

UDK: 282:283:284:286

Izvorni znanstveni članak

Pripremljen u ožujku 2013.

# THE MISUSE OF HISTORY THROUGH RELIGIOUS EXCLUSIVENESS AS A MAJOR OBSTACLE TO THE TRANSMISSION OF THE GOSPEL

*Dragutin Matak*

## SUMMARY:

### **The Misuse of History through Religious Exclusiveness as a Major Obstacle to the Transmission of the Gospel**

History is the backbone of life's reality because it protects us from imaginary, mystical and hypothetical reconstructions. Because of that God revealed Himself in history. However, this noble place of history in spiritual experience is undermined by its misuse through religious exclusiveness. Historical data is manipulated to provide false presumptions which support an identity of separation from others. In this paper we will briefly point out to some examples of Christian religious exclusiveness which are the obstacle to translatability of the Dragutin Matak: *Vjerska isključivost - Biblijski pogledi*, 21 (1-2), 89-100 (2013.) Gospel to the world. Finally, we conclude that the historical facts will always remain elements of identity, but they should never be idolized. The main ingredient of a balanced religious identity and mission is theological and not historical in nature. In such a frame of mind, creating the culture of regarding every human being as a part of human family with the same Parents, the Gospel is naturally and efficiently communicated.

**Key words:** *religious exclusiveness; transmission of the gospel; Jews; Catholics; Protestants; Adventists*

*Let me first suggest a definition of religious exclusiveness. Christianity is an exclusive religion, but when 'it calls us to center our ultimate concern in the God . . . rather than in*

the gods our hands and hearts have made—it is not thereby an excluding faith. If I cannot accept the god the neighbor worships, I must nevertheless accept the neighbor. If I cannot adopt his faith, I must nevertheless respect his faithfulness,”<sup>1</sup> explains Lloyd J. Averill.

In this sense exclusiveness and inclusiveness are conditioned by each other and create a living tension. Martin H. Franzmann observes: ‘To attempt to resolve the tension between the two by compromise or by a rational equalization instead of living in that tension is to lose both the warmth of inclusiveness and the strength of exclusiveness.’<sup>2</sup>

However, *religious exclusiveness* in this essay is defined as the tendency to exclude others, either politely or forcefully, from the earth and, if possible, from heaven, because of their otherness, by using, misusing, and twisting history.

Ideally speaking, history is the backbone of life’s reality, because it records the time, places, and activities of people. It protects us from imaginary, mystical and hypothetical reconstructions and helps us to relate to life in a more accurate way. This is why God revealed himself in history, and why the Bible, despite its age, offers such a practical and usable account.

This noble place of history in spiritual experience is undermined by its misuse through religious exclusiveness. Historical data are manipulated to provide false presumptions that support an identity of separation from others. In this way history becomes more important than spiritual reality. Properly applied, history should be the facilitator of the central theological message that is at the heart of the gospel. But history is misused when it is emphasized over theology. Such a misuse of history is easily observed within the Judeo-Christian religious experience. It can be characterized by the simple expression: ‘Sorry, only *we* participate in this unique history. You are out.’ It seems that there is a pattern of such an unbalanced approach to the history. We begin with the ancients.

## **Abraham and the Jewish people**

The biblical history of the Jewish people is rich. As people chosen by God to ‘translate’ the gospel to humanity, the Jews were highly privileged. With their historical roots in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and other notable figures, they were wonderfully blessed by God, both spiritually and materially. These historical leaders were excellent role models for the nation’s spiritual development. But gradually, instead of magnifying the Benefactor and the benedictions he bestows on all people, they sought to establish their identity by claiming ownership of history for themselves. As N.T. Wright observes: ‘Torah- observance was . . . accentuated because this was what enabled the

---

<sup>1</sup> Lloyd J. Averill, The Exclusiveness of Faith, *The Christian Century*, January 24, 1962, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Martin H. Franzmann, „The Inclusiveness and the Exclusive-ness of the Gospel, as Seen in the Apostolate of Paul“, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. XXVII May 1956 No. 5, pp. 350-351.

“wall” to be maintained between God’s people and the idolatrous pagan world.<sup>3</sup> It is as if they were saying to the nations around them: ‘Sorry, it’s only *us* who are the legitimate children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose deliverer is Moses, and who have David as their king. Our God is not your god. Whatever you do, you have no chance of competing with us because history cannot be reversed.’ We can illustrate the implications of such assertions for our spiritual identity and for the transmission of the gospel by looking at the ways in which Abraham was appreciated.

#### *Abraham*

Abram/Abraham is mentioned 318 times in the biblical record. About two-thirds of these texts are in the Old Testament. The Old Testament descriptions are part of the narrative of this historical person who, through severe challenges, developed an exceptionally profound trust in God. Because of this the New Testament calls him ‘the man of faith’ (Gal 3:9 NIV), ‘the friend of God’ (Jas 2:23 RSV). The New Testament refers to the history of Abraham for the purpose of formulating and promoting spiritual qualities that became the distinguishing marks of Abraham’s descendants. However, Abraham was appreciated for the wrong reasons.

In a tense conversation with the Jewish leaders, the biological and historical descendants of Abraham, Jesus denies their relationship with Abraham because of their lack of true spirituality. Jesus states clearly that the criterion for being Abraham’s children is doing good: ‘If you were Abraham’s children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me ...’ (John 8:39-40 RSV).

John the Baptist also stressed this spiritual quality of belonging to Abraham: ‘Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves: “We have Abraham as our father.” For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham’ (Lk 3:8; Mat 3:9 NIV).

The apostle Paul was not writing against the Jews and he “was not preoccupied with Hellenistic concepts of individualistic ethics [either], for he was a thoroughly Jewish Christian.”<sup>4</sup> As one who speaks within the Jewish religion he argues in the same way by spelling out the reality of faith and trust in Jesus the Messiah as distinguishing marks of a true relationship with Abraham.

And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise (Gal 3:29 NASB).

Even so *Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*  
Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham.

---

<sup>3</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (London, UK, SPCK, 2013), 193.

<sup>4</sup> Dragutin Matak, *The Empirical Development of a College Curriculum of the Epistle to the Galatians* (Maruševec: Adventistički teološki fakultet, 2008), 44.

The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you'* (Gal 3:6-8 NASB).

The universal, all-inclusive theological nature of Abraham's sonship, which is primarily based on the quality of a spiritual experience, allows the gospel to be appreciated and welcomed everywhere. Abraham must not be mummified in ancient history by a group of people who happen to share his genetic code. The history of Abraham testifies to the reality of his existence and experience, but his spiritual walk constitutes the precious example that all are invited to follow on their way to heaven, regardless of national and racial origin or cultural and religious heritage.

### **The church, Peter and apostolic succession**

With the Christ-event came the era of the church, and a similar exclusiveness lingered on. In Jesus Christ God revealed himself in history to bless the whole earth. Jesus expressed it plainly: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15 RSV). But again, over the centuries the misuse of history, fed by religious exclusivism, gradually took shape.

In the early years of the church, the Christians—both from the Jews and from the gentiles—had to resolve the question of how to approach and understand the Jewish Torah and accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. The incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11-14) clearly illustrates the seriousness of the problem.<sup>5</sup> The Jerusalem Council convened and concluded that Jewish nationalistic pressure must not be a stronger force than the reality of the Messiah—Jesus. Christian converts did not have to embrace the Jewish historical religion before or after accepting Christ. They were to build genuine spirituality on the basis of their faith in Christ and they were to understand the Jewish faith through the reality of the long-awaited Messiah—Jesus. N.T. Wright skilfully describes the essence of this new emphasis:

A new form of Torah-obedience was required and enabled (from the heart, but not involving such central Torah-observances as circumcision!); a new sort of 'apocalypse' had happened and was happening (the unveiling of Jesus as Messiah, both in the gospel events themselves and in the ongoing gospel proclamation); salvation there was, and history there was, but they no longer related to one another as once Paul might have imagined (the history was as much a damnation history as a salvation history, and both had reached their *telos* with

---

<sup>5</sup> Dragutin Matak, "Another Look at the Antioch Incident (Gal 2:11-14)", *Kairos*, 6/1 (2012), p. 47-56.

the Messiah).<sup>6</sup>

God has wonderfully acted in history and the divine affirmation of direct access to God through the Messiah is the foundation of man's spiritual identity, aptly expressed by the words of Paul: 'The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...' (Rom 8:16-17 NASB).

At the Jerusalem Council the church was saved from an erroneous interpretation of the Old Testament, and thus from the misuse of history, which feeds religious exclusivism. Freed from this historical burden, the gospel spread widely.

However, another temptation soon presented itself: the issue of succession in the apostolic church. Actually, there are three kinds of succession: *ecclesiastical*, *doctrinal*, and *episcopal*.<sup>7</sup> The last one is also called the *apostolic succession*. The issue is broad and complex, because it involves various claims to an uninterrupted line of historical descent from the apostles, from whom special powers are said to be derived, primarily to ordain priests. It is closely related to the idea of ecclesiastical succession that asserts that the organized church has continued uninterruptedly from the beginning. According to the doctrinal succession the same teaching has continued from the times of the apostles. This discussion could have ended long ago, if it had been accepted that the Bible, especially the New Testament, is the only real element of succession in the apostolic church.

Instead, it has been claimed that various churches were organized around distinguished episcopal sees, which were founded by specific apostles. Thus, the Patriarchate of Constantinople claims the apostle Andrew as its founder, which is also the claim of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Patriarchate of Alexandria claims to have been founded by Mark, and the Armenian Apostolic Church connects itself with Bartholomew and Jude. The Patriarchate of Antioch claims an unbroken succession to the throne of Peter, which is also the claim of the 'Holy See' of Rome. There are other churches that claim some form of episcopal, apostolic succession, such as the Church of the East, the Anglican Church, and some Lutheran churches. Those who cannot demonstrate an unbroken link with the apostles, such as most of the Protestant churches, are often denied even the title *church*.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, str. 1262.

<sup>7</sup> R.E. Higginson, 'Apostolic Succession' in: Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 73.

<sup>8</sup> Roman Catholics recognize the validity of the apostolic successions of the bishops, and therefore the rest of the clergy, of the Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Church of the East, and the Old Catholic Church (Union of Utrecht only). The Eastern Orthodox generally recognize Roman Catholic orders, but have a different concept of the apostolic succession as it exists outside of Eastern Orthodoxy. The lack of apostolic succession through bishops is the primary reason why Protestant communities are not considered *churches* by the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic\\_succession](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic_succession))

Let us look more closely at the most prominent concept of apostolic succession, namely the form of the apostolic succession that is practiced by the Roman Catholic Church. There is a belief in an unbroken historical link between the bishops of Rome, starting with Peter and continuing to the current pope, who exercises this authority with all regional bishops and priests.

The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council (21 November, 1964) in a well-known paragraph plainly states:

For it is through Christ's Catholic Church alone, which is the universal help towards salvation, that the fullness of the means of salvation can be obtained. It was to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, that we believe that our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant, in order to establish on earth the one Body of Christ into which all those should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God.<sup>9</sup>

The key biblical text, interpreted historically rather than theologically, is the metaphor of a rock. This rock is understood as representing Peter rather than his faith in Jesus, which he had expressed moments before. Let us read these verses again:

He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it' (Mat 16:15-18 NASB).

The metaphor of 'the keys,' which follows, should be read in the same context. The need to justify an exclusive right to history, which no one could match, has, however, influenced even the hermeneutics of the plain biblical account. Some of the bishops at the First Vatican Council in 1869-1870 strongly protested against this historical, rather than theological, interpretation of these texts and against the primacy of the pope. One of the most outspoken opponents was the Croatian bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer.

The message of such religious establishments is: 'Sorry, it's only *us* who have a direct line to heaven... You may have your own way of reading the Bible, and an authentic spiritual experience, but you can never be a partaker of the full measure of (I)ot'i's grace, because this comes through the sacraments which only we can fully administer, because of our unbroken historical connection with the apostolic church.'

This constant contest between Christians strongly reminds us of the quarrels among

---

<sup>9</sup> *Drugi vatikanski koncil, Dokumenti*, priredio Josip Turčinović, (Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1980) p. 213.

the twelve disciples about who is the greatest. Jesus' answer to them and to us is so clear that it takes an effort to misunderstand it:

They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the road?' But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.' He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me' (Mk 9:33-37 NIV).

## **Exclusiveness of the Protestants**

The Protestant movement of the sixteenth century was initiated to resist exclusive papal authority. Despite internal and external difficulties, the gospel was spread through both the written and spoken Word. The famous dicta, *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia* and *sola fide*, constituted the foundation of Protestant spirituality. The genuine gospel became more meaningful and accessible to the public. And yet, even the Protestants failed to avoid the temptation to adopt history to promote religious exclusivism.

As far as the apostolic succession is concerned, the Roman Catholic attitude was that an unbridgeable break occurred at the Reformation.<sup>10</sup> However, some Protestant churches would not let apostolic succession go, and have tried to retain its historical features at any cost. Actually, among the Protestant churches there is a movement in both directions, toward apostolic succession and away from it.

According to Otto F. Stahlke, the Anglican Church goes so far as to say that: '... since the church came into being before and without the New Testament books, ... the "apostolic ministry" must also have priority over the Scriptures ...',<sup>11</sup> So, it would seem that they depend on the historical linkage of the apostolate, and not on the theology of the New Testament.

One of the founders of the pro-Catholic Oxford movement in the Anglican Church, John Keble, formulated the teaching that W. Walker sums up as follows: 'The way of salvation is through reception of the blood of Christ in the eucharist, which is validly administered only through those in apostolic succession.'<sup>12</sup>

Otto F. Stahlke continues explaining the attitudes among the Protestants:

---

<sup>11</sup> William Thomson-Uberuaga, 'Continuity amidst Disruption: The Spirit and Apostolic Succession at the Reformation,' *Horizons* 29 no 2 (Fall 2002), 290-298.

<sup>12</sup> Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh. 1)K: T. & T. Clark, 1970), 498.

The German and the Danish Lutheran churches have in the past not considered the Roman apostolic succession valid, much less have they sought it. . . . The Swedish Lutheran Church has been in succession by an accident of history, but they have not considered it essential. They state that they possess it 'as though they had it not.'<sup>13</sup>

These secessionist churches do not accept the claims of the Roman Catholic Church that a valid ministry can be traced only to Peter, but in their own way they are concerned about the historic apostolic succession.

Another way used by some Protestant churches to promote their authenticity is by referring to some undeniable historical facts, for instance that they were established in the first half of the sixteenth century. On this ground they create some sort of distance from the hundreds of more recent Protestant movements. These newly-formed Protestant denominations might hear them say. 'Sorry, it's only us, the "main-stream" Protestants, established in the sixteenth century by Luther (1483-1546), or by Calvin (1509-1564), et al., who are the real Protestants. We have historical creeds, and whoever wants to know what righteousness by faith is all about, must listen to us. The authentic gospel is with us.'

## Seventh-day Adventists

This mentality of exclusiveness based on an attachment to specific historical events or persons may also be observed among the relatively new religious movements. Seventh-day Adventists believe they are the 'remnant church' that has something important to communicate to the world, namely the messages of the three angels of Revelation 14:6-12. This concept is based on their understanding of the prophecies in the book of Revelation, especially in 12:17; cf. 19:10; 22:8 9, where the basic identifying marks for the 'remnant' are found. One of these is a commitment to the commandments of God, in particular with regard to the Sabbath,<sup>14</sup> and the other is the concept of the 'testimony of Jesus' which is of special significance for our discussion. Hans K. LaRondelle explains:

Although for several years the phrase 'the testimony of Jesus' (Rev. 12:17, KJV) was used as a synonym for 'the faith of Jesus,' a new interpretation emerged in the 1850s. Now 'the testimony of Jesus' was linked with the prophetic gift manifested in the ministry and writings of Ellen G. White (cf. Rev. 19:10). This interpretation became an identifying sign of the remnant church of Revelation 12:17 and was integrated into the missionary proclamation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Stahlke, 'The Apostolic Succession,' 38.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Rice. *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985), 230.

<sup>15</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, „The Remnant and the Three Angels' Message“ *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Editor, Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD.: Review and Herald, 2000). 886.



This doctrine is among the Adventist fundamental beliefs and has been published repeatedly in the denominational *Yearbook*. It is number 18 in the current version of the *Fundamental Beliefs* and it reads: ‘One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White.’<sup>16</sup>

Historically, the Adventist movement has been blessed by the work of Ellen G. White, who is regarded as a prophetess—although not by all Adventists. Seventh-day Adventists believe they have a special role to play in spreading the gospel to the world, by drawing attention to God as the Creator and the Saviour/Judge who is coming soon. This mission orientation is impressive and there is nothing wrong in developing an identity of service to humanity against such an historical background.

However, claiming some sort of uniqueness, because historically Ellen G. White was a part of the Adventist movement, would demonstrate the same kind of misuse of history as we have already encountered several times in this essay, and would inevitably lead into religious exclusivism. Other denominations might hear the Adventists say: ‘Sorry, it’s only us who have the modern prophet, Ellen G. White, as a sign of the “remnant church.” Unless you join our denomination, you cannot be part of the “remnant church,” even if you wanted to.’ Such an attitude would certainly kill the potential of the gospel—as expressed in the three angels’ messages—to be a blessing to the *world*. It would also mean that any spiritual movement apart from Adventism would not be a legitimate ‘remnant,’ even if it proclaimed the three angels’ messages, kept the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath, because they could never claim that the ministry of Ellen G. White was historically exercised among them. There is, however, a more balanced attitude towards the service of Ellen G. White, in which theological issues are more dominant than the historical ones.

## **Ellen G. White as Abraham**

Drawing the lesson from the Old Testament example of Abraham, we could understand the place of Ellen G. White and the nature of the ‘remnant’ more theologically. History helps us to keep in mind that we are dealing with a woman who had an extraordinary spiritual experience, which in her time was a great blessing for many. But the baptized members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not the only fellow-believers of Ellen G. White; these may include all individuals who are blessed by her spiritual service. In her *ministry*, as in Abraham’s, *all the nations may be blessed*.

Some Adventists have been careful in applying texts from Revelation to their

---

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html>

movement;

It is in a spirit of deep humility that we apply this Scripture to the Advent Movement and its work, for we recognize the tremendous implications of such an interpretation. While we believe that Revelation 12:17 points to us as a people of prophecy, it is in no spirit of pride that we thus apply the Scripture. To us it is the logical conclusion of our system of prophetic interpretation.

But the fact that we thus apply this Scripture does not imply in any way that we believe we are the only true Christians in the world, or that we are the only ones who will be saved. While we believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the visible organization through which God is proclaiming this last special message to the world, we remember the principle that Christ enunciated when He said, 'Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold' (John 10:16).

Seventh-day Adventists firmly believe that God has a *precious remnant*, a multitude of earnest, sincere believers, in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who are living by all the light God has given them. The great Shepherd of the sheep recognizes them as His own, and He is calling them into one great fold and one great fellowship in preparation for His return. Our position on this point is clearly stated by Ellen White: '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.'<sup>17</sup>

Any religious movement can have a share in all the signs and blessings of the eschatological remnant. They may not be part of the organization created in part by the prophetess Ellen G. White, but they can follow her example in testifying for Jesus by: 1) loving God as Creator, Saviour, Mediator, and Lawgiver; 2) appreciating the Bible and studying diligently God's revealed will; 3) boldly testifying to the love of God by unselfish ministry to all human beings; 4) being governed in all they do in their life by the Spirit of 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control' (Gal 5:22, 23 NASB). The spiritual prophetic gift of this humble and courageous woman was to be 'a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light,<sup>18</sup> or 'the testimony of Jesus' for all people of this planet who are blessed by her service.

---

<sup>17</sup> *Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), 191-192.

<sup>18</sup> Exalting the Bible and illustrating the relation of her writings to the Bible, Ellen G. White wrote: 'Little heed is given to the Bible, and *the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light*. Oh, how much good would be accomplished if the books containing this light were read with a determination to carry out the principles they contain!' Ellen G. White, in *Review und Herald*, Jan 20. 1903. Quoted in *Colporteur Ministry*. (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1990), 125.

## Conclusion

Historical facts always remain part of one's identity, but they should never be idolized. The main ingredient of a balanced religious identity and mission is theological, not historical. In such a frame of mind—which creates a culture of regarding every human being as part of the human family with the same parents—the gospel is naturally and efficiently communicated.

The ancient Jews could not fully achieve their mission to the world because they claimed their rich history for themselves, instead of sharing it and appreciating that their Benefactor was ready to bestow wonderful blessings on them and all the earth. They mummified Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses in their history, instead of sharing the spirituality of the patriarchs with the whole world.

Although the incarnate God established the church himself with the same mission to go 'into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation,' the misuse of history—fed by religious exclusivism—gradually took shape over the centuries. The question of apostolic succession in the church reminds us of the continuing dispute of the twelve disciples over who was the first. Instead of being united in the Spirit, regardless of racial, national, cultural and social differences, Christianity has demonstrated its ability to divide its adherents over doctrinal, historical, and cultural issues, as no other religion or ideological movement has done before.

The Protestants protested against the excessive use of ecclesiastical authority, and have not avoided the temptation to claim their historicity to maintain the religious and social status of Protestantism. Some seem to think that without the apostolic succession they would not be authentic enough. Others cannot think of their identity without their religious pioneers such as Luther or Calvin, and their historical creeds that distinguish them from others—especially numerous recent Protestant movements.

Seventh-day Adventists have been blessed by the ministry of their pioneer Mrs. Ellen G. White. They believe that through her ministry a spiritual gift of prophecy has been manifested. Other Christians may form their opinion of her by looking at her life and work. But Adventists should never emphasize her historical presence at the expense of her universal theological contribution. Like Abraham, this humble and courageous woman could be 'a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light' and bear 'the testimony of Jesus' to all people of this planet.

The accentuation of history at the expense of theology can also be misleading when it concerns biblical exegesis, especially in the interpretation of the apocalyptic texts. Historicism may easily override the theological meaning of the prophetic biblical accounts. But that may be the theme for another essay at some other time!

#### SAŽETAK

##### **Vjerska isključivost izazvana zlouporabom povijesti - glavna prepreka širenju evanđelja**

Povijest je kičma stvarnosti života jer nas štiti od zamišljenih, tajnovitih i hipotetskih rekonstrukcija. Iz toga razloga se je i Bog objavio u povijesti. Međutim, ovo važno mjesto povijesti u duhovnom iskustvu potkopano je vjerskom isključivosti. Iskrivljavaju se povijesni podatci i tako se stvaraju lažne pretpostavke koje hrane identitet odvajanja od drugih i drugačijih. U ovome radu ukratko ukazujemo na nekoliko primjera kršćanske vjerske isključivosti koja je osnovna prepreka širenju evanđelja. Na kraju zaključujemo: Povijesne činjenice uvijek ostaju sastavnicama identiteta, ali nikada ne smiju postati idolima. Osnovno obilježje uravnoteženog vjerskog identiteta i misije je teološke a ne povijesne naravi. U takvom misaonom okviru valja smatrati svako ljudsko biće članom ljudske obitelji koja ima jednog i zajedničkog Roditelja. Na ovakav način Evanđelje se uspješno pronosi svijetom.

**Ključne riječi:** *vjerska isključivost; širenje evanđelja; Židovi; katolici; protestanti; adventisti*

This article is also published in: Dragutin Matak, „The Misuse of History through Religious Exclusiveness as a Major Obstacle to the Transmission of the Gospel,” u *Faith in Search of Depth and Relevancy*, Editor, Reinder Bruinsma (London: Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, 2014), 339-251.