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Evangelism and Social Action: The Legacy of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl

Introduction

In “Can Mission Stories of an Adventist Past Foster a Shared Adventist Future?” Charles Teel calls for commitments that make profound demand on our life together. Teel presents the story of the Stahls as part of an Adventist collective memory, which he thinks remains unknown, unfortunately. He argues that

the collective story advanced by a religious movement will continue to inform succeeding generation anew only as theological beliefs are demonstrated to have relevance for personal and social ethics. Said experientially, such a community must demonstrate that truth informs lived experience; that a way of believing results in a way of being; and that word becomes flesh. . . . [The] Adventist story may be passed on to our children only as this doing of theology becomes of one piece. (Teel 1989:1)

The story of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl, two Adventist missionaries in Peru, has inspired many and provides a new perspective on the scope and essence of the work that is expected from all who receive the call to be God’s witnesses in a fallen world. Seventh-day Adventists seek the transformation of an individual’s soul, body, and spirit (White 1899). The wholistic nature of Adventist mission is remarkably evident in the story of this extraordinary mission-driven couple.

This article probes into the life and work of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl and seeks to discover how they expressed the relationship between *evangelism and the work of social liberation*. Along the way, it will also assess

how their life and work reflected the tension between *believing and doing*, and how their ministry exemplified the integration of *theology and praxis*.

This article highlights key moments of Ana and Ferdinand's life, their passion for the mission of God, how their faith drove their unique social consciousness, and their approach to strategic advocacy leading to systemic change in Peru.

The Missiological Debate: Evangelism Versus Social Action in Evangelicalism

Evangelism and social action represent two paradigms that have engaged the mind of theologians and missiologists for centuries, particularly during the last few decades. Should Christians maintain an essentially evangelistic approach to mission or should they also be engaged in social action as a significant element of their outreach to the world? In this context, Timothy Tennent defines evangelism as "the proclamation of the good news that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ sinful people can be forgiven and reconciled to God" (2010:388). The evangelism paradigm insists that "the church's primary mission is to proclaim this good news, calling people to repentance" (388). Tennent defines social action as "the church's cultural mandate to express God's love practically through tangible acts of compassion and justice for the poor, the homeless, the sick, and disenfranchised" (389).

Tennent notes that evangelical, Pentecostal, and independent Christians are sometimes criticized for being committed to only evangelism, while other Christian denominations are portrayed as being committed only to justice and social action (2010:391). However, Tennent believes that "the difference is often one of emphasis and definition of what it means to evangelize, rather than discreet spheres of commitment" (391).

The renown missiologist, David Bosch, gives a comprehensive definition of evangelism:

We may, then, summarize evangelism as that dimension and activity of the church's mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Savior and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth; and being committed to God's purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ. (2011:1451 iBooks)

Bosch's definition above highlights the inclusive characteristic of evangelism. By stating that evangelism includes "word and deed," and is concerned with issues such as slavery to the world and its powers, reconciliation, peace, and justice on earth, Bosch treats social action as an integral part of evangelism, rather than as a separate entity.

Lesslie Newbigin suggests that it is impossible to set apart evangelism and social ministry. He noticed that missionaries sometimes tried to just "preach the gospel" and remain uninvolved in the business of "social service." But, inevitably, they faced a hungry man begging for food, or a sick child crying for help. Then, in spite of their "pure theology," they found themselves drawn into "the work of education, healing, social service, 'agricultural missions' and a host of similar activities" (1995:158). For this reason, Newbigin believes that "missions have never been able to separate the preaching of the gospel from action for God's justice" (157).

Most evangelicals acknowledge the importance of social action as part of the mission of the church (Tennent 2010:391). Several evangelical statements attest to this assertion. The most preeminent examples include the 1966 Wheaton Declaration, the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin, also in 1966, the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern in 1973, and the 1974 Lausanne Covenant. The *Lausanne Covenant* has been widely viewed as one of the most significant documents in modern church history, and it has served as a rallying call to the evangelical church around the world. The document defines what it means to be evangelical, challenging Christians to work together to make Jesus Christ known throughout the world. Paragraph 5 of the *Lausanne Covenant* on "Christian Social Responsibility" states that evangelism and social concern must go hand in hand.

Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. (Lausanne Movement 1992)

Tennent notes three key features of the Lausanne Covenant, especially in paragraph 5. The first feature highlights how "it properly places social action in a theological context, linking it to the doctrines of God, reconciliation, righteousness, and the fact that all men and women are created

in the image of God” (2010:392). The second feature is the affirmation that “evangelism and social action are not ‘mutually exclusive,’ thereby laying the groundwork for an integrated view of how the person and work of Christ are reflected in the life and witness of the church” (392). The last and third feature is the insertion of “the expression of *metanoia*, or repentance, for the church’s failure to live consistently with the biblical witness to social action and the struggle for justice on behalf of the oppressed” (393).

Tennent also notes that, in spite of such unequivocal acknowledgement that evangelism and social action are part of Christian duty, the nature of that relationship was not spelled out in the document. Consequently, one can observe broad differences in the ways evangelical denominations integrate the two. Some implement relief and development as a *bridge* to evangelism. Others view relief and development as a natural *consequence* of evangelism. A third category approaches them as complementary elements working as *partners*.

John Stott, architect of the Lausanne Covenant, sees social action and evangelism as partners, like “the two blades of a pair of scissors or the two wings of a bird” (Stott and Wright 2015:43). Stott further observes that Jesus “in his ministry, *kerygma* (proclamation) and *diakona* (service) went hand in hand. . . . Both were expressions of his compassion for people, and both should be of ours. . . . Indeed, so close is this link between proclaiming and serving that they actually overlap” (44).

Evangelism and Social Action in Adventism

Adventist missions have often been bashed for being oblivious to social injustices, too absorbed in evangelism, and with an overemphasis on eschatology. Indeed, from the onset, the impulse for Adventist mission has been Revelation 14:6, 7, which plainly teaches that “the everlasting gospel” and “the hour of his judgment is come,” themes would be preached “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” before Christ’s Second Coming. Adventist understanding of their prophetic calling gave to early Adventists a sense of urgency in the proclamation of the Three Angels’ Message to all the world before the end comes. Georges Knight highlights how critical and urgent that preaching was for Ellen White, who “called for ‘self-sacrificing’ Adventists to ‘give themselves unreservedly’ to the work of presenting the message ‘to those in darkness’” (1999:91). Knight also shows that preaching the third angel’s message was so important for Ellen White that she warned Adventists against anything that could interfere with this proclamation. Even the medical/welfare work should come second. “The medical/welfare work may be ‘good work’ but it was not to take the place of emphasizing the preaching

of Adventist's prophetic message" (Knight 1999:92). Knight concludes by calling Adventists to hold on to their prophetic heritage in their mission enterprise. Regarding Seventh-day Adventism, he states that "to deny its prophetic heritage is a certain way to destroy what might be thought of as its missiological mainspring" (94).

However, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in its official statements, acknowledges the importance of social action as an integral part of mission. Gordon Doss states that "Adventist mission has been consistently wholistic, even though in various times and places it may not have achieved the ideal coordination between evangelism and social ministry" (2018:6). The Adventist Church has issued a number of statements on specific global social issues. On the issue of global poverty, for example, in a statement approved and voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on June 23, 2010, it stated that "Seventh-day Adventists believe that actions to reduce poverty and its attendant injustices are an important part of Christian social responsibility" (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2010). According to the statement, the involvement of the church is not limited to just some paternalistic or gratuitous benevolence services here and there. The Executive Committee statement goes on to say that

working to reduce poverty and hunger means more than showing sympathy for the poor. It means advocating for public policy that offers justice and fairness to the poor, for their empowerment and human rights. It means sponsoring and participating in programs that address the causes of poverty and hunger, helping people to build sustainable lives. This commitment to justice is an act of love (Micah 6:8). (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2010)

Seventh-day Adventists are peacemakers, according to another official church statement voted on April 18, 2002. The statement lays out the path to achieving peace: dialogue, justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Notice what the document stated about the issue of justice.

Justice requires respect for human rights, in particular religious liberty, which deals with the profoundest human aspirations and undergirds all human rights. Justice requires nondiscrimination, respect for human dignity and equality, and a more equitable distribution of the necessities of life. Economic and social policies will either produce peace or discontent. Seventh-day Adventist concern for social justice is expressed through the support and promotion of religious liberty, and through organizations and departments of the Church which work to relieve poverty and conditions of marginalization. Such efforts on the part of the Church can, over time, reduce resentment and terrorism.

By this statement, the Adventist Church acknowledges that justice is a prerequisite for sustainable peace. Justice is achieved when human rights, including religious rights, are fulfilled. All this requires that church members be concerned with social issues and fully committed to social ministry and the work of advocacy.

In addition, numerous Adventist scholars advocate an approach to mission that integrates evangelism and social ministry. For Rudi Maier, Jesus was not interested in offering only eternal life and inner freedom to individuals while ignoring their human condition. Maier understands Jesus' mission was to offer "God's merciful love and the kingdom of life and freedom" to the "sheep without a shepherd," and "free them from the hunger they are suffering from" (1999:84). To the question, whether social service and development work are evangelization or not, Maier believes that Jesus' answer would be the following: "Social service and human promotion are not evangelization, since evangelization implies the explicit announcement of His kingdom and the call to faith and conversion. However, human promotion and social service are *integrated* in evangelization. They are part of God's project for total freedom of all people and thereby an important component of mission (1999:84, 85).

For David Trim, director of the Office of Archives and Research at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Adventists in the time of Ellen White (late nineteenth-century) shared the attitudes of other premillennialists of their day, such as Edward Irving and Henry Drummond. The premillennialist eschatology of these men did not lead them to fatalism or lack of concern. Instead, they became more eager to see both souls being saved and social reforms implemented by the government in order to mitigate the effects of the upcoming judgment (2019:15, 16). Trim notes that Adventists shared Irving and Drummond's attitudes on "the need for a wholistic approach to conversion, and some also shared similar perspectives on the legitimacy, even the necessity of acting against societal ills in order to ensure that more people could be holistically converted and thus saved at Christ's soon return" (2019:17).

However, it is worth noting that the Adventist Church's wholistic view of mission has not always been translated into practice on the ground. Instead, there still exists in many contexts a sharp distinction between evangelism and social concerns. Maier observes that "Adventists too often see themselves as ministering in one or the other of these spheres. Preachers often limit their concern to eternal salvation" (1999:85). For David Trim, Ana and Ferdinand Stahl are perfect examples of how "Adventist missionaries were able successfully to combine the conversionary imperative with truly radical social activism" (2019:22).

From Conversion to the Mission Field

Fernando Stahl was born on January 3, 1874, in Pentwater, Michigan. He was only eight months old when he lost his father, who was an officer in the German army before immigrating to the United States. Ana was a Swede who had emigrated to the United States when she was 16. Six years later, in 1892, she married Ferdinand, who was four years her junior (Trim 2019:21). The Stahls became Seventh-day Adventists in 1899 after they bought a book from a Seventh-day Adventist, and after studying the Bible together, were baptized. Following their conversion to the Adventist faith, they decided to “dedicate their lives to service for others” (Wearner 1988:17). That burning passion for service took them to Battle Creek, Michigan, where they enrolled in a nursing course. Upon completion of their studies, they were sent to Cleveland, Ohio, by the sanitarium board to take charge of the Cleveland Treatment rooms. With no support from Battle Creek, they purchased a treatment room in a small sanatorium out in the country 27 miles from Cleveland. They carried on their work there for about four years. “We believed this was right for we had studied the Testimonies,” they wrote later in a letter to Ellen White on February 4, 1909. However, since going to Cleveland they had heard a great deal about private sanatoriums not being the right kind of work, so they tried to pass the sanatorium over to the Adventist Church, but the leaders from the General Conference and the local conference showed no interest. This caused them great concern because they wanted to “be with, and in the organization, and in perfect harmony” (Stahl 1909).

It was in this context that on February 4, 1909, the Stahls wrote to Ellen White for advice. In their letter, they expressed their disappointment with the Church not showing interest in taking up the sanatorium. They expressed their desire to be in “the organized work” and their willingness to give up everything in order to be ready “to go where God calls us, whether home or foreign field” (Stahl 1909, Letter #2). On March 5, 1909, William Clarence White, Ellen White’s son, answered: “Mother wishes me to say to you that the Lord has not given her any revelation regarding yourselves or the work in which you are engaged. . . . Mother advises you to take counsel from brethren in Ohio who have a knowledge of your location and of your capabilities” (White 1909, Letter #3). William White offered the Stahl’s his personal advice saying that from reports coming to him from Ohio, it would be better for the Stahl’s to sell the building because it was too far from the city, too isolated, and settle in a place “where you can reach the people that need the treatments you can give” (W. White 1909). They followed the counsel from Ellen White’s son. They gave up on everything and sought an opportunity to serve wherever God would call them.

Robert G. Wearner describes the Stahls as missionaries with an exuberant passion for the mission of God. In his account, Wearner says that when Stahl and his wife Ana felt God's impression on their heart to serve as missionaries overseas, they left Ohio and headed to Washington, DC. There, they attended the 1909 General Conference Session and took the opportunity to meet J. W. Westphal, president of the South American Union. They expressed their desire to help as missionaries in the Andes Highlands, where indigenous tribes were oppressed and living in inhumane conditions. Westphal had a heart for mission and was sensitive to "the plight of the millions of the sons of the Incas, who lived and died without medical attention or educational privileges" (Wearner 1988:15). He was excited about the idea of sending two "consecrated workers" willing to risk their lives in order to alleviate the sufferings of the descendants of the Incas living in the highlands of Peru and Bolivia. Unfortunately, there were no funds to send another missionary family to South America. Ana and Ferdinand were so eager to respond to God's call that they decided to use their own money to cover their missionary travel expenses. Later, Ana used her inheritance to buy property and build a home in Iquitos in eastern Peru (23).

Ana and Ferdinand in South America

Ana and Ferdinand Stahl's time in South America can be divided into four periods corresponding to four different locations: La Paz, Bolivia (1909-1911), Plateria, around Lake Titicaca, Peru (1911-1920), the Amazon Jungles, Peru (1920-1925), and Iquitos, Peru (1927-1938). They went home to the USA on furlough during 1926. The Stahl's experience in these four locations is told in two books Ferdinand wrote: *In the Land of the Incas* (1920) and *In the Amazon Jungles* (1932).

La Paz, Bolivia (1909-1911). The Stahls arrived at the port of Mollendo in South Peru in mid-1909 after a voyage of twenty days from New York. Soon after, they headed by train to La Paz, the capital of Bolivia. They stayed there for two years, spending most of their time learning the local language and immersing themselves in the life and culture of a population that had been the victim for centuries of exploitation from the white man. The Stahls also sold Bibles and other religious books, which helped them meet many of the expenses of their missionary work.

Plateria, around Lake Titicaca, Peru (1911-1920). Two years later, in mid-1911, the Stahls were asked to move to Plateria on the shores of Lake Titicaca in Southern Peru. There they found an existing Adventist community with 46 baptized members. They encountered and described an oppressed race, "Indians in truly deplorable condition, living in the

most abject squalor and ignorance, knowing nothing whatever of the simplest laws of hygiene, and addicted to the most terrible drunkenness, and to the cocaine habit" (Stahl 1920:105). By the time they were about to leave, nine years later, Titicaca's membership had grown to over 2,000.

The Amazon Jungles, Peru (1920-1925). By 1920, Ferdinand Stahl received authorization from the Inca Union Mission to go up and over the Andes and down into the high jungle on the eastern slope. Having reached a coffee plantation at 2,000 feet elevation, whose owner was generous enough to donate land for a new mission, Ferdinand was stationed there for the next five years, joined later by his wife Ana. They found the Amazon jungle different from the high mountain plateaus. In the highlands among the Quichua and Aymara Indians, the air was always cool and clear, with brilliant sunshine, whereas in the jungle, one could barely see the sunlight, because of the dense vegetation, immense trees, tangled vines, and fast-moving streams running down deep gorges (Stahl 1932:7). Ferdinand relentlessly pursued his task of evangelizing the tribal people. Although he suffered great hazards because of the rapids and whirlpools, insects and snakes, as well as fierce opposition from those who felt threatened by his work, he persevered. The inhabitants of the rain forest received the living Word and treatment for their diseases. The Stahls founded a school, and baptized 184 people.

Iquitos, Peru (1927-1938). In 1925, before going home on furlough, Ferdinand explored Iquitos, the largest city on the upper Amazon with 14,000 inhabitants. There were many government schools, "roads have been cut through, and also a splendid airline has been established by the government" (Stahl 1932:102). Ferdinand quickly cabled the General Conference headquarters, "Iquitos Peru, Great prospects, (signed) Stahl" (Wearner 1988:24). Ana and Ferdinand spent their leave of absence attending the General Conference session in 1926 and visiting many churches in North America. They brought with them a Campa girl, Chave, who served as living evidence and witness of the fascinating stories they were sharing with Adventist congregations in the United States. Church leaders in Europe invited the Stahls to come and share their stories with them as well. Ana took that opportunity to pay a visit to her native Sweden. What a surprise and blessing it was for her to find inheritance money waiting for her in a Swedish bank. She used that money to buy property and build a home in Iquitos in eastern Peru.

Upon returning to Peru in 1927, Ana and Ferdinand settled in Iquitos. They immediately began making known their mission, holding meetings for the people, and soon had an organized church of a fine class of people. They found among groups of white people some who were willing to serve as gospel workers, whom Ferdinand placed in other villages on the

rivers. Not until 1938 did Ana and Ferdinand return permanently to the United States.

The Context of the Stahls' Mission in Peru

By 1909, the year of the arrival of Ana and Ferdinand in Peru, South America was called "the neglected continent" by the *Pacific Press*, publisher of the Stahl's book, *In the Amazon Jungles*. Indeed, the missionary couple found a population plagued with drunkenness, superstition, and spiritual slavery, and in need of the light and liberty of the gospel of Jesus (Stahl 1932:4). Other misfortunes among the people included illiteracy and oppression. Most of the indigenous people could not read, and this made them easy prey for abuse and exploitation. A small group of mestizo and white landowning families kept in total subjection 95 percent of the population. Land expropriations, forced labor, and arbitrary taxation were the chief tools of oppression. Notice how Stahl described the injustices the Indians were subject to in Plateria, Peru.

The Indians were beaten and deceived on every hand by the white people. They were considered as of less value than beasts. The first to mistreat them were the great landowners, who for many years had systematically robbed them of their lands. These were originally taken by the Spanish conquistadores, who in turn contracted with many of the Indians to work in the mines, paying them in land. At that time, the land was regarded as of little worth; but it has proved to be valuable, being excellent grazing land for the alpaca, the llama, and the vicuna, whose natural habitat is on these high plateaus.

Any Indian who was strong and fortunate enough to endure the hard work of the mines for two or three years received a title to a large tract of land. These papers either had been lost, or had become unreadable because of great age; therefore in the suits with the powerful landowners, the Indians could not prove their ownership by written titles, and most of the best lands had been taken from them.

The system of the usurpers was as effective as it was simple. Usually they forcibly removed the boundaries of the Indians' land, and at the same time laid claim to it. If an Indian remonstrated with a landowner, he was beaten by the landowners' servants. Finally, the Indian in desperation would go to one of the larger villages and secure a lawyer to take his case in hand. This would necessitate a suit against the wealthy landowner. The lawyer would take the case, promising faithfully to present the necessary papers before the court, and get the return of the land. Many papers would be prepared, for each of which a charge of from one to four dollars would be made; and the Indian, in order to get money to pay for them and carry on the suit, would be obliged to sell his cattle. . . .

The Indians, not knowing how to keep accounts, could never clear themselves of debt, and were thus kept virtually in slavery. There were hundreds of Indians in this condition. (1920:105-110)

A letter from E. H. Wilcox, the Stahl's successor in the Lake Titicaca Mission, describes an incident that showcases the injustice the Indians suffered from the authorities. The letter explains that nearby the *Misión Del Lago Titicaca*, Indians were selling the products during what seemed to be a fair (*fiesta*). The first day of the *fiesta*, a man called Arturo Dias, the judge of Santiago, erupted and began imposing taxes on all the products the Indians had brought to sell. Apparently, the problem was not the tax itself, but the fact that the judge raised the tax so high that the Indians were not able to pay it. As they could not pay the taxes, the judge would come and seize their belongings, which made the Indians furious and caused them to protest. To retaliate, Judge Arturo Dias used violence against the Indians, beating them with poles. As more Indians were protesting, he began to shoot in the air with his Winchester rifle, and threatened them that he would return and kill every last one of them.

The following day, he returned with two soldiers and his brother, and three more henchmen. Arturo Dias himself started firing on the Indians and killed one of them. When he saw that the man was dead, he returned to the town. The Indians all gathered around the dead body and watched over it during the whole night. The next day, the Indians saw someone on horseback coming from Santiago. Fearing that he was coming to take the dead man from them so they would have no proof that he had been shot, all the Indians surrounded the house where the dead man was lying. All of a sudden, horsemen headed by Arturo Dias came and began firing on the Indians again, wounding two of them. These two wounded Indians were carried to the Adventist Mission's compound, and there Kalbermatter, a member of the Mission's team, treated them. Unfortunately, one passed away and the other survived.

The Mission was then accused of inciting the Indians to subversion. Obviously, this was a lie. To the contrary, Kalbermatter did advise the Indians not to arm themselves but to quietly go back home and not to return to the fair. While on their way home, which was about two kilometers away, thirty horsemen, led again by Judge Dias, arrived from Santiago and began to attack them. They brutalized the Indians, trampled them with their horses, put their gun barrels in the Indians' mouths, shot them, and then shot them again. Some were shot as many as three times. The wounded were then trampled again with seven killed and five wounded. The Indians witnessed that Judge Arturo Dias killed more by his own hand, while many of the others only shot in the air.

Besides exploitation, violence, and injustices the Indians were subject to, there was no religious liberty in Peru. Catholicism was the dominant religion. The Stahls were regarded as lawbreakers for preaching and practicing a message other than that of the Catholic Church. They were insulted on every hand, stones were often thrown at them, and when they went through the villages, often the streets were blocked, their horses were struck with clubs, and they were threatened with death. Indians who accepted the Adventist message were also in some instances beaten almost to death (Stahl 1932:157, 158).

The Stahls' Social and Spiritual Impact

Education

Charles Teel wrote extensively about the Stahls. In one of his articles, published in the *Adventist Journal of Education*, he gave a glimpse of how Ana and Ferdinand fostered “a social transformation that affected social institutions as well as personal transformation that impacted individual minds, hearts, and bodies” (2013:24).

Teel reports that for centuries, Peruvian *Altiplanos* had no access to the legal structure of the national capital due to geographical isolation. An established caste system giving white and mestizo (mixed race) families land-holding privileges, alongside exploitation and abuse from state officials and religious functionaries of the state church had kept the 92 percent (Aymara and Quechua) in a form of “near-feudal” condition (24). The Stahls quickly realized that without education, there was no way out for the illiterate Indians, so education became their top priority.

By 1911, the Stahls launched a vast movement of establishing schools, relegating to second rank any other activities, including magazine peddling. They linked up with an Aymara visionary, Manuel Comacho. For some years Camacho had been clandestinely attempting to teach the Aymaras how to read. Camacho’s work had gotten him into a lot of trouble, even causing his arrest and imprisonment on several occasions. For a number of months, the Stahls joined forces with Camacho, traversing all the villages and hamlets, often in extreme conditions, bringing the bread of instruction, while living in a humble hut with a thatched roof and dirt floor.

The Stahls were able to raise enough funds to purchase a property on the shores of Lake Titicaca in the sleepy village of Platería. In 1913, a “mother school” opened its doors, “providing co-educational offerings in reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as hygiene and religion” (Teel 2013:25). There were bumps and all kinds of obstacles all along the way.

They met fierce opposition, but persevered. The credentialed professors who were imported to administer the new school were not able to cope with the high-altitude conditions (over 12,000 feet). A solution came with Ana accepting to take over the administrative responsibilities, supported by Camacho, and his young protégé Luciano Chambi (Chambi would later run the Broken Stone Mission). Demands for schools throughout the surrounding countryside increased rapidly, leading the Stahls to institute teacher-training courses in Platería and utilizing classrooms on a year-round basis (Teel 2013:25).

This educational program was spreading at a fast pace, boosting the popularity of the Stahls among the indigenous peoples of these highlands, in spite of strong opposition by the privileged overlords. The vast Lake Titicaca became soon the bastion of schools and churches, which were sprouting up like mushrooms. The schools ranged from humble home schools to large institutions. Teel gives a snapshot of the results of the Stahl's labor in the education sector: By 1916, 2,000 students were registered in 19 schools; by 1924, 4,000 in 80 schools; and by 1947, a high of nearly 7,000 in 109 schools. The Stahl's successor, E. H. Wilcox, reported that on one unforgettable day, 12 requests for village schools arrived from various villages (2013:25)

The amazing fact is, as schools were multiplying, congregations also multiplied. "Church congregations followed schools," observed Teel.

The baptized membership in the Lake Titicaca Mission numbered 445 in 1916; 2,255 in 1920; 5,963 in 1924; and 7,340 in 1927. By 1940, membership rolls had been purged of non-attending members and showed a total of 6,579. Yet that year's national census showed that in the Lake Titicaca area alone, there were fully four times that number of self-professed Protestants, virtually all of whom would have been Adventists. (Teel 2013:25)

Advocacy and Religious Liberty

Peru was a Catholic state, and Roman Catholicism was the state religion. Up to November, 1915, the constitution of Peru made it possible to persecute and banish from the country those who held religious services other than Catholic or refused to attend Catholic religious feasts (Stahl 1920:175). But this was about to change through the advocacy work of the Stahls.

On a construction site where the Stahls were erecting necessary mission buildings—a small hospital, a school building, and a house, the bishop of Puno, named Ampuero, showed up with a mob of two hundred men, all on horseback. Because the Stahls were not there, the bishop confiscated

the keys and other materials from the caretaker, while breaking up other supplies. Then the mob tried to compel the Indians living about the mission to kneel before the bishop and kiss his hand, which they refused to do. Six of them were bound arm to arm, and driven, hatless and coatless, to Puno, twenty-one miles away.

The Stahls, upon receiving the news about this affair, embarked on an advocacy enterprise that would be successful. They contacted the most prominent people of the city. They visited the judges, and other officials of the court, bringing evidence that the Indians were falsely accused by the bishop, warning them that someday they would “be called before the great judgment seat of God, and would have to answer for the judgment rendered upon these poor, misused people” (Stahl 1920:163, 164). In the afternoon, the judge released all the Indians from prison.

However, this incident was relayed by the local newspaper, the Puno *La Union*, in its issue of March 10, 1913. They criticized harshly the attitude of the Catholic bishop and the civil authority and called for justice. “What is happening is unheard-of! A proof that the authorities here are a danger and never a protection, is the fact that the Protestant natives, victims of religious persecution, are still imprisoned, locked up by the unconscionable action of the conscienceless authorities” (167). Then, the newspaper went on praising the work of the Stahls, “The evangelized Indian does not drink alcohol, he does not chew coca leaves, he is clean, he is moral; and now he can read, he has acquired habits of order and a desire to work, or he is sociable and exercises charity. They have a large ranch, a school, a hospital, and an inn for lodging” (170).

This *La Union* paper triggered a vast advocacy movement that resulted in a Supreme Court decree issued on September 2, 1914, and an amendment to the constitution of Peru, voted on November 11, 1915, granting religious liberty to all denominations (Stahl 1920:177-179).

Reflection on the Stahls’ Approach to Mission

The Stahl’s missionary approach embodies Ellen White’s statement, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour 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’” (1905:143). I have identified the following core pillars in the Stahl’s approach to mission: immersion, hospitality, care for the sick, education, training of workers, advocacy, and evangelization.

They invested their first two years to learn the local language and culture, to become familiar with the indigenous customs. In their two books—*In the Land of the Incas* and *In the Amazon Jungles*, Ferdinand

describes with minute details the cultural practices of the Indians and how he was eager to learn from them until he became like one of them and won their confidence.

Hospitality and care for the sick were other landmarks of the Stahls. “The missionary couple took children into their home, some of whom became missionaries to their own and other tribes” (Wearner 1988:23). They were also involved in medical work, which contributed to the success of their mission. Their ability to treat the diseases of the people was an incredible asset to their mission. They also provided the indigenous people with the education they longed for so that their children could enjoy a better life.

Ana and Ferdinand showed how their faith in God and their hope in the Second Coming generated in them a sense of urgency and a passion for mission. They were not content with only knowing the truth. They felt prompted to act. Eschatology did not mean for them fatalism or withdrawal from the world. They believed strongly in the imminent coming of Christ, as attested by how they closed a letter they wrote to Ellen White. “Thanking you kindly, we are you sister and brother in the *closing work*” (Stahl 1909, Letter #2, emphasis mine).

What was the priority of the Stahls? Was it to preach the Adventist message, make new converts, baptize the local people, or was it to help people with no strings attached? It is clear to me that in the Stahl’s approach, evangelism was not in opposition to social action. Was social action an entry point to evangelism, a consequence of evangelism, or were evangelism and social action partners in their approach to mission?

Reading through Ferdinand’s account of his experience in South America, it became clear that evangelism (preaching the gospel, saving souls) was the main drive for his commitment to mission. Yet, it was impossible to remain oblivious to the plight of the indigenous population who were suffering from numerous social evils.

Wearner highlights Ferdinand Stahl’s task of *evangelizing* the tribal people who had been untouched by the gospel (1988:23). He points to how Stahl carefully instructed the native people in the *doctrines of their faith* (23). Teaching correct doctrines to the indigenous people and making sure they followed the instructions they received were taken seriously by the Stahls. For example, “they counted the days by putting notches on a stick so as not to forget the Sabbath” (23).

They considered it important to baptize those who embraced the Adventist faith. But, baptism was not merely a quantitative goal to reach at all cost. Their true motivation was the salvation of souls from eternal death, as expressed in one of Ferdinand’s personal reflections. People, without a knowledge of the saving message, dying to be lost forever, is

an awful thought" (1932:116). Ferdinand wrote this reflection while thinking of a man who slashed off his left foot, cut off his left ear and left hand, and gouged out his left eye, because his conscience was troubling him for having lived a wicked life. Ferdinand was there at the bedside of that man who became delirious and would eventually pass away. "You cannot imagine my feelings as I sat there looking at this poor deluded man. . . . Ah, I thought, just sixteen days too late! If I could only have met him before to tell him of the loving Savior who is so willing to pardon our sins upon our sincere confession. (115)

Conclusion

The missionary experience of the Stahls validates the understanding that both Bosch and Newbigin had of the relationship between evangelism and social action. As seen earlier, both affirm the inseparability of the two. While the Stahls went to Peru to bring people to Jesus Christ for the redemption of their souls, they could not keep from exercising hospitality to the Indians, healing their sick, defending them against their oppressors, and advocating for systemic change. While doing evangelization, they could not escape from addressing the social needs that were so overwhelming. It is significant that the son of one of the Stahl's early converts, later wrote: "The Adventist school system opened the way for the indigenous population of the altiplano to achieve selfhood and self-sufficiency. The Stahl gospel both *converted hearts* and *changed the social fabric* of the highlands" (Teel 1999:279, emphasis mine).

In the framework of the Stahl's ministry to the Indians, there was no gap between *believing* and *doing*, and between *theology* and *praxis*. This may explain why many, including Samuel Escobar, often interpreted the work of the Stahls using a liberation theology lens. Charles Teel describes the Stahls as "missionaries, visionaries and revolutionaries" (1988:3). He cites Samuel Escobar, who in his book *La Fe Evangelica y Las Teologias de la Liberacion*, states that "the gospel which came to Latin America through Protestantism came as a liberating force because it brought with it the power of the biblical message" (quoted in Teel 1988:13). According to Teel, Escobar, at the very outset of his book, points to the "Adventist experience in the Peruvian Highlands as a 'dramatic example' of the social, economic, judicial, and political consequences that can be evoked by biblical, Christian faith" (13).

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