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ABSTRACT

TOWARD A BIBLICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK
FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL ADVOCACY IN THE
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Michelet William

Advisor: Wagner Kuhn

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: TOWARD A BIBLICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR
TRANSFORMATIONAL ADVOCACY IN THE SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Michelet William

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Wagner Kuhn, PhD

Date completed: April 2023

Problem

Adventists have been inconsistent in dealing with inequality and injustice in society, swaying between silence, accommodation, positional statements, and direct advocacy approaches. Although advocacy has become more prominent among Adventist thinkers since the end of the twentieth century, there is a lack of empirical data which answer questions related to contemporary Adventists' beliefs and practices in relation to advocacy in the context of mission. Concomitantly, there does not yet exist a documented or articulated Adventist missiological perspective on advocacy.

Research Questions

(1) What part, if any, has biblically-based social advocacy played in Adventist mission history? and (2) What do contemporary Adventists believe and practice about social justice advocacy?

Method

This dissertation starts by laying the theoretical and theological basis for addressing the problem. It then looks into Adventist mission literature, particularly the legacy of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl, to find the role advocacy has played in Adventist mission history. The field research applies a mixed-method. The quantitative method consists in the collection of beliefs and practices regarding advocacy from a sample of 260 Adventist students and faculty from Andrews University by using an online survey. The qualitative method includes interviews with 10 Adventist scholars and administrators (4 from Andrews, 1 from Oakwood, 1 from La Sierra, 1 from Loma Linda, 1 from Washington, 4 from the General Conference and its Divisions) and 2 PhD students. The questionnaires combined a series of closed and open-ended questions. Prior to the actual survey research, I tested the method with 33 seminary students (30 online questionnaires, 3 interviews).

Findings

Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally viewed evangelism and social ministry as two separate components of the Church's mission with evangelism having the upper hand. Nevertheless, there have been exceptions such as the experience of the missionary couple Anna and Ferdinand Stahl who integrated evangelism and social activism.

However, overall, the research participants expressed favorable views about advocacy and would like to see the Adventist Church become more engaged in social justice advocacy as a significant element in its outreach to the world. Those views are representative of younger church members (18–34 years old) and highly educated, older members, but not of most of the Church, which is, in fact, made of mostly older members (around 50 years old). The higher age groups in the sample, quite small in number, are somewhat skewed towards higher education (Masters or doctorates), which correlates with more progressive views.

Only one demographic response was found to influence views on social justice advocacy: Non-Whites are significantly different from Whites on “How often should Adventist Pastors advocate for social justice from the pulpit?” Non-White respondents want to see pastors advocate for social justice from the pulpit more often than their White counterparts.

Conclusion and recommendation

A careful study of three fundamental characteristics of the Adventist identity and message—the Sabbath in the context of Isa 58, the Three Angels’ messages in the context of Rev 14, and the Second Coming as expounded in Matt 24–26—reveals that Adventists have been called to be a prophetic movement and a repairer of breaches. As such, Adventists are by nature “prophetic evangelists,” as exemplified by the life and ministry of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl. The dissertation recommends that Seventh-day Adventists critique, serve, intercede, and influence. In so doing, they will be guided by three basic commitments: commitment to Scripture, commitment to peacemaking, and commitment to human flourishing.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Dissertation
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It takes a miracle to complete a dissertation in the context I have done it. I give all credit to Almighty God for all his provisions and for carrying me through every step of a lengthy and challenging process. Yet, some people deserve to be acknowledged for their invaluable help.

Boubakar Sanou, one of my professors in the World Mission department, was a source of inspiration. He has been for many years like a spiritual mentor, an adviser and a coach to me, always available and willing to provide support, encouragement, and guidance all the way until the end. His sense of details, his concern for excellence and his provocative remarks have pushed me to do my best.

I am particularly grateful to Nicholas Miller, Professor of Church History. Without him on board it would have been quasi-impossible to complete the task. His knowledge of and experience in the topic of justice and advocacy have significantly enhanced my own thinking and writing on the issues in this dissertation. His review of my drafts was comprehensive, objective and profound. He was able to grasp with clarity the intent and purpose of the document and gave me critical feedback that was so helpful.

Gorden Doss was the first professor in the World Mission department with who I discussed my topic ideas. He helped me find clarity and focus. I am also grateful to Wagner Kuhn, who accepted to take over as chair of my committee after Gorden Doss retired. His insights, encouragement and pragmatic approach helped me so much in making things done and avoiding the pitfalls of perfectionism and procrastination.

I am thankful to Petr Činčala, Director of Missiology Program, for giving me the opportunity to sharpen my quantitative and qualitative research skills by taking me under his wings as research assistant at the Institute of Church Ministry (ICM).

Although not a member of my committee, through his class “Christian Social Ethics,” Ante Jeroncic has broadened my perspective on the topic of advocacy. I have incorporated several important arguments from his wisdom into my project.

I express gratitude to Bruce Bauer and his wife Linda, Damus Francillon and his wife Carmel, Henry Bordes Saturney and his wife Lucette for their hospitality and generosity and all the support they gave my wife and me during my doctoral journey. I extend my gratitude to Roy Castelbuono and the Michiana Fil-Am SDA church, Ernst Jacques, former pastor of the Haitian Church in Berrien Springs, Lucile Sabas, David Sciaraba of the Groupe Francophone d’Andrews, for their support and encouragement.

I am appreciative of the support from my classmate, friend and prayer partner Daniel Duffis. I am thankful to all those who collaborate in the field research: Nathanael Gibbs, Flavio Prestes III, Tarsee Li, Olive Hemmings, Zdravko Plantak, Elias Brasil de Souza, John Webster, Andrea Luxton, Jerome Skinner, Darius Jankiewicz, Barna Magyarosi, Sharon Curson, and Denis Elijah Kawussa.

Last but not least, I am so debtful to my lovely wife, Tamara, my God-given partner in ministry. She has given me indefectible support, love and encouragement throughout my journey at Andrews University. God has answered her prayers.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Mission in the context of developing nations and various very poor regions of the world faces major and difficult challenges, especially when considering the needs of people and human rights. A recurring problem that the church in mission has to deal with is the disrespect or violation of human rights within a given cultural context and the question of whether and how the church can engage in advocacy that can effectively promote such rights.

Lacking a formal philosophy for social action, the Adventist Church has often been criticized for its inconsistency in dealing with human right issues.¹ Adventist scholars have noted at least four ways the church has traditionally responded to social injustices: silence, accommodation, positional statements, and direct advocacy.

1. *Silence*. In his comprehensive study of human rights and social ethics in Adventism, Zdravko Plantak documented how the Adventist Church has often kept silent in the face of social injustices, especially under totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany and Communist Russia, based on the principle of the separation of church and

¹ Zdravko Plantak, *The Silent Church* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 208.

state.² Jacques Doukhan highlighted the “silent complicity” of the church during the Holocaust.³ Arnold C. Reye documented how, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, “in spite of its own traditionally moderate theological stance, the Adventist Church became identified with ultra-conservative Fundamentalism”⁴ with a strong emphasis on evangelism and a limited social consciousness.

2. *Accommodation*. Accommodation was one of the strategies Black Americans used to solve the racial issue in the United States.⁵ Promoted by Brooker T. Washington, it consisted in avoiding “anything that would stir up white opposition as blacks focus on self-improvements.”⁶ Kessia Reney Bennett highlighted how Adventist workers sent to the American South where racial segregation was an issue transitioned from a resistance position to an accommodation approach were concerned for the “viability of the mission endeavor,” particularly the “physical safety of the Adventist missionaries and their

² Plantak, *The Silent Church*, 17. See, also, Richard W. Schwartz, and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 364–366.

³ Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 60–66.

⁴ Arnold C. Reye, “Protestant fundamentalism and the Adventist Church in the 1920s,” a paper presented in the Historical Adventism Symposium 26-28 May 1993 (Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, 1993), 42. “The Christian Fundamentalist movement of the 1920s was essentially a North American phenomenon. . . . There is general agreement that seven characteristics identify the Fundamentalist. These are: (1) belief in Scripture; (2) a narrow literalism or hermeneutic; (3) emphasis on evangelism; (4) militancy; (5) cultural isolation; (6) anti-intellectualism; and (7) a distinct personality.” See Reye, 1, 15.

⁵ G. Russel Seay Jr., “Social Justice and the Adventist Dilemma,” in *The Enduring Legacy of Ellen G. White and Social Justice*, ed. Jonathan Thompson (A. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 55-56. The other strategy—self-determination—was promoted by Edward Burghardt DuBois. It consisted in active participation in “direct activities to gain civil rights, voting rights, fair housing and equal education opportunities” (56).

⁶ In this article, Seay highlighted the Adventist dilemma when it comes to addressing racial injustices in America, grappling with two opposing approaches on how to tackle the plight of African-Americans—accommodation and self-determination.

congregants and students.”⁷ It has been suggested that Ellen White, as a pre-millennialist, was “shaped by Jewish and Christian apocalypticism” and accordingly tended to be an *accommodationist*, focusing on the urgency of Christ’s return.⁸

For C. Mervyn Maxwell, advocacy in the public arena is permitted only in the context of religious freedom.⁹ He recommended that Adventists “demonstrate to the world by our faith and action that we believe we have a far more effective remedy for its ills than mere human legislation and handout dollars.”¹⁰

3. *Positional Statements.* Positional statements refer to statements that the Seventh-day Adventist Church issues on chosen topics such as “violence, war, religious fanaticism, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue, or social issues like abortion or human trafficking.”¹¹ The Church has a General Conference Statement Committee which usually proposes statements to the Administrative Committee. In addition, the Annual Council or a department in the Church may issue a statement on an issue of relevance for its work. The Adventist Church has, thus, generated nearly 60 of these statements. Lenart

⁷ Kessia Reney Bennett, “Resistance and Accommodation among Early Seventh-Day Adventist Missionaries in the American South” (master’s thesis, Andrews University, 2011), 52.

⁸ Seay, “Social Justice and the Adventist Dilemma,” 56.
“Ellen White consistently and persistently counseled against actions and activities that would antagonize the social structures that perpetuate negro oppression in favor of activities that help transform the individual *negro into candidates for the heavenly kingdom.*”

⁹ C. Mervyn Maxwell, “Politics and Adventists,” in *Early Church History* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, E. G. White Research Center, 1976), 1. C. Mervyn Maxwell (1925-1999) was Chairman of the Department of Church History and Professor of Church History at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University for twenty-five years (<https://www.adventistbookcenter.com/authors/c.-mervyn-maxwell>).

¹⁰ Maxwell, “Politics and Adventists,” 1.

¹¹ Lehnart Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility? Advocacy, a Biblical Legacy,” in *Church and Society: Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, ed. Rudi Maier, (Benton Harbor, MI: Patterson Printing, 2015), 296.

Falk viewed the church's statements as "information sharing," which do not qualify as advocacy in the proper sense.¹² According to Falk, the "statement approach" is not proactive, and should lead the way for a more strategic advocacy. At the least, however, such statements create space and church-sanctioned opportunity for local church and member advocacy to occur.

4. *Direct advocacy.* Unlike accommodation, advocacy includes self-determination, a strategy William Edward Burghardt DuBois promoted to urge black Americans in the United State to be active in "direct activities to gain civil rights, voting rights, fair housing and equal education opportunities."¹³ Douglas Morgan argued that silence in the public square in the context of social issues has no historical root in the Adventist heritage. Morgan highlighted the corporate stand for nonviolence the Church adopted at its first Conference organized in 1861, the same year the American Civil War began. He also notes the Church's "outspoken opposition to slavery," along with its "call for change in the surrounding society, the wider world beyond the community of believers."¹⁴ Charles Scriven, a former Adventist pastor, educator, and health care administrator, stated that "it's a mistake to think that winning converts is the Church's only business. God's wish is to heal all of life. . . . He [Jesus] did not act as many of His fellow Jews expected the Messiah to act, He certainly condemned social and political

¹² Falk, "Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?" 296.

¹³ Seay, "Social Justice and the Adventist Dilemma," 56.

¹⁴ Douglas Morgan, "Adventism Peacemaking Heritage," in *The Peacemaking Remnant*, ed. Douglas Morgan (Silver Springs, MD: Morris Publishing, 2005), 80.

abuses.”¹⁵

David Pendleton argued that separation of church and state does not forbid the believer to speak up in the public square, nor does it relieve him or her from “urging government to act with wisdom, justice, and righteousness. And it clearly should not bar personal involvement in matters of law and public policy.”¹⁶ Similarly, C. Wesley Knight exhorted the church to speak up and be mad like Jesus “in the context of social injustice and racial terrorism.”¹⁷ Joy Butler, a director of Adventist women’s ministries in the South Pacific, linked advocacy for human rights to the search for peace when she declared,

The work of defending the rights of the weak and marginalized is peace work. Far from being a passive attitude, peace is active in breaking through the silence that perpetuates the violation of human rights on a daily basis. Christians must speak with the loudest voice and take the most daring steps to denounce any violation of the human being, made in the image of God.¹⁸

However, while not opposed to the change in Adventist thinking regarding social ministries, Norman Gulley, an influential Adventist writer, warned the Church against the trap of falling into contemporary political/theocratic movements. Gulley, as cited by Charles Scriven, remarked that “only resting in [Christ] will carry the remnant through

¹⁵ Charles Scriven, “The Gospel and the Global,” *Ministry Magazine*, May 1992, 17-18. Charles Scriven is currently Board Chair of Adventist Forum, the organization that publishes *Spectrum Magazine*.

¹⁶ David A. Pendleton, “Faith and Social Justice,” *Liberty Magazine*, July 2004, 20. David A. Pendleton was an Adventist author (*Liberty Magazine*) who served as a schoolteacher, college instructor, trial lawyer, elected state legislator, and policy advisor to a state governor, and then adjudicated workers’ compensation appeals in Honolulu, Hawaii. More recently, he became a Catholic and practices law in Southern California.

¹⁷ Knight C. Wesley, “Are You Mad Enough?,” *Message Magazine*, July/August 2015, 7.

¹⁸ Joy Butler, “Keeping Girls Safe: Educating for Peace through Social Justice,” *Journal of Adventist Education* (March 2008): 44.

the final crisis.”¹⁹ Gulley discredited all efforts to “change society” by means of politics and reminded us that movements such as the Christian Coalition and Christian Reconstructionism that “attempt to influence politics and dominate the public square with Christian values”²⁰ should be considered in light of the failures of the sixteenth-century Reformation in this regard.²¹

Statement of Problem

According to numerous critics, Adventists have been inconsistent in dealing with inequality and injustice in society, swaying between silence, accommodation, position statements, and advocacy approaches. Although advocacy has become more prominent among Adventist thinkers since the end of the twentieth century, there is a lack of empirical data which answer questions related to contemporary Adventists’ beliefs and practices in relation to advocacy in the context of mission. Concomitantly, there does not yet exist a documented or articulated Adventist missiological perspective on advocacy.

¹⁹ Charles Scriven, “The Peacemaking Remnant,” in *The Peacemaking Remnant*, ed. Douglas Morgan, (Silver Springs, MD: Morris Publishing, 2005), 12-13.

²⁰ Norman R. Gulley, *Christ is Coming!: a Christ-centered Approach to Last-day Events* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1998), 443. The Christian Coalition “supports candidates for government who will promote their own religious agenda” (212). They represent forces “seeking to tear down the wall of separation between church and state in America” (212). “Christian Reconstructionism is another name for dominion theology” (441). The adepts of dominion theology are “Christian mobilizing to Christianize America (Christian Coalition) and to Christianize the world (Dominionist)” (227).

²¹ Gulley reminded us how Luther and Calvin, who “abhorred the union of church and state in Catholicism, both stooped to do the same in their teaching and practice” (443).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study is to develop a framework for transformational advocacy that is both biblical and compatible with the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist message and mission.

Research Questions

The research will address two central and related questions: (1) What part, if any, has biblically-based social advocacy played in Adventist mission history? and (2) What do contemporary Adventists believe and practice about social justice advocacy? It is hoped that the exploration of these two questions will reveal how biblically-guided social advocacy can be a more deliberate and integral part of Adventist Mission.

Justification of the Study

There are unanswered questions regarding the currently apparent low profile of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the global social justice advocacy agenda. In addition, there are divergent views and theological arguments among church leaders on whether the Church should maintain an essentially evangelistic approach to mission or become more engaged in social justice advocacy as a significant element in its outreach to the world. More important, the absence of a biblical and missiological framework to help decide when and how to engage in advocacy may lead to uninformed and oblivious attitudes and actions that compromise the mission and reputation of the Church.

Defining Advocacy

Advocacy is one of the oldest forms of support to someone, a community, or a cause. Traditionally, it is understood as “legal services where the role of an advocate in

court (as a solicitor or barrister) is to represent the interests of their clients, speak up on their behalf and protect their rights.”²² Over time, the definition of an advocate has broadened to encompass all “people who act positively on behalf of someone else.”²³ Throughout the Bible, the word “intercession” is often used as a theological term for advocacy.²⁴

Kate and Tufail defined advocacy as “speaking up for yourself or for others when you think people with power over your life are ignoring your needs.”²⁵ David Cohen, Rosa de la Vega, and Gabrielle Watson linked advocacy to social justice and viewed it as “the pursuit of influencing outcomes—including public-policy and resource-allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions—that directly affect people’s lives.”²⁶ More specifically, social justice advocates identify the causes of violence and loss of dignity in a given society and create visions to move from this reality of “what is” to a new reality of “what should be” in a just, decent society. Thus, they will get involved in organized efforts and actions that aim at the respect and protection of human rights; the respect and preservation of the dignity of all people, regardless of difference; and the eradication of “cruelty by protecting people from abuse, violence, and humiliation caused by communities and institutions—including the government,

²² Christine M. Oliver and Jane Dalrymple, eds., *Developing Advocacy for Children and Young People: Current Issues in Research, Policy and Practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2008), 10.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?” 291.

²⁵ Kate Lyon and John Tufail, eds., *Introducing Advocacy* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007), 17.

²⁶ David Cohen, Rosa de la Vega, and Gabrielle Watson, *Advocacy for Social Justice: A Global Action and Reflection Guide* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2001), 8.

international financial institutions, and multinational corporations.”²⁷ They will also fight for the provision of “public space for people to challenge unjust behaviors,” for the inclusion of people in “decision-making processes that affect their lives,” and for the protection of people from “risk and harassment when they participate and exercise their rights.”²⁸ This dissertation in a large part leans on and is guided by Lyon and Tufail’s and Cohen, de la Vega, and Watson’s definition above.

Scope and Delimitations

Considering the relatively small sample of 260 Adventist students and faculty from Andrews University, the quantitative findings do not pretend to reflect the views and positions of all Seventh-day Adventists on the topic of social justice. To implement such a study would require resources and time which I, as a student, could not afford. Yet, complemented by the literature review and interviews with 12 church scholars and administrators from various parts of the world, the study will provide a relevant, overall insight into Adventists’ beliefs and practice about social justice advocacy. I will delimit the Adventist missions study by focusing it on the advocacy work by Fernando and Ana Stahl in South America during the first half of the twentieth century. The biblical section will be an introduction to my proposed Adventist missiological framework for transformational advocacy and will focus on those key biblical passages that Adventist leaders have primarily used to justify their positions.

²⁷ Cohen, *Advocacy for Social Justice*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study builds on Douglas Morgan's concept of *shalom*-nurturing activism. Morgan stated that "in addition to standing for nonviolence, the Adventist heritage includes other dimensions of peacemaking such as prophetic witness, and *shalom*-nurturing activism."²⁹ This concept will be a crucial element in the analysis of current Adventist beliefs and practices regarding advocacy.

In addition, Stephen Offut's conception of *transformational advocacy* offers a relevant framework that Christians can use to reflect on the rationale, purpose, and implications of their involvement or noninvolvement in the work of advocacy strategy. In *Advocating for Justice*, Offut presented an evangelical vision for transforming systems and structures. Transformational advocacy is defined as

intentional acts of witness by the body of Christ that hold people and institutions accountable for creating, implementing, and sustaining just and good policies and practices geared toward the flourishing of society. Transformational advocacy challenges injustice and obstacles to human flourishing at whatever level it is practiced by humbly engaging with people who can address the wrong, trusting God's Spirit to change all those involved as well as the institutions themselves.³⁰

Regarding the transformative role of the Church, Ellen White, a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, commented on Luke 5:13 as follows:

By these words of Christ we gain some idea of what constitutes the value of human influence. It is to work with the influence of Christ, to lift where Christ lifts, to impart correct principles, and stay the progress of the world's corruption. It is to diffuse that grace which Christ alone can impart. It is to uplift, to sweeten, the lives and characters of others by the power of a pure example united with earnest faith and love. God's people are to exercise a reforming, preserving power in the world. They are to counterwork the destroying, corrupting influence of evil. . . .³¹

²⁹ Morgan, "Adventism Peacemaking Heritage," 80.

³⁰ Stephen Offut et al., *Advocating for Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2016), 11-12.

³¹ Ellen White, *Amazing Grace* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973), 124.

Much has been written about Ellen White’s views on conversion and evangelism, but largely unexplored are what is meant to “stay the progress of the world’s corruption” and being a “reforming, preserving power in the world.” This dissertation aims to explore Adventist biblical, historical, and missiological resources to understand these concepts more fully.

Methodology

In this section, I describe the methods used to collect and analyze data to answer the research questions listed above and develop a framework of transformational advocacy. Since the study applies a missiological research design, I have followed an “orderly path through the identification of the central research issue, the identification of precedent research, and the development of a methodology that will produce reliable and valid results, which then serve as the basis for coming to conclusions and recommendations.”³² The path I have followed included a literature review, field research, and a biblical study, as described briefly below. In addition, I have applied a descriptive research method to the field research, which “allows the combination of multiple methods in order to better describe a given situation.”³³

Literature review. This section (chapter 2) includes current discussions among Protestant/Evangelicals regarding evangelism and social action (which include advocacy). Chapter 3 brings the discussion down to the Adventist Church’s theology and practices regarding evangelism and social ministry. It focuses particularly on Adventists’

³² Edgar J. Elliston, *Introduction to Missiological Design* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), xxix.

³³ *Ibid.*, 68.

contrasts to the Social Gospel movement and Gustavo Gutierrez's Liberation Theology, two major frameworks Christians have been using to theorize on and tackle social injustices as part of the church outreach to the world. Chapter 3 ends by looking at the legacy of Ferdinand and Ana Stahl, an Adventist missionary couple, in the area of social advocacy. The purpose of chaps. 2 and 3 is to identify key concepts, values, and principles that helped construct the hypothesis to be tested through the field research (chap. 4) and also to inform the proposed Adventist transformational advocacy framework in chap. 5.

Field research. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the field research. The field research applies a mixed-method. The quantitative method consists in the collection of beliefs and practices regarding advocacy from a sample of 260 Adventist students and faculty from Andrews University through an online survey. The qualitative method includes interviews with 10 Adventist scholars and administrators (4 from Andrews, 1 from Oakwood, 1 from La Sierra, 1 from Loma Linda, 1 from Washington, and 4 from the General Conference and its Divisions), and 2 PhD students. The questionnaires combined a series of closed and open-ended questions. Prior to the actual survey research, I tested the method with 33 seminary students (30 online questionnaires, 3 interviews).

Biblical study. The first part of chapter 5 is a scriptural/theological study of Isa 58 (the Sabbath), Rev 14:6–12 (the Three Angels' messages), and Matt 24–25 (Jesus' eschatological discourse). I review current Adventist interpretation of those passages and go further by studying other biblical passages from both Old and New Testaments related to social justice advocacy in order to create a fuller and more robust foundation. This

helps establish biblical values regarding the role of Christians in advocating for social justice and allowing information gathered through the literature review and the field research to be filtered so that I could propose a framework that is faithful to Scripture and Adventist core theological tenets.

Proposed Adventist Biblical and Missiological Framework. The second part of chapter 5 describes an Adventist framework for transformational advocacy, including a methodology for action and core guiding principles. The framework is anchored in the biblical/theological study, although it draws on the literature review and findings from the field research.

CHAPTER 2

ADVOCACY IN EVANGELICAL OUTREACH TO THE WORLD¹

Introduction

In *Mission in the Twenty-First Century*, Andrew Walls and Cathy Ross identified five marks of mission in the twenty-first century: (1) to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; (2) to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers; (3) to respond to human needs by loving service; (4) to seek to transform unjust structures of society; and (5) to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. Regarding the fourth mark—to seek to transform unjust structures of society—Walls and Ross noted that while the (Christian) church was active in welfare and relief effort, regarding many complex structural issues, the “church was, and still is to a large extent, silent on this matter.”² In many evangelical circles, theologians and missiologists continue to grapple with the following question: should Christians maintain an essentially evangelistic approach to mission or should they also be engaged in social justice advocacy as a significant element of their outreach to the world?

This chapter discusses evangelism and social action, particularly the role of advocacy in evangelicalism. It briefly explores the views of prominent missiologists such

¹ This chapter builds on previous research done by the author in partial fulfillment of doctoral requirements, Fall 2020, Andrews University.

² Andrews Walls and Cathy Ross, eds., *Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Exploring the Five Marks of Global Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 81.

as Timothy Tennent and Leslie Newbigin in current debates concerning the relationship between evangelism and social action. It then highlights four confessional influences on evangelicalism's public engagement. It also summarizes Heidi Holland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider's five types of mission orientations among evangelical churches. It then compares David Bosch and John Stott and the way these missiologists/scholars relate evangelism to social ministry, including advocacy from their soteriological, ecclesiological, and eschatological perspectives.

Evangelism and Social Action: Current Debates

Evangelism and social action represent two paradigms that have engaged the minds 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 engage in social action as a significant element of their outreach to the world? Timothy Tennent defined 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."³ The evangelism paradigm insists that "the church's primary mission is to proclaim this good news, calling people to repentance."⁴ Tennent defined 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."⁵

³ Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2010), 388.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁵ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 389.

Tennent noted that evangelical, Pentecostal, and independent Christians are sometimes criticized for being committed only to evangelism, while other Christian denominations are portrayed as being committed only to justice and social action.⁶ However, Tennent believed that “the difference is often one of emphasis and definition of what it means to evangelize, rather than discreet spheres of commitment.”⁷

In Leslie Newbigin’s thought, 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.” However, they inevitably 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.”⁸ For this reason, Newbigin believed that “missions have never been able to separate the preaching of the gospel from action for God’s justice.”⁹

Most evangelicals acknowledge the importance of social action as part of the mission of the church.¹⁰ Several evangelical statements attest to this assertion. The 1966 Wheaton Declaration and the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin, also in 1966, as well as the Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern in 1973, and the 1974 Lausanne Covenant are the most preeminent examples. The *Lausanne Covenant* has been

⁶ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 389.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 102.

⁹ Ibid., 103.

¹⁰ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 391.

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.¹¹

Tennent noted 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.”¹² 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.”¹³ The third and last feature is the insertion of “the expression of *metanoia*, or repentance, for the church’s failure to live consistently

¹¹ “The Lausanne Covenant,” Lausanne Movement, accessed May 1, 2022, <https://lausanne.org/content/covenant/lausanne-covenant#cov>.

¹² Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 392.

¹³ *Ibid.*

with the biblical witness to social action and the struggle for justice on behalf of the oppressed.”¹⁴

Tennent also noted that in spite of such an unequivocal acknowledgement that evangelism and social action are part of Christian duty, the nature of that relationship was not spelled out in the *Lausanne* 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*.

Four Confessional Influences on Evangelicalism’s Public Engagement

Historically, Evangelicals have engaged the state in different ways and on issues that vary from one denomination to another based on the theological roots of their specific confessional communities. Following is a succinct overview of four confessional influences on Evangelicals’ public engagement, as expounded in *Advocating for Justice* by Offut et al.¹⁵

Calvinism

John Calvin (1509–64) believed that the political sphere falls under the lordship of Jesus Christ as all creation is part of God’s handiwork. As such, although it does not have authority over the state, the church expects the state to govern justly, while recognizing the impact of the Fall on both human and individual institutions, including

¹⁴ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 393.

¹⁵ Offut et al., *Advocating for Justice*, 20-25.

government. This theology has led the Reformed tradition to encourage believers to engage with the state on policies of all kinds, seeking to reform all of society; to form political communities that would comport with the just character of God; and to hold the state accountable to govern toward just outcomes, regardless of particular forms of government. Calvinist tradition believes that God has called Christians at all times and places to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly.

Pietism, Methodism, and the Holiness Movement

The Pietist, Methodist, and Holiness movements form a religious mix embodied by John Wesley (1703–91), the father of Methodism. They focus on sanctification, grace, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Their approach to advocacy has fluctuated over the time. Wesley’s views of society were developed through his acquaintance with and exposition to several traditions including the Eastern Church, Reformed thought, Moravian pietism, and the Anglican Church, of which he was a member. At the beginning, he held a monarchical conception of the world (called “constitutional monarchy” by Theodore Webber) whereby God appointed specific rulers and gave them delegation to rule the people. For this reason, he opposed the American colonies’ fight for independence. However, his robust beliefs regarding the Trinity and sanctification planted important seeds for a theology of advocacy in Wesley’s heart. His understanding of the Trinity grounded and nurtured his conviction concerning the three facets of the image of God in humanity, which were moral, natural, and political aspects. Regarding sanctification, Wesley believed that it concerned not only individuals but also communities. Impregnated with such convictions, Wesley publicly defended the rights of the poor in eighteenth-century England and advocated the dismantlement of social, political, and

economic forces that sustained the slave trade. He corresponded with British parliamentarian William Wilberforce and urged him on in his work of abolishing the slave trade. The first and second great awakenings of the eighteenth century contributed to making Methodism the largest denomination in America by 1820. The denomination provided much of the impetus for social activism. Institutions and leaders, such as Charles Finney (1792–1875) who was a leader in the Second Great Awakening, supported the abolition of slavery among other causes.

Nevertheless, Pietism and Methodism do not really have a legacy of advocacy in American history. The Methodist movement's interest in advocacy in early America did not match that of its founder Wesley, maybe partly because of "its concentration in the south and along the frontier, away from the centers of power."¹⁶ However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Methodism entered the public policy arena to strongly advocate for the temperance movement. In addition, being a socially upwardly mobile group, Methodists also show interest for "respectability" in public policy, showing little interest in defending the rights of those behind. This lack of concern for the poor was among the reasons for splits in the movement, resulting in the birth of the Free Methodist, Nazarene, and Wesleyan denominations. Even these latter movements, however, rarely included advocacy in their strategies, preferring the provision of direct assistance for the poor, rather than political advocacy.

¹⁶ Offut et al., *Advocating for Justice*, 23.

Pentecostalism

Although Pentecostals form a massive and diverse group, they are traditionally situated in the lower socioeconomic segment of society and have not been empowered to participate in state-level policy discussions. In addition, Pentecostal theology emphasizes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the use of spiritual weapons to deal with life challenges. Politics being considered a weapon of the world, Christians should not employ it to transform society or to address social issues. Social transformation should be the consequence of spiritual transformation, of being born again, and of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, because of this mix of socioeconomic and theological reasons, American Pentecostals generally kept their distance from the state for much of the twentieth century. That began to change during the Reagan era, and this group was one of the most active and vocal in its support for many of the policies of candidate and President Donald Trump.

Anabaptism

Anabaptists represent the evangelical group that most strongly rejects Christians' engagement with the state. Because Christians' earthly citizenship subordinates their heavenly citizenship, their primary allegiance is due to the church and not to the state. Many Anabaptists view as unchristian the holding of public office, enlisting in the military, participating in the police, or even the act of voting in elections. Their positions on these issues are grounded on Anabaptist theology that emphasizes radical pacifism. However, Anabaptists are not indifferent to the world's problems. As pacifists, they are active in conflict-resolution programs carried out independently of the state. As a kind of

advocacy, they hold “a strong focus on ecclesiology, on intentional living in the world as an alternate community, or polis.”¹⁷

Typology of Mission Orientations Among Evangelicals

Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, in *Saving Souls, Serving Society*, explored how evangelical churches navigate the tension between their spiritual mission and the constraints on evangelism in the context of social services. They reviewed findings from national studies and noted that approximately 57% to 87% of congregations are involved in a form of social ministry. This sounds impressive in terms of scope of social services provided by churches. However, the depth of such services does not match their breadth, because “most congregation-sponsored programs provide a limited commodity to meet urgent or one-time needs, such as food, clothing or emergency financial assistance.”¹⁸ In addition, those programs tend to serve a very particular disenfranchised group—people living with AIDS or welfare recipients, for example—and both human and financial resources allocated to social ministry by congregations are also basically thin.¹⁹

Unruh and Sider provided a typology of mission orientations of evangelical churches. Their typology is based on the understanding that “a congregation’s mission orientation is reflected in both what it does and how it values this activity.”²⁰ Their

¹⁷ Offut et al., *Advocating for Justice*, 23.

¹⁸ Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

typology focuses on “the way that churches organize the relationship between spiritual and social dimensions of outreach.”²¹ Unruh and Sider divided churches in five broad categories or types based on their mission orientation.

Dominant social action churches emphasize social ministry to the exclusion of evangelism. Meeting practical needs and/or working for social justice are the main focus of the witnessing efforts, while religious elements are kept minimal. Churches in this category usually see their good works as an implicit witness. “This approach recognizes faith as a resource for beneficiaries without upholding faith as an end in itself.”²²

Dual-focus churches include both evangelism and social action as important, but independent aspects of their outreach mission. Churches in this category usually have separate leadership, administration, budget, and volunteer support for evangelism and social ministries, which are propelled by different theological motivations. “Social ministries in dual-focus churches typically do not make spiritual renewal of beneficiaries an overt goal; evangelism ministries do not address substantive material needs.”²³

Holistic mission churches are those where witness and service are inseparably linked. Unruh and Sider noted two sub-types in this category: the *holistic-complementary* sub-type and *holistic-instrumental* sub-type. The first conceptualizes evangelism and social ministries as “congruent facets of the same seamless mission,” while the second envisions social outreach as “a portal to the primary objective of winning converts.”²⁴

²¹ Unruh and Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society*, 130.

²² *Ibid.*, 137.

²³ *Ibid.*, 138.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Dominant evangelism churches focus primarily on evangelism aiming at saving souls for eternal life and increasing their membership through baptism of new converts. They consistently motivate church members to share their faith as if their own eternal life depends on it. Some churches in this category, demonstrating a certain degree of social consciousness through limited compassion and acts of kindness, consider individual conversions as a pathway to social change. Spiritual nurturing is seen as the highest form of compassion. They act on the premise that helping people “requires getting at the root of their problems by a religious conversion and process of discipleship that produces fundamental life changes.”²⁵

Inward-focused churches practice no significant outreach. They consider the world as a hostile environment that sanctified people should be shielded against. “Their concern is to shield members from temptations and travails of society, not to change society.” The church sees its role as “incubator of saved souls and sane psyches.” Churches in this category “point to socially uplifting effects of discipleship and mutual aid.”²⁶

²⁵ Unruh and Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society*, 138.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

Evangelism and Social Action in Theology of Mission: David Bosh versus John Stott

David J. Bosh²⁷ and John R. W. Stott,²⁸ two prominent thinkers in missiology, represent two major views on the relationships between evangelism and social ministry among evangelicals. The purpose of this section is to compare and contrast their positions on the relationship between evangelism and social transformation in the context of their views on the church (ecclesiology), salvation (soteriology), and eschatology.

Ecclesiology

In *Mission to World: The Theological Perspective*, David Bosch expounded his theological view of the church. The book reveals how his ecclesiology defined his support for Christian social justice activism. Bosch saw the church as a community that was “simultaneously distinguishable from and in solidarity with the world.”²⁹ This community gathers believers for communion with the Triune God and for service to the world in solidarity with all mankind.³⁰ According to Scripture, conversion has ethical implications (Luke 3:10–14), rather than being merely an emotional experience.

²⁷ David Jacobus Bosch (13 December 1929 – 15 April 1992), born in South Africa, remains one of the most influential missiologists and theologians of the twentieth century. He is best known for his book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991), considered widely as his “chief theological legacy.” See Willem Saayman and Klippiess Kritzing, eds, *Mission in Bold Humility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 3.

²⁸ John Stott (27 April 1921 – 27 July 2011) was an English Anglican priest. He is known as one of the most prominent figures of the evangelical movement of the twentieth century. As a pastor, scholar, evangelist, theologian, and writer, he was a spiritual and intellectual giant whom God has used to touch the lives of millions. His influence on the redaction and adoption of the Lausanne Covenant was tremendous, thus helping “shape a whole generation of evangelicals in their thinking and action” (Billy Graham). See Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, eds, *2000 and Beyond: A Mission Agenda*, a Festschrift for John Stott’s 70th Birthday (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, 1991), vii.

²⁹ David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980), 222.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 223.

Conversion is discipleship (Matt 16:24). The church is “discipleship-in-community,” “God’s new creation” that unites Jews and Greeks, simple fishermen and zealots, tax collectors, and erudite Pharisees. In this “single new community in Christ,” all barriers—racial, social, economic, and others—are broken down (Eph 2:14–16).³¹

According to Bosch, the book of Acts is replete with examples that should remind us about the fact that the church is both “stranger in this world” and an “agent of mission” to the world. Bosch criticized “evangelicals” for defining the “Church as a ghetto community,” whereby everything is spiritualized, and material, social, and political issues are taboo to the Church.” He also criticized “ecumenical circles” that do exactly the opposite, relativizing the difference between Church and world.³² Here is Bosch’s position: “The Church-as-community must be sufficiently distinguishable to resist and challenge the homogenizing power of the world. Only as prophetic minority in the secularized society of today can the Church remain faithful to her role of being a stranger in the world.”³³ Bosch added that it is “precisely as stranger and as God’s experimental garden on earth” that “the Church is Church-for-others,” quoting Bonhoeffer who wrote on 3rd August 1944: “The church is the church only when it exists for others. . . . The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating, but helping and serving.”³⁴

³¹ Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 223.

³² *Ibid.*, 224.

³³ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Similarly, in *Basic Christianity*, Stott placed the work for social justice in the context of the Christian's duty to the world. He recognized that, besides being "a family affair, in which the children enjoy fellowship with the Father and with each other," the Christian life implies serving others in whatever ways we can.³⁵ He pointed to New Testament writers who "lay considerable stress on our obligations to the state, to our employer, to our family and to society as a whole."³⁶ Christians possess dual citizenship, "the one earthly and the other heavenly." Thus, as members of the church, we are called to be "loyal in our church membership and at the same time active in Christian service and witness."³⁷

Stott also placed social justice activism in the context of God's love demonstrated at the cross. As a community of the cross, the church should show concern for social justice.

The cross is a revelation of God's justice as well as of his love. That is why the community of the cross should concern itself with social justice as well as with loving philanthropy. It is never enough to have pity on the victims of injustice, if we do nothing to change the unjust situation itself. Good Samaritans will always be needed to succour those who are assaulted and robbed; yet it would be even better to rid the Jerusalem-Jericho road of brigands.³⁸

Soteriology

Bosch urged the church to adopt a more comprehensive view of salvation in order to integrate the work of social change in the mission enterprise. For Bosch, "since one's

³⁵ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 166.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁷ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 167.

³⁸ John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 292.

theology of mission is always closely dependent on one's theology of salvation, . . . the scope of salvation—however we define salvation—determines the scopes of the missionary enterprise.”³⁹

Bosch contended that salvation in the Early Church was interpreted in comprehensive terms. He invited us to look into the Gospel according to Luke, for instance, to see the usage of “salvation language” in respect to a very wide spectrum of human circumstances—the termination of poverty, discrimination, illness, demon possession, sin, and so forth. Bosch agreed with Scheffler (1988) who understood salvation in Luke to include economic, social, political, physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering. Moreover, for Luke, “salvation is, above all something that realizes itself in *this* life, *today* (see, in particular, Jesus' sayings recorded in 4:21; 19:9; 23:43).” Bosch noted that, for Luke, “salvation is *present* salvation.”⁴⁰

Drawing on Paul's writings, it was Bosch's understanding that salvation is a *process* that begins with “one's encounter with the living Christ, but complete salvation is still outstanding.” For Paul, *reconciliation* occurs here and now, even if he referred to salvation in future tense: “For if while we were enemies we were *reconciled* to God . . . much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10). Although complete salvation is “reserved for the coming triumph of God (Phil 3:20),” the

³⁹ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 393.

⁴⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 393.

believer may already experience radical renewal—both personal and social—here and now (Rom 8:14; 2 Cor 5:17), according to Bosch.⁴¹

Bosch highlighted three models of understanding of salvation. The first model—the Greek Patristic mission, which was oriented to the *origin* and *beginning* of Jesus’s life—was His preexistence and incarnation. The second model—the Western mission, which was oriented toward the *end* of Jesus’ life—was His death on the cross. The third model—the ethical interpretation of salvation—was oriented to Jesus’ *earthly life and ministry*.

At the end, Bosch stressed the need of “an interpretation of salvation which operates within a *comprehensive* Christological framework, which makes the *totus Christus*—his incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection, and Parousia—indispensable for Church and theology.”⁴² He called the church to “find a way beyond every schizophrenic position and minister to people in their total need, that we should involve individual as well as society, soul and body, present and future in our ministry of salvation.”⁴³

When the church realizes the “integral character” of salvation, then the scope of the church’s mission will be “more comprehensive than has traditionally been the case.”⁴⁴ In Bosch’s perspective, salvation is as coherent, broad, and deep as the needs and exigences of human existence.” He stated that

⁴¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 393.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 399.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 400.

According to the Scriptures, salvation was never the saving of individual disembodied souls. The Bible always sees a human person as a living body-soul. Salvation is the re-creation that overcomes sin and regains control of God's great plan. Not only are individuals offered new life now and for eternity, there is also the assurance salvation will culminate in the fulness of the kingdom, in a new order of life, characterized by love, freedom, justice and peace.⁴⁵

Accordingly, Bosch defined mission as "being sent to proclaim in deed and word that Christ died and rose for the life of the world, that he lives to transform human lives (Rom 8:2) and to overcome death." Then, he added,

"Anyone who knows that one day there will be no more disease can and must actively anticipate the conquest of disease in individuals and society *now*. And anyone who believes that the enemy of God and humans will be vanquished will already oppose him *now* in his machinations in family and society. For all of this has to do with *salvation*."⁴⁶

However, John Stott had a more conservative or restricted understanding of salvation than Bosch. For Stott, salvation did not mean psycho-physical health, nor political liberation. For instance, he criticized Miss Phyllis Garlick who believed that "physical and mental health" is of the very essence of the gospel of the grace of God."⁴⁷ He also criticized Evelyn Frost for referring to physical health as an aspect of eternal life now. Frost wrote, "Christian healing for body and mind as well as for spirit is an integral part of the Christian gospel."⁴⁸ Stott counter-attacked, stating that "salvation by faith in Christ crucified and risen is moral not material, a rescue from sin not from harm."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ David J. Bosch, "Evangelism and Social Transformation," in *The Church in Response to Human Need*, ed. Tom Sine (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research Communication Center, 1983), 271.

⁴⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 400.

⁴⁷ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 84.

⁴⁸ Evelyn Frost, *Christian Healing* (London, UK: A. R. Mowbray & Co. Limited, 1949), 363.

⁴⁹ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 84.

Stott's view of salvation contrasted sharply with Liberation Theology. He rejected the view according to which salvation is socio-economic liberation. He defined salvation as personal freedom. Salvation brings "liberation from the just judgment of God upon sin."⁵⁰ Salvation delivers us "from the bondage of self-centeredness into the liberty of service."⁵¹ Complete salvation will be "a deliverance from the wrath to come (Romans 5.9; 1 Thessalonians 1.10; 5.9)." In addition, "it will include 'the redemption of our bodies.'"⁵² In other terms, "the salvation Christ gives his people, is freedom from sin in all its ugly manifestations and liberation into a life of service, until finally we attain 'the glorious liberty of the children of God.'"⁵³

Eschatology

Bosch affirmed that mission should be undertaken as an eschatological event. Eschatology is to be seen no longer as "the doctrine of the last things." It has to do with the here and now, as well. "To wait for the end never implies passivity but rather intense activity in the here and now."⁵⁴ Mission should never be "regarded as pre-condition or prerequisite for the coming of the end, neither may the Church hasten the end through her

⁵⁰ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 103.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 107.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁵⁴ Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 234.

missionary fervor.”⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the church should not “develop a ghetto mentality and simply turn in upon herself.”⁵⁶

Bosch believed that involvement in the world is one of the chief ways of preparing ourselves for the *parousia*. “Mission as an eschatological event proceeds from the certainty that the Kingdom of God is not only a future reality but is already present in our midst.”⁵⁷ We need to be aware of the fact that “at present the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’ still exist in mutual tension.” Mission as an eschatological event motivates the church to fulfill her obligations to the world. It is “hope in action.”⁵⁸ Bosch warned Christians this way: “One of the gravest dangers facing the Church today is that all expectations of a future prepared by God may disappear from our field of vision, that future expectations may be entirely subsumed in this-worldly categories. . . . We are so easily misled into believing that salvation is at our disposal.”⁵⁹ However, he added, “The Christians who concerns himself only with ‘ultimate things’ arguing that the present things are no more than provisional and passing away, does not understand the Christian hope.”⁶⁰

Nevertheless, both Stott and Bosch rejected Liberation Theology (Gutierrez’s idea of utopia). Stott wrote this paragraph in the Lausanne Covenant: “We reject as a proud

⁵⁵ Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 235.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 238.

self-confident dream the notion that man can ever build a utopia on earth. Our Christian confidence is that God will perfect his kingdom and we look forward with eager anticipation to that day and to the new heaven and earth in which righteousness will dwell and God will reign forever” (*Lausanne Covenant*, para. 13).⁶¹ Later, Stott also stated that “the followers of Jesus are optimists, but not utopians. It is possible to improve society; but a perfect society awaits the return of Jesus Christ.”⁶²

Similarly, Bosch wrote that “salvation in biblical terms is more than the relief of physical misery. *Shalom* is more than a ‘social happening.’ Redemption is more than a political programme.” He explained that the word *sozein*, although frequently used for “heal,” “is always related to the idea of ‘believing,’ something that does not apply to the other two words which the Gospels also use for ‘heal’ (*iaomai* and *therapeuin*).” The primary use of *sozein* in the New Testament, in the Gospels and elsewhere, is moreover not that of “heal”; “it refers rather to man’s total change in all his relationships, his adoption into a new community, the forgiveness of his sins, and deliverance from eternal judgment.”⁶³

Relationship between Evangelism and Social Action

Bosch considered the relationship between the evangelistic and the societal dimensions of the Christian mission as “one of the thorniest areas in the theology and

⁶¹ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 107.

⁶² John R. W. Stott, *Authentic Christianity* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 343.

⁶³ Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 218.

practice of mission.”⁶⁴ Bosch gave a definition of evangelism that was as comprehensive as his view of salvation:

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.⁶⁵

Stott’s definition of evangelism is less comprehensive than Bosch’s:

Sharing the good news with others. The good news is Jesus. And the good news about Jesus which we announce is that he died for our sins and was raised from death, and that in consequence he reigns as Lord and Saviour at God’s right hand, and has authority both to command repentance and faith, and to bestow forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit on all those who repents, believe and are baptized.⁶⁶

A first contrast between Bosch and Stott regarding their understanding of the relationship between evangelism and social action is their separability/inseparability. For Bosch, evangelism could not be divorced from the preaching and practicing of justice.⁶⁷ Bosch argued that “although evangelism may never be equated with labor for justice, it may also never be divorced from it,”⁶⁸ yet he recognized that “evangelism and prophetic ministries are not the same. Authentic evangelism should have a profound significance

⁶⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 401.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 418.

⁶⁶ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 54.

⁶⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 418.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

for development, liberation, justice and peace, but they aren't categories of evangelism."⁶⁹

For Bosch, the most adequate formulation that subsumes the comprehensive mission of the church is the biblical concept *martyria* (witness), which can be subdivided into *kērygma* (proclamation), *koinōnia* (fellowship), and *diakonia* (service). Proclamation (*kērygma*) and service (*diakonia*) are understood by Bosch as “two blades of a pair of scissors which operate in unison, held together by *koinōnia*, the fellowship, which likewise is not a separate ‘part of the Church’s task, but rather the “cement” which keeps *kērygma* and *diakonia* together, the axle’ on which the two blades operate.”⁷⁰

Like Bosch, Stott believed that mission should be comprehensive and embrace everything which God sends His church to do in the world. Mission “includes evangelism and social responsibility, since both are authentic expressions of the love which longs to serve man in his need.”⁷¹ Stott agreed with Bosch that evangelism and social responsibility should work as partners. “They are like two blades of a pair of scissors or two wings of a bird. ... Indeed, so close is this link between proclaiming and serving, that they actually overlap.”⁷² Again, like Bosch, Stott contended that they should not be identified with each other, “for evangelism is not social responsibility, nor is social responsibility evangelism.”⁷³

⁶⁹ Bosch, “Evangelism and Social Transformation,” 272.

⁷⁰ Bosch, *Witness to the World*, 227.

⁷¹ Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 35.

⁷² John Stott and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 44.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

However, Stott seemed to disagree with Bosch on the idea that evangelism may not be divorced from the practice of justice. In *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (1975), Stott discussed three main ways of relating evangelism to social action. First, social action as a *means to evangelism*. Here, the primary expected end result is winning converts, social action being the means to that end. Stott rejected this approach for being hypocritical and deceptive. Second, social action as a *manifestation of evangelism*, or, at least, of the gospel which is being proclaimed. In this approach, philanthropy “grows out” of evangelism “as its natural expression”; social action “makes the message significantly visible.”⁷⁴ Stott quoted Bishop John V. Taylor, a proponent of this view, who talked about a “three-stranded presentation of the Gospel,” by which he meant “what they say (proclamation), what they are (witness), and what they do (service).”⁷⁵ Stott also rejected this second way of relating evangelism to social action, arguing that “if good works are visible preaching, then they are expecting a return; but if good works are visible loving, then they are ‘expecting nothing’ (Luke 6.35).”⁷⁶ Third, social action as a *partner of evangelism*. This was Stott’s preferred approach, believing that “as partners the two belong to each other and yet are independent of each other. Each stands on its own feet in its own right alongside the other. Neither is a means to the other, or even a manifestation of the other. For each is an end in itself. Both are expressions of unfeigned love.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 26.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

While Bosch defined evangelism as “a call to *service*”⁷⁸ and, as such, cannot be divorced from social justice activism, Stott thought that the two, “words and works, evangelism and social action,” are not “such inseparable partners that all of us must engage in both all the time.”⁷⁹ He said that “situations vary, and so do Christian callings.” There will be situations “when a person’s eternal destiny is the most urgent consideration,” and other times “when a person’s material need is so pressing that he would not be able to hear the gospel if we shared it with him.”⁸⁰ A biblical example of Stott’s point is the man who fell among robbers; what he needed above all else at that moment was “oil and bandages for his wound, not evangelistic tracts in his pockets.”⁸¹

A second basic contrast between Bosch and Stott is the idea of primacy of evangelism over social responsibility. Stott, in *Christian Mission in the Modern World 1975*, gave preeminence to evangelism over social action, quoting the Lausanne Covenant, which states, “in the church’s mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary” (para. 6). Social liberation is important. Christians should “feel an acute pain of conscience and compassion” in the face of oppression and injustice, when “civil liberty, racial respect, education, medicine, employment, or adequate food, clothing and shelter” are denied to human beings. However, more important than political and economic

⁷⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 418.

⁷⁹ Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

liberation is “eternal salvation.” Stott saw “alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the gospel” as most “destructive of human dignity” than anything else.⁸²

Stott saw evangelism as the principle instrument of change. Timothy Dudley-Smith cited Stott who said that “evangelism is the major instrument of social change. For the gospel changes people, and changed people can change society.”⁸³ In the same line of thought, he argued that “social responsibility becomes an aspect not of Christian mission only, but also of Christian conversion. It is impossible to be truly converted to God without being thereby converted to our neighbor.”⁸⁴

Unlike Stott, Bosch saw social action (preaching and practicing of justice) as an integral part of evangelism. Bosch disagreed with the “view according to which evangelism is given absolute priority over social involvement.”⁸⁵ Bosch grounded his position on the Great Commission in Matt 28. The imperative is to make disciples, not just new converts. Reflecting on the use of the term “disciple” by Matthew, Bosch suggested that “to become a disciple of Jesus includes a whole range of commitments, including, primarily, a commitment to Jesus and to God’s reign.” Accordingly, evangelism must be understood as “a call to service.”⁸⁶ Evangelism includes “enlisting people for the reign of God, liberating them from themselves, their sins, and their

⁸² Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 35.

⁸³ Timothy Dudley-Smith, *Authentic Christianity* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 343.

⁸⁴ Stott and Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*, 53.

⁸⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 418.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

entanglements, so that they will be free for God and neighbor.”⁸⁷

Bosch gave a brief history of how the church has dealt with issues of justice as part of its mission, and how it came to give priority to evangelism. He indicated that “social justice was at the very heart of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament.”⁸⁸ Under a theocracy, it was normal for prophets like Amos and Jeremiah to challenge Israel’s kings because they at least professed to believe in Yahweh. However, the context was different in the New Testament, where Christianity was a *religio illicita* in the Roman Empire. It would be aberrant for Christians to address the Roman authorities on a basis of a shared faith as was the case in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, Bosch considered it “erroneous” the “view that the New Testament is more ‘spiritual’ than the Old Testament, and, because of this, superior to it.”⁸⁹ Bosch also noted that the “innate justice dimension of the Christian faith” should not be overlooked, although it was—in the prevailing circumstances—couched in terms which differed substantially from those we encounter in the Old Testament.”⁹⁰

However, the period starting with the reign of Constantine until the advent of the Enlightenment was similar to that of the OT. Christianity became not only *religio licita*, but also the only legitimate religion under Constantine. Unfortunately, since religion and politics were held together, it was a period of compromises, not only in the area of doctrines, but also in the area of social justice, as “court prophets” found it “either

⁸⁷ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 418.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

impossible or imprudent to criticize the authorities when the latter had connived and even colluded in injustice.”⁹¹

Later, Augustine’s thought, expounded in *The City of God*, would influence the church to embrace a dualist view of reality, construing a contrast between the realm of the divine and the realm of the world. Protestantism inherited this legacy from Catholicism and came to consider the world as “evil and unredeemable, and changing its structures did not really fall within the sphere of the church’s responsibilities.”⁹²

With the coming of the Enlightenment era, “the organic link between church and state had been severed and the church could no longer appeal to the state on the basis of a shared faith commitment. The church ministry—outside its walls—was by large limited to charity and development. To challenge unjust societal structures fell outside of its purview and would also have been totally unacceptable to the political rulers.”⁹³

Bosch also highlighted an observation Reinhold Niebuhr made in 1960. Niebuhr observed the existence of a *rational* ethic, which aims at justice, and a *religious* ethic, which aims at love. “The latter ideal is supported by viewing the soul of one’s fellow human being ‘from the absolute and transcendent perspective.’”⁹⁴ Within the religious ethic, there exist a “mystical” emphasis and a “prophetic” emphasis. On one side, the mystical dimension “tends to make an individual or a group withdraw from the world, devalue history, claim that one’s true home is not here but in heaven, seek communion

⁹¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 418.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 401-402.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 401.

with God without attending to one's neighbor." On the other side, the prophetic dimension "prompts the believer to get involved in society for the sake of the neighbor."⁹⁵ On the one hand, evangelism, aiming at eternal salvation, became the priority, and on the other hand, social justice became the priority.

The church today, distinguishes between two different mandates: one spiritual, the other social. "The first refers to the commission to announce the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ; the second calls Christian to responsible participation in human society, including working for human wellbeing and justice."⁹⁶ Gradually, evangelicals shifted toward the primacy of evangelism, as attested by the Lausanne Covenant and John Stott's writings. The evangelism paradigm insists that "the church's primary mission is to proclaim this good news, calling people to repentance."⁹⁷

However, Bosch distanced himself from Stott's "understanding of mission as evangelism *plus* social responsibility," and the idea that "each of the two has a life of its own," or that "it is possible to have evangelism without a social dimension and Christian social involvement without an evangelistic dimension."⁹⁸ Bosch praised the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) consultation in Wheaton, which, for the first time, issued an official statement that overcame the perennial dichotomy. The strength of the statement lies in the fact that it does not ascribe priority either to evangelism or social involvement. The *Wheaton 83 Statement*, para. 26 declared, "Evil is not only in the

⁹⁵ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 402.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 403.

⁹⁷ Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions*, 388.

⁹⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 405.

human heart but also in social structures. . . . The mission of the church includes both the proclamation of the Gospel and its demonstration. We must therefore evangelize, respond to immediate human needs, and press for social transformation.”⁹⁹

Bosch also showed his agreement with the 1982 *Mission and Evangelism* document, which attests to a renewal in evangelical thinking regarding evangelism and social responsibility:

There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God’s promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility test: A proclamation that does not hold for the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice (para 34).¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

Most Christian congregations include a social component as part of their mission orientation. However, the relationship between evangelism and social action in the context of their outreach to the world varies based on the theological roots of their specific confessional communities. Unruh and Sider found that evangelical churches can be categorized as one the following five types—dominant social action, dual focus, holistic, dominant evangelism, and inward-focused.

In addition, evangelical Christians struggle to find the right balance between evangelism and social ministry to bring transformation and *shalom* to people apparently due to theological differences regarding soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.

⁹⁹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 407. See full *Wheaton 83 Statement* at Lausanne Movement, “Transformation: The Church in Response to Human Needs,” <https://lausanne.org> (accessed April 8, 2021).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 408. Full 1982 *Mission and Evangelism* statement is available at <http://www.internationalbulletin.org/issues/1983-02/1983-02-065-churches.pdf> (accessed April 9, 2021).

Bosch and Stott’s ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology influenced their understanding of the importance of and relationship between evangelism and social action. They shared similar views on the church and the imperative it has to serve the world through evangelism and social action. While Stott understood salvation mostly in personal terms—personal freedom from God’s judgement upon sin and a life of service—Bosch had a more comprehensive understanding of salvation, which includes the *now* and the *future*. Salvation starts now and will be perfected in the age to come with the coming of Christ the King. Salvation aims at terminating poverty, discrimination, illness, demon possession, sin, and so forth. Accordingly, unlike Stott who thought that evangelism is primary and can exist without social action although they are partners, Bosch advocated a more comprehensive approach to evangelism, which he thought should never be severed from the preaching and practice of justice. Nevertheless, Bosch and Stott seemed to agree on the “inability of human beings to usher in God’s reign, and the need for both personal renewal by God’s Spirit *and* resolute commitment to challenging and transforming the structures of society.”¹⁰¹

Since this dissertation attempts to contribute a biblical framework for transformational advocacy from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, I will now turn to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I will briefly survey the historical development of Adventist social consciousness, the key features of Adventist outreach to the world. I will look at one Adventist missionary example of integration of evangelism and social action including social justice advocacy—Ana and Ferdinand Stahl. Then, I will explore how Adventist theology compares and contrasts with the theology of the Social Gospel and

¹⁰¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 408.

the Theology of Liberation developed by Walter Rauschenbusch and Gustavo Gutierrez respectively.

CHAPTER 3

EVANGELISM AND SOCIAL MINISTRY IN ADVENTISM

Introduction

This chapter reviews Seventh-day Adventist theology and praxis regarding evangelism and social ministry, including advocacy. The debate about whether or not evangelism and social ministries (healthcare, education, relief, and development, human rights, etc.) are both part of mission has occupied the mind of different Christian groups during much of the twentieth century.¹ Gordon Doss noted that “some at the conservative end of the theological spectrum insisted that only evangelism qualified and some at the liberal end said social action could stand alone.”² However, since the late twentieth century, most Christian denominations have embraced some version of “wholistic mission that includes both evangelism and social ministries.”³

In this section, I will underline the centrality of evangelism in Adventist mission, which also includes social ministry. Evangelism is generally understood in Adventism as proclaiming the everlasting gospel, mainly the Three Angels’ messages of Rev 14:6–12. I

¹ Gordon Doss, *Introduction to Adventist Mission* (Silver Springs, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 2008), 6.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

will also show on what grounds Adventists distance themselves from nineteenth-century Social Gospel and twentieth-century Liberation Theology and keep their evangelistic focus. The section will end by showing an example of integration of evangelism and social advocacy in Adventist missions through the legacy of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl.

Development of Adventist Social Consciousness

During its formative years (1839-1888), Adventism primarily focused on Jesus Christ's imminent Second Coming as the only remedy for the world's social problems. They eventually attended to the immediate needs of church members and the community through the local Dorcas⁴ society "where women tied quilts, processed used clothing, and led out in food collections for disaster victims."⁵ The Dorcas Society ministry started in 1879. Later, "some churches wanted to involve men and started the idea of the Good Samaritan Society."⁶ In addition, Adventists did "oppose slavery and have campaigned vigorously for religious liberty and for temperance causes—areas where we have discerned moral content."⁷

However, for the most part of the first half of the twentieth century, before World

⁴ Dorcas is a biblical name. She was an early disciple of Jesus. Her story is told in Acts 9:36–40). She was known for her "good works and charitable deeds."

⁵ Richard W. Schwartz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 459.

⁶ May-Ellen Colon, *Keys to Adventist Community Services* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2008), 12.

⁷ Roger Dudley, *Religion and Positions on Public Issues Among Seventh-day Adventist in the United States*, a research report from the Institute of Church Ministry (Andrews University, March 1989), 3. See also Douglas Morgan, "Adventism Peacemaking Heritage," in *The Peacemaking Remnant*, ed. Douglas Morgan (Silver Springs, MD: Morris Publishing, 2005), 80.

War II, the church embraced fundamentalism⁸ and has had limited social involvement, resisting the influence of the nineteenth-century Social Gospel. However, Schwartz noted that “World War II was a turning point in Adventist humanitarianism.”⁹ The dire conditions of living in the post-World War II era brought Adventist leaders to revisit their position on the Church’s mission orientation.

As devoted to the imminence of Christ’s return as they were, church leaders could not overlook other questions that plagued the world, such as poverty, disasters, war, abuse of the environment, disease, epidemics, illiteracy, prejudice aimed at ethnic and other minorities, sexism, and a host of other conditions that interfered with the well-being of people.¹⁰

By 1953, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists “broadened the concept of service to address many other kinds of needs in a manner more appropriate in an increasingly urbanized society.”¹¹ A new organization was born under the name of Health and Welfare Services. By 1970, this organization got a shorter name—Adventist Community Services (ACS). The idea was to “give local units many more ways of organizing to meet any kind of community need.”¹² In 1956, the Church also created the Seventh-day Adventist Welfare and Relief Agency, Inc. to coordinate and direct the Church’s international relief activities. The entity served as the “community services” branch of the Lay Activities Department and this was for a period of seventeen years. Then, in 1973, it became Seventh-day Adventist World Service (SAWS), a name that

⁸ Reye, “Protestant Fundamentalism and the Adventist Church in the 1920s,” 42.

⁹ Schwartz, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 459.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ May-Ellen Colon, *Keys to Adventist Community Services* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2008), 12.

¹² *Ibid.*

reflected its “broader scope of activities than emergency relief.”¹³

Plantak observed that towards the end of the twentieth century, the Adventist Church started showing a renewed social interest.¹⁴ In 1984, the Adventist Church replaced SAWS by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA),¹⁵ which, according to Wagner Kuhn, “has been chosen as a primary tool in the work of ‘exposing,’ ‘discrediting,’ and trying to address social distortions and depravation.”¹⁶ With ADRA, advocacy has become more prominent in Adventism. ADRA’s social justice statement emphasizes “individuals rejected by society” and commits to “break down barriers of prejudice through community training and by promoting inclusive policies.”¹⁷ In its development effort, ADRA commits to “reach out to vulnerable communities around the world, helping them gain the strength to put their lives back together.”¹⁸

The shift in Adventists’ attitude toward advocacy may have resulted from “the rise of the New Christian Right and the capture of the political agenda by conservative religions in the 1980s.”¹⁹ A striking example of Adventists’ renewed inclination toward “coming out” was the presentation in 1987 of Neal Wilson, President of the General

¹³ Schwartz, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, 459.

¹⁴ Zdravko Plantak, *The Silent Church* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 125.

¹⁵ Wagner Kuhn, *Redemption and Transformation Through Relief and Development* (Benton Harbor, MI: Patterson Printing, 2013), 202.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁷ ADRA, “Social Justice,” accessed October 12, 2017, <https://adra.org/impact-areas/advocacy-social-justice/>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Dudley, *Religion and Positions on Public Issues Among Seventh-day Adventist in the United States*, 3.

Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, to Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and to Konstantin Kharchev, chairman of the Council on Church Affairs, at the February Soviet-sponsored International Forum for a Nonnuclear World and the Survival of Humanity. Wilson's paper was an "appeal to the Soviet Government on behalf of human rights."²⁰ "We come. . . to give voice to our hope for peace and its requisites: justice, moral integrity, the dignity and freedom of the individual—for all those humanitarian and spiritual values for which mankind hungers."²¹

This action by Wilson, along with the 1990 General Conference's position statement on a series of global social issues, was saluted as a "change in denominational practice."²² However, Schwartz noted that "the church was not advocating political activism by the statement, but it was as close as the church had gone to recognize that handling social issues was not alien or unimportant to biblical teachings and the practice of Christianity."²³ Overall, as Dudley pointed out, Adventists have traditionally tended to

²⁰ Dudley, *Religion and Positions on Public Issues Among Seventh-day Adventist in the United States*, 3.

²¹ Neal C. Wilson, "Proposal for Peace and Understanding," *Ministry Magazine*, May 1987, accessed April 11, 202, <http://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/>.

²² At the 1990 General Conference session, denominational leaders released a position statement about pornography, assault weapons, poverty, AIDS, family values, ecology, and chemical dependency, all issues that affected societies and politics around the world [Richard W. Schwartz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 475].

²³ Schwartz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 475.

avoid socio-political questions.²⁴

Key Features of Adventist Outreach to the World

Centrality of Evangelism

As defined by Monte Sahlin, outreach is “a general term which means anything that the church does to reach out beyond its usual audience within church meetings and activities to contact non-members and general public.”²⁵ Then Sahlin defined evangelism as “those activities—public and personal, large-group, small-group and one-on-one—which involve bringing people to accept Christ and studying His message from the Bible.”²⁶ Ellen White, co-founder of the Adventist Church, qualified the work of evangelism as “aggressive work to be done.” She insisted that “evangelistic work, opening the Scriptures to others, warning men and women of what is coming upon the world, is to occupy more and still more of the time of God’s servants.”²⁷ Evangelism, the proclamation of the saving truths of the gospel, including the law of God, is the greatest work not only because the end of time is near, but also because, according to White, it is God’s way to fix moral corruption and broken relationships among men:

A great work is to be accomplished in setting before men the saving truths of the gospel. This is the means ordained by God to stem the tide of moral corruption. This

²⁴ Dudley and Hernandez made a remarkable observation regarding the historical development of Adventists’ approach to politics: “In the 1860s, church leaders were not hesitant to speak out. However, they did it not to bring about societal changes but to illustrate their apocalyptic of doom. By the 1960s, the church would either (1) not speak at all, lest it offend and divide or (2) speak with the intention of bringing change but limiting the issues to certain ones that seemed in the church interests” [Roger L. Dudley and Edwin I. Hernandez, *Citizens of Two Worlds: Religion and Politics Issues Among Seventh-day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1994), 74].

²⁵ Monte Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community: Intuitive Assessment Tools to Launch Relevant Ministry* (Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 2004), iii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, iii.

²⁷ Ellen White, “Aggressive Work to be Done,” *Review and Herald*, August 2, 1906 (parag. 13).

is His means of restoring His moral image in man. It is His remedy for universal disorganization. It is the power that draws men together in unity. To present these truths is the work of the third angel's message. The Lord designs that the presentation of this message shall be the highest, greatest work carried on in the world at this time.²⁸

For Doss, “evangelism is part of the core of the mission paradigm,” with “the distinctive role within mission of being the direct proclamation of the Gospel.”²⁹

Evangelism includes preaching, personal Bible studies, small groups, print publication, radio and TV programs, and electronic media and may take many other different forms.

What needs to be avoided is manipulative methods and “empire building,” using “coercion, deception, manipulation, and exploitation” to force people into accepting the Gospel.³⁰ Healthy evangelism, seeking conversion to Jesus Christ without manipulation and respecting the freedom of individuals to accept or refuse the gospel invitation, has been and will continue to be central to Adventist mission.³¹ Adventist evangelism from the beginning, since the Millerite era, has been qualified as “doctrinal evangelism,” comprised of a series of presentations “embracing a set of doctrines based on prophetic portions of Scripture and proof texts.”³²

Two scholars and historians of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—Gerard Damsteegt and George Knight—have documented the development of the Adventist theology of mission. They show that from the onset, the impulse for Adventist mission

²⁸ Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church Vol. 6* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1901), 11.

²⁹ Doss, *Introduction to Adventist Mission*, 134.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Richard W. Schwartz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 458-459.

has been Rev 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. Adventists’ understanding of their prophetic calling gave early Adventists a sense of urgency in the proclamation of the Three Angels’ messages to all the world before the end comes. Knight highlighted 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.’”³³ Damsteegt noted that “the significance and extent of the mission of the third angel also came to be associated with such texts as Mt. 24:14 and Mk. 16:15, the interpretation of which was directly influenced by successful mission efforts.”³⁴ Knight also showed 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 maybe ‘good work’ but it was not to take the place of emphasizing the preaching of Adventist’s prophetic message.”³⁵ Knight concluded by calling Adventists to hold on to their prophetic heritage in their mission enterprise. Regarding Seventh-day Adventism, he stated that “to deny its prophetic heritage is a certain way to destroy what might be thought of as its missiological mainspring.”³⁶

³³ George Knight, “Remnant Theology and World Mission,” in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World* (Jon L. Dybdahl, ed., 88-95, Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 91.

³⁴ P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1977), 293.

³⁵ Knight, “Remnant Theology and World Mission,” 92.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

Both Damsteegt and Knight concluded that due to the apocalyptic-eschatological motivation of the Adventist movement and its premillennialism, evangelism, understood as the proclamation of the Three Angels' messages, will always be the *raison d'être* of the Adventist Church. All other activities, including social ministry or social justice advocacy, are secondary.

Indeed, in the 1970s, Kenneth H. Wood, Editor of the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald*, wrote an editorial where he pointed to the “unique mission” the Church has to perform—“to carry the message of salvation to all men in all lands.”³⁷ He stated the following:

Christ's kingdom is not of this world, hence the organized body of Christ must avoid entanglements with governments, and with efforts to bring in the kingdom of God by human legislation. The church must marshal all its resources and focus all its energies on the task of setting forth clearly the vital issues in 'the great controversy,' and of preparing the world for the imminent return of Christ.³⁸

Although the general tone of the editorial indicates a concern regarding “division, disunity and schism” that is often the result when church leaders are split over political matters,³⁹ there is an implicit warning against involvement in social advocacy aiming at breaking down unjust systems and policies in governments.

However, the Adventist Church does have a social consciousness because of its “wholistic theology of the human being as a unity of physical, emotional, and social

³⁷ Kenneth H. Wood, “Unity, Politics, and Church Members,” editorial, *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* 34 (26 August 1971), 2.

³⁸ Wood, “Unity, Politics, and Church Members,” 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.* The article quotes Ellen White who elsewhere recommended not taking part in “political strife” and “refrain[ing] from bringing into the church or school ideas that will lend to contention or disorder. Dissension is the moral poison taken into the system by human beings who are selfish.” See Ellen G. White, *Fundamental of Christian Education*, (Washington, DC: White Estate, 1978), 483.

dimensions.”⁴⁰ Doss acknowledged the wholistic nature of Adventist mission, but also recognized that “in various times and places it may not have achieved the ideal coordination between evangelism and social ministry.”⁴¹ Here is how Schwartz and Greenleaf summarized Adventist outreach by the close of the preceding century:

At the end of the twentieth century the predominant effort of Adventists was still to reach the world evangelistically with the message of God’s saving grace. They preached a new heaven and a new earth, but world events had drawn attention to chronic human misery in many parts of the world.⁴²

Compassion Ministries

Sahlin defined compassion ministry as “another term used to refer to activities in which the church meets the non-religious needs of people in the community, both those outside the membership of the church, as well as some with the membership or who may be regular attenders but not yet baptized members.”⁴³ The term “compassion ministries” is often used interchangeably for “community services,” “humanitarian work,” and

⁴⁰ Doss, *Introduction to Adventist Mission*, 135.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴² Schwartz and Greenleaf, *Light Bearers*, 476.

⁴³ Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*, iii.

“community relations.”⁴⁴

Most of Adventist’s compassionate work was being carried out through the Adventist and Development Agency (ADRA) and Adventist Community Services (ACS). ADRA is “the global humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” delivering “relief and development assistance to individuals in more than 118 countries—regardless of their ethnicity, political affiliation, gender, or religious association.” ADRA partners with “local communities, organizations, and governments, . . . to deliver culturally relevant programs and build local capability for sustainable change.”⁴⁵ ACS operates at local church level and includes various types of agencies and programs that are sponsored by their respective Adventist Church organizations. ACS in the North American Division (NAD) is thus described by Sahlin:

Adventist Community Services is a vast coalition of local projects, programs, and groups; a network of grassroots ministries, not a monolithic departmental structure. Not all of the local entities even use the name ACS, preferring some local label, such as Good Neighbor House or Better Living Center, or some variation, such as Seventh-day Adventist Community Health Services or Adventist Inner City Ministries.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*, iii/iv. Sahlin provided his definition of each concept he used to talk about compassion ministries. *Community service*: “any activity which provides a real service to people in the community who are not members of the church. This is not meant to refer specifically to the traditional Community Services program sponsored by the Adventist Church.” *Humanitarian work*: “a third term similar to ‘community service’ and ‘compassion ministry,’ although it has specific, technical meaning in the secular world. It refers to efforts to serve basic, human needs such as hunger, thirst, clothing, shelter, health care, protection, jobs, education, belonging to a community, etc. It means what the church does to address human needs in the community outside of its religious role. It is when we serve in Christ’s name instead of proclaim His gospel or teach His Word.” *Community relations*: “another technical term. It is akin to ‘public relations,’ but it means activities designed to develop and maintain good relations with an entire community structure, focusing on key leaders and organizations. ‘Public relations,’ on the other hand, refers to activities focused on the general public, the mass audience, sometimes ignoring the fact that communities exist.”

⁴⁵ Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), <https://adra.org/about-adra> (accessed June 27, 2021).

⁴⁶ Monte Sahlin, *Ministries of Compassion* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 1994), 15.

Adventist Community Services in some areas is known as the Dorcas Society.

The *SDA Church Manual 2016* specifies the main tasks of the local church ACS or Dorcas Society:

This organization gathers and prepares clothing, food and other supplies for those in need and works closely with the Adventist Men, deacons, deaconesses, and other church departments in community outreach. Adventist Community Services or Dorcas Society ministry, however, includes more than giving material aid. It focuses on identifying needs and responding with services based on these specific needs.⁴⁷

In addition to the work of ADRA worldwide and of the local agencies organized under the umbrella of ACS or Dorcas Society, Adventist outreach also includes the Church education and health networks. In the area of education, the Adventist Church has created the Department of Education, which is “responsible for the coordination, promotion, training, and quality of the global Seventh-day Adventist educational program, which includes over 8,500 schools, colleges and universities, with over 108,500 teachers and 1,954,920 students.”⁴⁸ Adventists’ interest in education is driven by their understanding of education as “the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers.”⁴⁹ Accordingly, Adventists stipulate the aim and mission of Adventist education as follows: “Adventist education prepares people for useful and joy-filled lives, fostering friendship with God, whole-person development, Bible-based values, and selfless service in accordance with the Seventh-day Adventist mission to the

⁴⁷ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *SDA Church Manual 2016* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press), 101-102.

⁴⁸ Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Department of Education*, <https://education.adventist.org>.

⁴⁹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 13.

world.”⁵⁰ In the area of health, since the inception of the Church in 1863, Adventists have promoted “health evangelism” through various ministries, their medical institutions, and their professional personnel.⁵¹ Adventists believe that “Christians should have a concern for health, not because of any ceremonial or legalistic significance, but for the practical reason that only in a sound body can they render the most effective service to God and to others.”⁵² Ellen White advocated the fusion of health ministries with evangelism, calling the medical missionary work “the arm” of the gospel ministry.⁵³ Concerning the evangelistic role of physicians, she stated,

Let the medical workers present the important truths of the third angel’s message from the physician’s viewpoint. Physicians of consecration and talent can secure a hearing in large cities at times when other men would fail. As physicians unite with ministers in proclaiming the gospel in the great cities of the land, their combined labors will result in influencing many minds in favor of the truth for this time.⁵⁴

Across the globe, wherever the Adventist Church is established, it is not uncommon to witness health promotion being carried out or sponsored by local churches in the form of cooking schools, exercise classes, health fairs and screenings, smoking cessation programs, and other health-promotion activities; a variety of structured

⁵⁰ Curriculum and Instruction Resource Center Linking Educators (CIRCLE), “Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Education,” *General Conference Policy Manual* (2003), 221-228 (Education – Departmental Policies: FE 05, FE 10), accessed June 28, 2021, <http://circle.adventist.org/files/download/PhilStat2003.pdf>.

⁵¹ Don F. Neufeld, “Health Evangelism,” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1976), 681.

⁵² Neufeld, “Health Principles,” *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, 574.

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health and Instructions to Medical Workers* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1951), 392.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1932), 248.

programs for lifestyle modification, health clubs, health screening vans, and food outlets are sponsored by Church Conferences and other Church-related entities.⁵⁵

Advocacy

The Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, founded in 1901, “works in cooperation with other church departments to advocate public policy positions on issues in areas as diverse as health, education, peace issues, environmental protection, women’s’ issues, children’s’ issues, the rights of prisoners, and aid and development.”⁵⁶ Lenart Falk cited John Graz, former director of PARL, who provided an official definition of advocacy: “Being the voice of the voiceless, the sign of the kingdom of God in the world.”⁵⁷

In the latter part of the twentieth century, the Adventist Church publicly affirmed its interest in social ministries and the work of advocacy by issuing 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.”⁵⁸ According to the statement, the involvement of the

⁵⁵ Carol Easley Allen, “Chronology of Major Developments in Adventist Health Promotion and Wellness,” *Adventist Review*, June 24, 2009, accessed June 28, 2021, <https://www.adventistreview.org/archive-2676>.

⁵⁶ Public Affairs and Religious Liberty, “What is PARL?,” accessed November 28, 2021, <https://www.adventistliberty.org/what-is-parl>.

⁵⁷ Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?” 296.

⁵⁸ Seventh-day Adventist Church, “Global Poverty,” accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/global-poverty/>.

Church is not limited to just some paternalistic or gratuitous benevolence services here and there. It 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).⁵⁹

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. On the issue of justice, the document states:

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.⁶⁰

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 be fully committed to social ministry and the work of advocacy.

However, official Church statements on justice and human rights issues, as powerful and beautiful as they may sound, are not disseminated throughout the world

⁵⁹ Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Global Poverty," accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/global-poverty/>.

⁶⁰ Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Peace," accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/call-for-peace/>.

church family, and very few church officials and members are aware of them.⁶¹ Falk also criticized the “statement approach” for not being proactive enough.⁶² Nevertheless, those statements can potentially serve as encouragement, conceptual framework, and terms of reference for a more strategic advocacy at various levels of the Adventist Church.

Relationship Between Evangelism and Social Ministry

Commenting on the Great Commission in Matt 28:19–20, Sahlin stated the following:

Today, we describe the ‘go’ element in Christ’s commission as the ministry of presence or visible outreach and humanitarian work. We refer to the ‘baptize’ element as the ministry of evangelism, and ‘teach’ element as the ministry of nurture. This tripartite set of activities is necessary in order to for any missionary enterprise to be faithful to the Bible’s definition of the Great Commission.⁶³

According to this model as laid out by Sahlin, *evangelism* and *social ministry*, two separate set of activities, should work together alongside *nurturing* as partners in a tripartite partnership. However, in Adventism, evangelism has been central since the beginning of the Advent Movement and often excludes social action. 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.

A few Adventist scholars have come to the forefront advocating a stronger integration of evangelism with social advocacy. For Rudi Maier, Jesus was not interested

⁶¹ Roy E. Branson, “Taming the Apocalypse: Adventists and Apartheid,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 61 (December 1987): 28.

⁶² Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?” 296.

⁶³ Sahlin, *Understanding Your Community*, ii.

in offering only eternal life and inner freedom to individuals while ignoring their human condition. Maier understood that 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."⁶⁴ To the question of whether social service and development work were evangelization or not, Maier believed 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."⁶⁵

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."⁶⁶ In addition, many of the local ACS's projects are "amateur in character," consisting of "traditional 'handouts' such as the food pantries and clothing programs"⁶⁷ rather than

⁶⁴ Rudi Maier, "Evangelism and Development," in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*, ed. Jon L. Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 84.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁷ Monte Sahlin, *Compassion Ministries: What Do Pastors Know? (A Survey of Adventist Ministers in North America Conducted for the North American Division by the Center for Creative Ministry, 2013)*, 17. In this study, Sahlin indicated that the respondents [NAD pastors] clearly saw the need for compassion ministries implemented by local ACS organizations, but they were ambivalent about the effectiveness of these ministries, pointing to a need for further research. It is worth noting that there is provision for advocacy work in ACS guidelines laid out in the leaflet produced by the General Conference in 2008. It outlines four levels of community services at which ACS may decide to operate: level 1 – "relief"; level 2 – "economic development"; level 3 – "systemic (structural) change" or "advocacy"; and level 4 – "community action." The document encourages "each ACS to decide locally at which level it can currently work, ever striving to increase its capacity to work at more challenging levels" (*Key to Adventist Community Services*, 17).

sustainable development programs or advocacy aiming at tackling the roots of people's vulnerability.

For David Trim, Adventists in the time of Ellen White (late nineteenth century) shared the attitudes of other premillennialists of their days 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 being implemented by the government in order to mitigate the effects of the upcoming judgment.⁶⁸ Trim noted that Adventists in that era 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."⁶⁹

For 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."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ David Trim, "Missionaries as Conversionary, Social, and Political Actors," (Paper presented at the Jesus and Politics Conference, Andrews University, 18-20 October 2019), 15-16. David Trim is director of the Office of Archives and Research at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁰ Trim, "Missionaries as Conversionary, Social, and Political Actors," 22.

Ana and Ferdinand Stahl: A Model of Integrated Mission⁷¹

This section 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, I 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 section 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. It provides a specific example of how one early Adventist missionary pioneer approached questions of the relationship between the gospel and social reform and sheds some helpful light on the mindset in the earlier mission period of the Church.

From Conversion to the Mission Field

Ferdinand Stahl was born on January 3, 1874 in Pentwater, Michigan. He was only eight months old when he lost his father, who had been 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.⁷² The Stahls became Seventh-day Adventists in 1899 after they bought a book from a Seventh-day Adventist and studied the Bible together. Following

⁷¹ This section builds on previous research done by the author in partial fulfillment of class requirements and published in the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* (JAMS).

⁷² Trim, "Missionaries as Conversionary, Social, and Political Actors," 21.

their conversion to the Adventist faith, they decided to “dedicate their lives to service for others.”⁷³ 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 twenty-seven 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, after 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.”⁷⁴

It was in this context that on February 4, 1909, the Stahls wrote to Ellen G. White for advice. In their letter, they expressed their disappointment with the Church’s 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.”⁷⁵ On March 5, 1909, Ellen White’s son, William Clarence White, answered, “Mother wishes me to say to you that the Lord

⁷³ Robert G. Wearer, “Ferdinand Stahl, Missionary to Peru,” in *Adventist Heritage* 12, no 2, 15-26, (Summer 1988), 17.

⁷⁴ F. A. Stahl, Letter #2. Letter to E. G. White on February 4, 1909. WDF 3042 #1-7. E. G. White Research Center.

⁷⁵ F. A. Stahl, Letter #2. Letter to E. G. White on February 4, 1909. WDF 3042 #1-7. E. G. White Research Center.

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.”⁷⁶ William White offered the Stahls his personal advice, saying that from reports coming to him from Ohio, it would be better for the Stahls 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.”⁷⁷ They followed his counsel. They gave up on everything and sought an opportunity to serve wherever God would call them.

Robert G. Wearner described 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 inhuman 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.”⁷⁸ He was excited about the idea of sending two “consecrated workers” who were willing to risk their lives in order to alleviate the sufferings of the descendants of the Incas living in the highlands

⁷⁶ W. C. White, Letter #3. Letter to F. A Stahl on March 5, 1909. WDF 3042 #1-7. E. G. White Research Center.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Wearner, “Ferdinand Stahl, Missionary to Peru,” 15.

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.⁷⁹

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 United States on furlough during 1926. The Stahls' 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 victims of centuries of exploitation by 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.

⁷⁹ Wearner, "Ferdinand Stahl, Missionary to Peru," 23.

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.”⁸⁰ 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 move 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.⁸¹ Ferdinand relentlessly pursued his task of evangelizing the tribal people. Although he suffered great hazards because of the rapids, 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.

⁸⁰ Ferdinand Anthony Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1920), 105.

⁸¹ Ferdinand Anthony Stahl, *In the Amazon Jungles* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1932), 7.

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.”⁸² Ferdinand quickly cabled the General Conference headquarters: “Iquitos Peru, Great prospects, (Signed) Stahl.”⁸³ 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 a 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, held meetings for the people, and soon had an organized church of a fine class of people. Among groups of White people, they found 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.

⁸² Stahl, *In the Amazon Jungles*, 102.

⁸³ Wearer, “Ferdinand Stahl, Missionary to Peru,” 24.

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 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.⁸⁴ 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 95% of the population in total subjection. Land expropriations, forced labor, and arbitrary taxation were the chief tools of oppression. Stahl vividly 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.

Although the Indians were paid for their work by land, once it became clear the land was valuable, the colonizers pursued shady legal strategies to cheat the natives out of the land.

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 have been lost, or have become unreadable because of great age; therefore in the suits with the powerful landowners, the Indians cannot prove their ownership by written titles, and most of the best lands have been taken from them. The system of

⁸⁴ Stahl, *In the Amazon Jungles*, 4.

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.⁸⁵

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, the streets were often blocked, their horses were struck with clubs, and they were threatened with death. Indians who accepted the Adventist message were in some instances beaten almost to death.⁸⁶

Social and Spiritual Impact of the Stahls' Mission

Education

Charles Teel wrote extensively about the Stahls. In one of his articles, he gave a glimpse of how Ana and Ferdinand fostered "a social transformation that affected social

⁸⁵ Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas*, 110.

⁸⁶ Stahl, *In the Amazon Jungles*, 157-158.

institutions as well as personal transformation that impacted individual minds, hearts, and bodies.”⁸⁷

Teel reported 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% (Aymara and Quechua) in a form of “near-feudal” conditions.⁸⁸ 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 Camacho. 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

⁸⁷ Charles Teel Jr., “Fernando and Ana Stahl: Missionary Social Activist?” *Journal of Adventist Education* 75, no. 5 (Summer 2013): 24.

⁸⁸ Teel, “Fernando and Ana Stahl: Missionary Social Activist?,” 24.

hygiene and religion.”⁸⁹ There were bumps and all kind of obstacles 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.⁹⁰

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 soon became the bastion of schools and churches, which were sprouting up like mushrooms. The schools ranged from humble home schools to large institutions. Teel gave a snapshot of the results of the Stahls’ 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 Stahls’ successor, E. H. Wilcox, reported that on one unforgettable day, 12 requests for village schools arrived from various villages.⁹¹

Here is the amazing fact: 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

⁸⁹ Teel, “Fernando and Ana Stahl: Missionary Social Activist?,” 25.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

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.⁹²

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 those who refused to attend Catholic religious feasts.⁹³ However, this was about to change through the advocacy work of the Stahls.

On a construction site where the Stahls was 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. Since the Stahls were not there, the bishop confiscated the keys and other materials from the caretaker, while breaking up others. The mob then tried to compel the Indians living around 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 into 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

⁹² Teel, “Fernando and Ana Stahl: Missionary Social Activist?,” 25.

⁹³ Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas*, 175.

called before the great judgment seat of God, and would have to answer for the judgment rendered upon these poor, misused people.”⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵ The newspaper then went on to praise 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.”⁹⁶

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 that granted religious liberty to all denominations.⁹⁷

Learning from the Stahls’ Approach to Mission

The Stahls’ missionary approach embodies Ellen White’s statement:

⁹⁴ Stahl, *In the Land of the Incas*, 163-164.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177-179.

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.'⁹⁸

I have identified the following core pillars in the Stahls' approach to mission: immersion, hospitality, care for the sick, education, training of workers, advocacy, and evangelization.

They invested their first two years to learning the local language and culture and to becoming familiar with the indigenous customs. In his two books—*In the Land of the Incas* and *In the Amazon Jungles*—Ferdinand described in minute detail 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."⁹⁹ 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 for them did not mean fatalism or withdrawal from the world. They believed strongly in the imminent

⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 143.

⁹⁹ Wearner, "Ferdinand Stahl, Missionary to Peru," 23.

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*” (emphasis supplied).¹⁰⁰

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 Stahls’ 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. Nevertheless, it was impossible to remain oblivious to the plight of the indigenous population who were suffering from numerous social evils.

Wearner highlighted Ferdinand Stahl’s task of *evangelizing* the tribal people who had been untouched by the gospel.¹⁰¹ He pointed to how Stahl carefully instructed the native people in the *doctrines of their faith*.¹⁰² 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.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Stahl, Letter #2, February 4, 1909.

¹⁰¹ Wearner, “Ferdinand Stahl, Missionary to Peru,” 23.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Wearner, “Ferdinand Stahl, Missionary to Peru,” 23.

They considered it important to baptize those who embraced the Adventist faith, but baptism was not merely a quantitative goal to be reached at all costs. 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."¹⁰⁴ 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.¹⁰⁵

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 affirmed 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 Stahls' early converts later wrote: "The Adventist school system opened the way for the indigenous population of the altiplano to achieve selfhood and

¹⁰⁴ Stahl, *In the Amazon Jungles*, 116.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

self-sufficiency. The Stahl gospel both *converted hearts* and *changed the social fabric* of the highlands”¹⁰⁶ (emphasis supplied).

In the framework of the Stahls’ 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 described the Stahls as “missionaries, visionaries and revolutionaries.”¹⁰⁷ He cited Samuel Escobar, who in his book *La Fe Evangelica y Las Teologias de la Liberacion*, stated 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.”¹⁰⁸ According to Teel, Escobar, at the very outset of his book, pointed 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.”¹⁰⁹

Adventist Disagreement with the Social Gospel¹¹⁰

The Social Gospel is a religious social-reform movement prominent in the United States from about 1870 to 1920. This section will offer a historical overview of the

¹⁰⁶ Charles Teel Jr., “Fernando and Ana Stahl—Mediators of Personal and Social Transformation,” in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*, ed. Jon L. Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 279.

¹⁰⁷ Charles Teel Jr., “Missionaries, Visionaries and Revolutionaries,” *Adventist Heritage* 12, no 2 (Summer 1988):3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ This section is an expanded version of a term paper I previously submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the course MSSN 826 Theology of Mission, Fall 2018, Andrews University.

movement, outlining the major influences on its emergence, and its basic theological presuppositions with regards to soteriology and eschatology, as laid down in Walter Rauschenbusch's *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. Then will follow an Adventist critique and contrast to the Social Gospel, unveiling the cause of the reticence of Seventh-day Adventists to embrace the movement.

Historical Development

Theological and Philosophical Context

The formation of American Protestant liberalism,¹¹¹ which became a full-fledged doctrine in the nineteenth century, was influenced by Europe with several movements. One of the main influences came from Arminianism, or Arminian theology. Jacob Arminius (1559/60–1609) “rejected the Calvinist notion of predestination and stressed individualism and free will.”¹¹² Arminians believed that individuals played a role in obtaining their salvation, and many American Protestants who embraced liberalism used Arminian theology to critique Calvinist ideas. A second influence came from the European Enlightenment with philosophers such as John Locke (1632–1704) who argued that “humans received knowledge through their ability to reason rather than from God.”¹¹³ Other scholars such as Sir Isaac Newton (1642 –1727) “challenged the dominant Christian conceptions of the universe by explaining nature through physical

¹¹¹ Cara Burnidge, “Protestant Liberalism,” *Encyclopedia of Religion in America*, 1:1783: “In religion, *liberalism* refers not to a political paradigm but to philosophical and religious positions with social, economic, and political implications. Unlike conservative Protestants, Liberal Protestants display an interest in adapting Protestant thought and practice to modern challenges. Unlike secular humanism, liberal Protestants prefer to work within existing social, economic and political structure.”

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Burnidge, “Protestant Liberalism,” 1783.

laws rather than revelation.”¹¹⁴ American liberalism was further influenced by “Enlightenment values of intellectual inquiry, religious toleration, and the use of reason and empiricism.”¹¹⁵

Protestant American liberalism developed into a distinctive movement with the emergence of Unitarianism in the early nineteenth century. Unitarians distanced themselves from other Protestants on the basis of their “denial of the Trinity, the notion that God exists in the three forms: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁶ Major proponents of Unitarianism are William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), who insisted on using reason when reading the Bible, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1838), who challenged the historicity of Jesus’ miracles and claimed that supernatural beings were not necessary for revelation. They founded what Burnidge calls a “loosely knit intellectual and literary movement known as transcendentalism.”¹¹⁷

Alongside the consolidation of Protestant liberalism among Unitarians and Transcendentalists, liberalism also had a presence among evangelicals,¹¹⁸ who “rejected orthodox Calvinism and its strict adherence to the doctrine of original sin and determinism” while they “embraced biblical criticism, science, and scholarship.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Burnidge, “Protestant Liberalism,” 1783.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805-1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 27.

¹¹⁷ Burnidge, “Protestant Liberalism,” 1784

¹¹⁸ According to Burnidge (1:1785), main figures, collectively known as “Princes of the Pulpit,” included Episcopalian Philips Brooks (1885–1893), Congregationalists Horace Bushnell (1802–1876), Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), and Lyman Abbott (1835–1922).

¹¹⁹ Burnidge, “Protestant Liberalism,” 1785. See also William R. Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Durham, UK: Duke University, 1992), 4-75.

Liberalism moved toward maturity following the Civil War and the rapid industrialization and urbanization. This was the time when American scholars began to follow trends among European intellectuals who “dramatically departed from traditional approaches to Christian thought and history.”¹²⁰ Comparative religion became a field of study in higher education, with Max Mueller (1823–1900) promoting the “scientific” study of religion. The field of social science emerged in the early twentieth century as an empirical study of formally “moral” topics such as economic, politics, and society.¹²¹ Social science and theology merged with the academic study of Christian ethics. “University courses that addressed Christianity’s approach to public issues such as poverty, capitalism, and unionization became common place.”¹²² Thus was born another form of Protestant liberalism—the Social Gospel.

Socio-economic Context

The Social Gospel emerged during the period between the Civil War (1861–1865) and the dawn of the twentieth century, a period of great prosperity in the United States, known as the Gilded Age.¹²³ However, wealth was not distributed evenly, leading to

¹²⁰ Burnidge, “Protestant Liberalism,” 1785.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1786.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Allan Axelrod, *The Gilded Age: 1876 – 1912 Overture to the American Century* (New York, NY: Sterling, 2017), 2, 3. Also Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), xvii. Nell Irvin Painter reported that by the end of the nineteenth century, steel production soared to such an extent that the United States of America had exceeded the combined outputs of its two rivals, Great Britain and Germany, and could boast to become the “granary of the world.”

indecent social disparity.¹²⁴ Andrew Carnegie, a famous prosperous businessman during the Gilded Age period (from the late 1860s to 1896), praised and justified the social inequality of his days on the basis of the Darwinian “survival of the fittest” principle.¹²⁵ He insisted that this “intense Individualism,” despite its negative social effects, was the foundation upon which civilization rests. The Social Gospel had come as an answer to the Gospel of Wealth that was propounded by Andrew Carnegie.¹²⁶

The Theology of the Social Gospel

One way the Social Gospel differs from the Gospel of Wealth, which was based on an intense individualism, is through its theology, particularly its soteriology and eschatology. Regarding soteriology, it interprets the Kingdom of God as requiring social, as well as individual salvation and sought the betterment of industrialized society through the application of the biblical principles of charity and justice.¹²⁷ Walter

¹²⁴ Here is how Painter described the picture: The wealthiest 1% of families in 1890 owned 51% of real and personal property; the percent of families at the bottom owned only 1.2% of all property. Together, the wealthy and well-to-do (12% of families) owned 86% of the wealth. The poorer and middle classes, who represented 88% of families, owned 14% of the wealth (Painter, xix).

¹²⁵ Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1962). For Carnegie, the United States owed its wonderful material progress to the law of competition, which needed to be sustained at all costs, and even if it was “sometimes hard on the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department” (Carnegie, 16, 17). He exposed his philosophy of “Wealth” in an article he published in June 1889 in the *North American Review*. He stated, “We accept and welcome great inequality of environment; the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few; and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential to the future progress of the human race.”

¹²⁶ Arthur Hiebert, *The Theology of the Social Gospel and the Seventh-day Adventists* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1971), 5.

¹²⁷ Dorrien, *The Making of American Theology*, 311-312.

Rauschenbusch¹²⁸ rejected what he called the “old theology” that stresses the “power and guilt of sin.”¹²⁹ The Social Gospel theology, rather, concentrates on “questions of public morality, on wrongs done by whole classes or profession of men, on sins which enervate and submerge entire mill towns or agricultural states.”¹³⁰

Rauschenbusch calls groups or communities¹³¹ “super-personal forces,” which are immeasurably more potent and enduring than individuals.”¹³² While they are created with good intentions, they often “drift into evil under sinister leadership, or under the pressure of need or temptation”;¹³³ when this happens, they become super-personal forces of evil. What the Social Gospel considers of highest importance is the redemption of the super-personal forces.

Regarding eschatology, the idea of a millennial hope was seen as a force of benefit to mankind, along with the Social Gospel.

Our chief interest in any millennium is the desire for a social order in which the worth and freedom of every least human being will be honoured and protected; . . . and in

¹²⁸ Walter Rauschenbusch, was a clergyman and theology professor who led the Social Gospel movement in the United States. Reinhold Niebuhr called Rauschenbusch “the real founder of social Christianity in this country. . . . Its most brilliant and generally satisfying exponent” (cover page of the book *A Theology for the Social Gospel*).

¹²⁹ Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1917), 36.

¹³⁰ Ibid. Rauschenbusch considered the doctrine of the fall based on the Genesis account as “the product of speculative interest mainly, and that the most energetic consciousness of sin can exist without drawing from this doctrine.” Sin is not rebellion of a man against God as theology defines it. “Sin is not a private transaction between the sinner and God.” “Sin is essentially selfishness.”

¹³¹ “High school fraternities; any college community; a trade union; the I. W. W.; the Socialist Party; Tammany Hall; any military organization; an officers’ corps; the police force; the inside group of a local political party; the Free Masons; the Grange; the legal profession; a conspiracy like the Black Hand” (Rauschenbusch, 71).

¹³² Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 71.

¹³³ Ibid.

which the spiritual good of humanity will be set high above the private profit interests of all materialistic groups.¹³⁴

However, regarding the way this Christian ideal will be fulfilled, Rauschenbusch urged shifting “from catastrophe to development” terminology. He saw the coming of the Kingdom of God in all ethical and spiritual progress of humankind.¹³⁵

The theology of the Social Gospel has been criticized by conservative thinkers and even by its former defendant, Reinold Niebuhr, who questioned its importance.¹³⁶ We will now turn to an Adventist critique of the Social Gospel.

Adventist Contrast to the Social Gospel Theology

Arthur Hiebert, an Adventist theologian, criticized the Social Gospel, arguing that “the foundation of its theology was not balanced, and would therefore not be able to endure.”¹³⁷ He observed that Adventists were not blind nor indifferent to the conditions of laboring classes and the poor for whom the future had little or nothing to offer. Ellen White wrote, “The conditions that face Christian workers in the great cities, constitute a

¹³⁴ Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 224.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹³⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God of America* (Chicago, IL: Willett, Clark & Co., 1937), 77. Alongside Rauschenbusch, Niebuhr used to view sin as a social phenomenon and capitalism as immoral, but after witnessing the two World Wars, he changed his mind against the concepts of the Social Gospel. He found that the Social Gospel was unrealistic in its outlook and that it contradicts the Bible and its concept of man. Niebuhr was skeptical about the idea that a perfect world could be established in the present corrupt world as the leaders of the Social Gospel pretended. Niebuhr described the Social Gospel as “a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.” See also “religion,” *Great Issues in American Life. A Conspectus, Vol. II: The Annals of America: A History* (Chicago: Wm, 1968), 434.

¹³⁷ Arthur Hiebert, “The Theology of the Social Gospel and the Seventh-day Adventists,” a Report Presented in Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Course CH 570 History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Center of Adventist Research, Andrews University, 1971), 5.

solemn appeal for untiring effort in behalf of the millions living within the shadow of impending doom.”¹³⁸

However, Adventists adopted “realism” over the “idealism” of the Social Gospelers, according to Hiebert. Adventists believed that the main object in working with people was to be the conversion of men and women to Christ. A transformation of the heart brings remedy to the problem at its root, and when this objective has been reached, the person would be on his way to become independent of others and able to work for Christ toward the salvation of others.¹³⁹ White also called for balance in every part of the work: “We talk and write much about the neglected poor; should not some attention be given also to the neglected rich?”¹⁴⁰

Other important considerations in Adventist social welfare include the distinction between those poor who have caused their own poverty and those who came into that situation of distress without being able to control the circumstances. Ellen White called the latter “worthy poor.” Appealing to the rich, she stated, “Deal liberally with your poor brethren, and use your means to advance the cause of God. The worthy poor, those who are made poor by misfortune and sickness, deserve your special care and help.”¹⁴¹

From White’s perspective, Adventists should focus on the “worthy poor,” and while helping them, it is of utmost importance to restore their self-respect and dignity.

¹³⁸ Ellen G. White, *Present Truth and Review and Herald Articles*, vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald), 27.

¹³⁹ Hiebert, “The Theology of the Social Gospel and the Seventh-day Adventists,” 10-11.

¹⁴⁰ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 555.

¹⁴¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church, vol. VI* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 202.

Rather than keeping them in a state of dependency, they should be given opportunities to be of benefit to others. White stated that “instead of encouraging the poor that they can have their eating and drinking provided free or nearly so, we should place them where they can help themselves. We should endeavor to provide them with work, and if necessary teach them how to work.”¹⁴²

Another way to build their self-esteem is to encourage the poor to have a part in giving to God: “The poor are not to be excluded from the privilege of giving.”¹⁴³

Learning from the Social Gospel Movement

It is important to remember that the Social Gospel grew out of the abuses of industrialism. In spite of the many faults¹⁴⁴ that one may accuse the Social Gospel of the Progressive Era of having, it has the merit of raising awareness on “corporate sins” and the idea of “social salvation.”¹⁴⁵ During the 1930s, most of the Social Gospel’s prominent concerns were satisfied through the rise of organized labor and the legislation of the New Deal by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Specific gains were secured in the

¹⁴² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. VI, 278.

¹⁴³ Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1952), 203.

¹⁴⁴ Gary Dorrien listed some of the major faults of the Social Gospel movement of the Progressive era: “It was sentimental, moralistic, and culturally chauvinist; it spoke the language of triumphalist missionary religion; its various causes were compromised by its middle-class interests and its late-Victorian sensibility; with notable exceptions, it gave tepid support to, and sometimes opposed outright, the struggle for racial justice and women’s rights; its antiwar convictions were promptly put aside after a liberal Protestant president committed the United States to making the world safe for democracy; after the war, much of its leadership reduced the social gospel to pacifist idealism” [Gary Dorrien, “Social Salvation: The Social Gospel as Theology and Economics,” in *The Social Gospel in American Religion*, ed. Christopher Evans (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 101].

¹⁴⁵ Dorrien, “Social Salvation: The Social Gospel as Theology and Economics,” 102.

area of labor reforms—including abolition of child labor, a shorter workweek, a living wage, and factory regulation.¹⁴⁶

The Adventist Church, as both a religious movement and a global organization, with its multilevel networks of education and health institutions and publishing houses cannot afford to remain oblivious to matters related to social ethics and corporate social responsibility. The theology of the Social Gospel can inspire Adventists to do more to uplift the lower classes as other denominations such the Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists have done.¹⁴⁷ Hiebert reported that in May of 1908, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church gave expressions of support in a social creed which mainly concerned the welfare of the industrial labor class.¹⁴⁸

Adventist Disagreement with Liberation Theology¹⁴⁹

The biblical narrative indicates that God consistently intervenes to liberate human beings from social and political oppression, as well as from the devil and impure spirits,

¹⁴⁶ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “Social Gospel – American Religious Movement,” accessed October 4, 2018), <https://www.britannica.com/event/Social-Gospel>.

¹⁴⁷ Williston Walker reported that the Social Gospel was especially prominent in the life and work of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists of the North, and among Congregationalists and Episcopalians. “Courses on social ethics were added to seminary curricula, and denominational departments of social action were founded under social Christian influence. A number of social settlements in underprivileged areas were founded under Protestant auspices, and many institutional churches to bring social services to the urban masses were erected. The social emphasis was strongly felt on the mission field, where agricultural, medical, and educational missions were expanded” [Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1959), 518].

¹⁴⁸ Hiebert, “The Theology of the Social Gospel and the Seventh-day Adventists,” 7.

¹⁴⁹ This section builds on previous research done by the author in partial fulfillment of class requirements, Christian Social Ethics, Fall 2019, Andrews University.

from temptations and the bondage of sin, and from death itself.¹⁵⁰ In 1973, against the backdrop of Latin American countries' struggles to free themselves from poverty and oppressive political regimes and establish just and fraternal societies, Gustavo Gutiérrez published *A Theology of Liberation*, which he intended to be “an attempt at reflection, based on the Gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation, in the oppressed and exploited land of Latin America.”¹⁵¹

After a brief historical overview of the emergence of Liberation Theology, this section examines Gutiérrez' conception of liberation and his theology with respect to soteriology, ecclesiology and missiology, and eschatology. I underline areas of dissention with Adventist theology and praxis. I then discuss Gutiérrez' theology, identifying its major shortcomings, but argue that it has relevance for the Adventist Church in the fact that it offers a framework to analyze systemic injustice and close the gap between theology and praxis.

Overview of the Liberation Theology Movement

Liberation Theology is a religious movement that emerged in Latin America within the Roman Catholic Church in the late twentieth century. It aimed to change the living conditions of the poor and the oppressed through involvement in political and social actions. It promoted both a heightened awareness of the “sinful” socioeconomic

¹⁵⁰ Joel B. Green, *Dictionary of Scriptures and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2011), 480.

¹⁵¹ Gutiérrez Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), ix.

structures that caused social inequities and active participation in changing those structures.¹⁵²

The birth of the Liberation Theology movement is usually dated back to the second Latin American Bishops' Conference, which was held in Medellín, Colombia in 1968. On that occasion, the attending bishops introduced a document that asserted the rights of the poor and critiqued the role of industrialized nations in impoverishing developing countries by unscrupulously exploiting their meager resources. The movement's seminal text, *Teología de la liberación [A Theology of Liberation]*, was written by Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian priest and theologian. Other leaders of the movement included the Belgian-born Brazilian priest José Comblin, Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador, Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff, Jesuit scholar Jon Sobrino, and Archbishop Helder Câmara of Brazil.¹⁵³

A variety of contemporary versions of Liberation Theology, "loosely-connected and often conflicting,"¹⁵⁴ exist today. In his extensive study of Liberation Theology in its soteriology, René Dupertuis examined the works of Rosemary R. Ruether, James H. Cone, and Gustavo Gutiérrez and found different strains and emphasis in the movement. For example, women's Liberation Theology views oppression in terms of sexuality and fights accordingly for liberation from male dominance. Black theology understands

¹⁵² Otto Maduro, "Liberation Theology," *Contemporary American Religion* 1:392–393. See also Michelle A. Gonzalez, "Liberation Theology," *Encyclopedia of Religion in America* 3:1221–1222.

¹⁵³ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Liberation Theology – Roman Catholicism," accessed October 4, 2018), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberation-theology>.

¹⁵⁴ Jacob A. O. Preus III, "The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology: A Lutheran Confessional Response to the Theological Methodology of Leonardo Boff" (ThD Diss., Concordia Seminary – Saint Louis, 1986), 1, accessed May 2, 2022, <http://scholar.csl.edu/thd/15>.

oppression as racial injustices and stresses liberation from discriminatory and oppressive practices based on racism. Liberation Theology from the perspective of Third World countries sees oppression mainly in socio-economic-political terms, and, accordingly, seeks liberation from foreign dominance.¹⁵⁵

Despite such great variety in the Liberation Theology movement, two overriding themes stand out. First, it proclaims the need for liberation from any form of oppression: political, economic, social, sexual, racial, and religious. Second, Liberation Theology is anchored in the conviction that theology must grow out of basic Christian communities.¹⁵⁶

In addition, Preus noted seven themes which are shared by most, if not all, liberation theologians: (1) praxis is the starting point of theology, (2) history is the locus of theology, (3) a holistic view of the world, (4) the systemic nature of sin, (5) God is on the side of the oppressed, (6) the transformability of the present order, and (7) the priority of praxis over theory.¹⁵⁷

Historical Background

As argued by its main proponents, Liberation Theology is a reflection, an attempt that aims at a new relationship between Christianity and politics that is more faithful to

¹⁵⁵ Atilio René Dupertuis, *Liberation Theology: A Study in Its Soteriology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982), 2-3.

¹⁵⁶ Preus III, "The Hermeneutics of Liberation Theology, 1. "Liberation theologians believe that theology is not to be imposed from above, that is, from an infallible source-book or an infallible magisterium of the church. Rather, theology is to be done from below. It is to be derived from the locus of oppression in which people find themselves and is to be directed specifically to the relief of that oppression. Nevertheless, since every local situation is unique, liberation theologians throughout the world have displayed considerable variety."

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

the Bible, in both theory and practice.¹⁵⁸ It seeks to close the gap between theology and praxis.¹⁵⁹ Throughout history, such a relationship has suffered from a certain ambiguity.

In his *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, Paul E. Sigmund gave a brief historical and institutional background on the relationship between the Catholic Church and Politics, showing the ambiguity of the relationship and culminating in the emergence of Liberation Theology. He observed that during the first century, in the time of Jesus, there was the Zealot movement of liberation, seeking to overthrow Roman domination over Israel by force. Jesus distanced Himself from these violent political uproars. When His opponents sought maliciously to drag Him into civil disobedience against the Roman authorities, He recommended giving to Caesar what was his and to God what was His; later, He said that His kingdom was not of this world. Early Christians drew from Jesus' stance the principle of not antagonizing civil authorities, and as a church, striving to live in harmony with the government. This principle was reinforced by the apostle Paul, who urged Christians to submit to all authority, believing all authority came from God.

However, Sigmund pointed to times when harmonious relationships between church and politics were not possible.¹⁶⁰ For example, Peter and John confronted the civil and religious authorities on the basis of conscience, arguing that it was better to obey God than men (Acts 5:29). Christians endured persecution and preferred to die rather than burn incense to emperors.

¹⁵⁸ Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.

¹⁵⁹ Steve Daily, "The Irony of Adventism: Towards an Adventist Theology of Liberation," unpublished paper (The Center of Adventist Research, 1986), 2.

¹⁶⁰ Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 15.

Thus, Christianity grew independently of political structure. Nevertheless, it was influenced by Jewish and Roman legal theories (theory of transferring authority, ordination) and by philosophical currents of the time (Stoicism and Platonism). Influenced by Plato's principles of law and order, Augustine developed an ecclesiology that provided the basis for a conservative Christian worldview, which emphasizes order, obedience, hierarchy, authority, and the divine origin of spiritual and temporal rule. Thus was planted the seed of the politico-religious system, the church merging with the monarchy in Europe, that oppressed and exploited the masses. Sigmund recorded how the French revolution occurred as a form of liberation from obscurantism, oppression, and exploitation of the people by the dual combination of church and monarchy, resulting in a break in the relationships between church and politics, setting the stage for a largely secular democratization of Europe.

By the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, notably by the end of World War II, "the papacy formally supported democracy as morally and religiously justified."¹⁶¹ In the meantime, the church in Latin America started sending priests including Camilo Torres and Gustavo Gutierrez to study in Europe where they were exposed to Carl Marx's ideas and to socialist ideologies. Their return to the Latin American continent marked the beginning of the radicalization that would lead to the Liberation Theology.

The pontificate of Pope John XXIII in 1958 and the Second Council of Vatican (Vatican II) in 1962 were turning points in the Catholic Church's becoming more

¹⁶¹ Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 18.

supportive of political pluralism, democracy, human rights, and social justice. The Latin American bishops created their continent-wide organization, the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM). Following Vatican II, they met regularly to discuss their common problems and how they would apply the Council's teachings in their specific contexts. To this end, they decided to hold their second Latin American Bishops Conference at Medellin, Colombia in 1968.

The 1968 Medellin Council's goal was mainly to respond to the following preoccupations: the question of the legitimacy of revolutionary violence, the abuses of capitalism, and the appropriate response to poverty and oppression. To assist the bishops in achieving this goal, a preliminary meeting was held and a series of working papers was developed. One of these working papers came from a priest from the Lima archdiocese who had been educated at the Catholic universities of Louvain (Belgium) and Lyons (France) and had returned. His name was Gustavo Gutierrez.¹⁶²

Gutierrez' Liberation Theology

Gutierrez' working paper that was submitted to the Latin American Bishops, entitled *Teologia de la liberación*, is considered the most prominent foundational document of Liberation Theology.¹⁶³ In this document, the word "liberation" is primarily

¹⁶² Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 14-17.

¹⁶³ Maduro, "Liberation Theology," 394.

defined from a dependency theory perspective.¹⁶⁴ It means liberation from oppressive capitalism. As shown later in this document, Gutierrez' heavy reliance on social and political sciences to build his theology gave ammunition to his critics who accused him of being influenced by Marxist socialism.¹⁶⁵ Gutierrez defended himself, saying that "the interpretation of Latin American reality in terms of dependency is adopted and considered valid 'insofar as it allows us to seek a casual explanation, to denounce domination, and to struggle to overcome it with a commitment to liberation which will produce a new society.'"¹⁶⁶

However, Gutierrez' view of liberation is more comprehensive than the reversal of the corrupt and unjust capitalist system, which he denounced vehemently. According to Gutierrez, liberation is a single but also complex process, including various levels of meaning which are not to be confused : (1) economic, social, and political liberation; (2) liberation which leads to the creation of a new man in a new society of solidarity; and (3) liberation from sin and entrance into a communion with God and with all men.¹⁶⁷ Such a complex process requires a combination of actions that is comprised of "scientific

¹⁶⁴ There are two significant theories that attempt to explain the origin of inequalities among the nations and how to address them. On the one hand "Modernization Theory," which emerged during the 1950s, emphasizes internal causes of poverty such as lack of education, technology, and entrepreneurship. On the other hand, "Dependency theory" emphasizes external causes of poverty, global interactions between nation/states, mainly colonialism, and the exploitation of poor countries by the wealthier countries. Unlike in Modernization Theory, dependency theorists are pessimistic and consider it impossible to break out of underdevelopment without addressing the power imbalances among the nations (Susan. C. Mapp, *Human Rights and Social Justice in a Global Perspective: An Introduction to International Social Work* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007], 10).

¹⁶⁵ J. Andrew Kirk, *Liberation Theology, An Evangelical View from the Third World* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979), 164.

¹⁶⁶ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 109.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

rationality which supports real and effective transforming political action” for the first level, utopia¹⁶⁸ and historical projections for the second; and faith for the third.¹⁶⁹

Gutierrez stated that “it means, in a deeper sense, to see the becoming of mankind as a process of the emancipation of man in history. It is to see man in search of a qualitatively different society in which he will be free from all servitude, in which he will be the artisan of his own destiny.”¹⁷⁰ Gutierrez argued that “for this liberation to be authentic and complete, it has to be undertaken by the oppressed people themselves and so must stem from the values proper to these people. Only in this context can a true cultural revolution come about.”¹⁷¹

Poverty

In Gutierrez’ theology, biblical poverty has a double meaning. It is viewed both as a scandalous condition and as spiritual childhood. Poverty, as a scandalous condition, is “inimical to human dignity and therefore contrary to the will of God.”¹⁷² As such, it is to

¹⁶⁸ Utopia, in Gutierrez’ theology, does not mean unrealistic and unrealizable dreams. Instead, it means faith and political action. “Faith proclaims that the brotherhood which is sought through the abolition of exploitation of man by man is something possible, that efforts to bring it about are not vain, that God calls us to it and assures us of its complete fulfillment, and that the definitive reality is being built on what is transitory” (207).

¹⁶⁹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 235.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 291.

be rejected. The Old Testament uses several terms to identify the poor.¹⁷³ For Gutierrez, the Bible rejects and protests against the poverty that these terms evoke. He believed that “indigent, weak, bent over, wretched are terms which express a degrading human situation. These terms already insinuate a protest.”¹⁷⁴ Such poverty is not a result of fate, but is, rather, caused by the actions of men. The OT prophets, such as Amos and Isaiah, condemn such men and call shame on them (Amos 2:6-7; Isaiah 10:1-2).

The Bible does not simply denounce poverty. It also prescribes ways to “prevent it from becoming established among the People of God.”¹⁷⁵ Gutierrez saw three principal reasons behind these measures: (1) poverty contradicts the very meaning of the Mosaic religion, (2) the state of slavery and exploitation goes against the mandate of Genesis (1:26; 2:15), and (3) in addition to being made in the image and likeness of God, man is the sacrament of God. He stated that “to oppress the poor is to offend God himself; to know God is to work for justice among men. We met God in our encounter with men; what is done for others is done for the Lord.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ *Rash* is the least used inasmuch as it has a neutral meaning. The word *ébyôn* describes the condition of someone whose desires are not met, the beggar, the one who lacks something and expects it from someone else. The word *dal* refers to the weak one, the frail one, as applied in the expression “the poor of the land,” frequently used in Scripture. The word *ani* used for the poor person is applied to the bent-over one, the one laboring under a weight, the one not in possession of this whole strength and vigor, the humiliated one. And finally, the word *anaw* is used for the poor, but in a more religious sense—“humble before God.” The New Testament uses the Greek word *ptokós* to speak of the poor person. It is applied to someone who does not have what is necessary to subsist, the wretched one driven into begging (Gutierrez, 292).

¹⁷⁴ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 292.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 293. The legislation laid out in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy serves that purpose, alongside the Sabbath, offering a full day of rest to the slave and the alien (Exod 23:12; Deut 5:14). Under the law, interest on loans was forbidden. Other measures such as the Sabbath year and the Jubilee guarantee food for the poor, freedom and forgiveness of debt after seven years, and a redistribution of wealth every fifty years.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 295.

The second meaning of poverty is spiritual, conveying a state of “openness to God,” a certain “ability to welcome God,” a willingness to surrender to him and to humble oneself before him. Understood in this way, Gutierrez argued, spiritual poverty is the opposite of pride and self-sufficiency, but is synonymous with faith, abandonment, and trust in the Lord. This kind of spiritual poverty pleases God and is often accentuated in OT writings as “a precondition for approaching God,” as highlighted in Isa 66:2.¹⁷⁷ In the NT, spiritual poverty finds its highest expressions in the Beatitudes, especially the version of Matthew, where Jesus affirmed, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (5:1).¹⁷⁸

Attitude Toward Poverty: Solidarity and Protest

Gutierrez stressed the redemptive value of voluntary poverty. He stated that poverty is an act of love and liberation. It has redemptive value. If the ultimate cause of man’s exploitation and alienation is selfishness, the deepest reason for voluntary poverty is love of neighbor. Christian poverty has meaning only as a commitment of solidarity with the poor.¹⁷⁹

At first glance, one could be tempted to believe that Gutierrez is promoting salvation by works. However, Gutierrez is not idealizing poverty as a means of salvation. On the contrary, he saw it as an evil to protest against and ultimately, to abolish. The most effective way to achieve this is to solidarize voluntarily with poverty, which may be translated in specific actions, a modification of one’s life style, or a break with one’s

¹⁷⁷ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 296.

¹⁷⁸ Gutierrez noted that the version in Luke emphasizes material poverty. He argued that that did not mean Luke was canonizing a social class, nor sacralizing misery and injustice, nor preaching resignation. He believed that when Christ said that the poor were blessed because the Kingdom of God had begun, He meant, “They are blessed because the coming of the Kingdom will put an end to their poverty by creating a world of brotherhood” (298).

¹⁷⁹ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 300.

social class. By so doing, “one can help the poor and exploited to become aware of their exploitation and seek liberation from it.”¹⁸⁰ Gutierrez’ view of Christian poverty, as an expression of love, “is solidarity *with the poor* and is a protest *against poverty*.”¹⁸¹

Gutierrez used Acts 2 as the biblical framework for his thick and paradoxical concept of a Christian poverty that calls the church to reject poverty while making itself poor in order to protest against it. He argued that this was the only way the Church could preach something that is its own: “‘spiritual poverty,’ that is, the openness of man and history to the future promised by God.”¹⁸²

Ecclesiology and Missiology

Gutierrez called for a “new ecclesial consciousness and a redefinition of the task of the church in a world in which it is not only present, but of which it forms a part more than it suspected in the past.”¹⁸³ The church can no longer consider itself as the kingdom of God, “the exclusive place of salvation.”¹⁸⁴ The church should be out there in the world serving the people and being a part of the salvation process. The “action of Christ and his Spirit is the true hinge of the plan of salvation.”¹⁸⁵ The church is simply an instrument, one among many that God uses to create a new man. “The church must turn to the world, in which Christ and his Spirit are present and active; the Church must allow itself to be

¹⁸⁰ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 300.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 300-301.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 301-302.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 260-261.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

inhabited and evangelized by the world.”¹⁸⁶ When the church is transformed and serves as a place of liberation, it becomes a sacrament, a sign of the fulfillment of the salvation it announces.

Soteriology

Gutierrez noted two views of salvation, one quantitative and one qualitative. The concern of a quantitative view is “the salvation of the pagans.”¹⁸⁷ It emphasizes the “extensive aspect of salvation; it is the problem of the number of persons saved, the possibility of being saved and the role the Church plays in this process.”¹⁸⁸ In this view, salvation implies two well-defined characteristics: “it is a cure for sin in this life; and this cure is in virtue of a salvation to be attained beyond this life.”¹⁸⁹ Sin is the obstacle that “stands in the way of reaching that life beyond.”¹⁹⁰ It can be removed only through contact with “the channels of grace instituted by God.”¹⁹¹ Gutierrez deemed the quantitative view of salvation limited and inadequate to address the condition of people belonging to other religions and living in places the Church is not present.

The qualitative view of salvation, to which Gutierrez adhered, proposes a more universal approach to salvation: “man is saved as he opens himself to God and to

¹⁸⁶ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 260-261.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

others.”¹⁹² In this view, sin is redefined. It is no longer an impediment to salvation in the afterlife. Here is how Gutierrez put it:

Insofar as it constitutes a break with God, sin is a historical reality, it is a breach of the communion of men with each other, it is a turning in of man on himself which manifests itself in a multifaceted withdrawal from others. And because sin is a personal and social intrahistorical reality, a part of the daily events of human life, it is also and above all, an obstacle to life’s reaching the fullness we call salvation.¹⁹³

In Gutierrez’s view, the work of man and social praxis are central to the salvation process. He supported this view by pointing to creation as the first salvific act of God and to the fact that God created man as the crown and center of the work of creation and called him to continue it through his labor (Gen 1:28). He also indicated that the liberation from Egypt, understood as re-creation, was another salvific act of God to which man was called to participate, and thus forge himself. He did so by “transforming the world, breaking out of servitude, building a just society, and assuming his destiny in history.”¹⁹⁴

Gutierrez emphasized the inseparability of the present and future dimensions of eschatological promises:

The historical implementation of promises in the present are—insofar as they are ordered toward what is to come—as characteristic of eschatology as the opening to the future. More precisely, this tension toward the future lends meaning to and is expressed in the present, while simultaneously being nourished by it. It is thus that the attraction of ‘what is to come’ is the driving force of history. The action of Yahweh in history and his action at the end of history are inseparable.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 151.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 159. See also 173.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 164.

The kingdom of God is both now and yet to come. The presence of the kingdom of peace presupposes the establishment of justice. It implies the “defense of the rights of the poor, punishment of the oppressors, a life free from the fear of being enslaved by others, the liberation of the oppressed.”¹⁹⁶

Gutierrez concluded that

salvation embraces all men and the whole man; the liberating action of Christ—made man in this history and not in a history marginal to the real life of man—is at the heart of the historical current of humanity; the struggle for a just society is in its own right very much a part of salvation history.¹⁹⁷

There is no separation between the world and the kingdom of God, between natural and spiritual world. Men’s activities may either advance or hamper salvation. Political liberation is an integral part of the salvation process.¹⁹⁸

Adventist Contrast to Liberation Theology

In this section, I will briefly compare and contrast Adventist views to Liberation Theology on the aspects of hermeneutics, soteriology, ecclesiology and missiology, and eschatology.

Hermeneutics

In Adventism, theology does not start with praxis. Theology is a quest to understand God “about thinking and understanding divine revelation aiming at finding the wisdom of God expressed in teachings that may help believers to live their present

¹⁹⁶ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 167.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170-174.

and eternal lives as God intended.”¹⁹⁹ Canale upheld the “Radical Reformation *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle,” arguing that the source of theology must be God’s own self-presentation throughout human history, as attested to in the public records of Scripture.

In Adventism, Scripture is not interpreted using theories from social and political sciences. Norman Edward, an evangelical scholar of the second half of the twentieth century, deplored the fact that Christianity today “has increasingly borrowed its political outlook and vocabulary, the issues it regards as most urgently requiring attention, and even its tests of moral virtue, from the progressive thinking of the surrounding secular culture.”²⁰⁰ Adventists share the concern of Edward and warn against hermeneutics that is not grounded on the *sola scriptura* principle.

Soteriology: Sin and Salvation

In Adventist theology, a basic feature of sin is “a rebellion directed against the lordship and sovereignty of God and a refusal to accept His authority in one’s life, conduct, and destiny.”²⁰¹ What can be observed externally in terms of ethical, moral, and spiritual relationships and dimensions is not sin, per se, but the fruit stemming from the root of sin, which is a denial of God. Rather than the absence of good, sin is a “falling short” of God’s expectations.²⁰² Martin Hanna studied the concept of sin in Paul’s letter to the Romans and highlighted the three dimensions of sin: (1) legal condemnation, (2)

¹⁹⁹ Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Lithotec, Andrews University, 2005), 5.

²⁰⁰ Edward Norman, *Christianity and the World Order* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962), 15.

²⁰¹ Raoul Dederen, ed., *Handbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 239.

²⁰² Dederen, ed., *Handbook of the Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 239.

voluntary carnality, and (3) involuntary corruption. Such an understanding of sin is key to our understanding of the doctrine of justification, sanctification, and glorification.²⁰³ In Ellen White's thought, as understood by Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, "sin is not only an act, a wrongdoing, but also a principle in the selfish nature of humanity, an inclination to sin. Humans all have the propensity to sin, being born with sinful nature."²⁰⁴ White stressed the word "nature" when talking about sin, implying the idea of the intrinsic dimension of sin and its ineluctability. She stated that "everything that we of ourselves can do is defiled by sin."²⁰⁵

Ecclesiology and Missiology

The priority of evangelism

Adventists believe that the main object in working with people must be the conversion of men and women to Christ. A transformation of the heart brings a remedy for the problem at its root, and when this objective has been reached, the person will be on his way to become independent of others and will be able to work for Christ toward the salvation of others.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Martin Hanna, "What Shall We Say About Sin," in *God's Character and the Last Generation Theology* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2018), 51.

²⁰⁴ Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1294.

²⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, *Christ Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1900), 311.

²⁰⁶ Hiebert, "The Theology of the Social Gospel and the Seventh-day Adventists," 10-11.

The treatment of the poor

Adventist theology is in accord with Liberation Theology as it emphasizes God's care for the poor. White condemned the kind of accumulation of wealth that causes poverty in society:

Great evils would result from the continued accumulation of wealth by one class, and the poverty and degradation of another. Without some restraint the power of the wealthy would become a monopoly, and the poor, though in every respect fully as worthy in God's sight, would be regarded and treated as inferior to their more prosperous brethren.²⁰⁷

White analyzed the provision God made for the poor by requiring the children of Israel to pay a second tithe (Deut 26:12). She also noted that God gave the poor a right to a certain portion of the produce of the soil so that "when hungry, a man was at liberty to go to his neighbor's field or orchard or vineyard, and eat of the grain or fruit to satisfy his hunger."²⁰⁸ She studied the provision made for the poor in the Sabbatical Year (Exod 23:10, 11; Lev 25:5), and the Jubilee, which happened after "seven sabbaths of years" or "seven times seven years" (Lev 25:9, 10). She concluded, "Such were the provisions made by our merciful Creator, to lessen suffering, to bring some ray of hope, to flash some gleam of sunshine, into the life of the destitute and distressed."²⁰⁹

However, White's perspective on the poor contrasts with Gutierrez' concept of preferential option for the poor. She called for balance in every part of the work: "We talk and write much about the neglected poor; should not some attention be given also to

²⁰⁷ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1890), 534.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 531.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 534.

the neglected rich?”²¹⁰ White advocated in 1890 that the Church’s mission endeavor should reach out to the rich and the poor alike:

Let none receive the idea that the poor and unlearned are to be neglected. Right methods of labor will not in any sense exclude these. It was one of the evidence of Christ’s Messiahship that the poor had the gospel preached to them. We should study to give all classes an opportunity to understand the special truths for this time.²¹¹

Eschatology: Premillennialism

Adventists are premillennialists. Pre-millennialists are “shaped by Jewish and Christian apocalypticism,” focusing on the urgency of Christ’s return. Post-millennialists are “shaped by liberal reading of classical eighth-century prophets,” focusing on bringing about the “beloved community” and “correcting the social structures that perpetuate the cycle of racism, classism, and militarism.”²¹²

While liberation is an act of history in Gutierrez’ postmillennialist eschatology, in Adventism, liberation is an eschatological reality. Adventist theologians and administrators from around the world met in Rome, Italy for the Fourth International Bible Conference from June 11-21, 2018. They voted a Consensus Statement at the close

²¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), 555.

²¹¹ Ibid. See also Ellen G. White *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. VI (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 278 and Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1952), 203, where she said, “The poor are not to be excluded from the privilege of giving.” She also talked about restoring the self-respect and dignity of the poor by providing them with work and placing them where they can help themselves instead of allowing them to eat and drink for free or nearly so.

²¹² Seay, “Social Justice and the Adventist Dilemma,” 57. “John Edwards has been credited with being the first American to teach that the final consummation would come not after a cosmic cataclysm, but after a period of prosperity for the church brought by the work of the Spirit” [W. R. Ward, “Evangelical Identity in the Eighteenth Century,” in Donald M. Lewis, ed, pp. 11-30, *Christianity Reborn* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 17]. See, also, John F. Wilson, “History, Redemption and the Millennium,” in Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 131-41. This issue is raised in C. C. Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” *Church History* 28 (1959): 25-40.

of the event on June 20. The conference theme was biblical eschatology. The document that was voted reaffirms the Adventist understanding of biblical prophecy, end-time events, and missiological implications for the Church. The document states that “through the Holy Spirit He [Jesus Christ] confirms individual believers as being God’s children and heirs while they eagerly wait for the final liberation from all corruption (Rom 8:14-25).”²¹³ The document calls all Adventists to distance themselves from “futile attempts to build a paradise on earth.”²¹⁴

Learning from Liberation Theology

I will discuss what I consider as major shortcomings of Gutierrez’ Liberation Theology and its relevance for the Adventist Church. As shortcomings, I deplore (1) the violent language in the text and the justification for the use of violence when necessary and (2) his over-emphasis on one “material” side of poverty.

First, in its formulation, Gutierrez’ Liberation Theology employs strong expressions that gives the movement an air of violence. For example, when talking about the liberation of Latin America, he said that this would not happen without “a profound transformation, a social revolution, which will radically and qualitatively change the conditions in which they live.”²¹⁵ Expressions such as militancy, radicalness, radical

²¹³ Biblical Research Institute, “Adventist Theologians Approve Statement on Biblical Eschatology,” *Adventist Review*, June 22, 2018, accessed May 2, 2022, <https://adventistreview.org/news/adventist-theologians-approve-statement-on-biblical-eschatology/>

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 88.

change, and priestly subversion pervade throughout the text.²¹⁶ In analyzing Latin America's situation, Gutierrez distinguished the *unjust violence* of the oppressor (who maintains this despicable system) and the *just violence* of the oppressed (who feel obligated to use it to achieve their liberation).²¹⁷

In my opinion, such violent language contrast with Christ's method, even though Jesus was also calling for radical transformation in society. In *God in Pain: Inversion of Apocalypse*, Slavoj Zizek and Boris Gunjevic stressed the "theopolitical, subversive nature" of Mark's story and the question of the "Messianic secret" that runs through the sub-text. One key question Zizek and Gunjevic aimed at answering in their text was how Mark's Jesus succeeded in distancing Himself from "all political and theological Jewish movements, parties, or followings, while at the same time embracing disempowerment in the name of the marginalized multitude."²¹⁸

Mark did so by using irony, repetition, and understatement. Mark displays the paradoxes and ironies in Jesus' teaching and actions that expose and discredit the earthly kingdoms incarnated by the Roman Empire and the Jewish religious establishment. For example, the image of the sower is an image of agrarian poverty and its critics, but the true nature of Jesus' kingdom is not obvious; therefore, the disciple needs to "watch and pray."²¹⁹ An important part of the Zizek and Gunjevis' text is where they contrasted the

²¹⁶ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 88, 90, 102, 105, 106.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

²¹⁸ Slavoj Zizek and Boris Gunjevic, *God in Pain: Inversion of Apocalypse* (New York: Seven Story Press, 2012), 242.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 250.

messianic movements led by the Maccabees (Manahem, Simon bar Giora, John of Gischala) with the non-violent, humble entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

In the same vein, David P. Gushee and Glenn H. Stassen, in *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, discussed Jesus' ways of peacemaking. They underline the fact that Jesus entered history in "an arena filled with violence."²²⁰ Yet, Gushee and Stassen found that "Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that peacemaking would be a key mark of the reign of God."²²¹ They then concluded, "Even when Christians have struggled deeply and for good reasons with whether to resort to violence, we have known that the witness of Jesus himself offers little that can be directly cited in support."²²²

Second, although Gutierrez described two types of poverty in the Bible, a spiritual one and a scandalous, material one, he over-emphasized the material, personified by the indigent, the weak, the bent-over, the wretched, and so on.²²³ Depending almost entirely on the dependency theory, Gutierrez's poverty-alleviation solution seems to concern only the materially poor. In their *When Helping Hurts*, Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert discuss poverty in a broader and deeper sense, seeing poverty as rooted in broken relationships.²²⁴ They discussed poverty using a biblical framework proposed by Brian L.

²²⁰ David P. Gushee and Glenn H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 311.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 318.

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 292.

²²⁴ Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor. . . Yourself* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2012), 58.

Myers in *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*.

In Myers's framework, poverty is defined in relational terms, rather than in terms of lacking material goods. Myers noted that in the beginning, before the Fall, humans enjoyed four foundational relationships: a relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation. When sin was introduced, these four relationships, representing "the building blocks of life," were shattered. The result was a four-dimensional poverty: a poverty of spiritual intimacy, a poverty of being, a poverty of community, and a poverty of stewardship. Myers then define poverty as "the result of relationships that do not work, that are not just, that are not for life, that are not harmonious, or enjoyable. Poverty is the absence of shalom in all its meanings."²²⁵

Corbett and Fikkert agreed with Myers and stated that "Our perspective should be less how we are going to fix the materially poor and more about how we can walk together, asking God to fix both of us."²²⁶ Thus, according to Corbett, poverty alleviation should focus on "reconciliation" by putting things back into a right relationship again. This is not a task for men to take upon themselves and try to "manufacture through better techniques, improved methods, or better planning"²²⁷ because reconciliation is ultimately an act of God (2 Cor 5:18–20).

²²⁵ Brian L. Myers, in Corbett and Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts*, 62.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 79.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

However, in spite of these shortcomings, I believe that Gutierrez' Liberation Theology contains ideas relevant for the Adventist Church. Liberation Theology provides a framework to address systemic injustice in the world, notwithstanding the weaknesses in its analytical methods, its philosophical and theological presuppositions, and its hermeneutical shortcomings. As René Padilla's wrote, "One may be able to show that the diagnosis of the evils of society and the cure offered by the theology of liberation are colored by Marxist dialectics, but the economic dependence of the underdeveloped countries is by no means a myth created by that theology."²²⁸

Liberation Theology addresses a real issue that had always sparked God's anger in Old Testament times: an empty theology, one that is not translated into a Christian social ethics based on justice and mercy. Liberation Theology seeks to close up the gap between theology and praxis. Liberation Theology flows throughout the book of Isaiah like a river: "Therefore the Lord said: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. Their worship of Me is but rules taught by men'" (Isa 29:13; cf. Matt 15:8). Further in the book, God complains about the fact that, in the midst of bloodshed, lies, corruption and injustices, his people remain numb, no one daring to intercede. "Truth is missing, and whoever turns from evil makes himself prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man; He was amazed that there was no one to intercede." (Isa 59:15, 16a). In Isa 58, God rebukes Israel for fasting and keeping the Sabbath while they oppress their workers; they do not feed the hungry; they do not bring the homeless and

²²⁸ C. René Padilla, "The Theology of Liberation," *Christianity Today* 18 (1973): 201, 202.

the poor into their home. Richard Rice commented on Isa 58, saying, “Oppressive economic and social structures, which make it impossible for people to provide for themselves, contradict the message of the Sabbath. Those who appreciate the meaning of the Sabbath will seek to eliminate such things.”²²⁹

Walter Brueggemann discussed the concept of numbness, a result of “consumer ideology” and “commodity satiation.”²³⁰ The numb is insensitive to others’ suffering and needs, incapable of empathy, and incapable of capturing an alternative vision for the world, God’s imagination. Brueggemann said that “numbness robs us of our capability for humanity.”²³¹ Numbness thrives in contexts of static religion, economic affluence, and oppressive politics. The reign of Solomon, according to Brueggemann, embodied all three. He criticizes Solomon for countering completely the counter-culture of Moses, by replacing “*the economics of equality with the economics of affluence,*” “*the politics of justice with the politics of oppression,*” “*the religion of God’s freedom with the religion of God’s accessibility.*”²³²

Such was the situation in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. Gutierrez’ Liberation Theology emerged as a form of criticism of prevailing systemic injustice in order to shake up the church from lethargy and to demand social reforms.

²²⁹ Richard Rice, *Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1997), 406.

²³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2018), 33.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²³² *Ibid.*, 81-82.

The situation of the United States during the period of 1880–1940 was also similar to that of Solomon and Latin America in terms of wealth gap.²³³ Sadly, that period also coincides with the lynching tree, as extensively discussed in James Cone’s book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Cone, a Black Liberation Theologian, was upset by the silence of White scholars and preachers in the face of this unjust, horrible, and criminal practice.

Cone showed how the Cross of Jesus is central to Christianity. During communion service, Christians are reminded of the significance of the Cross for our salvation. The Cross is omnipresent in our sermons, our songs, and other rituals. However, it is unthinkable that White Christians could lynch a Black on a tree without thinking of Jesus on the Cross. This is the central question of Cone’s reflection. He said, “Christians, both white and black, followed a crucified savior. What could pose a more blatant contradiction to such a religion than lynching? And yet white Christians were silent in the face of this contradiction.”²³⁴ This testifies again to the gap between theology and praxis in Christianity. The Adventist movement emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Joseph Bates, co-founder, applied the “Repairer of the Breach”

²³³ Allan Axelrod, *The Gilded Age: 1876 – 1912 Overture to the American Century* (New York, NY: Sterling, 2017), 3, cited Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner who described their own era in a novel as a gilded age, “an epoch of excess, of consumption not merely conspicuous but pornographic.... It was an age of robber barons and political bosses; of obscene wealth acquired and disposal of in total disregard to ‘how to other half lives’; an age of industrial expansion at the expense of the land; an age of American imperial adventurism culminating in the Spanish-American War, annexation of the Philippines, and annexation of Hawaii, all in 1898.... An amoral epoch of exuberant political cynicism and chronic political mediocrity.”

²³⁴ James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 86.

motif in Isa 58 to the movement.²³⁵ However, as mentioned earlier, in the 1920s and 30s, Adventists fell away into quietism, influenced by Fundamentalism.²³⁶

Liberation Theology is a rejection of religiously apparent piety and the dry theology of fundamentalism, disconnected from social realities. It is the rejection of a religion that talks about righteousness, understood as “being right with God in one’s inner self,”²³⁷ but ignoring the fact that “being right with God in one’s inner self does, of course, have consequences for how one treats one’s fellows.”²³⁸ Wolterstorff noted that most English Bibles translate the Greek word *dikaiosyne* and the Hebrew word *tsedeka* as “righteousness,” where the context suggests instead to translate it as “justice.” This has led many to believe that in the New Testament, justice has been supplanted by love. Wolterstorff rejected this assumption, as it gives some people, those who supported Apartheid in South Africa, for example, leeway to avoid righting the wrong done to the Blacks. There is a need for the Adventist Church to embrace a theology that fuses righteousness and justice together.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s mission orientation, which has given me a sense of the weight that eschatology has on their

²³⁵ Joseph Bates, [Sabbath Controversy #2], *The Seventh-Day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign, 2nd Ed.* (Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 109. See also Damsteegt, *Foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, 139.

²³⁶ Reye, “Protestant fundamentalism and the Adventist Church in the 1920s,” 42. See also Michael W. Campbell, *1922: The Rise of Adventist Fundamentalism* (Pacific Press, 2022), 31, Kindle.

²³⁷ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Journey toward Justice: Personal Encounters in the Global South, Turning South: Christian Scholars in an Age of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 93.

²³⁸ Ibid.

making evangelism the center of their outreach to the world while recognizing the importance of social action. Adventist leaders have often opted to minister in one or the other of these spheres. However, Adventist preachers often limit their concern to eternal salvation. I presented the work of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl as evidence that Adventist premillennialist eschatology is not incompatible with wholistic evangelism where the preaching of the gospel is blended with social justice advocacy.

Adventists have rejected the theology of the Social Gospel and the theology of Liberation developed respectively by Walter Rauschenbusch and Gustavo Gutierrez mainly on the grounds of their postmillennialist eschatology and their attempt to usher in God's kingdom by human efforts. Adventists' primary focus has always been on the salvation of the soul of individuals, drawing on the belief that total social redemption will be a reality only at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Adventists can learn from both the Social Gospel movement and Liberation Theology about the importance of "corporate sins" and "social salvation," and the need to close the gap between theology and praxis and to blend righteousness and justice together.

The next chapter seeks to collect primary empirical data regarding the current Adventist perspective on social justice advocacy in the context of mission.

CHAPTER 4

ADVENTIST PERSPECTIVES ON ADVOCACY: FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS AND CHALLENGES

Introduction

I conducted this field research with the purpose of finding primary data to measure and interpret current views within the Seventh-day Adventist Church on social justice advocacy. The field research gave me the opportunity to test some basic assumptions and hypothesis encountered through the literature review (chaps. 2 and 3). An analysis of the findings allows identification of major biblical and missiological challenges, which I attempt to address in chapter 5.

Methodology

This section provides details on the design, sampling technique, instruments used to measure the variables, the detailed procedures of data collection, and the technique used for data analysis.

Research Design

The study applies a missiological research design, which “follows an orderly path through the identification of the central research issue, the identification of precedent

research, and the development of a methodology that will produce reliable and valid results, which then serve as the basis for coming to conclusions and recommendations.”¹

The process started with a literature review. I studied the topic of social justice in Christian/Adventist theology and the history of mission. This process has given an overview on the topic of social justice in Adventism, identifies the central research issue, and gives the development of a methodology that has produced reliable and valid results.

2

Sample

The research applies a mixed design which includes (1) a survey of beliefs and practices about social justice advocacy among 260 students and faculty at Andrews University and (2) interviews with 10 church leaders/scholars and 2 PhD students. I sought to collect personal convictions, theological insights, and guidance in relation to social justice advocacy from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective. I selected the 10 leaders/scholars in consultation with the Director of the PhD Department at Andrews University for his knowledge of the Adventist academic world, having more than 20 years of experience as an Adventist scholar, professor, and administrator.

He provided me with 15 names of Adventist scholars/leaders, classifying them in two categories: those who hold conservative views regarding social justice and those who hold less conservative views on the topic. Of the 15 scholars/leaders I contacted, 10 accepted participating; among them, six were more inclined to progressive positions, and

¹ Edgar J. Elliston, *Introduction to Missiological Design* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), xxix.

² *Ibid.*, 68.

four were more inclined to conservative positions; seven were men, and three, women; two worked as professors/administrators at Andrews University, four worked as professors at other Adventist universities, one works at the General Conference,³ and three worked as administrators in two Divisions.⁴ Of the two PhD students, one was more conservative and the other more progressive.

Prior to the actual survey research, I tested the research instruments with 33 seminary students (30 online questionnaires, 3 interviews) on the campus of Andrews University.

Measurement/Instrumentation

This study's objective was to describe current beliefs/perceptions and practices among Adventist scholars and leaders about social justice advocacy. Using an anonymous online survey and interviews (instruments), the study measured two variables: (1) the level of acceptance of or reluctance regarding social justice advocacy as part of the Church mission and (2) the extent to which social justice advocacy has been a part of Adventist theology and praxis. The qualitative research through the interviews attempted to find out why church pastors and administrators embrace or reject social justice advocacy as a part of the Church mission.

³ The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is the coordinating body of the denomination.

⁴ To facilitate its worldwide activity, the General Conference established regional offices, known as Divisions, that have administrative and supervisory responsibilities within specific geographic areas of the world.

Detailed study procedures

Two methods for collecting data were used: survey and interviews. In both methods, participants were asked to read and sign a consent form before starting.

Online Survey

The questionnaire included a series of closed and open-ended questions and was accessible online through SurveyMonkey. Participants in the survey were at least 18 years of age. The participants received an email of introduction asking them to fill out a questionnaire that asked a variety of questions about their views on and practices of social justice advocacy in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church mission.

The participants were given the freedom not to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. All information provided was anonymous and confidential. There were no identification numbers of any type in the survey; I had no way of knowing who the participants were unless they voluntarily provided their contact info in order to receive a gift card if they were among the first 50 respondents. Filling out the questionnaire took about 15 minutes, and the participation of the respondent ended as soon as the completed questionnaire was submitted. There was no name nor any identifying mark on the form. Data analysis, reports, presentations, and publications only focused on data combined from multiple participants.

Interviews with Adventist Scholars and Leaders

I sent interview questions ahead of time to the interviewee. This allowed the interviewee time to think about the questions ahead of time and be free to expound on the questions at length at the interview, unencumbered with questions from the interviewer.

At the interview, I sometimes had to step into the conversation for clarification or keep the interviewee oriented to the research question. All questions were subjective in nature.

The purpose of the research was for the interviewees to express their personal views and experience regarding social justice advocacy and to make suggestions and recommendations that would inform an Adventist missiological framework for social justice advocacy. The interviewees were asked questions to aid me in interpreting the responses, especially seeking to have the interviewees define what they believed social justice advocacy meant theologically and missiologically.

During the first 7 interviews, an audio recording device (my iPhone) was set up, and after I gave a brief introduction of the topic, the interviewee was free to talk, sharing answers to the questions sent ahead of time. For the remaining 6 interviews, I had to use Zoom because of social distancing protocol that became mandatory due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were always conducted in a friendly atmosphere of mutual respect with opening and closing prayer. Throughout the conversations, I often made comments and asked follow-up questions for clarification and direction.

After the interview process, a transcription of the audio recording was made using a paid online transcription software program (<https://www.temi.com/>). I then edited the automatic transcript produced by the software and sent it to the interviewee for correction and validation of the content. I made it clear to the interviewee that the purpose of the transcription was not for publication purposes, but for ensuring accuracy, and that it would be kept in a safe place that was accessible only to me for future reference. The transcription was then used as primary data, both for descriptive purposes, as well as for interpretative purposes for the dissertation research.

Internal Validity

Internal validity is relevant mostly in inferential or causal relationship studies. Although this study applied a descriptive design, the survey was made anonymous in order to avoid study bias and no personal identifiers were collected. The survey was made available and accessible to all faculty and students regardless of age, gender, location, color, and ethnicity. In addition, a benchmark of 215 well-completed questionnaires was established in order to consider the survey valid. With 260 well-completed questionnaires collected, the study met the validity criterium.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the online survey and the interview allowed for answering the two following questions: (1) What is the level of acceptance of social justice advocacy as part of the Church mission by Adventist administrators/leaders and beyond (pastors, students)? and (2) What is the extent to which social justice advocacy is applied in Adventist missions?

In order to analyze the quantitative data (survey), I used descriptive statistics to indicate general tendencies in the data (mean, mode, and median), the spread of scores (variance, standard deviation, and range), and a comparison of how one score relates to the others (z score, percentile rank). I also used inferential statistics (hypothesis testing) to compare seminary students and faculty and non-seminary students and faculty in relation to social justice advocacy (is there a significant difference in their perceptions and practices about social justice advocacy?)

Qualitative data analysis involved the identification, examination, and interpretation of patterns and themes in textual data (Oral Records in Appendix A), and I determined how these patterns and themes help answer the research questions at hand.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

First, it was difficult to recruit participants for the online survey because the Dean of the Graduate School and the Deans of various schools at Andrews University declined to send out the survey to their students and faculty. Only the Dean of the Seminary did so. This explains why more than half (52%) of the survey participants were from the Seminary (Master of Divinity, Master of Arts in Religion, Doctor of Philosophy in Religion, Doctor of Ministry, and Doctor of Missiology).

Second, the outbreak of Covid-19 in the first quarter of 2020 forced me to shift from face-to-face to Zoom interviews. Some interview participants were not comfortable with being recorded on Zoom. One of them wrote, “I have considered your request some more, and will decline your thoughtful and winsome invitation. I am not comfortable having the interview conducted by Zoom, and certainly not recorded in that interface.” Covid-19 restrictions also prevented me from promoting the survey with students and faculty of the schools who had not received an invitation by email.

Third, the topic of social justice makes conservative Adventists uncomfortable. Many of them would not reply to my invitation or declined. One Conference President wrote, “Thank you for inviting me to participate in your dissertation research. Social Justice is a controversial issue that lacks an agreed truth source that can be the last word. Additionally the term social justice itself has different meanings to different people. I am sorry but for these and other reasons I choose not to participate in your project.”

Quantitative (Survey) Findings

Most Adventists in the sample (68%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Adventist Church, through its administrative branches, should take a public stand on issues of social justice such as affirmative action. Only 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 13% remained neutral (See Figure 1).

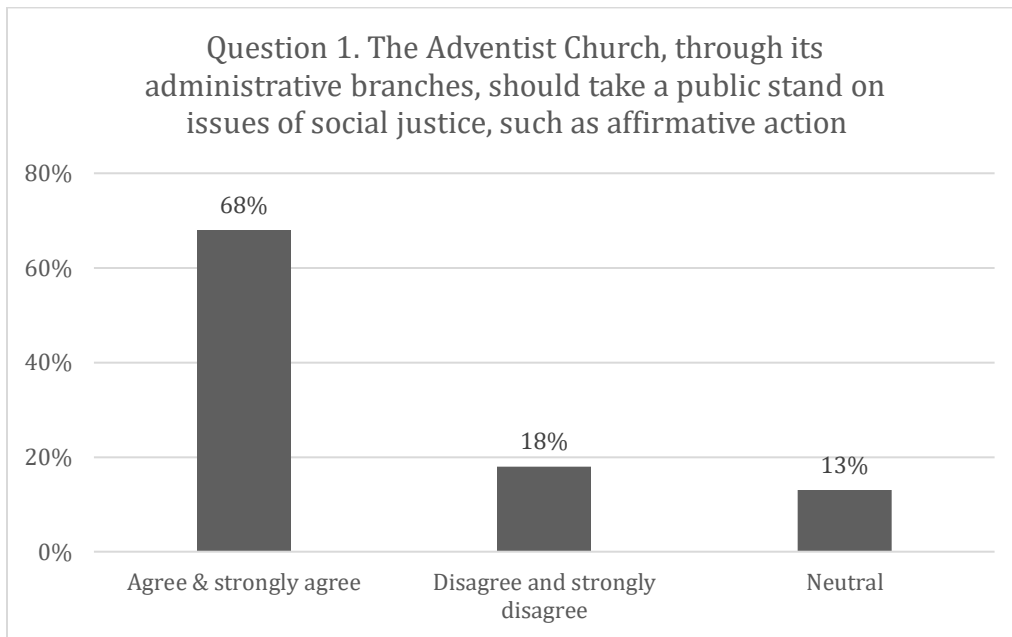


Figure 1. Frequencies – agreement & disagreement on taking public stand on social justice issues.

The following two questions were asked to assess the participants' views regarding Douglas Morgan's claim about Seventh-day Adventists' heritage of *shalom-nurturing activism*.

The majority of Adventists in the sample (82%) agreed or strongly agreed that, in the face of social injustice, the Adventist Church should call for change in the

surrounding society (i.e., the wider world beyond the community of believers). Only 11% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 7% remained neutral (see Figure 2).

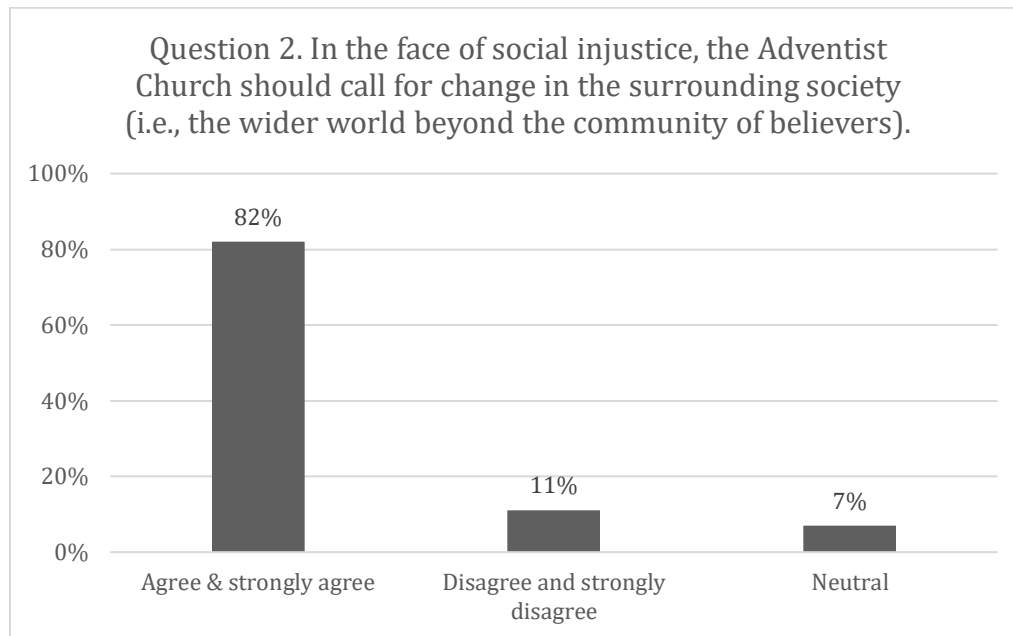


Figure 2. Frequencies – agreement & disagreement on calling for change in the surrounding society.

Most Adventists in the sample (77%) agreed or strongly agreed that the Adventist Church, as a body, should hold people and institutions (at large) accountable for creating, implementing, and sustaining just and good policies and practices geared toward the flourishing of society. Only 11% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and another 11% remained neutral (see Figure 3).

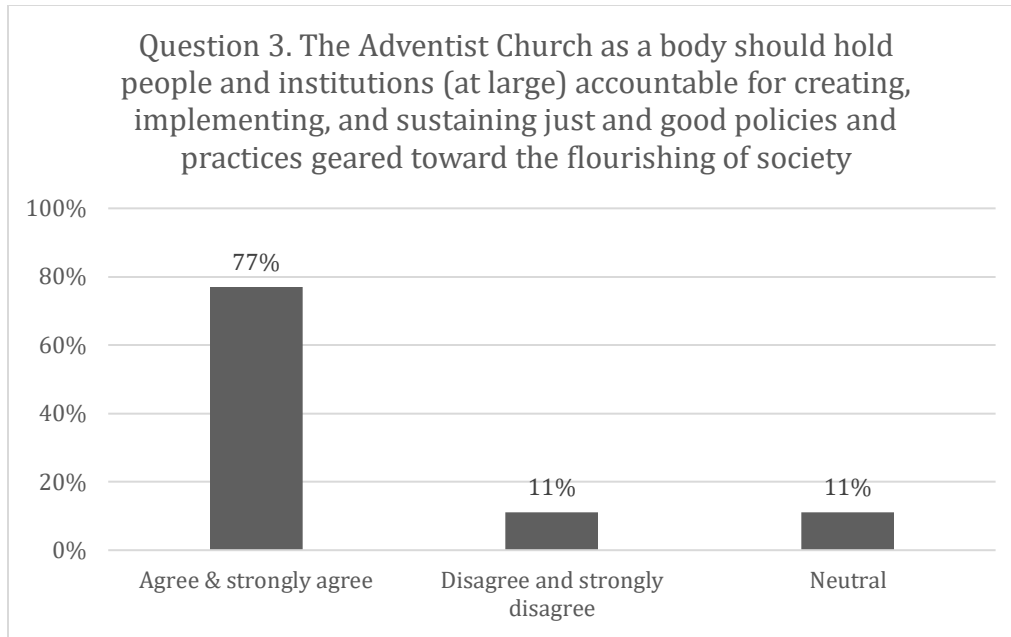


Figure 3. Frequencies – agreement & disagreement on holding people and institutions accountable.

Adventists in the sample expressed their preference as to *where* they would like the Adventist Church to advocate for social justice. Here is the order of preference: (1) Church level (General Conference, Divisions, Unions, and Conferences)⁵: 76%; (2) local level (city, town, village): 69%; (3) individual/informal level (person-to-person): 68%; (4) national level (e.g., government, congress/parliament, supreme court): 60%; and (5) global/international (e.g., United Nations): 60% (see Figures 4 and 5).

⁵ *Church Manual 2016*. The global Church is governed by the “General Conference,” which operates through “Divisions.” Divisions do not have their own constituency, but are Divisions of the General Conference. The Unions are the constituency of the General Conference.

Each Division groups together “Union Conferences” and/or “Union Missions.” Union Conferences are self-supporting financially, while Union Missions are not.

Each Union is composed of [local] “Conferences” and/or “Missions.” Local Conferences are self-supporting financially, while local Missions are not. Certain Unions are composed of local congregations, without intervening local Conferences/Missions.

Each local Conference/Mission is composed of local churches (congregations).

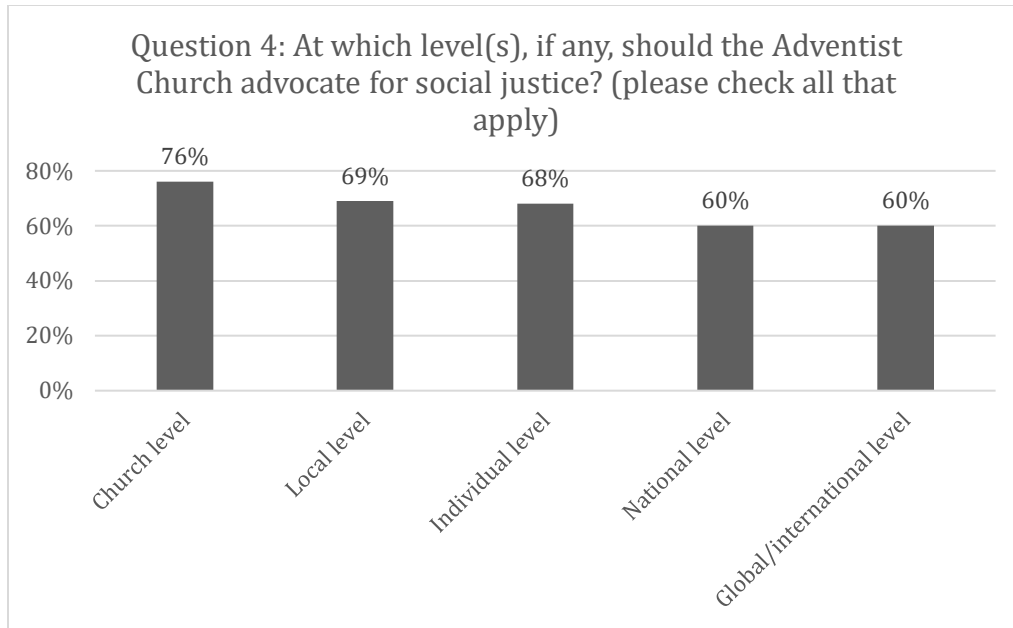


Figure 4. Frequencies – level at which to advocate for social justice.

Adventists in the sample expressed their preference as to *who* they would like to see advocate for social justice. Here is the order of preference: (1) All (GC/Divisions, Unions, Conferences, churches, members): 58%; (2) General Conference and its Divisions: 13%; (3) individual members: 11%; (4) local congregations: 8%; (5) Conferences: 5%; and (6) none: 4%.

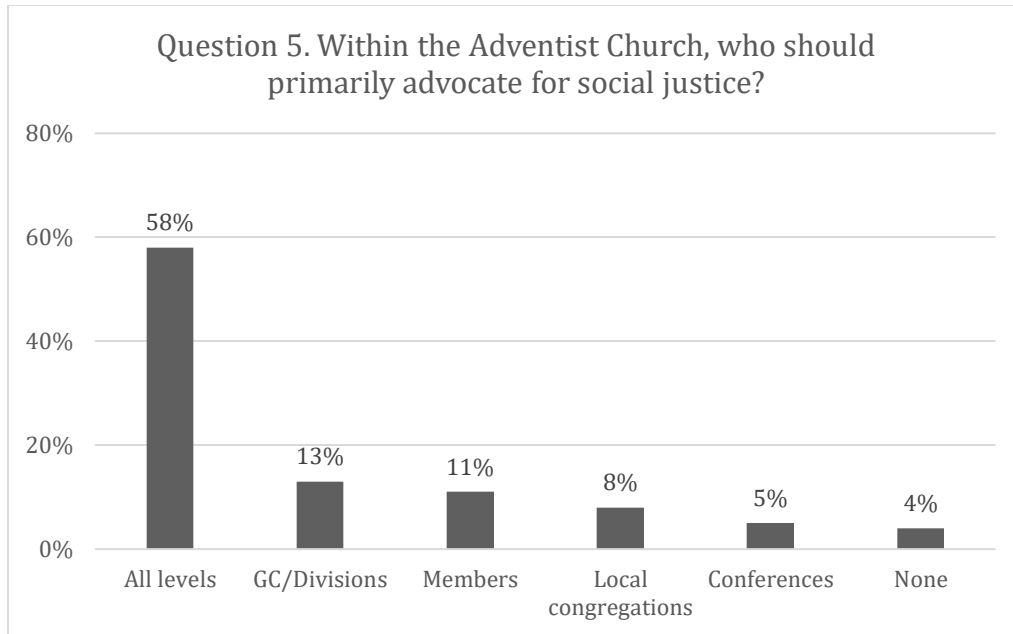


Figure 5. Frequencies – Who should primarily advocate for social justice with the Adventist Church.

Most Adventists in the sample (58%) thought that Adventist pastors should always or often advocate for social justice from the pulpit. Approximately 33% of them thought they should do so sometimes. Only 9% thought they should do so rarely or never (see Figure 6).

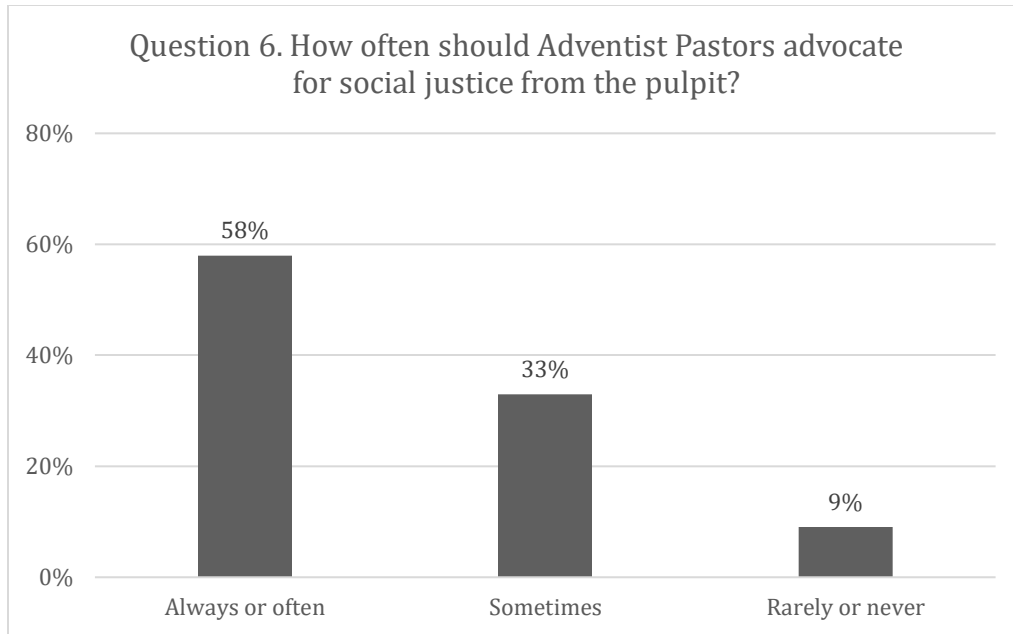


Figure 6. Frequencies – frequency of advocacy preaching from the pulpit by pastors.

The majority of Adventists in the sample (80%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Only 12% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 8% remained neutral (see Figure 7).

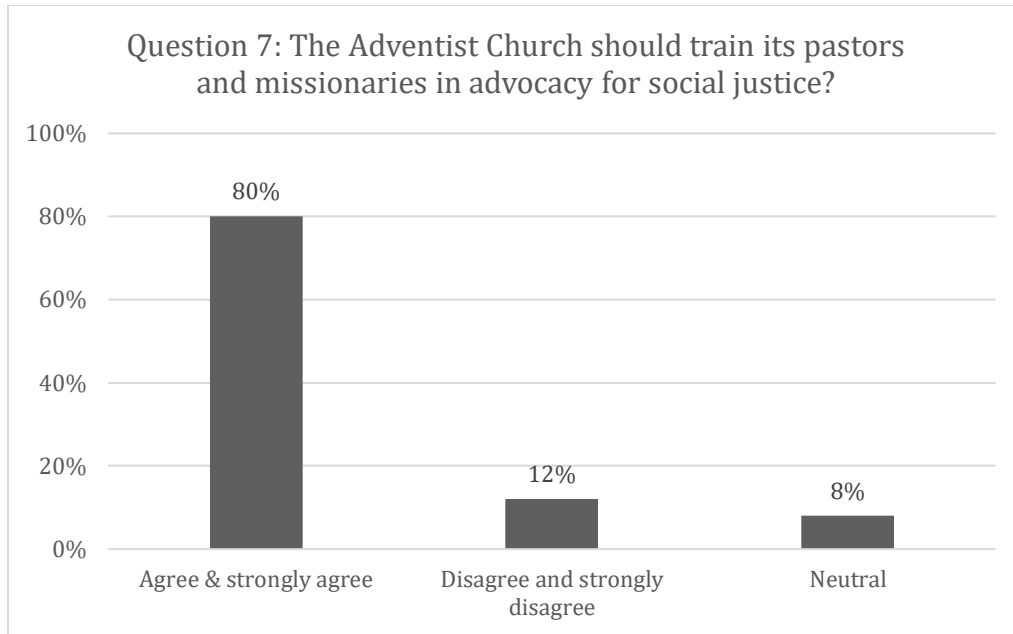


Figure 7. Frequencies – training pastors and missionaries in advocacy for justice.

Adventists in the sample express their preference as to *what* approach they would like the Adventist Church to prioritize to deal with social injustice. Here is their order of preference: (1) Compassion ministries: 47%; (2) Advocacy for structural change: 41%; (3) Position statements: 6%; and (4) Silence/abstention: 6% (see Figure 8).

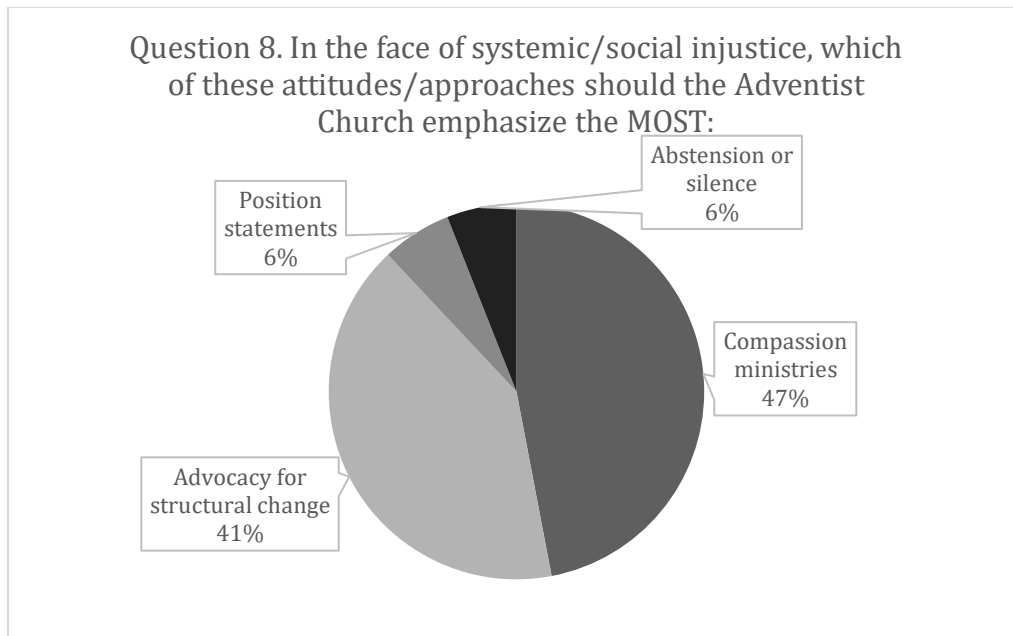


Figure 8. Frequencies – approaches to systemic/social injustice the church should emphasize the most.

The majority of Adventists in our sample (83%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “The Adventist Church should focus ONLY on evangelism aiming at saving individual souls, letting secular organizations deal with social justice issues.” Only 7% agreed or strongly agreed, while 10% remained neutral (see Figure 9).

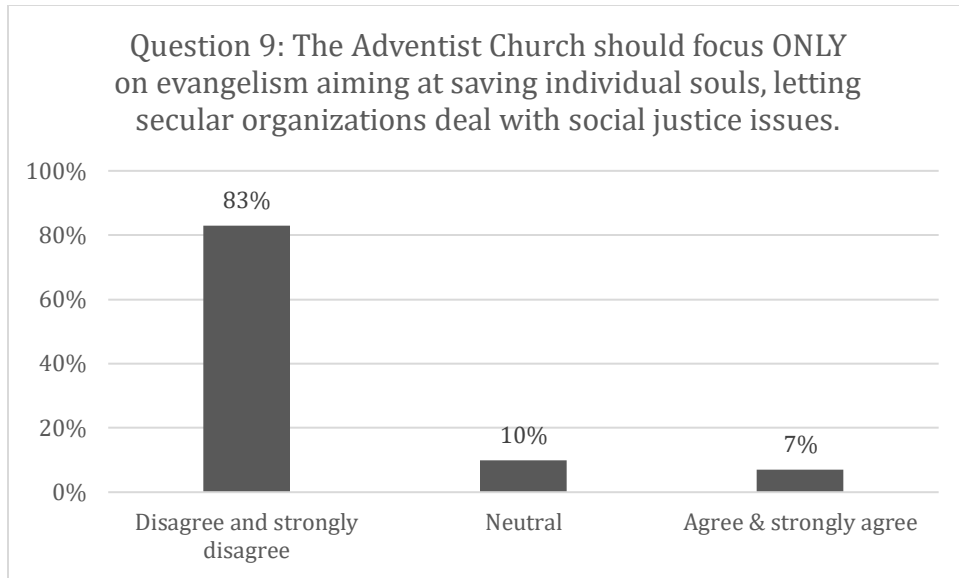


Figure 9. Frequencies – opinion about the Adventist Church focusing only on evangelism aimed at saving individual souls.

Most Adventists in our sample (70%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The Adventist Church should encourage its members to engage in advocacy for structural change in society.” Only 12% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 18% remained neutral (see Figure 10).

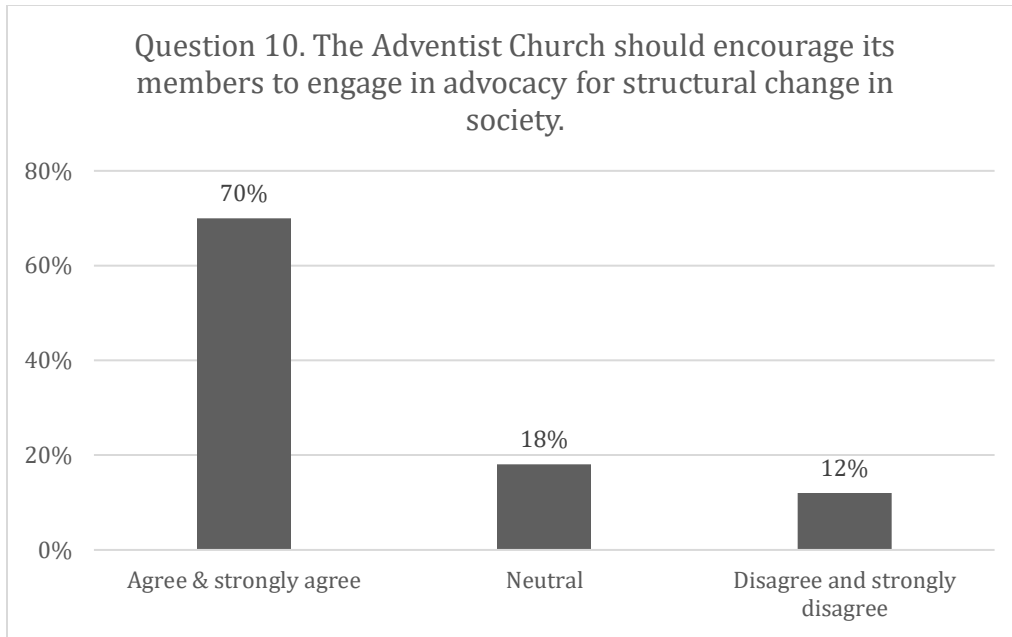


Figure 10. Frequencies – about the Adventist Church encouraging its members to engage in advocacy for structural change in society.

The majority of Adventists in our sample (90%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Only 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 3% remained neutral (see Figure 11).

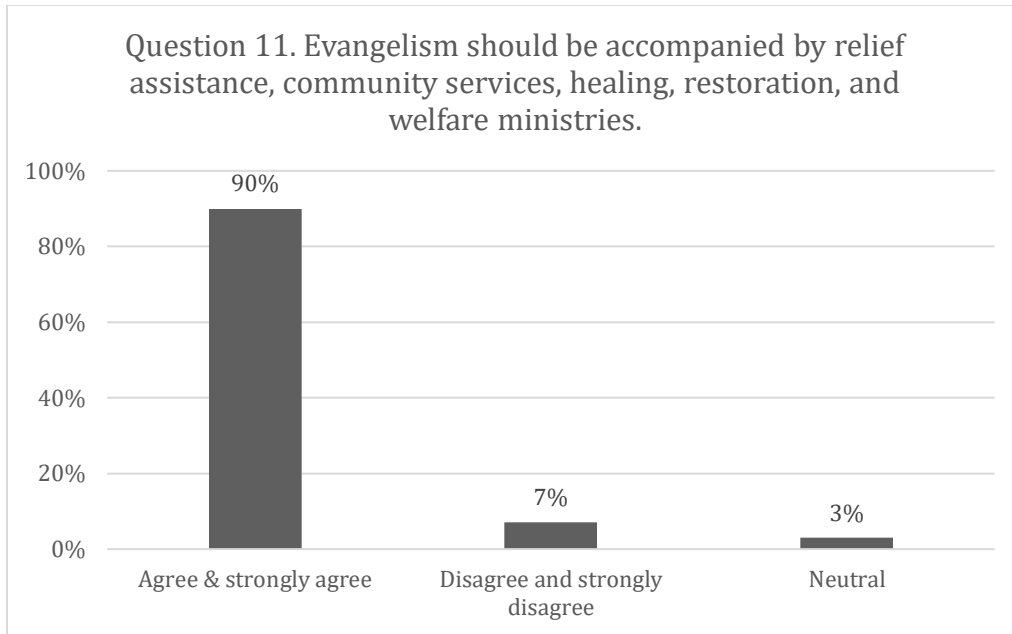


Figure 11. Frequencies – accompany evangelism by relief, assistance, community services, healing, restoration, and welfare ministries.

Most Adventists in our sample (58%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Only 17% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 24% remained neutral (see Figure 12).

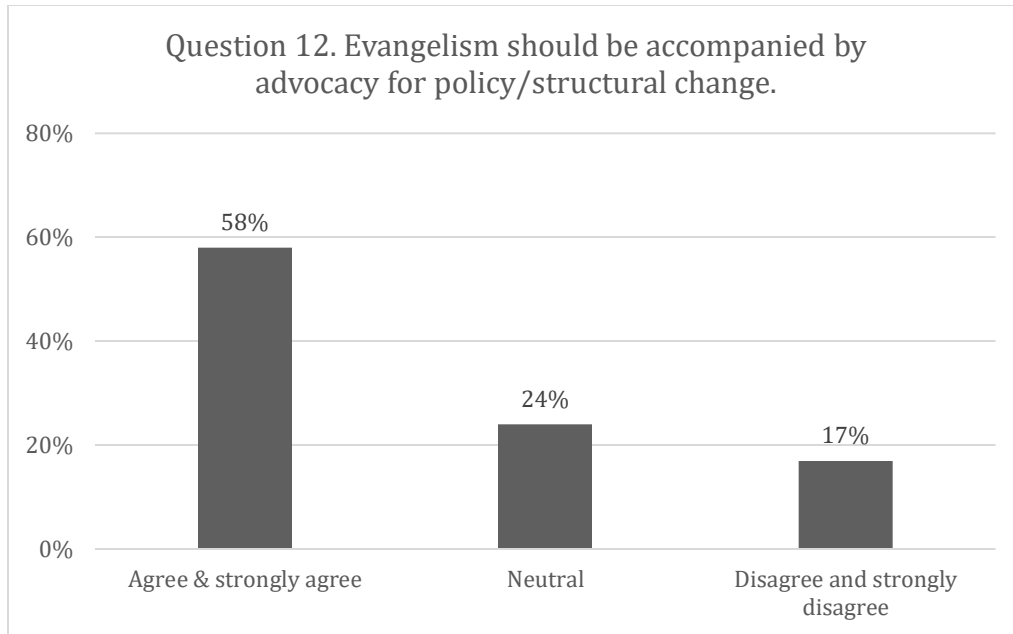


Figure 12. Frequencies – accompany evangelism by advocacy for policy/structural change.

Adventists in the sample expressed their preference as to the *best* combination of social ministry and evangelism they would like the Adventist Church to implement to deal with social injustice. Here is their order of preference: (1) Social ministry and evangelism as PARTNERS: 61%; (2) Social ministry as a BRIDGE to evangelism: 23%; (3) Social ministry as a RESULT of evangelism: 8%; and (4) Social ministry and evangelism SEPARATE from each other: 8% (see Figure 13).

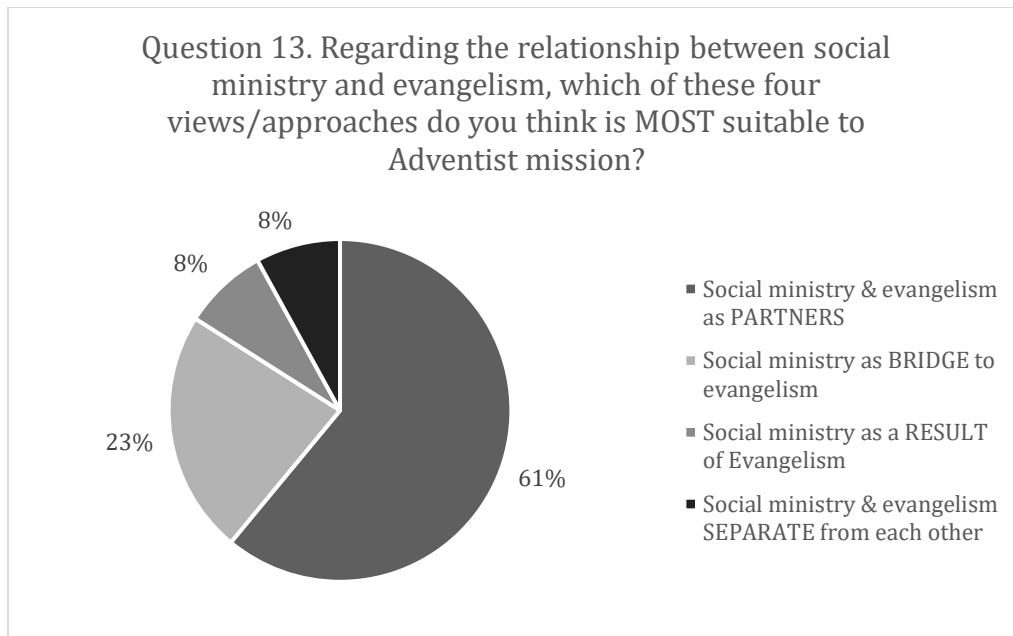


Figure 13. Frequencies – views/approaches most suitable to Adventist mission.

Adventists in the sample expressed their preference as to *what* social issues they would like the Adventist Church to tackle as moderate and high priority. Here is their order of preference: (1) Religious intolerance: 78%; (2) Domestic violence: 76%; (3) Human trafficking: 65%; (4) Racial injustice: 63%; (5) Mistreatment of refugees/migrants: 62%; (6) Destruction of nature: 53%; (7) Economic inequality: 46%; (8) Arm proliferation: 36%; and (9) Corruption in government: 32% (see Figure 14).

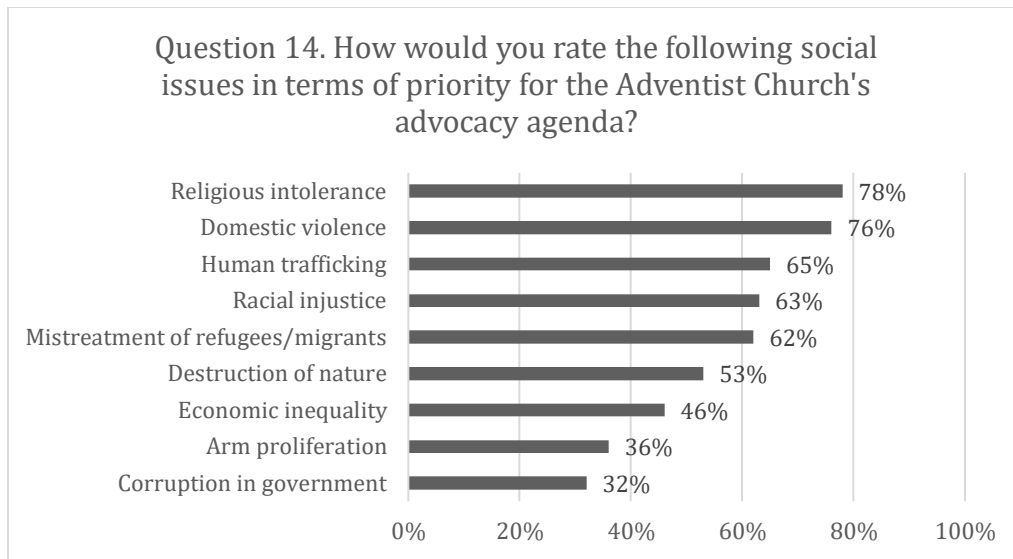


Figure 14. Ranking – priority for the Adventist Church’s advocacy agenda.

Less than half of Adventists in the sample (40%) reported about advocacy activity carried out by their Union, Conference, department or local church. Another 40% of them said they did not know. The remaining 20% said that no advocacy activity had been carried out (see Figure 15).

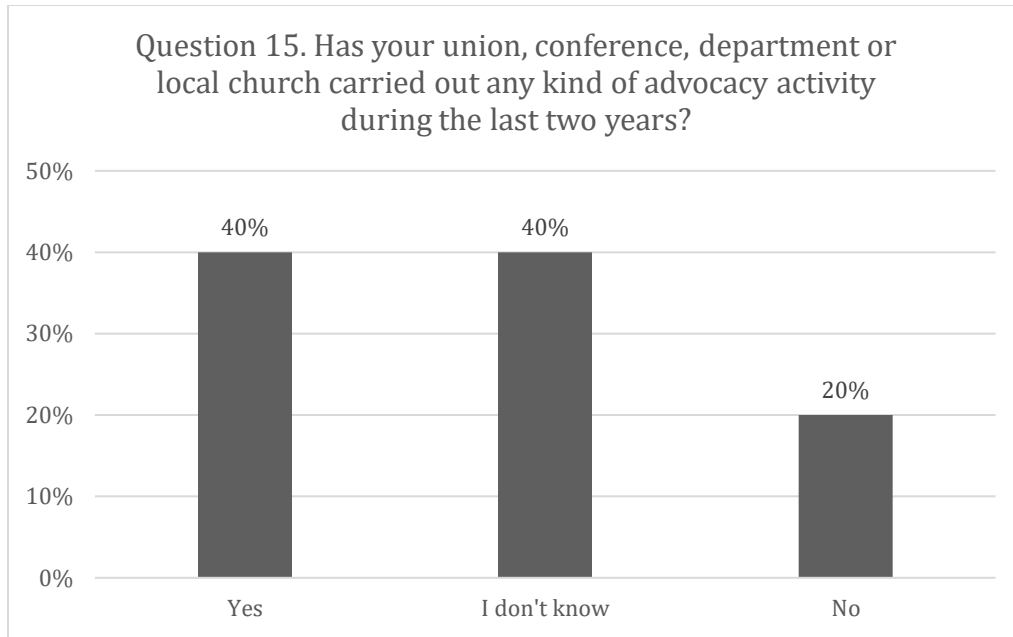


Figure 15. Frequencies – awareness of advocacy activity conducted by local church.

Adventists in the sample who reported that their Union, Conference, department, or local church had carried out advocacy activity indicated what kind of activity was implemented. The activities are classified here in order of frequency of occurrence: (1) Public rallies, sit-ins, or street demonstrations: 26%; (2) Writing in newspapers, on the internet, or on social media: 20%; (3) Ads using posters, flyers, or billboards: 10%; (4) Participation in policy forum discussions: 10%; (5) Face-to-face meetings with state/government authorities: 9%; (6) Legal assistance and/or training for victims of right violations: 7%; (7) Intervention in the radio, TV: 6%; and (8) Linking victims of right violations to authorities: 5% (see Figure 16).

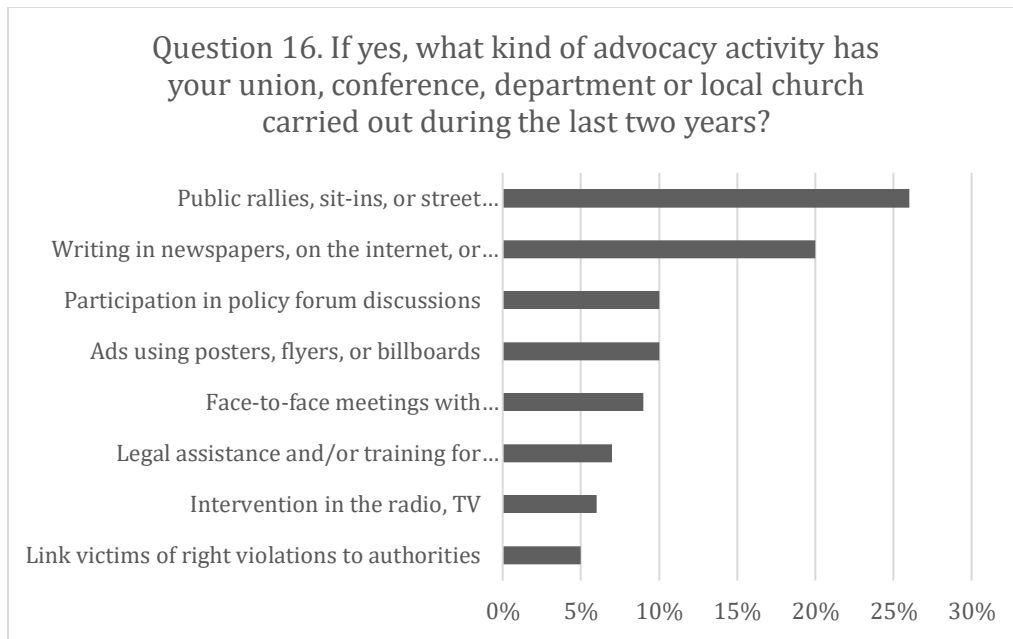


Figure 16. Frequencies – kind of advocacy activity conducted by union, conference, department or local church.

Adventists in the sample who reported that their Union, Conference, department, or local church has carried out advocacy activity indicate what social issue was the focus of the advocacy effort. The activities are classified here in order of frequency of occurrence: (1) Racial injustice: 33%; (2) Domestic violence: 21%; (3) Religious intolerance: 18%; (4) Human trafficking: 12%; (5) Economic inequality: 8%; (6) Mistreatment of migrants/refugees: 7%; (7) Destruction of nature: 5%; (8) Corruption in government: 3%; (9) Arms proliferation: 3% (see Figure 17).

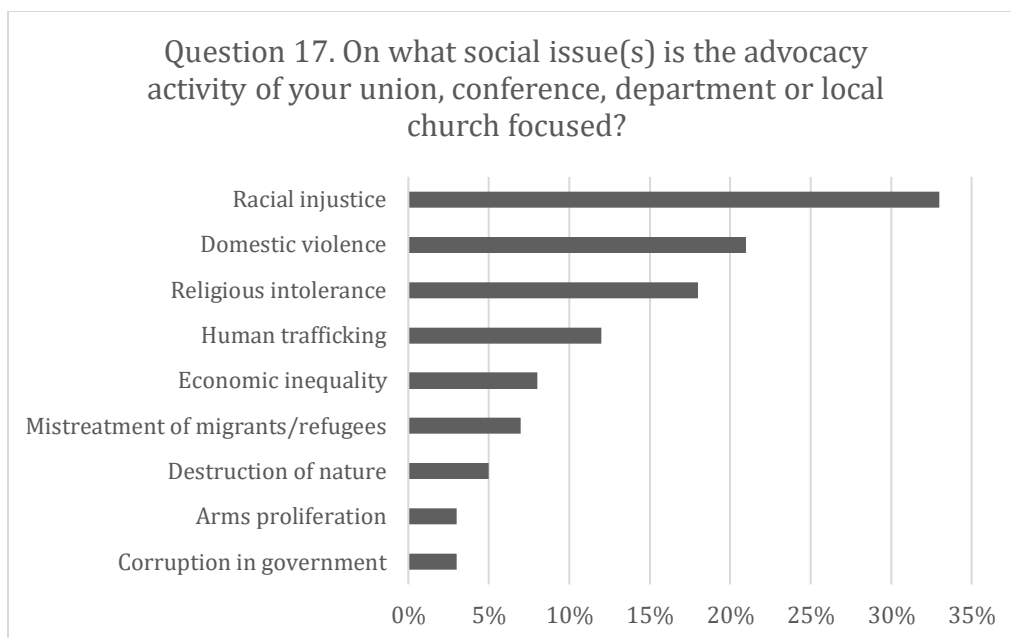


Figure 17. Frequencies – social issues Union, Conference, department, or local church focuses on.

Adventists in the sample expressed the main reasons why they would reject an advocacy proposal. The reasons are presented here in order of frequency: (1) Not have the required training and skills: 41%; (2) Advocacy is too political: 33%; (3) Safety concerns: 28%; (4) Lack of funds: 26%; (5) The timing is not appropriate: 18%; (6) Advocacy is not biblical: 14%; (7) Advocacy is not a priority for the Adventist Church: 11%; and (8) Advocacy should not be part of Adventist mission 7% (see Figure 18). The following are demographic questions that were included to create a description of the sample (see Figures 19 to 27).

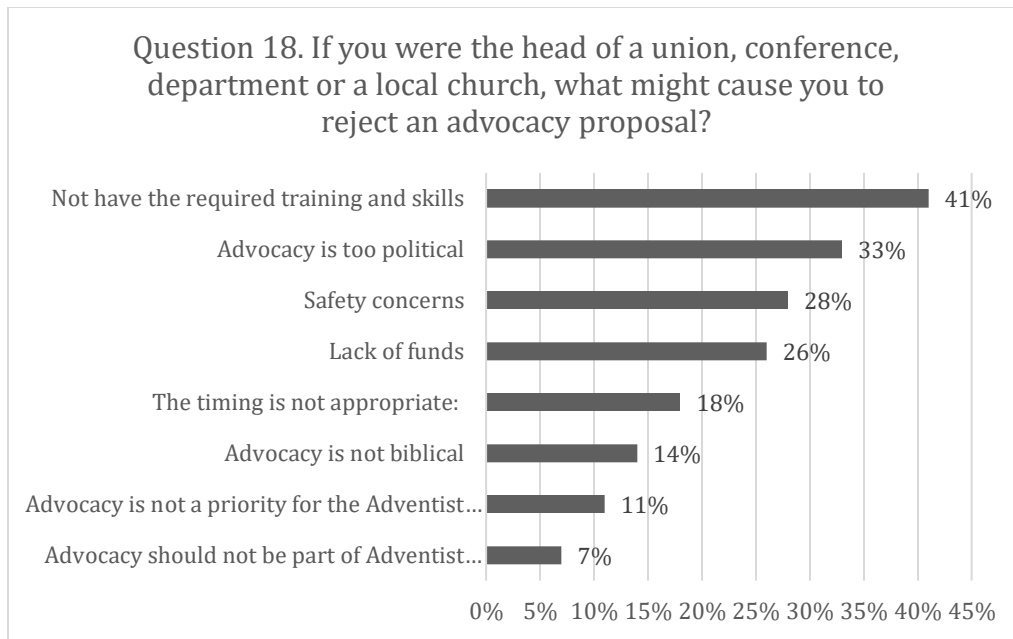


Figure 18. Frequencies – main reasons church leaders may not want to involve in advocacy.

The following are demographic questions that were included to create a description of the sample (see Figures 19 to 27).

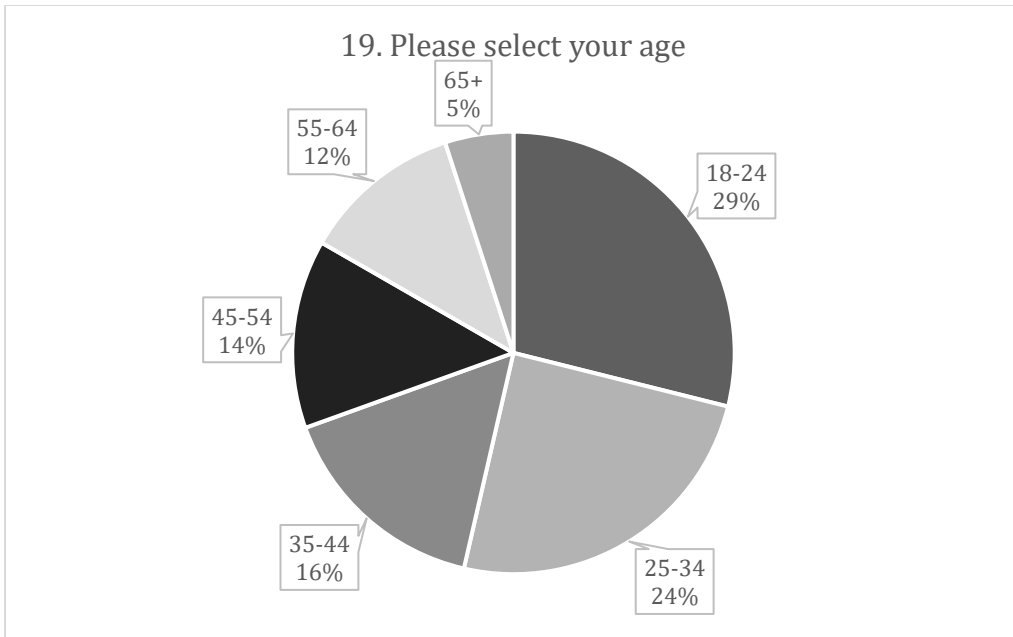


Figure 19. Frequencies – Survey participants' age.

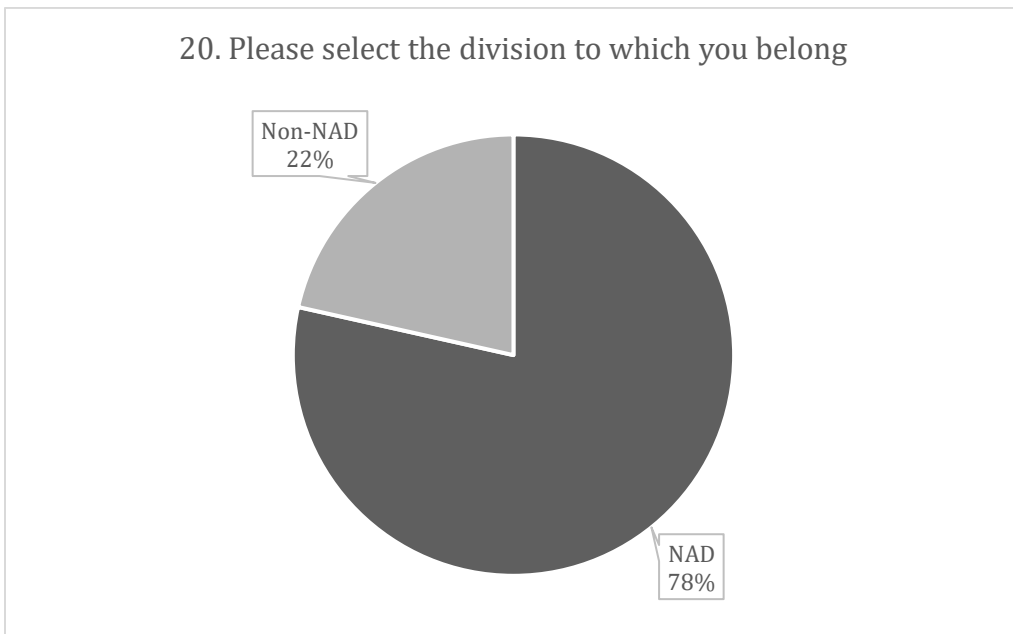


Figure 20. Frequencies – Division where participants are from.

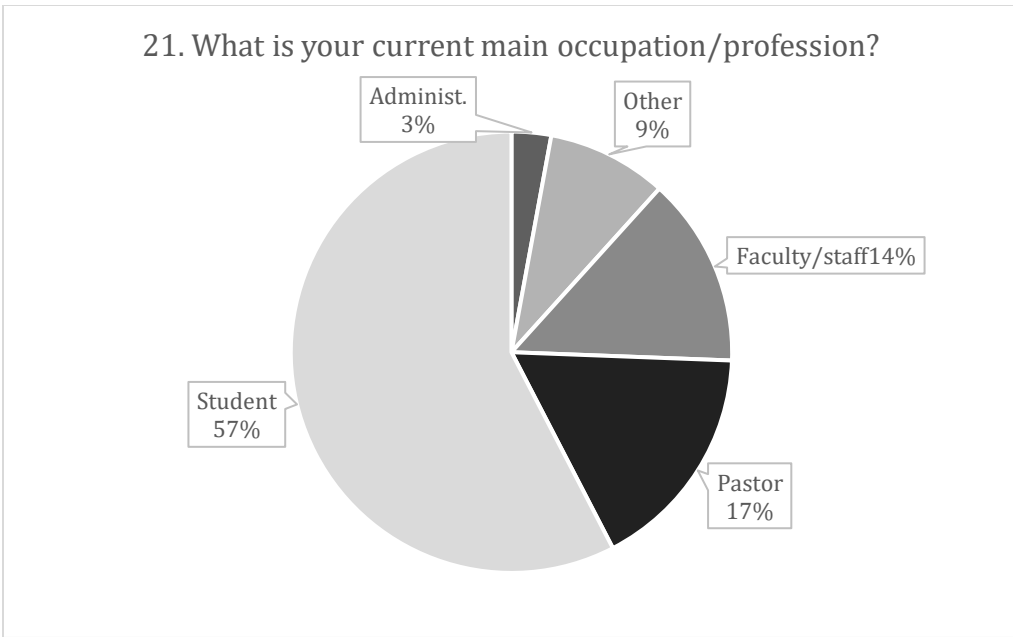


Figure 21. Frequencies – participants' occupation/profession.

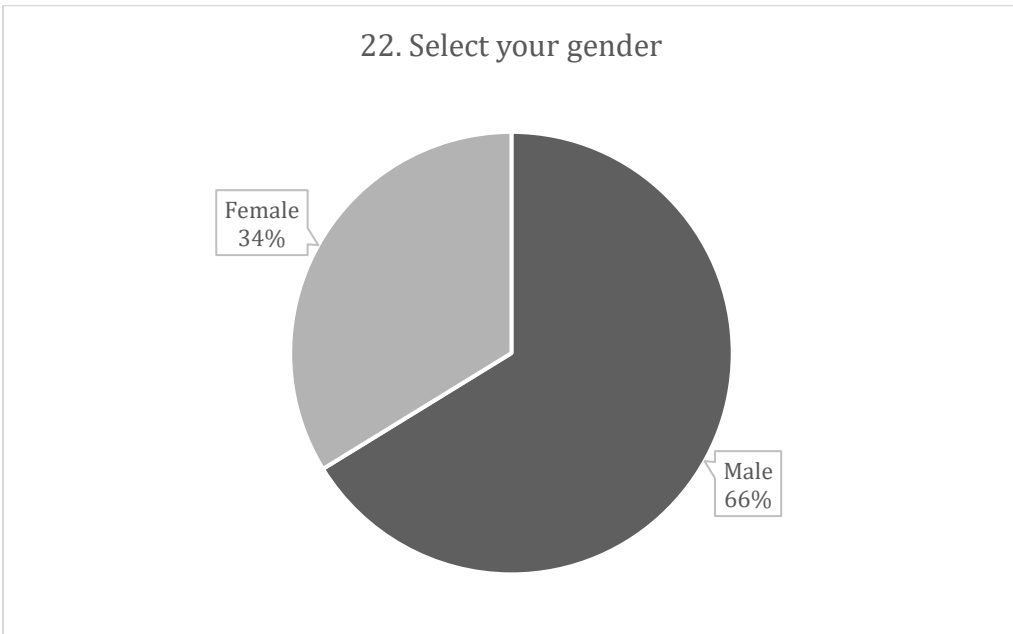


Figure 22. Frequencies – Participants' gender.

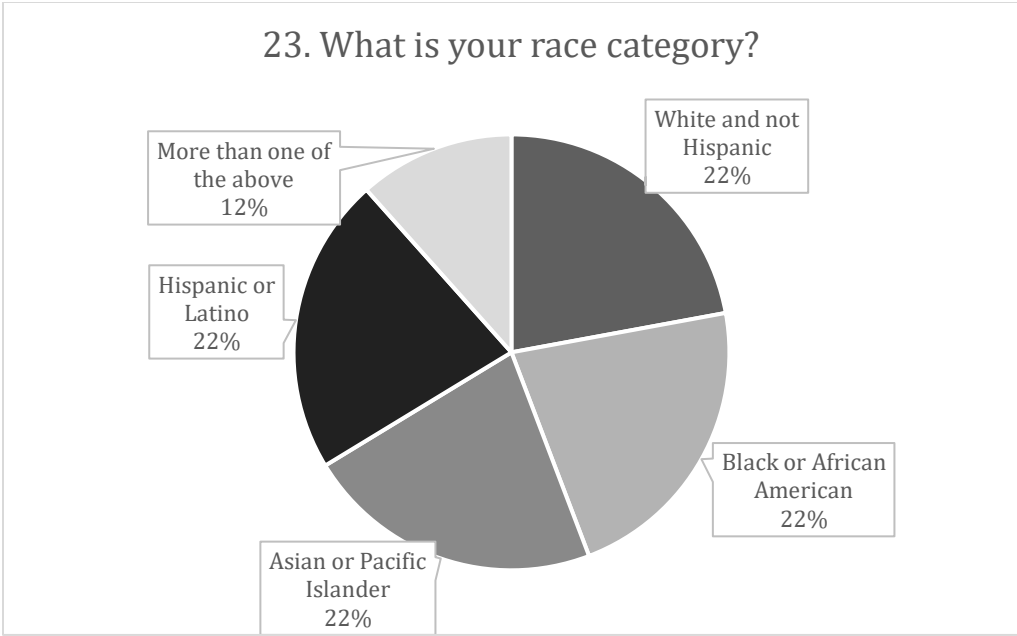


Figure 23. Frequencies – Participants’ race category.

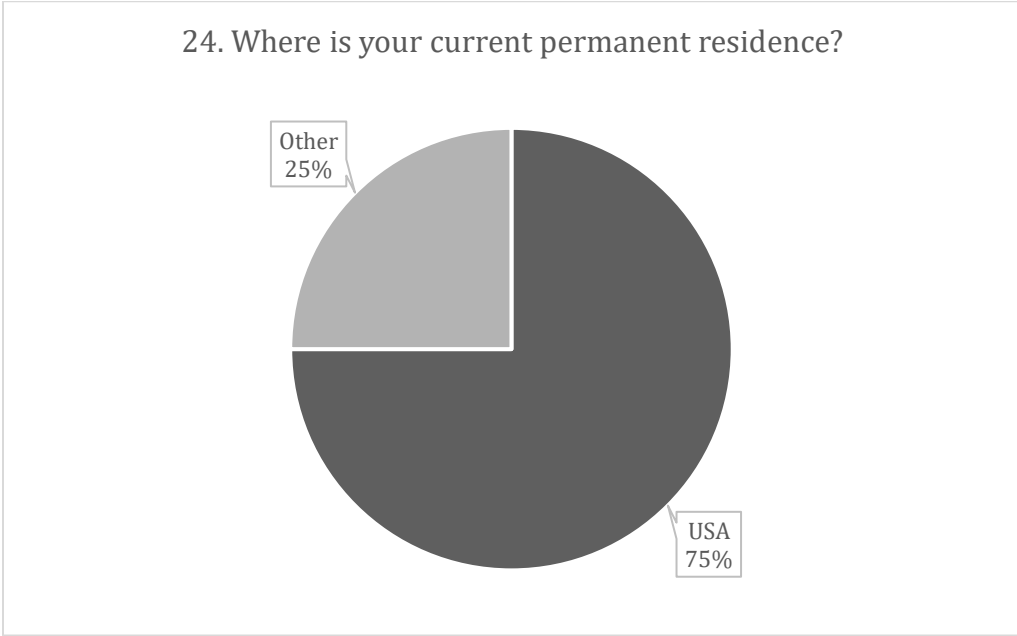


Figure 24. Frequencies – Participants’ permanent residence.

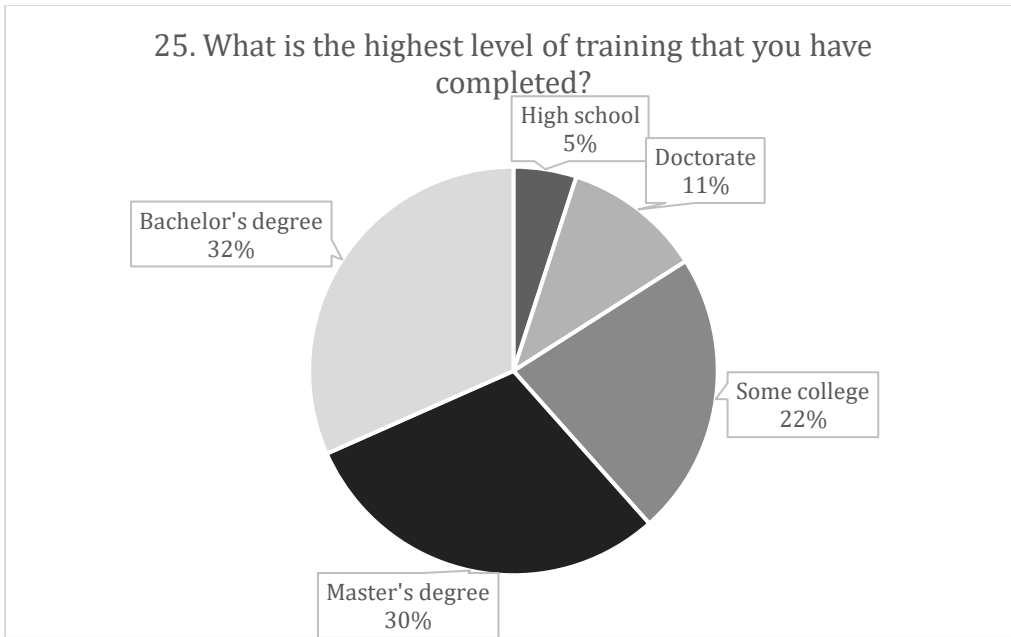


Figure 25. Frequencies – Participants' highest level of training.

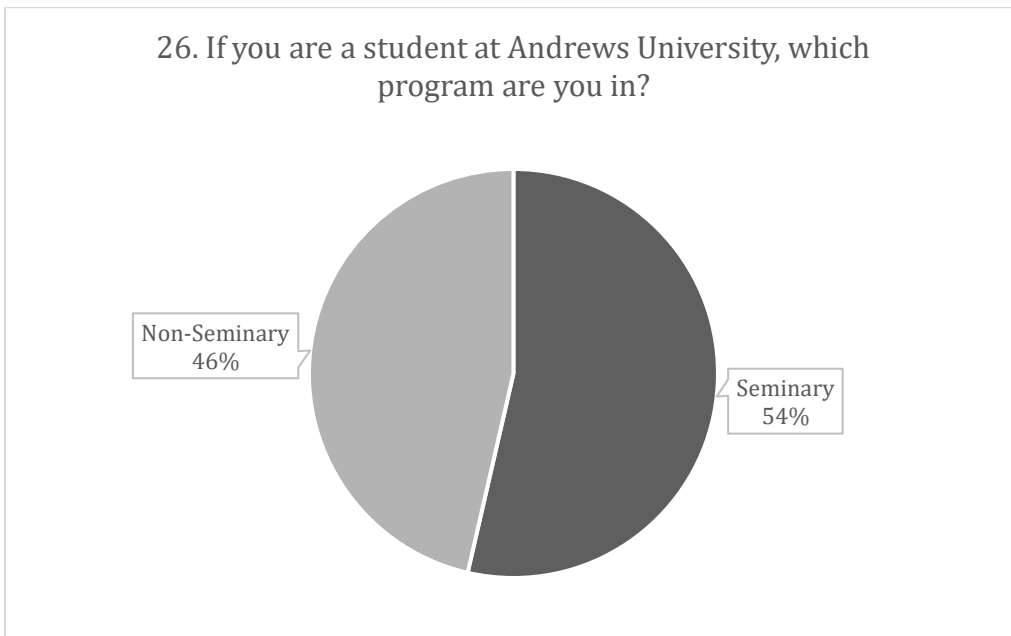


Figure 26. Frequencies – Participants' program at Andrews University.

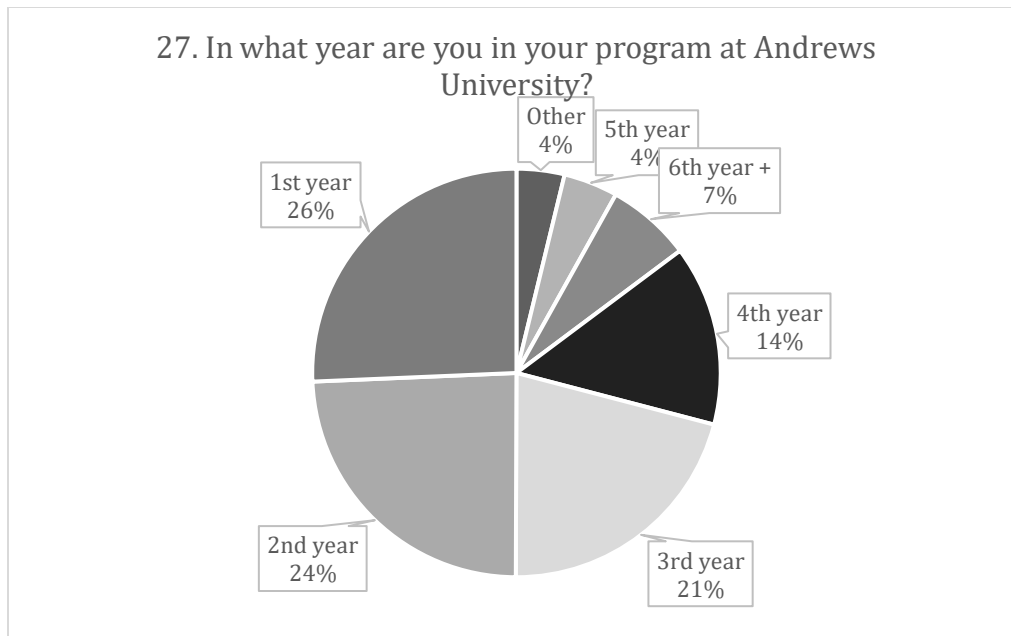


Figure 27. Frequencies – Participants’ year in the program at Andrews University.

Using inferential (correlation) measurement, demographics were later used as additional variables to test for influences on views about social justice advocacy. Independently and in combination, only one demographic response was found to influence views on social justice advocacy: Non-Whites are significantly different from Whites on “How often should Adventist pastors advocate for social justice from the pulpit?” Non-White respondents want to see pastors advocate for social justice from the pulpit more often than their White counterparts.

Overall, the participants expressed favorable views about advocacy and would like to see the Adventist Church become more engaged in social justice advocacy as a significant element in its outreach to the world. It is worth noting that those views are representative of younger church members (18–34 years old) and highly educated older members, but not of most of the church, which is, in fact, mostly older members (around

50 years old).⁶ The higher age groups in the sample, quite small in number, are somewhat skewed towards higher education (Masters or doctorates), which correlates with more progressive views.

Qualitative (Interviews) Findings

Definition of Biblical Advocacy

Most respondents defined advocacy from a biblical and Adventist perspective as the act of speaking up for the speechless and/or the act of promoting a cause or a policy that is supported by the Bible. One interviewee added that for advocacy to be Adventist, it must be grounded in Scripture and initiated and carried out by the Church as a whole. In other terms, Adventist advocacy is when the Church as a body, not just one or a few individuals, takes a stance against a social illness.⁷ He cited, as an example, Ellen White and early Adventists who joined the temperance movement in the United States and took a stance for prohibition. When Adventists take such a stance, it can be political, but it does not have to be. The goal is always to help those in need.

Other definitions of advocacy from a biblical and Adventist perspective include “actively engaging in representing” the disadvantaged and their needs,⁸ “speaking to the

⁶ News, “US Adventists Older Than New Pew Study Suggests,” *Adventist Review*, July 27, 2016, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://adventistreview.org/news/us-adventists-older-than-new-pew-study-suggests/>.

⁷ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 10, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 1.

⁸ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

oppressor,”⁹ and “mediation” on behalf of somebody who is unable to speak for himself or herself. Advocacy goes beyond speaking for or speaking on behalf of somebody. “It’s giving voice to the voiceless,” it is the act of empowering people to defend their rights.¹⁰ Advocacy could be official and/or unofficial, according to another respondent. Official advocacy happens at the levels of government, local, national, or any other level, or it may be with the involvement of the Church. Unofficial advocacy is when one grants public support to a cause through other kinds of means, including social media, personal engagement, speaking on behalf of other people in arguing their case, and trying to raise the issues to the forefront.¹¹

Finally, one respondent linked advocacy with sanctification: “You don’t really have sanctification if you’re not advocating.”¹²

Definition of Social Justice

Respondents talked of advocacy and social justice as interchangeable concepts. Social justice was defined as the defense of the weak, the helpless, the orphan, the

⁹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

¹⁰ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

¹¹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5.

¹² Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 10, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 1.

widow, and the socially deprived.¹³ It is also the act of standing up for the rights of the disadvantaged,¹⁴ the “act of equalizing the social position of people.”¹⁵

There are principles at play when talking about social justice from a biblical standpoint. The first principle is that social justice is to be understood in the context of God as the Judge, the Sovereign Judge. When God is not the starting point and primary focus of social justice, it may become subjective. A biblical notion of social justice implies acknowledging the fact that “we’re living in a world where God is the Sovereign Judge and that He’s going to hold humanity accountable for its acts of justice, according to His character or injustice against His character.”¹⁶ The second principle is that “social justice” is to be understood in the context of its two basic components, “social” and “justice.” The component “social” has to do with human interaction. Human interaction functions at the interpersonal level, but it also functions at other levels like the political level, the economic level, and so on. That is its social component. The other component “justice” has to do with is the way God has outlined His expectations from His people. For example, in Le 19, God said, “*Be holy because I am holy.*” Right after that, in the same chapter, He talks about justice—not taking bribes, not showing favoritism in the court, not taking advantage of the poor.

¹³ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

¹⁴ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8, 36.4-5.

¹⁵ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on March 14, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 10.

¹⁶ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

This implies that when we are talking about justice in relation to human interactions, it has to do with reflecting the character of God. Thus, social justice is reflecting the character of God in human interactions.¹⁷

Advocacy in Adventist Missions

I received mixed responses to the question related to the role that advocacy has played in Adventist missions. There is a general agreement that advocacy has somewhat played a role in Adventist missions, especially during early Adventism. However, for some, the Church has traditionally not shown much interest in advocacy, particularly with regard to race. One respondent said, “The Church is conservative in its values and has not done enough in the area of social progressiveness, embracing diversity, (of woman for example). Racism still prevails. It’s a bit disappointing because one should expect more from Christians, because at the Cross we are all equal.”¹⁸

However, another respondent believed that as far as the work of Adventist mission is concerned, the Church has been consistently concerned with groups that have been abused in different countries and different cultures and has represented them. That respondent noted, for example, that the Adventist Church has been strong on women’s rights, showing concern about how women have been treated in certain countries and advocating their rights to dignity.¹⁹

¹⁷ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

¹⁸ Interview with an administrative assistant from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 28, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 12.

¹⁹ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

When asked for specific examples of the Adventist Church's involvement in advocacy, respondents were generally unable to give exact details. However, they mentioned almost unanimously that Adventist pioneers, including Ellen White, highlighted their active participation in the Temperance Movement in the United States, their anti-slavery stance, and their treatment of Black people.

Temperance Movement in the United States

Adventist pioneers joined temperance movements happening in the United States in the nineteenth century because they were against the use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and so forth. They advocated for a healthy lifestyle and healthy living, considering this kind of advocacy as the work of freeing people from Satan's grip. Condering the pioneers' example, contemporary Adventists have no excuse to just sit in a bubble and say, "Oh, we're waiting for Jesus to come." Ellen White even worked with non-Adventists and other advocacy agencies to push forward the temperance movement.

Anti-Slavery Stance

Ellen White was an advocate of abolitionism. Her attitude to the law of the fugitive slave has been highlighted on several occasions by respondents. She spoke up against that law, saying [paraphrasing], "You have not to obey that law. You have to take them [the fugitive slaves] in. You have to protect them. You have to give them refuge."²⁰ This shows that early Adventists were very sensitive to the needs of socially outcast individuals.

²⁰ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

Treatment of Black People

Ellen White and Bates in particular were very active in social justice issues on the racial side of things. Ellen White said a lot about differentiation based on color. She called it one of the most egregious sins to make a difference among people based on their color. There was a general sense among respondents that the Adventist Church has not always maintained the ideal of the pioneers in respect to the treatment of Black people and probably in some other respects, as well.

Other Instances of Advocacy in Adventism

Some local churches

One respondent acknowledged that advocacy may also be happening at the local church level. He knew of some churches that were involved in local councils and helped the councils deal with certain issues. This was happening in New Zealand, a country under the rule of a secular government. The local councils and Adventist churches formed an advocacy group called *Crime to Christ*. The church interacted with prisoners and led them to embrace Jesus Christ. As a result, those prisoners left the life of crime. Note that it was an advocacy group working with the government, but with no political agenda or affiliation. Although it was a secular government, they liked and supported the program because it helped people not to go back to jail. It was a program that transformed people's lives.

General Conference's statements

Other respondents mentioned advocacy that is implemented by the General Conference, particularly the One Humanity's statement voted recently by the Executive Committee. The statement advocates strongly for respect for everybody irrespective of social, ethnic, racial, or other backgrounds.

During the Spring meeting [2020], there was also in-depth discussion among Adventist administrators and presentation on ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, casteism, and all kinds of reasons plaguing the society, and also had an effect on the Church.

One respondent saw the public relations and religious liberty department (PARL) as a bridge that could connect the Church with government. Through an entity like this, "the Church should voice its position, its concern with some matters, not only religious liberty."²¹ The Church can do this by putting "a statement in a newspaper or on the internet on a matter that is crucial, that is a moral issue for humanity, and it clearly has to do it with biblical morality, biblical principles."²²

Advocacy and Adventist Mission and Messages

When asked whether or not they believed tensions existed between advocacy and the Adventist mission and messages, responses fell into two broad categories: (1) less conservative and (2) more conservative. Those in the first category believed that no

²¹ Interview with a church administrator from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

²² Ibid.

tension existed, or if such tension did exist, it was a product of misunderstanding, particularly regarding the meaning of evangelization or the meaning of preaching the gospel. For those in the second category, however, real tension existed between advocacy and the Adventist mission/message. Below are a few quotes from both sides:

Less Conservative Side: No Real Tension

I don't know where it [the tension] came from [that dichotomy]. It wasn't in early Adventism. You have them doing abolition and prohibition and then preaching the gospel. And they were together. Somewhere along the line, we had a divorce. ... maybe we got it from that whole fundamentalism [this kind of split]. I don't know where it came from, but I think we need to go back to pure Adventism and marry the two.²³

There can't be a tension because the real work of ministry is analogous to God acting incarnationally. Just like God has incarnated Godself for us, so we incarnate ourselves wherever there are needs. That's the real work of ministry and that is what the Church does. There's no balancing that with anything else. That is how we reach people. Part of that is of course sharing the story that we are only imperfect agents, that it's God who is doing this. And once you start telling them that God loves them and what God is doing in the world, you're into the business of sharing what we normally think of as our beliefs: God made the world, God calls us to celebrate, and worship God on Sabbath, whatever. And all of these things can be tied into the center of 'God with us.'²⁴

I don't think there should be a tension.... I believe that the mission of the Church is much larger than just proclamation of some kind of cognitive truths. I think mission includes indeed advocacy, and evangelism and issues of advocacy in my view do not conflict. They complement each other. Jesus was proving to be both a healer and teacher of the word and going around doing the ministry of love and advocacy for those who have not been in many respects recognized, who have been marginalized.

I've observed in the church often when I speak from those issues, people will ask, 'well, how does that take away from evangelism?' My definition of evangelism or mission, which is larger than evangelism of the Church is that advocacy and

²³ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 10, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 1.

²⁴ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 26, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 7.

evangelism go hand in hand and that they are two sides of the same coin of Jesus' ministry.²⁵

We're seeing mission only as soul winning. And I'm not saying that's not important. But, you have to see mission also as getting kids into school where they are unable to go to school, getting people have jobs so that they can feed their families. You have to see all those things as part of winning souls.²⁶

The biggest tension is when it comes to America.... When most people in America think about social justice, they only think about it in terms of America and that's problematic because biblical social justice is a worldwide phenomenon, ... Justice is not a local phenomenon. It has local implications, but it's not just a private, personal interpretation of what we think is right or wrong in our own society. So that's the first tension.

The second tension is, in that very context, the partisanship in terms of the political apparatus. A lot of people think social justice, -- if they lean more conservative -- is fighting against abortion or putting a Supreme court justice, who's going to push a conservative agenda.... So, if we allow the political apparatus to dictate and to define biblical virtues and values and principles, we're going to run into problems. So those are, especially in the American context, the two things that I see as problematic.²⁷

Personally, I don't [believe that there exists a tension between advocacy and the Adventist mission/message]. Some people do have a challenge with it, and I think it's because the word advocacy suggests sometimes a level of action that they don't actually agree with. And I think they see advocacy maybe as aggressive. I don't agree with violence as a means of resolving things. So, I should say that upfront. But I think that it's an interpretation of advocacy and social justice that I don't think is really true to what social justice is about. So, I guess what I'm saying is that in its purest form, I think social justice and advocacy do not conflict with the message and the mission of the Church.²⁸

²⁵ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5.

²⁶ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

²⁷ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

²⁸ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

More Conservative Side: Tensions are Real

The tension, I think is that we were given a mission and, particularly for the Adventist people, the most important mission we have is sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the love of God for us, or the human family in the context of the entire proclamation of the Three Angels' messages, which highlight God's character, God's law, the Sabbath and things like that. That is our primary mission. So, the tension is, doing what you can to mitigate the effects of sin, not forgetting our primary focus, which is the fulfillment of the Three Angels' messages.²⁹

If you look at the Bible, if you look at the messages concerning social justice in a biblical context, it was primarily social justice among God's people. And so therefore the first starting point for the Church has to do with how we, as brothers and sisters, treat each other. So, I would say that's one point. I would say that comes before the question of how we address the world, because we are responsible before God for how we take care of our own house. The world doesn't claim to follow God. Well, we can help the world too, but they're not accountable to the same level we are. And therefore we, as a Church, we need to take that into consideration. The other thing I'd say here is that while social justice should be part of our work, it should not become the gospel.³⁰

What is the core of the gospel? So as a Church, ... our fundamental mission is to proclaim and preach the gospel. And we must be clear what the gospel is. I think biblically it's John 3:16 and many other passages. It's very clear. The gospel is God's plan to redeem human beings from sin. But of course, there's a number of entailments, number of things that go together. But this is the core of the gospel. The Church is called to proclaim the gospel and to be an agent to transform life, not necessarily to transform society at large, although ultimately the gospel will impact society. But if the Church focuses on social change, I'm afraid the Church will be doing what governments are supposed to do. And the Church does not have the capabilities, the tools to effect social change because the Church is not a political entity, is not even a sociological entity, although it's a kind of society. But the Church is the arm of God to redeem human beings, to bring them from sin to the light of the gospel. So, the Church must be clear on the focus. So, these must remain the main focus.³¹

²⁹ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

³⁰ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 23, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 3.

³¹ Interview with a church administrator from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

In summary, according to the views expressed, the respondents who saw tension tended (1) to define evangelism and social ministry as separate functions of the Church, (2) to define social justice advocacy according to the local context (American context for example), and (3) to define social justice advocacy according to the existing political apparatus.

Majors Social Justice Issues to Address

Due to lack of time and to the fact it was not really the focus of the research, I made no effort to obtain details concerning the meaning of terms used by respondents to express what they perceived as major social justice issues, which the Adventist Church should be concerned about. It was also difficult to establish a hierarchy of the issues because some respondents used broader terms that overlapped with other terms and encompassed multiple issues (e.g.: “a culture of domination” may include violence, racism, oppression of women, etc.).

Nevertheless, based on the affinity between the terms and concepts, I was able to identify five top categories of issues that respected a certain hierarchy in terms of importance for the respondents: (1) *Racial issues*: racism, nationalism, tribalism, casteism, a culture of domination (econ, culture, gender, race, etc.); (2) *Gender issues*: oppression on women, domestic violence, gender injustices, a culture of domination (econ, culture, gender, race, etc.); (3) *Economic issues*: poverty, inequities, economic malfeasance, exploitation of the poor, mistreatment of minorities, migrants, and refugees, human slave trafficking, gang warfare, a culture of domination (econ, culture, gender, race, etc.); (4) *Religious liberty issues*: Religious discrimination; and (5) *Environmental issues*: climate crisis.

Theological Arguments Against Advocacy

None of the interviewees presented theological arguments against the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice. I cite here a few reactions to the question as to whether or not biblical passages or Spirit of Prophecy statements exist that go against the Church's involvement in social justice advocacy: "Well, I don't recall that there is necessarily passages against advocacy."³² "I haven't heard one that's convinced me yet."³³ "I don't think in the Bible we have anything that could stop us.... I don't think there's anything in the Bible that would preclude us from becoming more oriented towards social justice area."³⁴ "To me, you have to search hard to find what not to do, why you should not defend and deal with social justice, because all the prophetic oracles are about social justice. Jesus' teachings are about social justice."³⁵

Having noted that the respondents were not willing or capable to argue against the Church's involvement in advocacy on scriptural grounds, I invited some of them (chosen randomly) to comment on a sample of biblical texts I used to hear/read being used to warn or caution about the Church's participation in advocacy movements. The following are excerpts of their reactions to those passages.

³² Interview with a church administrator from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

³³ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

³⁴ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on March 14, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 10.

³⁵ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

Reactions to Passages Often Used Against Advocacy

John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

But I think what Jesus refers to there is that we should not use violence. Because my kingdom is not from this world, I’m not going to use violence. If that would have been the case, I could have asked my Father to send the Legion of angels and they would have fought, but that’s not the case. And, I think that raising our voices, using our influence to change social structures and policies, there is any Bible passage that would go against that.³⁶

Jesus was also very strong on the kingdom of this world and on making that a better place for people as well as on the kingdom to come ... he was concerned about both of those. And, to me, even if you just take the new Testament summary of the law—love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself, that says it all. And that means that when someone is being mistreated and abused, that is breaking God’s law putting simply.³⁷

Romans 13: 1, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”

Passages like this do not preclude the Church from doing advocacy, nor do they preclude it from raising its prophetic voice, according to one respondent who thought there were universal moral and ethical principles that we are all accountable to, no matter whether it is the Church, the government, or any kind of society. These are universal points. That respondent argued that whenever there are some universal principles at stake, the Church should not be afraid to raise its voice.³⁸

³⁶ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

³⁷ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

³⁸ Interview with a church administrator from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

Adventists are not to obey human legislations that go against God's law. This is the general position of the respondents. Some cite as an example the experience of early Adventists confronted with the Slavery Fugitive Act. According to that law, if a slave escaped from his or her master in the South and traveled North, it was a crime to give them shelter. One had to capture the slave and hand him or her over to the authorities to be returned (to their masters). Ellen White specifically said that Adventists were not to abide by that law.

To really submit yourself to the authorities in Romans 13 means to obey God rather than men. In other words, this is the issue that we faced in South Africa with apartheid. And the argument was, 'well, it's the laws of the land. God put these people here.' Do you think that the Church should have followed along in the lines of racial discrimination just because it was the law of the land? No, the Church shouldn't.³⁹

Paul certainly did not submit with authorities when it came to talking about issues, which he felt were important. . . The Early Church went against some of the authorities, because they felt they should reach out to Gentiles and treat them differently, treat them better. So, I don't think that that one text can be taken to say more than it really means. Jesus did the same.... He was not silent on what he saw happening that was wrong, whether it was to the children or whether it was to the poor or whether it was to the Gentiles.

Let's provide a Church perspective too. We can't have it both ways. So, if there was a Sabbath law that came out, we would not submit to the authorities. If we felt it was wrong and it was against the law of God, then we would react. And to me, when you see injustice and people being treated unreasonably unfairly, with a lack of dignity and respect, that is against God's law. So, why would we not feel we should respond to that if we feel we should respond to Sabbath laws or other laws like that.⁴⁰

Ellen White said,

³⁹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 26, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 7.

⁴⁰ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses,—extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Savior attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart.⁴¹

This statement from Ellen White speaks against certain methods people use when engaging in the work of justice, but she did not necessarily suggest that the Church should not advocate for justice. White’s statement has to be understood in the context of Jewish expectations during that time. A lot of the Jews were expecting a political Messiah to come and overthrow the Roman rulers. In John 6, Jesus had to escape because He knew they were going to try to force Him to be King. God had promised that He would restore the Kingdom of Judah through the Messiah and do justice for His oppressed people, but it was the way that the Jews were trying to establish Jesus’ messiahship that was problematic. “Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world. That means that he’s not using the political apparatus of the day to bring about his aims, but that does not mean that he is not sovereign over every political system in the world.”⁴²

Another respondent expressed his agreement with White’s statement and said that there is advocacy and advocacy. Here is his comment:

You can see it as involving yourself in government and politics and all of this. Or you can see it as quietly working behind the scene and advocating for the poor within your local spheres and talking to people and helping creating initiatives within the communities rather than on a government level.... It [the statement] can be read that we should not be involved in social justice advocacy, but that depends on how you

⁴¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 509.

⁴² Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

define it. She addresses a specific form of social advocacy, but there could be other ways of socially advocating. And we need to not throw the baby with the bath water and say because of this quote we should just totally not get involved. I don't think this is the message of Ellen White.⁴³

Warning

A couple of respondents warned social justice advocates of the danger of going too far. Drawing on the experience of John Harvey Kellogg who envisioned his work to help society to be so important that Ellen White perceived it as basically replacing the Adventist theological message, one respondent believed that “you can take it too far, not that you do too much, but in the sense that it becomes your message rather than being part of your message.”⁴⁴

Another respondent noted that advocacy groups usually choose a position or an idea or a cause to advocate for, and they “run with it.” Along the way, that position, idea, or cause becomes so important that everything else becomes secondary. It happens sometimes, and even often, that this position, idea, or cause is in opposition to other people or other groups. The result is that the Church will be perceived as favoring a group to the expense of other groups.

While we mitigate the effects of sin, we should be known by our love for all. We cannot favor particular groups....

The issue for me is that partiality and favoritism can be dangerous for the Church. So, I don't like to be boxed [being labeled]. I don't think the Church should be boxed.

⁴³ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on March 14, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 10.

⁴⁴ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 23, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 3.

The only box [label] that they can place us under is that we belong to Jesus, that we are faithful to the Bible.⁴⁵

In the same line of thought, a respondent advised being careful about the methods we use to advocate for justice. It is in the context of methods being used in advocacy that Adventists need to understand White's statement regarding Jesus' kingdom not being from the world. However, Adventists do not have to throw out the baby with the bath water.

Just because you do not agree with the method does not mean that you just throw out the work of justice all together. What that method looks like has to be different because every country has a different political and economic apparatus. You just cannot have a one-size-fits all, but there is nothing in the Bible that speaks against the work of caring for other people or of being holy as God is holy.⁴⁶

Theological Arguments for Advocacy

In the following section, I identify key theological themes or biblical arguments on which respondents grounded their position in favor of the Adventist Church's involvement in social justice advocacy.

⁴⁵ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

⁴⁶ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

The Three Angels' Messages

Seventh-day Adventists incorporated abolitionist arguments into the Three Angels' messages, arguing that "recognizing the Creator means treating people equal."⁴⁷ It was based on their understanding of the Three Angels' messages that early Adventists considered pro-slavery Americans as "unrepentant." They understood that the eschatological message of the Church had very clear social consequences. Ellen White herself recommended that Seventh-day Adventists who were holding proslavery sympathies to be immediately disfellowshipped.⁴⁸

Creation, Image of God (Genesis)

The main goal of the plan of redemption is the restoration of the image of God in humanity. Thus, the "image of God" theme [*imago Dei*] is the bigger umbrella under which Adventists can participate theologically in advocacy. Whatever the Church sees as an opportunity to promote or foster the restoration of God's image in people is something Adventists could be involved in.⁴⁹

The starting point for Adventists is the recognition that each individual has been created in the image of God. Adventists should do advocacy because of their love for God, what God has done in their lives, and recognition of the value of each individual and the dignity each one has as created in the image of God. Through the work of

⁴⁷ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

advocacy, Adventists demonstrate that they understand the full potential of people for this life and the life to come.⁵⁰

Adventists should look at scriptural texts another way and see how the image of God equalizes us as we worship God the Creator and guides our attitudes towards human beings, women and men of all gender and race and culture. We should always ask ourselves, “In what sense am I seeing my brother and my sister suffering? How can I be God’s hand, God’s heart, and God’s voice in terms of supporting such people, such individuals? This is the way of someone who lives an authentic Christian life, someone who lives a remnant kind of perspective in the last end-time.”⁵¹

Isaiah 58

Many respondents cited Isa 58 as a relevant and foundational biblical passage for social justice advocacy. The chapter talks about when people come to church and seek God’s presence to no avail. They wonder why God is against them, and God says, “Well, yes, you come and you fast and you do all the right things, but then you go away and you treat people badly. Isaiah 58 is “a great chapter that emphasizes the responsibility we have towards other people now, not just into the future.”⁵²

What does Isa 58 say God wants His people to do? In v. 6, it says, “*It’s not this the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds of wickedness?*” What is wickedness?

⁵⁰ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

⁵¹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5.

⁵² Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

Wickedness is not just a private enterprise. “There’s wickedness in the political and in the economic and social system.”⁵³ Isaiah was not just talking about spiritual realities, but about real people who were literally enslaved.⁵⁴

The Psalms

Psalms 72 refers to King Solomon in vv. 12–14: “For He will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, And will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; And precious shall be their blood in His sight.”

Psalms 68:5 is also a very significant verse, saying that God is “the father of the fatherless and the protector of the widows.” Verses like these show that God takes social justice very seriously, declaring Himself to be the God of the orphans and widows, of the oppressed and the needy. That constitutes the most powerful argument. “The personal example of God tells me that I have a responsibility myself.”⁵⁵

Old Testament Prophets

Old Testament prophets—Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, and others—unanimously spoke out and rebuked Israel and Judah about their attitudes towards the poor and the vulnerable ones. Isaiah said that God did not care about the people’s sacrifices, their New Moon, their Sabbaths, . . . God said He did not ask for these. What did He ask them to do?

⁵³ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

Isaiah 1:16–17 gives the answer: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.” That is what God asked His people to do. True and undefiled religion before God is this. “What is it that the [Adventist] Church doesn’t understand in these oracles?” wondered one respondent.⁵⁶

The prophets did not focus on charts or times merely for the sake of those times. They actually were very strong advocates for the causes of the most vulnerable and marginalized, and shouted from the rooftops about God’s displeasure in the face of injustice. God said He hated their Sabbaths because they trampled on the poor, built house after house and added fields to fields (Isa 5:8). Isaiah prophesied that their houses would be desolate (v. 9). Then, in Isa 58, a huge passage for Adventists, the prophet talked about the Sabbath, which should be a day for the equalization of the unequal yokes and injustices that were happening in the period between one Sabbath and the next. Isaiah 61 outlines key features of the sabbatical year (the Jubilee), implying that a sabbatical attitude needs to be looked at as we worship on Sabbath. Proverbs 31 (Wisdom literature) also talks about speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

⁵⁷ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5.

The Gospels

Luke 3:10–14

Adventists often use the proclamation of the Second Coming as an excuse not to do much about social justice. However, John the Baptist had a specific message to proclaim—the imminent coming of the Messiah. Nonetheless, he was able to link his urgent, God-focused preaching with the temporary focus of social justice: “Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it” (v. 11).⁵⁸

Luke 4:18–19

When Jesus, in Luke 4:18–19, got up and read from the book of Isaiah, He explained to the Jews what His anointing was about. He announced publicly that He was the Christ (the word anointing means Christ) and that He was the Christ in order that He might preach good news to the poor, that He might bring sight to the blind, release to those who were oppressed or in bondage, to bring in God’s liberation, the Jubilee.⁵⁹ “He didn’t talk about church membership, or dogma or anything, but instead, social justice, taking care of those who are least esteemed and neglected and overlooked in society. These are the people for whom he says, I am Christ. That’s why I’m Christ.”⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Interview with an administrative assistant from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 28, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 12.

⁶⁰ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4, 17.

Matthew 24–25

Matthew 24 is one of Adventists' favorite chapters because of its emphasis on the signs of the times and the urge to be ready for the Second Coming. One respondent noted that preoccupation for end-time events often keeps Adventists away from the battlefield of social justice.⁶¹ For example, Joseph Bates, who used to be a huge social justice advocate, was working for the cause of abolitionism and other social causes of his time as a member of advocacy groups. However, when he joined the Advent movement after he learned about the Second Coming, he slowed down in his advocacy work. When some people asked him why he changed his attitude towards social issues, his answer was that he did not have as much time as before because he needed to prepare himself and others for the Second Coming. This tension has always been in Adventism: "Oh, well, we proclaim the gospel message. Christ is coming soon. Things are going badly anyway, so Christ will come in and take care of all of this."⁶²

Then, the same respondent tried to bring a correction to the Adventist understanding of Matt 24. Chapter 24 is part of an eschatological discourse that extends to chapter 25. It is important to note that the same sermon where Jesus gave the signs of the times ends with three stories and two metaphors conveying the message to "be cautious because you don't know the time." This is a relevant question for those who wait for the return of the Master (Adventists, in this case): how do you occupy your time till I come? The scene of the final judgment gives a hint about how best to answer this

⁶¹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5, 23.

⁶² Ibid.

question. There are two groups: the sheep and the goats, the right and the left. Those who will enter the kingdom are “those who have done it to the least of my brethren,” which are those who ministered to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, or the prisoner because “inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me” (Matt 25:45).⁶³

The Book of Acts

The Book of Acts is a source of inspiration and guidance for church involvement in social ministry. Commenting on this book, one respondent stated that “the Early Church had a message but was also practical – [it] looked after the poor and widows, sold possessions, etc.”⁶⁴

Spirit of Prophecy

Several respondents found encouragement, motivation, and guidance for the work of social justice in Ellen G. White’s statements and personal example. One of them quoted White who stated that “during His ministry, Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5.

⁶⁴ Interview with an administrative assistant from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 28, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 12.

⁶⁵ Interview with an administrative assistant from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 28, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 12. The quote can be found in Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 19.

White also argued that “we should not only know the truth, but we should practice the truth as it is in Jesus.”⁶⁶ Following in the footsteps of Old Testament prophets, White felt compelled to rebuke injustices perpetrated by the rulers of God’s people. She recalled the specific nature of her calling:

I was charged not to neglect or pass by those who were being wronged. I was specially charged to protest against any arbitrary or overbearing action toward the ministers of the gospel by those having official authority. Disagreeable though the duty may be, I am to *reprove the oppressor, and plead for justice*. I am to present the necessity of *maintaining justice and equity in all our institutions*.⁶⁷ (emphasis supplied)

Another of White’s statement to which respondents referred several times during the interviews is the following: “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.’”⁶⁸

Another respondent reflected on the statement above and saw in Christ’s method, which White advocated for, an illustration of how sharing our beliefs and social ministry are blended together.

And I think that is the principle that Ellen White fought for her whole life. It is a blended ministry where the doctor, the plumber, and the bread maker, or whatever your occupation, you are all involved in ministry. Because ministry is caring for somebody else. That’s sharing the gospel. And then, people will be interested in why we do that. What makes us act/think as Adventists? Or why are you opposed to imperial religion? Why are you doing what you do? And that is the opportunity for us to share what we think of the gospel, and all our doctrinal beliefs. The doctrinal

⁶⁶ Ellen White, *Christ Triumphant* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 331.

⁶⁷ Ellen White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958), 33.

⁶⁸ White, *Ministry of Healing*, 143.

beliefs are the scaffolding, which enables us to do the real work of ministry, which is the caring work in whatever form it takes place.⁶⁹

Advocacy, Scripture, and the Three Angels' Messages

For several respondents, social justice advocacy is not contradictory to Scripture and the Three Angels' messages. Comparing the book of Revelation with the rest of Scripture, one respondent believed that it stands to reason that Babylon represents the opposite of everything that God wants His people to do. For example, one principle of the Babylonian system, seen from a prophetic angle, is enslaving people, whereas one can see throughout Scripture that God is bringing people to freedom. The call to preach the Three Angels' messages is a call to counteract the effect of the system of Babylon, a system, according to biblical prophecy, that “controverts the will of God, that enslaves people, that deceives them, that does not give them the choice to choose God and that enforces its will upon the human conscience.”⁷⁰

Just looking at it on a prophetic level, it is correct to say that any person or system that is enslaving another person or group of people is advocating for the principles of Babylon. Conversely, when a person or group is advocating for the freedom of human beings so that they can have the opportunity to choose Jesus freely and voluntarily, such a person or group works in harmony with the Word of God. “Thus, viewed from a prophetic perspective, advocating freedom and justice for all cannot in any way impede

⁶⁹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 26, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 7.

⁷⁰ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

our prophetic message. To the contrary, it is uplifting Christ according to the makeup of His kingdom when people enjoy the freedom to make a rational choice for Him.”⁷¹

Potential Threats and Risks

Imbalance

There is the risk that advocacy can go too far, where the issue becomes more important than the people we are trying to be there for.⁷² There is the risk that we might lose our balance. This happens when people get so much absorbed in the social change that they neglect the spiritual change.⁷³

A respondent noted that social advocates tend to focus too much on fighting evil rather than on doing good. The problem with this attitude is that we become changed by what we contemplate. He agreed with the fact that evil has to be confronted and stopped, but he thought that people sometimes spend too much time on the evil and they fail to spend enough time on developing a vision for the good and on the action that they will concretely take to reach that vision. Acting like this sometimes creates more hatred instead of creating solutions.⁷⁴

Another scholar feared that because we are so excited about tackling social issues, we may simply forget the core of the gospel, the mission of the Church, which is to

⁷¹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

⁷² Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

⁷³ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

⁷⁴ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

proclaim the gospel and change life. He reminded social advocates that advocacy at the political level may indeed bring significant change in societies, but people are not necessarily happier. They still experience violence because the inner being of the individuals has not changed. Therefore, the Church has been called to do something bigger, which starts with changing the hearts of people, leading to changes in their habits, which will eventually impact society at large. Advocacy may be required in some cases, yet “we must be careful not to be dragged by social agendas so that these will impair the evangelistic mission of the Church, which is the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”⁷⁵

Wrong Motive

Advocacy should “be driven by our belief in the dignity of people and our role in helping people representing the image of God, and helping them find their own image of God in that way,” according to a respondent.⁷⁶ “Once we change our motive to revenge, to putting down the other side, the people that we think are doing wrong, when it gets to something that is violent, then I think, yes, we lose what we’re doing. We lose the true intent of what we should be doing at that point.”⁷⁷

Another respondent saw here the risk that “we might get entangled with organizations that have a different agenda and unwittingly we might espouse an agenda

⁷⁵ Interview with a church administrator from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

⁷⁶ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

that is not God’s or ours.”⁷⁸ Another respondent added that “when you become extremely political, and partisan in doing social justice, then that can become divisive.”⁷⁹

Recommendations to Mitigate Threats and Risks

Study Context and Be Innovative

It is important to study the context and find the most appropriate way to conduct advocacy. Advocacy is not always literally raising one’s voice. The context may not be appropriate for that. One respondent recommended being innovative.⁸⁰ Another one said, “You may not say a word, but you still may be advocating for certain groups by standing up for their rights or representing their rights or helping them in a way.”⁸¹

Check Motive against God’s Will

According to one respondent, the motive of advocacy should be the transformation of people’s lives. With such motive, social advocates will refrain from getting involved in any social movement that damages property, and thus damages the gospel, too.⁸²

⁷⁸ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

⁷⁹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

⁸⁰ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 10, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 1.

⁸¹ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

⁸² Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on March 14, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 10.

Following the same thought, one respondent believed that advocacy should not be an end in itself. Rather, “it should be to bring change that is positive for individuals, for community, church, and help create an environment where the gospel and the future kingdom will have a greater chance of thriving.”⁸³ Another respondent recommended always asking the question, “What am I doing in my advocacy for social justice? Am I affirming life in every form, both for those who are with me and for those opposing me.”⁸⁴ She stated that “advocacy should be about affirming life and the quality of life and seeking to bring about human reconciliation.”⁸⁵

“We should promote the restoration of the image of God in people,”⁸⁶ added one respondent. Similarly, another one thought that “the motive should never be to change political systems but to effect positive changes that will transform people’s lives.”⁸⁷

Trying to change political systems is problematic because the Bible does not give the Church any guidelines about what the political system you want would look like. “God is not telling us to change political systems, but that does not mean that we cannot work with systems.”⁸⁸ The respondent who made the previous statement gave the example of the temperance movement in the early nineteenth century and argued that

⁸³ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

⁸⁴ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

⁸⁷ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Ellen White actually worked with non-Adventists and other advocacy agencies to push forward the temperance movement. He concluded, “The work of freeing people from Satan’s grip demands that we engage with other human beings.”⁸⁹

Seek Wisdom to Find the Right Balance

Wisdom is needed to decide when to be patient and when to be impatient and to say enough is enough.⁹⁰ Wisdom is needed to decide on the most appropriate combination of evangelism, advocacy, and compassion ministries. It should not be an “either/or; it’s a both/and.”⁹¹ Wisdom will teach you how best to combine them. It is important to remember that God has given many gifts to the Church. Each one of us has his or her sphere of influence. Therefore, there is no one-size-fits-all or an either/or approach to transform people’s lives. “Our goal as Christians is to use those gifts in any way to lift up Christ and to lift up the principles of his government, his government of righteousness and justice and truth.”⁹²

Develop Expertise

Remember that advocacy is a very complex field. The issues to tackle are also very complex. The work of advocacy cannot be done in an amateur way. It is wrong to

⁸⁹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

⁹⁰ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

⁹¹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

⁹² Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

think that people will probably listen to you because you just shout louder. In order to become a credible advocate and have an audience and be listened to, you need expertise.

The Church is not always the best channel to influence in the area of social justice because of incompetence and prejudices of all kinds. The Adventist Church has agencies such as ADRA and others that could be used to penetrate different areas of society where Adventists can be in positions where they are listened to. It is critical to have “agencies and organizations that are doing so much good that the governments are listening to us through those.”⁹³ The author of the previous quote believed that “we need [the] experts in law, experts in social work, experts in sociology, experts in psychology, experts even in social sciences in terms of policy making and all those.”⁹⁴ He encouraged young Adventists to go and study, and see what they can do.⁹⁵

Another respondent went on the same path to recommend that Adventists “have a dedicated arm of the Church devoted to this in the same way we have a ‘health’ arm, and a ‘religious freedom’ arm.”⁹⁶ She expected that arm to do more than what ADRA has

⁹³ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 4, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 11. The church administrator/professor told the story of Dr. David R. Williams. He is one of the most internationally recognized social scientists from Harvard. When he speaks, the world listens, not because he is an Adventist, but because he is one of the best-known social researchers in North America at the moment.

⁹⁶ Interview with an administrative assistant from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 28, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 12.

been doing, “because you need to get to the root cause. Before actions happen, thinking happens. We need to correct the conversation and thoughts.”⁹⁷

Use the Correct Language

It was a general observation by the respondents that the idea of advocacy is encountering resistance within the Adventist Church and in many other parts of society. One of them thought that it was important to find the correct way to sell the idea of advocacy “at home” in order to harness members’ support in the mission field. He noted that, unfortunately, many Adventists see the emphasis on social justice as a threat to the Adventist message. He believed that so far, the Church had done well in the mission field by staying out of political issues, but the Church has not done so well in selling its members the challenge getting involved in advocacy work.⁹⁸ Here is how he analyzed the problem:

And part of it is we’ve been too polarized instead of really looking at it from a biblical perspective, instead of really communicating with each other. We have just talked past each other. We have simply tried to gain more support, we have not tried to help the other side to understand, to see this as we see it.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Here the respondent was referring to injustices perpetrated against aboriginal inhabitants of Australia. “A lot of thoughts that underpin today’s aboriginal situation in Australia have to do with the eugenics theory, even though it was discarded after WWII. The thought of that is still around,” she stated.

⁹⁸ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 23, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 3.

⁹⁹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 23, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 3.

Be Non-Partisan

Adventists should avoid getting involved in politics for personal gain or advancement within a political party.¹⁰⁰ One respondent reflected on advocacy in the context of American partisan politics. He advised the Church to be careful so as to avoid appearing, or even being, hypocritical or contradictory in its positions while advocating for just public policies. This danger is significantly enhanced, and indeed unavoidable, if one sides fully with one party or another, because there exists no moral or biblical coherence in either the Republican or Democratic party or any human political party, for that matter. Hence, his recommendation to be apolitical in relation to partisan or party politics. The Church will find coherence on how to act if it follows the Scriptures.¹⁰¹ This respondent thought that Adventists “have to be creatively thinking apolitically.”¹⁰²

Another respondent recommended that the Church stay out of partisan politics because the world in which we live is very fragmented, divided, and polarized, and because it is very easy for people to just throw the Church into one or the other extreme. He recommended that the Church be very careful when situations of crisis arise and that the Church rise up and show its position. It will not always be necessary for the General Conference to issue a statement. It is sometimes better to act locally because many situations involving violations of individual rights can be addressed by a simple

¹⁰⁰ Interview with an Adventist university administrator on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

¹⁰¹ Interview with a PhD student from Andrews University on April 19, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

intervention by the local church pastor there in the community.¹⁰³ The local pastor has the duty to make the voice of the church be heard in a certain matter and remind the authorities about their job, but this must be done in the proper way.¹⁰⁴

According to a respondent, “as long as we stay neutral, we don’t get involved in politics. We want to stay neutral. We want to stay neutral in America also. We’re not supporting and we’re not trying to dismantle any government. We’re interested in helping the people who are disadvantaged.”¹⁰⁵

Be Brave

The work of advocacy requires courage, according to a respondent. If the Church is concerned too much about whether it would hurt in advocating for social justice, it is not going to do it.

It is a question of laying down your life for your friend. Jesus says no greater love than this, because Jesus saw he was going to the cross as laying down his life for his friend. So, social justice advocacy, it’s about laying down your life for your friend, that is for your brother or for your sister.¹⁰⁶

On the question of whether or not she thought advocacy could impede the progress of the gospel and cause harm to the Adventist Church’s reputation, one respondent was adamant that social justice advocacy cannot cripple the Adventist message nor damage the reputation of the Church. Then she added, “To me, if you’re not

¹⁰³ Interview with a church administrator from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 23, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 3.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

doing social justice already, you're damaging your reputation. The Church is right now, not just Adventism, but Christianity itself is losing its reputation because many see it as irrelevant."¹⁰⁷

Another respondent, in agreement with the previous position, added that "yes, there might be at times conflict and embarrassments. But sometimes when we are silent as a Church, . . . we also do damage by not speaking up for those that need to be spoken for."¹⁰⁸

A respondent thought that "if the Church is being the Church, the risks will be the risks that Jesus took. Jesus was crucified. I am not worried at all about risks like, 'Oh, it may water down our preaching, it may sidetrack us from our proclamation.'"¹⁰⁹ He thought that "the heart of the Church is to act for others, to have a vocation as partners of God in God's cause in the world."¹¹⁰ Then, he added,

And of course, those risks are persecution. People don't like when you mess up with the system, people don't like it when you oppose the principalities and the powers of the day. The risks are there, but they are not risks to the mission of the Church. This (i.e. partnering with Jesus in the ministry of healing, reconciliation, education, reform, 'waiting & hastening the coming of God's Kingdom. . .) is the mission of the Church.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 24, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 4.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 26, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Biblical and Missiological Challenges for Adventists

In the face of a world in despair and of lack of respect for human rights, the Adventist Church, through official statements mentioned earlier, commits to answering the prophetic call to “seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isa 1:17, ESV). However, the findings from field research point to two broad biblical and missiological challenges for Seventh-day Adventists: (1) lack of education on biblical advocacy leading to suspicion regarding the concept and practice of advocacy and ambiguity regarding the definition of “gospel” in relation to the Three Angels’ messages and holistic ministry and (2) absence of a methodology and clear guidelines on how to implement the Adventist Church’s official position statements on social justice advocacy.

Lack of Education on Biblical Advocacy

The Adventist Church has committed to a holistic mission. To live up to this commitment, the Church cannot escape being involved in social advocacy. However, comments from many respondents pointed to a concern that advocacy may be perceived by the Church’s constituencies as “foreign fire” being brought to the altar. The term “social justice advocacy” has indeed evoked strong reactions from many Adventist members, scholars, and administrators I met during the research. They argued that the concept has often been highjacked by modern politics and applied to pursue agendas that have no biblical grounds. Nevertheless, the Bible story contains multiple events and teachings that theologians have used to ground the work of social advocacy. For example, most liberation theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez and Walter Brueggemann, evoke

the Exodus to anchor their theology of liberation.¹¹² Scot McKnight linked social justice to the Atonement.¹¹³ Chapter 5 will discuss three biblical themes (the Sabbath, the Three Angels' messages, and Jesus' eschatological discourse) that resonate with core Adventist theology and identity and that offer a biblical grounding for integrating advocacy in Adventist mission.

The research also reveals ambiguity regarding the “gospel,” the Three Angels' messages, and holistic mission. Preaching the gospel has come out as a top priority for respondents in both survey and interview research. Respondents have mentioned “preaching the gospel” or “preaching the Three Angels' messages” interchangeably. However, I have noticed that for some respondents, the work of social advocacy was included in preaching the gospel. For others, especially those who insisted more on the Three Angels' messages exclusively as the Church's priority in the end-time, the work of advocacy should be dealt with separately. Evangelism was understood differently among research participants. Does evangelism consist uniquely in making new converts to the Adventist faith or does it include social ministry meeting the needs of people as well? What difference is there, if any, between evangelism and proclaiming the gospel? There is a need for clarity in the Adventist definition of the “gospel” in relation to the Three Angels' messages and in relation to holistic mission.

¹¹² See Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 69, 86, 88–102; and Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 1-19.

¹¹³ Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 13-14. Studying the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), the *Benedictus* (vv. 67-79), along with the inaugural sermon (Luke 4:16-21), Jesus' answer to John the Baptist (7:21-23), and the Early Church (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35), McKnight concluded that “Jesus' kingdom vision and atonement are related; separating them is an act of violence” (13). He also stated that the “atonement creates the kingdom” (13), that is, to be understood as a society where God's will is fulfilled in terms of “equality, social justice, economic availability to and liability for one another, and fellowship” (14).

Moreover, four (4) Adventists out of (5) in our sample thought that the Adventist Church should train its pastors and missionaries in advocacy for social justice. In addition, not having the required training and skills came out as the number one concern of survey participants regarding the Church's involvement in advocacy (i.e., higher than advocacy's being too political, safety concerns, and lack of funds).

Absence of Methodology and Clear Guidelines

The Adventist Church is a global organization with a physical presence in nearly all countries in the world. The General Conference has issued statements that acknowledge the importance of social justice and encouraged members to support it.¹¹⁴ However, considering that different philosophical and ideological frameworks and worldviews bring along different conceptions of the just order, how is it possible to translate the Church's statements into action without endangering the unity of the Church and its mission? How is it possible to carry out transforming and peacemaking mission and help bring *shalom*/peace among men in such a pluralistic age? Most research respondents concurred with the idea that involvement in social justice advocacy using the definition and framework of the existing local political apparatus can be dangerous for the Church.

There is a need for cross-cultural methodology and principles to guide the Adventist Church, particularly frontline workers, in implementing advocacy action aimed

¹¹⁴ Seventh-day Adventist Church, "Peace," accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/call-for-peace/>. See also the statement on "Global Poverty," (<https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/global-poverty/>), "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)."

at bringing holistic transformation in people's lives. I attempt to meet this need by proposing a framework for transformational advocacy for Seventh-day Adventists in chap. 6.

Conclusion

The study was set to measure two variables: (1) the level of acceptance of or reluctance toward social justice advocacy as part of the Church mission and (2) the extent to which social justice advocacy has been a part of Adventist theology and praxis.

Concerning the first variable, based on our sample, the level of acceptance of social justice advocacy as an integral part of Adventist missions outweighs the level of reluctance. Just one (1) Adventist in five (5) in our sample still seemed to hold negative views or were reluctant about social justice advocacy. Four (4) Adventists in five (5) expected the Church to be involved in compassion ministries and actions for systems change to address social injustice. Of five (5) Adventists in our sample, three (3) saw evangelism and social ministry as partners, one (1) saw social ministry as a bridge to evangelism, and one (1) saw social ministry as either a result of evangelism or separate from it. However, Non-White respondents wanted to see pastors advocate for social justice from the pulpit more often than their White counterparts.

Concerning the second variable, based on our sample, social justice advocacy has not played a major part in Adventist missions or there was a lack of awareness of social justice actions undertaken by the Church. Only two (2) Adventists in five (5) reported having witnessed or heard about social justice advocacy by their church, Conference, union or administrative department. Nevertheless, the respondents identified religious intolerance, domestic violence, and human trafficking as three top social issues the

Adventist Church should be concerned about in its advocacy effort. The scholars/leaders of the Church are favorable to social justice advocacy playing a greater part in Adventist missions, but the Church should be apolitical, act in areas where it has expertise, stay balanced in its approach, seek the transformation of individuals and communities rather than systemic change, and set a framework for action grounded on Scripture and informed by Adventist theology.

The next chapter attempts to address the missiological challenges raised in the field research, mainly limited knowledge on biblical advocacy in Adventism and the absence of an official written methodology and guiding principles to implement transformational advocacy. The framework proposed in the next chapter draws on information gathered in chaps. 2 and 3 and on the findings of the field research but relies on and filters through Seventh-day Adventists' understanding of the truth of the Scriptures.

CHAPTER 5

TOWARD A BIBLICAL AND MISSIOLOGICAL ADVENTIST FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL ADVOCACY

Introduction

Chapter 5 proposes a framework in light of the major biblical and missiological challenges in previous chapters, particularly in chap. 5. The framework has three major components: (1) A biblical study of advocacy in the context of Adventist theology, (2) a methodology for implementing transformation advocacy, and (3) guiding principles.

Advocacy in Scripture and Adventist Theology

This section starts with an overview of the three main areas where at least some Christian thinkers see the concept of advocacy developed in Scripture. It then goes on deeper to study advocacy in relation to Adventist core theological tenets, mainly in relation to Sabbath observance, the proclamation of the Three Angels' messages of Rev 14:6–12, and the Second Coming, the focus of Jesus' lengthy teaching in Matt 24–26. The reason for choosing these tenets is because the Sabbath is the most visible sign of Adventism and the Three Angels' messages in Rev 14:6–12 and Jesus' eschatological discourse in Matt 24–26 represent foundational themes and biblical passages in Seventh-day Adventist theology of mission.

The Concept of Justice in Scripture

This section is a brief discussion on the concept of justice in Scripture. It seeks to clarify the type of justice I refer to in my proposed framework for transformational social justice advocacy.

Justice versus Righteousness

In the Old Testament, we find the pair *mishpat* and *tsedeka* translated almost always as “justice and righteousness.” *Mishpat* is a legal term, used in courts, that clearly means justice.¹¹⁵ Most English versions translate *mishpat* as “justice” or “judgment.” In the case of someone who judges, then “judgment” is the right translation. But if someone brings a situation to an appropriate resolution, then “justice” is the best translation.¹¹⁶

The root meaning of *tsedeka* is straight, correct, upright.¹¹⁷ *Tsedeka* is “the fulfillment of the demands of a relationship, with God, or a person.”¹¹⁸ In the NT, the Greek word *dikaiosyne* bears the meaning of both “justice” and “righteousness.” According to Wolterstorff, the adjective *dikaios* in Plato’s *Republic* was translated as “just,” and the noun *dikaiosyne*, as “justice.” However, in most English translations of the NT, the adjective is almost always translated as “righteous,” rather than “just,” and the noun as “righteousness,” rather than “justice.” For Wolterstorff, this was confusing

¹¹⁵ Wolterstorff, *Journey toward Justice*, 95.

¹¹⁶ Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 16. This distinction between judgment and justice is based on the word *shapat* that is ordinarily translated as “judge,” but can also mean “govern” and “intervene to bring a situation to an appropriate resolution.” *Mishpat*, then, is the decision or action that results when someone *shapat*.

¹¹⁷ Wolterstorff, *Journey toward Justice*, 95.

¹¹⁸ Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible*, 16.

because in present-day English, “righteousness” is by no means a synonym of “justice,” and in present-day religious talk by Christians, “righteousness” has acquired the meaning of “being right with God, this being understood as a matter of the inner self.”¹¹⁹ As a result, many Christians reading English Bible translations tend to believe and argue that justice has been supplanted in the New Testament. The present work advocates faithfulness to Scripture, which, when interpreted correctly and in context, displays the prominence of justice in the New Testament, as it is in the OT.

Retributive versus Restorative Justice

Two events stand out in a biblical framework of justice. The first one is the *liberation* of the children of Israel from Egyptian oppression and their formation into a covenant community under God’s law. The second one is the coming of *Jesus Christ* who also brings deliverance from servitude and inaugurates a new covenant.¹²⁰ Under the legislation expounded in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, God laid out measures for both retributive and restorative or distributive justice.

Retributive justice “centers on the notion of law-breaking, guilt and punishment.”¹²¹ Carol J. Dempsey noted that *lex talionis*, also known as the law of retaliation, was predominant in ancient Near Eastern cultures and influenced the Israelites’ concept of justice. “The deuteronomistic theology of retribution was a

¹¹⁹ Wolterstorff, *Journey toward Justice*, 92-93.

¹²⁰ Christopher D. Marshall, *The Little Book of Biblical Justice: A Fresh Approach to the Bible’s Teachings on Justice* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2005), 9.

¹²¹ Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 2.

theological construct best described by Deuteronomy 28, which put forth the notion of divine blessings and curses.”¹²²

Restorative justice “focuses on relationship, reconciliation, and reparation of harm done.”¹²³ Among God’s other measures for restorative justice, there was the Sabbath that offered a full day of rest to the slave and the alien (Exod 23:12; Deut 5:14); the Sabbatical Year that guaranteed food for the poor and freedom and forgiveness of debt after seven years; and the Jubilee that guaranteed release of slaves, forgiveness of debt, and a redistribution of wealth every fifty years (Lev 25). Such measures prevented cycles of intergenerational poverty and social and economic disparity among God’s people. Note that Jesus chose a Sabbath to launch His public ministry of preaching, liberty, and healing¹²⁴ and announced that He was enacting a jubilee (“the acceptable year of the Lord”). In other words, in Luke 4:18–19, Jesus introduced Himself as the anti-typical Jubilee, or the embodiment of restorative justice. The idea of biblical restorative justice is central in the present transformational advocacy framework

Three Types of Biblical Advocacy

Understood as the act of promoting or defending a cause, representing, interceding, pleading, speaking up or standing in the gap on behalf of someone or group of people, the concept of advocacy is applied in the Scriptures in the context of salvation, of righteous living, and of social justice.

¹²² Carol J. Dempsey, *Justice: A Biblical Perspective* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 2008), 9.

¹²³ Christopher D. Marshall, *Beyond Retribution: A New Testament Vision for Justice, Crime, and Punishment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 2.

¹²⁴ See *Andrews Bible’s* footnote on Luke 4:16.

Salvation Advocacy

Salvation advocacy occurs when someone is standing before God pleading the salvation of other humans. This kind of advocacy seems to be “internalized as a characteristic of the universal divine Ruler,” as God is always looking for “advocates who will stand in the breach between God and humankind, in order to deter God’s wrath.”¹²⁵ God came to Abraham to tell him His intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, thus giving him an opportunity to intercede (or advocate) in the presence of the Lord on behalf of the people in order to prevent the destruction of the righteous living in those wicked cities (Gen 18). God forced Jonah to go to Nineveh and plead with its inhabitants so that they could escape an imminent destruction.

God established the earthly sanctuary so that the priests, among other roles, might intercede on behalf of the people. Jesus Christ Himself is ministering in the heavenly sanctuary as our advocate: “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1). John refers here to the work of Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary on behalf of repentant sinners. The Greek word παράκλητος for advocate means “One who pleads another’s cause before a judge, a pleader, counsel for defense, legal assistant; an advocate; one who pleads another’s cause with one, an intercessor.”¹²⁶ In theological terms, advocacy can be translated as *intercession*, a concept very predominant in the Bible, as well as in Adventist theology.

¹²⁵ Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?”, 291.

¹²⁶ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Accordance Software.

Righteousness Advocacy

Righteousness advocacy works to defend a moral principle (not necessarily an individual or a legal obligation).¹²⁷ John the Baptist, in the New Testament, the greatest prophet on earth, according to Jesus (Matt 11:11), exemplifies this form of advocacy. John was not afraid to censure not only injustices and abuse against the weakest among the people, but also corruption and unethical behavior that plagued the Jewish administrative, civil, and political elites. To the tax collectors, he recommended, “Collect no more than what is appointed for you” (Luke 3:13). To the soldiers, he said, “Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:14).

Then he aimed at a higher target and publicly condemned King Herod’s immoral behavior.¹²⁸ Because Herod was living with Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, John publicly rebuked him: “It is not lawful for you to have her” (Matt 14:4). The Greek word used for “lawful” is *exestin*, (ἔξεστιν) which is translated as “it is right,” implying the idea of a moral obligation, not necessarily a legal requirement. When the question is related to a rule or a specific regulation or law, the appropriate Greek word is ἐννόμος (*ennomos*). See Acts 19:39, where *ennomos* is used to qualify a “lawful assembly,” an

¹²⁷ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 1033. The Hebrew word regularly translated as “righteous” or “just” is *sāddiq* and originally meant “straight” or “right.” The corresponding Greek term is *dikaïos*, and in Greek society referred to that which was in accordance with law or social norm. The noun forms are *sedeq* (or *sēdāqā*) and *dikaïosynē*. The verb *sādak* and *dikaioō* mean “to do justice,” “to be just,” “to vindicate,” or “to justify” in the forensic sense of “declare righteous” or “treat as just.” However, Nicholas Wolterstorff noted that, in present-day English, the word “righteousness,” rather than meaning “justice,” is used instead to describe someone’s moral rectitude (see Wolterstorff, *Journey Towards Justice*, 92-93). I refer to that present-day meaning in this section discussing “Righteousness Advocacy.”

¹²⁸ Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew & Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 387, noted that “John’s courage in denouncing Herod distinguishes him from the Essenes (with whom many scholars associate him), for they tended to refuse to meddle in political life, no matter how evil it became.”

assembly held according to the established regulations. However, ἔξεστιν is used in Luke 14:3 where the Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful (*exestin*) to heal on the Sabbath. The Pharisees referred to the moral law of God—the Ten Commandments. The same word is also used in Luke 20:22 where the Pharisees asked whether it was lawful (*exestin*) to pay taxes to Caesar. By using *exestin* instead of *ennomos*, they were asking whether they were morally-bound by God to pay taxes to Caesar.¹²⁹ The NLT gets it right by translating Matt 14:4 in this way: “John had been telling Herod, ‘It is *against God’s law* for you to marry her’” (emphasis supplied).

The use of ἔξεστιν by John shows that he was decrying the violation of a universal moral law, something that was not supposed to be. In fact, the Roman law did not forbid a king to have sexual intercourse with his sister-in-law.¹³⁰ However, it was against God’s moral law. For John, Herod’s marriage with Herodias was a “sinful relationship,” an immoral conduct, an “affront to God’s law.”¹³¹

Note that John’s stance against “what was not right” caused him his life, the same way the OT prophets were murdered because of public advocacy ministry. John has left us an example: Christians are to advocate for God’s moral and immutable principles. In defending these principles, we need to be ready to lose our comfort and even our lives.

¹²⁹ In the case of Herod Antipas, Longman III and Garland, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* 387, indicated that “John probably did not denounce Antipas for divorcing his former wife, an action probably judged allowable, but for incestuously marrying his half brother’s wife (Lev 18:16; 20:21).”

¹³⁰ William R. Farmer, ed., *The International Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 1299, noted that “Herodias had used Roman law to divorce Philip, an act not valid in Jewish law.”

¹³¹ Ben Witherington, *Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Matthew* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 283. See also Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 513, who commented on Herod Antipas’ marriage to Herodias: “Such a marriage would have been considered an incestuous affront to God’s law (Lev 18:16; 20:21).”

Social Justice Advocacy

Besides its application in the context of salvation and righteousness, advocacy, in Scripture, is also applied to defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; upholding the rights of the afflicted and oppressed (Ps 82:3, NIV). It refers to speaking up in favor of the poor and helpless, and seeing that they get justice (Prov 31:9, NLT). In the Old Testament (OT), God repeatedly called advocates to denounce oppression, injustices, and wickedness in earthly political regimes. Moses (Exod 4:22–23; 5:1–3), Queen Esther (Esth 1:1–5; 7:1–10), Jeremiah (Jer 22:1–5, 15–16), and Isaiah (Isa 3) are examples.¹³² Isaiah cried out, “For ye have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What mean ye that ye beat my people to pieces, and grind the faces of the poor? saith the Lord GOD of hosts” (Isa 3:14–15).

Ellen White explained that Isaiah spoke in a context marked by evil and oppression, absence of justice, widespread violence and wickedness.¹³³ In Isa 59, God was displeased because “there was no justice” (59:15b), but a greater concern for the Lord was the absence (or silence) of intercessors or advocates, in other terms, someone “to interpose,”¹³⁴ as expressed in the following verse: “And he saw that there was no

¹³² Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?,” 291–293. See also Jeff Boyd, “Advocates for Social Change: Beyond ‘Teaching People How to Fish,’” in *Church and Society: Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, (Department of World Missions, Andrews University, 2015), 273–274.

¹³³ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917), 306 pointed out that “justice was perverted, and no pity was shown the poor. . . . The outlook was particularly discouraging as regards the social conditions of the people. In their desire for gain, men were adding house to house and field to field. Even the magistrates, whose duty it was to protect the helpless, turned a deaf ear to the cries of the poor and needy, the widows and the fatherless.”

¹³⁴ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Isa 59:16.

man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore, his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him” (Isa 59:16; see also Ezek 22:30–31; Amos 4:1, 5:11–13; Mic 2:2; Hab 1:4). God is heartbroken when no one advocates on behalf of the mistreated. OT social ethics emphasizes the moral obligation to advocate for or defend the widow, the stranger (alien), and the fatherless, which Tom Evans called “God’s special trio.”¹³⁵

Scott Rae suggested that NT ethics focuses more on “a morality for the church,” rather than on society at large,¹³⁶ even though the theme of advocacy transpires through the Gospel of Luke,¹³⁷ and the question of civil injustice and economic abuse can be found quite vividly in the book of Revelation.¹³⁸ Besides the image of “community, cross, and new creation,” love is “a distinctive element in the Christian life.”¹³⁹ Hays noted that Jesus and the apostles developed “an ethic of love,” based on the central command of the Law, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your

¹³⁵ Tom L. Evans, “God’s Special Trio,” *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* 12, no. 2 (2016): 1, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?Article=1339&context=jams>.

¹³⁶ Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 26.

¹³⁷ Lehnart Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?” 295.

¹³⁸ Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 60-66. His comments on the red, black, and pale horses of Revelation 6 point to persecution and abuses against Christians during fourth and fifth centuries, and also to the Christian Church’s oppression against all those suspected of heresy in the time of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the religious wars. Doukhan highlighted the “silent complicity” of the church during the Holocaust and added, “violence and oppression are the natural consequences when we usurp God’s role.” See also Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 247. In his commentary on Rev 6:10, Stefanovic regarded the plea of the martyrs not “as a longing for revenge but a plea for legal justice (cf. Luke 18:3, 5).”

¹³⁹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 202. See also Rae, *Moral Choices*, 30.

soul and with all your strength” (Deut 6:5).¹⁴⁰ The parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37—although the Good Samaritan represents someone outside the community of faith—exemplifies the idea of a moral and loving church that stands up for the oppressed and victims of injustices, and reaches out to the poor as particular recipients of the gospel, caring for them and treating them with respect (see also Matt 5:11; Luke 4:18; 6:20; Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8:1–7, 9:1–15; Jas 2:1–13).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has concentrated its efforts mainly on salvation and righteousness advocacy.¹⁴¹ Social justice advocacy, as confirmed by the research findings, is getting some momentum among younger Adventists, is seen in the work of ADRA more broadly, but is generally not yet an integral part of Adventist missions.

Advocacy and the Sabbath in Isaiah 58¹⁴²

Following is a scriptural/theological study that focuses on Isa 58, dealing with social justice advocacy and the Sabbath. I have a twofold motivation to study this passage. First, the “repair of breaches” motif in Isa 58:12 has been applied by pioneers of Seventh-day Adventism, mainly Joseph Bates, to the calling of Seventh-day Adventist people. Second, the Sabbath is the ultimate visible sign or identity of Seventh-day Adventists.

¹⁴⁰ Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 30.

¹⁴¹ The *28 Fundamental Beliefs* stress the kind of life Adventists are expected to live here on earth and what kind of priorities they should have individually and collectively as a community of faith. Social justice advocacy is not specifically included in any of the fundamental beliefs.

¹⁴² This chapter builds on previous research done by the author in partial fulfillment of doctoral requirements, Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics class, Summer 2019, Andrews University.

Sabbath observance in Adventism is often viewed as a sign of obedience and a mark of allegiance to the true God,¹⁴³ while the social ethics of the Sabbath are often overlooked. Adventists tend to keep the Sabbath by focusing on church attendance and worship, then on things not to do. Beyond church time, they tend to “rest” passively on the Sabbath day, expecting to please God in that manner. In the study below, I attempt to show the connection of v. 13–14 to vv. 1–12 of Isa 58.¹⁴⁴ My main thesis is that Isa 58 is structured as a synthetic parallelism, with verses 13–14 conveying this basic message: when God’s people make the Sabbath a delight for everyone, not just for themselves, they will delight in the Lord. I argue that, flowing from the whole chapter, principles of self-denial, inclusiveness, and social justice undergird Sabbath observance.

History of Interpretation

When Joseph Bates, co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, developed the restoration theme in 1847, he used Isa 58:12 as a biblical foundation:

Those from among you
Shall build the old waste places;
You shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach,
The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

¹⁴³ William Warren Prescott, *Christ And the Sabbath* (Battle Creek, MI: International Religious Liberty Association, 1893), 35. He stated: “The highest form of worship is in obedience. To worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea, and the fountains of waters, is to yield our obedience to him. And this message, given everywhere, calls attention to the worship of the true God, the Creator, and really contains in it the essence of Sabbath reform, in that it calls upon us to worship the true God, the Creator, by obedience to him, and that we observe the day which is a sign, or a mark, of his creative power. . . . The observance of the true Sabbath is the sign, or mark, of allegiance to the true God, the Creator of the heaven and the earth.”

¹⁴⁴ I made an exegesis of verses 13–14 of Isa 58 and looked for parallel ideas/concepts with verses 1–12 of the same chapter. I also studied the historical background of the passage, major studies on Isa 58 (history of interpretation), and other commentaries.

Bates said, “The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath has been made void by the working of Satan, and is to be restored as one of the *all* things spoken of by all the holy prophets since the world began, before Jesus can come, is evident.”¹⁴⁵ In his interpretation of Isa 58:12, Bates seemed to limit the meaning of “breach” to only the injury done to God’s law and that repairing the breach could mean only to come back to the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a test of obedience to God’s law. “The two following verses show that keeping or restoring the Sabbath is the special work. Jesus says, ‘they shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven, that do and teach the commandments.’”¹⁴⁶ Bates further stated this: “That there will yet be a mighty struggle about the restoring and keeping the seventh day Sabbath, that will test every soul that enters the gates of the city, cannot be disputed.”¹⁴⁷ However, Bates did not make the link between verses 13–14 (Sabbath) and verses 2–14 in Isa 58 because he called to restore seventh-day observance, with no mention of the restoration of the poor, the exploited, the oppressed, which is so prominent in the whole chapter.

Like Bates, Clauss Westermann did not connect Isa 58:13–14 with the previous part of the chapter dealing with the fast that pleases God. For Westermann, Isa 58:13–14 “form a distinctive and impressive example of parenthesis connected with the commandments.” He saw vv. 13–14 as “a commentary on a single commandment, the fourth,” and “an addition to vv. 1–12.” His overall view of v. 13 in relation to the rest of

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Bates, [*Sabbath Controversy #2*] *The Seventh Day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign*, (2nd Ed.) (Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 8, EGW Writings Online. See also Damsteegt, *Foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, 139.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

the chapter is this: “everything has to do with turning towards one’s fellow-men, whereas in v. 13 the interest is exclusively concentrated on the holy day.”¹⁴⁸

However, other scholars approach Isa 58 as a single unit. Paul V. Niskanen saw the insertion of 58:13 in the chapter as the continuation of a tradition “understanding Sabbath observance precisely as a fasting from one’s own (evil) desires.”¹⁴⁹ For Motyers, vv. 13–14 are introduced as a way to counterpoise “the desperate fasting of verses 2–3 with the joyful keeping of the Sabbath in verses 13–14.”¹⁵⁰

Delimitation of the Study

The study does not comment on all the verses of Isa 58, but attempts to draw some basic theological and social ethics principles flowing from vv. 13–14 in relation to Isa 58:2–12. I decided to delimit the text this way because my goal is to show that vv. 1–14 form one structure, and that the central theme does not really change throughout the whole chapter.

Content and Word Study

There are two key words in Isa 58:1–14 that I want to emphasize based on their frequency in the text and how they interplay to convey meaning:

(1) חֶפֶז (*chaphetz/chephetz*)—to delight in, delighted, have pleasure; the word is associated to a selfish pleasure, something that profits one’s greed or desires; thus, translated in Lexham English Bible (*LEB*) by “affairs;” and

¹⁴⁸ Clauss Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1969), 340.

¹⁴⁹ Paul V. Niskanen, *Isaiah 56-66* (College Ville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 25.

¹⁵⁰ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 478.

(2) ענוב (*oneg/anog*)—to delight in, to be soft, delicate, dainty; the word is associated with the Sabbath and God, as sources of your delight.

First observation: Isaiah uses חֶפֶז (*chephetz*) 5 times, but only in a negative way, in cases where the people seek delight or pleasure selfishly, not considering God’s desire nor the needs of others. First, in verse 2a, “they **delight** to know my ways;” second in verse 2b, “they take **delight** in approaching me;” third, in verse 3b, “the day of your fast you find **pleasurepleasurepleasure**.” It appears obvious to me that Isaiah applies intentionally חֶפֶז (*chephetz*) to selfish “delight,” either in fasting or in keeping the Sabbath.

Second observation: Isaiah uses ענוב (*oneg*) 2 times in a positive way, when “delight” is associated with the Sabbath and with God as the source of such delight. First, in verse 13a, “If you. . . call the Sabbath a **delight** (*oneg*);” and second, “then you shall **delight** (*anog*) in the Lord.” In one case “delight” is associated with the Sabbath as a pleasure that everyone can enjoy, and in the other, “delight” is associated with God who desires that everyone should have pleasure in Him.

In other terms, Isaiah seems to convey this message from the Lord, saying, “Don’t just delight yourself (*chaphets*) in the Sabbath, but call the Sabbath (or make the Sabbath) a delight (*anog*) for everyone. Don’t take pleasure (*chaphets*) in the Sabbath, but let the Sabbath be pleasurable (*anog*). Make the Sabbath כָּבֵד (*kabad*) honorable, glorious for everyone. Don’t only take delight (*chaphets*) in seeking the Lord for yourself, but instead let everyone delight (*anog*) in the Lord. If you call the Sabbath a delight (*oneg*) for

everyone, not seeking your own benefits/affairs (*chaphets*), then Yahweh will be a delight (*anog*) for you.”

Here is my conclusion about Isa 58:13–14: The Sabbath that pleases the Lord is the one in which we do not seek our own delights (*chaphets*), but one which we call, proclaim or make a delight (*oneg*) for everyone. In such a Sabbath, the Lord will be a delight (*anog*) for us. Walter Elwell pointed out that “to call the day a delight is to think about ways in which other people, too, may delight in the day. The Sabbath day is most appropriate as a day in which to do works of mercy in order to give an experience of light and joy to those who are oppressed and distressed.”¹⁵¹ Commenting on Isa 58:13, Gerald Klingbeil and Chantal Klingbeil observed that

pursuing our “pleasure” (*Isa. 58:13, NKJV*, or our “own interests,” as the *NRSV* translates here) is equivalent to “trampling the Sabbath” (*NRSV*). Human agendas are not part of God’s Sabbath ideal. Rather, we are invited to look out for those who struggle, who are captives, who are hungry and naked and walk in darkness, and whose names no one seems to remember. More than any other day of the week, Sabbath should take us out of ourselves and our own selfishness and cause us to think more about others and others’ needs than about ourselves and our needs.¹⁵²

Theology and Key Message of Isaiah 58

Isaiah 58 shows the perfect symbiosis between the Sabbath and social justice. Sigve K. Tonstad supported this assertion when he said, “Old Testament voices do not cast the Sabbath and social justice in opposition (*Isa. 58:6-7*) . . . the same chapter that spells out the obligation of social justice (*Isa. 58:1-12*) calls for a restoration of the

¹⁵¹ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 510.

¹⁵² Gerald Klingbeil and Chantal Klingbeil, *Rest in Christ* (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press, 2017), 128.

seventh day (Isa. 58:13-14).”¹⁵³ Key theological messages flowing from Isaiah, underlining similarities that exist between a day dedicated to fasting and the Sabbath day, include denying oneself, caring for others, and living in total reliance on God’s provision. It also comes out clearly that God condemns selfishness.

A day of fast and the Sabbath are means to teach us to deny ourselves and focus on what pleases God. The text indicates what pleases God: “If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul (v.9b-10a). . . . And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words” (v. 13b).

Isaiah 58 shows the best ways to fast and to keep the Sabbath: When you fast or when you keep the Sabbath, focus on God and focus on others as well. As a result, God will fulfill the covenant promises for you. The Sabbath is a day to look up to God and to minister to others. A day to honor God, not to look for our own pleasure or to seek our personal benefits. By discussing fasting and the Sabbath together, Isaiah seems to suggest that, in both, we need to fast from “selfish desires,” not just from food. We may come before God daily, but if the purpose is for our own “delight,” God will not approve it.

The Sabbath has been given, not to be just a weekly event, but to serve as a social

¹⁵³ Sigve A. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 134.

imaginary¹⁵⁴ that will constantly remind us how to approach God and to relate to those around us on a daily basis. Whenever you are tempted to oppress someone, remember the Sabbath. Your fast and your daily transactions should emulate the Sabbath if you want God to take delight in you and bless you. Your day of fasting must be like the Sabbath day: not a day of affliction, but a day to delight in the Lord; a day of freedom for all, as expressed in the fourth commandment (Exod 20:8-11):

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it *you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.* (emphasis supplied)

One may be tempted to see this command as negative, indicating things we should not do on the Sabbath with the purpose of remaining in a contemplative state during the whole day. It is possible to perceive the Sabbath this way by looking at how Eusebius of Caesarea framed his recommendation to believers:

spend your life in holiness and purity. And so you are to sanctify the Sabbath and keep it delightful and free from toil because of the rest that Gods has prescribed, not even moving your foot to attend to other affairs or defiling your lips with a word. But you are to devote yourself only to the study of divine things through the entire day.¹⁵⁵

However, in Isa 58, the rest of the Sabbath is an “active” rest. This is the peace of God, which is never passive, but always active, looking to restore, to heal, to bless others.

This is the invitation of the Sabbath.

¹⁵⁴ Social imaginary, as defined by Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (London: Duke University Press, 2004), 23, is “something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode.” It is rather, “the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions or images that underlie these expectations.”

¹⁵⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah* (Translated and noted by Jonathan J. Armstrong. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 283.

In the first part of Isa 58 (vv. 1–12) lies the exhortation on how to approach God in the right manner, that He may listen to us and grant the desire of our heart. It is not to be selfish, seeking our own pleasure, but to do social justice, allowing others also to partake in God’s blessings. In the second part (vv. 13–14), the Sabbath is given as the model, the standard, the blueprint of a community that approaches God in a spirit of altruism, inclusiveness, and justice.

Isaiah 58 and Other Scriptures

The text of Amos 8:4-6 below reflects well the basic message of Isa 58, connecting the Sabbath to social justice:

Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, And make the poor of the land fail, Saying: When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? and the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals— even sell the bad wheat?

Amos was not diplomatic in his language when, addressing the affluent and affluent of his days, he called out their hypocrisy, which consisted in keeping the Sabbath as a form while entreating injustice in their transactions. Here is how George Adam Smith captured the relationship between the Sabbath and social concerns in Amos:

And, as in every other relevant passage of the Old Testament, we have the interests of the poor. The Fourth Commandment enforces the day of rest on behalf of the servants and bondsmen. ... The interests of the Sabbath are the interests of the poor: the enemies of the Sabbath are the enemies of the poor.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ George Adam Smith, *The Twelve Prophets, vol. I, rev. ed.* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1928), 190.

The Sabbath was given as a weekly reminder of the ideal society, a society based on freedom and equality: “In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates” (Exod 20:8-11). Sigve K. Tonstad observed that this list had no parallel in other cultures. He noted that “legislation of this kind in the ancient world prioritizes from up and not from the top looking down, giving first considerations to the weakest and most vulnerable members of society.”¹⁵⁷

The Sabbath must be a delight for everyone, not for an elite group. Jesus confirmed this when He said, “The Sabbath was made for man (everyone), and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Jesus said these words to respond to the Jewish leaders accusing the disciples of violating the Sabbath because when they passed through the grain fields and, as they were hungry, began to pluck the heads of grain. Matthew reported the same incident, but added something Jesus also said: “But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Matt 12:7–8).

Matthew emphasized the fact that the disciples were hungry. To let the hungry go unsatisfied and not show generosity is to act like a fool or a scoundrel (Isa 32:6). The Sabbath incident, as reported by Matthew, reminds us that God desires “mercy” more than sacrifice; in other words, more than “afflicting his soul, bow down his head like a bulrush, spread out sackcloth and ashes” (Isa 58:5). Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, embodies mercy, love and compassion. In texts like Exod 20:8–11, Deut 5:12, and Isa 58,

¹⁵⁷ Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, 126.

God appears to be advocating a certain type of life that Sabbath keeping would naturally lead you to. These texts proclaim that “true Sabbath keeping is releasing burdened humanity from the oppression.”¹⁵⁸ Accordingly, there is a danger “when we just make it an intellectual exercise rather than something practical.”¹⁵⁹

It is remarkable that both Mark and Luke arranged fasting and Sabbath in parallel in their narratives, following the same literary structure of Isa 58. The incident about fasting (Mark 2:18:22; Luke 5:33–39), where Jesus declared in essence that His disciples should not fast while He was with them, is followed by the incident about the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–27; Luke 6:1–5), where Jesus said that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. As pointed out earlier, fasting in Isa 58 was understood to mean mourning, afflicting one’s soul, bowing down the head like a bulrush, spreading out sackcloth and ashes, but Jesus’ disciples could not fast (this way) when the Lord was in their midst.

The two stories put together as a synthetic parallelism copy Isa 58’s structure, presenting fasting and Sabbath-keeping as similar concepts. The point that Mark and Luke seemed to be making was not that fasting and Sabbath-keeping were abolished, but instead, that they were now to be practiced in Jesus, who embodied the spirit of love and mercy. I believe that Mark and Luke wanted their readers to get this basic message: the presence of the Lord in our fasting and in our Sabbath will make these moments enjoyable, a “delight” for everyone, because mercy, joy, love, and compassion flow from Him.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

On another occasion, Jesus pointed to the Pharisees' selfishness, willing to care for their own affairs on the Sabbath, rather than caring for the sick and the needy. Jesus was about to heal a man with dropsy on a Sabbath. As the Pharisees were watching Him closely, looking for an occasion to accuse Him, Jesus asked them: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" And as they kept silent, Jesus answered saying, 'Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?' And they could not answer Him regarding these things" (Luke 14:1–5). In "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath," Jesus used the word *exesti*, which means lawful, permissible, permitted.¹⁶⁰ Jesus seemed to ask, "Is it according to God's law," or "Is it morally permissible" to heal on the Sabbath?¹⁶¹ Mark reported the same incident, but the same question was asked differently: "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4). But Matthew (not Mark) reported Jesus' answer to the question: "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt 12:12). William Barclay noted that, in Greek, there are two words for *good*. The first one, *agathōs*, simply defines a thing as being good in quality; the second one, *kalōs*, means that a thing is not only good, but that it is also winsome and beautiful and attractive.¹⁶² Note that Jesus used the word *kalōs* (instead of *agathōs*) to qualify the works Christian are called to perform on the Sabbath. The word *kalōs* implies the idea of beauty, handsomeness, attractiveness, admiration. On the Sabbath, we are called to perform the good works with love,

¹⁶⁰ Joseph Henry Thayer, *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1981), 223. See also *Biblehub*, (accessed October 6, 2022), <https://biblehub.com/greek/1832.htm>.

¹⁶¹ See earlier comparison of *exesti* and *enomos* in Greek.

¹⁶² William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 1* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), 125.

sweetness, indulgence, always with a smile. Addressing Adventist Sabbath School’s teachers, Ellen White stated that “it is our own character and experience that determine our influence upon others. . . The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown. . . The strongest arguments in favor of the gospel is loving and lovable Christian.”¹⁶³

Theologically, the Sabbath is grounded in the nature of God’s creation—“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Gen 2:2-3; Exod 20:11; 31:17). Historically, the Sabbath is grounded in God’s redemption of Israel from slavery—“Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deut 5:12–15). This foundation confers to the Sabbath a humanitarian dimension—freedom from exploitation.¹⁶⁴

The Sabbath was made for man, which means that it is a universal basic human right. The Sabbath reminds us that rest for human beings is an imperative of social justice. “Sabbath is meant to act as an equalizer; Sabbath is meant to suspend our socio-economic social order every week.”¹⁶⁵ Bruce Malchow indicated that the fourth commandment—calling the people to remember the Sabbath—was meant to create

¹⁶³ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Sabbath School Work* (Washington, D.C: Review and Herald, 1938), 100.

¹⁶⁴ Saul M. Olyan, “Sabbath,” *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, eds. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 1174.

¹⁶⁵ *Spectrum magazine*, March 13, 2013, accessed April 29, 2019, <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/alyssa-foll/2013/03/13/creation-sabbath-and-social-justice>.

greater equality between rich and poor.¹⁶⁶ Commenting on Exod 20:8–11, an Adventist scholar stated this:

There lies true Sabbath keeping. It's not just refraining from an activity. It's providing a sense of rest. Not only a sense, but the actual experience of rest for the servant, for your animal. And then there's this key word for the sojourner at the gate, a person who is not even a part of the covenant community or at this time to the Israelite community. They did not have any rights within the system of Israel's economic or political or judicial system. But He [God] says, even for that person, give them rest. That's caring for the other. Again, if we talk about true Sabbath keeping, it's not just about keeping a day, it's about a care for the other person, even if they're not a part of your group.¹⁶⁷

Another Adventist theologian also stated that “oppressive economic and social structures, which make it impossible for people to provide for themselves, contradict the message of the Sabbath. Those who appreciate the meaning of the Sabbath will seek to eliminate such things.”¹⁶⁸

Advocacy and the Three Angels' Messages in Revelation 14:6–12

In Adventist theology, the timing of the proclamation of the Three Angels' messages coincides with the end of time when the Second Coming of Jesus is near.¹⁶⁹ In Adventism, the three angels represent God's human agents and the Seventh-day Adventist Church is considered the continuation of the movement God raised by the

¹⁶⁶ Malchow, *Social Justice and the Hebrew Bible*, 26.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with an Adventist university professor on August 10, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 9.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Rice, *Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1997), 406.

¹⁶⁹ According to Jacques Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation* (Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 2002), 123, the three heavenly messengers “directly precede the coming of the Son of man on the clouds (Rev. 14:14) and follow the four beasts of Daniel 7 (Rev. 13:2ff.)”

second half of the nineteenth century specifically to fulfill that prophecy.¹⁷⁰ I will argue in this section that the three proclamations contain a concern for social justice and could be seen as a form of advocacy for a better society, which is more inclusive and rejects all forms of oppression and injustices.

The Apostle John's vision from the island of Patmos portrays three angels flying one after the other in the midst of heaven, proclaiming three messages to the inhabitants of the earth. In the Three Angels' messages, the angels makes three calls that are seen as three areas for advocacy by the Remnant: (1) the first angel calls to worship God the Creator (the Remnant advocates for God's right to be worshiped, advocates righteousness, warns about God's upcoming judgment and advocates for the salvation of individuals); (2) the second angel announces the fall of Babylon (the Remnant advocates for the end of a system that uses deceptions, oppresses people and coerces conscience to accept lies); and (3) the third angel calls for the rejection of the mark of the Beast (the remnant advocates for justice and freedom of conscience and truth). Michael Nixon suggested that "the Three Angels message, in its true light, is a call to religious, racial, and social justice."¹⁷¹ Let us consider each message one by one.

The first angel preaches the "everlasting gospel" to "those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water'" (Rev 14:6).

¹⁷⁰ Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press, 2005), 181-197.

¹⁷¹ Michael Nixon, "The Three Angels' Messages: A Call to Religious and Social Justice," in *Real. Deal. Heal. Gen Z and Social Issues*, ed. Steve Case (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 2021), 44.

What is the gospel? The Greek word *evangelion*, translated in the text by “gospel,” literally means “good news.” In classical Greek literature, it is often used to express the news of victory.¹⁷² For Michael Nixon, the gospel was the “good news of God’s reconciling love toward us as human beings, which reciprocates and manifests itself through us in horizontal reconciliation.”¹⁷³ An Adventist scholar stated that “the gospel is God’s opposition to every form of bondage and God’s call to come out of Babylon. ... It’s about living in a way that is fundamentally in opposition to what Babylon represents.”¹⁷⁴ He also added that “the everlasting gospel is God with us, and God is with us radically. And therefore, we must be incarnationally with our neighbors.”¹⁷⁵ The first angel’s message thus advocates for God’s reconciling love.

The second angel proclaims, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Rev 14:7). In Babylon are “all structures, institutions and systems that are set up to defy the Gospel, the beauty of God’s love and the character of God.”¹⁷⁶ The Millerites interpreted Babylon as constituted of the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. The Roman Catholic Church because of the Pope’s claiming to be God’s viceregent on earth—the Pope is the anti-

¹⁷² Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation*, 124.

¹⁷³ Nixon, “The Three Angels’ Messages: A Call to Religious and Social Justice,” 44.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 26, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 7.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Nixon, “The Three Angels’ Messages: A Call to Religious and Social Justice,” 45.

Christ—and the Protestant Churches because of “their spirit of oppression (pro-slavery), their pride, and their desire for power and wealth.”¹⁷⁷

Damsteegt explained how the Millerites came to characterize Babylon based on two prevailing features: oppression and confusion (disunity).¹⁷⁸ The Millerites saw Babylon in the OT as the power that oppressed God’s people, while in the NT, they saw it as all forces that persecuted and oppressed the church of God. Damsteegt pointed to Joseph Marsh, editor of the Millerite periodical *Voice of Truth*, as the one who refined the view that Protestant churches represented the daughters of Babylon. Besides oppression, Babylon was also seen as a symbol of confusion on the basis of a typological relationship with the Babel of Gen 11. Damsteegt quoted Marsh who argued that in the same way God confounded the language of the postdiluvian and scattered them, Christendom has been confounded and scattered, being split into several sects, each fighting the other because of differences in their creeds and doctrines.¹⁷⁹ One research participant, an Adventist scholar, stated that “the gospel includes a call for people to come out of Babylon and to come into a new community in which those things do not dominate

¹⁷⁷ Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission*, 80.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 46-48.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

us.”¹⁸⁰ The Second Angel’s message thus advocates for a non-egotistical state of mind and behavior in humanity.

The Third Angel’s message is a warning to the inhabitants of the earth regarding the mark of the beast:

If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name (Rev 14:9–11).

Ranko Stefanovic stated that “the beast of Revelation 13 uses fear to make people conform to his demand for worship.”¹⁸¹ Nixon wrote, “The heart of the Third Angel’s Message reveals that God operates on the premise of non-coercive love in all of His relationships.”¹⁸² Then he added, “Coercion in any form, as represented in the person of the Beast and its way of ruling, is antithetical to the character of God.”¹⁸³ The Third Angel’s message thus advocates for liberty of conscience.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 26, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 7. “The fall of Babylon is the collapse of Christendom (the temporal, spiritual, imperial form of Christianity). It is that Christendom became imperial and all other religions too. We have an imperial Christianity that lasted for 2000 years in five different forms. We’ve got imperial Islam. We’ve got imperial Judaism, we’ve got imperial Hinduism, we’ve got imperial Buddhism, and imperial Secularism, wherever you find these forms—that is ‘Babylon’. What is imperialism? Imperialism is the idea that a certain individual or group of individuals think and take on the responsibility of being god. And therefore, try to tell everyone what is the good, and then to draw a boundary and say, you are inside and you’re outside, and you’ve got to come inside to get the benefits. And the outside is not worth caring about.”

¹⁸¹ Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press), 463.

¹⁸² Nixon, “The Three Angels’ Messages: A Call to Religious and Social Justice,” 47.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Advocacy and the Second Coming in Matthew 24–25

Adventist eschatology is premillennialist, meaning that Christ’s Second Coming is imminent and will inaugurate a period of one thousand years (millennium), during which the earth will be empty and the elect will be in heaven.¹⁸⁴ At the end of the millennium, everlasting peace, justice, and abundant life will be restored by God on earth where His people, descending from heaven, will live forever. According to this belief, the church’s primary mission is proclamation, blowing the trumpet, warning the inhabitants of the earth about the imminent destruction of the world, and calling them to repent from sin. This is the work of the remnant as stated in Seventh-day Adventists’ *Fundamental Beliefs* 13.¹⁸⁵ However, besides proclamation (*kerygma*), it is important to note that the biblical concept of “witness” (*martyria*) also includes fellowship (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*).¹⁸⁶ A closer look at Jesus’s extensive teaching about His Second Coming sheds light on the importance of service (*diakonia*) to others or social action in the remnant’s preparation for Christ’s return.

Matthew 24–25 form the eschatological discourse of Jesus. The disciples were showing Jesus the buildings of the temple with pride, but Jesus told them that not even

¹⁸⁴ 28 *Fundamental Beliefs*, 2020 edition, accessed April 21, 2023, <https://www.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ADV-28Beliefs2020.pdf>.

¹⁸⁵ Fundamental belief 13: “The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Mic. 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4.)”

¹⁸⁶David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1980), 227.

one stone would be left, that the whole construction would be thrown down (Matt 24:2).

Jesus's reaction puzzled the disciples who later asked Him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

Note that the question has two parts: (1) When would the buildings of the temple be destroyed and (2) when would the end of the age and Jesus's coming be? Therefore, Jesus included details in His response that pertain to both events, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the end of time. Concluding His eschatological discourse, Jesus told three significant parables in relation to the end time and one illustration of the judgment of the nations at His Second Coming. The central theme of these parables is how to prepare for the Second Coming.

The first parable found in Matt 24:45–51 is about a faithful servant and an unfaithful one. The master established a certain servant ruler over his household. The servant would be declared faithful and rewarded by his master if he fulfilled his duty, consisting in providing food to those under his charge. The servant would be declared unfaithful and harshly punished by his masters if, instead, he beat his fellow servants and drank with the drunkards. Jesus had earlier critiqued the Jewish leaders for disregarding the welfare of the people (Matt 23:1–4, 23–24). Jesus' mention of punishment for the oppressive and wasteful servant was a condemnation of the rulers' actions.¹⁸⁷ However, it also served as a warning to remind future Christian believers, especially church leaders,

¹⁸⁷ French L. Arrington and Roger Stronstad, eds., *Life in the Spirit: New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 235. See also Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 110.

that eternal judgment awaits those professed disciples who abuse or neglect the “little ones” under their care, those who live selfishly and do not care for others.¹⁸⁸

The second parable found in Matt 25:1–13 tells about ten virgins waiting for a bridegroom. Five of them were wise and five were foolish. The wise virgins made sure they always had oil in their lamps, but the foolish virgins paid no attention to the quantity of oil they had in their lamps until it was exhausted. When the bridegroom finally arrived, the wise virgins were ready to go, while the foolish were not because they had to go the village to buy oil for the lamps. When they returned and tried to get into the wedding room, it was too late.

The five foolish virgins represent false disciples.¹⁸⁹ For Robert H. Gundry, the virgins’ failure to take oil represented “unpreparedness” for the Son of Man’s coming.¹⁹⁰ For other commentators, the “oil” might mean the “good works” mentioned in the previous parable.¹⁹¹ Walter A. Elwell held the same view, stating that when Jesus comes “he will surely judge church members for their works.”¹⁹² However, for Seventh-day Adventists, the “oil” symbolizes the Holy Spirit. The virgins are foolish “in that they had not yielded themselves to the working of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁹³ according to Francis D.

¹⁸⁸ Walter A. Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 752.

¹⁸⁹ Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, 753.

¹⁹⁰ Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 110.

¹⁹¹ Arrington and Stronstad, eds., *Life in the Spirit*, 235.

¹⁹² Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, 753.

¹⁹³ Francis D. Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary vol 5* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), 508.

Nichol. Nichol also pointed to the “selfishness” of these five virgins that “keeps the truth from taking deep root in their lives and bearing the fruit of a Christlike character.”¹⁹⁴ The teaching of the parable seems to imply that preparing for Christ’s second coming requires that believers renounce selfish living and fulfill good works on behalf of others by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The third parable found in Matt 25:14–30 is about a man entrusting his servants with talents before he travelled to a faraway country. He gave five talents to one servant, two talents to another one, and one talent to a last one, according to their capacity. The servant who received five talents and the one who received two talents doubled their shares through good trading, but he who had received one talent went and hid his master’s money under the ground. When the master came back, he praised the servants who multiplied his money and rewarded them by entrusting them with more talents, but the lazy servant who hid the master’s money saw his talent taken away and given to the those who already had more talents. Jesus concluded the parable saying, “To everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (Matt 25:29).

While the *SDA Bible Commentary* assigns to “talents” the meaning of “special gifts of the Spirit, together with all natural endowments,”¹⁹⁵ for Gundry, the “talents” represented “opportunities to do good deeds.”¹⁹⁶ He argued that the expression “to each according his own ability” referred not to differences in native aptitudes, but rather to

¹⁹⁴ Nichol, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary vol 5*, 508.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 510.

¹⁹⁶ Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 111.

“differences in number of such opportunities.”¹⁹⁷ Elwell thought the same, stating that “investing talents does not mean developing one’s natural skills but seizing opportunities to do good works for the sake of the Master.”¹⁹⁸ The teaching of this parable, again, “stresses the responsibility to take advantage of opportunities to do good deeds.”¹⁹⁹

To conclude the whole discourse, Jesus gave an illustration of the scene of the final judgment of the nations. It will be “as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats” (Matt 25:32). Theologians diverge regarding the meaning of this parable. Elwell believed that “the sheep are those [nations] who receive the gospel of the kingdom and its bearers and the goats are those [nations] who reject them.”²⁰⁰ However, Arrington and Stronstad disagreed with this interpretation and believe instead that “the separation of sheep and the goat represent not a judgment of the those nations who are sympathetic to Christians from those who are not, but a judgment of the church from all nations.”²⁰¹ For Gundry, the hungry and thirsty ones, the homeless and naked, the sick and imprisoned are such “because they were suffering persecution and fleeing from it in obedience to Jesus’ command.”²⁰² He argued that Jesus was not talking about general humanitarianism, but about “disciples’ risking persecution of themselves by helping fellow disciples already

¹⁹⁷ Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 111.

¹⁹⁸ Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, 754.

¹⁹⁹ Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 111.

²⁰⁰ Elwell, *Baker Commentary on the Bible*, 754.

²⁰¹ Arrington and Stronstad, eds., *Life in the Spirit*, 236.

²⁰² Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 111.

under persecution.”²⁰³

However, from an Adventist standpoint, the main point Jesus was making in telling the parable was that those who will be granted eternal life are those who will have shown compassion to the “little ones,” the needy, the ones in prison, the ones who cannot afford food and clothing. Nichol commented, “When we reflect the character of Jesus perfectly we will feel as He does toward those in need, and through us He will be able to solace and succor others. The best evidence of love for God is love that leads us to bear ‘one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6; cf. 1 John 3:14–19; see on Matt. 5:43–48).”²⁰⁴ Sahlin stated that in the metaphor of the sheep and the goats, Christ “portrays God as deciding whom to save on the basis of whether or not his followers fed the hungry, housed the homeless, cared for the poor, treated the sick and visited the prisoner.”²⁰⁵

Commenting on the parable of the sheep and the goats, an Adventist scholar interviewed during the field research thought that Adventists should not just give food, but also teach people how to get their food. “We don’t just get them fish, we give them a fishing rod and we tell them here’s how to fish so that they are sustainable.... Advocacy is asking, ‘why is it that some people don’t even have access?’”²⁰⁶

Considering how Jesus insists on rendering service to others, works of righteousness, and social action in his eschatological discourse, Sahlin stated that “when

²⁰³ Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 111.

²⁰⁴ Nichol, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* 5, 512.

²⁰⁵ Sahlin, *Ministries of Compassion*, 2.

²⁰⁶ Interview with an Adventist university professor on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 5.

we take a stand for justice, compassion and healing, we demonstrate the values of the coming Kingdom; we make it clear why God will come to destroy those who do not want to live with Him in His city.”²⁰⁷ A focus on eschatology cannot preclude Adventists from “becoming more oriented towards social justice area.”²⁰⁸

Summary

Living the Sabbath in its full meaning, proclaiming the everlasting gospel, and getting ready for the return of King Jesus who will ask us for an account of how we have treated the “least of these,” constitute fundamental biblical principles for Adventists’ involvement in advocacy. I argue in my study that Adventists have been called not only to restore the strict observance of the seventh day as a day of rest, but also to restore the deep meaning of the Sabbath by breaking up egotism and all forms of oppression and injustice within God’s family. I also argue that a proper understanding of eschatology and of the “everlasting gospel” to be proclaimed in our time should lead the Adventist Church to be more concerned about social evils and make transformational advocacy a greater part of its mission effort. The next section will propose a methodology and guiding principles to help the Church make this happen.

A Methodology for Adventist Transformational Advocacy

Isaiah 58:12 is a foundational text for Seventh-day Adventists. It reads, “Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of

²⁰⁷ Sahlin, *Ministries of Compassion*, 2.

²⁰⁸ Interview with an administrator and professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on March 24, 2021. See Appendix A, Oral Records 10.

many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.” Bill Knott, former Editor of *Adventist Review*, wrote: “The ‘breach’ we Adventists are called to repair (Isa 58:12) isn’t only the injury done to God’s law, but the injuries still happening to ‘the least of these.’”²⁰⁹

I propose below four integrated methodological approaches for the Adventist Church to *be* the “repairer of breaches” it claims to be: critique, service, intercession, and influence. I craft these methodologies drawing on recommendations from research interviews and on some of the best practices in the history of mission, on theories in Christian social ethics, and on my own experience as a trained professional in the field of community development.

Critique

Adventists claim to be the “repairers of breaches” referred to in Isa 58, but the first step in repairing a breach is to find that breach. Through *critique*, Adventists identify breaches that need repairing. The verb “critique” means to examine critically, to review.²¹⁰ Having a critical mind will make Adventists “breach finders,” before they can become “breach repairers.” In other words, in order to become an effective transforming force in the world, Adventists need to study the world and know what is going on there. “Take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible,” said Karl Barth in *Time Magazine*, in May 1, 1966.

²⁰⁹ Bill Knott, “Repairers of the Breach,” *Adventist Review*, July 1, 2016, 5.

²¹⁰ (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*), s.v. “critique” [accessed October 6, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/critique>].

By critique, I mean a critical analysis of the field of operation of the Church along with the study of Scripture in context. Specific concepts associated with the idea of “critique” include situational or context analysis, needs assessments, exploration, baseline study, evaluation, and so on. This step is primordial before, during, and after the implementation of any mission enterprise, whether it is evangelism, social ministry, church planting, and others.

Critical analysis also includes cultural hermeneutics whereby one seeks to understand the social location of the recipient of the gospel. Social location is defined as the “sum total of human experiences that contribute to and shape a person’s overall perspective on life.”²¹¹ Social location includes not only “a person’s physical location in age, gender, race, and community, but also the moral, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual atmosphere they live in, their social class, marital status, political convictions, language, nationality, history of the communities they belong to, etc.”²¹² The study of people’s social location is critical for mission; “for the gospel to meaningfully engage recipients with the purpose of transforming their worldviews, its communicators must encode the biblical and theological message in such a way that its content remains faithful to biblical principles, but also makes sense to its receptors in terms of its relevance in order to challenge them given their social location.”²¹³

²¹¹ Boubakar Sanou and John C. Peckham, “Canonical Theology, Social Location, and the Search for Biblical Orthodoxy,” (invited paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, San Diego, CA, November 20, 2019), 2.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Sanou and Peckham, “Canonical Theology, Social Location, and the Search for Biblical Orthodoxy,” 3.

There exist two basic types of breaches Adventists need to identify before embarking in mission: breaches in their understanding of the *Missio Dei* and breaches in people's lives. Before embarking in repairing breaches in people's lives, we need to identify what is God's original intention for humanity and what He is currently doing in the world according to Scripture.

Volf talked of two contexts Christians need to study as they prepare to engage for the common good: first, the context of the gospel, which he calls the "canonical context"; second, the context of our own lives or of the particular situation we want to change, which is the "contemporary context."²¹⁴ Regarding canonical context, Volf recommended that Christians go "back and forth reading every part of Scripture in light of the New Testament testimonies about Jesus Christ and reading the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ in light of the entire Bible."²¹⁵

Regarding contemporary context, Volf recommended that we "identify ways that our situation differ from the social world in which the Gospels are set and to which they originally spoke, and we need to discern what bearing those differences have for our judgments and actions."²¹⁶ Although one may encounter many differences of historical context, Volf highlighted three general features of many contemporary contexts: the popularity of the democratic ideal, the emergence of complex social systems, and astounding technological development. Christians need to "discern how to participate

²¹⁴ Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *Public Faith in Action: How to Engage with Commitment, Conviction, and Courage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 19.

²¹⁵ Volf, *Public Faith in Action*, 20.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

faithfully in the mission of Christ in novel and rapidly changing situations.”²¹⁷

Ultimately, the creation story, as expounded in Scripture, should remain the frame of reference for the ideal of flourishing life. The type of political apparatus—conservative or liberal, republican or democratic, socialist or capitalist, and so on—should never set the standard in the process of gap analysis.

Critical analysis of canonical and contemporary contexts will help the church determine how to contextualize its approach. Contextualization or indigenization is the process by which the church becomes “inculturated” in the life of a people. Critical analysis is key to the process of contextualization as it studies the culture, not only the surface, but the worldview of a community, which is the structured set of assumptions (including values and commitments/allegiances) underlying how a people perceive and respond to reality.²¹⁸ A successful critical analysis of context will make a Christian witness effective in bringing people to Christ and planting churches that are biblically and culturally appropriate.

Identifying the breaches in our understanding of both canonical and contemporary contexts through critical analysis will enable Adventists to readjust or bridge gaps in their theology and social praxis. Guided by the Holy Spirit through prayer, critical analysis will lead the church to the most effective way to repair the breaches. Job said, “And I searched out the case that I did not know” (Job 29:16). Commenting on this passage, Ellen White wrote,

²¹⁷ Volf, *Public Faith in Action*, 24.

²¹⁸ Charles H. Kraft, “Culture, Worldview and Contextualization,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, edited by Ralph D. Winter, pages 400–406 (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 406.

Do not wait for them [the poor] to call your attention to their needs. Act as did Job. The thing that he knew not he searched out. Go on an inspecting tour and learn what is needed and how it can be best supplied.²¹⁹

Service

Through *service*, Adventists repair breaches that need repairing. By service, I mean community outreach undertaken by the Church to meet the needs of people holistically, whether it is spiritual, mental, or physical. Service may include public evangelization; small groups; church planting; provision of spiritual, educational, and health services; relief and disaster responses; and community development (integrated ministries). All is implemented in a spirit of service, rather than with a focus on increasing our membership. Why?

Because Jesus is our example, and He said in Matt 20:28, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.” The Church was organized for service, according to the co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen White: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was *organized for service*, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world” (emphasis supplied).²²⁰ Adventists are called to carry the gospel to the world through service. Sung K. Kwon believed that “servanthood is a Christian journey” as “Jesus lived His life as a humble servant.”²²¹ He wrote that “the bottom line of the Christian journey is to be servants of God, by serving His people, not

²¹⁹ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1882), 151.

²²⁰ White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 9.

²²¹ Sung K. Kwon, *Burst the Bubble: Finding Your Passion for Community Outreach* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 14.

just the ‘chosen’ within the walls of the church building, but by being His disciples outside the walls of the church.”²²²

Kwon pointed to three essential functions of the church to complete its community outreach mission: discipleship, world mission, and community transformation. In *discipleship*, the church equips, develops, educates, and enlightens disciples (the change agents and difference-makers). In *world mission*, the church takes the Three Angels’ messages to the end of the world, and in *community transformation*, our faithful presence, as God’s servants, individually or collectively as a church body (various congregations, health-care and educational institutions, etc.), transforms the surrounding environment for the better wherever we are in the world.²²³

Ruthven J. Roy called Adventist leaders to shift their mission paradigm, criticizing the current approach to mission for being “largely message-centered, with an orientation toward the church as an organization.”²²⁴ He encouraged “church administrators, pastors, and lay people to pursue a mission paradigm that is more people-centered and not allow the shackles of traditionalism, formalism, and/or denominationalism to overshadow or ignore the needs of lost humanity.”²²⁵

Carried out from the perspective of service to the community, evangelism will work hand-in-glove with social ministry. There will be no place for antagonism between

²²² Kwon, *Burst the Bubble: Finding Your Passion for Community Outreach* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 14.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ruthven J. Roy, *A Challenge to the Remnant: Designing Our Mission Strategy to Impact the Real World* (Frederick, MD: NDM Books, 2002), 86.

²²⁵ Ibid.

the two because each will aim at addressing a specific need in people’s lives. Depending on the context and the gaps found during the critical analysis phase, the emphasis may be on either one or on both. In places where spiritual gaps are the main issue, a focus on Bible study and spiritual revival will be needed. In other contexts, poverty may be the main issue. Then, social ministry for the provision of food, water, clothes, shelter, physical healing, access to education services, and so on will have the priority. Evangelism thus becomes “prophetic evangelism.”²²⁶

Within this proposed transformational advocacy framework, Adventists should not approach poverty and lack of respect for human rights in the same way secular political advocacy groups do. A participant in the field research noted that most advocacy groups are just mighty in word: “They just do a lot of stir, a lot of fluff, but little substance in reality.”²²⁷ He believed that it is risky to join the stir rather than doing the good deeds Jesus expects from us. Jesus was a man of action. In Luke 24:19, two disciples were discussing about Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They said, “The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.” In 1 John 3:18–19, John also talked to the church and said, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this, we

²²⁶ “Prophetic evangelism” is a model of evangelism (alongside personal, small group, visitation, liturgical, church growth, revival, and media evangelism) that captures the holistic nature of evangelism. Proponents of this model often pair the word evangelism with a short phrase that includes the world social, such as “evangelism and social responsibility,” evangelism and social service,” or “evangelism and social reform.” For Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Models of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academy, 2020), 114, “the point of this combination of social and evangelism is to emphasize that evangelism involves more than saving individual souls, ‘as if souls existed in isolation from all that makes a person human—relationships, inheritance, social context, bodies, minds, emotions and wills.’ Other advocates of this model call it *service* evangelism, *holistic* evangelism, *compassionate* evangelism, or *liberation* evangelism.”

²²⁷ Interview with a PhD Student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

know that we are of the truth, and we shall assure our hearts before him.” Thus, we are of the truth, not if we cause a lot of stir, or if we are good and mighty in word. We have to be mighty in deed.²²⁸

Framing our mission endeavor as service will also help address a basic missiological challenge. In a world that is becoming more and more suspicious about religion and which often views churches through the lens of medieval Christianity with its aggressive proselytism, its corrupt leadership, and its exploitation of the mass, the Adventist Church will gain in projecting itself as a servant, rather than a missionary-proselytist organization. In our secular, postmodern, and post-Christian era, terms such as mission or evangelization, conversion, or even discipleship elicit resistance and hostility in some milieus because they are perceived as disrespectful of people’s identity, including their culture and religion, and often as an infringement of their freedom of conscience. However, servanthood has a more positive connotation and is widely associated with the intention to serve, to help, to be merciful and hospitable. Even politicians, government officials, and corporate leaders win the favor of people when they show a spirit of servanthood. In nearly every society, servanthood is a cherished value. Therefore, servanthood is an essential requirement for a leader. The traits of servanthood “are even more critical in the church than in the corporate world.”²²⁹ When seen as a community of servants, the Adventist Church will be able to access territories that have so far offered obdurate opposition to the Christian message.

²²⁸ Interview with a PhD Student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

²²⁹ Kwon, *Burst the Bubble*, 15.

Intercession

Through *intercession*, Adventists call upon authorities capable of repairing breaches beyond our scope to repair. In the face of poverty and social injustices, in the face of the physical and spiritual needs of people, Adventists may not always be able to provide a service, but they can and should intercede. “Intercession” is a biblical term that is often interchangeably used for “prayer,” mainly for prayer made on behalf of others.²³⁰ The word comes from the Hebrew *pāga*, “to make intercession,” originally meant “to strike upon.” Over time, the term came to mean “to assail someone with petitions.” However, *pāga* got its sense, “to intercede,” when this “assailing” was done on behalf of another. The Greek verb for “to make intercession,” *entygchanō*, is found five times in the NT (Acts 25:24, Rom 8:27, 34; 11:2; Heb 7:25). The noun, *enteuxis*, appears in 1 Tim 2:1 and is translated as “intercessions,” and in 1 Tim 4:5, where it means “prayer.” The Latin form of the word intercession is *intercedo*, meaning “to (or pass) between.” That specific meaning has been applied in 1 Tim 2:1, where Paul wrote, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men.” Intercession, in contexts similar to this one, “does not signify praise or petition in general, but a heart concern for others in which one stands between them and God making request on their behalf.”²³¹ Why intercede?

Jesus is our example. He is the High Priest in heaven, always making intercession for men (Heb 7:25). Not only did Christ practice intercession when He was on earth, but He also urged it, even for those who “spitefully use us and persecute us (Matt 5:44). Jesus

²³⁰ William Bentham, ed., *The Dictionary of Religion* (London: Cassel & Compagnie, 1887), 558.

²³¹ Joseph Kenneth Grider, “Intercession,” *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, 290-291.

interceded for Peter: “But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32). In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus prayed for His disciples and for Christian believers of all times, pleading with God to “keep them from the evil one,” to “sanctify them” by His truth, and that they “may be one with God, as He is one with His father (John 17). The Holy Spirit also “makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26).

Adventists should intercede with both divine and earthly powers. First, Adventists should intercede with God because social justice issues cannot be solved by mere human means alone. Old Testament prophets lamented before God when things were going wrong in society. One example is the prophet Habakkuk, who lamented to God about injustice: “O Lord, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? ... Why do You show me iniquity And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, And justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds” (Hab 1:1–4). Another example is Jeremiah. He poured out his grief before God for the doomed nation “O my soul, my soul! I am pained in my very heart! My heart makes a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, Because you have heard, O my soul, The sound of the trumpet” (Jer 4:19).

Falk noted that God is always looking for “advocates who will stand in the breach between God and humankind, in order to deter God’s wrath.”²³² However, Brueggemann suggested that OT prophetic intercessory prayers, besides pleading with God to intervene,

²³² Falk, “Does the Church Have a Social Responsibility?” 291.

were a form of criticism of the “dominant community” and served to energize the “subcommunity” into resistance.²³³ He noted with amazement “the capacity of the prophet to use the language of lament and the symbolic creation of a death scene as a way of bringing to reality what the king must see and will not.”²³⁴ He believed that “grief and mourning, that crying in pathos, is the ultimate form of criticism, for it announces the sure end of the whole royal arrangement.”²³⁵

Second, Adventists should intercede with earthly powers on behalf of those whose freedom of conscience and access to basic goods of life and dignity are threatened. Moses interceded with Pharaoh on behalf of the children of Israel (Exod 5:1, 3; 8:1–4; 9). Queen Esther interceded with King Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jews threatened with extinction by Haman’s plot (Esth 1:1–5; 7:1–10). Daniel interceded with Arioch, captain of the guard of King Nebuchadnezzar, on behalf of his companions and the rest of the wise men of Babylon (Dan 2:14–19). On several occasions, Jesus was found in the noble act of being a go-between. One example was when He interposed to defend the woman caught in adultery, preventing her from death by lapidation (John 8:1–11). On the day of His arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, He also pleaded with the officer to let His disciples go, while surrendering Himself with no resistance (John 18:8).

²³³ Brueggemann discussed the concept of “prophetic imagination” as a call for Christian ministry to be relevant and responsive to its dominant context. His description of prophetic imagination refers to a subcommunity that stands in contrast to a dominant community. While participating in the public life of the dominant community, the subcommunity rejects and critiques its value system. Brueggemann applied and connected his understanding of the Old Testament prophets to the realities of the church in America. He calls for prophetic ministry, with the specific task to “nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us” (Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 42).

²³⁴ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 46.

²³⁵ Ibid.

Influence

Through *influence*, Adventists seek to empower others to become breach repairers. In Matt 5:13–16, Jesus used two powerful metaphors to define an authentic Christian: salt that gives savor and a light that shines. Jesus called His followers the “salt of the earth” in v. 13. Salt is a powerful metaphor for influence. In Matt 5:13a (*halas tēs gēs*), the Greek word *halas* for salt refers to those kinds of saline matter used to fertilize arable land.²³⁶ Jesus meant to say to His disciples, “It is your prerogative to impart to mankind [likened to arable land] the influences required for a life of devotion to God.”²³⁷ Commenting on this passage, Ellen White stressed the transformative role of the Church:

By these words of Christ we gain some idea of what constitutes the value of human influence. It is to work with the influence of Christ, to lift where Christ lifts, to impart correct principles, and stay the progress of the world’s corruption. It is to diffuse that grace which Christ alone can impart. It is to uplift, to sweeten, the lives and characters of others by the power of a pure example united with earnest faith and love. God’s people are to exercise a reforming, preserving power in the world. They are to counterwork the destroying, corrupting influence of evil. . . .²³⁸

In Matt 5:14, Christians are called “light” (*fōs*). The Greek word *fōs* is often used in poetic discourse, in metaphor, and in parable. Because of its extremely delicate, subtle, pure, and brilliant quality, *fōs* has often been used as an appellation of God, whose nature is incorporeal, spotless, holy. Jesus the Messiah is called *fōs* in Luke 2:32; John 1:7; 12:35, 46; John 8:12; 9:5; and John 1:9. The disciples of Jesus are distinguished by the

²³⁶ Thayer, Joseph Henry, *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1981), 25.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ellen White, *Amazing Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1973), 124.

same name, and *fōs* is used for that which is exposed to the view of all by a figure borrowed from daylight.

I am recommending four ways Adventists can enhance their influence and become a positive force for change in the world: education, public service, relationship building, and alternative beloved community.

Adventist education. Biblical advocacy should be a part of Adventist education. Preparing our youths to become “lights” in the world and “salt” on earth must be a priority for the Adventist Church. Adventist education should prepare young men and women to exercise great influence in the world by holding positions of leadership (engage with civil and political authorities and decision-makers) in public and private organizations that implement policies and laws affecting the lives and destiny of many.

Ellen White encouraged the youths to aim high in life and to seek to impact this world:

Dear youth, what is the aim and purpose of your life? Are you ambitious for education that you may have a name and position in the world? Have you thoughts that you dare not express, that you may one day stand upon the summit of intellectual greatness; that you may sit in deliberative and legislative councils, and help to enact laws for the nation? There is nothing wrong in these aspirations. You may every one of you make your mark. You should be content with no mean attainments. Aim high, and spare no pains to reach the standard.²³⁹

White warned young people against egoistical motivations as they aim for greatness. Their motive should be the uplifting of humanity and the flourishing of life before God.

²³⁹ White, *A Call to Stand Apart* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 64. White also added, “And many a lad of today, growing up as did Daniel in his Judean home, studying God’s word and His works, and learning the lessons of faithful service, will yet stand in legislative assemblies, in halls of justice, or in royal courts, as a witness for the King of kings.”

True education embraces physical, mental, and moral training in order that all the powers might be fitted for the best development, to do service for God, and to work for the uplifting of humanity. To seek for self-recognition, for self-glorification, will leave the human agent destitute of the Spirit of God, destitute of that grace which will make him a useful, efficient worker for Christ.²⁴⁰

Adventist education and family ministries should emphasize the formation of Christlike character in children and young adults so that they influence their world positively. White wrote that only “a Christlike character, . . . will open to us the gates of Paradise. It is not dignity, it is not intellectual attainments, . . . Only the meek and lowly ones, who have made God their efficiency, will receive this gift [immortality].”²⁴¹ She also wrote, “Knowledge harmoniously blended with a Christlike character will make a person truly a light to the world.”²⁴²

Volf highlights five basic virtues or qualities necessary for Christians to live out their public lives. These are courage, humility, justice, respect, and compassion. For him, “faithfulness to Christ is about more than having the right beliefs and doing the right things. It is about being formed into a certain pattern of character so that we become witnesses to Christ in the whole of our lives.”²⁴³ According to the field research findings, Adventist members, pastors, and administrators need education in biblical advocacy.

Public servanthood. A public servant is any officer or employee of a governmental body.²⁴⁴ Public servanthood is an effective way to influence politics

²⁴⁰ White, *A Call to Stand Apart*, 65.

²⁴¹ White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1925), 247.

²⁴² White, *Christian Education* (Battle Creek, MI: International Track Society, 1894), 51.

²⁴³ Volf, *Public Faith in Action*, xii.

²⁴⁴ Webster International Dictionary.

without being political. Public servanthood allows one to influence positively the political apparatus by acting honestly and impartially in the best interest of the people and by acting as social advocates without being involved in partisan politics. White condemned partisan politics, yet she praised Daniel, who was a high-ranking officer in the court of Babylon (as Joseph and Nehemiah were in the courts of Egypt and Assyria, respectively) and she encouraged young Adventists to follow in his footsteps. She wrote, “Many a lad of today, growing up as did Daniel in his Judean home, studying God’s word and His works, and learning the lessons of faithful service, will yet stand in legislative assemblies, in halls of justice, or in royal courts, as a witness for the King of kings.”²⁴⁵ In their capacity of public servants, youthful Daniel, Joseph, and Nehemiah advocated for God’s justice and righteousness. They did not run for any elective positions; they were not members of a political party, nor did they make partisan statements, but instead, were placed by God in positions of leadership in pagan governments to influence the course of history. Note that when governments changed, those faithful public servants often remained at their positions, especially in the case of Daniel (See Dan 1:21; 5; 6:1–5). A good contemporary example is Barry Black, a Seventh-day Adventist Chaplain for the United States Senate. He does not advocate for one political party or another, but when he goes to pray in the Senate and to preach, he lifts up God’s righteousness and justice.

Cordial relationships. This is another effective way to influence political decision-making without political entanglements. Joseph of Arimathea entertained a cordial relationship with Pilate, the governor. Scripture says he “went to Pilate and asked

²⁴⁵ White, *A Call to Stand Apart*, 64.

for the body of Jesus” (Matt 28:58) and his request was granted. The king of Israel restored to the Shunammite her land (she had to flee to the land of the Philistines to escape the famine) after Gehazi, the servant of prophet Elisha, who happened to have a friendly relationship with the king, spoke favorably to him on behalf of the widow (2 Kgs 8:1–6).

Both individual members and the administrators of the Church are called to influence their environment for Christ by building and maintaining cordial and respectful relationships with decision-makers at local, regional, and international levels. The administrative branch of the Church has access and opportunity to political systems, to entities, and to other administrative bodies. They can and should use their influence to effect positive change in favor of the most vulnerable in society. General Conference administrators should function on a global level. Those at the Divisions, Unions, Conferences, and local churches should focus on the governing bodies within their territory of influence. Again, the motive must be clear. We are not advocating for changing the political apparatus, but we are sharing with those in a position of power the good news about Jesus Christ and about His kingdom of justice, mercy, love, and compassion, expecting the Holy Spirit to work in them “to will and to act on behalf of His good purpose” (Phil 2:13, Berean Standard Bible).

Alternative Beloved Community. In their beginning, Adventists were an “alternative community,”²⁴⁶ a kind of “sectarian movement,” which the former General

²⁴⁶ Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Ministry*, 116, posited that “prophetic ministry does not consist of spectacular acts of social crusading or of abrasive measures of indignation. Rather, prophetic ministry consists of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God’s freedom and his will for justice.”

Conference President, Robert H. Pierson urged, in 1978, to retain its “distinctive profile and resist at all costs, taking the path of so many others and evolving. . . into a church.”²⁴⁷ By “church,” Pierson meant a group that “enjoys complete acceptance by the world.”²⁴⁸ However, while acknowledging the necessity for Adventists to retain their identity as a “prophetic remnant” that “proclaims the Word, the doctrine, and truth,” offering an “alternative belief system,” Rick Ferret argued that the remnant is more than that. “It is community, human interaction, a social integration of wholeness, structures and institutions.”²⁴⁹ He argued that “our structures and institutions are indicators of our corporate identity alongside and contributing to what we teach and preach.”²⁵⁰ Ferret warned against the danger of corporate Adventism becoming one of the modern Babylonian institutions. He stated,

Thus the historical beastly powers of Revelation are able to retain their original interpretation and validity, but not to the exclusion of other contemporary beasts in our midst which include oppression, injustice, non-reconciliation, persecution, child abuse, sexual and environmental abuse, and a host of modern Babylonian institutions which rail against humankind, and which the Adventist Church, including its structures and institutions, must strongly oppose.²⁵¹

The best way for Adventists to exercise a positive influence on this world is by becoming that alternative community whose values and practices stand in sharp contrast

²⁴⁷ Robert H. Pierson, “An Earnest Appeal from the Retiring President of the General Conference,” *Review and Herald*, 155 (October 26, 1978):10.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Rick Ferret, “Adventist Identity in a Changing World,” *Ministry Magazine*, October 2002. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2002/10/adventist-identity-in-a-changing-world.html> (accessed November 8, 2021).

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

to everything modern Babylon represents because they are called to live “out of Babylon.” For Paul Hiebert, human systems—social, personal, biological, and even physical systems—affect worldview transformation.²⁵² Accordingly, “conversion often involves a break with our old community and entry into a new covenant community.”²⁵³

Adventists will exercise a transforming influence in the world when they become that alternative, covenant-beloved community. “Beloved community” refers to Martin Luther King’s vision of a community realizing “divine love in lived social relation.”²⁵⁴ According to Charles Marsh, “King’s concept of love was surely not the platitudinous ‘all you need is love’; it was rather the passion to make life and social existence a parable of God’s love for the world. It was *agape*: the outrageous venture of loving the other without conditions—a risk and a costly sacrifice.”²⁵⁵ During the field research, one high-ranking administrator in the Seventh-day Adventist Church said that “the Church should show in its own methods and ways of acting and doing and making things happen the

²⁵² Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 324.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 325. Hiebert remarked on the emphasis modern societies put on individualism and personal choice. He said that “we stress individual conversions, inviting people to make Jesus their personal Lord and Savior, without considering the consequences their decision has for their families and communities.”

²⁵⁴ Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movements to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 2. Marsh wrote about the 1954–1968 civil rights movement in the United States and discussed how the Christian faith motivated and sustained the movement. The movement emerged as local groups were struggling for the creation of a beloved community. Marsh argued that the failure of the vision of the beloved community by the 60s came as a result of the movement’s incapacity to develop a clear vision of what racial reconciliation would entail after integration and legal equality, and as elements of the movement turned from a religiously inspired focus on helping local people toward a universal condemnation of whites, and “globalist” fantasies that rejected the need for local organizing. The movement became “abstracted from the lives and struggles of real people in real communities” (130).

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 2. Marsh wrote, “The beloved community remains broken and scattered, an eschatological hope, yet precisely a hope that intensifies rather than absolves us from responsibilities in the here and now” (50).

principles of the gospel.”²⁵⁶ Richard Rice said that Christians “implicitly criticize society when they follow standards of behavior that are higher than what society expects.”²⁵⁷ He added that “they also bear a critical witness when they refuse to allow prevalent social structures to interfere with their fellowship within the church.”²⁵⁸

The Bible reminds Christians that they live in the world but they are not of the world. Paul Hiebert stated that “we are those transformed by the power of the gospel to show to the world a new worldview, one that brings about eternal salvation and manifests itself in love, joy, peace, gentleness, and witness.”²⁵⁹ He added that “we are to live as a countercultural community and as individuals in the world, exemplifying Christlikeness in our lives as individuals and as communities of Christ’s disciples.”²⁶⁰

During the field research, an Adventist scholar stated the following:

I actually do not think that the Church has an advocacy role. I think that is the task of agents and political parties, et cetera. I would not think that the Church should become a political party. The Church is not in the world for advocating anything. However, I believe *the Church should be the Church. And I do not think that we can be the church, the body of Christ, without taking radical action, not just advocacy, but action, which will look from outside like engagement with social justice issues* [emphasis supplied].²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ Interview with a church administrator from the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists on November 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 6.

²⁵⁷ Rice, *Reign of God*, 306.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 333.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Interview with a Adventist university professor on November 26, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 7.

Although apparently equivocal and self-contradictory, the statement makes a powerful point. By its nature, consciously or not, everything the church does is a kind of advocacy because the church lives to care for the holistic well-being of the city or it is not a church at all.

Guiding Principles for Adventist Transformational Advocacy

I recommend the following three basic, yet non-exhaustive, commitments as guiding principles for Adventist transformational advocacy.

Commitment to Scripture

Seventh-day Adventists hold a high view of Scripture, affirming the “Radical Reformation *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle.”²⁶² We should avoid advocating and supporting policies and government actions that have no biblical grounding. “I think what makes advocacy Adventist is when it’s biblical or based on the Spirit of Prophecy,”²⁶³ said one respondent. Another respondent said, “The big umbrella for us would be the biblical principles, the biblical story, how God has been guiding His people, what He expects for this world. So, whatever would be in harmony with that trajectory, I think would be an Adventist thing.”²⁶⁴ Then he added, “We [Adventists] have a very high view of Scripture and we try to read reality through the lens of Scripture. And, I think that’s

²⁶² Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology*, 5.

²⁶³ Interview with a PhD Student from Andrews University on April 19, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 1.

²⁶⁴ Interview with a PhD Student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

deeper than what other Christian groups would usually do.”²⁶⁵

Ellen White always upheld the Scriptures in her writings. She wrote about the gospel worker and stated that “the mind must be restrained, and not allowed to wander. It should be trained to dwell upon the Scriptures.”²⁶⁶ She was eighty-one years old and was attending what she felt would be her last General Conference session. Ruth Wheeler reported that in her parting message to the delegates, White, in a clear, strong voice that could be heard all over the great congregation, concluded by saying, “Brethren and sisters, I commend unto you this Book.”²⁶⁷ Then, Wheeler added that White “gently closed the Bible and laid it back on the pulpit. Slowly she walked from the platform—she had spoken her last words before this great assembly of Seventh-day Adventists.”²⁶⁸

Our commitment to Scripture includes a defense of biblical teachings on sexuality and gender. Accordingly, the proposed transformational advocacy framework will not lead to a support of secular social justice movements or ideologies that seek to overturn these teachings.

Commitment to Peacemaking

Douglas emphasized Adventists’ peacemaking heritage and highlighted the corporate stand for nonviolence the fledging movement took in the midst of the national crisis of the Civil War (1861–1865) in the United States. According to Douglas, the

²⁶⁵ Interview with a PhD Student from Andrews University on April 25, 2019. See Appendix A, Oral Records 2.

²⁶⁶ Ellen White, *Gospel Workers* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1892), 418.

²⁶⁷ Ruth Wheeler, *His Messenger* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1939), 180.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

position of the pioneers was based on three sometimes-conflicting rationales: (1) convictions about scriptural imperatives, amplified by their identity as a prophetic minority with the mandate to uphold “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus”; (Rev 14:12); (2) their stern opposition to slavery; and (3) their pragmatic concerns for the survival of the embryonic movement.²⁶⁹ Nonviolence is an ideal that we should strive for. However, Adventists are, at best, supporters of pragmatic nonviolence, rather than absolute nonviolence. Adventists have historically been peacemakers, seeking non-violent solutions in most circumstances, but not denying the possibility of needing to use force to restrain evil violence.²⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Adventists would do well to listen to Volf’s advice: “We should seek peace both within and between nations. War is never—or almost—justifiable, and every successful justification has the heavy burden of showing how a particular war is an instance of loving one’s neighbors and loving one’s enemies.”²⁷¹

Ellen White was upset by the display of corruption and violence in society, which she believed were a consequence of men’s rejecting the law of God. She reported that “men in their blindness boast of wonderful progress and enlightenment; but the heavenly watchers see the earth filled with corruption and violence.”²⁷² She urged the Church to

²⁶⁹ Douglas, *Peacemaking Remnant*, 80-81.

²⁷⁰ See Ellen White’s comments about the Bohemian leader Ziska, which she qualified as “one of the ablest generals of his age,” being “raised up” to oppose the papal crusade against the Hussites (*The Great Controversy*, 116). She also spoke positively of the prowess of Gustavus II, king of Sweden, who came to the aid of the Protestant German states during the Thirty Years War (*Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 191-192). See Nicholas Miller, “Just War Theory and the Christian” (unpublished paper), 14-15.

²⁷¹ Volf, *Public Faith in Action*, 150.

²⁷² White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. VI, 10.

uphold the “truths of the Gospel” as God’s ordained means to “stem the tide of moral corruption. . . . It is His remedy for universal disorganization. It is the power that draws men together.”²⁷³

White also condemned violence in the context of the education of children by parents. She said, “Violence or harshness is not required in this work. Self-control must be cultivated and leave its impression on the mind and heart of the child.”²⁷⁴

Commitment to Human Flourishing

God is the source of life according to Scripture. He has adapted all “wonderful and beautiful things of nature” marvelously to the “needs and happiness, not only of man, but of all living creatures.”²⁷⁵

Smith defined “flourishing” as “a good life well lived.”²⁷⁶ He drew his definition from the Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia*, which means “happiness and flourishing,” and which “involves not only living well but to some extent having life *go well*, expressing right conduct and prosperity.”²⁷⁷ Smith noted that human motivations tend toward flourishing, toward the realization of six distinct, basic, and natural human goods, which are (1) bodily survival, security, and pleasure; (2) knowledge of reality; (3)

²⁷³ White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. VI, 11.

²⁷⁴ Ellen White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1954), 205.

²⁷⁵ White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1802), 9.

²⁷⁶ Smith, *To Flourish or To Destruct*, 202.

²⁷⁷ Smith, *To Flourish or To Destruct*, 203. The biblical equivalent of *eudaimonia* is the Hebrew word *shalom*, translated as “peace” in English versions. For Douglas, *The Peacemaking Remnant*, 88, “peace in the biblical sense of *shalom* also encompasses the full range of human well-being. Peacemaking thus means *nurturing shalom*—restoring health and wholeness in human communities at every level. The major Adventist category here would be health reform, which connects embodied life in all its aspects with the plan of redemption.”

identity coherence and affirmation; (4) exercising purposive agency; (5) moral affirmation; and (6) social belonging and love.²⁷⁸ The pursuit of these goods and interests are universal from a personalist perspective. Adventists should act responsibly to promote and defend access to these goods for all human beings. Schweiker argued that “to act responsibly, . . . is not simply to respond rightly to ‘the other.’ It is to put power in the service of meaningful life rather than to have the meaning of personal and social existence defined by the exercise of power.”²⁷⁹ According to Schweiker, here is the imperative of responsibility: “*In all actions and relations we are to respect and enhance the integrity of life before God.*”²⁸⁰ Applying this principle while committing to human flourishing will prompt Adventists to take the proper stand vis-a-vis issues such as global warming, abortion, human trafficking, economic malfeasance, corporate greed, migration crisis caused by warfare, treatment of animals, and so on.

²⁷⁸ Smith, *To Flourish or To Destruct*, 181. Smith sifted through the various existing theoretical accounts of human flourishing and considered them through retroductive reasoning in light of a personalist view of persons and propose the following six, distinct, basic, natural human goods and interests: (1) *Bodily Survival, Security, and Pleasure*: avoiding bodily death, injury, sickness, disease, and sustained vulnerability to harm; maintaining physical and bodily health and safety; sensual enjoyment, satisfaction, delight, or gratification of appetitive and perceptual desires of the body; and the absence of physical pain and suffering. (2) *Knowledge of Reality*: learning about the world and one’s place and potential in it; increasing awareness and understanding of material and social realities; developing or embracing believed-in truths about what exists and how it works that provide order, continuity, and practical know-how to life experience. (3) *Identity Coherence and Affirmation*: developing and maintaining continuity and positive self-regard in one’s sense of personal selfhood over time and in different contexts and situations. (4) *Exercising Purposive Agency*: exerting influence or power (broadly understood as transformative capacity) in the social and material worlds, through the application of personal capabilities for perception, reflection, care, evaluation, self-direction, decision, and action, which causes desired (and unanticipated) effects in one’s environment. (5) *Moral Affirmation*: believing that one is in the right or is living a morally commendable life, by being, doing, serving, thinking, and feeling what is good, correct, just, and admirable; avoiding moral fault, blame, guilt, or culpability. (6) *Social Belonging and Love*: enjoying recognition by, inclusion and membership in, and identification with significant social groups; loving and being loved by others in significant relationships.

²⁷⁹ Schweiker, *Responsibility & Christian Ethics*, 45.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

Adventists advocate obedience to both the moral law of God (as expressed in the Ten Commandments) and the natural law, because they are inseparable and together constitute the source of health and human flourishing. White said, “Men and women cannot violate natural law by indulging depraved appetite and lustful passions, without violating the law of God.”²⁸¹ Then she added, “And it is in love and pity to the race that he causes the light to shine upon health reform. He publishes his law and its penalties, in order that all may learn what is for their highest good.”²⁸² On the Ten Commandments she commented, “Two mighty principles are declared in those ten precepts. On the first table of stone were inscribed the four precepts showing the duty of man to God; and on the second table were the six showing the duty of man to his fellow man.”²⁸³ In order to demonstrate how the natural is connected to the spiritual she wrote, “But if he disregards [the health reform] light and lives in violation of natural law, he must pay the penalty; his spiritual powers are benumbed, and how can he perfect holiness in the fear of God.”²⁸⁴

Adventists’ transformational advocacy does not focus on changing the political apparatus, but rather, on bringing real transformation in the lives of real people, yet change in political systems is sometimes a prerequisite to effect positive impact on the lives of persons. Smith noted that “motivated human actions are always facilitated, governed, and constrained by the ordering causal powers of social institutions and

²⁸¹ Ellen White, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health Publishing Co., 1890), 9.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ White, “The Law from Sinai,” *Signs of the Time*, March 1878, 73.

²⁸⁴ White, *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene* (Battle Creek, MI: Good Health Publishing Co., 1890), 10.

structures.”²⁸⁵ However, as seen earlier, in acknowledging that all political systems have flaws, Adventists should avoid promoting one system over others, but instead, work with actors within existing systems to improve the living conditions of persons and help them realize their inherent rights as beings created in the image of God.

This will also require a focus on interventions that empower people to become autonomous beings, rather than placing them in conditions of dependency. Rudi Maier compiled selected passages from Ellen White on social responsibility. He grouped her recommendations under six broad strategies that she proposed for fighting poverty: (1) teaching self-reliance, (2) industrial training, (3) training to serve, (4) relieving necessities, (5) teaching discipline, and (6) practical training.²⁸⁶ White’s concern was the personal development and self-reliance of individuals, instead of giving them free materials. “Let the members of the poor households be taught how to cook, how to make and mend their own clothing, . . . how to care properly for their home. . . . By instruction in practical lines we can often help the poor most effectively.”²⁸⁷

Conclusion

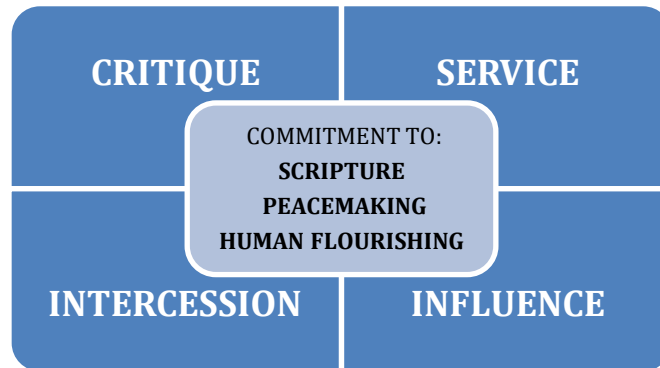
Chapter 5 sketches a framework for transformational advocacy that includes three main parts: (1) a biblical study of advocacy in relation to Adventist theology; (2) a methodological approach proposing four critical integrated ways Seventh-day Adventists should implement transformational advocacy: critique, service, intercession, and

²⁸⁵ Smith, *To Flourish or To Destruct*, 188.

²⁸⁶ Rudi Maier, *Working with the Poor* (Berrien Springs, MI: Lithotec Andrews University), 323-361.

²⁸⁷ White, *Ministry of Healing*, 194-195.

influence; and (3) guiding principles in the form of three basic commitments—
commitment to Scripture, commitment to peacemaking, and commitment to human
flourishing. Our proposed transformational advocacy framework is summarized in the
schema below:



Adventist Transformational Advocacy Framework

This framework is not a formula but a guide that can be applied everywhere with some adaptation according to the cultural context, the political environment, the level of socio-economic development, and the resources available to the church (human, material and financial) among other factors. The implementation of the four strategies (critique, service, intercession, and influence) is expected to bring better results if done in an integrated manner. They, alongside the three commitments, represent a way to *be* the Church. As Scripture compares the Church with the human body (Rom 12:4–51; 1 Cor 12:12–27), the four strategies could be illustrated as the four members (two legs and two arms, which represent action), whereas the three commitments (to Scripture, peacemaking, and human flourishing) are the heart, where lies our motivation for action.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter 6 is the closing chapter of the dissertation, including a conclusion and recommendations. The conclusion section summarizes the previous chapters (1, 2, 4, and 5) and recalls and answers the research questions. The recommendations section proposes areas where further research is needed in Adventism on the topic of social justice advocacy.

Summary of the Dissertation

In chap. 1, the introduction of the dissertation, I highlighted the concerns raised by some Adventist scholars (Zdravko Plantak, Lenart Falk, Russel Seay Jr.) about the inconsistency in the way the Adventist Church has dealt with issues of injustice and human rights violation in the world and the implications of such inconsistency for Adventist mission. I then set the research questions: (1) What part, if any, has biblically-based social advocacy played in Adventist mission history? and (2) What do contemporary Adventists believe and practice about social justice advocacy? I have explored these two questions with the purpose of revealing how biblically-guided social advocacy can be a more deliberate and integral part of Adventist mission.

In chap. 2, I highlighted various views among evangelicals about the relationship between evangelization and social justice advocacy in their outreach to the world. I summarized four confessional influences on Evangelicals' public engagement. Then I presented Unruh and Sider's classification of evangelical churches in America: dominant social action, dual focus, holistic, dominant evangelism, and inward-focused. The chapter ends with comparing and contrasting two major schools of thoughts, one represented by David Bosch and the other represented by John Stott. In the former school, social justice advocacy is an inseparable part of evangelization, whereas in the latter, evangelization and social justice advocacy are not inseparable but should work as partners with evangelization having the upper hand. The discussion of Bosch and Stott's theology of mission led to the conclusion that a church or denomination's approach to evangelism and social ministry is determined by its ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology.

In chap. 3, I studied social justice advocacy in the context of Adventism. I showed that the Adventist Church has generally prioritized evangelism—preaching of the Three Angels' messages of Rev 14:6–12 and implementing social ministries, mainly education and health ministries as a support (“right hand”) to the gospel. Adventists reject the Social Gospel movement and the Theology of Liberation, not on the basis of their concern for the poor, the oppressed, the neglected and the vulnerable of society, but rather, on the basis of their ecclesiology, soteriology, and particularly, their eschatology. I introduced the story of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl as an example of Adventist holistic mission and transformational advocacy.

In chap. 4, I presented the findings of the field research, both quantitative and qualitative. The study shows that Adventists generally believe that (1) evangelism should

hold priority over social ministry; (2) evangelism and social ministry should work as partners; (3) the Church should focus more on compassion ministries rather than on advocacy for structural changes; (4) the political character of advocacy, lack of training of our leaders, pastors, and church members on this topic and safety concerns should make Adventists think twice before involving themselves too quickly in social justice advocacy, and (5) religious intolerance, domestic violence, and human trafficking are close to core Adventist gospel concerns and could play a priority role in the Adventist Church's advocacy effort. The interviews reveal that the scholars/leaders were favorable towards having social justice advocacy play a greater part in Adventist missions, but they want the Church to remain apolitical in a partisan sense, act in areas where it has expertise, stay balanced in its approach, emphasize the transformation of individuals and communities rather than prioritizing systemic change, and set a framework for action grounded on Scripture and informed by Adventist theology.

In chap. 5, I proposed a framework for Adventists to implement transformational advocacy in a complex and pluralistic world. In the development of this framework, I drew a hexagonal frame formed of Scripture, Seventh-day Adventist theology, best practices in the history of mission, theories in Christian social ethics, and the research interviews. The framework contains (1) a biblical study, (2) a methodology, and (3) guiding principles.

The biblical/theological study focused on Isa 58, which addresses issues pertaining to social justice and the Sabbath. I argued that Adventists have been called not only to restore the careful observance of the seventh day as a day of rest, but also to restore the deep meaning of Sabbath by breaking up egotism and all forms of oppression

and injustice within God's family, which deprive outsiders, the marginalized, and the poor of rest. The Sabbath reminds humanity of creation and the Creator and of the dignity of man created in the image of God. It is also a memorial of Israel's liberation from Egypt and the liberation of every Christian from the bondage of sin understood as selfishness. On that day, God expects His people to empty themselves, to fast from their own desires, and to focus on God and the needs of others. The Sabbath reminds us that we are all equal in the eyes of God so that no one should treat his or her neighbor as inferior or second-class citizen.

I also succinctly studied the Three Angels' messages in Revelation 14:6–12 and Jesus' eschatological discourse in Matt 24–26. The purpose was to show and argue that a proper understanding of eschatology and of the "everlasting gospel" to be proclaimed in our time should lead the Adventist Church to be more concerned about social evils in society and make transformational advocacy a greater part of its mission effort, which is to be on behalf of all "nations, tribes, tongues and peoples."

The methodology I proposed to implement transformational advocacy includes four integrated components: critical analysis, service, intercession, and influence. As the Adventist Church is called to be "repairer of breaches," critical analysis is important to find out the social breaches that need repairing. Service represents concrete action the Church can take to repair a breach or to palliate or alleviate or mitigate its symptoms when repairing it is beyond our capacity. Intercession is calling on divine power and/or human competent authority for intervention. Influence is the inevitable transformation resulting from a life lived in love, righteousness, and justice.

As guiding principles, I propose a three-fold commitment: commitment to Scripture, commitment to peacemaking, and commitment to human flourishing. Committing to Scripture implies avoiding advocating and supporting policies and government actions that have no biblical grounding. Committing to peacemaking implies emphasizing Adventists' peacemaking heritage while rejecting Liberation Theology's idea of just violence of the oppressed. Committing to human flourishing implies working with actors within existing systems to improve the living conditions of persons and helping them realize their inherent rights as beings created in the image of God.

Conclusion

There exist divergent views and theological arguments among Adventist thinkers on whether the Church should maintain an essentially evangelistic approach to mission or become more engaged in social justice advocacy as a significant element in its outreach to the world. There is no easy answer to this challenge because of the ambiguity around the concept of "social justice" and the complexity of doing justice to all in a fragmented world.

I have indeed learned through the literature review that social justice advocacy remains a debated topic among Evangelicals as each denomination approaches poverty and issues pertaining to human rights based on its theological roots and on how its leaders think of the relationship between evangelism and social action (see discussion on John Stott and David Bosch and Adventist theology regarding soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology in relation to social justice advocacy).

In addition, I have learned that no consensus yet exists among Seventh-day Adventists concerning the role social justice advocacy should play in Adventist mission. I

have probed the following questions: “What do Seventh-day Adventists believe and practice regarding the relationship between evangelism and social justice advocacy? What is biblical social justice advocacy? Is social justice advocacy included in preaching the gospel of the kingdom in all the world (Matt 24:14), in the Great Commission calling the Church to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19), and also in the Three Angels messages (Rev 12:6–14)? In other words, is social justice advocacy blended with evangelism as one, or are they two separate components of the mission of the Church? Should the Church prioritize one to the expense of the other?”

The study unveils two main findings: first, Seventh-day Adventists have traditionally viewed evangelism and social ministry as two separate components of the Church’s mission, with evangelism—proclaiming (*kerygma*) the “everlasting gospel”—having the upper hand. The field survey shows that most participants believe that evangelism and social ministry should operate as partners, followed by another group that believes that social ministry should serve as a bridge (entry point) to evangelism, while a few others believe social ministry should be a consequence of evangelism or that the two should be kept separate from each other. Second, most Adventists believe that social ministry should be limited to compassion ministries understood as caring for the victims of social inequality, rather than involving in advocacy for policy/structural change. In other words, for a significant number of Adventists, the Church should refrain from engaging with the political system which often perpetuates social inequality, arguing that such an effort is in vain because men are incapable of realizing justice or ushering the kingdom of God on earth, and that a just order can and will be established by God Himself after the Second Coming. This explains why Adventists are traditionally critical vis-a-vis the theology of the Social Gospel (Walter Rauschenbusch) and the Theology of Liberation (Gustavo Gutierrez).

However, a closer look at three foundational theological tenets of Adventism and Adventist message—the Sabbath in the context of Isa 58, the Three Angels’ messages in the context of Rev 14, and the Second Coming as expounded in Matt 24–26—and the example and writings of Adventist pioneers, including Ellen G. White, reveals that Adventists have been called to be a prophetic movement and “repairers of breaches.” As such, Adventists are, by nature, “prophetic evangelists,” as exemplified by the life and ministry of Ana and Ferdinand Stahl. The Stahls went to Peru at the beginning of the twentieth century to bring people to Jesus Christ for the redemption of their souls, but they could not keep from exercising hospitality to the Indians, healing their sick, defending them against their oppressors, and advocating for systemic change. In so doing, they set an example for Adventist missionaries to remember that evangelization is complete and effective when accompanied with social action, especially in places where social needs are so overwhelming. They also demonstrated that the gospel leaves no room for tension between *believing* and *doing* and between *theology* and *praxis*.

This dissertation argues that Adventists do not have to choose between evangelism and social ministry. By virtue of being Adventists, that is, by living the Adventist core message of the Sabbath, by proclaiming the Three Angels’ messages, and by heralding the message of Jesus’ Second Coming, Seventh-day Adventists are “prophetic evangelists.” As such, they are doing *prophetic evangelism*, which includes (or should include) getting to know the context, announcing the good news, denouncing the bad news, calling to conversion, and enacting the good news.¹ A *critical analysis* of context under the guidance of the Holy Spirit will help prophetic evangelists decide on when to be more “implicit” and

¹ Pope-Levison, *Models of Evangelism*, 124-129.

when to be more “explicit” in their approach, particularly when it comes to denouncing the bad news or doing social criticism.

This dissertation recommends that Adventists be servants of humanity, not of themselves, following in the steps of Jesus Christ who came to earth, not “to be served, but to serve” (Matt 20:28). In a spirit of *service*, we actively share the truth and good news of the gospel to free people from the yoke of deception and sin, we minister to their needs, we *intercede* with God and men on their behalf when their divine inherent rights and dignity are being ignored, and we seek to exercise upon them a positive and transformative *influence* by *being* loving and lovable Christians.

This dissertation also pleads for educating Adventist members and leaders on social justice advocacy. The theme of social justice is so prominent in the Scriptures that it seems almost an aberration that the expression “social justice advocacy” still evokes such strong reactions from many Adventist members, scholars, and administrators whom I interviewed during the field research. Their arguments were often based on the idea that the concept of social justice has been hijacked by modern politics and applied to pursue agendas that have no biblical grounds. However, have we stopped valuing and defending the truths of the Bible because the sacred Book has often been and still is being used by occultists in perpetrating black magic? Have we stopped promoting and defending marriage because it has been corrupted by the devil and redefined to allow same-sex people to live together legally?

This dissertation studies three biblical themes—the Sabbath, the Three Angels’ messages, and Jesus’ eschatological discourse in relation to social justice advocacy. The study shows that the concept of social justice advocacy is embedded in these three themes,

which constitute core Adventist theology and identity and which thus offer a biblical grounding for integrating advocacy in Adventist mission. This dissertation accordingly recommends not throwing the baby out with the bath water. Adventists rightfully reject the theology of the Social Gospel (of Rauschenbush) and the Theology of Liberation (of Gutierrez), mainly on account of their premillennialist eschatology, attempting to usher in a new world order through human efforts while minimizing the importance of personal sin. Nevertheless, Adventists can learn from both movements, particularly regarding their concern about “corporate sins” and their emphasis on “social salvation.” These movements can also teach Adventists about the need, how to close the gap between theology and praxis, and to blend righteousness and justice together.

The dissertation has highlighted another area of concern that needs to be addressed. There is an ambiguity regarding the definition of the “gospel,” the Three Angels’ messages, and holistic mission. I have noted that preaching the gospel has come out as a top priority for respondents in both survey and interview research. However, I have also noted that some respondents mentioned “preaching the gospel” or “preaching the Three Angels’ messages” interchangeably. In such cases, the work of social advocacy is assumed to be included in preaching the gospel. However, other respondents have a more-narrowed view on what it means to “preach the gospel.” They would insist that, unlike other Christians who preach the gospel at large, the Advent movement was called to “preach the Three Angels’ messages” exclusively. In such cases, the work of advocacy should be dealt with separately or even dropped. I disagree with this view.

This dissertation argues for preaching the Three Angels’ messages as the “everlasting gospel” in which social justice advocacy is included. Evangelism should

never consist uniquely in making new converts to the Adventist faith and exclude social ministry that meets the needs of people. It is of utmost importance to reinforce the biblical truth that the Three Angels' messages are "the everlasting gospel" and that their everlasting nature urges the Church at all times and everywhere to uphold God's law of love, justice and liberty and holds the "Remnant Church," in particular, accountable for how it addresses injustices within its membership and beyond—the wider society.

This dissertation calls for wisdom, prudence, and balance in the way the Church approaches social justice advocacy, acknowledging it as a challenging and complex endeavor in this pluralistic age. Jesus recommended being "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matt 10:16).

I have garnered incredible wisdom from the Adventist administrators and scholars I interviewed on how the Church can mitigate the risks associated with the work of social advocacy. They recommended seeking wisdom in deciding when to be patient and when to be impatient and to say enough is enough. We need wisdom to decide on the most appropriate combination of evangelism, advocacy, and compassion ministries. We need wisdom to assess objectively our competence, expertise, and available resources in a given situation. In order to be credible advocates, we need to develop expertise on the issues we choose to tackle. The administrators and scholars also insisted on the need to be prudent and remain apolitical even when we engage with politics and to avoid doing politics for personal gain and aligning the Church with a political party.

Being advocates for justice requires that Adventists be brave. However, in all circumstances, we should check our motives against God's will. The motive of Adventist advocacy should always be the transformation of people's lives, never to promote a

political ideology or to overthrow a government. Therefore, Adventists will seek to “bring change that is positive for individuals, for community, church, and help create an environment where the gospel and the future kingdom will have a greater chance of thriving.”² This quotation epitomizes what an Adventist transformational advocacy should look like.

Ultimately, this dissertation calls for a three-fold commitment for Adventists who are involved in the task of transformational advocacy: commitment to Scripture, commitment to peacemaking, and commitment to human flourishing. By committing to Scripture, we affirm the Radical Reformation *sola-tota-prima scriptura* principle and avoid advocating and supporting policies and government actions that have no biblical grounding. By committing to peacemaking, we promote pragmatic nonviolence, we reject the idea of “unjust violence of the oppressor” versus “just violence of the oppressed” that is present in some versions of Liberation theologies (like in Gutierrez’). Instead we uphold our peacemaking heritage and promote peace and reconciliation among and between nations. By committing to human flourishing, we respect and enhance the integrity of life before God in all actions and relations and we act responsibly to promote and defend access to life’s goods for all human beings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Scale up the study. I recommend repeating the field research worldwide to get a more accurate picture of Seventh-day Adventist knowledge, attitude, and practices

² Interview with an Adventist university administrator from Andrews University on July 29, 2020. See Appendix A, Oral Records 8.

regarding social justice advocacy. A study at the World Church level would allow better testing of the influence of demographic and socioeconomic factors on church members' perspectives on this subject matter.

Investigate business-as-mission models for advocacy. Businesses have traditionally impacted a community's social life. Businesses have recently been used as a tool for mission. The concept is not really new because historian Kenneth Scott Latourette observed that during the first few centuries, as a result of the *Pax Romana*, travel and commerce spread throughout the Empire, "facilitating not only political unity but cultural and religious exchange."³ However, as the term "business as mission" (BAM) is about to become a new mission buzzword, C. Neal Johnson noted that it has not garnered a great deal of action for three reasons: (1) it is difficult to define exactly what BAM means; (2) many people love the concept of BAM, but few really understand how to do it; and (3) those who do understand and undertake a BAM initiative seldom stop to count the true cost of undertaking it.⁴

Although Johnson attempted to clarify all three difficulties in his book *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, I would like to recommend that Adventist mission scholars investigate the potential of BAM to advocate biblical justice in the workplace, especially in countries where there is suspicion or even hostility regarding the presence of the Church.

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, vol. 1 (*Beginnings to 1500*) (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1975), 21.

⁴ C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 27.

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APPENDIX A

ORAL RECORDS

These documents are the result of in-person interview conversations or interview conversations conducted via Zoom. These interviews were audio recorded on an iPhone or video-recorded on my laptop, and then transcribed verbatim. Next, these transcriptions were edited by both the interviewer and the interviewees, resulting in, not a transcript, but an oral record. Each oral record has been approved by the interviewees, and will be released to the Center for Adventist Research following the completion of this study. Most of the interviewees requested anonymity, i.e to not make public any personal identifiers collected during the conversations. Thus, I have translated the names of all interviewees into codes. Oral records are listed in chronological order:

CODE	Place of Interview	Date
T01G041019	Berrien Springs, Michigan	April 10, 2019
T02P042519	Berrien Springs, Michigan	April 25, 2019
T03L112319	San Diego, California	November 23, 2019
T04H112419	San Diego, California	November 24, 2019
T05P112519	San Diego, California	November 25, 2019
T06B112519	San Diego, California	November 25, 2019
T07W112619	San Diego, California	November 26, 2019
T08L072920	Zoom	July 29, 2020
T09S081020	Zoom	August 10, 2020
T10J031421	Zoom	March 14, 2021
T11M050421	Zoom	May 4, 2021
T12C052821	Zoom	May 28, 2021

Oral Record 1

T01G041019 – PhD Student from Andrews University

Berrien Springs, Michigan

April 19, 2019

Can you share with me your own definition of advocacy from an Adventist perspective?

To me, when you would do Adventist advocacy, it would be like the church, -- and not just the North American division advocacy, even though that might be -- it would be the church as a whole taking a stance to promote a cause. For example, Ellen White and the early church leading the cause against prohibition. That might have been a United States issue. But I think it kind of carries that they see that alcoholism and alcohol as a social ill, and that's why we have a stance of prohibition. We don't have moderation in our statements, even though maybe biblically, you could argue for it. But, because of society and what it has done, I think the church as a whole took that stance. Now, there might be pockets that like, 'we're not sure if we do that,' but by and large, the church voted to say, 'hey, we're going to advocate against the use of alcohol.'

Not just necessarily because it's bad for health. A lot of it was social. A lot of it was like husbands going out spending their whole paycheck, that kind of thing. So, to me, Adventist advocacy is something the whole church can rally around.

Now there could be local manifestations of that. And that's where it gets difficulty. To me, it's a social issue or an injustice or something that the church says we want to use our ability and power to make change. Not necessarily politically. It could end up having a political arm, obviously. The most success I think Adventism has had on these things is just trying to promote helping people change and not the legislation ended up backfiring. Sometimes people mix the two, and they could go together. But I think you can be an advocate without necessarily voting or changing laws. You can change people and still be an advocate.

You could be political, but I don't think you have to be. And I think some of the tension comes in when people make it like you have to do this, or you can't do that. I think advocacy should just be plainly that you see a social ill, which the Bible condemns, or the spirit of prophecy condemns, and you want to do something about it. And it should be collective. I should say you, you like in plural. Or we, as the church, see this going against the Bible, and we as a church put power and pressure on society, or try to change it, whether that's one on one, or programming or voting or that kind of thing. That would be the way I see it.

So, you think that not involving into the political sphere will make advocacy more Adventist, is that correct?

It could be political. I don't think it has to be political. What I mean is. . . Ellen White did say to vote against prohibition. But when it backfired, it's not like the church gave up. They just changed how they attack the problem. And then, later on, because she also spoke against the ills of smoking, we came up with stop-smoking programs. There's alcohol programs in the secular society, but other than maybe some mesmerism, hypnosis stuff, there's nobody trying to help people stop smoking like the Adventist church. We didn't try making it illegal, but you know

what is funny? You can't smoke anywhere anymore. I think part of that, at least in a small sliver, is us taking a stance way before it was bad, saying it was bad and spreading that message. People didn't become Adventist, but they might've gone to an evangelistic series and we presented, 'Hey, this is really bad.' We've been presenting that way before it got popular and now in popular opinion smoking is not cool anymore.

Okay. I'm trying to find out what would make advocacy more Adventist? Is it when we try to change a policy at government level, or when we try to address it with the victims themselves, trying to change them, trying to advocate the cause to the victims and not to the authorities?

I think what makes advocacy Adventist is when it's biblical or based on the spirit prophecy. How it functions is something else. To make it universal, it might be law, it might be one-on-one. I don't think you can make it one or the other. I think what makes it Adventist is we're basing it on the Bible. The Bible says this or spirit of prophecy says this. It's not just a philosophy. It's not because I'm of a political party. This is my problem. And we'll get to this later. The problem with advocacy is that if it becomes too political you won't take the right stance. Because my political party says this, I don't care. Then, the political party is above the Bible. Adventist advocacy says, I'm going to take the stance even if it goes against any other affiliation; it's putting the Bible as the source. How it manifests itself? I think we just have to be adaptable with our context, contextualizing the advocacy in the locale. Because there could be advocacy in other parts of the world that North America doesn't have that problem with. But as a church, we see it's a problem. For example, I think there's advocacy against polygamy. Well, that's not a problem in North America. And I think there's ways to handle it. Obviously, the Bible had polygamy. But I think pushing against polygamy is appropriate advocate action, not changing where it's legal, if it is legal in someplace. Maybe it's changing laws, but maybe it's also just education.

All right. Now let's move to our next question. What are in your view major social injustices in the world today that you think the church should be concerned about?

My pet one is environment. And I don't care if there's global warming or not. I see the Bible saying that God created the world beautiful. He made us stewards and caretakers of it. Revelation says, God will destroy those who destroy the earth. So, biblically, biblical ethics, we should care about God's masterpiece of creation. It's kind of like my brother and my wife and my sister-in-law who are all artists. And if they paint a painting or do a sculpture, and then I go and graffiti or go do some vandalism to it. Am I respecting their art? No. So we go destroy the environment. We can keep all the Sabbaths we want, but in a sense, we we're not worshiping the creator. Politics aside, that's one I really care about, because I think as Adventists who keep the Sabbath, we should love creation more than the atheists. And it's sad that atheists love the creation more than Christians. So that's a big one for me.

Second to that -- I'm in a biracial relationship -- racism is huge to me. But, I don't think that's black and white. I think it's not even just race, it's nationalism. I mean, . . . in one of my first jobs in the church, two youth got in a fight, one's Jamaican, one's Haitian. In my ignorance, they looked the same, but they hated each other because of the country they were born in. So, when I say racism, I mean, it's bigger than that. And it's not just ethnocentrism, we all have. But, when

it manifests itself it's hate, hate towards something different than you, and this could be because you think you're superior.

This could be because you're at the bottom. When hate is involved against people who are differently than you and the injustice that comes from that. And I think it can go both ways. Hate based on difference, . . . it's right up there. So those are my two.

So, I have issues with the separate conferences, both in South Africa and in United States, because to me, it's allowing hatred to continue. And I don't think it's an easy fix, but I think we should be not sticking our heads in the sand just saying, 'Oh, we'll wait until Jesus comes.' That's like saying the same thing with the environment. 'Oh, we'll just wait for Jesus to burn it all and restart it.' I'm like, why would he trust us in the next world, if we're trashing his environment and we're building walls of hatred towards another person who's different than you?

You think you are going to heaven and all the Jamaicans and all the Haitians you are going to hang out with are white? Heaven is not going to be like that. Heaven's going to be everyone. People aren't going to think that way. People are just, I love you. And I love you. And I love you. And I love the environment. So, to me, part of that advocacy is fitness for heaven, having God's principles starting to become in your life, living them now, knowing that it will never be perfect. That's fitness. You don't have to worry about when are you perfectly fit. It's a non-stop battle. Even people at the top of their game have continually to push to stand up of the game. So, I don't know. I think it's a work of a lifetime. Advocacy to me is linked with sanctification. You don't really have sanctification if you're not advocating.

Good point. Thank you. In what areas either theological, missiological ecclesiological do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message?

I don't know where you would categorize this, but I see one tension, and I don't know where it came from, maybe this isn't part of your research. There seems to be this idea that either you're doing social advocacy or you're doing evangelism. And so, when one is promoted, the other one is put down. So, you could say evangelism, mission, social advocacy, . . . For me, this is a false dichotomy. I don't have to adjudicate between these two positions. That doesn't make sense to me. If you're advocating for groups by Jesus' method alone, you're caring for these groups. Then, they're going to listen to your evangelism. I've heard of churches that really care for the poor in their community. And the rich care for the poor sometimes too. Not all of them are greedy.

Some of them really love their city. They want it to do better. And then they see this church is really pouring into the community. Then they joined that church because they want an outlet to use their money that way. Some of them don't think the government is proper.

So, I don't know where it came from [that dichotomy]. It wasn't in early Adventism. You have them doing abolition and prohibition and then preaching the gospel. And they were together. Somewhere along the line, we had a divorce. And maybe that came with, . . . maybe we got it from that whole fundamentalism [this kind of split]. I don't know where it came from, but I think we need to go back to pure Adventism and marry the two.

Okay. So, for you, there is no real tension. It is just apparent, right?

I think the tension came from outside of the church. I think it came from Babylon, the confusion of all things. By Babylon, I think probably about the confusion of different denominations fighting with each other on issues. And I think sometimes we get into these false things. I am asking why not both? Why not having ADRA go in first and pave the way for missions? Or mission comes in and ADRA also comes in and develops the community. Why does it have to be one against the other, why is it in competition? That's to me the biggest issue in the church with advocacy. Some of the people who want to advocate, maybe they push that colonial idea, that missions is colonial and we shouldn't do missions. And I think that's false. Maybe there were some incorrect methods, but that needs to be thrown out. Some people are like, 'well, if I'm for advocacy then I'm not preaching the gospel.' I'm like, no, these should not be divorced.

There is also a perception that people who are doing advocacy, they are not spiritual.

Yes. And sometimes it's true. And that's where I think the church community should marry these two. It's like, let's say advocacy is the right leg of the gospel. And, preaching the gospel is another part. And then the health messages, another part. And the body, you don't go to the right leg and say "I don't need you." You don't say the health message, "I don't need you" or to revelation seminars, "I don't need you." There's so much like just picking one body part and making it supreme importance and like who cares about the rest? No, these things just all need to work together as a body. And they all have their role and part. And when they would press together, as Ellen White always calls all these things would press together, I think our whole package holistically ... our mission would be better, much better for sure.

Well said, thank you. Now how the Adventist Church should address injustices in the world while remaining faithful to its mission, as the end-time remnant?

So, I think one of the important things is to be apolitical. I said, environmentalism is big to me. I know that's highly tied with the democratic party and the green party. I know that there's tons of Adventists who are conservative and whether it's libertarian, Republican or constitutional, they don't believe in global warming, they don't believe the democratic answer for environmentalism, making the government do all these regulations. That aside, I don't care whether it's Democrat, Republican. I think there needs to be an ethics based on the Bible. And then you say, I'm going to be environmentalist. The way I practice that might not be the way the democratic party wants it to be done. But, you can just choose to recycle and you're taking a step. That's apolitical. That's why I think sometimes Adventism can get political because we're in a world that has party system. And, these things, you can't ignore it.

But, that doesn't mean you can't go against party. You could still be a Republican and agree with the Republican party in many things, but this stance on environmentalism goes against my belief system. Honestly, that's why I think largely that politics need to be involved. They should, but I think it's easier to practice it in such a way that's apolitical. I think that'd be the safest way and going back, it should be based on the Bible and spirit prophecy to make it faithful and how it manifests itself should be apolitical.

I think you should be environmentalist because of the Bible. And if you were a Republican, the way you believe it should be acted out might not be voting for the democratic party. I'm asking you to do that, but you should still care for it in your own way, like recycle, like if there's polluted water in Flint, that's not good for the environment, and like every humanity, hey, we should fix that. That's to me an apolitical problem, that's making that political wrong. Like when you see an injustice being done, who cares about who it benefits? It needs to be fixed.

Awesome. What are some of the theological arguments, if any, against the church involvement in social justice advocacy?

Again, in the political part, Jesus, didn't try changing the Roman government overtly. You could make an argument against. That's where the apolitical comes in. I don't think it's against advocacy. I think it's against politics. Some may say that the gospels were political, that they made statements that made Jesus a Roman emperor, that there was a subversion of politics in their message. It's just they weren't overt. And I think we have to be careful, especially in the United States, what we believe about eschatology. You don't know what party, what power is going to be in place, when/what we believe is going to happen. I don't think you need the agitate what's happening. So, to me, I don't see it saying it's against advocacy.

I think we have to be careful with our politics, the anger one government side versus the other. And we have to understand that there's multiple ways of looking at how to fix politics and if we're being really political about it, we can end up dividing the church unnecessarily. That's the only issue I see against it.

Sometimes that's how it's done, because for example, Paul says, if you don't work, you don't eat. But at the same time, Jesus is about giving to the poor. So, how do you adjudicate these two? Well, to me, you don't do the Roman idea of just giving free food. You community develop. How do you help the poor? Do you just give them a handout, so then that they need to be dependent on you or you teach them how to be independent?

And that to me is a political issue, and both parties, Republicans do nothing, Democrats give handouts that don't fix the problem. The Adventist church should go in and community develop. We're Andrews university. We have Benton Harbor right here. We have a community development program. We have social work, we have a seminary. Why isn't more being done about Benton Harbor? We should advocate for this, get them off the welfare system. It's not helping them. If it was, if it was helping them, they wouldn't be in where they are. They're so used to getting the handout that they're stuck down in poverty. So, Republicans and Democrats, both are guilty, and largely the problem was largely racial because of the way zoning and the way they did real estate. But we're here with all this energy and we do this Change Day. But it should be Change Years. And we should go fix something with all the, ... you know, there's a ministry HELP here, Harbor of Hope there, but I think we could do more and it's totally apolitical.

And what are some of the theological arguments, if any, in favor of the church involving in social justice?

The biggest one to me is the eschatological sermon on the Mount, the Mount of olives. Matthew 24 and 25. So Jesus was basically saying when is the destruction of Jerusalem, when is He coming. Not that they get deep into theology. That's the context, right? So, he starts saying these signs, talking about these things. And then he switches all of a sudden, he starts talking about two groups of people, faithful servant, not faithful servant; wise virgins, unwise virgins or foolish virgins; the people who used their talents, the people who don't use their talents. So, he built and then it was like culminations, the sheep and the goats, which is largely what? How you know you're going to be ready for the second coming? How do you know you're an Adventist? How you treat the neglected.

It builds up the culmination. Like the punchline of the sermon is, "listen, I'm coming soon. Look at the signs. What are you going to do? You need to be doing something. You need to be Spirit filled. You need to be using your talents for what? The less fortunate. That's Matthew 24, 25. So as an Adventist, I read that and we're talking about the investigative judgment and it's based in the law of God. What is the law of God? It's a transcript of his character. How do you fulfill that? By loving. How can you say you're a loving person if you're not taking care of the less fortunate around you? We're supposed to be mirroring God, what God is all about.

I've heard theologians sometimes say that it's because of our eschatology that we are not involved in social justice advocacy. But here you are trying to show me that there's a connection between the two?

Our eschatology should be all about that. In fact, if you think about what the day of atonement is. It's, at one, making things right. It's getting rid of the, ... The day of atonement roll around and here is the sabbatical years. The economy that God set up, that antitype that is coming is about righting things that were wrong. So, I totally understand preaching the gospel. But, look at this. It was the signs of the destruction of Jerusalem and His coming. You could largely look at Jerusalem, which was being destroyed because the Jews, God's people did not heed Matthew 25. They were not doing anything. They cloistered themselves off. They were not being led by the Spirit. They were not using their talents. And they didn't care about the poor. Jerusalem is destroyed. And Jerusalem being the church, ... there was faithful, there was repentance, the church pour out of that. There was the fateful virgins that came out of that, the disciples and those that were baptized. The same thing. People are talking about shaking of Adventism. It's going to be separating sheep and goats. And Jesus said, what is it about? Helping the less fortunate.

All right. Now, what are some of the practical risks or threats to mission, if any, do you see when we try to do advocacy for social justice?

Again, the risk, I think we have to be creatively thinking apolitically. Because sometimes we're just caught up in like all the Republican party or the democratic party has an answer. And this, I mean, that's so American and that's all I can think about. But the same thing would be in Africa, this tribe or that tribe, or this or that. Some would say, you know, communism is the answer, or we need socialism. These are all human secular answers. They don't have the answer. I think we need to go to our Bibles and find the biblical ethics for advocacy. And I think we need to be

Bible informed. And as a church, we just need to do resources as part of our mission. For example, ADRA is doing this community development.

That's neither Republican or Democrat. That's just we're going to develop the community. And it started out with the disaster response and it's evolved and developed. And I think we just need to be reading our Bible and the spirit of prophecy and thinking and planning how to do this in marriage to the gospel. I think Kellogg was the first one wanting to divorce it, making it just about helping people's health and kind of doing a welfare ministry. And he didn't want the Adventist name and he wanted to maybe separate that. And so, there's a risk that way, but then there's a risk of the other way where you're not doing it at all because you're afraid of being political. I think we just need to be more Spirit-led, innovative with it so that we're not offending one group or the other. We're just wanting to help.

I think by responding the seventh question you also started responding to the eighth one. The eighth one is, what recommendations you would give to minimize those risks?

Oh yeah. It's being innovative, and divorcing yourself from politics. That doesn't mean you can't have a political party. It's almost impossible not to side one way or the other. But I even look at things, ... let's take abortion, which is not my big issue, but it's a lot of people's big issue. It's funny. I meet Adventists that are Democrats who are strong against abortion, which is kind of a Republican thing. And part of my problem is all those babies if they're born, some of them are from super low income. So, you only care about the baby when it's unborn and then you don't care about it once it's born. That's a contradiction to me in the Republican party. I have a friend who adopted, and she was a strong position on that. If you are strong on that and you're not adopting, that's hypocritical.

So, you're trying not to be hypocritical or contradictory. And you're trying to have coherence with your positions. And I don't think there's coherence in the Republican and Democratic parties. That's why we need to be apolitical because there's coherence in the Scriptures on how to act. Paul says, if you don't work, you don't eat. Don't just take handouts. But at the same time, you have to help the poor. So, you come up, how do you help the poor and not give handouts? Community development. So, when you're biblical, I think God has all the answers. I think we got to stop looking outside. I'm not saying you only read Adventist resources or the Bible, but I think that if our primary sources are the Bible and the spirit of prophecy, we can then use that as a filter and borrow from the outside correctly and be innovative and develop principles that God's like, yeah, he saved [us] to go to heaven. Look what he's doing on this planet.

I like that. Use the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy as filter. Thank you so much. Unless you have a final word. Thank you for your time.

Oral Record 2

T02P042519 – PhD Student from Andrews University
James White Library, Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan
April 25, 2019

How would you define advocacy from a biblical perspective?

As far as I understand it, advocacy usually refers to some kind of public support to either a cause or a policy. And we see that happening in the world all the time today, especially through social media. People are advocating for different causes in the political spectrum and in churches. There's always a cause and people feel very strongly about those causes. They think that if their points of view are heard, some good will come out of that, that's their hope. Some of them might be correct. Some might not be correct. But, from an Adventist position it is important that such kind of defense or support is done in harmony with biblical principles. The big umbrella for us would be the biblical principles, the biblical story, how God has been guiding his people, what He expects for this world. So, whatever would be in harmony with that trajectory, I think would be an Adventist thing.

A lot of Christians would also probably say the same thing that I'm saying to you. But, I know from what I've been studying, that we have a different understanding of the Bible from other Christians. So, we have a very high view of Scripture and we try to read reality through the lens of Scripture. And, I think that's deeper than what other Christian groups would usually do.

According to you, are there major social issues in the world today you think the Adventist Churches should be concerned about?

Yes. I think in the biblical story, whenever there's oppression, when people are being hurt, God criticizes those things through his prophets and, basically telling to people not to do those things and calling people to repentance, calling people for fairness. So, that happened in the past. It's happening today because the world is still sinful, right? So, there's still oppression. And of course, there are things that are bad.

Today there are many things that are going on, but the Bible seems to be most worried about the most vulnerable in society. So, whenever people are vulnerable, that's a top priority for God and therefore for his people. Today, I think the issue of migrations for example has skyrocketed. It has probably reached a high in history today with perhaps dozens of millions of people displaced in the world. And of course, when people are in this kind of situation, there's a lot of suffering involved, insecurity problems with sanitation problems, with education, all sorts of issues. God loves those people. I think that's one of the things that our church can help. We could help in both ways. We could help with our physical presence to immediate needs, but also with a perspective that reaches eternity, something that the world is not able to offer.

Good. In what areas either theological, missiological or ecclesiological, do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message (you may want to support your view by biblical verses, or Ellen White's quotes, but that's up to you).

Yes. I think there are tensions because the world is broken and, as the church, we want to help with this brokenness. I think it's a good thing to mitigate the effects of sin and reduce suffering. I think that's a very good cause. But the tension, I think is that we were given a mission and, particularly for the Adventist people, the most important mission we have is sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the love of God for us, or the human family in the context of the entire proclamation of the Three Angels' messages, which highlight God's character, God's law, the Sabbath and things like that. That is our primary mission. So, the tension is, doing what you can to mitigate the effects of sin, not forgetting our primary focus, which is the fulfillment of the Three Angels' messages. So, it's not necessarily a tension, but it can become a tension if you choose one over the other.

How the Adventist church should address injustices in the world while remaining faithful to Scripture and its special mission as the end-time remnant?

I think that the answer is in Christ. If we look to be faithful to Scripture, the better we understand Jesus and his life and how he lived, the better we are able to do that today. Because He was able to be very resolute to his mission while at the same time solving a lot of social issues or mitigating the effects of sin along the way. So, he did both. So, his life, I think, is the great model. If we are able to learn from him, I think we'll do well.

What are some of the theological arguments, if any, against the church's involvement in social justice advocacy?

I have a few ideas against the involvement of the church. It's not an absolutely against, but it's things for us to be cautious. One of the things that I see in the world happening in advocacy groups is that people choose a position, they choose an idea, they choose a cause and they run with it. And along the way, that becomes very important and everything else is secondary. And sometimes, and often I would say, this cause is in antagonism with other people or other groups. So, what I'm saying is there's a lot of conflict, a lot of antagonism. Sometimes it's unavoidable, I understand. But, a lot of those things are happening.

But one of the issues for us is that we are not supposed to favor a particular cause or a particular group with our faith, with our favor, with our help, with our love. We are to help all, including those that disagree with us that might have a very different cause from ours. But, that's not how things are happening in the world. In the world, if you have a view, if you have a cause, you're usually "boxed" within a certain group. And so, people just label you and that's what you are, they don't discuss anything else. And I think for the church, we don't want that for us. We don't want to be boxed 'we are here and that's who we are.'

Jesus said, "by this people shall know that you're my disciples if you have love for them, if you love one another." So, I think that, while we mitigate the effects of sin, we should be known by our love for all. We can't favor particular groups. My concern is for some kind of partiality or a favoritism to certain causes, even if they're worthy causes. There might be people or groups of people that are in causes that we fully disagree, but they still should receive our love or respect and our message. And that's not easy to do if you stick to one cause only. So, I think that the issue for me is that partiality and favoritism can be dangerous for the church. So, I don't like to

be boxed. I don't think the church should be boxed. The only box that they can place us under is that we belong to Jesus, that we are faithful to the Bible. I'm okay with those boxes, but other boxes I'm more uncomfortable because I think our mission is very broad.

But, a counter argument to what you just said could be that, as you said in the beginning, we as a church need to care for the vulnerable. From the beginning, we have a group that you are going to give more attention than other groups.

That's right. There are tensions. I agree with that. It's not a neat picture. It's not a black and white, there's a lot of gray zones I think in this topic. So, it's not that easy. I think wisdom is necessary to deal with the concrete situation. In abstract, perhaps we can say, but like when you were actually dealing with the issue, there's some gray. We need the divine wisdom to deal with it.

Absolutely. Now, what are the theological arguments, if any, in favor of the church involvement in social justice advocacy?

Right. I think there are good arguments in favor, especially historically. At the beginning of our history as a church, the Adventist pioneers got involved in a few social issues. Two that I could remember just like that was the issue of the temperance movement. There were a lot of different temperance movements happening in the United States in the 19th century. And the Adventists were for that. They were against the use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, and so forth. And so, they joined that movement. Not really joining that movement, but they were also saying those things that were happening in society. So, there was advocacy for healthy lifestyle, healthy living, and so forth. We also had involvement in the 19th century with the abolition of slavery that was happening in society. The church also thought that way, which was a good thing. So, these are arguments in favor. I think we've done it in the past. We can do it today as well for relevant issues today. And I think the bigger umbrella under which theologically we could participate in some of these things is the issue of the restoration of all things. You know, the main goal of the plan of redemption is the restoration of the image of God in humanity. And so, whatever we can see that will promote or foster the restoration of God's image in people, I think that's something we could be involved in.

Very good. What are some of the practical risks or threats to mission, if any, do you see that we should take into account when doing advocacy for social justice?

Yeah, that's a good question. Let's see if I can find something that helps. When I see social media, for example, a lot of advocacy groups in social media, and also in the media, like the mainstream media, there's a lot of stir, people are very loud. From my perspective, I see that there's more noise than deed. And when I see the Bible, like, for example, the report we have about Jesus, in Luke 24, verse 19, it says that they were discussing on the road of Emmaus, they said about Jesus, -- but that's the idea they had about Jesus, -- "Jesus of Nazareth, He was a prophet mighty in deed and word right before God into people." So, he was not only mighty in word. He was mighty in deed. Yeah. Also, in 1 John 3:18, 19, John talks to the church and he says, "my little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this, we know that we are of the truth, and we shall assure our hearts before him." So, we are of the truth, not if we cause a lot of stir, or if we're good and mighty in word. We have to be mighty

in deed. And I think that most of advocacy groups are just mighty in word. They just do a lot of stir, a lot of fluff, but little substance in reality. So, one of the things that I would think is risky is to join the stir and don't do the deeds.

Another thing that I noticed is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is something that will give us peace. And a lot of these advocacy groups are not movements of peace. They are just about noise. So, there are potential problems there.

It's not that being God's people there are not moments that when we're feeling strongly about things. Of course, there are. But in general, I think people of God tend to be peaceful, and we become strong when it's necessary. But, most of the time I think we're characterized as peace and love, genuine.

Actually, the last question is related to the previous one and I think you've started giving some recommendations on how to minimize those risks.

I have a couple of ideas, maybe three, about advocacy.

(1) We should care for the vulnerable. Like I said, we should promote the restoration of the image of God in people. So, I'm in favor of advocacy in those terms, if it's in deed, and not in word only. I think those are good things.

(2) But, the one problem I see, even when people are legitimately trying to do good is that sometimes advocacy groups focus a lot on the evil. They dissect the evil, what happens, and dah, dah, dah, dah. And the problem I have with that is that we become changed by what we contemplate. If you become a master in evil, you become evil. You're not going to become good.

Evil has to be confronted and stopped, but I think that sometimes people are spending too much time on the evil and they're not spending enough time on what or how would good look like and what are we going to do. I think that's something that I don't see many groups do. They focus a lot on evil and it's not going to help them. It's not going to help either side. Sometimes it creates more hatred, it doesn't create solutions. So, that's one of the things.

(3) Another thing is that when looking at our situation, when humanity fell, we put ourselves in a very bad situation. How God minimized or how did he try to minimize the effects of the fall? Well, let me put it on the positive side. He basically gave us work to do, he gave us service to do. From the beginning, they started tilling the ground, effort and so forth. And that was not punishment in my view. I think that was the blessing in a sinful situation. Being busy and doing good will actually help you and protect you from corruption. So, He directed us into service. When Jesus was here, He did the same thing. It was especially clear that the service He wanted us to perform was a service for the benefit of others, so how we can help others. But again, it's still service. So He did both in creation or redemption. I think God has been guiding us into service as a way of redemption, I'd say.

And my caveat for advocacy groups is that they tend to be not groups of service, like I said, not of deed, but they tend to be groups of complaint and stir. And I don't think that's going to bring

any good out of that. If it's only about disturbing society, about the evil and dwelling on the problem. If it doesn't become service to bless others, I think it's misguided. That's one thing.

And the second thing or recommendation is that again, we have a main mission, which is to share the love of God for us in the context of the Three Angels' messages. I think that's the main effort of the Adventist church and of an Adventist believer. Of course, along the way, we're going to do a lot of other things. But, that's the guiding principle.

And my fear is that if people lose the focus of this main goal, there is the danger of a lot of fragmentation, people will get diverted into different pursuits -- and all of them can be worthy pursuits, like there are lots of good stuff you can do and, that's fine. But, it seems that we have messages from Ellen White. She's not talking only about one way necessarily. But, she talks about pressing together and being of one mind and one judgment, in the sense of not being fragmented and dispersed. That's not an absolute thing. Like I said, the work of God, I think, it's so broad that it allows for you to do very different things and you're still in the same mission, but it's just something in the back of my mind, how much can we do different things?

There's room for that. But, we also should be pressing together to accomplish this main mission together. And I think that's something that is a guiding principle for advocacy groups as well.

That's good. We come to the end of this conversation, which was very interesting and also meaningful, insightful, I would say. And I thank you so much for this. I don't know if you have a final word?

The main thing or the big concern for us is that we will only advance, I think, to the right proportion that we are able to follow Jesus. So, I thank you for the interview. I thank you for this opportunity to engage with you on this. And I encourage you, as you are thinking about solutions to mission, to advocacy groups and whatever else you are engaged with, I encourage you to think about the life of Jesus and draw from Him, from the Source, the best guidance that you can get. I think His guidance will be superior to any other sources.

Thank you. Well said.

Oral Record 3

T03L112319 – Adventist University Professor

San Diego, California

November 23, 2019

What is your definition of advocacy?

I don't have one. Perhaps you can think of it as speaking on behalf of others.

What would you consider as major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

Since you're just asking me that at the moment and I'm answering off the top of my head, I'm sure that I'll be missing something. But I can think of social injustices in terms of wealth inequality, in terms of certain people, groups being marginalized in certain societies. I can think of human slave trafficking and so on. Probably it's more.

In what areas (theological, missiological, ecclesiological) do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

If you a look at the Bible, if you look at the messages concerning social justice in a biblical context, it was primarily social justice among God's people. And so therefore the first starting point for the church has to do with how we, as brothers and sisters, treat each other. So, I would say that's one point. I would say that comes before the question of how we address the world, because we are responsible before God for how we take care of our own house. The world doesn't claim to follow God. Well, we can help the world too, but they're not accountable to the same level we are. And therefore we, as a church, we need to take that into consideration. The other thing I'd say here is that while social justice should be part of our work, it should not become the gospel.

How could social justice advocacy be part of Adventist missions without compromising Scripture and the Church's unique mandate to preach the Three-Angel Message?

I think some of our activities such as what you're seeing, ADRA for example, are in part addressing social justice. And so, yes, we have a mission. We have to deal with social injustice. The very act of helping those with disadvantages, those who are poor, those who are refugees, is in a sense doing social justice. Can we do that while remaining faithful to Scripture into our mission? Yes, we can. We have to do it. But it doesn't mean that that replaces the gospel.

Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, in support of or against the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

If you take it too far. I think the way John Harvey Kellogg envisioned his work to help society was seen by Ellen White as basically replacing our theological message. So, you can take it too

far, not that you do too much, but in the sense that it becomes your message rather than being part of your message.

On the top of your mind, is there any biblical verses that could be used as a caution for the church not to be going too far into doing advocacy work?

I can't think of a text in the Bible so much as the context of the texts that do talk about social justice, because so much of it deals with in-house. Take, for example, in the parable of the sheep and goats in Jesus' day. "inasmuch as you have not done it to the least of these, my brethren, you have not done it unto me." In other words, the context in most of the social justice passages deals with God's people about helping God's people, and God's people not taking advantage of God's people, and so on. And so, I don't know that there's a need for passages warning us to not go overboard as much as we need to take these passages in context, because it's talking about how we, as a family, should live together. In terms of more recent times, you can say that Ellen White's warning not to let the right arm become the head could be applicable in this case.

What would you consider as risks or threats to mission, if any, when/if the Church is involved in social justice advocacy?

I think if we become too political, when we're in the mission field. Adventists have been accused, I believe wrongly, of supporting corrupt governments. I think we are wrongly accused of that when the truth is we simply want to stay neutral. And as long as we stay neutral, we don't get involved in politics. We want to stay neutral. We want to stay neutral in America also. We're not supporting and we're not trying to dismantle any government. We're interested in helping the people who are disadvantaged.

What would you recommend as ways to minimize those risks/threats?

Being in the actual field. I haven't thought of any recommendations. But I would say:

- Number one, stay away from politics.
- Number two, I would think, selling this in the correct way at home would help to support this in the mission field. There are many Adventists who see the emphasis on social justice as a threat to the Adventist message. It shouldn't be. But depending on how you present it, it may create that feeling along a certain section of the Adventist church. So, I'd say there are two sides to it: how it's done in mission field -- and I think we have done well there, staying out of political issues, -- but then how to sell it at home. And we have not done it as well here. And part of it is we've been too polarized instead of really looking at it from a biblical perspective, instead of really communicating with each other. We have just talked past each other. We have simply tried to gain more support, we have not tried to help the other side to understand, to see this as we see it.

Oral Record 4

T04H112419 – Adventist University Professor

San Diego, California

November 24, 2019

What is your definition of advocacy?

When I think of advocacy, I think of mediation, mediation on behalf of somebody who is unable to speak for himself or herself. It's giving voice to the voiceless.

And what do you consider major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

I'd like to look at it from the big picture. I think there is a culture of domination that permeates human culture that is manifested in many ways in the world. Those who are able to acquire wealth and resources, continue to be quiet without regard for those who are not able, who do not have the talent or the capability to acquire even resources that is enough to meet their daily needs. You have of course cultural domination and again, gender domination, racial domination. These are all manifestations of a general culture of domination that created a very alienating society, a very alienated human race. It's a chronic problem. And I think the problem is chronic because for some reason, human beings are constantly anxious about their survival, and they believe that 'my survival' is independent of the survival of another group or another kind of humanity.

And therefore, I feel that this group feel 'I have to get as much as I can, and I have to keep back this other group because in keeping them back, I can get as much as I need to get.' So, it's a very basic and animalistic approach to life. Some of us think that we're being very human, even though all we're concerned about is how much we can get, how much we can exalt ourselves above another person, how much my status is better than yours. All of that is a very basic physiological, animalistic survival instinct. And until we get to the point where we see ourselves as truly humans created in the image of God and began to nurture that image, then we will realize the importance of undermining, of subverting this culture of domination that continues to create the state of alienation in human society.

Thank you so much. Now, in what areas, either theological, missiological or ecclesiological do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message.

Unfortunately, there are some Adventists who believe that the word justice is a 'J' word. Very influential leaders do not want to hear about the term justice. For example, when you talk about women's ordination, and equate it with justice, "Oh, I don't want to hear this term justice; it's not about justice." It is unfortunate because the whole idea of social justice is the basis of all the Hebrew prophetic oracles. Social justice is a basis of the teachings of Jesus and the early church, because they live in a Roman empire that was oppressive, a culture where domination was just the definition of that culture. And the early church teachings and practice undermined that culture. And it's unfortunate that in Adventism we cannot see that. Which is different from the

early Adventists, -- early Adventists were on the forefront for social justice and so on. We need to pick up where they left off, or even better, pick up where the early church left off before it was hijacked by Rome and made into the instrument of Roman imperialism.

Yes, we do social justice work in the world, ADRA and so forth. But the way we do social justice is like, if I may use it a popular political term, *quid pro quo*. It's for winning souls. Well, what does it mean? If we see winning souls for simply joining the church, then it's unfortunate. Of course, we need people to hear the gospel. We want people to be saved. But the point is, if we view "soul winning" and salvation simply as coming to church, singing songs, believing a set of doctrines, then, we're very narrow on that. You win a soul when you feed them and you save them from death; and you win a soul when you enable a child to go to school, whether they join the church or not. So yeah, we're doing social justice work. But it's a bit narrow. We're seeing mission only as soul winning. And I'm not saying that's not important. But, you have to see mission also as getting kids into school where they are unable to go to school, getting people have jobs so that they can feed their families. You have to see all those things as part of winning souls. Let's talk about saving souls.

So, for you, there is no contradiction between theology, missiology or even ecclesiology and doing social justice advocacy?

But that's what it's supposed to be. When Jesus, in Luke 4:18-19, got up and read from the book of Isaiah, what is his anointing about? The word anointing means Christ. I am Christ in order that I might preach good news to the poor, I might bring sight to the blind, release to those that are oppressed or in bondage, to bring in God's liberation, Jubilee. That's what he says. He didn't talk about church membership, or dogma or anything, but instead, social justice, taking care of those who are least esteemed and neglected and overlooked in society. These are the people for whom he says, I am Christ. That's why I'm Christ.

I will make a little digression. You think that social justice can be applied only on people who are oppressed, the poor, etc. Don't you think it requires also working with the system?

When we think of the oppressed, it is not only the poor. Everybody is oppressed, even those on top we think are at the top of the food chain, because we all suffer. Some of us need to be liberated from our mental slavery. Even some of us at the top of this food chain are mentally enslaved, living in fear. Those people need to be released and set free as well. So, it's a question of human liberation, that does not occur in isolation. You can't be free unless I'm free. I can't be free unless you are free. It's the reality of it.

So, if you live in an affluent neighborhood and there is a lot of poor suffering people around you, you have to have a gated community to protect yourself and your wealth. And when you go into the gate, you have to put up barriers around. You know what I'm saying? I go down to Ghana -- my husband is from Ghana. His sister and her family, they live in this neighborhood and there's a gated community. The community is gated. And yet all of them have these high fences around their houses. And the fence of my sister-in-law has a barbed wire on top of it. I said, my goodness, how can you people live in this way? It's like you all live in high security prisons.

Because there are so many people that are suffering and you're protecting yourself from them. So, you can't be free if they are not free.

Now, if the church decides to address social justice issues, how they can do it in a way that will not damage their mission, their message, their reputation.

But that's the thing. To me, if you're not doing social justice already, you're damaging your reputation. The church is right now, not just Adventism, but Christianity itself is losing its reputation because many see it as irrelevant. Now, look at this current US government. It has become morally bankrupt. The United States' government and culture have become morally bankrupt. Look what is happening at the border. It's all about political expediency. It's all about power and money. And you see all the moral bankruptcy, the lies, the untruths, the coverups, and yet the excuse to maintain that is we're doing well economically. How can that be? And this is what I'm actually getting in to. Many perceive that it is the church that is enabling this morally bankrupt system. It's a very powerful fundamentalist stream in Christianity that enables what is going on now in the U S cultural system. The current president is not the problem. It's the church, the Christian fundamentalist movement that enables this. They use him. And of course he's using them. You know? So, to say that if you attend to social justice, the church is losing its reputation, it is already losing its reputation by not attending to social justice.

That's powerful. Now you will agree with me that some use the Bible to defend their position. What biblical passages or verses or theological arguments people can use to defend a position not to do social justice advocacy?

It's crazy. To me, you have to search hard to find what not to do, why you should not defend and deal with social justice, because all the prophetic oracles are about social justice. Jesus' teachings are about social justice. People say, Jesus says "my kingdom is not of this world." Perhaps they can go there and say, "my kingdom is not of this world." But that is a misapplication of the texts. To say, "my kingdom is not of this world," Jesus was actually speaking to the Jews who expected that the kingdom of God will be established when they are able to overthrow Roman colonialism and reestablish themselves as a sovereign nation. That's what was being addressed. You see, Israel in the first century was looking for a Messiah who would overthrow Roman rule and make Israel great again.

And that's when Jesus says "my kingdom is not of this world." What the early church was doing, they were reinterpreting the whole concept of Messiah. That Messiah is not a political reality, but instead a spiritual reality. That's why Paul constantly says "in Christ," "now in Christ," all these things are obliterated - no more Jew, Gentile, male or female, whatever. Because all those hierarchies are worldly. That's what it means. My kingdom is not of this world. We don't follow the things of the world, the oppressive state of being in the world. That's what it's talking about. It's not saying you evacuate. It's not about evacuating the world, but it's about not bowing the oppressive state of the Roman empire system; and it's not about reestablishing Israel's sovereignty.

Okay, good. What texts, biblical texts that are in favor of social justice advocacy?

Go to the prophets. Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, . . . “I don't care about your sacrifices, your New Moon, Sabbath, . . . “I didn't ask you to do this. What did I ask you to do? Isaiah 1, “take care of the widow, the orphan, and all of that. That's what they ask you to do.” That's religion. “True religion and undefiled before God is this. What is it that the church doesn't understand in these oracles? Why do we not care about that? It's there, it's there in their eyes. And in my opinion, in order for Jesus to be palatable, we have made over Jesus. We've given him an extreme makeover. That's why we can talk about Jesus today because we have made him over. The real Jesus, we would kill him just the same.

You would agree with me that there are good ways to do social justice advocacy and there are also bad ways.

When it becomes political, partisan, when it's all about politics and all this stuff, that's where again you become focused on worldly things. And I don't like to use the word ‘worldly’ too much because many times when we say worldly, we tend to not see that God is in the world. So I do not make any distinction between ‘world’ as being a non-sacred place and ‘church’ as being sacred. No, the world is where the church is and the world is where Christ is. And the world is where God is. It's all sacred space because God is in it, Emmanuel God with us. So there is no space in creation that is not sacred. Whatever is profane, it has to be in the heart and the mind of the individual, because God's creation is all sacred. So we must all respect our history and creation and all that God does in it. But what is the question again?

...Bad ways to do social justice advocacy. When using violence, for example.

Yes, when you become extremely political, and partisan in doing social justice, then that can become divisive. The question is, ‘what am I doing in my advocacy for social justice? Am I affirming life in every form, both those who are with me and those opposing me.’ It's about affirming life and the quality of life and seeking to bring about human reconciliation. That's what social justice must do. It must be reconciliatory. And so if it's not, . . . and then again, . . . it's even difficult to make any blanket statement on that. In South Africa, you know, they weren't taking up arms and then you see that they were shooting down children and women and men in the street. What do you do? It's very hard for me to answer that question.

Even here in America, in the civil rights movement, how do you meet the violence? They weren't fighting back; black people were not fighting back. You can look at Jesus and, you know, he took the cross, and as we look at that cross and we see what happened to Jesus and even the prophets before him, I think it must give us pause. We only look at the theological reason for the cross. We say “God put him on the cross to save us for our sins.” We must always realize that our sins put him on the cross in another way, in an historical way. When we believe we know what is right, and we are not open to God's will, we really have closed our minds.

It's what was happening when you read the New Testament. It's a question of a religious system that had closed its mind to what God had to reveal, because they thought they knew everything already. That led to pure violence - the violence of the cross. And so, the violence of the cross must be a demonstration of the extent to which we can go when we close ourselves off to what God has revealed to us. That is why nobody must ever claim they have truth and that they don't

need anything more. Because that leads to violence. And we can see today, it is the people who said they have the truth that are the most violent people in the world. I won't call any names or any group names, but you know what I'm talking about. But, when you open to God and you open to the entire process of God's being in the world and you see the other person as you, -- because we all came from the same source, -- these are the ways in which we must articulate the whole question of social justice.

What are some recommendations for someone who wants to involve in this social justice advocacy work. How to do it in a way that will not hurt the person him or herself, and also hurt the church or hurt even the people you are defending.

I think if we are concerned about whether we would hurt in our advocacy for social justice, we aren't ever going to do it. It's a question of laying down your life for your friend. Jesus says no greater love than this, because Jesus saw he was going to the cross as laying down his life for his friend. So social justice advocacy, it's about laying down your life for your friend, that is for your brother or for your sister. That's what it's all about. Now, we love to talk about "I'll die for my beliefs." Okay, let it go on record. I have no beliefs about which I will die, but I will die for my fellow human beings. Don't tell me to die for my beliefs. What beliefs? What is a belief? Belief is where we concretize things we don't really know. I'm not dying for something I don't really know. But, I'll die for my fellow human beings. That's what God asked me to do. That's what Jesus asked me to do. That's the love I want to demonstrate.

Thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Oral Record 5

T05P112519 – Adventist University Professor
San Diego, California
November 25, 2019

How would you define advocacy?

I think that my understanding of it is a public support of causes or groups of people that are in a particular predicament, the unfortunate, the marginalized, the people that do not have a voice and need somebody else who might have a voice raise that voice on their behalf. I do think also that there is a more private or unofficial advocacy and official advocacy. In official capacity we'll do that on the levels of government, local or any other, or maybe in the church. But unofficially we can grant that public support or advocacy through all kinds of means including social media, personal engagement, speaking on behalf of other people in arguing their case and trying to raise the issues to the forefront. It's public support of causes and groups and people in need.

Do you see major social injustices today in the world that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

Absolutely. All the way through our history and today particularly, as we see more and more social and communal things being broken down, I see huge needs in many respects, including the immigration issues around the world. Even the advocacy for the causes of sustainability, creation care, environment, as it impacts also social injustices to people, to the poor, the issues of the greater gap between the poor and the rich, the issues of certain inequalities, racial in particular. Again, I don't look only the worldwide, but I'm looking from the perspective where I live, which is United States of America, and the kinds of things that we thought we have resolved in terms of racial or gender issues and injustices have come again and again in the last few years to the forefront showing its ugly head and proving that we have not gone as far as we needed to do and that we need to really do much more as a community of faith, community of believers that stand on Jesus's side for such groups. I could go on and on, but, you know, certainly issues of immigration, racial, gender, environmental, issues that have special relationship to the poor and the marginalized that suffered the most, the issues of even food scarcities and also food industry and the immigration workers in food industry in this country and around the world. These are all hugely important to us as a faith community to address.

Do you see any tensions between the work of advocacy and the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

I don't think there should be a tension. Have I seen tension? Absolutely. Over the decades that I've been speaking of those issues often I see the tension that arises between our, I think, wrong perception of what evangelism is all about and how evangelism seemingly in a kind of wooden literalistic sense can become an obstacle to being engaged in these advocacy issues as well. I don't personally think that that should be the tension. I believe that that the mission of the church is much larger than just proclamation of some kind of cognitive truths. I think mission includes indeed advocacy, and evangelism and issues of advocacy in my view do not conflict. They complement each other. Jesus was proving to be both a healer and teacher of the word and going

around doing the ministry of love and advocacy for those who have not been in many respects recognized, who have been marginalized, through the blessings, through the way that he expressed his love and community loving people and caring for them, and not only caring for them on a one-on-one level, but also asking questions, structural questions, -- which is advocacy again -- on why is it that people are marginalized and struggling without food, without clothing, without shelter, being imprisoned, et cetera.

So, for me, that tension has been there because I've observed in the church often when I speak from those issues, people will ask, 'well, how does that take away from evangelism?' My definition of evangelism or mission, which is larger than evangelism of the church is that advocacy and evangelism go hand in hand and that they are two sides of the same coin of Jesus's ministry,

But in our fundamental beliefs, we say that we are the remnant and we are not like the other Christian denominations, that we have a special mission, which is to proclaim the Three-Angels' messages. Don't you see tension between the focus on the 3-Angels' messages and advocacy work in the world?

Not really. And again, that's me. That doesn't mean that the church doesn't. I've seen those conflicts, even conflicts of people saying, 'well, the Second Coming is coming soon and Jesus will come and resolve all these issues, and that has been sometimes a detriment to being involved. I find that if I study remnant mentality and the purposes throughout the Judeo-Christian history, when I look at remnant and what prophets are calling for in remnant is precisely the kind of advocacy for the marginalized, for the widow and the orphan and the alien. So, immigration, the issues of the poor, those who don't have access, et cetera, is the true 'remnant-ness'. So, in my opinion, remnant is what remnant does rather than just the kind of beliefs, structure or some kind of doctrinal concepts that we need to share. We need to share the love of God as remnant. And that is something that will inevitably touch the issues of advocacy for those who cannot speak for themselves.

On the top of your mind, do you have some biblical passages in the Bible, texts that can support the work of advocacy?

Yes. We call ourselves a prophetic minority at the end time. I have studied the prophetic role and what remnant often is, or explained as. Prophetic minorities look at the prophets and see what the prophets have done. And prophets have not just taken off charts of some dates. They actually were very strong advocates for the causes of the most vulnerable and marginalized, and shouted from the rooftops about, 'I hate your Sabbaths because you trample on the poor, you build your houses and you add field to field, but you will be living alone.' So, you take Isaiah 58, -- such a huge passage for Adventists, -- or Isaiah 61 about building those walls and looking at how sabbath, a sabbatical attitude, the sabbatical years talk about, again, the equalization of the unequal yokes and injustices that happened in the periods between one Sabbath and the next. And that sabbatical attitude needs to be looked at as we worship on Sabbath. Then, the issues of Proverbs. Proverbs 31 talks about speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

When I look at Jesus's ministry, I see tremendous amount of work, not just doctrinal or going around, preaching the gospel, but actually doing the ministry of love for the marginalized. So, showing practically not just through some kinds of theory of advocacy, but practically how those who are most vulnerable needs to be seriously taken care of and learn from them the value of human life.

So, the issue of our attitudes towards human beings, women and men created in God's image, of all gender and race and culture and how that equalizes us as we worship God that created us all is another way of looking at the scriptural texts and saying, in what sense am I seeing my brother and my sister suffering? And how can I be God's hand, God's heart, God's voice, in terms of supporting such people, such individuals? This is the way of someone who lives authentic Christian life, someone who lives a remnant kind of perspective in the last end-time.

Now, there are also some passages in the Bible that those who don't want to do social justice advocacy use. Do you have, in your mind, any of those verses that might have been misinterpreted and what would be your way of correcting those misinterpretations?

Well, one or two of those have been from early on in Adventism. Joseph Bates was a huge advocate and working for the cause of abolitionism and other social causes of his time as an advocate and as a member of advocacy groups. And when he learned about the Second Coming, he slowed down in those advocacy issues and people accused them and they said, "why is it that you're not involved in this as well?" He said "I don't have as much time because I need to prepare myself and others for the Second Coming." This tension has always been in Adventism, "Oh, well, we proclaim the gospel message, Christ is coming soon. Things are going bad anyway. So, Christ would come in and take care of all of these."

Well, when I look at the biggest passages that we've had on that, like Matthew 24, the signs of the times. We had been preoccupied with these passages so, so long, we often don't see, -- and these are my corrections as I see it, -- that same sermon, the last sermon that Jesus preached extends to Matthew 25. So, it's that same sermon where he gives signs of the times and then ends with three stories, two metaphors to say, 'be cautious,' 'You don't know the time.' But what is it that you do while you occupy till I come? And this is for us Adventists, those who wait for the advent, very relevant? How do we occupy that time? So, my corrective is I think that he's saying, 'well, there are two groups, really two: the sheep and the goats, the right and the left. And those who have done it to the least of my brethren have done it to me.'

So, as I look at the people who are the least, the needy, the ones that are in prison, ones that are given food and clothing. And not only that we just give food, but also we teach people how to get their food. We don't just get them fish, we give them a fishing rod and we tell them here's how to fish so that they are sustainable. But, then, the last step is asking, 'okay, well, do they have even access to the pond, to the fishing place? And so, advocacy is asking, 'why is it that some people don't even have access?' And that's something that is part of the whole story of people doing it without even thinking and doing it not just to the vulnerable but to Jesus who is associating or identifying himself with the vulnerable thing, you have done it to me when you've done it to the least.

So, these are the kinds of corrective. Of course, there are more, and we can talk about it. I published on these issues. There are texts that are given, texts that are routinely taken and isolated. But, when you put them into context, you'll see how much God really cares for those kinds of situations and issues and how, when you put them into context, those texts actually have a broader perspective. That gives me absolute confidence that God wants me, maybe in my private way, through social media, through education, through preaching, through teaching, or for some who are capable and learn how to do that in a public arena, to actually put their faith into the questions in the high courts, in the legal sense, in the way that they agitate and ask questions of the governments, et cetera.

You would agree with me that if we don't do advocacy the right way, it may cause damages to the church, to the church's mission or reputation and image. If you agree with me on that, what would you recommend to minimize or to mitigate those risks?

Well, I would need to see in what way would we put the church at risk if we behave Christ-like. If God's heart is in this kind of work, then I think this is what the church should be and should do.

And so, yes, it is true that if we get into party politics and kind of say, 'Oh, this group is so much better or ideal, and that group of political operatives is terrible and not good,' then we will do damage. And this is not the kind of thing I have in mind when I talk about advocacy. But if we live authentic Christian life, I think sometimes we will make controversial waves, especially if society is going absolutely opposite way. If we, during the Nazi state, during the third Reich, or in my own country during the 1990's war, side with Hitler or Milosevic or . . . and start doing that kind of abuse of power towards the marginal and people of different ethnic, in this case, Jewish or other persuasions, then, I think we do more damage. But, if we actually keep on being loving and fair and advocating for those who sometimes governments ignore or imprisoned or captured and killed, then maybe this will be controversial in that moment, but it will actually justify the church being the church in those moments.

So sometimes you cannot avoid, because many social issues, economic issues are also political issues. But, that doesn't mean the party politics. That means always being consistent. And there is no party in the world, there is no political effort in the world that is pure as God's heart or Jesus's message is pure. So sometimes that will mean that we are on different sides, but we will be consistent in fighting for those who Christ has close to his heart.

So yes, there might be at times conflict and embarrassments. But sometimes when we are silent as a church, -- and this is the theme of my book, -- when we are silent as a church, we also do damage by not speaking up for those that need to be spoken for. So if there's immigration issue and we are imprisoning children and have the most recent children in the world at this moment in our country, I don't care whether that's political or not. We need to speak up for those children that are in the immigration camps, treated unfairly and unjustly. And so, that might be at this moment politically very controversial. But, hey, our pioneers have done that. Our pioneers have called this country, while they lived in it -- and they were true Americans, -- the beast, the lamb that is beast-like, et cetera. Loughborough and others have spoken and written about these issues. And yeah, that was controversial. Call your own nation that, or 'slavery is the biggest sin' as

Ellen White says of this country. Well, we need to say it as it is. And, if black people are treated this way, or women are treated that way, we cannot just try to be politically quiet and correct. We need to say what God would say, what God has said as he created us all in his loving care equal. And that means certainly stepping out.

Thank you so much. It was my last question. Unless you have a final word that will be the end of our conversation.

I hope that our church could be more proactive because I think that at times I wish our remnant perspective would come out and we wouldn't be just equal to many other Christians, including many other evangelicals. Is that embarrassing themselves in not being in many respects the way that Christ is calling us to be? I think that there is time for us to step up and be serious about our faith and do mission of the church including evangelism in a powerful way, speaking up to the powers and saying no to issues that are just opposite to anything that God has done for us and for the world -- that Christ came to save us and love us unconditionally.

Thank you so much.

Oral Record 6

T06B112519 – General Conference of SDA Church Administrator
San Diego, California
November 25, 2019

How would you define advocacy in your own words?

In my own thoughts, advocacy means defense of the oppressed. Outside defense of the oppressed probably is the best way to define it. But I would say oppressed in a very broad sense because there are different categories of oppressed, not only social oppressed, but there may be psychological oppressed and other categories of people that for some reason are disadvantaged. So for me, advocacy is to be the voice of those who do not have voice.

Do you see some major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

I think injustices is what we see all around. As a church, I think we should be sensitive to injustices. We should be sensitive to those who are victims of violence, of oppression, because this solidarity with those in need, in my view is part of the gospel. It's not the core of the gospel, but it's part of it. It goes along with the gospel.

The issue of environment is also is also another point, which sometimes the church has not done enough. We more than anybody else believe in creation. We should stand up for the environment, to the protection of it, because until Christ come, this is our home. We have no other planet to go to. Until Christ comes who have to live in this world. So let's try not to damage it more than it has been already.

That's going to require that we sit at policy discussion.

Exactly. We have to make our voice heard at policy level.

Sometimes people see tension between our definition of the remnant church (the Adventist Church) and the work of social justice advocacy. Do you see tension?

That's an interesting question. There may be. I think first of all, we must be very clear. What is the core of the gospel? So as a church, our mission, for me, our fundamental mission is to proclaim and preach the gospel. And we must be clear what the gospel is. I think biblically it's John 3:16 and many other passages. It's very clear. The gospel is God's plan to redeem human beings from sin. But of course, there's a number of entailments, number of things that go together. But this is the core of the gospel. The church is called to proclaim the gospel and to be an agent to transform life, not necessarily to transform society at large, although ultimately the gospel will impact society. But if the church focusses on social change, I'm afraid the church will be doing what governments are supposed to do. And the church does not have the capabilities, the tools to effect social change because the church is not a political entity, is not even a sociological entity, although it's a kind of society. But the church is the arm of God to redeem

human beings, to bring them from sin to the light of the gospel. So, the church must be clear on the focus. So, these must remain the main focus.

There's a difference between doing the work of the government and calling the government to do its work. Advocacy is more calling the government to do its job. So, do you think that the church can do advocacy as part of its mission?

It's possible. And I think it's somehow part of our mission, especially as we read and study the prophets in the Old Testament. Although having said that, I must be careful because in the Old Testament you have the actions of the prophets, the preaching of the prophets, but we should understand that in the Old Testament context where we have a theocracy. So it's a different structure. But even if the situation today is different, I think the church also have to raise its voice, calling governments to do their job, to be kind, to be faithful, to give the people the freedom that they need to thrive. So, in that sense, I think the church can be a prophetic voice without confusing political agency with the proclamation of the gospel.

There are some biblical passages that can be used to support the work of advocacy. And there are other passages that seem to be in contradiction to the work of social advocacy. On the top of your mind, can you share some of those passages against or in favor?

Well, I don't recall that there is necessarily passages against advocacy. Probably the way they are understood leads to some misinterpretation. For example, if you go to the book of Amos, even with the book of Proverbs, you know what God says about the poor, they importance of helping the poor. Even the Psalms. So, you'll have a number of text passages where God very clearly presents himself in his character as a Holy God, who is offended by the mistreatment of people, the mistreatment of the oppressed, the oppression of people. So I think especially the eighth century prophets, Amos, Micah, Isaiah, Hosea, these prophets are very clear on how God is really concerned about the way we treat our neighbors.

What about passages, for example, where the apostle Paul says that "we need to submit to authority."

Romans 12 is a case in point. But I don't think that those passages preclude the church from doing it, or preclude it from raising its prophetic voice. I think there are universal moral, ethical principles that we are all accountable to no matter if it's the church, the government, or any kind of society. These are universal points. And the Bible is very clear on that because we are all created in God's image. So there are some universal principles and the church should not be, let's say, afraid of raising its voice. It comes to my mind, for example, issues of domestic violence, issues of drugs, issues of religious freedom. I think these are very crucial areas on which the church should make his voice heard, according to the gospel, according to the Bible. The church, of course, should not make these kinds of things the core of its mission. Because, otherwise, it becomes one more political party. So, the church must be careful. But the church should not be afraid. More recently we have the issue of immigration, which is a very serious moral issue. And I don't see many people speaking about this. I think the church has the obligation also to be clear on this matter.

When you say “the church must be clear on clear on this matter,” are you referring to the position statements the General Conference has been issuing on several subject matters? Does this also include asking the union, the conferences to do mass protests or intervening in the media, et cetera?

Not necessarily that because sometimes these approaches are counterproductive. And when you do that, you are just one more organization siding with others who are already doing that for political reasons. Because what I'm afraid of is that if the church uses these same methodologies, the church may be confused with these other entities. So I think the church should have more a kind of a moral voice. But above all, the church should show in its own methods and ways of acting and doing and making things happen the principles of the gospel.

So you think that just buy issuing statements, the Adventist Church will be to effectively advocate for social issues?

This is one point, not everything. The church has its a religious liberty department, which in a certain way help make a bridge with government. Through that kind of entity, I think the church should voice its position, its concern with some matters, not only religious liberty. But I don't think there is a problem for the church eventually, let's say, to put a statement on a newspaper or the internet on a matter that is crucial, that is a moral issue for humanity, and it's clearly has to do it with biblical morality, biblical principles.

So, you mentioned the religious Liberty. And usually this has to do with the Sabbath, freedom of worship on Sabbath. But when it comes to other injustices, we sometimes don't show the same concern.

We have this problem. These are weaknesses. We are more concerned with the spiritual things and we forget that social and material injustices are also problematic and they also should be addressed.

We know that there are some ways we can conduct advocacy that may damage the church, definitely put the church at risk. What would you recommend as ways to conduct the work advocacy without causing damage to the church?

I think when you do that advocacy, first of all, we should avoid, or do everything we can to avoid any misunderstanding that we are a political party or that we are siding with some side of the ideological spectrum. Because we live in a very fragmented, divided world, polarized world, to say better. It's very easy for people to just throw the church into one or the other extreme. So the church must be very careful when situations of crisis arise and that the church has to raise and show its position. Now I would say there are situations that are local and other situations that are global. So, there are many cases for which probably the General Conference does not need to come up and make a statement, but probably in some cases for the church pastor there in the local community, because the problem is there.

For some reason, he [the local pastor] needs, must, should make the church voice be heard in a certain matter. Let's say for example cases where there is violation of the rights of people, of

being disrespected. I mentioned before issues of drugs and the domestic violence and these kinds of things. So, we should not be afraid of voicing our position and especially asking the government to fulfill its role because the government, as we understand it, is placed by God to correct evil and to implement the good. So the church sometimes may need to remind the government to do its job, to do it the proper way. However, this is a very mined field. Because we are so excited about tackling social issues, it's very to simply forget the core of the gospel, the mission of the church, which is to proclaim the gospel and change life. For, you may do everything you can to change society -- and political parties have tried to do that. Some societies indeed have changed. They have progressed. But it doesn't mean that they are happier. It doesn't mean that there is less violence there. So the old human beings are still there. So the church is called to do something bigger, which is not change society or not start to change society, but to start with the human being, starting with the heart of people, changing their habits, because these will eventually impact the society at large. So doing advocacy, which I think may be required in some cases, we just must be careful not to be dragged by social agendas so that these will impair the evangelistic mission of the church, which is the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord and savior.

And this is what will make the Adventist movement different from the Social Gospel, and Liberation Theology?

Exactly. We have the Three-Angel's messages. We have the message that Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary interceding for us. You know, there's a work of judgment being done. So this is very important. This transcends social accidents, social issues that we're facing here, although they're important. So that's why the church must never lose focus of the core of the gospel without of course being insensitive to the problems that are around. And I think the church has been doing this through ADRA, through other entities. The church has been doing a lot of good work in the area of temperance, for example. I think even our pioneers, they were not insensitive to these matters. Some of them were involved in campaigns against slavery, against tobacco, alcohol. So even our pioneers almost 200 years ago, they were sensitive to these issues, but they did not lose the focus of the gospel. Because it's impossible to be a sincere believer, a faithful Christian without being compassionate towards those who suffer. These cannot be disjoined, cannot be separated. If someone is a good Seven-day Adventist, a committed Christian who has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, that person must necessarily be sensitive to the suffering of others. And consequently, that person will feel the need to go to the rescue of those who suffer. And this is what advocacy.

So to summarize my understanding of what you just said, we need as a church to focus more on the transformation of the individual [this is the core], and when individuals are transformed, society will implicitly benefit from that transformation. Is that correct?

But it doesn't mean that the church should not do social work.

Okay. So while we are doing that, . . .

Don't make it the core, as if we exist just for that. No, we exist for something bigger, which has to do with eternal life. So, we have our goal. Our aim is much bigger than. These are small things compared to the big things that we dream.

Thank you so much.

My pleasure.

Oral Record 7

T07W112619 – Adventist University Professor
San Diego, California
November 26, 2019

How would you define advocacy?

I think the meaning of the word advocacy means to ‘speak for’. In my part of the world, it (i.e. advocate) means a lawyer, somebody who speaks for somebody else.

What major issues in the world today do you think the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

I actually do not think that the church has an advocacy role. I think that is the task of agents and political parties, et cetera. I would not think that the church should become a political party. The church is not in the world for advocating anything. However, I believe the church should be the church. And I do not think that we can be the church, the body of Christ, without taking radical action, not just advocacy, but action, which will look from outside like engagement with social justice issues. Does that make sense?

So, the church is called to be the church, but being the church is not just a club for the saved. That's a common Protestant idea -- ‘God saves us individually, then we get together as a sort of country club to celebrate and to be thankful and to go out and win new members.’ Nor do we believe in the Catholic idea of the church, which is *extra ecclesia nulla salus*, which is the Latin for “outside of the church there's no salvation.” We don't believe that the church is an instrument, a means of salvation. Because for Catholics, the administration of the sacraments is what makes you saved. Sin is like an infection and the sacraments, all seven of them, but particularly the mass, is a means, an antidote to the infection.

We don't believe in a sacramental view of the church, nor do we believe that the church is merely a club. We believe that the church is already the beginning of salvation. The church is the new community. The church is the radically reordered community, which is the body of Christ, which is radically inclusive because in principle, Jesus has died for everyone. The gospel goes to the whole world.

Therefore, you've asked me a question here, “what are the major social justice issues, the church should be involved in?” Well, I will give a normal list. Racism is pervasive and ubiquitous. Racism, sexism, I would say, global greed and poverty, economic structures, structural systems that make an underclass and a permanent distinction between ‘the haves’ and ‘the have-nots,’ which is structurally built-in. I would also say that we are in a climate crisis; so, environmental stewardship, caring for the very world that God created. In addition, probably abuse and exploitation of individuals.

Now, looking at those lists of things, it is not that the church should just care about them. The church should care about the gospel. But the gospel includes a call for people to come out of Babylon and to call them to come into a new community in which those things do not dominate

us. We're still infected by the evils of Satan until Jesus comes again. So, we still have sin around us. Even the church will never be perfect, but the church cannot be the church without being engaged in opposition to these things. It's the Three Angels' message. The first of these messages pronounces the everlasting gospel. The everlasting gospel is God with us, and God is with us radically. And therefore we must be incarnationally with our neighbors.

The second angel's message is announcing the fall of Babylon (which culminated in the 20th century). The fall of Babylon is the collapse of Christendom (the temporal/spiritual/imperial form of Christianity). It is that Christendom became imperial and all other religions too. We have an imperial Christianity that lasted for 2000 years in five different forms. We've got imperial Islam. We've got imperial Judaism, we've got imperial Hinduism, we've got imperial Buddhism, and imperial Secularism, wherever you find these forms---that is 'Babylon'. What is imperialism? Imperialism is the idea that a certain individual or group of individuals think and take on the responsibility of being god. And therefore, try to tell everyone what is the good, and then to draw a boundary and say, you are inside and you're outside, and you've got to come inside to get the benefits. And the outside is not worth caring about.

One more tremendously important social justice issue is nationalism. And I mention 'white nationalism particularly because that is so dominant in America right now. So, my understanding isn't that the church's business is to preach the gospel like a five-step recipe of how to be saved. The mission of the church is to be the church. But to be the church we have to be engaged in all the issues I've talked about. It is not an either/or. Let me be very clear. Conventionally, we think of our healthcare ministry, ADRA, welfare ministries, religious liberty as 'entering wedges'. We find and make contact with people (perhaps in our hospitals), and then we give them Bible studies---and only then are we doing evangelism. I'm fundamentally opposed to that. I want to switch that around and say that the real work of Jesus was his 'Ministry of Healing' and 'Ministry of Reconciliation'; his theological explanations were just that---explanations for his caring ministry. As Ellen White states, in *Christ Object Lessons*, page 67 (I think, and I paraphrase), "Jesus' method is the only one that works. He mingled with men as one who desired their good, he empathized with them, with their suffering, and ministered to the needs. And then he bade them 'follow me.'"

And I think that is the principle that Ellen White fought for her whole life. It's a blended ministry where the doctor, the plumber, and the bread maker, or whatever your occupation, you are all involved in ministry. Because ministry is caring for somebody else. That's sharing the gospel. And then, people will be interested in why we do that. What makes us act/think as Adventists? Or why are you opposed to imperial religion? Why are you doing what you do? And that is the opportunity for us to share what we think of the gospel, and all our doctrinal beliefs. The doctrinal beliefs are the scaffolding, which enables us to do the real work of ministry, which is the caring work in whatever form it takes place.

Now, some people see tensions between Adventist identity, message and mission and the work of advocacy. They believe that theologically they are not compatible.

I see that in the reigning paradigm or the reigning model of why we work. I can see that tension appearing all the time. But if you go through the paradigm shift I'm suggesting, there can't be a

tension because the real work of ministry is analogous to God acting incarnationally. Just like God has incarnated Godself for us, so we incarnate ourselves wherever there are needs. That's the real work of ministry and that is what the church does. There's no balancing that with anything else. That is how we reach people. Part of that is of course sharing the story that we are only imperfect agents, that it's God who is doing this. And once you start telling them that God loves them and what God is doing in the world, you're into the business of sharing what we normally think of as our beliefs: God made the world, God calls us to celebrate, and worship God on Sabbath, whatever. And all of these things can be tied into the center of 'God with us'.

So, if we keep our focus on what our message really is, which is to love in light of the Advent, -- the Advent is not just what's coming in the future. That's the second advent. There's also the first, which is the first coming of Jesus, and even before that the primordial advent, which is God's coming to us in creation, and covenant, the coming from the beginning. And the Bible is the witness to this threefold coming of God. If that's the message, then we do it by practice more than we do it by talking.

Do you know any biblical passages that seem or that appear to be in opposition to the work of social justice advocacy?

Well, let me just give you one example. When we read Jesus' first sermon recorded in Luke chapter 4. Jesus goes to Nazareth. He opens the scriptures and he proclaims from Isaiah passages that are really about the Jubilee, the year of the Lord's favor that is coming, the expectations of God's Coming Kingdom. But we often take Luke 4 as only about spiritual matters, not real physical healing and liberation. Take Mary's prayer. She knows that she is pregnant and the Lord is doing something with her. We read these things and we just spiritualize them. "He came to heal the blind and make the lame walk." No, read it literally, take it seriously. Mary says, "he's got to take the mighty and bring them down. He's going to lift up the weak." We have consistently talked about reading the Bible literally. But, we've missed that. Now, you're going to get a lot along these lines from liberation theologians.

The problem I have with liberation theologians, it's not that there's anything wrong with the notice that the gospel calls us to radical action. It is that they need to realize that in the end, we need the breaking in of the kingdom of God, because we will never create a just society perfectly. So, we need to live with tension and ambivalence as the church, because we will not be perfect before the Second Coming. We are 'between the times'. We are between the first and the second advent. So we're in the middle of the *Theodrama*. I think what is helpful is to note that Ellen G. White and the early Adventist pioneers were far more engaged in social issues than we think. They were involved in temperance, they were involved in abolition of slavery, they were involved in women's suffrage, they were involved in health reform, they were involved in education reform, they were involved in all sorts of reforms . . . just because the language doesn't say 'social justice,' doesn't mean they were not social justice issues.

It's more recent Adventism, it's post-1922 Adventism that has turned its back on these issues and become a rather sectarian kind of inward-looking bureaucracy that is intent on building an empire instead of being a movement.

What about passages like when Paul says we should submit to authority, that “all authority comes from God”?

Get a good commentary and read it. Because, we've totally misunderstood it. To really submit yourself to the authorities in Romans 13 means to obey God rather than men. In other words, this is the issue that we faced in South Africa with apartheid. And the argument was, ‘well, it's the laws of the land. God put these people here.’ Do you think that the church should have followed along in the lines of racial discrimination just because it was the law of the land? No, the church shouldn't. Racism is wrong today as it has always been. Just because you quote the Bible to support slavery does not make slavery right. Just to say that God has given us a ruler? No. It is true that God asks us to live responsibly in society. That means we live with covenantal relationships. We live with multiple levels of authority. I cannot just ride through a traffic light because I want to. I can't just steal anything that I want. We have structures of organization. Yes, we obey the authorities. Don't think only of the top, think from the bottom up, because we live in community. We are citizens. But, it is very clear, we're to obey God rather than men. And when governments and leaders and rules are made that are opposed to the Lord God, we are opposed. I'll give you a classic example. The SDA church was founded while slavery was still alive in America in the 1840s, in the prelude to the civil war, which broke out in 1861 through 1863 in America, which was revolved to maintain the union, but also to abolish slavery. In order to try to stave off war, the North (Lincoln), past the Slavery Fugitive Act. So, if a slave escaped from their master in the South and traveled North, it was a crime to give them shelter. You had to capture them and hand them to the authority to be returned [to their masters]. Ellen white specifically said we are not to abide that law. And the same for all of our pioneers, . . . you can research that. It's just a classic example that Adventists do not believe that you obey the authorities no matter what. So, get good commentaries on Romans 13 and read Romans, but read also read Revelation 13 in conjunction with Romans 13, because Revelation 13 is about the beast and about imperial religions, *that should NOT be obeyed.*

What about when Christ says, “blessed are the meek, blessed are those who persecuted ...

These are public things, not private little things. The meek are those who live in the world without raping the earth. So, our massive consumer society with its focus on greed and growth, that is not being meek. So, don't read those things individually, read them as Jesus intended: for all of us.

What would be your strongest verses in the Bible to support the work of helping people, defend justice, et cetera?

Go into all the world, be my disciples. Go to all the world and preach the gospel. What is the gospel? The gospel is God's opposition to every form of bondage and God's call to come out of Babylon. The Three Angels' message. Come out of her, my people! Just don't interpret that as if it's just some little minor doctrinal issue. It's about living in a way that is fundamentally in opposition to what Babylon represents.

Can you identify some risks to the mission of the church when we embark into the work of social justice advocacy? What are some recommendations on how to minimize the risks involved in doing advocacy work?

If the church is being the church, the risks will be the risks that Jesus took. Jesus was crucified. I am not worried at all about risks like, 'Oh, it may water down our preaching, it may sidetrack us from our proclamation.' As I already told you, I think the heart of the church is to act for others, to have a vocation as partners of God in God's cause in the world. That what it means. And of course, those risks are persecution. People don't like when you mess up with the system, people don't like it when you oppose the principalities and the powers of the day. The risks are there, but they are not risks to the mission of the church. This (i.e. partnering with Jesus---in the ministry of healing, reconciliation, education, reform, 'waiting & hastening the coming of God's Kingdom---God's cause in the world) is the mission of the church.

Thank you so much!

Oral Record 8

T08L072920 – Adventist University Administrator

Interview conducted via Zoom

July 29, 2020

How would you define social justice from a biblical perspective?

Social justice is, in my mind, actively looking out for individuals who are being disadvantaged, because of their state, because of who they are, whether they're poor, whether it is race, whether it is gender, whatever it is, they're being disadvantaged. And I think it is a standing up for their rights.

How would you define advocacy from a biblical and missiological perspective?

Social justice is, I think, just the act of looking out for individuals with disadvantages. Advocacy is actively engaging in representing those individuals and their needs.

What part has social justice advocacy played in Adventist mission history?

I think a lot. I can't give you the exact details on this, but I do know that early in Adventist history, Ellen White and Bates particularly were very active in social justice issues on the racial side of things. They also did a lot looking out for other disadvantaged groups. As far as our mission's work is concerned, they have been consistently concerned with groups that have been abused or so on in different countries and different cultures, and represented them. The Adventist church has been strong on women's rights when there have been issues in certain countries with the way that they will treat women and just the whole general sense of dignity. So, I think on a number of fronts, the Adventist church has actually done a lot, both on the mission front and in North America, to look after those rights.

In what areas (theological, missiological, ecclesiological) do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

Personally, I don't. Some people do have a challenge with it, and I think it's because the word advocacy suggests sometimes a level of action that they don't actually agree with. And I think they see advocacy maybe as aggressive. I don't agree with violence as a means of resolving things. So, I should say that upfront. But I think that it's an interpretation of advocacy and social justice that I don't think is really true to what social justice is about. So, I guess what I'm saying is that in its purest form, I think social justice and advocacy do not conflict with the message and the mission of the church. Some people would also argue that, really, we should be about evangelism and not about these other issues, but I'm not sure that you can separate those that easily. If you just look at Jesus all the time, he was constantly reaching out to those in need, trying to resolve whether issues of where people were not treated reasonably or fairly. And that was part of what he was doing while he was speaking through about the kingdom of God.

What would you consider as major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

There are so many. Poverty, racial injustice, gender injustices, inequities in certain places. I think even the way different religions treat each other is a problem. For instance, some of the challenges [exist] in some countries where Christians are demeaned or Muslims are demeaned. You have multiple issues around the world. I think you have social issues that are real problems that we need to be aware of as a church and stand against as a church when necessary.

Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, against the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

No, I haven't heard one that's convinced me yet. But if you have one that you can suggest to me I'll respond to it.

What about Romans 13: 1 “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which is from God. The authorities that exist have been appointed by God.”

That's an example of taking one text out of context, because Paul certainly did not submit with authorities when it came to talking about issues, which he felt were important. And even authorities related to the Gentiles and so on. The early church went against some of the authorities, even within the early church, because they felt they should reach out to Gentiles and treat them differently, treat them better. So, I don't think that that one text can be taken to say more than it really means. Jesus did the same. So, he said, ‘get to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that belong to God,’ but at the same time, he went into the temple and he overturned the tables of the moneylenders when he saw injustice happening.

He was not silent on what he saw happening what was wrong, whether it was to the children or whether it was to the poor or whether it was to the Gentiles. I think that, with something like this, you have to take the whole Bible and look at and see the balance that is there. And then you can take your position from there. Let’s provide a church perspective too. We can't have it both ways. So, if there was a Sabbath law that came out, we would not submit to the authorities.

If we felt it was wrong and it was against the law of God, then we would react. And to me, when you see injustice and people being treated unreasonably unfairly, with a lack of dignity and respect, that is against God's law. So, why would we not feel we should respond to that if we feel we should respond to Sabbath laws or other laws like that.

Some would agree that we need to try to help those who are victims of injustices by implementing compassion ministries, but not by trying to change government or to change systems. They argue that Jesus’ kingdom was not of this world; so, we are here in transit. We help out as much as we can, but we should not try to change systems. How would you respond to that?

Well, but Jesus was also very strong on the kingdom of this world and on making that a better place for people as well as on the kingdom to come. And in that it's both the present kingdom and the kingdom to come, and he was concerned about both of those. And, to me, even if you just take the new Testament summary of the law—love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself, that says it all. And that means that when someone is being mistreated and abused, that is breaking God's law putting simply. So, for us not to speak up is basically being complacent, complicit in that act. And I don't think as Christians, we can do that. I don't think we can say it's okay, let me feed you. Let me give you some soup, but I'm not going to tell the person who is mistreating you that they are mistreating you. So, I think that in many countries we have Adventists who are part of government. That has not been so true in, let's say, the United States. But, to me that is a wonderful opportunity for people to influence the way that countries make decisions and act. So, I think that is perfectly in line with what the gospel is telling us to do.

Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, in support of the involvement of the Adventist Church involvement in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

You go back to the Old Testament, in Isaiah 58, the chapter that talks about when you come to church and the people are saying why is God against us? And God says, well, yes, you come and you fast and you do all the right things, but then you go away and you treat people in certain ways and negative ways. I don't know you when you do that.

I think that is a great chapter that emphasizes the responsibility we have towards other people now, not just into the future. I think on the advocacy side, I would still go to the way Jesus responds, you know, when he talks to the scribes and Pharisees. He basically says to them, the way you treat the other people, you basically are hypocrites, and so on. And it's all about the way that they loaded over other people and treated other people with a lack of respect and dignity. And he's very outspoken to them. That to me is advocacy. So, I think that you do have examples of that in the scriptures.

That makes sense to me. But, I could argue that there was a theocracy in the Old Testament, and that the church of the New Testament was under the rule of the Roman government, that Jesus Christ didn't make any attempt to overturn or to reform the Roman government at that time. How would you respond to that?

I'm not talking about overthrowing governments. I don't think that's our role is to overthrow governments. I guess when you advocate, you are doing something that you think that is right, that is part of bringing change in society, which to me is the role of a Christian and the role of a good citizen. I think there's a bigger conflict when you are out there for your personal gain and you get involved in politics. I think it is a matter of deciding what things you stand for, whether you stand up for things you think are wrong, when do you think something is wrong and when do you speak up and when are you silent. Back in European history, which is my background, you have the rise of Nazi-ism, and there's been a lot of conversations there about what is the role, what should have been the role of Christians and Adventists in that environment where they see something evil happening.

Some definitely did take active roles in standing up. That advocacy can take many forms. For some, it was, you know, hiding Jews, getting them across borders, protecting them. But there were a lot of people that, in different ways, stood up for what they felt was wrong. That to me is advocacy at its best. You may not say a word, but you still may be advocating for certain groups by standing up for their rights or representing their rights or helping them in a way. But you could say that they were acting against the government. Well, yes, they were, but I'm so glad that some of them did. Right? We are faced today with things, at least in America, that may not be so life-threatening. But, certainly, if actions or attitudes demean people or diminish their dignity, I think we have a responsibility to do what Jesus did in the temple. He overturned the tables of those that were abusing the people. Right? So, I think whatever that means in a positive way, I think we need to be able to speak up.

How could social justice advocacy be part of Adventist missions without compromising Scripture and the Church's unique mandate to preach the Three-Angel Message?

I'm not sure that the two are contradictory. I don't know why the two are contradictory because to me, if I see someone who is standing up for what to me is the core of the gospel, I'm much more likely to listen to what they say about other issues. And I don't think our message, the three-angels' message, is separate from our understanding of the gospel. And the understanding of the gospel is very much about loving God, loving our neighbor. Right? So, they're not two separate pockets to me. I don't have to have one pocket full and the other one empty. I'll give you a kind of a little model that has helped me on a number of things. So, imagine it; it's sometimes used as a leadership model.

At one side you have a 1 to 10, and that represents how much you care about people. At the other, you have a 1 to 10, that's how much you care about productivity. Where should you be on that graph? Should you be 10-1, better with people? or 1-10 better productivity? or 5-5 which is a compromise? And what leadership people will tell you is, no, it should be 10-10, right? You should be a hundred percent for people and a hundred percent for productivity. Sometimes that brings some tensions and it's not one or the other. And I would say the same to your question. One side, you say it's about, what I'd say, living the gospel as it's relating to people, and standing up for them and their dignity. I think we should be at 10. Three-angels' message, we should be at a ten. It should be a 10-10.

Some believe that mixing the two will jeopardize the church's mandate to preach the gospel. What do you think of that?

I don't believe that. I know that some people who will argue that. The reason that I feel increasingly strong about that is just with the current generation, because the average 18-24-year-olds, at least the ones I know and speak to, they are very much driven by, they want to be proud of a church and what we stand for and the way we represent our living faith. If we can't do that, . . . they're not interested in prophecy and message. They're very much driven by the activity and the engagement of the church in real world and representing Christ in that real world. They want the whole package. If we can't do one and they can't be proud of that and of how we represent Christ in the world, then how are they going to talk about just the prophecy beasts?

Again, go back to the gospels. How many times does Christ heal first and then give a little bit about the truth of the gospel. Or, he didn't go to the people who were lame or blind and start telling them about the gospel. He healed them first. And then he spoke to them. I don't see how you can separate those two.

What would you consider as risks or threats to mission, if any, when/if the Church is involved in social justice advocacy?

Yes, absolutely. It can go too far, where the issue becomes more important than really the people you're trying to be there for. To me it's got to be driven by our belief in the dignity of people and our role in helping people representing the image of God, and helping them find their own image of God in that way. So, once we change our motive to revenge, to putting down the other side, the people that we think are doing wrong, when it gets to something that is violent, then I think, yes, we lose what we're doing. We lose the true intent of what we should be doing at that point.

What would you recommend as ways to minimize those risks/threats?

I would start with the why we do this. We do this because of our love for God and what God has done in our lives and our recognition of the value of each individual and the dignity that they have, as created in the image of God. That is where we start from. And in that role, we want them to understand their full potential for this life and the life to come. I think that if you start there, it helps you identify whether you are doing this in order to further what is important here. The motive is key. Yes. Motive is key.

I would also say another guideline, if you like, about social justice activism. I don't think it should be an end in itself. It is to bring change that is positive for individuals, for community, church, and help create an environment where the gospel and the future kingdom will have a greater chance of thriving.

What do you think about using frameworks that are not biblical?

I slowly remember, there was something that went on a couple of years ago. I can't remember what the issue was. It may have been with DACA, but it was something that a lot of campuses reacted to and we did too. Then, the president of Calvin college did a great statement that day. When he started out, because he knew that some people in their faith tradition, as in ours, would rather be just kept quiet, he started off and said, 'what I'm about to say is by no means political, it is by all means biblical.' And then he went on to make his comments. And, I think that is part of our problem, --especially, I would say I've seen it more in the United States than in other countries actually, -- there is a feeling that you act, you take a certain position on an issue, because you're being political, you're taking a political position. That's unfortunate because we should act because we're taking a biblical position, not because we're taking a political. We should never have such belief in a political position that it prevents us from acting in what we think is a biblical role. And sometimes this position that we think we should follow, what the rule is saying, can be a political statement as well.

Thank you so much!

Oral Record 9

T09S081020 – Adventist University Professor

Interview conducted via Zoom

August 10, 2020

How would you define social justice from a biblical perspective?

There're several ways that I always preface that phrase social justice. The first one is that it has to be understood in the context of God as the judge, and as the sovereign. I think when people talk about social justice, if that's not the primary focus -- that our notion of justice has to be understood that God is a judge --, and that's when it becomes murky, and then it can become more subjective. But, a biblical notion of social justice is first that we're living in a world where God is the sovereign judge and that he's gonna hold humanity accountable for its acts of justice, according to his character or injustice against his character. So that's the first principle. The second principle is when you talk about "social justice," those are two different words that combine. One is social, and that has to do with human interaction. Human interaction functions at the interpersonal level, but it also functions at other levels like political level, the economic level. There're different ways that the Bible addresses the topic. So, I would say it has to be a more robust understanding of all the different interactions that humans have. So that's the social part of it.

And then the justice part of it is according to the way that God has outlined what he wants his people to be. For example, in Leviticus 19, he says, "be holy because I am holy." And then right after that, if you read the whole chapter, he talks about justice -- not taking bribes, not showing favoritism in the court, not taking advantage of the poor -- So justice, when we're talking about it in relation to human interactions has to do with reflecting the character of God.

So, when we say social justice, those two dynamics are always at play that God is the sovereign judge and that he is calling his children to reflect his character in matters from interpersonal relationships to the wider world of, . . . say even international, communities. And that can be political, economic, cultural and so forth. It encompasses more than just someone doing something wrong to me. That's part of it, but it's more expansive, because that's how God has outlined it in His word.

How would you define advocacy from a biblical and missiological perspective?

That's a great question. Again, the definition or the response has to be encompassing the totality of human relationships. There's advocacy at the interpersonal level. If someone is doing something wrong to their neighbor, the Bible says that you're supposed to speak up for the person being oppressed. Then there's also the notion of the international scene. So, there's this continuum. I just wanted to read a quick Bible texts to you because I think this is often overlooked. Like people say, 'Oh, just preach the gospel.' Well, the prophet Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, -- remember Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful ruler and the then known world, and Daniel worked in his administration. In Daniel 4, Daniel says this to Nebuchadnezzar: "Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you. Break off your sins by practicing righteousness and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity."

So, in every context, from one person being oppressed, even to having political implications, -- because Daniel was saying to Nebuchadnezzar what have political implications in how Nebuchadnezzar would administrate his kingdom. So, there's this continuum of advocacy, again of righteousness in doing or showing, I should say, the character of God when it comes to how we interact with other people. So, advocacy is not just speaking up for the oppressed. It's also speaking to the oppressor. And again, if we want to be biblical Christians and have a biblical understanding of justice, we have to look at the totality. And the totality in the whole Bible is that it has individual, interpersonal, but it also has political connotations as well.

What part has social justice advocacy played in Adventist mission history?

Obviously, our pioneers were against slavery. They were radical abolitionists. They connected the notion of the Three-Angel's message with the release of the slaves in the antebellum South. And they also had a notion of speaking in political assemblies to fight for religious liberty. So again, there's always a sliding continuum from the interpersonal to the political. So our church has always been engaged in the work of advocacy in terms of religious liberty. I'll just give you a quick example. When I came back to the church, on the job that I worked at, I worked on the Sabbath. When I became Adventist again, I had my pastor write a letter to the hospital that I was working for and I got the Sabbath off. So, there's this notion of the church engaging in advocacy at different levels, whether it's your job or the political system, because when our pioneers were speaking against slavery, that was a political activity.

It wasn't just 'oh be nice to people.' It was stopping a government sponsored system of chattel slavery. And even Ellen white. We are familiar with the story where she told people to break a federal law. I believe it was in 1850, the slave convict law, where you're supposed to bring back slaves to the people who enslaved them. She said, don't do it. So that was a political act that she was advocating, because it was an unjust law. So she and our other pioneers have always been engaged in advocacy when there is some type of injustice that is out of harmony with God's revealed will.

Some people may argue that it was a personal commitment to social justice, but not a corporate stand when sister White says 'don't do it, don't obey that law.' It was not the voice of the church. It was the voice of Ellen white. How would you respond to that?

I think there's a danger in saying that. She is the prophet of the Seventh day Adventist church. We try to make it seem like it was just her own personal fillings. Then we run the risk of making it seem like we can pick and choose what she said, what was inspired and supposed to be put in practice for the church and what was just her personal opinion. There's always a danger in this because then we become the arbiters of saying what's right, and what's wrong and how to judge her in terms of her work. And I appreciate the work of Kevin Burton and Jeff Rosario and Baker Benjamin Baker. They have created a series, because they're are as historians. And they have actually been putting on programs to look at how her counts.

So, to the church, like for instance, she says, "the Lord showed me." So that's something that God is advocating in terms of what he wants his church to do. And so, she gave a lot of counsel on how ministers are supposed to interact with church members, the wider society, and even the political system. I was amazed when I read the book, *Welfare Ministry*, where she actually takes

ministers to task for not speaking up for people that were being oppressed. And she talks about holding politicians culpable for their activities. So, I think there's much there that's for the benefit of the church. But if we go down that road of saying, 'Oh, that was just her personal opinion,' I think we're gonna end up in a dangerous place where we become the judges of what God says is right or wrong.

In what areas (theological, missiological, ecclesiological) do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

The biggest tension is when it comes to America. And I think bringing this up is the first tension. When most people in America think about social justice, they only think about it in terms of America and that's problematic because biblical social justice is a worldwide phenomenon, right? It's not just having to do with America. And I think that the problem is that, when people are seeing, when they're advocating for justice, they localize it. That's the first problem. Justice is not a local phenomenon. It has local implications, but it's not just a private, personal interpretation of what we think is right or wrong in our own society. So that's the first tension.

The second tension is, in that very context, the partisanship in terms of the political apparatus. A lot of people think social justice, -- if they lean more conservative -- is fighting against abortion or putting a Supreme court justice, who's going to push a conservative agenda.

And then when you talk about those who lean more liberal, they advocate a certain type of social justice. And to me, we're allowing a political apparatus to define what social justice is instead of allowing biblical principles to define what social justice is. To me biblical advocacy, regardless of what political party, it is supporting things that the Bible does advocate and fighting against things that the Bible doesn't.

But I think that's the danger. We're allowing something external from the word of God to define the word of God. For instance, the Bible does talk about the value of life. So, when we are in the abortion discussion, we need to talk about that. But the Bible also does talk about taking care of the widow, the orphan and the oppressed. So, we do need to have a voice in that conversation. But when we make it seem as if the political apparatus is the mechanism that God primarily uses for justice, then we're going to run into problems because there are things that the conservative political tradition advocates that the Bible doesn't, and there are things that the liberal political apparatus advocates that the Bible doesn't.

So, if we allow the political apparatus to dictate and to define biblical virtues and values and principles, we're going to run into problems. So those are, especially in the American context, the two things that I see as problematic.

If I understand clearly what you are trying to say is that if we use the Bible or define social justice from a biblical perspective, there should not be tension. But there will be tension whenever we use the political apparatus as framework to advocate for social justice. Right?

I'm not saying that we shouldn't be civically engaged. I think that's a quick knee-jerk reaction when you say that we shouldn't use the political apparatus primarily. I'm not saying that we

shouldn't be civically engaged and support programs or policies that care for the oppressed, the widow and the orphan, or care for the lives of the unborn. I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is that we need to have a canonical understanding of every single issue in life. Because if we don't, again, you're just going to allow some external force to control the Word of God in terms of what we advocate. For instance, there are people who only advocate certain parts of the Bible because it fits into their political agenda. And then when you bring up issues that don't coincide with their political agenda, then it becomes uncomfortable whether it's conservative or liberal. You know those two ways of thinking. So, I'm not saying we shouldn't be civically engaged. I'm just saying our civic engagement, just like Daniel, is to stand on the principles of the Word of God and hold people accountable to that.

What would you consider as major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

You have again those social interactions between humans. How do humans interact? Humans are engaged in cultural activities. So, you have some injustices that are based on subcultures. Like you have gang warfare, you have things like that. You have economic interactions. So, you have economic malfeasance, if that's what you want to call it, when people are taking advantage or manipulating or misusing the gift of wealth to take advantage of the poor. I'll give you a quick example. In Isaiah chapter 5, God holds Israel accountable. He says, "woe to you who joined field to field" right? So they were being oppressive land owners. So they were manipulating and misusing an economic system, right? And then you have the political apparatus, which can be misused to enforce unjust laws. Because again, that's another way that humans interact.

And then, you have economic, you have political, you have cultural, and then you have the interpersonal. And there's an interesting way to think about this. God doesn't just deal with what we can see in terms of our actions. He even deals with our dispositions. In Deuteronomy 15, he says, "do not sin in your heart." He says in verses 8 and 9, "take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart. And you say the seventh year, the year of release is near, and you look grudgingly on your poor brother and you give him nothing. And he cried to the Lord against you and you be guilty of sin." So again, it's these external mechanisms, whether it's cultural, political, or economic, but it's also the internal manifestation of sin. And I think when we're talking about how injustice functions, you have to look at all aspects, the internal disposition of a person's heart, as well as the external activities that are generated from a person's heart.

So again, it's not just one thing. I heard people say sometimes, 'you know, Oh, it's just a matter of the heart.' And I say, yes, that's true. But out of the heart spring the issues of life. That's what Proverbs says. So it's not just the issue of the heart. It's that people are physically doing things that cause other people to be oppressed, that cause other people to suffer pain, that cause other people to not be able to thrive and live the life that God intends for every human being to live. So there's the internal and there's the external mechanisms of injustice. And it's really too big with the time that we have, too many issues to bring up, if you talk about individual things.

For example, "don't move your landmarks." That means, don't widen your territory beyond what God has apportioned to you. He talks about different laws and he gives different principles for how Israel was supposed to interact. Just a quick example. He says, "build a peripatetic on your

roof.” That would be like a fence, right? Why? Because if someone's walking in Israel roof, someone could bump into them and they could fall off to their eminent death.

So, there's so many different aspects. We could read from Genesis to Revelation and see what justice looks like, and then what injustice looks like. But I would say the basic foundation is under the Ten Commandments and then the rest of God's revelation builds on those foundational principles. So, anything and everything that goes against those principles that God has outlined in his Word would be an act of injustice because it's out of harmony with the character of God.

But if you look at it on a global scale, what would you consider the most concerning manifestation or external manifestation of sin in the heart?

When you talk about global phenomenon, there's a couple of issues. There is warfare. You have our brothers and our sisters in Syria or Lebanon, whatever you want to call it, the Middle East, a lot of people have been displaced. You have internecine warfare in Africa. So, a lot of people have been misplaced. You have vast migrations to other countries because of warfare and displacement. And then that creates a situation that causes poverty, because if you have people going to a whole nother country where they're not able to function or work, to make a living wage in the country that they're displaced to, that creates a system of poverty. So, poverty is another worldwide issue that's affiliated with fast migrations because of warfare.

And then you have the issue of the misuse of God's creation. And I know the word climate change is a charged term politically in America. But we do have to admit that human action is causing problems when it comes to the earth's atmosphere, the earth's environment, the earth landmass. So human activity does impact the world, whether you call it, climate change or not, we have to be honest that we are depleting the earth's resources that God gave for all humanity to benefit from. But some people, because of their interactions, like fracking that causes problems, . . . when you talk about the Earth's landscape and mass. . . . building these pipelines, that's another issue. There's an intercontinental pipeline in Europe that they're trying to go. And I don't know if they completed it. Same thing in America. So you have these big corporations that are making decisions that are negatively affecting the people, the world over.

I did not tell the American government that I want them to go to war with Iraq in 2003, when we enter that war. So, I had nothing to do with that decision, but yet the political apparatus, a world government made the decision. And that has negatively impacted lives in our country and in their country. So, when you're talking about global phenomenon, you have to talk about the interests of power. What are people doing who have power? Are they using it to build a just society, or are they using it to get monetary gain or some type of interests that are only for a certain group of people? You know, we need to actually look at that because there are companies in America that benefit from warfare. There are companies that benefit from these oil pipelines. There are companies that are financially benefiting from low-wage workers in these sweat shops. I don't know a better word for it.

When we take big business from here and they establish it in another country and they pay them little wages, -- outsourcing -- they don't have to pay for medical insurance. So again, that's a company utilizing its power in a way to gain a financial benefit that actually takes advantage of

the people in those countries. So there're different ways to look at it in terms of a global phenomenon, but that's just a few issues that are interconnected. I don't think we should ever try to separate out these issues. They're always interconnected, because you're talking about human interaction.

Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, against the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

Against it? No. I think the methods that we use, we need to be well about, but there's nothing in the Bible that speaks against engaging in the work of justice. Matthew 25 is the clearest example where Jesus talks about what his true followers will be doing. And I think what ends up happening is people throw out the baby with the bath water. Just because you don't agree with the method doesn't mean that you just throw out the work of justice all together. I think for every country, what that method looks like has to be different because every country has some different political apparatus, economic apparatus. So you just can't have a one-size-fits all. I would agree with that premise. But there's nothing in the Bible that speaks against, you know, the work of caring for other people, of being Holy as God is Holy. And that does have implications for justice in society.

But, I've heard people quote John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world." This statement of Jesus has been often used to say that we should not be too concerned about changing policies or involving in social reform. We only need to care for our neighbors as a one-on-one approach. There is also that statement from Ellen White, recently used by Pastor Ted Wilson, our president, "The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses, —extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Savior attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart." {DA 509.3}. What is your response to that?

I think I have to use my words wisely. That's a very one-sided approach to this issue. Jesus saying that his kingdom is not of this world does not mean that we are to sit on our thumbs and do nothing. In fact, the Bible says that there is no disagreement in it. There's no contradiction, there's no tension. So I would say, if you read John 18, you also need to read Matthew 5 thru 7. You know, God tells us that we are to be salt, that we are to be light. If you think that just means being a nice person, then I have a problem with that because when Jesus explains that our righteousness is supposed to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees, he gives concrete examples of taking care of people and the implications that that would have. And that quotation by Ellen White also has to be understood in the context of Jewish expectations during that time.

I think if you don't take context into consideration, you'll make the Bible or Ellen White say something that they were not. Remember the Jews, a lot of the Jews expected a political Messiah, right? That was their expectation. So, in John 6, Jesus says that he knew they were going to try to force them to be King. Because they wanted a political Messiah to stomp out the

Romans. That was the problem. It was not that God was saying for all time and in all generations that we should not be involved in the work of justice. It was the way that they were trying to establish Jesus messiahship that was problematic. So, I'll give you another example. If we're not supposed to be engaged or utilizing the political apparatus, then we would have to say that what Paul did was wrong.

I don't know if you remember when the Sanhedrin was trying to stone him to death, what did he do? He appealed to Rome. So Paul was utilizing the political system to advocate for his ability to stay alive. We don't like talking about that. When Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world, he was not just saying, 'be so heavenly minded that you're of no earthly good,' or that we shouldn't do anything to try to assuage the pain and suffering that other people feel. In fact, there is this danger in the strand of Adventist theology that all we're supposed to do is to preach the gospel. The problem is what is the gospel? If you ask yourself, what is the gospel, and you have a very limited understanding, then you would have to throw out most of what the Bible says.

And I just want to give you an example of a more robust understanding of what the gospel is. If we're talking about applying the gospel, Ellen white, when she talks about applying the gospel, she actually talks about Isaiah 58. What does Isaiah 58 say that God wants his people to do? In Isaiah 58:6 it says, "it's not this the fast that I choose, to loose the bonds of wickedness?" What is wickedness? Wickedness is not just a private enterprise. There's wickedness in political and in economic and social system. So that's one thing to undo the straps of the yoke to let the oppressed go free. Isaiah was not just talking about spiritual realities. There were people who are literally enslaved. Then I'll show you an example of that. "to break every yoke. Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house? When you see the naked, cover him and not to hide yourself from your own flesh, then shall your light break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring of speedily."

And then as you keep reading, it talks more about how to take care of other human beings. And I think that's the danger. If the gospel is just some spiritual belief system, and it doesn't have any practical applications in terms of human interaction and caring for the other person and also holding accountable those who misuse what God intended to be a blessing, then we have a very truncated understanding of the gospel.

My question would be if the gospel is just some spiritual reality, then a lot of the counsels that sister White gives also have to be thrown out. I would advocate anyone who really wants to understand what are practical things we can do as Christians and as ministers and as a church in the work of justice, read the book *Welfare Ministry*, because that gives no elbow room for this spiritualized notion of preaching the gospel.

God inspired her to get very concrete and very practical guidance for the church. It's not just a person's private belief system, it's guidance for the church in terms of interacting with the wider society. She talks about that people are going to be, when caught into the halls of justice. What does that mean? Does that mean that we just give a personal private spiritualized understanding? The same thing that Daniel did. And I love the book of Daniel when it comes to how do we interact with political systems. Because we see Daniel interacting with not only Babylon, but also Media-Persia. Daniel wasn't this radical person who was just saying, 'I'm not going to

engage the political system.' He worked in the political system. Same with Joseph. They worked in the system to lift up righteousness.

And they were not just saying, 'no, sorry, I'm not going to do that because I just believe in the kingdom of God.' They said, no, the kingdom of God has implications, not only on a private and personal level, but also on the international level, because God is sovereign over the whole world. So if your gospel is personal and private, then what you're saying is that God is not engaged in the whole world. There are things that Jesus is doing that we don't know about, but it's on an international level. It has applications for how nations interact among each other. A good example, again, is Daniel chapter 10. What is Gabriel saying? He and Michael were wrestling with the Prince of Persia. So God is working, not just in the private, personal aspects of human life. He's also working on the international level.

And when he calls us to give witness to that, we can't just spiritualize away or abdicate our responsibility, just because one statement, -- Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world. That means that he's not using the political apparatus of the day to bring about his aims, but that does not mean that he is not sovereign over every political system in the world. So I think we need to be careful and mindful about how we use the Bible to try to make it seem as if God was advocating inaction.

And one more thing, just one more thing. I'll say if I benefit from a system, and then I tell someone who is in that same system, who is not benefiting from it, that they need to be quiet and accept life as it is. That means that I'm willing to call God's blessings a blessing when I'm the beneficiary of it, but tell someone else who God also intends to bless that they should not be a beneficiary of it. And that to me is a dangerous thing that borderlines on selfishness. Because it's saying, I'm willing to accept the goodness of a system that benefits me. But if someone else says that they want it to benefit them, then I call to question their right for that. That's a dangerous ideology. And it does not square with the righteousness and equity and fairness that is in harmony with the character of God.

How could social justice advocacy be part of Adventist missions without compromising Scripture and the Church's unique mandate to preach the Three-Angel Message?

I would flip that on its head and look at it in a prophetic way. If you read revelation 18, it tells you the activities of Babylon. It tells you the characteristics that are of Babylon. Then it would seem to you, -- it stands to reason if you compare with the rest of scripture, -- that the opposite of everything that what Babylon is doing is something that God wants us to do. So Babylon engages in enslaving people, right? So that's a principle of the Babylonian system when you talk about the prophetic picture. All throughout Scripture, what is the Bible advocating in terms of freedom? That God is bringing people to freedom. So just on a prophetic level, you would say any person or system that is enslaving another person or group of people is advocating for the principles of Babylon. And any group or person who is advocating for the freedom of human beings so that they can have the opportunity of freedom to choose Jesus is advocating the principles in harmony with the word of God.

So again, just on a prophetic basis, does that take away from our prophetic message? No, it's your honoring Christ according to the makeup of his kingdom, the characteristics of his

kingdom, which is for people to have freedom so they can make a rational choice for him. And you're counteracting the effect that the Babylonian, the system of Babylon in biblical prophecy that enslaves people, that deceives people, that controverts the will of God and does not give them the choice to choose God and enforces its will upon the human conscience. And I could go on throughout the whole book of revelation and just go example by example, what is the characteristics and system of Babylon and what is the characteristics and virtues of the lamb.

It talks about, in Revelation chapter 1, that the lamb has loosed us from our sins. Well, what is sin? Any system that is practicing sin, the church ought to be in its voice and practice striving to counteract that, because it follows the lamb. So whatever the lamb is doing, the people of God need to be doing in practical terms too. That's revelation 14. It talks about the pure people following the lamb, whether so ever he'd go. And Ellen G White has some interesting comments on that chapter when she talks about the church doing the works of Christ. So again, if/when people say that that distracts from our prophetic message, I would actually go to the books of Daniel and revelation and say, 'what does it say the people of God are doing?' What does it say that the forces against God are doing? And then how do we engage and interact with, being responsible, faithful Christians in light of our prophetic message? So Babylon is not just the ideology, Babylon enforces it's doctrine in practical ways. Christianity is not just an ideology. Christianity is calling people to come back in harmony with the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth and with his principles. What are his principles? How are people supposed to know those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus? Just because they say so, or because they're actually engaging in the work of showing that they keep the commandments, all of the commandments and had the faith or the righteousness of Jesus Christ? So I think when people say that, I automatically go to Revelation to say, okay, let's look at that. Because, again, we have been taught to think about prophecy as just an ideology and we sometimes just stand back and act as if we're waiting for something to happen, rather than Jesus calling us to make something happen in terms of his revealed will.

So that's one way that I could approach the issue. And then of course, you go to Matthew 24 through 26, Mark 13, when Jesus talks about the end and what his people should be doing. So if Jesus said that there's something that we should be doing, who are we to tell him that it's distracting from preaching the gospel? He never said that. So I'm not going to tell God what he should and should not be having his church do. That's not my place. I'm supposed to follow what he said when he told us about the end.

Follow up Q: Being born a Seventh-day Adventist, I grew up with the traditional understanding of Babylon as representing those who are not worshiping God on Sabbath, those who worship on Sundays, or those who do not keep the Ten Commandments. Babylon to me has represented all those who are not Seventh-day Adventists. Was I wrong?

I actually want to read Deuteronomy chapter five because we're familiar with Exodus 20 and what it says about the Sabbath. But listen to what the Sabbath is encompassing in Deuteronomy chapter five, it says, "observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant, or your female servant, or your ox or donkey, or any of your livestock or the sojourner

who is within your gates, that your male servant in your female servant may rest as well as you.” Then he says this as a mode of clause, why they should do this. “You shall remember that you were slave in the land of Egypt and the Lord, your God, brought you from out there with the mighty hand and outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord, your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. So, what is the mode of cause that God gives for true Sabbath keeping is that we are supposed to be doing the work of giving other people rest because we remember that one time we were enslaved and we did not have rest. In Exodus 20, he talks primarily about creation. In Deuteronomy 5, he talks about the social motivation for true Sabbath keeping. And that again goes into harmony with Isaiah 58. It's not just a belief system. ‘I keep the right day. So I'm okay.’ If that were the issue, then all one would have to do is go to a building one day a week and then say that they're saved.

But what did Jesus say? He said many will say to me, “Lord, Lord.” And what will he say? “I don't know you.” Why? Because they don't do the works of his father. And there lies true Sabbath keeping. It's not just refraining from an activity. It's providing a sense of rest. Not only a sense, but the actual experience of rest for the servant, for your animal. And then there's this key word for the sojourner at the gate. That's a person who is not even a part of the covenant community or at this time to the Israelite community. They did not have any rights within the system of Israel's economic or political or judicial system. But he says, even for that person, give them rest. So that's a care for the other. So again, if we talk about true Sabbath keeping, it's not just about keeping a day, it's about a care for the other person, even if they're not a part of your group.

So again, God is trying to teach us what does it really mean to worship. And what does it really mean to observe the Sabbath? Is it just refraining from playing basketball or just, I don't do this. Or has God advocating a certain type of life that Sabbath keeping would naturally lead you to? And that's why I think there's a danger when we just make it an intellectual exercise rather than something practical. Remember in Mark, I believe it's chapters 1 through 3, these are Sabbath controversies. Some of the religious leaders kept trying to give Jesus a hard time because they had this very rigid notion of keeping the Sabbath and then Jesus comes and tells them, ‘No.’ True Sabbath keeping is releasing burdened humanity from the oppression. That's what true Sabbath keeping is. And so we have so many examples that Jesus gives us of what he really intends for his people to do, what he really intends for his people to be like on the personal, interpersonal, and on the larger scale. We have to have a canonical or a completely biblical understanding, or we'll pick and choose the things that line up with what we personally believe, but do not take into account everything that God has said.

What would you consider as risks or threats to mission, if any, when/if the Church is involved in social justice advocacy? What would you recommend as ways to minimize those risks/threats?

Jesus' advocates that we're wise as serpents and harmless as doves, right? So I think trying to change political systems becomes problematic, because the Bible doesn't give us a guideline for then how a political system you want would look like. So God is not telling us to change political systems, but that does not mean that we cannot work with systems. I'll give you an example. The temperance movement, in the early 19th century. Ellen White actually worked with non-Christians and other advocacy agencies to push forward the temperance movement. And again, I

don't think we remember things like that in our history. I don't know if it's conscious or unconscious. But again, the work of freeing people from Satan's grip, from Satan's whole demands that we engage with other human beings. We can't just sit in a bubble and say, 'Oh, we're waiting for Jesus to come.'

If someone is advocating something that is right and just, and it's in harmony with biblical teaching, that's a worthy cause because it's for the upliftment of humanity. And it also shows people that we care, we care about people's physical, mental, emotional, social wellbeing. That doesn't mean that we're trying to create a worldly system where people can just walk around without any type of problems. No, we live in a world of sin. Sin is going to be with us until Christ destroys it. But I do think that there is value in looking at what are some things that are being advocated in society. What are some things that we can have a cake in society that will give people the ability to see the grace of God? One example is our health reform message. We're told that the health reform message is the arm to the body, and by helping to help men, that it will open up their hearts to receive the gospel message.

Now, if we just run in and preach the gospel, is that what we're told to do as Adventists? No, we're told that there's a work that we can do to show people that we care for them that will soften their hearts to see that we care for their whole humanity. We're not just trying to say, 'we don't care that you're a slave. Here's a Bible message for you.' No, that's not. You have to follow Christ method alone, that Ellen White says, will give true success. "The Savior mingled among men as one who desired their good, he ministered to their needs, won their confidence. And then he bade them follow him." So there's a preparatory work that we can do to show that we care for people. And once they see that we care, they will be open to the message that God is calling to complete renewal, not just physical, renewable, spiritual renewal.

So that principle would apply across the globe because we have a worldwide message. I don't believe we should go around trying to change every political system in the world. I think that becomes dangerous, but I do think that there are many worthy causes in the world that we can work in harmony with, many issues that we can advocate for as biblical Christians. There are many ways that we can help people that are oppressed, that do suffer, win their confidence, and then offer to them the spiritual food that will really give freedom to their hearts and minds. But if we don't do that, we run the risk of becoming irrelevant, that we're just preaching a message that has no impact in everyday life.

Can I summarize that last part of your intervention this way: you prioritize developing ministries of compassion instead of engaging in social reform advocacy work, even though you believe that it's important? Right?

And this is the thing. It's not a 'either/or.' It's a 'both/and.' God has given our church many gifts. There are some people that are lawyers, that have a sphere of influence that a carpenter doesn't have. And so that lawyer can have contact with people and influence in systems that can work for a more equitable and just society so that the doors of the gospel can be opened up. But then there are people who have a different sphere of influence, who have a different system or a different gift that God has given to them that can have implications and applications. So I don't think it's a one-size-fits-all, or an either/or. I think it's a both/and. God has given some people 10

talents. Some people five, some people two, some people one. Our goal as Christians is to use those gifts in any way to lift up Christ and to lift up the principles of his government, his government of righteousness and justice and truth.

So, I wouldn't say it's that either/or, I'd say it's both/and. And to the extent that God gives us opportunity and influence to positively affect change, I think we need to utilize that. But just to say, 'we should only do what I do, or we should only do what you do' becomes dangerous because God has given us specific gifts, but he's given us someone else a gift that we don't have. So, I think we can do both. I don't think there's a necessity to say we should only do one. Our pioneers did both. Some like A. T Jones would go to court and argue for religious liberty in the face of the blue Sunday laws. But then there were some people that were abolitionists, but then there were some people that were fighting on the health reform front. And then there were some people that were ministering to the homeless. So there's so many varieties of ways we can impact the world. I think it's dangerous to say we should only do what one person is doing or what one person says. God is sovereign over the whole earth. And we need to allow him to have Daniels, to have Joseph's, but also to have a Hannah, to also have a Samuel. You have so many different ways that God is working in this world. I don't want to limit him by saying we should only do one thing.

Follow up Q: *I really like that. But people may try to separate what people can do on an individual basis and what the church as a corporate body should do. And they might say, all social ministries, including policy advocacy and social reform should be taken care of by individual members or lay ministry. But the church as an institution should not be doing this kind of thing. Would you agree with that?*

You have to think about the makeup of the church. When you say the church, are you talking about the administrative branch of the church? Well, then the administrative branch of the church has again access and opportunity to political systems, to entities and other administrative bodies to influence positive change. So when people say the church shouldn't be doing A, B, C, or D, I'm wondering, what do you mean by that? What is the job of the church administration? What is the job of the layman? Who is the church? What aspect are we referring to? I think that people are just mixing everything together without understanding how each entity operates. Like we have a General Conference and that focus functions on a global level. Then we have national, divisions, . . . we have these 13 national divisions. And then within that national division, we have these unions. And within those unions, we have local conferences. So, you have people that interact on a local and limited level, and then people who interact more on a widespread and more administrative level. Who is contacting the political apparatus?

Again, I'm not advocating for changing the political system, but those people need to hear about the message about Jesus Christ and about his work of righteousness too. In *Testimonies Vol. 5*, Ellen White says something. She says, "Enough of this! We try to reach only the educated man." She says, "God wants educated men and women." She says she even advocates that some may have to go to non-Adventist schools to get an education so that they can have a wider sphere of influence to speak to the intelligent classes." So again, I think that there's two problems. One is people are down on what they're not up on. The more the Spirit of Prophecy I read, the more I

start having a lot of my personal private beliefs challenged because I'm starting to see that God's plan is not limited to my thinking.

God has many ways that he wants his people to interact. A good example is Dr. Barry Black. He's the chaplain of the United States Senate. He's not advocating for one political party or another. But when he goes to pray in the Senate, he lifts up righteousness and justice. So he has a Bible study with senators. They need to hear the Three-Angel's message too, and they need to hear it in the context of how the decisions that they're making as senators are impacting God's world.

So, I think there's a danger when we say the church, what do we mean by that? Are we limiting God by our little thinking, or are we allowing that he be the sovereign of the universe and play our part, whether it be small or large in his vineyard. I think there's this danger of having a God complex, of thinking that I'm in a position to tell God how the church should function. I'm not in that position. I want to make sure that everything that I'm doing is in harmony with God's total revealed will from Genesis to Revelation, and then having a robust understanding of the writings of Ellen White, so that we don't just try to use one quotation to support our personal belief, but that we hear the totality of what God wants for his church.

Thank you so much!

Sure!

Oral Record 10

T10J031421 – Administrator and Professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Interview conducted via Zoom
March 14, 2021

How would you define social justice from a biblical perspective?

Social justice is, in my opinion, something that you care for people around you. You are interested in their life and their life's story and you don't live selfish lives. So that means you engage yourself in acts of equalizing the social position of people. That means that people have equal opportunities. All people in the world have equal opportunities. And I know it's a high in the sky sometime because whatever country you come from, it's really defines who you are in some way. But my ideal of social justice is that all people have equal opportunities to achieve their goals and live fulfilled lives.

How would you define advocacy from a biblical and missiological perspective?

When you look into the Old Testament (OT), you do find that OT is not just about 10 commandments, but every prophet talked about treating other people justly, taking care of the poor and widows and so on. And in the Bible, in my opinion, social justice is an incredibly important theme. It's almost more important than many other religious themes. The way we treat other people is of huge importance. So, the Bible speaks a lot about social justice.

Do you think it's more important to try to meet the needs of the victims of social injustice than to advocate for social justice?

I think there needs to be a balance between the two, because the Bible talks about meeting the needs of the people. But in my opinion, often meeting the needs of the people does not address the root cause of social injustice, because you may meet the needs of the people and those people are still left in a same position, and they will need again from you in the future. Whereas, advocating actually helps people to achieve a status within a society that they can have; they can actually do it themselves in some way. So, it's putting people in a position where they can function within a certain societal parameter, so to speak, and they can do it themselves. I've heard this, maybe it's a cliché, "you give a fish to somebody, you feed him for one meal. You give somebody a rod and teach him how to fish, you give him a life-skill so that he can survive." Advocacy is exactly that in my opinion. You give the skill to somebody so that they can do it themselves. That would require equal treatment of people. That would require a government recognizing that all people should have the same kind of opportunity, rather than based on color of skin or anything like this, or country where they come from.

Have you seen advocacy play a part in the Adventist Church? What part has social justice advocacy played in Adventist mission history?

I'm not sure. When I was a pastor, I did not know anything about any of those concepts. I grew up in Poland where we did not actually think in terms like this at all. Poland was communist

socialist when I grew up and there was a general ethos of a society that everybody starts on equal footing. Everybody has the same kind of opportunity. It was communism and socialism, atheistic-socialism type of situation (different from biblical socialism). But I grew up within a society that advocated equal opportunity for everyone, without God, of course, and it fell on its face. And it was a poor country because people didn't care about what they were doing, and so on. This was an issue. But, that kind of Poland when I was growing up was a very closed society, meaning there was just us and that's it. We didn't have minorities in Poland. Everybody was on the same social footing. We all took the same bus. We all bought the same bread. We all kind of live the same kind of lives, and very few people were richer and poorer and so on. So, this kind of thing did not play any kind of role in my early upbringing.

Then I came to Australia, and I heard about the Aboriginal situation and so on. I heard about those things. But, I was a new immigrant myself trying to find my way in Australia. I was just trying to get myself into a position of where I could be on social equal footing with everybody else. And learning English was one of those things that I needed to do in order to have this. So, I did not advocate; I was not part of that.

Then I came to Andrews few years later and I did my master's and doctoral studies. And once again, I encountered the black and white issue in America and it was shocking to me because I've never seen that before. I've never seen the racial inequality like this. That was new to me. I was learning again and doing my theological studies. So, I have not actually advocated. I did not get involved with this environment.

Then I came back to Australia in 2001 and I was a pastor for a while. I was pastoring in a very poor area of Australia. I got involved in ministries like AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and other things that were helping people. Was it advocacy? I don't know. I never had the opportunity to march.

I probably would march in America during the BLM marches at Andrews. But I was not there anymore. I suppose I did some advocacy on an individual basis but not on an organized basis when I was a pastor back in early 2000's. But it was with white people who were at a very poor socio-economic level, very, very poor people. And then I went back to Andrews, then to Fiji as a missionary. And once again, how do you advocate? It's kind of difficult for me to say because I've lived in five countries in my life and each country has a different situation and a different social environment. And now I've lived in Australia for 20 months almost. I'm learning again about different issues.

So, almost I feel that in order to advocate you have to be rooted in one place for a long period of time. And I have not been. Although in America, when I was there for 11 years teaching, I came close to actually trying to do something on my own. But I have not seen the church advocating, really. Maybe the closest would be PMC with pastor Dwight trying to include the New Life church at the seminary on Sabbath and making it a part of PMC congregation, which did not work very well. So, as you see, I have not seen the church actually doing this. I kind of wondered about this, why we as Adventists have not done this? It's probably because our ethos was not social justice. Our ethos was eschatology and our belief is primarily that God will end all

inequality when Jesus comes and we are called to proclaim Jesus coming, and God will end everything. Probably that's why as a church we have not involved ourselves as we could.

What would you consider as major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

In America, I think especially of the Black Lives Matter, the whole movement. I'm very sympathetic to the movement. Of course, it has some unhelpful sides to it too, but definitely I've had black friends in America. And I've felt that they were racially profiled. I'm sure you've experienced that too. And I don't think it's just, and we as a church should be advocating for this. Absolutely.

In what areas (theological, missiological, ecclesiological) do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

Well, once again, I have not involved myself in social justice studies. There has been a whole movement over the last 50 years that died down a bit—liberation theology, especially originating in South America. That movement is basically about social justice and equal opportunity and so on. While I have been sympathetic with the movement, it has not been the focus of my studies and I involved myself more on the reformation and Roman Catholicism. This is the areas I taught. I know about liberation theology, but I have not actually been involved much with it. But I know that from biblical perspective, God does call us as a church to address social in justice issue. Micah 6:8 classic verse, “we need to act justly and walk humbly before God, and dispense justice and so on to other people” (paraphrasing). That's probably all I could say about that.

Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, against the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

No. I don't think in the Bible we have anything that could stop us. Look at Jesus. He was talking about eschatology, of course, about his second coming and so on. This is where we as Adventists we follow in His footsteps. But he took care of the widow. He touched the people, he healed the people. I don't think there's anything in the Bible that would preclude us from becoming more oriented towards social justice area.

How would you see the relationships between evangelism and social justice advocacy? Do you think that they should go together or one should lead the other?

As Adventist, we always believed that the health reform is the right arm of preaching the gospel. So, they go hand in hand. I would say that social justice could be a left-hand. I don't mean left as if it's a worse thing in any way. But, if we proclaim the health message, we can proclaim social justice message just as the same. But, there's always a danger that Adventism can become all about health reform or all about social justice. So, I think preaching the gospel is primary, but where we can, as Christians, we can use health reform and social justice as right and left hand of the message. And we can certainly advocate in some way. As I talked to you about this as

Adventist, we're definitely not doing this this well. However, people who become Adventists are always upwardly mobile.

What I mean is that their social situation improves. You could see this because they begin to save, they begin to be better human beings in some way, they don't smoke, don't drink and, and begin to save money and so on. So, you do become a kind of socially upwardly-mobile person. So, there's some aspect of social justice in that too, although however, imperfect.

But, as I'm talking, I just remembered I wrote a paper on slavery. I remember Adventists pioneers advocating against slavery and they used the passage from Galatians 3:28 that "there's no more Jews no more Gentiles, no more man or woman, no more slave or free. We're all one in Jesus Christ" [paraphrasing]. And they use that passage, not just like some Adventists use it in terms of salvation, but they actually extended it to social justice, social action in elevating women, working with those who are of different races, minorities or women who are diminished in the world. And then, as far as slaves were lower level, we need to bring them up to the same level as we are as white people who are not slaves. I've seen articles in the Review and Herald actually advocating for social justice using that particular passage.

That's good. Was it some Adventist leaders or was it the voice of the church?

I think it was the voice of the church. The articles were published during the Civil War in America in Review and Herald. And it was the voice of the church as such, because that was the magazine that was proclaiming the message of the church. So, they were definitely into those issues. And when I think about Ellen White, her son was involved with work in the South a lot, and she supported that work among the people of color there. So, I think our early Adventist pioneers were more interested in social justice than we are today to some extent as a church.

How could social justice advocacy be a part of Adventist missions without compromising Scripture and the Church's unique mandate to preach the Three-Angel Message?

There are several people who say that all this social justice concept is Marxist idea. I think this is just crazy. We can build a great framework for social justice just based on the Bible or using biblical passages. I think that this could damage the church if it becomes primary focus. God called this church to proclaim the gospel. And just like I said to you a few moments ago, social justice has to be together with health reform under the big umbrella of preaching the gospel.

It should not, in my opinion, become a primary focus because, then, it can become all consuming. I believe that while social justice is extremely important and that we must not neglect it, it's the result of the gospel preaching rather than a primary thing. The gospel does not necessarily result from social justice. I would say that preaching the gospel is primary. The gospel is primary driver and helping others and advocating for social justice comes after it's as a result of preaching.

Some people would argue that helping other and advocating social justice should be an entry point or kind of bridge into evangelism. You would see it as a result of evangelism instead, right?

I have not thought too deeply about those issues, but in my opinion, I would probably say as a result. There's a distinction between, like we talked about, meeting the needs and advocating for social justice. Meeting the needs of people as we currently do it with ADRA and other institutions can be an entry point to the gospel. I agree with that. However, advocacy is active participation in something, and that means it can take over something else. And I don't think that social justice advocacy should take over the primacy of preaching the gospel. I think that [preaching the gospel] should always be primary. And I think this is biblical in some way. To me, then, advocacy comes with the gospel, not necessarily as an entry point as when you meet the need of people.

I think advocacy is the responsibility of those who are already converted to the gospel. It's the responsibility of all of us.

How we can avoid damaging the church while doing advocacy?

Let me be completely frank with you. Some social justice causes, I suppose, could be damaging to the church. Some not, but some could be. For example, political advocacy for LGBTQ. Many people see it as a social justice issue. And I do too, to some extent. I do believe that we've treated people of that orientation in the wrong way as a church. There is no question about that. But then again, there are some difficult issues. Maybe how can we avoid damage to the church is to be selective in issues that we advocate for. Make sure they do not contradict the biblical ethos. And even with the issue of LGBTQ situation, there are some things as a church, we can advocate, there are other things we cannot advocate. For example, we can advocate for good treatment of people like this, to embrace them and so on.

But then how would you feel where you employ a person who is of that orientation in school, and that person actually actively proclaims the lifestyle as absolutely fine and that the Bible is outdated and all this kind of situation as a church. You'd have to probably not allow for something like this. You know, that's a very difficult issue because on one hand you want to be compassionate. On the other hand, you know what the Bible says. There are some social justice issues that we as a church would have to be very careful. With others we can absolutely engage and even engage in political activity. But then again, when you really look into what happens in politics and the political lobbying, you realize that even lobbying for social justice causes can turn devilish, or can become an angry kind of enterprise and can destroy the Christian ethos, so to speak.

You can see this actually happening in America during the last summer where you've got an incredibly good cause, but which people took too far, where the property was damaged, where people got killed and stuff like this that damages the cause, totally damages the cause.

I'm pretty sure that if in America there was no damage to buildings, to establishments, if protesters were all peaceful, then it would be a much greater voice in America. But because it resulted in the vandalism, people are afraid of this. And I think this is probably the danger for the church.

There are some people who actually get over-involved and go too far. Because the issues of social justice are very emotive issues. Emotions get involved when you really believe in the cause that you would chain yourself to the tree and you will die with the tree. And this is probably too far. And I think the danger for the church is that if we lost sight of the primary mission that God gave us, it would be very easy to embrace the social justice causes and just forget about the primary mission, because your whole being gets involved. And I know how it is, because when I would work for the people in Tasmania, sometimes I lost perspective, I would lose the greater picture of all of this. I would get involved emotionally and it damaged me to some extent.

So, to answer your question, we need to keep focused on the primary call of God for the church and don't close ourselves to be involved with social causes, but don't get carried away.

Do you think that the tension between eschatology and social justice advocacy in the Adventist Church is real or is it just a result of people's misunderstanding of Scripture?

I think it's real. Absolutely. And it's tied to social justice. As Adventist, we often think it is God's job to actually bring into social injustice. So, we need to preach the gospel and to preach the end of the world and God will come and make an end to social injustice. So, there is a real link. Absolutely.

How about our soteriology, the way we define salvation? Does salvation include the current life or is it concerned only with the afterlife? Those who think salvation concerns only the afterlife usually don't care too much about social justice issues. What do you think?

Well, I don't think there's an official definition of salvation, but I'm a firm believer in the fact that we are saved, not just for eternity, but we are saved for today. And I do believe that when we preach the gospel and help people to embrace Jesus Christ, a social situation improves. So just preaching the gospel is very much tied to social justice. I've seen numerous cases when people had terrible lives and this goes to the board, it goes in poor countries, anywhere you go. When they embrace Christ, they become part of a community and their social situation drastically improves. So, I think that properly understood, the gospel carries the seeds of social justice in itself. If we'll listen to Jesus and we watch what he did and how he behaved, then social justice is part of the whole thing and does not nearly need to be emphasized.

But that is another issue altogether when you become politically involved. I know of Adventist pastors who became involved politically, and they basically left the church and left Christianity. I'm not sure that this is the way. I almost feel that the Bible allows us to be concerned about others. In Philippians chapter two, you've got this beautiful passage, "do not just be concerned about your situation, but be concerned about others also" [paraphrasing], and then it says, "have the mind of Christ who, although He was God, He became a slave." [paraphrasing]. In this passage alone, in Philippians 2:1-8, it's all about the gospel and social justice in some way. So, becoming a Christian instantly makes you aware of the situation of the others around us, and want to help them and preach the gospel to them and see them being lifted up from their social position. But does it extend to political advocacy? That's another matter.

Do you believe that social justice advocacy is included in the gospel itself or that they are kind of two entities?

It's included in the gospel, but depending on what you mean by advocacy, because I'm discovering in our conversation that advocacy can have two different meanings. Advocacy means that I'm concerned about my neighbor and help them, and preach to my church that we need to be concerned about preaching the gospel, we need to be concerned about people around us and help them, and let's organize programs that we can actually do help people. But this is one way. Another way is that the church suddenly tells the pastor, you have to now run for the government so you can be our mouthpiece, you can be our politicians, so we can actually achieve social justice goals via our youth through you. That's another matter altogether.

Don't you think that we need to make the difference between the principle of social justice advocacy and the way it can be implemented?

It is difficult. It is really difficult. How this can be implemented without becoming another lobby group? And then again, some social justice causes that people perceive as social justice causes are not biblically-mandated, and how far do you involve yourself with those? Do you reject some and accept some? It's just a very difficult issue for us as a church.

As far as my research is concerned, we are talking about biblical advocacy, advocating for causes that can be defended by the Scriptures.

I've known of churches who involve themselves with local councils and help the councils to do with the issue. For example, in New Zealand, there is a church that works with the government. It's a secular government. It's an advocacy group called Crime to Christ. So, the church talks to prisoners and helps the prisoners to embrace Christ. And they left the life of crime. It's an advocacy group for prisoners and they work with government, but they're not a political group. It's just a program that government likes and supports, even though it's a secular government, because it helps people not to go back to jail. It's a program that transforms people's lives.

And I think if we can combine the social justice causes with transforming people's lives, that would be probably the best kind of option. But you can go and get involved with social cause and damage property, and that just damages the gospel too.

I think I have covered all my questions. I don't know if you have anything else you would like to add?

I can only add that at time I feel like a poor example of social justice warrior and that's been bugging me and I don't quite know how to deal with this. I've always lived in kind of a cocoon type of environment one way or the other, either Adventist or societal. Australia has social justice issues, but they kind of very much hidden. It is my new departmental assistant who is very much into this. Our answers probably will be totally different than mine. She did studies in that area and she would probably say that we should be lobbying government. We should be doing this. We should be doing that. I'm more cautious, but God need both of us. And I'm sure

you'll get different answers from her. But, yeah, I've seen what happens in America and I'm appalled by the whole racial divide in America.

Partly because it's not a part of my upbringing. You know, I tell people that the first time I saw a black person was when I was 18. I've never seen anybody, not on TV or in real life because I grew up in a communist country. Everybody looked like me. And I did not have those social justice bugs implanted in me when I was young. My girls are a little bit different. They are much more attuned to those issues because we kind of try to implement some of the things. And then they learn in their school, of course. They were in school in America. They were in Ruth Murdoch [it's a different situation now than it was], where social justice issues were at the forefront of some of the things that kids do. They would be much more advocating than I am. I recognize humbly that I'm a poor social justice warrior, even though I know the Bible's message.

What is your opinion on this quote from EGW? "The government under which Jesus lived was corrupt and oppressive; on every hand were crying abuses, —extortion, intolerance, and grinding cruelty. Yet the Savior attempted no civil reforms. He attacked no national abuses, nor condemned the national enemies. He did not interfere with the authority or administration of those in power. He who was our example kept aloof from earthly governments. Not because He was indifferent to the woes of men, but because the remedy did not lie in merely human and external measures. To be efficient, the cure must reach men individually, and must regenerate the heart." {DA 509.3}

That quote almost exactly expresses the sentiment I expressed to you in our conversation, that there is a social advocacy and there is a social advocacy. You can see it as involving yourself in government and politics and all of this. Or you can see it as quietly working behind the scene and advocating for the poor within your local spheres and talking to people and helping creating initiatives within the communities rather than on a government level. And that's why my hesitancy in being involved with government issues, because when I noticed that often Christians do corrupt themselves to achieve their goals. So, I would say that quote is pretty much spot on. It can be read that we should not be involved in social justice advocacy, but that depends how you define it. She addresses a specific form of social advocacy, but there could be other ways of socially advocating. And we need to not throw the baby with the bath water and say because of this quote we should just totally get not involved. I don't think this is the message of Ellen white.

She refers to the lobbying, the government, politics, etc. And that's exactly what I told you throughout this conversation. I'd be hesitant to become a politician in order to deal with social justice things. But at the same time, social justice advocacy and social justice advocacy, that could be different things understood differently. I believe you can be a social justice advocate without being involved with government, like she says.

Because you will find plenty of other quotes about Jesus speaking about justice and being involved. And you can't use one quote. You have to use the whole message of Ellen white and she was not against social justice. Absolutely not.

Do you see social justice advocacy included in the Three-Angels' messages?

Sure! It's the gospel. I have this quote somewhere. I have it in a presentation on hermeneutics of slavery. I found this amazing quote in Adventist Review.

““There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”. . . .Can a language be more express and conclusive than this? The distinctions here dissolved by waters of baptism, and blended into “one in Christ Jesus,” are not, as our Southern brethren assert, simply religious, but NATIONAL, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL—slavery, and the spirit of case and clan which upholds it, alike forbidden, and liberty, equality, and fraternity, social, political, and religious, proclaimed as the rule of Christ’s kingdom.” [RH 18 (October 8, 1861)].

This is the preaching of the gospel, using Galatians 3:28. This is the gospel. This is the Three Angels’ message. Yes, it’s not Ellen White who says that. But it’s our pioneers. So, absolutely, advocacy for social justice is part of the gospel. I would be totally not true to myself if I say anything otherwise.

Thank you so much!

Oral Record 11

T11M050421 – Administrator and Professor from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Interview conducted via Zoom

May 4, 2021

When you hear the word advocacy, what come to your mind as a theologian, as a leader in the Adventist Church?

I would define advocacy as speaking for those who cannot speak for themselves (1) and helping those who cannot help themselves (2). So, it is supporting the speechless and the helpless people among and around us. You may find that definition very short, but looking at it from a biblical perspective, probably one of the best expressions is what Job said in his speech. “I was a father to the needy,” “I was eyes to the blind,” “feet to the lame.” These are metaphorical expressions, but basically that's what it is to defend the cause of the ones that cannot defend themselves.

As the concept of advocacy is very often associated with social justice, how would you define social justice?

I think advocacy is part of social justice. Advocacy is one of the means through which social justice can be achieved. Social justice is the greater picture. I think in the Bible you wouldn't find the term social justice. It has been recently coined, at least as far as I know. Yet, the concept is present in the Bible. The Bible presents a God who is always on the side of the underdog. He is always the one that tries to defend the weak, the helpless, the orphan, the widow, the socially deprived. And in that respect, I think the Bible is full of social justice. If you think of the very beginning of the Old Testament story, God comes in the life of the Israelite nation because they cry out for help.

The text in Exodus says, “and God heard their cry.” And you can go through the entire Old Testament and the entire Bible. God is about to establish a society that is based on social justice. And if you read all the legislation of the Old Testament, or the prophetic writings, everything is meant to establish a society in which there is equality.

Now, of course, that needs to be nuanced because people can ask, what about slavery and other kinds of similar things? But if you understand the context, you see that God always brings an improvement to the local context. That is a far cry from that reality in the direction of social justice. The Old Testament is all about advocacy and social justice and establishing a society that is closer to God through righteousness in that respect.

Have you seen advocacy being a part of the mission of the Adventist Church?

Well, I think so. But that needs to be also nuanced. Because if you look at the history of our church, I would say that our church has always been involved in that. If we look at our pioneers, from the beginning, we started as a movement that sprung from people who were oppressed. I wouldn't say always in a racial sense, but in a social sense. Certainly, because those who believed in the message of Miller and the Second Advent were ostracized from their community.

The Methodists, the Baptists, and so on, they were dis-fellowshipped or sent away. So, from the beginning, the Seventh Day Adventists represented a community that was socially outcast. And probably their understanding also of the Bible led in that direction. And when it comes to abolitionism, when you read Ellen White's writings, it is clear that she was an advocate of abolitionism. We can go on and talk about others. Butler, at the beginning, was on the other side, probably. But as he came to understand the message of the Bible deeper, he became himself an abolitionist.

I'm not an expert in Adventist history, but what I have learned from this history is that the church has been heavily involved in those things. Consider their attitude to the law of the fugitive slave. Ellen White spoke up. It doesn't matter. You have to take them [the fugitive slave] in, you have to protect them. You have to give them refuge. All that shows that early Adventists were very sensitive to the needs of the socially outcast people.

And also, if you read what Ellen White says about the differentiation based on color. She calls it one of the most egregious sins to make a difference between people based on their color. Of course, the thing is the church, I would say, has not always maintained the ideal of the pioneers in this respect and probably in some other respects as well. But, as we look at our more recent history, probably there are some moments here and there in our history that we cannot be proud of in terms of that. And then of course, there's always an action and there is reaction, and we have comebacks, and we have some moments of consciousness in which we say, well, we have to do something about this.

I wouldn't say it's a very constant thread or it's like a golden thread that is just going through all of our history. Probably not. But it is there very clearly at the beginning. It is there in some parts of the world where this issue probably has been more in the forefront.

And probably lately I see that there was a strong act to emphasizing it. I mean, if you look at the latest two executive committees, the One Humanity's statement of the General Conference. That is strongly for respect for everybody irrespective of their social, ethnic, racial, whatever background. And also in the latest Spring meeting, at least in the mission issues committee, we had a very strong discussion and presentation on ethnocentrism, nationalism, racism, casteism, and all kinds of reasons that are plaguing the society, and also had an effect on the church.

A follow up question. As you are talking about those official statements by the church, some would argue that those statements are not really useful. First, because they have not been translated in other languages. Second, they are not being made available at conference or even union levels of the church. Nobody really knows about those statements. As a result, many Adventists on the ground still believe that they should not take any part in advocacy for social justice. What would you respond to that?

I think that's a general challenge that things do not go all the way down or do not reach all in what I wouldn't like to think of a pyramid structure. But I think, at least in our division, we try to bring it to the attention of our unions. We raise those issues at our division meetings. And one of the biggest challenges that we have is that some people, some leaders think that we do not have an issue with that. And for me, that becomes the issue. I've seen that the biggest issues are in

places where people think they don't have any issue with that. And, you don't need to quote me on this one, but I just want to show you my perspective on this.

As I told you, I come from Romania, but from a Hungarian minority. So, I grew up in a minority group that has a completely different culture and a completely different language. And even within the church, the Romanian majority had difficulties understanding why do we need to have our own Hungarian speaking churches, when we understand Romania perfectly. "You leave everyday in our country in Romania, you are a citizen, you speak the language. Why do you have to have your own churches in your own language?" We try to explain, telling that it's a different thing. When I pray, I want to pray my native language in the language of my heart and all that. It was difficult for them to understand until a large group of Romania immigrated to Spain, to Italy, to France, to all over the place in Europe. And then they realize that yes, they live in Spain, they understand Spanish, they speak Spanish, but yet when they gather for Sabbath and for church, they want to keep it in Romanian. It makes a big difference. And I asked them, do you know, why do you need that? And they smiled. They said, now we understand. I would say it is not ill intent.

I see that sometimes when you are in a majority group, you just simply do not have that chip that makes you sensible or sensitive to the needs of a minority. I always use this illustration. The elephant goes to the mice and tells him, 'let's lean against each other and have some rest.' And the poor mice is sweating, is groaning, he's having a hard time. And the elephant says, "why is it so difficult for you to just lean against me and relax?" You get the point. When you are in the minority group, you cannot be treated equally because that's not fair. Equal treatment to non-equal groups is completely unfair.

And I think sometimes this is what we are lacking, that we think that giving just the equal rights and status for everyone, we are equal. But equal people can be treated equally, but non-equal entities, if they are treated equally, that's an injustice. And, I think we still have a lot to do in opening the eyes and the minds of our people. And I speak of Europe because this is what I know best. I don't want to go to Africa. I know stories, and I know things, but that's not my world. But I come to Europe, which is highly nationalistic. It's amazing how Daniel has been fulfilled. Our people are first French and Germans and Italians, and after that, they are probably Christians and probably after that, they might be Adventists.

I think we have a lot to do in raising awareness, in disseminating the materials. . . It's a long way to go until we become advocates for non-Adventists, for groups that are outside of the church. Sometimes we are not even attentive to our own people inside the church. What I learned from looking even at the Bible is that social change requires time. It doesn't happen overnight, even as much as you wanted to. And I am fully sympathizing with people who say, "yes, but it's easy for the majority or for the big group to say it takes time, you have to be patient, but for us, we're living in difficulties. And there we are, always drawing the shorter straw." It's not that easy, but still, I have to say, it takes time.

Now, as you said, because it takes time, intention, effort, and resources, many leaders of the church will tell you that this is going to be a distraction for the church to get involved in

advocacy for social justice. Do you see any tension between the mission that God has given the church and involving in advocacy for social justice?

If I see tension? I would say, yes, I do see tension. If I see incompatibility? I don't. I think all of our big fundamental truths exist in a tension. I think it was Niels Bohr, Nobel Laureate in Physics who said that "the opposite of a simple truth is a lie. The opposite of a complex truth is another complex truth." And I think that we sometimes find difficult to understand that the biggest truth in the world, even in the world of physics, and also in the world of theology and the Bible exist in a tension. And basically, we have this tension built in our name. It is Seventh-day Adventist. The "Seventh-day" anchors us in this world. It's creation. It's about preserving creation. It's about taking care of the world. It's the first mandate of human beings, to keep and to cultivate. And that's the social mandate basically.

The other one is the eschatological mandate, the Second Coming. Adventism exists in this tension between "the 7th day" and "the Advent." But we need to keep them both. And this is where we have a problem. And what I have seen in my experience is that Adventists who are more leaning towards the right, they focus on the Advent, the eschatology. You have to proclaim it. We have to prepare the work for the second coming. We need to give them the warning message. And I say, hallelujah, amen! I agree. This is what we need to do.

But Adventists that lean more towards the left sometimes lose the eschatological perspective because they are so busy, involved in doing justice in the world. And that's okay. That's important work needs to be done. But I think we need to be able to maintain these two in a balance and tension. Yes, because Christ is coming, we need to do this. And yes, we are doing this, we need to bring justice, we need to bring the kingdom here and now, because Christ has come. So I think, yes, there is a tension because there's always a tension. We tend to emphasize only one, then we go one extreme and forget the other. That's how I see it.

Profound! I've not heard anyone presenting it the way you just did. I really appreciate that. That tension in our name, the present and the future, the eschatological part. . .

And, I can see that sometimes, we criticize one another. We criticize the more conservatives that only want to focus on Christ's coming, the end-time's events, the warning message, and all that. I criticize you because you are so absorbed by this future that you can hardly touch reality. And the other group is so absorbed by spreading the kingdom here and now that they tend to forget that we have also an eschatological perspective. And personally, I think that we need to keep that balance. And not only at a community level, at a congregational level, in our theology, but also at a personal level, because if I'm not balanced as a person, I tend to be an extremist in one side or the other. And that's not good for the church either.

Can you list a few major social injustices in the world today that you think the Adventist Church should be concerned about? Because we may not be able to address everything, if you could prioritize, what would you include in that list?

I think it's where racism, nationalism, tribalism, ethnocentrism, caste-ism, and all things like those, when they become systemic. They will always be present in individuals. But when they

become part of a system because of our blind spots, I think those are the places where we need to lift our eyes first and our voices, because that becomes a problem. I think we, as Adventists, we should speak against all kinds of discrimination. And it depends on where you live sometimes. I want to try to strike a balance. I understand that many Adventists are very afraid of social justice, because they are afraid of the agendas of other social groups that would go beyond our comfort zone and espouse values that are not ours.

Allow me to mention the LGBTQ agenda that is clearly present in society today. And it is a very strongly driven agenda. I mean, you can hardly watch an innocent movie that is not even rated. You suppose that you can watch it with your kids. And all of a sudden, the LGBTQ agenda is on the forefront of that movie without any rating. That's just the normal thing. And of course, we Adventists, we feel that if we go into this social justice and advocacy, it is almost impossible not to be swallowed by this larger movement that has some undercurrent that represent values that is just opposite to what we believe or what we consider to be the biblical teaching. And this is the difficult thing.

But given the value of human beings and the value that God puts on freedom and personal choice, can we advocate the freedom of all? Even if that freedom is going to be used against what God thinks is good and right? That's a very hard question, but I think we will have to, as an Adventist Church, we'll have to grapple with that. Can I be an advocate for religious liberty for groups that believe biblical nonsenses? My answer to that is I have to, because otherwise I'm a partisan, I'm just believing in the liberty and freedom only of the Adventists. If I have to advocate the religious freedom of everyone, I have to allow for the possibility that, yes, everybody is free to choose to worship the way they want even if biblically that's not correct, or that's not what the Bible teaches according to my convictions.

And of course, again, can we find a balance when it comes to issues of gays and lesbians and all that? Can we see that they are free to exercise their liberty, at the same time say that their lifestyle might not be according to the Bible and might be sinful, but yet they still have the right to exercise their freedom? These are difficult questions. I don't have a final answer to this. But I can see that how these tensions come into the church, and because we have certain principles and fundamental beliefs, sometimes we want to stop halfway in providing social justice only for a certain category, we try to draw the boundaries and that's difficult.

And of course, we need to give more attention to studying that, coming up with clear positions and principles on how to do that, how to be involved in social justice in a way that keeps our identity and principles and mission, and how to choose those groups that we want to affiliate with. That's another challenge. That's another problem. Because again, social justice is such huge issue. If we just want to do it alone, probably we are too weak to accomplish anything. Ellen White always spoke about the fact that in good causes that are noble and that are respectable, we could join with non-Adventists if you don't have to give up on our principles. And I think this is the question. How do we choose those agencies of advocacy in such a way that we try to advance these causes, but on the other hand, we are not going to compromise who we are. It's a complex question.

It seems to me that Adventists prefer implementing compassion ministries (palliative approaches addressing the needs of the victims of destructive structures) because of the ambiguity around the concept of human rights, which is defined differently according to particular contexts and cultures. What do you think of the way we way Adventists approach human rights?

The concept of human rights, of course, again, is not in the Bible in the sense it's not a strictly biblical concept. Of course, it can be taken to an extreme, and then it becomes completely useless because everybody can claim rights whatsoever. You have the right to all kinds of things. But I think, if you start from the Bible, it's a little different concept. And I would say nobody has any rights because we have forfeited our rights. We have chosen sin and rebellion. And everything that we have is by grace, nothing is by right. Of course, this is a biblical religious concept. And if you take that to society, it doesn't make sense, again. Because they say, okay, so what? if everything is by grace then you have to give grace to everyone and you end up again with a non-defined, amorphous concept.

But I think that the concept of dignity of human beings, I find it helpful because it says human beings have been created according to the image of God. And even if that image has been marked by sin and by the consequences of rebellion, still these human beings are made in the image of God and they are redeemed by the son of God. So there's an infinite value to human beings, and it gives dignity to humans. And I think instead of speaking about rights, -- which is in a sense revindicating 'I'm right' -- if you approach it from the dignity perspective, the value of human beings, then it's not something that you have to fight for but something that needs to be recognized. It is there. You don't have to fight for it because you already have it.

This is the way I can philosophically speak into the issue of rights. For the right, you have to probably fight for it. But if it's the dignity of all human beings, it is there, you just have to recognize it. Of course, it's easier to go to palliative care, as you mentioned it.

But if you look at the Bible, you have both. If you look at the New Testament, especially in the early Christian Church, they didn't have probably the structures and the means of being advocates, because they were one of the poorest and the oppressed groups. So they embraced the oppressed, they picked up the babies that were thrown out by the Romans. They took care of all the people during the social unrest. They just did what they could.

But on the other hand, if you go back to the old Testament, and if you read the prophets, it's not only binding the wounds, it is righting the wrongs. It is changing structures, because the prophets were speaking to the kings and the kings were the authority figures that had the ability to reinforce structures or to change structure in society. Basically, the structures were there, they would just be ignored and neglected because God established them through all the legislation that He provided to Israel. And in that case, I would say, it's not just trying to help the victims. It is trying to change society, the structure of society. Of course, one can argue that Israel was a theocracy, and that was a completely different society. And here again, we need to strike a balance because, I think individually, if Christians intend to go into politics and social service and public service and legislation and policy making and all that, I think that's perfectly fine. But when it comes to the church as an entity, I think the church should stay apolitical.

Yes, the church can affiliate with different organizations as long as there are no strings attached and you have to support social initiatives and all that. But here's the balance. If you look at the New Testament, even at the old Testament, God wanted to change social structures. And He does it both by giving legislation and clear directives, but he also does it by transforming the people inside out. I dealt sometimes with the issue of slavery in the Old Testament. "God, how can you say that Israelites can have slaves?" This is ridiculous. But if you understand the context, you know that in that society it is preferable to be a slave of someone than to be completely broke and independent because you die. If you lost your land because of bad administration or natural catastrophe or whatever, you have nothing to survive and you have to feed your children and your family. It's better to be a slave of a fellow Israelites. Now, God says you are supposed to treat your slaves as your smaller brothers so they love you so much that when the seventh year comes and you have to tell them you are free, they will say, you know what? I prefer to stay. Because you treated them so humane as if they were your family members. And it says, instead of facing the uncertainty of survival and the future, I prefer the certainty of your house and of your kindness. So I want to be your slave for the rest of my life.

And if you understand that context, God couldn't change completely the social structures of the time, because that was the situation. But He wants to transform the people in the system. And then the system, even if in itself is not perfect, it becomes more reflective of who God is and His grace and love. The same thing with slavery. And far from me being an advocate of slavery. No, it's wrong, it's unjust, it's terrible.

And especially, I speak about the Old Testament and the New Testament, which is completely different from the chart of slavery that was practiced in modern times. It's completely different, but even that is not the right thing to do.

But what I want to say is, again, you see the New Testament, you don't have a blatant condemnation of that. Even Paul says to Onesimus, 'you go back, and I will write a letter to Philemon. And don't worry, he will receive you as a son.' And we hope it happened that way. But instead of changing social structures, that is very difficult and sometimes not in the power of the church to do, we can still do something else. That being said, I still believe that there's place for a way in which we can advocate for social structural change.

First of all, within the church. I think we need to have policies in place that are sensitive to and preventing systemic nationalism, racism, favoritism, ethnocentrism and all that. I think we need to do that within the structures that are in our power. And for social structures, I think we need to raise our voices like Martin Luther King and others. I think the Adventist Church has not been in the forefront. But I also believe that we should not also make a confusion between the purpose of the gospel and to solely equate it with social justice like the Liberation movements. This is my personal opinion. You do whatever you want with it. But I think that if we reduce the gospel only to the social gospel, we missed the element of redemption. And that's also important, the transformation of the heart, the transformation of human beings, to the image of God, the restoration of people, not only in their social rights, in their social status, but also in the deeper dignity as children of God. And I think we need to do both, they have to go hand in hand. That's where I stand. And I don't know if it's helpful.

It is. My next question would be, do you have any Bible verses or any quotes from Ellen White that support the involvement of the church in social justice advocacy?

I don't remember it exactly. I have found some quotations for myself. But the first volume of *Testimonies* has some, and what strikes me is that Seventh-day Adventists incorporated abolitionist arguments into the Three-Angel's messages. And this is amazing to me. Because it comes from the eschatological message of the church. And it has very clear social consequences. For example, Adventists emphasized that pro-slavery Americans, they are unrepentant. And because of that, they are part of Babylon because they don't see the value of the creator. And the first Angel's message says that we should worship the creator. So recognizing the creator means treating people equal. To me, that's amazing. You wouldn't start from the Three-Angel's messages to get to social justice. But that's what they did.

And, Ellen White specified that Seventh-day Adventists that are holding proslavery sympathies must be immediately disfellowshipped. I think if you read *Testimonies I*, p.259, and p.358, you will find it. They also connected slavery to worshipping the Beast. This is amazing to me. And if you look at Ellen White's personal example, again, I have found some very interesting cases. For example, soon after her marriage in 1846, God instructed her to show particular interest in the motherless and the fatherless children. And she based that on Isaiah 58. She says, "I have taken children from three to five years of age and then educated them and trained them for responsible positions."

So she goes out personally and takes children in her house when she lived in Australia – Sunnyside, next to Avondale. That place, Sunnyside, became an asylum for the poor and the afflicted and for the sick and the suffering. And, I have found that interesting thing. Thomas Reston, a local businessman, said that when Ellen White left "her presence in our village will be greatly missed. The widow and the orphan found in her a helper. She sheltered, clothed and fed those in need. And where gloom was cast her presence brought sunshine." So it's amazing that not only what she wrote, because she raised her voice against all these things, but also what she did as a personal experience.

You said also if I have a favorite Bible verse. My most favorite one is Isaiah 58. There are other interesting ones, but one of my favorites is psalm 72 that says about the king, it's about Solomon. Psalm 72: 12 - 14. "*For He will deliver the needy when he cries, The poor also, and him who has no helper. He will spare the poor and needy, And will save the souls of the needy. He will redeem their life from oppression and violence; And precious shall be their blood in His sight.*"

And probably, the most significant one is Psalm 68: 5. It says that God is "*the father of the fatherless and the protector of the widows.*" And to me, those verses show that God is number one in social justice. He is the one who himself takes care. He declares himself to be the God of the orphans and widows, of the oppressed and the needy. And to me, that's the most powerful argument. If God is that, what about God's children? To me, the personal example of God tells me that I have a responsibility myself.

Good. So, now the opposite. Do you have biblical arguments or Spirit of Prophecy arguments against the church involvement in social justice? Someone argued, for example, that Jesus

said in John 18:36, "my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would fight for me." And other passages like when Paul recommended to submit to authorities.

I don't see it that way. I think that it depends on the means that we are using. But I think in my definition, advocacy does not involve violence. So, I want to make that clear. You cannot fight for God's cause with the means of the devil. It's clear. So I believe that violence, coercion, forcing people or even cheating, all of these methods are excluded. You cannot use those methods because you cannot build the kingdom of light with the weapons of darkness. It's not going to work.

But I think what Jesus refers to there is that we should not use violence. Because my kingdom is not from this world, I'm not going to use violence. If that would have been the case, I could have asked my Father to send the Legion of angels and they would have fought, but that's not the case. And, I think that raising our voices, using our influence to change social structures and policies, there is any Bible passage that would go against that.

Okay, good. Now I have just two more questions. What would you consider as risks or threats on the church when/if we are involved in social justice advocacy?

I think I have shared already before in our discussion that we might lose our balance. If you get so much absorbed in the social change that you neglect the spiritual change. That's one aspect. The other aspect is that we might get entangled with organizations that have a different agenda and unwittingly we might espouse an agenda that is not God's or ours. Those are the risks that I see.

So, what would you recommend to those who want to get involved in trying to redress unjust structures? How could we do it in a way that would be helpful and not cause any harm to the church?

I think first of all, we need patience. Second, we need impatience. And I'm not contradicting myself.

I think we need to know where we need to be patient and where we need to say enough is enough. And that requires wisdom. I think we have agencies such as ADRA and others that we could use to penetrate different areas of society, where we can be in positions where we are listened to. I always tell people, you know what, I don't know how, I don't know when, I don't care how much you could do. Because you will not be able to drive a car from the rear bench, or from the rear seat. You have to sit at the driver's seat if you want to drive the car, but you have to get into that position. And probably there is no more annoying people than those that are sitting behind or next to you and are trying to do the driving.

And I think this is where we need to have agencies and organizations that are doing so much good that the governments are listening to us through those. Sometimes the church directly cannot have that influence because of prejudices and all that. But I think it doesn't hurt even for the church to be seen as more involved in social issues, sincerely. And at the same time, I think

we need expertise. I think this work cannot be done in an amateur way. Some think that because they just shout louder probably somebody will listen to them. No. I think we need experts. We need the experts in law, experts in social work, experts in sociology, experts in psychology, experts in even in social sciences in terms of policy making and all those. That's why I encourage Adventist young people to go and study, and see what you can do.

And when we have experts and we become one of the best, . . . I can think of doctor Williams. He is one of the most well-recognized social scientists at Harvard. When he speaks, the world listens, not because he's an Adventist, but because he is one of the best-known social researchers in North America at the moment. And if you become an expert in these areas, -- law, social sciences, -- all that, then you have a voice that you can use. And I think with that, you can do more than just being loud and noisy and achieving nothing. That's my 2 cents of worth. Take it for what it is.

It's been great. I really appreciate your insights so profound, Dr. Barna. Thank you so much for your time.

Oral Record 12

T12C052821 – Administrative Assistant from a Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
Interview conducted via Zoom

May 28, 2021

How would you define social justice from a biblical perspective?

Advocacy is being the spokesperson for the oppressed. The following passages from Scriptures provide a biblical perspective on social justice: Isaiah 58

v6-7

*“No, this is the kind of fasting I want:
Free those who are wrongly imprisoned;
lighten the burden of those who work for you.
Let the oppressed go free,
and remove the chains that bind people.
⁷ Share your food with the hungry,
and give shelter to the homeless.
Give clothes to those who need them,
and do not hide from relatives who need your help.*

v9-10

*“Remove the heavy yoke of oppression.
Stop pointing your finger and spreading vicious rumors!
¹⁰ Feed the hungry,
and help those in trouble.
Then your light will shine out from the darkness,
and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon.*

Leviticus 19:33-34

Do not mistreat foreigners who are living in your land. Treat them as you would an Israelite, and love them as you love yourselves. Remember that you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Zechariah 7:9

“Long ago I gave these commands to my people: ‘You must see that justice is done, and must show kindness and mercy to one another. Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners who live among you, or anyone else in need.’”

Luke 3:11

“Whoever has two shirts must give one to the man who has none, and whoever has food must share it.”

James 1:27

Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

How would you define advocacy from a biblical and missiological perspective?

Jesus' defense of woman is a biblical example of advocacy.

John 8: 1-11

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. ⁷ They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" ⁸ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

⁹ When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. ¹⁰ Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

¹¹ "No, Lord," she said.

And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

John 12:1-8

⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it^[c] for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

What part has social justice advocacy played in Adventist mission history?

I have not seen much interest in the Adventist Church in advocacy, particularly with regard to race.

The church is conservative in its values. It has not done enough in the area of social progressiveness, embracing diversity, (of woman for example). Racism still prevails. It's a bit disappointing because one should expect more from Christians, because at the Cross we are all equal.

I believe that silence is complicity.

In what areas (theological, missiological, ecclesiological) do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

The perceived link between SJ and politics, and caution against becoming involved in politics

The need to keep the gospel (i.e. the salvation of people) as the core mission and priority, not just their welfare

The use of social welfare as an “entering wedge” for the gospel – can be perceived as manipulative or disingenuous by outsiders

What would you consider as major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?

Major social justice issues: Racism, oppression of women, refugee mistreatment, poverty – increasing gap between rich & poor

Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, against the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

None. Perhaps that it distracts from central mission of gospel.

Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, in support of the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).

We, Adventists, have a very special message to proclaim, which is the Second Coming. And we often use that as an excuse not to do much about social justice.

But John the Baptist had a specific message (The Messiah is here) however he linked this with social justice now:

Luke 3:10-14

¹⁰ *The crowds asked, “What should we do?”*

¹¹ *John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”*

¹² *Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”*

¹³ *He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”*

¹⁴ *“What should we do?” asked some soldiers.*

John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.”

EGW, Min of Healing:

“During His ministry, Jesus devoted more time to healing the sick than to preaching.”

This article, (<https://record.adventistchurch.com/2021/02/18/was-aunty-ellen-a-social-justice-advocate/>) “Ellen G. White and Social,” portrays Ellen White as a social justice advocate.

She argued that “we should not only know the truth, but we should practice the truth as it is in Jesus”. This focus remained an unaltered mandate of her entire ministry—truth in terms of its

practical application in the “Lord’s service”. In this context, she recalled her calling’s specific nature: “I was charged not to neglect or pass by those who were being wronged . . . I am to reprove the oppressor and plead for justice. I am to present the necessity of maintaining justice and equity in all our institutions.”

Re Australia: After her departure to America, The Bible Echo (August 19, 1901) published an editorial expressing the Church’s protest against government abuses and mistreatment of the Indigenous people: **“Every opportunity should be improved to create a public sentiment against the brutal customs above described** until the authorities take hold of the matter and inaugurate a vigorous reform. The blot is a foul upon the country, and should be eradicated without delay.”

Acts [the book of Acts].

The early church had a message but was also practical – looked after poor & widows, sold possessions, etc.

What would you recommend as ways to avoid/minimize risks/threats associated to social justice advocacy?

Use the right language.

Have a dedicated arm of the church devoted to this in the same way we have a “health” arm, and a “religious freedom” arm. That arm would do more than what ADRA has been doing. Because you need to get to the root cause. Before actions happen, thinking happens. We need to correct the conversation and thoughts. A lot of thoughts that underpin today’s aboriginal situation in Australia have to do with eugenics theory, even though it became discarded after WWII. The thought of that is still around. Wintley Phipps said regarding what happened in SA that the Adventist Church should confess and repent.

Thank you so much!

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary

Researcher: Michelet William
9142 Woodland Dr, Berrien Springs, MI 49103
(269) 861-1352
Advisor: Petr Cincala
(269) 471-3589

The following questions are given to guide the Interviewee to develop his or her thoughts in order to give an oral answer as detailed as possible. Please try to answer the questions to the best of your ability while you share your views, knowledge and experience related to social justice advocacy.

1. How would you define social justice from a biblical perspective?
2. How would you define advocacy from a biblical and missiological perspective?
3. What part has social justice advocacy played in Adventist mission history?
4. In what areas (theological, missiological, ecclesiological) do you see tensions, if any, between social justice advocacy and the Adventist mission and message? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).
5. What would you consider as major social injustices in the world today that the Adventist Church should be concerned about?
6. Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, against the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).
7. Can you think of theological reasons/arguments, if any, in support of the involvement of the Adventist Church in social justice advocacy? (feel free to provide biblical references and/or EGW as appropriate).
8. How could social justice advocacy be part of Adventist missions without compromising Scripture and the Church's unique mandate to preach the Three-Angel Message?

9. What would you consider as risks or threats to mission, if any, when/if the Church is involved in social justice advocacy?
10. What would you recommend as ways to avoid/minimize those risks/threats?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary

Research Title:

“Beliefs and Practices about Social Justice Advocacy among Adventist Leaders”

Principle Investigator:

Board (IRB) Office:

Michelet William, PhD candidate
9142 Woodland Dr,
Berrien Springs, MI 49103
(269) 861-1352
micheletw@andrews.edu

Advisor:

Peter Cincala, PhD
(269) 471-3589
cincala@andrews.edu

Institutional Review

(269) 471-6361
irb@andrews.edu

Statements about the Research:

This research study is part of the Principle Investigator’s dissertation project, in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Philosophy in Mission and Ministry at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this research is to explore beliefs and practices about social justice advocacy among Adventist scholars/administrators/leaders.

Procedures:

The interviewee will receive the questions ahead of time. This will allow the interviewee time to think about the questions ahead of time and be free to expound on the questions at length at the interview, unencumbered with questions from the interviewer. At the interview, the interviewer may step into the conversation for clarification or keep the interviewee oriented to the research question. All questions will be subjective in nature. The purpose of the research is for the interviewees to express their personal views and experience regarding social justice advocacy, and make suggestions and recommendations that will inform an Adventist missiological framework for social justice advocacy. Their thoughts will allow for further interpretation by the research in a later period. Questions will be asked of the interviewees to aid the researcher in the interpretation, seeking the interviewee to interpret what they believe social justice advocacy means theologically and missiologically.

At the interview, an audio recording device will be set up, and after a brief introduction to the topic by the interviewer, the interviewee will be free to talk, sharing answers to the questions sent ahead of time. The interviewer will sometimes comment or ask further questions for clarification and direction.

After the interview process, a transcription of the audio recording will be made and will be sent to the interviewee for correction of content. The purpose of the transcription is not for publication purposes, but for ensuring accuracy, and it will be kept in a safe place accessible only to the research for future reference. The transcription will be used as primary data, both for descriptive purposes, as well as interpretative purposes for the dissertation research.

Duration of Participation of Study:

1) 30-minute, audio-recorded interview; 2) following editing by the Principle Investigator, Participant(s) will make additional editions to the transcription of the interview in order to create the final interview transcript. Once the Participant(s) has approved the transcript, the Participant(s) concludes role in the study.

Risks and Benefits:

This study poses no anticipated risks beyond minimal risks. Concern(s) of confidentiality are addressed under the section, Confidentiality. This study presents no tangible benefits for the Participant(s). However, the Participant(s) receive the intangible benefit of contributing to the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the broader Christian community by means of the Participant(s)' practical experience and theological interpretation, fostering a better understanding of and pertinent guidance for the church's social engagement.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality:

An interview transcript document for the nature of this study acknowledges that there is a lack of confidentiality. The interview transcript does not keep confidential the Participant(s) own statements revealing one's personal experiences, memories, and identity. Personal information such as Participant(s) personal address and telephone number will be kept confidential. Additionally, the audio transcript will be kept confidential, though a CD of the recording may be sent to the Participant(s) at his/her request.

At the Participant(s) request, the interview transcript may be anonymous, concealing the subject(s)'s identity. If so, the Investigator will use codes or identifiers (e.g., subject ID numbers) for the data, so that only the researcher can trace the identity. This data will be password protected and stored on the Investigator's computer.

Waiver of Confidentiality:

I understand that creating an interview transcript necessarily reveals my identity. I waive my right of confidentiality.

Name (Signature) : _____

Name (Printed) : _____ Date: _____

Request for Anonymity:

I request that my identity be concealed for the interview transcript, hiding my name, and using codes or identifier numbers for the data, so that only the researcher can trace my identity.

Name (Signature) : _____

Name (Printed) : _____ Date: _____

Statement of Consent to Participate in the Study:

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked.

Participant(s) Signature(s): _____

Participant(s) Printed Name(s): _____ Date: _____

Investigator's Signature: _____

Investigator's Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary

Researcher: Michelet William
9142 Woodland Dr, Berrien Springs, MI 49103
(269) 861-1352
Advisor: Petr Cincala
(269) 471-3589

This survey explores the views of the Adventist community (students, faculty and staff) at Andrews University (AU) about advocacy for justice. This is a voluntary survey that takes about 10 minutes or less. Anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed. By participating, you will contribute to a doctoral dissertation project and help develop a framework for transformational advocacy from a biblical and missiological perspective. The first 50 participants will receive a \$10 gift card.

If you have any questions about this important study contact Michelet William at 269-861-1352, micheletw@andrews.edu, or Petr Cincala at 269-471-3589, cincala@andrews.edu. Those who may have questions regarding their welfare and rights regarding participating in the study, please contact AU IRB Tel. 269-471-6361; irb@andrews.edu.

Research question 1: What do contemporary Adventists believe about advocacy?

Survey questions	Type of variable, Values	Measurement/Analysis
<i>Advocacy and the Adventist Church</i>		
1. The Adventist Church through its administrative branches should take a public stand on issues of social justice such as affirmative action	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree)	Frequency - %
2. In the face of social injustice, the Adventist Church should call for change in the surrounding society, the wider world beyond the community of believers	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree)	Frequency - %
3. The Adventist Church as a body should take action to hold people and institutions accountable for creating,	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree)	Frequency - %

implementing, and sustaining just and good policies and practices geared toward the flourishing of society		
4. At which level(s) should the Adventist Church advocate for justice if any? (check all that apply)	Nominal (checkboxes): - Global/international level (e.g. United Nations) - Government/national level - Local level (city, town, village) - Church family (Gen. Conference, Divisions, Unions, Conferences, and churches) - Individual/informal (person-to-person) level	Frequency - %
5. Who should primarily advocate for justice within the Adventist Church?	Nominal (multiple choice): - GC, Union, Conference, Churches, members, all of them, none of them	Frequency - %
6. Adventist Pastors should advocate for justice in society from the pulpit	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Never – 5=Always	Frequency - %
7. The Adventist Church should invest in training its pastors and missionaries in advocacy for justice	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree)	Frequency - %
<i>Corporate advocacy and social injustice</i>		
8. In the face of systemic/social injustice, which of these four attitudes/approaches, the Adventist Church should emphasize the most:	Nominal (multiple-choice): - abstention or silence, compassion ministries, position statements, advocacy for structural change	Frequency - %
9. The Adventist Church should focus ONLY on evangelism aiming at saving individual souls, letting secular organizations deal with social justice issues.	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree	Frequency - %
10. The Adventist Church should encourage its members to engage in advocacy for structural change in society	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree	Frequency - %
<i>Evangelism and Advocacy</i>		
11. Evangelism should be accompanied by relief assistance, community services, healing, restoration, and welfare ministries	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree	Frequency - %
12. Evangelism should be accompanied advocacy for policy/structural change	Ordinal (Likert scale): 1=Strongly disagree – 5=Strongly agree	Frequency - %
13. Regarding the relationship between Social Ministry and Evangelism, which of these four views/approaches do you think is most suitable to Adventist missions?	Nominal (multiple-choice): - Social Ministry and Evangelism SEPARATE from each other - Social Ministry as a CONSEQUENCE of Evangelism - Social Ministry as a BRIDGE to Evangelism - Social Ministry and Evangelism as PARTNERS	Frequency - %

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Research question 2: What do contemporary Adventists practice about advocacy?

Survey questions	Type of variable, values	Measurement/Analysis
<i>Practices of advocacy in Adventism</i>		
14. How would you rank the following social issues in terms of priority for the Adventist Church's advocacy agenda if any?	Ordinal (Matrix/rating scale): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Racial injustice - Economic inequality - Domestic violence - Religious intolerance - Mistreatment of migrants/refugees - Corruption in government - Destruction of nature - Human trafficking - Arms proliferation 	Frequency - %
15. Has your Union, Conference, department or church carried out any kind of advocacy activity during the last 2 years?	Nominal (multiple choice): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes - No - I don't know 	Frequency - %
16. If yes, what kind of advocacy activity has your Union, Conference, department or church carried out during the last 2 years? Please check all that apply:	Nominal (check-boxes): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing in newspapers, the Internet or social media - Ads using posters, flyers, or billboards - Public rallies, sit-ins, or street demonstrations - Public rallies, sit-ins, or street demonstrations - Face-to-face meetings with state/government authorities - Participation in policy forum discussions - Legal assistance and/or Training for victims of right violations - Link victims of right violations to authorities 	Frequency - %
17. On what social issues the advocacy activity of your Union, Conference, department or church focused on? Please check all that apply:	Nominal (check-boxes): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Racial injustice - Economic inequality - Domestic violence - Religious intolerance - Mistreatment of migrants/refugees - Corruption in government - Destruction of nature - Human trafficking - Arms proliferation - Other 	Frequency - %
18. If you were the head of a Union, Conference, department or a church, what might cause you to reject an advocacy proposal? (check all that apply)	Nominal (multiple-choice): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocacy is not biblical - Advocacy is not the part of the mission of the Adventist Church - Advocacy is not a priority - Concerns for the safety of our members, personnel and facilities - Not enough funds 	Frequency - %

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not having the approval of the governing body - Not have the required training and skills - Advocacy activities are planned for next year 	
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Demographic Data: Age, Geography, Occupation, Gender, Race, Education, Field of Study

Survey questions	Type of variable, values	Measurement/Analysis
19. Select your age range	Nominal (multiple choice): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 18-24 - 25-34 - 35-44 - 45-54 - 55-64 - 65+ 	Frequency - % Correlation
20. Select your Division	Nominal (dropdown): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - North-American (NAD) - Inter-American (IAD) - South-American (SAD) - East-Central African (ECAD) - Euro-Asian (EAD) - Middle-East and North-African (MENAD) - Inter-European (EUD) - North-Asia Pacific (NSD) - Southern Africa-Indian Ocean (SID) - South-Pacific (SPD) - Southern Asia (SUD) - Southern Asia Pacific (SSD) - Trans-European (TED) - West-Central African (WAD) 	Frequency - % Correlation
21. What is your current occupation/profession?	Nominal (dropdown): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pastor - Administrator - Faculty - AU Staff - Student/unemployed 	Frequency - % Correlation
22. Select your gender	Dichotomous (multiple-choice): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male - Female 	Frequency - % Correlation
23. What is your ethnic background?	Nominal (multiple-choice): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - White and not Hispanic - Black or African American - Asian or Pacific Islander - Hispanic or Latino - More than one of the above - Other (specify) 	Frequency - % Correlation
24. Where is your current permanent residence?	Nominal (dropdown): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - United States - Canada - Europe/Australia - Africa - Asia 	Frequency - % Correlation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Caribbean - Central & South America 	
25. What is the highest training you have completed	Nominal (dropdown): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High school - Some college - Bachelor's degree - Master's degree - Doctorate – professional - Doctoral – academic 	Frequency - % Correlation
26. If you are student at Andrews, in which program are you enrolled?	Nominal (dropdown): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MDiv - MA Religion - PhD Religion - DMin - DMiss - MSCIDP - MSW - MMus - Communication - Critical Mental Health Counseling - Curriculum and Instruction - Educational Leadership - MBA - MSA - PhD Archeology - MPH - DTP - Nursing – DNP - Undergrad. Behavioral Science - Undergrad. Religion & Ministry - Other (specify) 	Frequency - % Correlation
27. In what year are you in your program at Andrews University?	Nominal (dropdown): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1st year - 2nd year - 3rd year - 4th year - 5th year - 5th year & plus 	Frequency - % Correlation

APPENDIX E

SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary

Introduction and Purpose – this survey explores beliefs and practices about social justice advocacy among Adventist administrators/leaders. There are no right or wrong answers. We wish to know what administrators/leaders believe, and their attitudes towards social justice advocacy. The survey takes about 15 minutes. We very much appreciate your participation in this voluntary survey.

Inclusion Criteria – You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Procedures – If you chose to participate in this survey, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire that asks a variety of questions about your involvement with and attitudes toward the Church and its programs. In addition, there are questions about personal beliefs and attitudes.

Risks and Discomforts – There are no physical risks involved in filling out the questionnaire. You may find some of the questions sensitive; do not answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

Benefits – You will not receive any direct individual benefits from participating in this study. However, the survey results will help your Church understand what members think about core beliefs and Church programs. The information gathered will be used by the Church to change or develop programs and practices to meet the needs of Church members.

Voluntary Participation – Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may discontinue your participation in this study at any time. Do NOT answer any question that causes you discomfort.

Duration of participation – Your participation to the survey ends as soon as you complete and submit the questionnaire, which takes about 15 minutes.

Anonymity and Confidentiality – All information provided is anonymous and confidential. There are no identification numbers of any type on the survey; we have no way of knowing who

you are. Do not place your name or any identifying mark on the form. Data analysis, reports, presentations and publications will only focus on data combined from multiple participants.

This is an important study to try and help understand the views on social justice advocacy and develop a biblical framework for people in ministry to act wisely and effectively in the face of injustices. We hope you will be willing to fill out the survey.

If you have any questions about the study contact Michelet William at 269-861-1352, micheletw@andrews.edu, or Petr Cincala at 269-471-3589, cincala@andrews.edu. Those who may have questions regarding their welfare and rights regarding participating in the study, please contact AU IRB Tel. 269-471-6361; irb@andrews.edu.

By filling out the questionnaire, you are giving consent to participate in this study.

THANK YOU!

Michelet William
PhD Student
Andrews University

VITA

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- 2023 PhD in Religion (Missiology/Ethics), Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
- 2016 M.Div., Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
- 2000 MSA in International Development, School of Behavioral Science, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI
- 1993 Bachelor in Management Science, School of Higher Education in Technology (ENST), State University, Haiti

WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2022-Present Pastor, Philadelphie French-Haitian SDA Church, Indianapolis, Indiana Conference, IN
- 2008-2013 Country Director & Program Manager, Plan International, Mali
- 2001-2008 Program Manager, Plan International, Haiti
- 2000-2001 Food Security Coordinator, Central Plateau, World Vision Haiti
- 1993-1999 Monitoring Director & Field Operations Coordinator, ADRA Haiti

PUBLICATIONS

William, M. (2021). "Gen Z and Their Rights to Participation. *180 Symposium Publications*. 4. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cye-pubs/4>.

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SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

William, M. (2021). "A Critic of Gutierrez' Liberation Theology from an Adventist Perspective," *Adventist Theological Society (ATS)*, San Antonio, Texas.

William, M. (2019). "The Social Gospel Movement and Adventism in Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Century in The United States," *Adventist Association for Religious Studies (ASRS)*, San Diego, California.

William, M. (2018). "Youth Participation from a Human Rights Perspective," *Michigan Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*, Alma, Michigan.