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Prolegomena to a Theology of Eschatological Leadership: 13 Leadership Principles for the End Time Gleaned from the Book of Revelation

Introduction

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20 NKJV).

Jesus entrusted his disciples with leadership. That leadership was to be exercised on behalf of his mission to seek and save the lost in all the world before his return. This mission work will reach a climax during the time of the end before Christ’s promised return. This article explores the book of Revelation for clues concerning leadership qualities required for this task. The article will support the discussion of these leadership qualities with contributions from contemporary authors on the topic.

The question might arise: What is the relevance of research leadership in the context of the end in Bible prophecy? Seventh-day Adventist self-identity is focused on being a people who are partnering with God to complete the mission that Jesus commenced in the first century A.D. Specifically, the Adventist Church identifies itself as a remnant movement of people who place their faith in Jesus’ salvation, keep God’s

commandments, and proclaim the eternal gospel and Three Angels' Messages to prepare for and hasten Christ's return. In other words, the Seventh-day Adventist Church takes its apocalyptic role very seriously. Therefore, it is advisable that thought be given to the specific demands of God's people for leadership in the last days?

According to the General Conference 2019 *Annual Statistical Report*, the Adventist Church, in addition to the General Conference and its 13 divisions, has 96,718 organizations worldwide. These organizations include local churches, primary schools, secondary schools, universities, clinics and hospitals, publishing houses, television and radio outlets, missions and conferences, unions, and more. In each of these organizations, there is a team of elected or appointed leaders to guide the mission of the Church. Each of these bodies should have a leadership team that understands how it fits into God's bigger mission and its particular contribution to completing the mission in the time of the end.

Developing a theology of eschatological leadership is a daunting task and will require a broader discussion than what one author can contribute. This article consists of three parts. The first part proposes a working definition of the time of the end—the eschatological period that will couch the specialized focus of this article. A survey of selected eschatological passages in Revelation will follow. The purpose of this survey is to identify the nature of the events and themes focusing on the period of time, technically defined as “the time of the end,” and then to extrapolate leadership implications from these passages. In the final section, the identified leadership implications will be further discussed and compared with contemporary literature on leadership principles to propose a theology of eschatological leadership.

A Working Definition of “the Time of the End”

The concept of the time of the end is not a concept first developed in the New Testament. Rather, it is a significant focus in the book of Daniel and provides the framework for the authors of the New Testament.

Hans LaRondelle, in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, states,

[The apocalyptic phrase ‘time of the end’] is found only in Daniel's visions concerned the ‘distant future’ (five times mentioned in Daniel 8-12). It is not completely identical to the familiar phrase, ‘the last days’ or ‘days to come,’ as used 14 times by the OT prophets. While the classical prophets combine God's judgments in their own time *directly* with the final judgment, Daniel leads his readers from his own time down through the ages of redemptive history. His time frame extends beyond the violent death of the Messiah (Dan. 9:26) to the emergence of the anti-Messiah or antichrist (Dan. 7:8, 24, 25). (2000:871)

In his 1991 article in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* on the same topic, LaRondelle points out, "The phrase, 'the time of the end,' is found only in the Old Testament, exclusively in Daniel 8-12" (28). The phrase is used only five times in those chapters. The usage focuses on a particular time associated with the end of earth's history and when Daniel's prophecies will be understood (Dan 12:4, 9) (29, 30).

Traditionally, Adventist theologians understand that "the time of the end" is a technical eschatological term (Pfandl 1991:152) used to refer to a final or apocalyptic period before Christ returns. Adventist interpreters associate this period with the time that begins with the end of the symbolic three-and-half year prophecy and 1,260-day prophecy found in the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation. They interpret the ending date to be 1798, when the pope was arrested by General Berthier and exiled in France. The time of the end is associated with the 2,300-day prophecy of Daniel 8:14, which points to 1844 when the investigative judgment, or the cleansing of the temple would begin. In referring to this prophecy, Gabriel clarifies for John that "the vision refers to the time of the end" (v. 17). It is beyond the scope of this article to study in-depth the interpretation of this phrase. This article accepts the traditional Adventist understanding regarding this phrase.

Survey of the Book of Revelation

Revelation is the capstone of Scripture explaining the march of history from Christ's victory on the cross until the new age when he will reign for eternity from his throne room in the new heaven and new earth. For many readers, Revelation has become associated with dragons, beasts, and fear of persecution. However, the opening lines clearly state that the fundamental objective is to reveal Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1). Those who read and keep the words written in this book are called blessed (v. 3).

Because this article is interested primarily in exploring the leadership implications related to the time of the end, it is crucial to identify the relevant portions of Revelation. Ranko Stefanovic, a New Testament scholar and author of *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, proposes a structure of Revelation that is helpful for our purposes. Stefanovich builds on E. Schüssler Fiorenza's sevenfold chiasmic structure and Kenneth A. Strand's two-part structure of Revelation, which identifies chapter 14 as the dividing line between the historical and eschatological parts of the book. Stefanovic's suggested outline is in figure 1 (2002:36-37).

The chiastic design of Revelation shows parallel passages in the two halves of Revelation. It draws the reader to the book's center, which begins with the sanctuary scene of the Ark of the Covenant in heaven. John records the great controversy vision of the birth of the Messiah and His victory and casting of the dragon (Satan) out of heaven (Rev 12:1-9). Satan's loss does not portend the end of the war; Satan pursues the woman, symbolizing the Church and her offspring (vv.13-17) employing legal prosecution in the heavenly courts (12:10), persecution (12:13), and deception (13:14). The devil strengthens his strategy by forming a religio-political power in his image, a sea beast rising out of the populated lands with seven heads and ten horns (13:1). Next, he raises a second religio-political power from the unpopulated lands that mimics the Lamb at first but then compels people to give homage to the sea beast by performing signs and wonders and threats (13:11-17).

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| <p>A. Prologue (1:1-8)</p> <p>B. Promises to the overcomer (1:9-3:22)</p> <p>C. God's work for humanity's salvation (4:1-8:1)</p> <p>D. God's wrath mixed with mercy (8:2-9:21)</p> <p>E. Commissioning John to prophesy (10:1-11:18)</p> <p>F. Great Controversy between Christ and Satan (11:19-13:18)</p> <p>E'. Church proclaims the end-time gospel (14:1-20)</p> <p>D'. God's final wrath unmixed with mercy—7 Bowls (15:1-18:24)</p> <p>C'. God's work for humanity's salvation completed (19:1-21:4)</p> <p>B'. Fulfillment of the promises to the overcomer (21:5-22:5)</p> <p>A'. Epilogue (22:6-21)</p> |
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Figure 1. Stefanovic's Structure of Revelation

In Adventist eschatology, Revelation 12 is associated with the period of history that concludes with the time of the end. The 1,260 prophetic days and the three-and-a-half prophetic years of Revelation 12 combined with the 42 prophetic months that the sea beast rules over God's people in Revelation 13:5 point to the 1,260 years when the Holy Roman Empire ruled over the Christian scene. This period is marked as beginning in 538 with Justinian I's efforts to make Byzantium a Christian religious power and the uprooting of the three tribes in Italy that sought to assert their independence and control over the city of Rome. The period ends in 1798 when General Berthier captured Pope Pius VI and exiled him to Napoleon's France when Pius VI refused to renunciate his temporal power.

In the book of Revelation, the time of the end is emphasized in the following section of Revelation, according to Stefanovic's structure. That is, the following section covers 14:1 to 18:24. Chapters 19:1-22:21 depicts the events associated with the day of the Lord when Jesus establishes his

physical kingdom by returning to earth to deliver his loyal followers, the 1,000 years in heaven, the return to earth to destroy Satan and the wicked, and God creating the new heaven and new earth.

Based on this outline, the focus of this survey in Revelation will be two passages selected from Revelation 14:1 to 18:24. Those passages are Revelation 14:1-13 and Revelation 18:1-4.

Revelation 14:1-13

Appointed by God

Revelation 14:1 depicts the 144,000 standing alongside Jesus, the Lamb of God, having God's seal upon their foreheads. This seal has the Father's name written on it. These individuals are favored and appointed by God. Their description stands out in distinct contrast to what is written two sentences earlier in 13:16-17. The Lamblike Beast has enforced all human beings across the face of the globe to submit to the authority of the Sea Beast. These have a mark of the beast either on their foreheads or right hands (v. 16). The significance of having the mark of the beast in one's forehead is that they are willingly uniting with Satan's agencies—the Sea Beast and Lamblike Beast. Those having the mark of the beast in their right hand signify those who submissively comply with Satan's agencies. In contrast to the seal of God that has the Father's name written on it, the mark of the beast has the name and number of the Sea Beast (vv. 17, 18), exhibited by the prostitute who has the name Babylon inscribed on her forehead (17:5).

There is also significance to the timing of God's sealing of his people. The rhetorical question is asked at the close of the sixth seal, "the great day of [God's] wrath has come and who is able to stand?" (Rev 6:17). Then in the following few verses, John is shown the 144,000 whom God seals before the judgment plagues fall upon the wicked (7:1-4). The significance is that God will have already sealed the ones he knows will be faithful during the great tribulation. In other words, the sealing of God is *predictive*, identifying beforehand those who will be faithful and not succumb to Babylon's persecuting threats. In a sense, the sealing of God is like God's appointment of Joshua as leader of Israel, saying, "Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9). The 144,000, the countless multitude of every nation, tribe, people, and language who have passed through the great tribulation (7:4, 9, 14), are not superheroes who earn their right to honorable status with God. They are pre-appointed by God as those whose hearts God knows and identifies them as loyal partners in His mission and kingdom.

The implication for all leaders and end-time leaders in this passage is that God is the one who appoints and calls his leaders. End-time leaders are not self-appointed or motivated by recognition. They are motivated by their identity in God's estimation of them.

David Benner discusses the various ways Christians answer the question, "What would you identify as the most important thing for your existence and well-being?" They suggest finding God, knowing or loving God, serving God, and so forth (2015:21). Notice that in each of these, the one speaking only mentions God but the one doing all the action is the one speaking—self. Quite commonly, one's perception is based on the "childhood discovery that we can *secure love* by presenting ourselves in the most flattering light" (55, emphasis mine). The sealing of the 144,000 implies that end-time leaders will have a self-identity that Christ defines. Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, in their bestseller, *Lead Like Jesus*, write, "The persistent barrier to leading like Jesus is a heart motivated by self-interest" (2005:39). Only when a leader recognizes that God has made one what they are can they forget themselves and become good stewards, focusing on what God is calling them to do (43).

Exclusive Intimacy with God

In Revelation 14:4, 5, the text identifies the characteristics of God's people. First, the text states that they are virgins "not defiled with women." This indicates their moral purity and, more importantly, it symbolizes their undivided loyalty to Jesus Christ. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." The 144,000 are people who remember their betrothed. They remember their first love, unlike the Ephesians in Revelation 2:4, who had forgotten their first love.

This second implication for leadership is that leaders operate from undivided loyalty to Jesus and his authority over them. The most extraordinary duplicity of a Christian leader is the struggle to allow God to remain on the throne of one's will and not mounting one's own throne.

Blanchard and Hodges write about the struggle with self in one's leadership. They use the acronym EGO to describe both the negative and positive role of self in leadership. The negative EGO is "Edging God Out," while the positive EGO is "Exalting God Only" (2005:42). By promoting self, one forms the most insidious and persistent of all idolatries.

Knowledge of God's Voice

Verse 4 continues by stating that the 144,000 “follow the Lamb wherever He goes.” When the rich young ruler asked what good thing he could do to have eternal life, Jesus invited him to keep the commandments which led the self-confident young man to say he had already done so. In order to open the man’s eyes to his self-reality, Jesus then instructed him to sell his riches, distribute the proceeds to those in need, and follow him. In response, the man sorrowfully retreats from Jesus’ presence. The principle at work is that true righteousness is being an obedient follower of Jesus Christ and investing in those things that matter most to the Master.

Another truth associated with the concept of following Jesus is in John 10. Jesus explains that Satan is a thief who seeks to destroy human beings, but Jesus is a shepherd who offers an abundant life (v. 10). Then in verse 27, Jesus says, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” The Psalmist writes,

He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you will *hear* His voice: ‘Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, as in the day of trial in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me; they tried Me though they saw My work. For forty years, I was grieved with that generation, and said, “It is a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.”’ (Ps 95:7-10)

While God and his angels have spoken in audible tones or through visions, he does not only rely on these means to communicate with us. God can impress our hearts. The prophet Isaiah relays God’s promise to lead his people. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isa 30:21). However, lest one become unbalanced, one must be careful. John writes, “Do not believe every spirit, but tests the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). Paul says, “do not despise the prophets; test all things” (1 Thess 5:20-21). Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39), and Luke records an example of the people who feared God in Berea, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore, many of them believed” (Acts 17:11-12a).

Where does the Lamb lead the 144,000? The answer to this question can be many. The leading will be to follow our Lord into all truth (John 16:12-13a) and follow our Master into mission to find lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7).

One must receive the promptings of the Holy Spirit willingly, with a desire to know God's will, yet with cautiousness and reliance on Scripture to ascertain whether the message is from God or not.

The third implication for leadership is a leader's connection with God, resulting in a passionate interest in listening for God's guidance in daily matters. Following the Lamb is not a one-off encounter related to one's pivotal conversion story but should be an ongoing experience in life.

Some Christians speak of a personal encounter with Jesus as if this were a one-time matter—something that happens at conversion. This is a tragic confusion of an introduction and relationship. A first encounter is just that—a first encounter. God longs for us to experience intimate knowledge that comes through an ongoing relationship. (Benner 2015:35)

Frank Buchman, a Lutheran clergyman and native of Allentown, Pennsylvania (1878-1961), was a charismatic Christian who influenced many through a Bible study group in England called the Oxford Group. He taught that God desires to speak directly to each person's heart, and he modeled a life where people saw the evidence of a man whom God led. Buchman described his relationship with God by simply calling it a relationship of "Speaker and listener." He said, "I came to know the Holy Spirit as the light, guide, teacher, and power. What I am able to do, I do through the power that comes in the early hours of morning quiet" (in Lean1988:171). And yet, "Buchman was aware that people who tried to listen to God needed safeguards" because humans have "an infinite capacity for self-deception." Some even try to associate "their will as synonymous with God's." Therefore Buchman offered six tests against self-deception: (1) willingness to obey, without self-interested editing; (2) watch for intervening circumstances that altered the circumstances which make the presumed instruction from God irrelevant; (3) compare the thought to the highest moral standards—particularly the so-called "absolutes"—honesty, purity, unselfishness, and love; (4) harmony with the teachings of Scripture; (5) harmony with advice from godly friends who were also conscientiously following God's guidance; and (6) the experience and teaching of the Church (76).

End-time leaders will not be satisfied with merely God's leading into propositional truth of doctrines and fundamental beliefs, but also into an experience of absolute willingness to have God's will done in their lives even as it is done in heaven (Matt 6:10).

Saved for Spiritual Leadership

The last characteristic of the 144,000 found in verse 4 is that these are “redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.” The idea of firstfruits suggests two things. On the one hand, it suggests the 144,000 are the profits of the capital investment God has made by giving his Son to die on their behalf. On the other hand, sacrificial laws stipulated that the male firstfruits in each family were to be redeemed from the priest as a sign of God’s ownership and remembrance of their deliverance from Egypt and the tenth plague (Exod 13:13-16; Num 18:16). In addition, the firstborn male served as the primary heir and spiritual leader. The famous conflicts between Jacob and Esau and the succession of kings demonstrate these facts.

The significance of the 144,000 being the firstfruits is that they are to play a sacred role of leadership in the time of the end. Furthermore, the 144,000 are not spiritual superheroes but the entire community of believers who have been redeemed by Jesus and are faithful to him. Therefore, although the Seventh-day Adventist Church has tens of thousands of organizations and many more elected and appointed leaders, every member is a leader. They are all kings and priests, a royal priesthood (Rev 1:6; 1 Pet 2:9).

The fourth leadership implication is that leaders empower those around them because they know that all believers are spiritual leaders. Many mistake leadership as the opportunity to dictate to others what they will do. However, a leader who dictates to others attempts to adopt the prerogative of God. Another mistake is when followers of God believe that elected and appointed leaders who are paid to do God’s work are the ones who should do the work of mission and ministry and not themselves. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers corrects this perspective. The biblical concept of leadership is that all of the redeemed are now leaders. Russell Burrill writes, “In the New Testament, the clergy were lay people who devoted full time to directing gospel work. The laity was seen as the performers of ministry and the clergy as the trainers and equippers of ministry. However, as part of the laity, the clergy also performed ministry” (1993:30). Who are the laity? The Greek word is *ho laos*, which means “the people” and is used in the New Testament to refer to “the people of God” (33). Since ordained and licensed ministers are also the people of God, they should also be called laity.

Integrity and Self-Awareness

Revelation 14:5 states that the 144,000 have no deception in their mouths. Deception is an eschatological theme in Scripture. In Revelation 12 and 13, we find that Satan first is our accuser attempting to use legal arguments to prevent God from saving us (12:10). When Jesus won the legal battle with Satan on the cross, Satan switched tactics and persecuted those who follow God (v. 13). Finally, in the last days, Satan seeks to deceive the earth's inhabitants to prevent them from discovering the truth about God and his authority (13:14; 2 Thess 2:9-12).

It is the habit of Satan and among corrupt leaders to deceive those they seek to influence for personal gain. God's leaders maintain their integrity even if it disadvantages them. One of the curses of having experience, wisdom, and a leadership position is that human beings grow self-deceived to see themselves as wiser than they are. They begin resisting council, help, and correction. This is not only true in practical matters but also in spiritual. 1 John 1:8 warns, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The epistle to the Hebrews states, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (3:12-13). How often are fellow pilgrims of the faith able to share a concern with a brother or sister and not fall into conflict? It is rare to have a congregation whose members enjoy the freedom of openness and mutual vulnerability that allows for encouraging and instructing each other in particular matters. When one forgets that they are sinners in remission—people who are still growing in God's grace—they can become blinded by self-deception. The 144,000 recognize that their righteousness is not their own but from their Redeemer. Without Jesus, their righteousness is as filthy rags (Isa 64:6).

The implication for leadership is that godly leaders have integrity in identifying and communicating truth and self-awareness, recognizing their need for growth and accepting honest feedback from others.

Paul Hill writes about the importance of honesty and having "technical truth," which he identifies as "what is *really* happening, not what we had planned or what we hope or wish was happening." (2017:63). Leadership in the last days requires the ability to speak honestly in all contexts and this requires courage. Later Hill writes poignantly about the type of self-awareness that leaders and leadership teams need. He suggests that self-aware leaders will be able to say, "We're not as unique as we think we are. . . . We're not as good as we think we are. . . . We can learn from others and continuously improve" (211).

Blanchard and Hodges suggest that “self-serving leaders spend most of their time protecting or promoting the things in which they have invested their self-worth and security, such as their public image, their reputation, their competitive performance, their position, their possessions, or their personal fulfillment in their intimate relationships” (2005:44). Protecting oneself is an outgrowth of fear. Promoting oneself is the result of pride. A leader who is grounded in God and who receives constructive criticism may still feel hurt at times, but they will respond courageously and in humility mingle with healthy confidence (66).

Success as Transformation

The next characteristic of the 144,000 is “they are without fault before the throne” (v. 5b). Through their association with Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith (Heb 12:2), their robes are purified by Jesus’ blood (Rev 7:14). They are transformed as a people with only righteous acts (Rev 19:8) who embody James’ definition of “pure and undefiled religion,” which is “to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (Jas 1:27).

The leadership implication is that leaders are not merely declared righteous and in need of correction; they exhibit a transformation into God’s character. Peter Scazzero defines success as “radically doing God’s will” (2015:188), which harmonizes with Buchman’s precondition for receiving God’s direct guidance regarding whichever situation a Christian seeks His direction. Scazzero realized as he began a new emotionally healthy journey with God in 1996 that he “had missed or outright ignored” God’s will up to that point in his spirituality. Later, in 2003 and 2004, he began to alter the way he approached planning and decision-making. He wrote a new definition of success for his life, “to become what God had called us to become, and to do what God had called us to do—regardless of where any of that might lead us” (189).

By focusing on being what God wanted him to be and doing what God directed him to do, Scazzero was transformed into someone God could have freedom in leading. How can God fault one in that situation? So often, people associate character perfection or completeness as a position of absolute sinlessness. If that were the definition of spiritual perfection, would it also be true that a dead man is righteous because he is not thinking, speaking, or doing anything evil? Many favor only one definition of sin, “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4). However, sin is also defined as, “to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (Jas 4:17). Paul writes, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but God who

gives the increase . . . each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Cor 3:6-8). Paul adds, “Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards. . . . Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” (4:1-2). In other words, Christian success has less to do with the returns on investment and accomplishments and more to do with knowing and obeying God’s will. For a sinner to achieve this objective, surely indicates transformation. A sinful person is controlled by the law of sin in one’s members and cannot fulfill the law of God in which one delights (Rom 7:19-23). Contrastingly, a Christian leader has offered himself to God as a living sacrifice and now counts success in terms of the transformation and renewing of one’s mind according to God’s perfect will (Rom 12:1-2).

Sense of Urgency

Revelation 14:6 begins a discussion about the Three Angels’ Messages. It is not the purpose of this article to comprehensively discuss the eschatological interpretations of these messages. Instead, the focus will be on the general picture and specific implications for leadership in the end time. These angels, called *aggelos* in Greek, can also be called messengers. The book of Revelation is a book of symbols that needs interpretation. Scholarship has long associated these angels as human messengers. The context suggests that these messengers are the 144,000, and this is their end-time mission mandate.

The first angel is depicted as “flying in the midst is heaven,” who has the everlasting gospel for the world, and who is proclaiming “fear God . . . for the hour of His judgment has come” (vv. 6-7). The tone of this message is an urgent one. The angel is noticeable flying in heaven and it has a message to fear God and draw attention to the start of a special event. Peter exhorts people who are longing for Christ’s return to “be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11-12a). This demonstrates our first leadership implication. End-time leaders must have a sense of urgency, knowing that their time is short.

However, it is important to note that the urgency emphasized is not based on external motivators. It is the urgency exhibited by the prophet Noah. Noah spent 120 years constructing a ship and warning his generation of the coming flood. He worked with urgency even though there were no clouds in the sky. Rather, he sensed the importance of God’s instruction and had faith in the certainty of the coming deluge.

External factors that motivate urgency can deceptively distract a leader. A phone can ring during family dinner only to turn out to be a wrong

number. In the church, committees can spend large amounts of time discussing church construction projects, fundraising needs, and personality conflicts. Meanwhile, the mission of God to the unreached is hardly discussed or funded. Leaders can become focused on solving all types of problems that have very little importance in the scope of eternity. However, accomplishing these matters gives the church and its leaders a sense of self-importance by addressing these short-term issues. Stephen Covey, Robert Merrill, and Rebecca Merrill write in *First Things First*, “Anything less than a conscious commitment to the important is an unconscious commitment to the unimportant” (1994:32). And later, “Urgency addiction is a self-destructive behavior that temporarily fills the void created by unmet needs” (35).

The urgency possessed by eschatological leaders will be related to the undeterred focus on the coming of Christ and the mission to proclaim it to the world.

Strategic Focus on Unbelievers

Revelation 14:6 makes it very clear that the end-time mission is to take this message to everyone. This mission is to believers and unbelievers, not only to Western Christians but Asian Buddhists and African Muslims. No people group, language, or class should be left out of God’s end-time mission. Why is this important to God?

There are two reasons why God will not rest until all people groups have been reached. Peter writes, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, . . . but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Another reason is found in Genesis 11. When the human family began to rebel after the flood, God confused communication by creating new languages. God’s objective was to save people from colluding and self-destructing. However, in the very next chapter, it is recorded that God called Abram, promising that “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:4b). The first message clearly shows that God has not forgotten his promise to the scattered families and people groups around the globe.

Frontier Ventures, founded by the late missiologist Ralph Winter and his wife, Roberta, operates a ministry called the Joshua Project. This ministry tracks and monitors the unreached people groups around the world. They define people groups based on language, culture, religion, geography, or a combination of these (*Joshua Project* 2019b). For example, the Thai Deng people in Laos will be counted as a different people group from the same ethnicity in Vietnam. According to their online database, there are 17,094 people groups globally, and 7,165 of these, 41.9%, are designated as unreached by Protestant missions (*Joshua Project* 2019a).

The General Conference does not keep a record of people groups but does have a list of living languages in which it is operating. According to the Department of Archives, Statistics, and Research's *2019 Annual Statistical Report*, the church publishes in 234 languages, broadcasts in 239 languages, and conducts oral work such as preaching and witnessing in 415 languages. The report states that the 2015 *Ethnologue Languages of the World* identifies 7,097 living languages in the world today. This means that Adventists are only working in 5.8% of these languages (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research [GCASTR] 2019:73, 74). However, the actual picture is better than this because several countries did not submit a report. Only 155 reports out of 212 countries and territories where the Adventist Church operates have submitted reports. The report shows that even of the countries that did report, not all languages were included (67). It appears that the tracking of these types of details is very inadequate, and therefore reports such as these are not reliable.

In 2016, the General Conference Mission Board approved a document from the Global Mission Issues Committee to define people groups and identify the difference between those the Church will consider reached or unreached. In brief, a reached people group has the following four characteristics: (1) there are adequate numbers and resources to effectively witness to the rest of the group without requiring outside assistance; (2) they have the option to worship corporately in their first language or "heart language"; (3) they have Bibles and other key literature in their first language; and (4) they have indigenous church leaders who can witness to the rest of the people group without working through a translator. On the other hand, an unreached people group does not have these features (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Mission Board [GCMB] 2016:3-6).

The Scriptures, particularly the apocalyptic literature, emphasize the importance of proclaiming the message not to all geographical areas of the world but among all cultures, languages, and social classes. This should be a metric tracked by the Church's administrators, statisticians, and missiologists. The implication for spiritual leaders is that they have a strategic focus on all unbelievers.

Clarity of Message

The three messages of God's people in the end time is the everlasting gospel, a call to submit to God's authority, and to recognize that his work of judging the earth has begun. It is an uncompromising warning of the corrupted message and systems of the world's corrupt moral authorities

and God's plan to destroy them and their followers. These are messages of warning mixed with mercy. The implication is that God's end-time leaders need to proclaim this message with clarity and not seek to alter the message that God would have them communicate, even despite the inherent risks.

Radical Keepers of Sabbath

Revelation 14:12-13 identifies that the end-time people of God keep God's commandments, which includes obeying the ten commandments and keeping the seventh day as a day of sabbath rest. The Sea Beast of Revelation 13 and the Little Horn of Daniel 7 are identified as the same entity that seeks to change "times and law" (Dan 7:25). End-time leaders will be sabbath-keepers.

What is the importance of Sabbath-keeping? Is this merely an arbitrary token that reminds human beings to give homage to their Creator and Savior? Robert Fryling states that "Sabbath keeping is countercultural in our 24/7 world. But it is a practice that weans us from our infantile need for immediate gratification and allows for a deeper contentment of our souls" (2010:41). Scazzero reflects on Sabbath with these words, "Once we stop and rest, we also discover that God is speaking—a lot. There are things he wants to reveal to us that we will never be able to hear, much less attend to, unless we are in a place of rest." Scazzero was "amazed how often God uses Sabbath to deepen in us crucially important truths" and mentions how he had learned on Sabbath that "God is not in a rush" and "God's primary work" for him as a leader "is to trust in Jesus" (2015:164).

Earlier in this article, I discussed the importance of taking time to listen to God's voice. Of course, this is done through meditative reading of Scripture and listening for the still, small voice of God. Sabbath provides this opportunity. And yet, so many Christians who go to church on Saturday and refrain from work and commerce on the holy day fail to rest and fully hear God's voice on the Sabbath. Connecting with God is the purpose of sabbath-ing! Scazzero defines success as "an act of radical obedience to God" (2015:188). In this sense, Sabbath is a microcosm of Christian success because, if obeyed, it proves to be radical obedience.

Takers of Measured Risk

Within a context of freedom and plurality, being a social non-conformist and an advocate for a quaint cause seems plausible. However, the context of taking a stand for God's commands and the truth is in the time of the end. This is a time when it is risky to stand against the tide of human

will. How are the 144,000 able to do this? Their risk-taking is made possible only because they focus on the present task of exalting God in their lives, and they do not have their well-being as their central concern. They have the faith of Jesus. End-time leadership implies that these must also have a self-disinterested, risk-taking spirit focused on God's will. In these end times, legal and social pressures seek to silence the message and stop the 144,000 from completing the mission of God. Courage is required to remain focused on the core purpose for the existence of the Church, which is to complete God's mission. While it may feel scary, to not move forward would be to fail.

Paul Sean Hill and his leadership team at NASA Mission Control recognized that their mission was high risk. In the wake of the space shuttle Columbia breaking up upon re-entry into earth's atmosphere and killing all seven astronauts on board, how could NASA dare risk more lives by sending them up to space?

Hill writes, "Make no mistake; in the control room, it is a morality. . . . Real people trust us with their lives in these spacecrafts." Hill then describes that to succeed under these high stakes, Mission Control needed to have "real-time morality," which Hill defines as "unyielding alignment to purpose and deliberately applying the Mission Control trust elements of technical truth, integrity, and courage in all decision-making." Their purpose was to "protect the astronauts, protect the spacecraft, and then accomplish the mission" (2017:78, 79).

The concept Hill calls "technical truth" is an important aspect of risk-taking because it stays grounded in reality. The end-time mission is a life-and-death cause. Making decisions based on guesses, overconfidence, intuition, personal preference, tradition, or hope that it will work are lazy decisions that take an uncalculated risk (65). There may be times when making decisions in this way appears correct because the results feel like they are a success when they are lucky.

God's end-time leaders do not assume that a running translation will be sufficient to bridge the cultural barriers to understanding the gospel. They do not take uncalculated risks, nor do they stoke people's prejudices or ignore the laws of the land. Rather, godly end-time leaders will only take risks after understanding the context and recognizing God's leading. Once they have done this, they will be willing to pay the ultimate price, courageously knowing that this is moral risk-taking.

Revelation 18:1-4

Synergistic Ministry

Revelation 15 and 16 depict God sending out the end-time plagues upon the wicked, while Revelation 17 depicts a prostitute located in the place where God's bride fled—the wilderness. John is shocked by the scene of debauchery and utter violence against God's faithful followers. Revelation 18 describes a fourth angel-messenger who repeats the Three Angels' Messages with these scenes as background. This time the messenger, the Church of God, has "great authority," "the earth [is] illumined with his glory," and "cries mightily with a loud voice" (18:1-2).

What is it that provides this level of power in ministry? The answer is in the book of Acts. First, the believers were united in their care for each other and their desire to follow God (Acts 1:14). Second, the early Christians were given a special gift in the direct outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower and enable their God-given mission (2:2-4). In Revelation 18:4, there is also a personal invitation, "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (v. 4). Only the Creator and Savior of this world has a right to claim the faithful followers of God as his own.

As the judgments of God fall upon the wicked, God empowers his church with a final missional push. The ability for end-time leaders to achieve and maintain unity by God's grace is mission essential. Patrick Lencioni points out that leaders who can lead organizations to sustained success place primary importance on the commodity of trust in the leadership team. Trust, he points out, "is marked by an absence of politics, unnecessary anxiety, and wasted energy" but the most damaging are leaders who cannot overcome politics. . . . Politics is the result of unresolved issues . . . and trying to curb politics without addressing issues" (2000:143).

Lencioni describes a healthy team as being able to make decisions quickly, all members have buy-in, hold each other accountable, and fight. By fight, Lencioni means that they "fight about issues, not personalities" (144, 145). End-time leaders will be adept at coming into unity with each other and God, resulting in a greater synergy than the individuals working independently.

Builders of Healthy Community

The question naturally follows: Where does God call his people when he cries, "come out?" The New Testament word for church is *ekklesia*, meaning the ones called out. This is not a geographical coming out but

exiting from social inclusion with Babylon and her daughters. Those who leave are the ones being separated and sanctified by God. These *ekklesiae* are not now in social isolation but are gathering into communities of faith. Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20).

The new communities of faith do not just passively exist in exclusion from Babylon. The community of faith in the end time, like God’s faithful in all ages, will be a people who commune together to build up each other. The letter to the Hebrews emphasizes how the community of faith should behave, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:24, 25). Christian community is not only important; it is essential for holiness and missional synergy. This will be even more true in these last days when the latter rain of the Holy Spirit is poured out.

End-time leaders understand that the biblical community of faith is not simply a respectful gathering of strangers but a place where relationships are based on trust and where interaction between members is vigorous—yes even in their disagreements.

William Ury, the cofounder of Harvard University’s Program on Negotiation, writes about the importance of saying no and how to say it positively. Quoting British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Ury writes, “The art of leadership is not saying Yes, it’s saying No” (2008:4). And quoting Mahatma Gandhi, Ury writes, “A ‘No’ uttered from deepest conviction is better and greater than a ‘Yes’ uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble” (7). Continuing, Ury notes three mistakes people make: they accommodate others with a Yes when they fear conflict, attack with a No when they are angry, or avoid others by saying nothing at all. Ury’s thesis is that people must find a way out of the dilemma by learning how to offer a “positive No.” Ury illustrates a positive No with a description of a tree with three parts—roots, a trunk, and branches. Here is how it works. People should always say Yes to their values—the roots. They should always say No to anything that compromises their values—the unbending trunk. Because saying No to compromise is being vocal to the person you are negotiating with, the conversation must return to saying Yes to your relationship with that person—represented by the branches that bend and flex in the wind. End-time leaders will form a trusting community that knows how to negotiate between themselves and thrive. This end-time community can say No to that which compromises their commitments but say Yes to their relationships.

How does this work in real life? For example, the prayer coordinator for Barnston Church has announced a Sabbath of fasting and prayer next month and is requesting everyone's participation. However, the head elder is conflicted because he has planned a special picnic with the Primary Sabbath School class teacher. On this occasion, the elder's next-door neighbor, a non-Christian divorced mother of two primary-aged children, has planned to come to church and go on the picnic. The elder recognizes that mission is a high priority of the church, and his neighbor is coming to church for the first time. He is unwilling to change this first-time opportunity to bring his neighbor's family to church and fellowship with them afterward. He communicates the predicament to the prayer coordinator and negotiates an agreement that the elder will commit to fasting and praying on Friday instead.

End-time leaders do not strive to build communities that are sterile and impersonal. Instead, the communities they seek are diverse and open with each other, supporting the mutual growth and transformation to becoming like Jesus.

Conclusion

This article has explored leadership from the perspective of the time of the end. This is a period of time that heightens the missional urgency of the church before the second coming of Christ. Based on the prophecy of Scripture, the time of the end is today. Revelation 11:19 to 18:24 is the section that deals particularly with the events during this period.

Revelation 14:1-13 and Revelation 18:1-4 speaks directly about the qualities and vocation of the 144,000, the people of God in the time of the end. Thirteen characteristics of eschatological leadership are: (1) appointed by God rather than achieved by people; (2) have exclusive intimacy with God; (3) have a knowledge of God's voice and follow him; (4) saved for spiritual leadership; (5) have integrity and self-awareness; (6) success as transformation; (7) sense of urgency; (8) have a strategic focus on unbelievers; (9) have clarity of message; (10) radically keep the Sabbath; (11) take measured risks; (12); have a synergistic ministry; and (13) are builders of a healthy community.

This unusual framework for developing a theology of eschatological leadership is intended to get missiologists and the wider church thinking. This list is by no means an exhaustive one. Nor could it be said that these leadership qualities only apply to the end of time. The objective of this article is to reflect on the fact that the apocalyptic context offers clues regarding leadership principles that are essential for success in the days leading up to Christ's return.

Peter exhorts, “What manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11, 12a). The church of God needs leaders who will keep this vision before the people, empower the people, and model the way.

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