles his whole book on the history and teachings of Buddhism *The Experience of Buddhism* [emphasis supplied].

²⁸“The question of the ‘existence’ of a Buddha after His death is one which the Buddha Gautama refused to answer. Whether he exists, or does not exist, . . . is, according to the Buddha, irrelevant to the salvation quest” (Spiro 1982:33).

²⁹For a discussion on Buddhism and death (*marana, cuti*) see Washe (1978), Kariyawesam (1979:331–335), and Nyanatiloka (1976:125, 126). *Cuti* literally means *abscheiden* in German, or “vanishing, passing away, shifting out of existence” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:270). *Marana*, though translated as “death” more exactly means “ending this (visible) existence” and needs to be distinguished from *kāla-kiryā*, which is dying [ceasing to exist]” (1989:524).

³⁰See Dharmasiri (1987) for a Buddhist attempt to explain the reasons that led the Buddha to such a conclusion and Lynn de Silva’s (1970) Christian answer to Buddhism as to why someone needs to believe in God.

³¹Buddhism does not attach positive value to suffering. On the contrary, suffering is an evil, something that is to be avoided rather than accepted, and not something to be pursued through certain forms of asceticism (Spiro 1982:38).

³²For a discussion on *kusala* and *akusla*, see Nanayakkara (1999:258, 259) and Malalasekera (1961:369).

³³The Four Noble Truths (or The Four Truths of the Noble One) (Sanskrit: *catvāri āryasatyāni*; Pali: *cattāri ariyasaccāni*) (Rahula 1978:16) is one of the most fundamental Buddhist teachings (Nanayakkara 2000:262). In fact, the Buddha said that these truths are

“unerring” (Nanamoli & Bodhi 1995:1856). Therefore, “it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life, it leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation of suffering, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvāna” (1995:533–36).

³⁴*Dukkha* is a compound of two words, *du* and *kha*. The prefix *du* is used in the sense of “perverseness.” It signifies something “bad,” “disagreeable,” “uncomfortable,” or “unfavorable.” The suffix *kha* is used in the sense of “empty” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:324–326). It is usually translated as “suffering” but is often closer in meaning to “flawed” or “unsatisfactory.” This means that all existence is painful and frustrating. For a detailed discussion of the meaning of the word *dukkha*, see Ratnam & Rao (2003).

³⁵In this way birth is *dukkha*, decay is *dukkha*, sickness is *dukkha* (likewise sorrow, grief, woe, lamentation, and despair are *dukkha*). Association with things disliked, and separation from things liked, is also *dukkha*, as is not getting what we desire (Nanayakkara 2000:263).

³⁶Many descriptions of life’s transitory condition have been given in the Buddhist scriptures. See *Samyutta Nikaya* SN 38.14 [*Dukkha Sutta*: Stress]; SN 22.48 [*Khandha Sutta*: Aggregates]; *Majjhima Nikaya* MN 141 [*Saccavibhanga Sutta*: An Analysis of the Truths]; see also MN 38, 43, 109, 141 and Thanissaro 1993.

³⁷“It includes the ordinary meaning of suffering such as misery, distress, agony, affliction of body and mind. It also means impermanence, emptiness, and imperfection. Others used the meaning of ‘disharmony,’ ‘conflict,’ ‘unsatisfactoriness,’ ‘despair,’ ‘existential anxiety’ (De Siva 1980:57).

³⁸*Anguttara Nikāya* is the fourth division of the *Sutta Pitaka*, <http://www.thisismyanmar.com/nibbana/tipintr3.htm> (accessed November 29, 2009).

³⁹*Tanhā* or *trsnā* literally means “thirst” and figuratively denotes “desire” or “craving.” It is traditionally juxtaposed with “peace of mind” (*upekkha*) (Williams 1964:454, Rhys Davids & Stede 1921–1925:294). For a detailed discussion on the nature of arising cessation and the path to freedom from *tanhā*, see Analayo (2008:244–250).

⁴⁰This is also known as *Tanhakkhaya* or “Extinction of Thirst” (Nyanatiloka 1980), as well as *nirodha* or “the Cessation of *dukkha*” (*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2009d; Keown 2003:194).

⁴¹*Bodhi* is more accurately translated as “awakening.” The word “buddha” means “one who has awakened” (Nyānatiloka 1980:40, 41; Malalasekera 1971:178–180).

⁴²*Nibbāna* is a Pali word that is composed of two constituents, namely, *ni* and *vana*: *ni* is a negative particle and *vana* is craving. Their combination in the word *Nibbāna* comes to mean “the absence of craving.” In Sanskrit, *Nibbāna* is written as *Nirvāna*, which is derived from the root *va*, “to blow (as a lamp or fire),” and the prefix *nir*, meaning “out.” *Nirvāna* therefore means “to blow out,” that is, to blow out the flame of one’s craving (Williams 1964:557; Macdonell 1929:143; Rhys David & Steele 1989:362–365).

As this term also denotes the extinguishing of a fire, it carries the connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, a burn-

ing fire seizes or adheres to its fuel; when extinguished, it is unbound. “Total *Nibbāna*” in some contexts denotes the experience of awakening; in others, it is the final passing away of an *arahant* (Keown 2003:194, 195; Nyanatiloka 1980:128).

⁴³Premasiri has clearly shown that in early Buddhism the characterization of *Nibbāna* “lays great emphasis on its empirical characteristics which can be ascertained in the living experience of a person who has attained it in this life itself. According to early Buddhism, *Nibbāna* is conceived as a positively blissful attainment. Its blissfulness is believed to be a result of a certain transformation of mental attitudes and dispositions. Buddha’s descriptions of *Nibbāna* take a purely psychological form. It is described as ‘elimination of lust’ (*rāgakkhaya*), ‘elimination of hatred’ (*dosakkhaya*) and ‘elimination of delusion’ (*mohakkhaya*) (Premasiri n.d.:3; see also Lily De Silva 1987:29–50).

⁴⁴Heinz Bechert says, for example, in his foreword to *The World of Buddhism* (1984), that “the Buddha’s teaching is for all mankind, but its original aim was not to shape life in the world but to teach liberation, release from the world” (1984:7).

Several years earlier Max Weber made similar remarks. He described Buddhism as a “salvation religion.” According to him, “its salvation is an absolute personal performance of the single individual . . . The specific asocial character of all genuine mysticism is here carried to its maximum” (1984:213).

Spiro (1970) speaks of a distinction between “*Nibbānic Buddhism*” and “*Kammatic Buddhism*,” and believes that *Nibbānic Buddhism* is properly characterized as a religion of radical salvation (see also King 1964). Spiro says: “Ideational, its conception of salvation, is indeed a radical one, entailing the transcendence of the entire physiotemporal world. Sociological, its character for a soteriological community is equally radical: in order to abandon the sociopolitical world. But physical retreat from the world is not sufficient; it is merely a necessary condition for yet another psychologically radical act: having abandoned the world, one must sever all ties to it and withdraw all cathexes from it. Salvation can only be achieved by a total and radical rejection of the world in all its aspects. *Nibbānic Buddhism* demands no more: it demands no less” (Spiro 1970:65). For an extensive analysis of these various options see Dhammavivari 2003:160–164.

⁴⁵From the word *ādi* (“initial” or “chief”) and *purisa* (“man” or “hero” who performed a long journey) (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:98, 469).

⁴⁶Also known by the Sanskrit name *Madhyamā Pratipat* (see Kalupahana 2002:366–378).

⁴⁷*Sammā* in the context of *Sammā-Sambodhi* is translated as “Perfect Enlightenment,” applying to the Universal Buddhahood (*Sammā-sambuddha*) (Nyanatiloka 1980:195).

⁴⁸“Right Ideas” or “Right Mindfulness” comes closer to the Pali meaning of *Sammā Samkappa* (Nārada 1980:324). The dictionary form actually translates as “Right Resolve” or “Right Intention” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:696).

⁴⁹“Despite the fact that *śīla* is extolled as the indispensable foundation for progress in the Buddhist path, the Buddha often warns his disciples not to consider *śīla* as an end in

itself. The Buddha has cautioned his disciples against the possibility of clinging to śīla and as a consequence becoming victims of a kind of spiritual pride that might become a serious hindrance to their moral development” (Premasiri 2007:123).

⁵⁰“Herein someone avoids false speech and abstains from it. He speaks the truth, is devoted to truth, reliable, worthy of confidence, not a deceiver of people. Being at a meeting, or amongst people, or in the midst of his relatives, or in a society, or in the king’s court, and called upon and asked as witness to tell what he knows, he answers, if he knows nothing: ‘I know nothing,’ and if he knows, he answers: ‘I know’; if he has seen nothing, he answers: ‘I have seen nothing,’ and if he has seen, he answers: ‘I have seen.’ Thus he never knowingly speaks a lie, either for the sake of his own advantage, or for the sake of another person’s advantage, or for the sake of any advantage whatsoever” (Nyānatiloka 1968:50).

⁵¹Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:695

⁵²“Monks, a lay follower should not engage in five types of business. Which five? Business in weapons, business in human beings, business in meat, business in intoxicants, and business in poison. These are the five types of business that a lay follower should not engage in” (*Vaniija Sutta* [AN 5.177]).

⁵³*Sati* can mean “intentness of mind, wakefulness of mind, lucidity of mind, conscious” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:672).

⁵⁴For the four foundations of “mindfulness,” see Nyanatiloka 1980:204 (*satipatthāna*) and Anālayo 2007b:12–15.

⁵⁵For the Buddha’s teaching on mindfulness, see *Satipatthāna Sutta* (in Nyanasatta 2006).

⁵⁶In Japanese Buddhism there is a major sect (*Jodoshin Shu* or “True Sect of the Pure Land”) that has developed an easier way of salvation than Zen Buddhism. Genku-Honen (1133–1212), the founder of that sect, substituted for the difficult path of traditional Buddhism the concept of Amida-Buddha. Shinran (1173–1262), the disciple of Honen, developed the idea further and contended that faith in Amida would bring salvation (see Uenuma 1992:243, 244; Ingram 1974:334–344; Barth 1948:372, 373; 1956:340).

⁵⁷The name Maitreya or Metteyya is derived from the word *maitrī* (Sanskrit) or *mettā* (Pāli) meaning “benevolence” or “goodwill (toward someone)” (Monier-Williams 1979:834; MacDonell 1979:236) or “active interest in others” (Rhys Davids & Stede 1989), which is in turn derived from the noun *mitra* (Pāli: *mitta*) in the sense of “friend” (1979:228; Rhys Davids & Stede 1989:532).

⁵⁸The “Buddha did not claim to have any relationship with God. In fact, Buddha did not consider the matter of God’s existence to be important, because it did not pertain to the issue of how to escape suffering” (Halverson 1996:63); see also Marasinghe (1990:349); Wijebandara (1993:108, 109).

⁵⁹These local gods are worshipped in *devāls* (local shrines) that are often part of a Buddhist temple. See Kariyawasam (1979:413); De Silva (1980:173–183); and Obeyesekere (1984).

⁶⁰That is, black magic (Lynn De Silva 1980:195-198. See also Spiro 1982:273-275; Ratnapala 1991:100-108).

⁶¹For an in-depth discussion on folk religions, see Hiebert, Shaw, & Tienou (1999).

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Bruce Bauer earned BA and MA degrees, from Andrews University, and MA in Missiology and Doctor of Missiology from Fuller Theological Seminary. Bruce and his wife spent 15 years in Japan leading the Seventh-day Adventist English Language Schools, 5 years in Guam as mission president, then spent the next 8 years teaching in the Seminary at Andrews University. From 1997 until 2001 the Bauers returned to Asia where Bruce was the mission president in Cambodia. Presently Dr. Bauer is the chair of the Department of World Mission at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and the editor of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*. He has authored numerous articles and edited four books.

Reinder Bruinsma

Author

Retired Church Administrator

Reinder Bruinsma was born in the Netherlands and has worked for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as pastor, editor, teacher, and church administrator in West Africa (1984–1991) and at the Institute of World Mission on the campus of Andrews University (1991–1994). He then moved to the United Kingdom, where he was elected as the executive secretary of one of the European regions of the Adventist Church (1995–2001). Before retiring in late 2007 he served as the president of the Adventist Church in the Netherlands.

Reinder earned a BA at Newbold College/Andrews University (1965), an MA (1966) at Andrews University, a BD-Honors degree and PhD degree (1993) from the University of London (UK). His area of special expertise is church history.

He is the author of numerous scholarly and popular articles and of some 20 books in Dutch and English, some of which have been translated into other languages. In addition, he translated a number of scholarly books from Dutch into English. He continues to be active in teaching, editing, and writing.

Petr Činčala

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Petr Činčala grew up as a pastor's child in Communist Czechoslovakia. After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, he studied in the newly reopened Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in Prague.

After Petr's graduation, God opened the door for his training at Andrews University (MDiv). As part of his studies he researched the role of the church in post-communist society in the Czech Republic. He completed degrees in Social Work (MSW) and Missiology (PhD) at Andrews University.

Upon returning to the Czech Republic, Petr worked as an intern pastor and later as a self-supported church planter. Currently he is involved in mission work among atheists, he promotes national mission renewal, and makes a living as a speaker, teacher, researcher, and interpreter.

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Richard M. Davidson has been with the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and Andrews University faculty since 1979. He graduated in 1968 with a BA degree in Theology from Loma Linda University. He earned his MDiv degree summa cum laude from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in 1970, and his PhD in Biblical Studies at Andrews in 1981.

Davidson has written numerous articles for refereed journals and Adventist denominational papers, as well as various chapters in scholarly books. Additional publications include the following books: *A Love Song for the Sabbath* (Review and Herald, 1988); *In the Footsteps of Joshua* (Review and Herald, 1995); *Biblical Hermeneutics* (in Romanian; Editura CARD, 2003); and *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Hendrickson, 2007).

Cheryl Brown Doss

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Cheryl's mission experience began as a missionary child at Helderberg College in South Africa. Later, with her husband Gordon, she served for 16 years in the country of Malawi, where she directed rural clinics, developed training programs for pastors' wives, facilitated women's ministries programs, and helped start Shepherdess Clubs. She also home-schooled her two children and taught classes in the ministerial training program at Lakeview Seminary. As a nurse she lectured on health and, along with her husband, initiated annual family life training seminars for pastors and their wives. Their book, *Christian Marriage*, was published in Malawi in 1995.

Combining her mission background and educational training with her

passion for family growth, Cheryl's research and writing has largely focused on families in cross-cultural transition. Besides teaching, her specific responsibilities at the Institute of World Mission are curriculum development, development of resources for missionary training, and the support and education of missionary families through newsletters and re-entry programs.

Cheryl earned a BS in Nursing (1972), an MA in Religious Education from Andrews University (1998), and a PhD in Education and Intercultural Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Chicago (2006).

Gorden R. Doss

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Gorden R. Doss was born in the USA and grew up in Malawi. His service includes 5 years as a pastor in the USA, 16 years in pastoral education in Malawi, and 12 years teaching world mission at Andrews University. He has earned a DMin degree from Andrews University and a PhD from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

Jacques B. Doukhan

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Jacques Doukhan received an MA in Hebrew Language and Literature and a doctorate in Hebrew Language and Literature from the University of Strasbourg. He was the recipient of a post-doctoral research scholarship from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Later, he received a ThD in Biblical Studies and Systematic Theology from Andrews University. Dr. Doukhan also holds a Master in Egyptology degree from the University of Montpellier.

Before assuming his present position, Doukhan taught and served as president of the Adventist Seminary in Mauritius. He also taught at the seminary in Collonges, France and at the Adventist college in Algiers. In addition, he served as a pastor in the France-Belgian area.

In addition to his published articles and reviews, Doukhan has written 10 books, including the following: *Drinking at the Sources*; *Daniel, The Vision of the End*; *Hebrew for Theologians*; *Secrets of Daniel: A Jewish Prince in Exile*; *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes*; *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God*; *Mystery of Israel*; and *Ecclesiastes: All Is Vanity*. Also he edited the book *Thinking in the Shadow of Hell: The Impact of the Holocaust on Theology and Jewish-Christian Relations*.

Yuri N. Drumi

President

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Yuri Drumi was born in Moldova, USSR. He worked as pastor, teacher, and administrator in various assignments in the service of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Moldova and the Russian Federation. For most of the years of his career he was connected with Zaoksky Theological Seminary, where he served as teacher (1997–2000), dean of the theology department (2000–2004), and Master's programs coordinator (2008–2009). He currently serves as the president of Zaoksky Adventist University in Russia.

After having earned a BTh at Zaoksky Theological Seminary in Russia (1994), he earned an MA (2002) at Andrews University (Zaoksky branch). In 2008 he was awarded the PhD degree from Andrews University. His area of special expertise is church mission.

Yuri is the author of two books on homiletics in Russian and one scholarly book in English (his PhD thesis).

Cristian Dumitrescu

PhD Candidate in World Mission

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Cristian Dumitrescu has known the cruel oppression of Ceausescu's communist regime in Romania and was forced to change schools frequently because of his allegiance to the seventh-day Sabbath. He also experienced pressure from the Orthodox Church's population and leaders.

Cristian holds a BA from the Adventist Theological Institute in Bucharest, a License in Theology from the Babes-Bolyai University at Cluj-Napoca in Romania, and an MA in Religion from Newbold College in England.

He began to be interested in cross-cultural mission and contextualization of mission in his native country by working with gypsies, planting churches in unentered areas, working with postmodern young people, and doing creative ministries in the poor areas of southern Muntenia, Oltenia, and Moldova. After finishing his MA degree, he taught Mission, Evangelism, and Practical Theology at the Romanian Adventist Theological Institute.

Currently, Cristian is writing his PhD dissertation on Mission Theology in the Old Testament at Andrews University. Cristian is also an associate editor of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* (JAMS), published by the International Fellowship of Adventist Mission Studies (IFAMS).

Paul Dybdahl

*Professor, School of Theology
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Paul Dybdahl was born in Northern Thailand to missionary parents. After 8 years of service in Southeast Asia (in Thailand and Singapore), the Dybdahl family moved to the United States. This early mission experience had a profound effect on Paul, who, while still young, decided he wanted to devote his life to sharing good news with others.

Paul graduated from Walla Walla College in 1992 with BA in Theology and continued his education at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI, where he received his MDiv. After four years as a pastor, Paul returned to Andrews, where he completed his PhD in Missiology. Paul's doctoral work focused on the need for missiological principles to be applied in North American evangelism.

Larry R. Evans

*Undersecretary
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Larry R. Evans was born in Texas and has lived in the plains, northwest, northeast, and southeast regions of the United States. He graduated with a BA in Theology from Walla Walla College in 1970 and an MDiv from Andrews University Theological Seminary in 1973. Studies for his DMin began at Fuller Theological Seminary and were completed at Andrews. Larry graduated in 1981 with an emphasis in church growth and

church planting framed around a church plant he led in Spokane, Washington. Soon afterward he was invited by two of his professors with the Fuller Evangelistic Association to join them in starting an interdenominational church consulting company in Grand Rapids, MI. He has served as pastor, church growth coordinator, associate ministerial secretary, special assistant to a conference president, conference executive secretary, conference president, adjunct professor for evangelism and church growth, and the assistant for administration to the president of the North American Division. Since 2002 he has served as the Undersecretary for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

James R. Fisher

Associate Registrar for Graduate Studies
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Jim Fisher was born in Loma Linda, California. As a college student he spent a year at Avondale College (Australia) and served in Osaka, Japan, as a student missionary. After completing his BA at Pacific Union College (1968) and an MDiv at Andrews University (1970), he pastored in the Southern California Conference until receiving a call to serve overseas in the South China Island Union Mission. Prior to joining the faculty at Taiwan Adventist College, Jim completed his MSPH degree from Loma Linda University School of Public Health (1973) and graduated from the two-year certificate program in Mandarin Chinese at Taipei Language Institute.

Beginning in 1974, Jim taught (in Mandarin) at Taiwan Adventist College and served variously as registrar, church pastor, mission temperance director, theology department chair, and academic dean. Returning to the USA in 1989, Jim earned his PhD (1998) at Andrews University, where he directed the Office of Scholarly Research and later taught Biblical Hebrew and Archaeology in the SDA Theological Seminary (1999–2004).

Jim has participated in nine seasons of archaeological excavations in Jordan (‘Umayri and Jalul) and Israel (Gezer). His publications include excavation reports in the Madaba Plains Project publication series.

Ann Gibson

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Ann Gibson has worked for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an accountant, auditor, professor, and university administrator. Her overseas mission experience was in Singapore, where she served as an accountant for the Far Eastern Division (1970–1973), and at the General Conference Auditing Service (1977–1983), first as staff auditor and then as district director. She taught at Atlantic Union College (1973–1977), Walla Walla College (1983–1987), and Andrews University (1992–present). While at Andrews University she also served as dean of the School of Business (1995–2006).

Ann obtained a BA in Business Administration at Walla Walla College (now Walla Walla University) in 1968, an MBA from Andrews University (1970), and a PhD in Accounting from Washington State University (1992). Her areas of expertise are financial accounting, auditing, and business ethics. She is also a licensed Certified Public Accountant (CPA).

Ann has published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Issues in Accounting Education*, *Women of Spirit* (where she authored a quarterly column on personal finance issues for four years), and *Spectrum*.

Ann has been honored with the receipt of the J. N. Andrews Medallion in 2007; as Adventist Woman of the Year for Professional Life in 2002; an Outstanding Woman of the Century, 1901-2001, by Andrews University in 2002; and Who's Who Among America's Teachers in 1996. She has also received the Daniel A. Augsburg Excellence in Teaching Award from Andrews University in 1995 and 2009; the Academic Advisory Award in 1994 from Andrews University; the Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award in 1990 from Washington State University; and the Burlington Northern Award and Grant for Faculty Excellence in 1986 from Walla Walla College.

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*Founding and Senior Pastor, New Seed SDA Church
São Paulo Conference, Brazil*

Born in Brazil, Kleber D. Gonçalves has served the Seventh-day Adventist Church, primarily in the states of Santa Catarina and São Paulo, where he has been involved in publishing work, church planting, teaching, and pastoral ministry.

He graduated from the Adventist Latin American Theological Seminary (São Paulo, Brazil) in 1991 with a BA in Theology. After his ordination to the pastoral ministry in 1996, he and his family moved to the United States where he attended Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and concluded his MDiv (equivalency) from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in 1998, and received a MSA in Church Administration from the School of Business at Andrews University in 2000. Five years later, he earned a PhD in Missiology, also from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Kleber's doctoral work focused on Urban Mission and Postmodernism. This interest took him back to Brazil after he accepted a call from São Paulo Conference to start the New Seed Seventh-day Adventist Church, a church-planting project focusing on secular/postmodern people, where he is currently the senior pastor.

Kleber is also a visiting professor of mission to the Adventist Latin American Theological Seminary in São Paulo, Brazil, and a regional editor of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies (JAMS)* for the South American Division territory.

Scott Griswold

*Director for the Global Mission Buddhist Study Center
Thailand*

Scott Griswold has been the director for the Global Mission Buddhist Study Center since 2002. He is a minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church who has also served as a church planter for Adventist Frontier Missions in Cambodia.

S. Joseph Kidder

Professor of Christian Ministry

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University

Joseph Kidder has been teaching in the area of Spiritual Formation, Church Growth, Evangelism, and Leadership at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary for the last 10 years. Prior to that, he had over 20 years of successful pastoral work. He has helped many people come to the Lord and grow in their spiritual walk.

Joseph is a well-recognized authority in the areas of spirituality, leadership, and church growth. He has invested his life in the equipping and training of pastors and laity for church health and growth. He travels extensively in the USA and abroad conducting seminars for pastors, church leaders, and members in evangelism, leadership, and spirituality. His passion is to help people have a vibrant, ongoing, authentic walk with God.

Dr. Kidder has written numerous articles and a book in various areas of biblical studies, practical ministry, spirituality, and worship.

George R. Knight

Professor Emeritus of Church History

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University

George R. Knight taught at Andrews University for 30 years, serving as a professor of Philosophy of Education from 1976 to 1985 and a professor of Church History with a specialty in Adventist Studies from 1985 to 2006. He has authored more than 30 books and has edited another 30. He is currently serving as editor of the *Adventist Pioneer Biography Series*, the *Library of Adventist Theology*, and the *Adventist Classic Library*.

Delcy Kuhlman

*Adjunct Professor of Spiritual Formation
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University*

Delcy Kuhlman has an MDiv degree from Andrews University. Guided by God, she found her call, purpose, and love in God's sight through spiritual disciplines and companionship. This led to founding "Still Waters," a place for silence, solitude, and spiritual companionship in Buchanan, Michigan.

Wagner Kuhn

*Associate Director of the Institute of World Mission
Associate Professor in World Mission
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary
Andrews University*

Originally from Brazil, Wagner Kuhn has extensive cross-cultural experience. He has worked on three continents and in various capacities with the Adventist Church. He started his denominational career working for the publishing department in Brazil. His first missionary post as a pastor was in the United States, where he helped establish the Framingham SDA Portuguese Speaking Church in Massachusetts. A couple of years later Wagner worked in Central Asia, first as ADRA's regional and program director in the Autonomous Republic of Naxçivan and later as country director for ADRA Azerbaijan (1994–2003). In this capacity he coordinated several large relief and development programs and learned from dozens of expatriate colleagues from various nationalities as well as hundreds of national co-workers. After completing his doctoral studies, he served as professor of Mission and Theology for the SDA Theological Seminary in São Paulo. Since 2005 Wagner has been working as an associate director of the Institute of World Mission and associate professor of Mission at Andrews University.

In 1986, Wagner graduated with a BTh degree from Seminário Adventista Latino-Americano de Teologia (São Paulo) in 1986. He obtained an

MA degree in Religion (Mission Studies) from Andrews University (1994) and a PhD in Missiology (2004) from the School of Intercultural Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA.

Wagner has written scholarly and popular articles that have been published in academic journals and books. He has also written a book on relief, development, and Christian witness both in English and Portuguese.

Rudi Maier

Professor of International Development and Intercultural Studies

Director, PhD in Religion/ThD Programs

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University

Born in Germany, Rudi Maier served in overseas work for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Pakistan and Sri Lanka for 8 years. During those years he was involved in grassroots work, which included community dialogue and development.

Trained as a pastor at Pacific Union College (BA in Theology) and Andrews University (MDiv), he saw the need to incorporate anthropology and sociology as well as community development in his work. His community programs included strong components of dialogue and the strengthening of local village leadership.

He studied at Paradeniya University in Sri Lanka (Buddhism), the University of Chicago (MA in Cultural Anthropology and Buddhism), and American University in Washington, DC (PhD in Sociology and International Development).

He worked for three years with ADRA International as Director of Evaluation. Since 1988 he has been connected with the Department of World Mission at Andrews University.

Jiří Moskala

Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University

Born in Cesky Tesin, Czech Republic, Moskala received his BA (1976), MTh (1979), and ThD (1990), all from the Protestant Theological Faculty

of Charles University, Czech Republic. In 1998 he completed his PhD from Andrews University.

He joined the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary faculty in 1999. Prior to coming to Andrews University, Moskala served in various capacities (ordained pastor, administrator, teacher, and principal) in the Czech Republic.

He is a member of different theological societies and has authored or edited a number of articles and books in the Czech and English languages. He also has participated in several archaeological expeditions in Tell Jalul, Jordan.

Bruce Campbell Moyer

Professor, World Mission

Associate Director of the Institute of World Mission (Retired)

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University

Bruce Campbell Moyer, STD (San Francisco Theological Seminary) was an associate director of the Institute of World Mission for 12 years. Prior to that he taught at Washington Adventist University and Solusi University. He served as a senior advisor to ADRA International and pastored a number of urban and inner-city congregations. Since his retirement he has become very active in Gospel Outreach, a supportive ministry to the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

G. T. Ng

Associate Secretary

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

G. T. Ng comes from Singapore. He started his missionary experience in Cambodia in 1973. After the fall of that country, he worked briefly in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore where he served as pastor, chaplain, health educator, and union department director. From 1991–2000 he served as a professor and dean of the theological seminary in the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS) in the Philippines. From 2000 to 2006 he was the executive secretary of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. He is currently the associate secretary of the General

Conference. He liaises between the General Conference and three world divisions (NSD, SUD, TED).

He earned his BTh from the Southeast Asia Union College in Singapore, an MA from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary (Far East) in the Philippines, and a PhD from the Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

Siroj Sorajjakool

Professor of Religion, Psychology, and Counseling

Program Director for MA in Clinical Ministry

Associate for Center for Spiritual Life and Wholeness

Loma Linda University School of Theology

Siroj Sorajjakool was born and raised in Thailand. He graduated with a BTh from Southeast Asia Union Seminary in Singapore in 1982 and got his MA in Religion from Andrews University Extension Campus at Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India in 1987. After his graduate work in India, he served as director of Thailand Adventist Seminary for 5 years, as academic dean for Mission College, Muak Lek Campus, for 2 years, and as an associate director of Adventist Development and Relief Agency for 2 years. In 1994 he started his doctoral work at Claremont School of Theology and received his PhD in Theology and Personality in 1999.

Russell L. Staples

Professor Emeritus of World Mission

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Andrews University

Russell Staples was born in South Africa and upon graduation from Helderberg College served the Church as pastor/evangelist in South Africa for 10 years. After studying at the Seventh-day Adventist Seminary in Washington, DC and earning a BD from Potomac University (1958), he served at Solusi College (1957–1967), initially as theology teacher but subsequently as principal. After doctoral studies in theology and social anthropology at Princeton Theological Seminary, he joined the Department/Institute of World Mission at Andrews University in 1971 where he served until his retirement. During this period he travelled widely, teaching at

various Adventist institutions and conducting workshops for missionaries in Europe and Africa. He published a book on the church as a community of faith, has contributed many chapters to a variety of books and journals, and has written countless book reviews. He has continued to teach and publish until the present.

Jerald Whitehouse

*Special Advisor, Office of Adventist Mission
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*

Jerald Whitehouse has worked in various parts of the world since 1966 as a pastor, health educator, field project director, country director, and global health advisor in various assignments for the Seventh-day Adventist Church and ADRA. His international experience has included assignments in Libya (1966–1970), Lebanon (1970–1973), Sudan (1980–1985), and Bangladesh (1988–1992), before he joined ADRA International as senior health advisor (1993–1995). Subsequently he assumed responsibilities as director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (1995–2009), under the office of Global Mission at the General Conference. He currently is working on special assignments for the Office of Adventist Mission in the General Conference.

Jerald received a BA from Walla Walla College (1965), an MS degree from Loma Linda University (1967), and DrPH and MPH degrees from Loma Linda University, School of Public Health (1977). He added a Physician's Assistant diploma in 1979 from the School of Medicine, Loma Linda University. His areas of special expertise are in global health and Muslim relations.

Jerald has authored a number of papers and held numerous training seminars in Muslim relations around the world. He has also presented papers at the Doha Interfaith Dialogue conferences in 2007 and 2008 and has been an invitee to the Common Word Interfaith conferences at Yale University in 2008 and Georgetown University in 2009.

This *Festschrift* is being published to honor our esteemed colleague and friend Dr. Jon Dybdahl who recently has retired from being the president of Walla Walla University and who has also lately passed his well-respected "retirement age."

The title of this book is *Encountering God in Life and Mission*. It has been chosen because the book has pulled together three important elements from the work and ministry of Jon Dybdahl: God, Life, and Mission. These three concepts have not been mere abstracts in Jon's life but they have influenced him and his ministry.

From the life story, written in this volume by Jon's son, we have seen a small glimpse of how Jon has encountered God in his life and how that life has been filled with a desire to make God's mission supreme in his work.



Contributors to this *Festschrift* are some of Dr. Dybdahl's former students, colleagues, and friends. The editor of the *Festschrift* is Rudi Maier, Professor of World Mission at Andrews University.



Department of
World Mission

Andrews University

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