This issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* focuses on the plight of the marginalized in society. God’s people have from the very beginning been instructed and required to offer care and compassion to the widows, orphans, strangers, and disenfranchised. Jesus also highlighted the fact that these were the people he had come to serve when he said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed be to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come” (Luke 4:18, 19 NLT).

There are all types of marginalized people in our world—tribal people are often thought of as barbaric, uneducated, and sub-human. Children are taken advantage of by their parents and those who should protect them. The Roma people (Gypsies) have lived at the margins of society for hundreds of years. Indigenous peoples have had their land snatched from them, been decimated by the diseases of the encroaching colonists, and had their language and culture labeled as primitive and backward.

Groups that are discriminated against exist in all societies of the world, and it seems that it takes very little for one group to look down on another group. Marginalization can occur because of group affiliation, ethnicity, skin color, the level of one’s education, economic status, religion, and a host of other trivial matters. Regardless of why marginalization occurs God’s people are called to remember that every person is made in the image of God and thus has incredible worth and value.

Christian mission and Christian compassion ministries are very active and involved in working among the “least of these.” It is always gratifying to see the response by Christians to tragedy and crises as they mobilize to send aid and assistance to those in desperate need.

This *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* features several articles dealing with Adventist responses to marginalized people. I have great respect and admiration for those working among the marginalized for they often work for years unappreciated and unobserved even by most of their fellow church members. But, Jesus knows and has promised that “when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me” (Matt 25:40 NLT).

Bruce L. Bauer, Editor
“The bananas fell and killed the dog. Momat ate the dog!” I glanced up into Chyam’s beautiful face. She loved her husband. For the past few days she’d been faithfully caring for him in the provincial hospital. Yet she was sure that medicine and doctors weren’t enough to heal her husband. The sickness that clung to him was more than malaria or tuberculosis. He was dying because he ate the dog the bananas killed. “What do we do?” her eyes pleaded.

Suddenly all my years of being a Christian spun by me. My mind raced through the four years of theology I’d championed through. I had once felt prepared to begin ministry, but I couldn’t think of anything I’d ever learned or experienced that dealt with Momat’s situation. I knew dogs weren’t clean meat, but it didn’t seem the right time to bring up Leviticus 11. My mind raced with how to find a cure, but I didn’t know enough about medicine. And perhaps Chyam was right about medicine being useless. I sensed that evil spirits were involved. I knew God was big enough to chase them away, but how could I explain that to these people? Momat had eaten the dog the bananas killed.

In the spring of 2002, my wife and I moved into the hill country of Cambodia along the Vietnamese border. Mondulkiri is Cambodia’s largest province yet it is the least populated and considered to be one of the most remote provinces in the country. We arrived in the rainy season and the roads into the province were nearly impassable. Most villages throughout the province could only be accessed by foot, oxcart, or elephant. Yet we immediately began searching for the Pnong people.

The Pnong live in villages throughout the forested province of Mondulkiri along the border. For centuries they have maintained a subsistence economy based on swidden agriculture and the gathering of local resources from the surrounding forests. They are a semi-nomadic people and rely on the natural resources surrounding them. Traditionally, everything they
need to survive comes from the forest and their upland rice fields near their villages. The swidden or shifting cultivation includes clearing a section of the forest and then burning the trees. On the newly cleared land the Pnong grow a form of hill rice, interspersed with a wide variety of vegetables and fruits. The surplus food from their fields usually provides them with nourishment for nearly half of the year. Hundreds of Pnong women walk to the provincial center each day carrying their back pack baskets to sell produce in the market. Though the sellers rarely pay them enough, the woman are able to use the money to purchase salt, MSG, sugar, clothes, fishing line, flashlights, and other necessities. If their rice harvest is good, they will have rice for at least seven months. Then they depend on what they can find in the forest.

We found it hard to even find the Pnong at first. The clusters of thatched dwellings are easy enough to locate, but the villagers are often gone. Many are deep in the jungles sleeping in their field huts. Others are hunting, fishing, or collecting supplies in the forest. Still others are walking to and from town. One day we arrived in a village and greeted the few people who came out of their huts with the only Pnong words we knew, jit han. Though most Pnong know some of the Khmer language, in their homes they speak only the Pnong language. Of those that can speak Khmer, very few can read or write. We repeated the Pnong words over and over to the curious, though somewhat confused villagers who stood in a semi-circle staring at us with no response. After several more discouraging attempts in other villages, we finally found out that jit han means “Where are you going?” and had to laugh with our new acquaintances. We spent the next few months learning the words for chicken, duck, and dog. Anything we could see or touch was easy to learn about through pantomime, but we longed to know how to express the feelings of our heart. And we sensed that we had not yet entered the real Pnong world. Then a young man invited us to follow him into the jungle—to see his parents’ rice field.

Suddenly we were in another realm. Everything was new and we were the students sitting at the feet of our teachers. For there in the field hut we met an old man and woman, Koin and Yau. Most of the Pnong people didn’t know what to do with us. They seemed to enjoy staring and laughing at our funny skin, hair, and clothes. But Yau and Koin felt sorry for us. They exclaimed, “What? You don’t even know what a fish basket is or how to plant rice? Didn’t your parents teach you anything?” They invited us to come back often and learn the basics of survival. “Because you sure need help,” they assured us. And with that we began a friendship that led Yau and Koin to eventually refer to us as their own children. I will never forget their generosity and patience with us. For over two years they spent nearly every day teaching us to weave baskets, work the fields, fish in
the stream, shoot a crossbow, and prepare pumpkin leaf soup. But as we worked on survival skills, Yau began to show us a hidden world.

“Don’t talk about him out loud,” Yau warned us, lowering her voice to a whisper one afternoon. She was squatting by the cooking fire in the field hut. “If we don’t give him chicken liver and blood we won’t have a rice crop.” Without warning she violently twisted the little stock of rice she’d been holding. “He may kill us.” The hut fell silent and I wondered if I had asked one too many questions. I glanced up at her and she held a finger to her lips then looked away and out through the low doorway. Who was she talking about? Why was she so scared?

Another day we asked Yau about the spirit poles at both entrances to their field hut. The odd knobs at the top had shaved bamboo on the sides like hair. She said, “They are called ‘their heads,’” pointing to her own head. We asked what they were for. “To make it watch the house, to make it watch the people, make it watch the rice, make it watch the animals, make it watch the food in the field.” We asked, “Does it watch over the jungle or the water?” Yau shook her head and gave us a look of pity. “Of course not but if it doesn’t watch, they will come from the jungles. People will get sick and the rice and vegetables in the field will die.” My wife and I looked at each other in confusion. What was it? Who were they?

“I dug up the termites,” Yau explained one morning as we stood looking down at the fresh hole in her field hut. “The soul-eating sorcerer came a few nights ago and was scratching,” she pointed to the woven bamboo wall of the field hut. She illustrated by curling her fingers into claws and moaning scary ghost sounds. The grandkids scurried away in all directions before she continued. “Koin’s throat began to swell and it spread down his arm. He could hardly breathe. At first I thought of the termites, but Koin was still sick after I dug them up. Then I realized the soul-eating sorcerer was angry with me for delivering Liu’s baby.” I pictured Yau, the midwife, going to poor Liu’s hut in the night. Liu was an impoverished widow with three tiny girls. I looked back at Yau. “Liu didn’t have a pig, of course, so without the purification, my husband and I had sin. The same soul-eating sorcerer who killed Liu’s husband was now killing mine. I told Liu she had to find a pig for sacrifice. She had to borrow one, but when we finally killed it and placed the blood on Koin, his swelling immediately whet down.” What was a soul-eating sorcerer and why the termites?

I spent months sorting through the information I’d gleaned with Koin and Yau. I invited a Christian Pnong man to my home to help me understand. Slowly I began to see the world through the eyes of the Pnong. And slowly I began to understand the unseen world Yau had been showing me.

If you were to tell the Pnong that God loves them, they would imme-
diately think you’re talking about the spirit of the rice. It may bring blessings of abundant harvests, but the word love wouldn’t seem to fit. If you told the Pnong that God’s Son, Jesus, had come to save them from their sins, they would wonder how the rice had given birth to a son. The rest of the sentence wouldn’t make sense at all. Sin, to the Pnong, is a blemish we receive when a spiritual law is broken. Sin can come from touching a woman who has just had a miscarriage. Sin is speaking the name of your father-in-law or touching your sister-in-law. It can be spread from one home to the next through a visitor staying in your home. The cause of sin is much less important to the Pnong than the cure. A blood sacrifice, from the death of a tiny chick or a piglet can purify from most sin. Serious sin, like having twins that are a boy and a girl, require the blood of a chicken, duck, dog, pig, cow, and water buffalo if you can afford it. To the Pnong, there is no good news in the words God loves you or Jesus came to save you from your sins.

Evangelistic Challenges

Though Cambodia has several versions of the Christian Bible and hundreds of Christian organizations working in the country, the indigenous people of the highlands remain mostly untouched by the gospel. Why? There are several main reasons. First, for decades the highlands have been geographically cut off by poor roads and bad weather. Second, the multiple tribes of indigenous people each speak separate, unique languages. Third, the indigenous people are animists, in contrast to the national Buddhist religion. Fourth, the Khmer have traditionally looked down on the minority people and don’t respect their unique culture. Fifth, the indigenous people are oral communicators in nature and have a difficult time relating to the literate Western cultures that are involved in bringing change to their part of the world.

Geographic Challenges

For centuries the Pnong and other indigenous hill-tribe people have lived and worked deep in the jungles of Cambodia separated from the rest of the country by hundreds of miles of wilderness. Roads to the capital city, linking the Pnong to the rest of the world, didn’t even exist. The rainy season lasts half of the year with rivers and streams overflowing their courses and trails and roads often being washed away. Thus the Pnong continued their lives the way they’d always known with very little interaction with outsiders. Those wishing to share the gospel with the Pnong have had to first find a way to get to them. But that is changing now with new roads. This year the government completed a new paved road from the capital city of Phnom Penh to the provincial capital of Mondulkiri.
Language Challenges

There are at least eight separate languages used in the highlands of Cambodia, besides a number of dialects, spoken by separate and unique tribal people. Most villagers speak some Khmer, the national language, but very few speak it well enough to call it their own. Even fewer can read and write the national language. Some wishing to share the gospel with the indigenous people have started language schools, to help them learn the national language. Others have chosen to invest the time and energy in learning an indigenous language well enough to speak at a heart level with the people, which may take years. Reaching more than one group at a time is nearly impossible without starting all over.

Religious Challenges

Buddhism is the national religion of Cambodia. Yet the highlanders practice animism, the belief in natural spirits combined with ancestor worship. While the lowland people frequent the Buddhist temples, filled with the bright orange-clad monks, chanting their memorized prayers, the hill people focus on the vast array of spiritual forces surrounding them in nature. Every animist group has a unique code of spiritual rules they believe and follow. Understanding the deep, often hidden spiritual beliefs of the people is of paramount importance when trying to discuss religion with them. Otherwise well intended words may mean something completely unintended by the missionary.

Challenges of Discrimination

The Pnong, about 30,000 people, are the largest ethnic group of the highland people. Collectively the highlanders number about 100,000 throughout the northeast of the country. But they are by far a minority in the country. The Khmer have traditionally looked down on the tribal people. Even the word Pnong has become a derogatory term meaning savage or cannibal. Even the Khmer Bible translates *barbarian* in Colossians 3:11 as *Pnong*. Many stories have circulated in the lowlands about who the Pnong really are. Some say that they have tails like monkeys. One story says that the Pnong will sometimes kill and cook their own daughters in honor of a guest visiting their home. Many Khmer feel that the Pnong are uncivilized, dirty, and incredibly ignorant. Even among the Christian Khmer there are a lot of negative attitudes towards the indigenous people. Very few Khmer will “lower themselves” to learn the Pnong language or seek to understand its unique culture and religion. Without this knowledge they can never be effective evangelists to the Pnong.
Challenges Associated with an Oral Culture

The indigenous people of Cambodia traditionally have not had a written language. They have relied upon the elders, the shamans, and the storytellers to remind them of important information. Questions about the spiritual code of law are answered by the elders. The shamans are a bridge between villagers and spirits and show the people what is required of them by the spiritual powers around them. The storytellers remind them of their history and important values by telling the old folk tales. Oral cultures think differently than literate cultures. They rely on relationships with people to give them the information they need. And they are completely unprepared to use and unwilling to trust inanimate objects, such as books, to give them new life-changing information.

Sharing Good News

My wife and I have been struggling with these issues for over nine years now. We arrived with the plan of telling the Pnong people about God and watching the Good News flash from church to church, village to village as people accepted God as their Savior and asked for baptism. Today there are still no baptisms; there are no churches. We left many comforts to live in the Pnong world. We have prayed and prayed. And we have pressed forward believing that God was leading us. The results have been unexpected, even surprising. We see God at work in a way we may never have noticed before. He’s touching people at the heart level. We’ve done four simple things: (1) learned the heart language and culture, (2) loved the people with no strings attached, (3) become oral-minded in our involvement with the Pnong, and (4) been patient (the hardest of all). And God is using that to do great things.

Learn the Heart Language and Culture

I’m not a natural linguist. Learning a language doesn’t come easy for me. I don’t relish the humiliation of trying to say a word over and over with the whole village laughing at me. Yet I have found learning the Pnong language to be one of the most important ways of sharing the Good News with them. It forced me to become their student and to give them the opportunity to teach me. The process was long and hard and gave us time to grow and bond. The years of learning to understand the words and wrap my tongue around them gave my mind time to grow. Their words come from within the heart of their culture. And in the process of learning to speak their words, I began to see the world through their eyes. My own worldview began to change and I saw a God big enough to express Good News to the Pnong—Good News that was their very own. But, I had to understand it first before I could express it to them.
Good News for the Pnong is not that God loves them or that Jesus died to save them from their sins. Good News for the Pnong is simply that Chief God is bigger than the soul-eating-sorcerer. Heads turn when I say that. People ask for more. They can’t believe it and immediately ask me to tell them stories of this God. My Pnong mother and father asked me many questions about Chief God during our times together in the field hut. And when my Pnong father became so sick people thought he would die, Koin asked me to come close to him. “Will you talk with Chief God for me? I want him to chase away the soul-eating-sorcerer who is eating me at this moment.” As I prayed, Koin’s eyes followed my lips. Then he looked around us and asked, “Is he gone?” But before I could answer I could see his eyes dancing. He smiled at me and squeezed my hand. Yau stood there watching in awe. Koin slept peacefully after that and died a short time later.

The family invited me to mourn for him around his body in their inner circle, as one of the children. Other family and friends waited outside the hut. Together we cried. I was angry at God for letting my Pnong father die. I had prayed publically for his healing and God chose to let him die. And now I waited for a miracle. Would he raise Koin back to life? But God was performing another type of miracle as I cried. For that night the villagers told Yau to move her hut. “The soul-eating-sorcerer will certainly return for you,” they said. “You must move your hut to a new location where he can’t find you.” But Yau was firm in her answer. “I will not move my hut; I have asked Chief God to protect me and I believe he will.”

Every night after, the villagers watched in amazement as Yau slept in peace. “Chief God is protecting me,” she told them. But one night she heard scratching on the outside walls of her hut. Then she heard the moans of a soul-eating sorcerer. He had returned for blood. But without fear she called out into the darkness, “What are you doing out there? You have no right here. I have entered Chief God. Now you go away.” In the same instant the scratching stopped and the sorcerer was gone – never to return.

Share Love Freely

God never commanded books to go to the ends of the earth with his Gospel. Books can never accomplish Jesus’ greatest command: love each other. That must be done within a relationship. Over the past nine years among the Pnong I’ve often felt driven to accomplish more. We developed an eight-book series of simple Bible stories, printed in the new Pnong writing system. The hours we’ve spent on the project are unimaginable. We plan to record the books digitally when they are complete so everyone can hear the stories and learn to retell them. We’ve also developed an oral Bible story project by working with a Pnong story-teller and recording
the Bible stories with all the flare, rhythm, and rhyme of a true oral story. Again, the hours spent on the project are beyond imagination. The projects are exciting and I believe God called us here for these projects. Yet time and time again God reminds me that the projects are not the most important part of why he called me here. I’m here to share his heart within relationships. I’m here to love.

The nights I spent in Koin’s hut holding his hand as he screamed in pain were hard. I had so many other things I wanted to be doing. But I sensed that nothing was more important than being with him during those moments. I accompanied him to the capital city where the doctors told us he had prostate cancer and would soon die. I held him there. I translated the words of the doctor for him. And I cried with him. Yau was watching. She looked at me and said, “Chief God sent you here from America, didn’t he. He must be such a wonderful God. He loves us enough to send you here now.” I was humbled by her words. And once again I was reminded that loving freely is the most important part of my job.

I started the article about the man who ate the dog that the bananas killed. Momat is Koin’s second son. Of all the siblings, Momat looks the most like his father. He has the same quiet personality and the same twinkle in his eye. Our eyes met there in the hospital. I knew he’d been listening to the stories I’d told his father. And I saw there the same hope, the same certainty, the same faith I’d seen in Koin’s. And there in that hospital room I said, “Some sicknesses can’t be cured with medicine. But Chief God sees clearly what causes us pain. He knows all spirits of evil for he once created them. And he knows and loves each of us and longs to help us if we’ll let him.” Then looking down again into Momat’s eyes I said, “Let’s talk with him now?”

I have offered to pray many times with my friends. Everyone nods in agreement, but not until then had I seen such hunger, such a yearning to communicate with Chief God, and such sincere belief. Momat and Chyam, have been watching Chief God at work in their lives for years. As Koin grew sick and slowly died, they had watched us love him. They had listened to us share about our experiences with Chief God and how much he’s blessed our lives. They watched their step-mother chase away powerful soul-eating sorcerers in the night with the name of Chief God. And all along they’ve silently grown to know him, trust him, and believe in him.

After a simple prayer I reminded them that they could also talk with Chief God at any time. A smile tickled the corners of Momat’s mouth the way Koin’s once had and his eyes twinkled. I knew he was experiencing the presence of his Creator.
Use Oral Methods

“They know all the thrilling stories.” Rote was saying. “Can you bring us the stories of the elders next time you come?” The fire snapped and a spark rose in a wisp of smoke. I hesitated to look back at Rote because I didn’t want her to see my disappointment or confusion. We’d worked so hard to write the Bible stories in the Pnong language.

I glanced down at my photocopied Bible stories. “If only the people could understand how important this book is,” I thought to myself. “These elders seem to have them wrapped around their little finger. Everything they say the people believe without question.” But then I thought of Maat, the precious little old man who first introduced me to the other villagers as “our child.” That was shortly after I arrived in the village. He’d seemed so interested in me. He was so excited that I was learning to speak the Pnong language. From that moment on he’d made it his duty to teach me about the Pnong world with all its intricacies. “This is a piece of chicken liver that I’m placing on the spirit pole,” he explained to me out in his rice field. “This offering and this blood will assure us of a good rice harvest this year.” I listened and took notes, but I didn’t understand. At harvest time he took me up into a rice storage loft where I was surprised to find the other village elders gathered for a sacrifice. “This offering of chicken meat, rice wine, and a new kramah (head scarf) will assure us of another good harvest next year,” he explained. He smiled up at me as the elders began chanting together around a small cup of blood mixed with rice wine. I watched and listened, but I didn’t understand. A million memories filled my mind of Maat carefully teaching me Pnong ways. Then I thought of Jyaar and all his lessons about life. And then Koin, my Pnong father, came to mind. In his own quiet way, he too was constantly trying to teach me. I tried to learn, but I’d never understood what these giants of men were doing for me. They were teaching me within a relationship. Suddenly I began to comprehend what Rote was saying. I glanced back down at the photocopied Bible stories. I was offering truth on written paper—an object used for wrapping a cigarette in. Rote was looking for truth from someone who knows—a living person, an expert in knowledge—instead of dried up paper.

The Pnong are oral people. They don’t store knowledge in books or on their laptop. We may go to the library to find information, or surf the web; but the Pnong will go to an elder. Oral societies store their information in oral literature, in myths, legends, poems, songs, and genealogies. And the elders are the ones who have all of this oral literature stored away in their heads, for they are experts in knowledge. The elders themselves are the libraries of information to the people. But they are far more than a brainless computer or a stack of paper. The villagers come to the elders for guid-
ance or knowledge and the elders respond with care and affection. Truth is passed from one to another within a relationship. An elder who can tell the ancient stories and recite genealogies becomes more of a counselor and friend than a reference. That’s what Rote was trying to express to me.

I’m not really sure what happened, there in that hut, but when Rote looked back at me the conversation changed. We no longer talked about books. Instead we talked about Chief God. Yau, Rote’s sister, and my Pnong mother, began to share her story, once again, of how Chief God protected her the night the soul-eating sorcerer visited. Then I smiled and began to tell my own story of knowing and loving Chief God. And knowledge flowed from one to another within a relationship.

I’ve had in my mind somehow that my Pnong friends would learn to read and write. Then they would ask for our Bible story books. Within the stories they would find God and long to serve him. They would start little schools and teach others to read and write. Pretty soon they’d be having Sabbath School. Isn’t that how all the mission stories go? But I am from a literate culture. Oral societies are different. They’re not familiar with interacting with inanimate objects, like books. Does this make them primitive? Will they need to evolve and mature into a literate society? I’m afraid such evolutionary thoughts are a way to place me and my literate society above the Pnong and all other oral cultures like them. But, they are not lower in any way, but they are different. I’m beginning to realize it’s me who needs to be transformed. I’m entering their oral society. They already have a beautiful way of learning and growing and passing along truth and knowledge about life—a way of warm relationships instead of cold objects. They have much to teach us about sharing truth, if we would be willing to listen.

So what do we do with our Bible Story books? I feel quite certain that these beautiful books will bless the Pnong people for many years to come. Their world is quickly changing and the younger ones are attending school in droves. Our books will assist them in learning to read. The books will help them learn of their Creator, their Savior, their Friend. But Rote’s words to me remind me that we can never rely on our books to spread the Good News message. God did not command books to go to the ends of the earth. Books can never accomplish Jesus’ greatest command: Love each other. That must be done by us and by people like you.

Be Patient

We find God using oral methods with the Israelites century after century. He started very easy. The main rule that he kept stressing was, “I am the LORD your God. . . . You shall have no other gods before me” (Deut 5:6-7 NIV). He presented a simple law, but it was hard for the Isra-
elites to fully grasp. They couldn’t grasp the concept that he was their only God and that by worshiping other gods they would enslave themselves to supernatural forces of evil. But God slowly encouraged them, nurtured them, and patiently led them.

God continued working with them over the next 1,400 years in some incredibly oral ways as he tried to show them glimpses of his heart that they had missed while trembling before him at Mt. Sinai. He made a walking stick sprout. He made water gush out of a rock. He asked Moses to create a bronze serpent to place above the people on a pole so they could look up and be saved. He spoke through many different people as history unfolded. Some of them spoke the message from God in beautiful songs. Others tried to capture the message in poetry. A few actually dramatized it before the people for months or even years at a time. And then, in an act far beyond all comprehension, God’s Son came to this earth to play out a drama of life, of death, of separation, of love, and of eternal victory.

The Pnong are very similar to the Old Testament Israelites. They haven’t heard the stories of a Creator God all of their life. But they have seen and witnessed a plethora of other spirits at work and are quite familiar with how that system works. We must be very careful about presenting too much “naked” information, expecting them to understand, and change their lives. God did speak with the Israelites, outlining his laws. But that wasn’t terribly effective at first. He lit up a mountain in explosive fire and thundered a message so clear they begged him to be silent. He even used his finger to carve out the laws in stone so they could read them if they forgot. But words didn’t do much to change their worldview at first and their actions showed clearly they still did not fully understand what God was talking about.

In the same way, “naked” words will do little to change the worldview of the Pnong, or groups like them. They will need time, just as the Israelites did. If we expect them to become Christians with a full understanding of the New Testament in a few short years, we may be attempting a pace they can’t follow. If even God spent nearly 4,000 years helping the people of the Old Testament understand the meaning of his sacrifice, then I think we should plan on patience as we work with indigenous people groups. I think we need to start at the same place he did. “God is God. Serve him only.” If the Pnong hear the simple Bible stories from a trusted friend, they will remember them. They will learn who God is and that he is the only true God. They have the benefit of learning from other people’s experiences throughout history and can grow faster than the Israelites did. Little by little, as they hear stories of everyday life in Old Testament history, as they ponder what might come next, as they try to make sense of everything based on their own worldview, as they subconsciously com-
pare and contrast, as they observe how God works in a silly family from America, a new and wonderful picture will arise before them by an Artist sketching them into the panorama. They will find that they have been in the picture all along and that the Artist has been painting their life from the beginning.

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Relational Care as Ministry to the Marginalized

This article seeks to show that the marginalized are as much social and relational beings as the non-marginalized and hence deserve a ministry of intimate loving care which in some circles is known as relational care. Mission to the marginalized may be considered a special ministry because of the difficult conditions people already find themselves in. Nevertheless, what is important is not so much who marginalizes who, but an awareness that as humans we need to re-establish those God-given links with one another. Such links or relationships will not only help us understand our relationship with God, but will also help us affirm one another as his most valued creation regardless of our status, religion, or race. The development and use of a relational care model is essential to those seriously contemplating a ministry to the marginalized.

Who Are the Marginalized?

Marginalized people can be found almost anywhere in the world. But who are they? Is it necessary to look further “out there?” Or is it my neighbor who is marginalized? Within and without the church doors there are many who feel they are not welcomed into full fellowship or acceptance because they are vulnerable in different ways because they are disabled, divorced, illiterate, imprisoned, HIV/Aid stricken, poor, uneducated, or unemployed; or they may be marginalized because of gender, ethnicity, race, or geographic location. John M. Perkins reveals that “we live in a critical hour in which the ‘least among us’ (Luke 9:48) are growing at a frightening rate. We can no longer see the pain and suffering as something that takes place ‘over there’ in Third World settings. We now hear the cries of our own people, especially those in our urban centers” (Perkins 1996:21).

The question of who the marginalized are and even why they are marginalized may be as important as the question of what they need. Many
times the Christian church or community at large thinks the only way to minister or attend to the needs of such people is to provide them with the materials or services which they need the most, but from a distance. Such an attitude often treats the marginalized as objects and not human beings. There is a tendency also by governments and organizations to overlook the fact that marginalized people are as much human as are the privileged and they have the same rights as any person who walks the surface of the earth.

Caf Dowlah observes that “there are literally mountains of evidence that suggest that the LDCs [least developed countries] have increasingly been marginalized in the rapidly globalizing world economy, and much of this debacle can be attributed to economic globalization, to the processes of economic integration of trade, migration, technology, and financial flows around the world, that took place during the second wave of globalization” (Dowlah 2004:12). Consequently, whole nations may be marginalized, sometimes societies or communities, but quite often it is individuals who bear the brunt of marginalization in their daily lives.

But is it only governments that turn a blind eye or worse still, contribute to the marginalization of people? How about the Christian church and its various organizations? How about church members at a personal level? And what does the Bible say about the condition, treatment, and fate of marginalized people?

Serving people—any people—at a material or superficial level will neither bring the intended change to the recipients nor satisfaction to the benefactors. Why? Because human beings are divinely created persons who are related to each other through a common linkage to the protohumans, Adam and Eve. Humanity was created to love God and to love one another, but they were also created in the image of God. People are relational beings—not cold robotic creations that have no care or concern. God’s question to Cain, “Where is Abel, your brother [or sister]?” (Gen 4:9), is a question for everyone to ponder. Because humans are relational beings, Christians must not only acknowledge that they are responsible and keepers of their brothers and sisters (including the marginalized), but God’s people must also know where they are in each local community.

If human beings are relational beings, it follows then that they will interact relationally, that they will care for one another in a reciprocal and mutual way. This means humans are to exhibit and offer relational care to one another regardless of color, race, religion, status, ethnicity, or geographic origin. Under this setting, marginalization is a misnomer in any true Christian setting. Marginalization then, properly understood, reflects the human attitude toward others gone awry. Marginalization is a manifestation of humanity allowing the venom of disinterest, insensitivity, and
carelessness to poison relationships. A mission to the marginalized is an attempt to reverse this sad phenomenon through a better understanding and practice of relational care.

What Is Relational Care?

Because humans have been created in the image of God, they always have a craving for a loving and caring relationship first with God and, second, with other human beings. But that is not the end of the story—they must be at peace with themselves. In other words, if any of this relating is amiss, then they need relational care to restore it. Until the world church community realizes that the marginalized need to be helped with the provision of a safe environment in which the relational presence of God, the church, and individual is felt, the marginalized could still be the loneliest of all God’s creation in spite of the numerous and often well-intended efforts to meet their material and other needs.

The marginalization of others symbolizes a people whose human connections with others has been bruised, severed, or rendered dysfunctional. Reuniting those connections or mending those relationships is the basis for relational care. Without relational care, few will feel the urge to offer charitable services to other human beings. Engendering any rewarding human linkages would indeed involve “differentiating between the dysfunctional and functional connections that people commonly form with other people, possessions, objects, ideas, or experiences” (Marx 2010). This then calls for a comprehensive profiling of all the communities in the target areas with the aim of establishing who are the marginalized, what were the initial and current causes of this marginalization and—most important—what are the present barriers to the restoration of self-worth, relationships to one another, and to significant others.

Lessons on relational care to the marginalized may be drawn from three areas that I discuss below: Jesus, the New Testament Church, and the Ubuntu/Botho African philosophy models.

Jesus Christ: The Exemplar in Relational Care to the Marginalized

The ministry of Jesus on earth was one of love, compassion, and restoration within an intentional relationship which he offered to all. Jesus had his own group of marginalized people among whom he served. According to Robert J. Karris, the gospel of John depicts Jesus’ ministry to a category which included “those who are made marginal because they do not know the law (7:49), those who are marginal because they are not Jews, but Samaritans (4:4-42), those who are marginal because they are not
chronically ill (9:1-41), those who are marginal because they are women” (Karris 1990:11).

One of the reasons why Jesus effectively ministered to all, but specifically and successfully to the marginalized, was that he identified with or was practically one with them. He characterized the marginalized in many ways: “There is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected by men. A man of sorrows acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him. He was despised, and we did not esteem him” (Isa 53:2-3). No wonder it was the marginalized that responded to him most effectively. Yet it is clear that they saw some relatedness between themselves and Jesus. They could identify with him and that attracted them to him.

Furthermore, “Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) shows us a pathway to a deeper relationship with the poor [and marginalized]” (Perkins 1996:33). His communication with the woman showed that Jesus had not allowed himself to be consumed by the syndrome of marginalization. Even the woman could not believe his unique way of doing things, and she asked: “How is it that you, being a Jew, ask drink from me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9).

Here we find Jesus showing love and ministry to a marginalized community in another country, to a person marginalized by her gender, and to one who was also marginalized for her shady way of life (prostitution). Jesus demonstrates the power of the gospel and shows that he is willing to sacrifice his life for the marginalized. His ministry was that of one who crossed barriers, creating a new Christian community, restoring Israel as a community where sinners such as Samaritans and Gentiles were not only invited but welcomed (Motyer 1995:76). If this were not true he would not have risked his life by associating with and healing the marginalized or by becoming their spokesperson on issues of social justice. But of course all this came with consequences: “A final reflection upon a Messiah who ministered to the marginalized is that this Messiah himself became marginalized. He identified himself so much with the marginalized that he himself was thrown out of the synagogue. And then condemned by both religious and political authorities, he became, as the crucified, the symbol of the marginalized” (Karris 1990:109).

With all this activity and sacrifice, it is disturbing that the New Testament church still missed the point on the importance of an inclusive ministry regardless of a person’s status. In the next section, we see Jesus starting all over again to re-emphasize the need to do ministry in a way that embraces the marginalized.
The New Testament Church and Relational Care to the Marginalized

The New Testament Church was first built on a membership which was largely Jewish. Gentiles were the marginalized group. It took drastic divine intervention for Peter—a Jewish Christian himself—to acknowledge the duty to minister to Gentiles. In Acts 10, God sends Peter a vision in which he is instructed to “kill and eat” the contents of a great sheet which was lowered to him from heaven “wherein [were] all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.” While Peter revolts at God’s instruction to partake of the unclean things three times, he finally perceives God’s purpose for this vision.

A deeper understanding on how to treat the Gentiles occupies Peter’s mind and he is able to say to Cornelius and his other Gentile companions, “You know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come to one of another nation: but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Peter then utters one of his greatest fundamental truths concerning God’s relations with humanity: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him” (Acts 10:34-36).

Not only was Peter converted from the sin of marginalizing people of other nations, he shared his new experience with the hard-line Jews who still thought otherwise, vehemently defending his ministry in the house of Cornelius. It is amazing that “they that were of the circumcision” who had contented with Peter for associating and ministering to Gentiles, also saw the light and they too uttered in unison: “Then has God also to the Gentiles granted repentance to life”—holding their peace and glorifying God” (Acts 11:18).

There are several lessons that can be drawn from Peter’s experience in relation to the ministry to the marginalized. First, it must be known that as much as God “is no respecter of persons,” no other human has the right to segregate, oppress, discriminate, or demean others on whatever basis. Second, God expects all who intend to do a ministry to the marginalized to repent as individuals as well as corporately as a body of any practice, attitude, propensity, or inclination to marginalize others. Last, but not least, when the marginalized are treated with dignity, love, and care, they are most likely to trust the care-givers and even more importantly, will likely become receptive to the Word of God.

It follows then that no one should attempt a ministry to the marginalized, including the Adventist Church, if there has not been personal repentance of the offense of marginalizing people. Jesus says, “In as much
as you have it to one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me” (Matt 25:40). A ministry draped with hypocrisy is a ministry weak and fragile.

If all were to experience conversion before they begin a ministry to the marginalized the ensuing ministry would reach the same proportions as Paul’s did to the marginalized Gentile world. Paul was converted while persecuting the Christians and was commissioned by Jesus to his special ministry “to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). God needs apostles to the marginalized as much as he needed the apostle to the Gentiles. However, as mentioned above, conversion is a prerequisite.

**Ubuntu/Botho and Relational Care to the Marginalized**

The Bantu peoples of sub-Saharan Africa have a philosophy from which the Christian church can learn. **Ubuntu** (South Africa) or **Botho** (Botswana) is an African humanist philosophy which encourages members of the group to enhance human dignity in their communities. Under the Botswana setting, **Botho** is “one of the tenets of African culture: ‘It encourages people to applaud rather than resent those who succeed. It disapproves of anti-social, disgraceful, inhuman and criminal behavior, and encourages social justice for all. **Botho** as a concept must stretch to its utmost limits the largeness of the spirit of all Batswana. It must permeate every aspect of our lives, like the air we breathe, so that no Motswana will rest easy knowing that another is in need” (Botho and Vision 2016).

Under the **Botho** philosophy, an individual cannot be larger than the community. Thus, one has to be sensitive to others, showing care and love to them; in reciprocity, the community loves each person in return. **Ubuntu/Botho** has proven to be one of those footprints of God in those cultures that had never learned of Jesus. Indeed the command, “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12) reigns supreme in the spirit of **Ubuntu/Botho**. Incorporating the **Ubuntu/Botho** philosophical construct into Christian practice will have dramatic results in understanding an individual’s role in the community.

Certainly **Ubuntu/Botho** sets a distinctive between Western individualism and African communalism. This can be observed in the fourteen **Ubuntu/Botho** virtues: hospitality, compassion, empathy, tolerance, respect, interdependence, collective solidarity, patience, kindness, reconciliation, cooperation, warmth, forgiveness, and supportiveness (Hanks 2008). Clearly all of these virtues are relational. Marginalized people would be better served by Christians who possess these virtues; after all they are all biblical ethical virtues.
Relational Care: Implications for a Ministry to the Marginalized

Ministry to the marginalized must move from the fringes to the forefront, from the back streets and alleys to the main thoroughfares of ministry. As Christians, God’s love for us as his creation must direct our altruistic passions towards other human beings. Relational care as ministry to the marginalized is nothing but Christian endeavor based on love that begets love, for “God is love” (1 John 4:8b). This love may not be directed in only selective ways while failing to reflect it in the same way Jesus demonstrated that love for “love is born in the space of relation” (Reynolds 2005:197). Marginalized people’s responses to gospel outreach are more positively influenced by loving ministering hands than by faceless charitable gifts. Loving from a distance is indeed the antithesis of human to human love and interaction.

There will be considerable self-discovery whenever serving among the marginalized. Because marginalized people are vulnerable, relational care givers have no choice but to allow themselves to also become vulnerable through opening up of themselves and facing the possibility that they too could be marginalized. For example, the marginalized at times may be broken people needing healing and restoration. Unless the relational care givers themselves come to see their own brokenness before God, they may never live and communicate at the same wave length with the people they want to share their life, gift, or help with.

Conclusion

Mission to the marginalized needs a loving human touch if people are to experience a more meaningful relationship with God and with other people. Christians are the agents for this relational care. Jesus demonstrated relational care when he served marginalized individuals, select groups, and even communities in areas of poverty, hunger, sickness, demon possession, and social injustice. The New Testament church aptly embraced the new command to minister to marginalized Gentiles. This called for the church to change its negative attitudes towards them with the result that the greatest growth in the church was due to the conversion of the Gentiles who felt the warmth of transformed Christians.

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church and other Christian denominations have various entities such as ADRA and World Vision International which are constantly seeking to restore the dignity of humanity in the spiritual, social, physical, and emotional areas of life. These services will be more appreciated if the relational care givers resonate with the spirit of Ubuntu/Botho—a humane interaction inclined to restore the dignity of all people in any community.
Perhaps before engaging in a ministry to the marginalized, everyone should ask the following questions: “My brother, my sister, what are you doing for Christ? Are you seeking to be a blessing to others? Are your lips uttering words of kindness, sympathy, and love? Are you putting forth efforts to win others to the Savior?” (White 1948:39). However, one would need to “become acquainted with them [as] preaching will not do the work that needs to be done. . . . This work cannot be done by proxy. Money lent or given will not accomplish it. Sermons will not do it. By visiting the people, talking, praying, sympathizing with them, you will win hearts. . . . To do it, you will need resolute, persevering faith, unwearying patience, and a deep love for souls” (White 1948:41).

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Embedded in the 2010 Seventh-day Adventist Annual Council Action Document entitled “God’s Promised Gift” is the affirmation of the church’s recognition that “God is going to use children” in the last mighty revival. The strategy document “Tell the World,” in its turn, highlights youth retention and mission participation under Adventist goals for in-reach. Significantly, children are not even mentioned in this five-year plan, except in a quotation referring to students in Adventist institutions.

How are Seventh-day Adventists as a church to participate in God’s work of engaging children in this last mighty work? Are children essential or incidental to the mission of God? Who are the children that God calls the church to engage during this last mighty work? Must the church’s engagement of children of necessity be primarily incidental or secondary to that of their parents? These questions and more merit our best thinking in view of the realities of our time.

Ellen White, in a letter dated 1892, said, “From the light given me of God, I know that as a people we have not improved our opportunities for educating and training the youth” (1970:581). A sober review of the present realities of children in our world, and our corresponding work among them may bring us to the same point (Annual Statistical Report for 2009).

Indeed, a vital component of revival and reformation must be in improving the Adventist Church’s opportunities to reach up for the children of our world, reach across to the children in our congregations, and to reach out to the overwhelming majority of children who have as yet not heard the everlasting gospel in any context. The challenges and descriptions of the world’s children as listed below portray children as a huge percentage of the world’s population that is marginalized, stigmatized, and at risk.
Why Is Mission to Children Important?
Children Are Uniquely Receptive to the Everlasting Gospel

Christ, knowing that children would more readily listen to him and accept him as their Redeemer, adjusted his teaching to them, simplifying “His important lessons to meet their childish understanding” (White 1970:579). Using the well-known adage “as the twig is bent, the tree is inclined,” Mrs. White acknowledged the developmental principle that early training and experience is, in most instances, life defining.

When through Christian witness people stamp God’s Word and ways on the “plastic” minds of children, he works to ensure that the lessons are never effaced. We should learn the lesson from Christ’s outreach to children “that the hearts of the young are most susceptible to the teachings of Christianity, easy to influence toward piety and virtue, and strong to retain the impressions received” (White 1952:275).

The Barna Research Group, cited in an article in Christianity Today, corroborates this by indicating, “What you believe at age 13 is pretty much what you’re going to die believing.” Their research shows that “children between the ages of 5 and 13 have a 32 percent probability of accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. That likelihood drops to 4 percent for teenagers between the ages of 14 and 18, and ticks back up to 6 percent for adults older than 18” (Kennedy 2004:53).

Children Comprise a Third of the World’s Population

The second reason children warrant specific attention is their number. In the countries classified as “least developed,” children below the age of fifteen comprise 41 percent of the population. In the countries classified as “less developed,” excluding China, children below the age of 15 comprise 33 percent of the population. Almost one third of the world’s population—27 percent—is children under the age of 15 (Population Reference Bureau 2010:6), making children arguably the single largest population group. For a detailed analysis of per country ratio of children below the age of 15 see http://www.prb.org/Datafinder/Topic/Bar.aspx?sort=v&order=d&variable=94

In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, there is almost a 1-to-1 ratio between working-age adults (classified as ages 15-64) and children under 14 (World Population Highlights 2010). At least 65 percent of the world’s children are classified as “at risk” (McConnell 2007:7). There is “a web of risks and vulnerabilities” that underlie the classification of a child as being at risk, “including sexual abuse and exploitation; trafficking; hazardous labor; violence; living or working on the streets; the impact of armed conflict, including children’s use by armed forces and groups; harmful
practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) and child marriage; lack of access to justice; and unnecessary institutionalization, among others” (UNICEF Child Protection Strategy 2008:2) Essentially, when a child’s needs for survival, development, and well-being are compromised, that child is said to be at risk.

Seventy Percent of Children Live in the 10/40 Window

A fourth factor that merits focus on children is the fact that more than 70 percent of the world’s children reside in the 10/40 Window (Koh 2010:18). Given the Adventist Church’s concern for prioritizing work in the 68 countries in the 10/40 Window, it is worthy of note that children below the age of 15 constitute the majority in two-thirds of these countries, and 33 percent of the entire 10/40 Window population is comprised of children under the age of 15.

As crucial as these four factors are, the most significant rallying cry to the strategic engagement of the church in behalf of and to children comes from Christ himself, for he commissions us not only to bring children to him, but to work against that which would keep children from him (Luke 18:15-17; Matt 18:1-6; 28:18-20, emphasis mine). This mandate to work for children goes beyond those children that are our own, to that vast number who are not part of our families.
The State of the World’s Children
Children Are Not Receiving Basic Needs

Children are not receiving the basic needs of food, health, education, and shelter. More than 1 billion of the world’s children lack access to basic resources and services necessary for their survival. It is estimated that 148 million children under five years of age are underweight, 19 million of whom are born as such, and are thus vulnerable to the associated developmental challenges (State of the World’s Children 2009:4). It is estimated that 8.8 million children die before the age of five every year in our world of preventable causes, and survivable diseases, and four million of these die within the first month of birth from causes that could be prevented by simple nutrition and health education (State of the World’s Children 2009:5).

Children Suffer from Prejudice and Inequality

Children are also suffering prejudice and inequity based on their ethnicity, their abilities, their gender, the cultures within which they are born, and more. For instance, in six child-marriage high prevalence countries within the 10/40 Window, more than 60 percent of 20-24 year old women were married as children. Globally, more than 64 million young women 20-24 years old have reported that they were married before age 18. Half of these women live in South Asia (Progress for Children 2009:26). Of the 64 million, roughly 50 percent of this number was married before the age of 15. By contrast, in only 7 countries does the prevalence of child marriage for boys exceed 10 percent (Progress for Children 2009:10, 11).

It is conservatively estimated, using Research International’s rough calculation estimate of 10 percent of the world’s population acquiring disability at some point in life, that more than 150 million children are disabled, and suffer cultural and societal ostracism on account of their disabilities, particularly within the majority world (UNICEF and Disabled Children and Youth 2003). However UNICEF indicated in 2010, from a survey of 22 countries, that the disparities in risk of disability are huge, indicating that from respondent data disability ranged from 3 percent of children in Uzbekistan to a full 48 percent in the Central African Republic (Progress for Children 2009:18).

Furthermore, of the over 30 million persons under the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees due to displacement, more than 18 million are children, and often the displacement has been due to ethnicity (State of the World’s Children 2009:9).
One billion children live in countries or territories affected by armed conflict. Aside from children being forced to become refugees or internally displaced persons, UNICEF states, “More than 2 million children have died as a direct result of armed conflict over the last decade, and more than three times that number, at least 6 million children, have been permanently disabled or seriously injured.” Furthermore, “An estimated 300,000 child soldiers—boys and girls under the age of 18—are involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide. Child soldiers are used as combatants, messengers, porters, cooks, and to provide sexual services. Some are forcibly recruited or abducted, others are driven to join by poverty, abuse, and discrimination, or to seek revenge for violence enacted against themselves and their families” (Children in Conflict and Emergencies 2010).

Children Are Abused and Exploited

Although it is hard to nail down trafficking data due to the illicit nature of the vice, the Initiative Against Sexual Trafficking (IAST) states that over 1 million children are entering the sex trade annually. According
to UNICEF data, approximately thirty million children have lost their childhood innocence through sexual exploitation over the past 30 years (IAST).

Admittedly, the full extent of violence against children is difficult to quantify, but from data compiled by the Innocent Research Center for the UN Secretary-General’s Study on Violence against Children in 2006, UNICEF estimates that between 500 million to 1.5 billion children experience violence annually (State of the World’s Children 2009:8). Three out of four children in the Middle East and North Africa are subject to physical abuse. Children suffer domestic violence, are living on the streets, and are sold into hazardous labor (Progress for Children 2009:28).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that one third of the children in sub-Saharan Africa—where child labor is most common—are engaged in child labor. Further, it estimates that more than two-thirds of all labor is in the agricultural sector, and found that in rural areas, children, particularly girl children begin agricultural labor as young as 5-7 years old. UNICEF estimates that 150 million children 5-14 years old are out of school, due to their engagement in child labor, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty that necessitates their present labor (Progress for Children 2009:15).

By the term “child labor” the ILO in the above data is referring to three categories:

1. The worst forms of child labour, including slavery; prostitution and pornography; illicit activities; and work likely to harm children’s health, safety or morals, as defined in ILO Convention No. 182.
2. Employment below the minimum age of 15, as established in ILO Convention No. 138.
3. Hazardous unpaid household services, including household chores performed for long hours, in an unhealthy environment, in dangerous locations, and involving unsafe equipment or heavy loads (Progress for Children 2009:16, 22).

Children Are Suffering Family Breakdown

In 2007, 24.9 million children in Eastern and Southern Africa were orphans. More than a quarter of the children under 15 in Lesotho, South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe are orphans (Progress for Children 2009:24). Globally 2 million children are in institutional care around the world (19), and 1 million children are detained in the justice system at any one time (State of the World’s Children 2009:9). In the United States in 2009 the State of Mississippi had 48 percent of its children living in single-parent homes (The Annie E. Casey Foundation). Domestic violence, the ever increasing divorce rate, and the quest for careers are threatening the
norm of children growing up in families.

As averse as most of us are to statistics, these are but a portion of the numbers. The stark reality is that the vast majority of the world’s children are in crisis. In the face of this reality, what must the Seventh-day Adventist Church offer?

**A Call to Action: We Must Do Who We Are**

It is widely recognized in the childcare industry that the sheer magnitude of the problem leaves the church as the only capable entity to address the challenge of children at risk with the scale and longevity that any credible response requires (McConnell 2007:7).

The children of the world are uniquely within the reach of the Seventh-day Adventist Church because a crucial type of our nature and role as a remnant people is that of the shepherd laboring under the True Shepherd. As such, we, of all Christendom, cannot afford to exclude ourselves from this critical component of the *Missio Dei* and engagement in the strategic mission to children at risk (Luke 15; John 10).

As those called to shepherd those that are God’s sheep in every fold, we must recognize that these children too, and the millions like, yet unlike them in our churches, in our schools, in our social circles, are those we are called to seek and to search for.

Are not these children the weak we are to strengthen, the sick we are to heal, the broken we are to bind up, the driven away we are to bring back, the lost we are to seek? Are not these too that have been scattered because there was no shepherd, and so have become prey for all that is evil in our world? (Ezek 34).

As such, I humbly submit that the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to repray, rethink, and restudy its mission strategy so that it can include an adequate component that coheres with the reality that almost a full one-third of the world that it has been commissioned to tell is comprised of children whose plight has been ever so slightly highlighted in this short article.

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P. T. Pointe resides with her family in Metro-Manila where she is working with Children at Risk in two squatter communities.
The Roma people, also called Romani or Gypsies, are one of the oldest people groups living in Europe, speaking one of the earliest European languages. Although found on all continents, including the Americas, the majority of Gypsies live in Europe. Having an oriental origin (India or “Little Egypt”), Gypsies came to Europe around AD 1000 and have since preserved their culture and traditions and refused assimilation or integration. Council of Europe statistics estimate a minimum of 6.5 million Gypsies living in Europe, but because many do not read or write, do not apply for identification papers, and thus are not counted in a census, the real figures could easily surpass 16 million (Council of Europe Stats 2009).

Known as Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, Kale in the Iberian Peninsula and Northern Europe (Finland), Sinti in Northern Italy, Austria, and Germany, Romanisael in the Scandinavian countries, Manoush in France and the Netherlands, and Romanichal in England, Gypsies are a very diverse people but with a lot in common. Language wise, “after an evolution extending back for more than a thousand years, with no written models to foster uniformity, there is no single standard of Romani speech. Instead, we have a multiplicity of dialects (in Europe alone, something like 60 or more), obviously related to each other to an important degree, but often mutually unintelligible” (Fraser 1995:12).

On their migration to Europe, Gypsies were influenced by Muslims, Tatars, Byzantines, and by the peoples they decided to live with.

As well as words, the Gypsies acquired in Byzantium and Greece a familiarity with the Christian world. On the roads and in the ports, they encountered travelers from all over Europe. They may have learned additional languages. They would certainly have heard of the Holy Land; they had seen that pilgrims were privileged travelers. All this
knowledge would be profitable to them one day, when they decided to pursue their migration into the world of western Christianity. (Fraser 1995:56)

Thus, Gypsies presented themselves as pilgrims and conquered Europe without guns or swords.

Because of their Indian heritage, each Gypsy belongs to a caste with a specific trade even today. However, Fraser notes that, although they are no longer pure Indians,

their identity, their culture would, however—regardless of all transformations—remain sharply distinct from that of the gadző who surrounded them and on whom their economic existence depended. They had no promised land as a focus of their dreams and would themselves, in time, forget their Indian antecedents and, indeed, show little interest in their early history, leaving it to the gadzę, centuries later, to rediscover and pursue obsessively their past and their lineage. (1995:44)

Gypsies have a particular word to identify those who do not belong to their ethnic group, gadzę (or gacho/gorgio/busne/gadje/gaj/e/gagii), which is the equivalent of the word Jews use to identify non-Jews, goim (gentiles). The non-Gypsy is seen as impure, but not based on a theological concept as was the case for Jews. “The passionately held view of most Gypsies is still that gadje are dangerous, not to be trusted, and, in the interest of the survival of the group, they are to be avoided except for dealings in business. Indeed, in the most general sense, gadje are considered to be maxrime: polluted. To develop unnecessary relations with them is to risk contamination” (Fonseca 1995:12). As a result, Gypsies isolate themselves from the rest of society and in turn society marginalizes Gypsies.

Although it is difficult to talk about a Gypsy Diaspora since they are a nomadic people, “one cannot cease to wonder at their extraordinary tenacity. . . . a diaspora of a people with no priestly caste, no recognized standard for their language, no texts enshrining a corpus of beliefs and code of morality, no appointed custodians of ethnic traditions” (Fraser 1995:44). Referring to the unity of the Gypsy tribes, Isabel Fonseca considers that “the Gypsies have no heroes, there are no myths of origin, of a great liberation, of the founding of a ‘nation,’ of a promised land. . . . They have no monuments, no anthem, no ruins, and no Book. Instead of a sense of a great historical past, they have a collective unease, and an instinctive cleaving to the tribe” (Fonseca 1995a:84).
Gypsies have never claimed a country or a territory and never started a war for one. When persecuted, they moved from one country to another. Today, due to their trades, they travel and preserve the nomadic character of their ethnicity. Some countries have tried to settle them, and some clans or tabors accepted the land offered, but it was mostly on the outskirts of poorer suburbs of cities or villages. However, the settling attempts did not solve the integration problem, for Gypsies were still kept at the margins of the communities. Even when they settle, their trades often require them to travel. Gypsy trades include investing in and processing silver and gold. Goldsmiths and silversmiths travel to fairs and large events to sell their products. The Gabor Gypsies, those who cover the house roofs with tin, go wherever they are needed and whenever they are called, while the Kalderash (coppersmiths) travel through cities and villages patching and selling tins and tubs. They are permanently on the move—nomadic life for them is what settled life is for Western societies.

The integration program of the European Union, “The Decade of Roma Inclusion: 2005-2015,” remains a wish. Stereotypes and even hate toward Gypsies resulted in the recent deportation of Gypsies from France, the demolition of Gypsy settlements in Italy, the burning of Gypsy houses in Hungary, the shooting of Gypsy families in Slovakia, and an official inquiry into a report on the sterilization of Gypsy women in the Czech Republic. Gypsies seem to make the news headlines on a very regular basis. Artists, like Madonna or Bono, have supported them publicly in their European concerts. Gypsy bands are becoming stars in the postmodern society. Several renowned artists claim Gypsy heritage. But this people remain different than the rest of the population they live among. Although some countries on the continent have passed laws to support and integrate the Gypsies, there are no real signs of integration and they continue to be marginalized.

Many people believe that what has kept Gypsies distinct from the majority population is their language, culture, and folkways or “their migrancy, the mobility of their dwellings, and . . . their reliance on family-based self-employment” (Mayall 1988:181). In this article I suggest that the main factor that keeps Gypsies distinct goes beyond the cultural or social differences; it has to do with their worldview.

The Gypsy Worldview

The Gypsy worldview is based on different values than the Western worldview and the two worldviews frequently clash in societies where Gypsies are present. The values of honor and shame place Gypsies closer to Mediterranean and Muslim peoples. These values are often expressed by a fairly rigid purity and pollution ideology that is also found in Islam.
and Judaism. For example, Gypsies do not greet each other by shaking hands, but use the Indian greeting based on the pure/impure religious value. The system of trades that divides them is also based on purity criteria while the social structure of the Gypsy population is based on castes, families, tabors, and trades.

Honor unites Gypsies in times of need but divides them in times of peace. As a result, there is no social or civic tradition of unique representation, so each leader tries to represent their family, clan, tribe, or trade. Gypsies do not have political parties, institutions, or any type of structure. As a result there is no Gypsy church either. Each family and clan has its own pride, and individuals try to defend the honor of their extended family.

In spite of their faults Gypsies showcase a number of pleasant characteristics. Family loyalty is basic and no effort is spared to defend a member of the family. The keen sense of honor requires that the clan remains united when facing accusations or adversity. The spirit of sacrifice is high when it comes to the needs of an extended family member because the honor of the family has to be protected. However, due to their nomadic lifestyle, the dead are usually buried by the side of the road and their burial place often forgotten. But the memory of the deceased is meticulously preserved and the person becomes the theme of songs and poems, thus making sure that future generations remember their ancestors. Ancestor veneration is not exhibited in relation to a place or a cemetery, but retains the memory for future generations.

Gypsies live for the needs of the day, and do not make long term plans or share a long term vision. The worldview of the Gypsies is oriented toward the past, not the future. The past is the source of their pride and honor which they defend at any cost. Their songs express nostalgia for past ages and long passed heroes while their poetry exudes melancholy. Gypsies are also very emotional, impulsive, and short fused; they lack patience, and want things done now or they abandon the project. If they have been shamed, Gypsies react quickly and violently. Feelings and emotions are exaggerated and lived at maximum intensity. Life for a Gypsy has value as long as it brings honor, and any shame needs to be avenged even if it means killing someone. Such behavior is rejected by society which in turn stigmatizes the whole ethnic group.

In spite of a fateful worldview and an orientation toward the past, Gypsies are a happy people. They enjoy the day and the moment, and live the present to the fullest. One can often hear them saying “Better next time.” They sing, dance, play, and laugh, not worrying for tomorrow. “Gypsies enjoy parties of all kinds, and any excuse for a celebration seems acceptable. . . . Like most parties, the integral elements are food, drink, and
music” (Gropper 1975:111). Life for them is a connected series of events added on top of one another.

If laid off from a job, most conservative and traditional Gypsies would not accept the unemployment benefits of the country as this is seen as affecting their honor and pride. They cannot accept the position of unemployed, which is a shame and unthinkable in their communities. On the other hand, less conservative Gypsies, who have renounced their traditional values, prefer instead to live on social benefits as long as they can. Local communities, administrations, and governments in those situations try to officially find ways to encourage them to become employed, but people who live around them simply call them lazy.

Gypsies like to fight in order to defend their honor, but do not like competition between equals as a societal or cultural value. They discriminate between each other, do not marry those from another caste or clan, and discriminate against the “gagii” (gadže), the non-gypsy (see Wedeck 1973:147, 157). History records that Gypsies who traveled through Europe stole from the gadže, but not from their own. They were frequently labeled “the most cunning thieves in the world” (Fraser 1995:72). Martin Block indicates that, “when gypsies are not given easy opportunities of stealing and are allowed to lead their natural life, the nomad life, they are quite able to live honest lives. There are plenty of gypsies living now who hardly ever come into contact with the police” (1939:247). On the other hand, Jan Yoors admits that “the Rom might have as many prejudices against us, the Gaje, as we had against them” (1967:16).

Most Gypsies are uneducated from a Western perspective because they did not go to school and do not have a formal education. Without land ownership, and because of their nomadic lifestyle, they usually do not educate their children scholastically or academically. There are no words in the Gypsy languages for “write” and “read.” “Gypsies borrow from other languages to describe these activities. Or else, and more revealingly, they use other Romani words” that refer to reading the palm rather than a written text (Fonseca 1995:11). Some Gypsy tribes allow their kids to go to school only until the fourth grade to learn the basics of reading, writing, and calculation, after which they join their parents and perpetuate the trade of the family or clan. Schooling is seen as a concession or adaptation to the local culture that will allow their kids to be able to cope and survive in it. Emancipation of individuals is sacrificed in favor of preserving the group (Fonseca 1995:16). However, the societal stereotypes mar the life of Gypsy children among their peers.

Gypsy culture is an oral culture. Stories are the main venue of communication for Gypsies. Their history is transmitted to the next generation by stories, poems, or songs. Children are taught to memorize long poems
which praise the heroic acts of their predecessors. Most Gypsies do not sign documents, their word being the seal of an agreement and carrying important weight. Those who decide to pursue higher education are often treated with suspicion, while those who place value on written documents are considered handicapped or having memory problems. Oral societies with its traditions excluded keeping written documents, and as a result there was no written language until recently and only from gadżé sources. Today there are attempts at unifying their written language and the more than 60 dialects, but the process is hampered by the pride of each Gypsy tribe who claims theirs is the best language.

Without land ownership, Gypsies did not have rights in the lands they passed through. They could not send their children to school, had no right to vote, and were considered pilgrims or travellers. When life was difficult, Gypsies preferred to become slaves or serfs in order to be under the protection of nobles, kings, or monasteries as a way to survive. In Wallachia and Transylvania, Gypsies were serfs until the mid-nineteen century, and because they were skilled in metal-working they were assigned to manufacture weapons which gave them a royal servant status (Fraser 1995:108). Because of the advantages of protection and gifts, Gypsies often asked wealthy gadżé to become godparents for their children (93).

Under communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the few Gypsy intellectuals banded together and decided to fight for the right to be recognized as a separate ethnicity and people. At the end of the 1970s, Romania’s dictator Ceausescu wanted to be known as a promoter of ethnic and cultural diversity, so Gypsies were encouraged to develop and to display their cultural traditions. Prior to this new recognition they could be officers in the army, communist party activists, and have different trades if they never mentioned their ethnicity. However, in the 1980s, they became free to admit their Gypsy origins. The communist government protected their villages, allowing them to have their own organization and structure, but intervened when ethnic or clan conflicts became violent. After the fall of communism life for the Gypsies did not improve and ethnic conflicts from the majority population groups increased. Houses were burned, people killed, and Gypsies even had to flee and hide in the forests.

Today, Gypsies are still discriminated against when it comes to employment all through Europe. Although they like to preserve the family and live in their communities, European governments seldom have any plans to support their integration in society. As a result, most Gypsies live in shantytowns or illegal settlements on the outskirts of large cities. This is considered the secret of their survival—not fighting the majority, but retreating to the margins and preserving their identity in community, family, or clan/tribe. By separating from the rest of society (like the Jews),
Gypsies survived as an ethnic group or a people while other peoples (like the Bretons) disappeared. In times of crisis they developed a culture of poverty and became satisfied with less in order to be able to survive.

**Gypsy Religious Life**

In spite of the popular belief that Gypsies are not interested in religion and being labeled “heathens,” “Saracens,” or “Tartars,” they are a religious people. It is not easy to identify the religious side of the Gypsies for one needs to live within their community long enough in order to recognize their religious inclinations and the forms in which these are expressed. Gypsy religious life and worldview is often another reason for keeping them out of Christian communities.

Although the original Gypsy religion is unknown, Gypsies have often embraced the religion of the locals in order to be accepted and survive. “Thus there are Catholic Gypsies, various types of Protestant and Orthodox Gypsies and, throughout the Islamic world and those parts of south-eastern Europe where the Ottomans recently ruled, large numbers of Muslim Gypsies” (Fraser 1995:312). Rena Gropper notes that in the U.S. “the Rom usually follow the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church, mainly because so many of them came to this country from areas of Europe in which they were practiced” (1975:109).

In Eastern Orthodox countries, Gypsies felt at home because eastern Christianity presented similarities in many worldview areas. However, any change in religious beliefs or belonging is a reason for shame. It is a shame for a Muslim Gypsy to become Christian as well as for an Orthodox Gypsy to become an evangelical Protestant. Anything that requires a change in lifestyle is interpreted as a departure from the traditions of the family. It is considered a shame not to be able to drink a glass of wine any longer with the family, a shame that reflects on the extended clan or family. Anything that distances or separates one from the rest of one’s family is a danger to fight against. As a result, conversion to Christianity often contributes to further marginalization of the Gypsies.

Gypsies find it humiliating and shameful to worship in small churches or house churches probably because their ancestors used to worship in large temples in India. They often prefer to join the religious majority that worship in large churches rather than to be in a position of shame in the religious realm. This was one of the reasons Gypsies more easily adopted the religion of the masses. They believed that if you do like the majority, you will be honored—the main motivation is to get honor—and their religion is based less on a conviction that the chosen church faithfully follows the Bible. The same criteria may be noticed when Gypsies join Protestant churches for they prefer the ones with large numbers of members like the
Pentecostal or charismatic churches. When the family leader decides to change religious affiliation, most of the extended family follow him and adopt the new religion. This seems to be the reason for the unprecedented numbers of conversion to Pentecostalism in Toflea, Romania.

Protestant churches helped Gypsies change their religious mentality and lifestyle, and also helped them abandon smoking, drinking, and other destructive behavior (beating spouses, stealing, or cheating). Eastern Orthodox society, although calling the Protestant Gypsies names, appreciates the changed behavior and tolerates them. However, those Gypsies joining the Eastern Orthodox Church live more of a nominal and mystical type of Christianity, being attracted by rituals, by religious traditions, and by the mystical side of Orthodoxy. When Gypsies adopted the religion of the locals they also retained their own worldview. The result was a syncretistic religion and lifestyle. Certain foods are forbidden and people who deal with body secretions (i.e., midwives, doctors) are declared impure. Ancestors are worshipped out of fear, so the prayer to saints is not foreign in their midst (Lucassen et al. 1998:47). Baptism became popular among Gypsies, but “they often went their own way in matters of burial and, particularly, marriage” (Fraser 1995:313).

**Gypsy Religious Worldview**

Gypsy religious beliefs are relatively unstructured. They believe in a God who is omniscient and omnipotent but who does not intervene in human affairs except when he capriciously decides to do so. As a result, prayers to God are believed to have no impact since God has already decided the fate of every human being. Gypsies believe in baxt (fate or luck, the most common greeting is avelo bahtalo—have luck), and “even though a person would act responsibly according to Gypsy custom, the concept of fatalism softens the harsh judgment” (Belgum 1999:176). Fate is often the easiest explanation when things go wrong.

Because they believe in fate and luck, Gypsies do not welcome change. “Fate-plus-luck is a convenient explanatory device in Gypsy thinking” (Gropper 1975:117). Although a Westerner may believe this is an excuse for laziness, for Gypsies it provides a face saving mechanism. Fate moves the responsibility from the human being to supernatural forces or beings.

The Gypsy worldview for divinity is dualistic, with Manichaean influences, likely coming from Persian dualism, in which both forces of good and evil, truth and lie, pure and impure are necessary for the world’s harmony (Trigg 1973:165; Grigore 2003:153, 157). These forces are complementary while humans are simply observers of the battle between these two entities which have equal chances to influence the evolution of world phenomena (Cherata 1994:60). In Gypsy tales the devil is often found in the “smart” Gyp-
sy category, “namely, tales about Rroma who outwit Gadže (often priests), the Devil himself or even God” (Rroma Tales and Stories).

The Gypsy word for God (O Del, with its diminutive O Deloro) seems to have an Indian origin (O Dewel). The meaning of the word is “The Great Spirit” or the Good one, “master over the thunder and lightning, snow and rain” (Block 1939:235). The devil (Beng) is portrayed as a seducer or betrayer of the Gypsy and has less power or influence than the Great Spirit. The Great Spirit is actually responsible for death or other negative things. The devil’s name means “Unclean” and matches the shame and honor worldview of the Gypsy. O Del is believed to be both apart from the physical world and in it at the same time. Gypsies do not have idols or representations of God; however, they are attracted by the moon and the stars, rather than the earth, especially for fortune telling.

Gypsies also believe in fairies (sky-spirits) and nature-spirits (water, tree, forest, or earth spirits) which should be treated with respect or they will punish the offender. The sky-spirits bridge between God and nature-spirits, act as God’s delegates, and are the custodians of unborn souls. When women lose their temper, it is believed that it is because a bad spirit entered them. There are good and bad spirits, almost always female, and some delight in tempting young men to have children with them. Nature-spirits are believed to be very capricious.

The numbers three and nine are important for Gypsies, as well as black hens which are considered responsible for the births of children with disabilities. Fairies are responsible to protect the life of a newborn and to supervise human affairs. Although Gypsies believe in fairies, no human being has seen one. “They are neither immortal nor invincible, but their lifespans are indefinitely long and their powers far beyond human capacity” (Gropper 1975:115). Fairies are believed to be the servants of God, in charge of bridging between humans and the divinity.

The third category of spirits is the Ursitori, or fate spirits. These spirits come in groups of three, three days after birth, and decide the destiny and fate of the baby (Trigg 1973:163). One spirit is favorable to the human being; the second is against the human being, while the third is a negotiator between the two. They decide the amount of luck a person begins life with. Gropper notes that this luck is similar to Hindu karma, and “includes a belief that one’s position in life is in part the result of one’s past incarnations” (1975:117). Merit is accrued and rewarded, while debt from former lives, as well as from one’s ancestors, need to be repaid by suffering.

The fourth set of spirits is ancestor spirits. Special memorial feasts are organized, especially during the first year after a death. “During this period, the soul should be feasted and entertained at proper intervals; after the first year, the soul merges its once-individual identity with the collectiv-
ity of ancestral souls, who are themselves honored annually with a feast” (Gropper 1975:118). The ancestors dwell with the sky spirits (angels) and mediate between humans and God when asked or invited to. It is believed they can also penalize those who break Gypsy traditions.

There is one more entity the Gypsies believe in: the ghosts of the dead. These are not real spirits but embodiments of all the negative traits, like hostility, jealousy, selfishness, or cunning. Their role is to scare people so they will not break Gypsy laws. If a Gypsy discovers he was negotiating with an embodied ghost, he believes he is doomed and stops eating and sleeping. The family watches the person slowly die, but they do not intervene because dealing with ghosts and their decisions is considered dangerous. The ghosts’ decisions are treated as fate that cannot be changed, because fate is the highest evil Gypsies recognize.

The world of these spirits seems to be separate from the human realm (although they roam the earth) but it is not part of the O Del’s world either. The Great Spirit does not rule over fairies, but these lesser spirits have power to influence humans for good or evil. Although O Del is perceived through nature, the spirits are identified through the results of their influence (especially the evil ones). The influence of the oriental worldview is clearly seen, with Gypsies frequently separating the world into three levels: divinity, fairies, and humans (see Hiebert 1985:148-149; 1994:194; 2008:107, 133), and even when admitting only two levels, the fairies are relegated with the humans (part of the natural world and daily life) and not with the sphere of divinity (Gropper 1975:108).

Gypsies believe in magic rather than reason or logical systems. It is customary for a Gypsy to be interested in miracles, but also to react to them with both respect and reserve. However, the miracle stories of Jesus or the Old Testament prophets draw an audience among Gypsies because they can easily identify with those healed. Unfortunately, the border between spiritualism, magic, and biblical authentic miracles is fuzzy and leads frequently to confusion and syncretism.

Gypsies are very impressed by suffering, by stories about suffering, and are very receptive to solutions that provide an end to suffering. The story of Jesus’ sufferings and death is very appealing to them and they shed lots of tears. It is not difficult to convert Gypsies to Christianity; it is difficult to keep them Christian. When conversion implies only the acceptance of a set of beliefs without changing the deep seated values, the result is frequently backsliding or syncretism. Joseph Tson, president of the Romanian Missionary Society and a pastor in Romania, states that “the main challenge in evangelizing the Gypsies is not so much resistance to the gospel, but emotionalism. Gypsies respond very quickly, but it’s hard to know if they’ve responded because they’ve been really affected by the
There was a notable conversion of Gypsies to Pentecostalism or charismatic movements during the past decades. For example, Florin Cioaba, the King of one of the Roma tribes, recently became a lay Pentecostal pastor. He is the President of the Christian Center for the Roma, which has over 100 churches under its jurisdiction. His extended family followed him, as well as some Gypsies from other tribes.

Pentecostalism offers Gypsies a kind of Christianity that allows for free manifestation of emotions and sentiments. The emphasis is on experience, not truth. This is a problem for Adventists when introducing Gypsies to a set of doctrines or intellectual propositions. The classic Adventist evangelistic approach of presenting historic timelines based on the book of Daniel in order to prove the reliability of Scripture has little impact when used with Gypsy groups. Gypsies do not ascribe value to books since their culture is an oral culture, and most of them do not read well enough to be able to check things out for themselves. The Bible is treated more as a magic book rather than a source of truth.

On the other hand, Gypsies are more attracted by the biblical stories with which they can easily identify. The story of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and the honor that Daniel received as a result of revealing and interpreting the dream is a favorite. Joseph’s story and his capacity of interpreting the dreams keep Gypsies on their toes and stretch their emotions for Gypsies believe in dreams and are receptive to messages that come to them in this way. They are very superstitious and treat omens, dreams, visions, and spells with utmost reverence, thus being considered too mystical and superstitious for secular societies.

Death is seen by Gypsies as a short sleep, but life never ceases, it just continues on “the other side.” The dead go to the underworld through a hole located in the far West, considered to be the end of the world. It is believed that the spirits from the realm of the dead have power over the living, so Gypsies avoid talking about them or expressing negative feelings about the deceased out of fear of vengeance. “Their concern at death deals almost entirely with the question of what relationship the dead will have with those who remain among the living” (Trigg 1973:96). One never insults a spirit or talks about one’s real feelings about one’s ancestors. One’s duty is to honor them.

Funerals and burial ceremonies are merry occasions where people eat and drink and sometimes play games. If a Gypsy reaches an old age “it is taken as a sign that they are especially in favor with the good fairies, and have been exceptionally successful in conciliating the evil ones. Age is therefore, greatly respected” (Block 1939:241). Birthdays are rarely celebrated, and old people cannot recall their birth date, especially when no
records or birth certificates are kept. However, name days are celebrated, especially of the old people (Gropper 1975:111). Men usually leave the religious duties to women, especially old ones. They believe in magic and attribute special powers to witches or old ladies who know how to cure diseases or foretell the future (Fraser 1995:71, 122). If people have a marriage problem, they go to an old woman, recognized by the community to have supernatural powers, who gives them a special potion or an amulet to cast away the spell. It is believed that “an old woman is in league with the supernatural, she has the gift of second sight. She charms and bewitches, practices as doctor and advises lovers. . . . She can use these powers for good as well as for evil” (Block 1939:241).

It is interesting that in order for a spell to be extra powerful, the old woman goes to church to get the help of God. She sets up icons in the home or store, arranges an altar or a kneeling place before a burning candle, decorates the shrine with flowers, and burns incense. There are no crosses or crucifixion icons due to the Gypsy fear of ghosts, but images of the Holy Infant are more acceptable. There are no images of Christ because he was not yet old, and young unmarried men are not considered wise and responsible enough. On the contrary, images of Mary the mother of Jesus are not a problem since women are related to religious duties and Mary was married and had a child. Images of the Virgin Mary are not considered appropriate (Gropper 1975:110).

Although Gypsies will visit a church, they are not fond of priests whom they believe possess magical powers that can upset the balance of the world. Priests are suspect because Gypsies do not believe in humans who are dedicated to the service of God. “Gypsies believe all adult human beings are equal before God and should serve Him, and they see no reason to accord special respect to the status of priests and nuns” (Gropper 1975:114). Another reason Gypsies do not like priests, monks, and nuns (especially Catholic ones) is their celibacy status which is considered unnatural and against the rules of the universe. For them, adults who do not marry, especially ladies, do not fulfill the destiny of their bodies. This might explain why so many Gypsies in East European countries feel much more comfortable with Orthodox priests who marry and have regular families.

In going to church, the nomadic people do not really look for metaphysical explanations or help. They are satisfied to live the present according to the rules of the past, and are usually afraid of what the future may bring, thus trying to employ the services of witches. “O Deloro zanel” is a frequently employed expression that translates “God knows” (what the future will bring). When inquiring of the future, an old Gypsy woman is always preferred to a gadźé priest. However, in order to be considered
good citizens, Gypsies will often become members of different Christian denominations and request the presence of a priest for a christening, wedding, or a funeral, but feel happy if he is not available. In the religion they adopt they are primarily “interested in religious rites at birth and death, but on their own terms” (Belgum 1999:176). This nonconformist attitude toward the Christian established traditions is another reason why Christian communities usually do not welcome Gypsies.

It is good to remember that any change in the Gypsies’ tradition and rhythm of life leads to an imbalance. Block insightfully notes that “it is for this reason that gypsies on becoming settled frequently lose their most attractive characteristics” (Block 1939:243). Gypsies are “fascinated by all religions, and the subject interests them as a topic for philosophical discourse and debate” (Gropper 1975:109). By adopting the religion of the majority of the land or country they are in, Gypsies avoid religious persecution. Although they easily become Orthodox, Catholic (attracted by the high rituals and ceremonies that resemble theirs or appeal to their imagination), Protestant, or Muslim, Gypsies remain Gypsies and retain their ancient Gypsy beliefs. “They never fail to preserve outward appearances but their real nature does not change” (Block 1939:244). Therefore, conversion is often superficial at best, and the Hindu worldview shows its flexibility again when Gypsies incorporate the new god beside their ancient gods, practices, and beliefs.

Since Gypsies believe that truth comes in different shapes and understandings, they are tolerant of others’ ways of conduct. However, they are very strict with their own, especially the extended family. Since they believe truth may be different for each individual, Gypsies fit in very well in a postmodern society.

Block suggests that Christian missionaries should try to identify Gypsy practices and traditions that have Christian meaning. “Dogma still forbids such methods, and as a result, the door to Christianity remains closed to numerous gypsies who otherwise pass readily to the new life without any spiritual upheaval” (1939:243).

No Sin for Gypsies

Gypsy representatives and leaders describe their religion as a “laic religion” (Cace and Ionescu 2000:8). Grigore explains that “the laic religion of rroma is Rromanipen, the rromani law, a system of community norms and concepts, which has the center in the identity cell of traditional culture: the family” (Grigore 2003:163). Something is considered bezax and wrong only if it disturbs the peace and order of the family.

A complete presentation of the gospel has to include the seriousness of sin. A true understanding of the sinfulness and the depravity of human
nature is required in order for the recipients to realize the miracle of salvation. “Good contextualization is aware of the impact of human sinfulness on the process” (Pocock, Van Rheenen, and McConnel 2005:325). The most important work of the Holy Spirit is to convince about sin (John 16:8). However, in order to quickly see people baptized, evangelists and missionaries tend to forget or neglect the importance of understanding how people think about sin in their culture and what the Bible says about sin apart from one’s own culture.

Dye emphasizes the fact that “one must first determine how sin is defined for any particular culture. . . . Prohibitions against lying, stealing, murder and adultery are virtually universal, although what exactly constitutes each sin varies from culture to culture” (Dye 1999:470). Every culture has a certain ethical system which points out wrong behavior, and this is also true for Gypsies.

The notions of right and wrong in the Gypsy worldview are different than the good vs. evil concepts in Western philosophy. Gypsies believe that “right” means to be in harmony with the universe, even if that includes negative actions. A snake bite is considered part of the natural order of things, and appropriate. “Inappropriateness and/or rarity are suspect and probably wrong. . . . As chickens are birds that do not fly properly, the Gypsies contend that eating chicken is not as satisfying as eating other meats” (Gropper 1975:120).

There is no repentance of sin among Gypsies as understood by Christians. In their language, the word for sin is beţax, but it has a different meaning than for Christians. Rather than being a black or white juridical category with absolute meaning, sin is a relative cultural notion. In the Gypsy court, called kriss, Gypsies allow both parties to be right; there is no absolute truth and justice is distributive (Grigore 2003:153-154, 161).

Regret is unknown among the Gypsies. Due to their merry-go-round and nomadic lifestyle, they do not find time for self-examination or heart-searching. They understand sin as breaking the Gypsy code of behavior for which they receive real, physical punishment. Gypsies also refrain from breaking societal norms when they become aware that the police (law enforcement) are watching. Since stealing, cheating, lying, or other petty crimes are not immediately punished, Gypsies considered these behaviors acceptable. And since the Christian God does not punish them immediately, they can even pray to God to help and support them in such dishonest activities. Such syncretism is frowned upon by most Christian communities.

Gypsies believe that each human being has been endowed with a bit of the primordial energy of the universe. This is the equivalent of the Western conscience, and it is given a lot of respect and credibility. This seed has the
potential to develop into both positive and negative sets of traits. When actions that seem strange happen, Gypsies prefer to witness them but not intervene because it is believed that this might be part of the balance of the universe and that the person acting as such might do so guided by his conscience. “Any human interference thus may upset the divine plan and provoke the wrath of the universe” (Gropper 1975:121). This seed of energy from the universe enables Gypsies to relate to God and receive direct instructions from divinities.

Vows are made and broken with the person invoking the voice of the inner guidance for breaking the vow or promising to make up later for the broken promise. However, promises to never break the Gypsy code of conduct are made public with an oath and rigorously kept as a way to increase their honor quota. Expectant mothers frequently make vows during their pregnancy hoping that their faithfulness in keeping the vows will earn special blessings on the baby. The vows are made to themselves and frequently associated with a fast. Unfortunately, Gypsies no longer feel bound to their oaths once they migrate or move to a new location. It seems that faithfulness to their own promises are linked to the location and to the land they are in, paralleling vows made in the Old Testament (i.e., Jacob in Gen 28:20-22).

Sin as Defilement

Gypsy life is defined by a dynamic expressed in pair words. Such a pair is uzo (pure), and mahrime or maxrime (impure). The whole Gypsy philosophy and worldview is based on this dualism. Much of the distinction between pure and impure “stems from the division of a woman’s body into two parts, above the waist and below the waist. A woman is clean from the waist up and ‘polluted’ from the waist down. . . . The lower part of the body is, however, an object of shame . . . because it is associated with menstruation. The fact that blood flows without injury seems to be the proof of a bodily impurity” (The Patrin Web Journal).

The biblical ceremonial laws of purity found in the books of Leviticus and Numbers parallel the Gypsy worldview. After birth, a Gypsy woman is unclean for forty days (Grigore 2003:39). The same injunction is found in Lev 12:2-4. Gypsies divide animals into clean and unclean (Grigore 2003:41). The Old Testament indicates in Lev 11 the same distinction. Dead bodies are also a factor of pollution for Gypsies (Grigore 2003:152-153) as well as for the Old Testament Jews (cf. Lev 21:1, 4, 11; Num 9:10; 19:11, 13, 16). Those declared impure are excluded from both the Gypsy community (Grigore 2003:155) and the Jewish community (cf. Lev 13:46; Num 5:2, 3; 31:19). As Jiří Moskala points out, in the Mosaic Law “there is a connection between uncleanness and sin. Uncleanness could mean sinful in a moral
sense” (1998:196). But, as Moskala notes, the meaning of sin is only one of the many facets of impurity.

Grigore emphasizes that in the Gypsy mind “the concept of pure, . . . implies both a physical dimension and a spiritual dimension, the second being presupposed by the first, bodily purity being nothing else but a reflection—both cause and effect—of the moral purity (Grigore 2003:130). Ritual purity is preserved by keeping the universal order and harmony, while ritual impurity is attained by breaking the intercommunity balance which is established by a set of laws governing behavior (Grigore 2003:160). If a missionary simply presents sin as impurity, and purity as moral goodness, the result will be confusion for Gypsies. They believe that both pure and impure should be present in their lives and that the goal is to keep them in balance as opposites. Joe Sprinkle concludes that “ceremonial ‘uncleanness/impurity’ cannot be equated with ‘sin,’ since natural bodily functions and other factors beyond human control could (and periodically did) cause a person to be unclean. Nonetheless, there is a strong analogy between ‘uncleanness’ and ‘sin’” (Sprinkle 2000:652). This analogy functions in both the Jewish ceremonial system, as well as in the Gypsy culture.

Although there is no full identification between sin and impurity, “in a culture where ceremonial purity is more important than moral uprightness, salvation needs to be expressed in terms of deliverance from the basic depravity of human nature” (Dumitrescu 2005:35). In Gypsy cultures, which are similar to Muslim and the Jewish cultures in this respect, sin is reflected in the corruption of humanity. Moskala indicates that in the Mosaic Law, “ceremonial uncleanness is also related to sinful human nature, which is the result of the original sin. It reminds humans that they are sinful in all activities even though they are performing acts according to God’s creation order (childbirth, marital intimacy)” (Moskala 1998:193). Therefore, the pure-impure dynamic can be used to illustrate the human condition of sinfulness.

Every Gypsy knows they are susceptible to mahrime. Douglas points out that everybody is liable to be defiled or to defile (Douglas 1993:25). But for Gypsies, one can fall into the state of impurity not only by contact with impure objects or substances, but also by certain actions. “Traitors, those who steal from their brothers, adulterous women, those who break the taboos and norms of shame by their behavior, language, and attitude, those who despise the judgment and will of old men become mahrime by the decision of the kriss, a punishment that in most cases is extended upon the family of the guilty person” (Grigore 2003:130). This punishment is the worst form of punishment a Gypsy can receive, being the equivalent of the spiritual death, a consequence more serious in their understanding than
physical death. Sin is thus presented as a state, a condition.

Sin as Shame

When declared *mahrime* (polluted, impure), one is excluded from the kin group or from the church, based on the impurity or *shame*. The Gypsy term for shame is *Lajavo*. Looking at this concept from another angle, those who do not respect or *honor* the clan are declared impure, and are banned from the communion of their own family. “The honor and trust, which the individual owes to the kin and which one guarantees by living within the spirit of the community laws, is named *pakiv*” (Grigore 2003:101-102, 161).

Being pure means to have honor, while the feeling of shame is induced by the state of *mahrime*. Keeping the laws of purity is one of the most important factors involved in social control in a traditional Gypsy society. It is an individual as well as a collective responsibility to avoid *shame* at any cost. Children, especially girls, are educated to preserve their honor and avoid even the appearances of shame. Just as in Muslim societies, Gypsy children are taught to “have shame,” which means to be concerned about one’s honor, the opposite of shaming or being ashamed (Dumitrescu 2005:15).

The concept of shame for Gypsies cannot simply be substituted for guilt in Western societies. More than a result of sin, and unlike guilt, shame is also an *attitude* toward sin which expresses the *relation* of the person to the concept, rather than the concept of sin in itself. However, together with the purity code, shame could very well be used to illustrate the idea of sin in Gypsy communities. The Western world tends to deal with the concepts of sin in very abstract ways, defining its nature. But in nomadic cultures like Gypsy cultures as well as in Mediterranean cultures, the concepts are to be exemplified by stories, illustrating the person’s *relation* to the concepts. The issue is not to define what sin is, but to explain how to relate to this reality.

The entire biblical story is written in terms of honor and shame, of purity and impurity. When this perspective is used in presenting the gospel to Gypsies, they will understand much better how to deal with sin from a biblical perspective. This approach will also result in a better understanding of the nature of sin. As Dye says, “God can allow time for converts to realize the cultural implications of being Christians” (1999:472). I agree, but feel that a missionary should move beyond the Gypsy’ concept and understanding of sin and allow the Holy Spirit to bring change. “Unless we have a broken, humble attitude, sin may become the determinant factor in our contextualization rather than the Spirit’s gentle promptings” (Pocock et al. 2005:325).
Conclusions

In spite of being ostracized for their skin color, poverty, illiteracy, and poor living conditions, Gypsies have survived as a people and preserved their culture. They may be a nuisance to Western societies, but they are also a people made in the image of God and therefore worthy of serious witness. Ten aspects need to be considered when working with and for Gypsies in order to facilitate their integration in Western societies and Christian communities.

First, the Gypsy worldview has to be understood before any missionary work is planned. No strategy will result in real conversions unless the message is communicated through their own understanding of the world and cosmos.

Second, one must praise Gypsies for the resilience in preserving their culture. No feeling of superiority should be employed. When honored, Gypsies will respond with honor and hospitality, opening their homes and hearts.

Third, Gypsies need to be encouraged to go to school and get an education. They are capable, and frequently when given the chance are among the best students. A missionary should not forget that Gypsies are already bilingual and often bicultural.

Fourth, a missionary’s goal should be to develop and train missionaries from among the Gypsies. As Jim Whitley noticed, “When the Roma begin to do their own evangelism, they begin to cross barriers so quickly [that] a real indigenous church-planting movement” is started (Davidson 2007:15).

Fifth, the gospel message should be presented in story form. The Bible needs to be allowed to speak directly to Gypsies. Biblical culture is much closer to the Gypsy culture than to today’s Western culture.

Sixth, a missionary should be prepared to adopt a nomadic lifestyle if necessary. In order to be able to offer continuing support and discipleship, the missionary should be able to join Gypsies in their travels for work.

Seventh, the message should utilize an approach that makes it relevant to the extended family. Today’s individualism in the West has shaped much biblical understanding and most commentaries and Bible study series are based on an individualistic approach.

Eighth, the notions of honor and shame should be employed in explaining the concept of sin and its consequences. The Old Testament teaching about defilement offers an excellent basis for communicating the seriousness of sin to Gypsies. Purity is a virtue to be preserved in Gypsy worldview.

Ninth, worship styles should be adapted to the Gypsy manifestation of emotions and sentiments. Although truth should be emphasized, experi-
ence should undergird their understanding of truth.

Tenth, for a true contextualization of the message to Gypsies, one should identify those elements in the Gypsy tradition that have Christian meanings. Although coming from a Hindu background, Gypsies have acquired elements from the religions they have been influenced by.

Works Cited


Cristian Dumitrescu, a native of Romania, is an associate editor of JAMS. He worked as a pastor in a Gypsy context and learned firsthand the differences between the Gypsy culture and the majority culture in Romania. Cristian would like to see an Adventist approach that offers the gospel to the Gypsies in their cultural context while at the same time integrating them into the life and mission of the church.
Iancu Gabor (IG) is a businessman and TV program host in Romania and belongs to the Gabor family of Gypsies. Cristian Dumitrescu (CD) is associate editor of the Journal of Adventist Mission Studies.

CD: Tell us something about yourself.

IG: I am 25 years old, but I have already been involved in working with non-governmental organizations for improving the Gypsies’ situation and also been a travelling merchant in many European countries. I spent four years in Zagreb, Croatia and since I returned home, three years ago, I am taking care of the family roofing business. I am part of the GABORII male vocal group and I schedule, coordinate, and organize their concerts. We already have held more than a hundred concerts in Romania and abroad. I am also trying to launch the program “Roma for Roma” in partnership with the Romanian Union of Seventh-day Adventists, a program designed to motivate Gypsies for mission.

In 2009 I was invited to host a Light Channel TV program about Gypsies, with Gypsy guests. In May 2010 we finished the first series with 25 programs, which aired on Light Channel TV and was lately contracted by Credo TV. The second series is on hold until funds come in. In the meantime I attended a TV presenters school which I just finished in November. My family is a traditional Gabor family. I married at 16 and now I have two boys, six and four years old.

CD: What attracted you to television and how is media viewed by Gypsies?
IG: When I was invited to host the TV program I initially declined the invitation, but after much thought I accepted hoping that through such programs other Gypsies would be able to see how God can change their lives if they accept him. At the same time, I hoped that the majority population would also better understand the Gypsy minority by witnessing changed lives. I invited Gypsies from different branches of activity and society strata to these programs. I discovered that I enjoyed hosting TV programs and that I have a gift for it, so I decided to learn how to do it better. Gypsies are avid media consumers, especially TV programs, but they usually cannot see themselves as media people for it is not one of their traditional occupations. When some of them saw me the first time on TV they started to laugh, especially the young ones, but later they came to understand that new occupations are possible.

CD: I understand you opened a shop where you sell traditional Gypsy clothes. Are your customers interested to find out more about your people and culture?

IG: I have an online shop, and my contact with the customers is very limited. A real store may open up opportunities for more detailed conversations.

CD: Why do you think that a high percentage of the Gabor Gypsies embraced Seventh-day Adventism while other Gypsy groups chose to become Orthodox or Pentecostal?

IG: We believe that the Adventists preach the biblical truth. On the other hand, the Gabor Gypsies were attracted by the Adventist Church because they felt accepted, loved, and not discriminated against as they are in society at large. In the Adventist Church they can get involved, in spite of the fact that most have only finished the fourth grade, and have been able to serve and worship along with those who have the highest educational degrees. Those who decided to become Pentecostals were attracted more to a worship style where feelings and emotions are more important, or because they received material help. The Gypsies belonging to the Eastern Orthodox Church seldom go to church, mainly twice a year, at Christmas and at Easter.

CD: When did the Gabor Gypsies embrace Seventh-day Adventism?

IG: Around 1960 a few Gabor Gypsies embraced Adventism. Two of them are still alive today. Through those few, the Adventist message spread to their families and relatives, so in 1985 there were already sev-
eral families in the church. After the fall of communism in Romania, in 1989, the Gabor Gypsies accepted in large numbers the biblical message preached by the Adventists. There are no exact statistics, but approximately 70 percent of the Gabor Gypsies today are Adventists.

**CD:** I know there are several Gypsy Adventist churches, how many Gabor Adventist churches exist in Romania?

**IG:** Unfortunately, there is only one Adventist church exclusively for Gabor Gypsies; it is located at Craciunesti de Mures, with about 200 members, but the rest of Gabor Gypsies worship in churches along with Romanians, Hungarians, etc. However, there are twelve other Gypsy churches made up of other types of Gypsies. Soon the first Adventist Gabor pastor, Gabriel Samu, will graduate and become the first Gabor to have an advanced degree. No other Gabor has dreamed of studying in a university yet, and we are proud to see him as a model for others to follow.

**CD:** Which evangelistic or missionary method do you think works best with Gypsies and why?

**IG:** It is difficult to generalize and suggest one method only because there are so many Gypsy subgroups, and I believe the missionary method should specifically be adapted to each group. But, as a general rule, the group’s language should be used, with the presenter belonging to the group and using the group’s history. The music should be specific to that group, too. Public evangelism works with Gypsies, as well as working with extended families which are part of the group. Gypsy Christian concerts are well received in large Gypsy communities.

**CD:** What are the most urgent needs among the Gypsies?

**IG:** The most pressing needs are spiritual ones, but you cannot talk about Jesus if people do not feel Jesus’ hand and feet at work. Gypsies have material and educational needs, too, and these are always the doors to accepting the good news of salvation through Christ.

**CD:** What are the major cultural differences between the Gypsies and the rest of the population?

**IG:** The most striking difference between the Gabor Gypsies and the majority of the population is the way we dress. I mentioned the Gabor Gypsies because not all Gypsy groups preserve their traditional dress.
But another important difference is the way Gypsies see and interpret the world around them. Most Gypsies do not value formal education. They prefer to live together, several generations in one house. The married men live together with their parents who frequently educate their grandchildren. They also work together and perpetuate the family business or trade. They earn money together and the first one to benefit is the eldest brother who moves out first. The second will move out only when enough money is gathered again, and so on. The youngest son inherits the parents’ house and takes care of them for the rest of their lives. The Gabor gypsies are especially proud that none of their parents are in an asylum or nursing home. It is a shame to abandon elderly parents or to place them in the care of strangers. In order to preserve the family, the women do not seek employment out of the house, but stay at home and raise the children and educate them.

**CD:** *Is the nomadic spirit still alive among the Gypsies today?*

**IG:** Gypsies have always travelled, either going to Europe or within Europe. Today, Gypsies are partly settled, partly nomadic, some have houses and land but they still travel for their business or trade. Very few travel in wagons, they use modern means of travel, use cell phones, and other advanced technology. Some decide to move to another country and settle there, but family ties remain equally strong. In case of a wedding or a death or another important family event all gather together. It is a shame to miss a family reunion.

**CD:** *Is there an improvement in the integration of Gypsies in society after the local governments and the EU decided to allocate funds for integration projects?*

**IG:** The integration of Gypsies is very difficult to attain. In spite of so many programs, funds allocated, and strategies developed, very little has been achieved. I believe only God can change the Gypsies.
UBIRAJARA DE FARIAS PRESTES FILHO

The Karajá Mission in Brazil

Introduction

For a long time indigenous peoples were pretty much a marginalized part of Brazil’s official history. Their conquest and genocide lasted for five hundred years while the traditional view of history emphasizes a harmonious meeting between indigenous people and Europeans, which together with the Africans formed Brazil’s national culture. However, a more detailed analysis shows what really happened was a very violent and cruel conquest with enslavement, transmission of diseases, land invasion, and intolerance towards their religious ideas.

The story of Brazil’s actions towards its indigenous people is a story full of tragedies, few hopes, and little expectation, but things have started to change in the last few decades. There was a widely held idea that the natural evolution of the indigenous people would integrate them with the national society in such a way that their indigenous cultures would blend in with the rest of Brazil’s cultures as they were assimilated. Contrary to what many people taught in the 20th century, the indigenous nations did not disappear by the end of the millennium. Instead, their population is increasing every year, and there are a growing number of institutions that are fighting to get back their lands and to force changes that will result in respect for their cultures.

During the 20th century there was progress in the study of anthropology and people became more conscious about the need to promote self-determination among the various people groups and to allow all people groups to have the right to live according to their own cultural beliefs. This right usually needs to be assured by the legislation in every country before it can make much headway. In Brazil both Catholics and Protestants began reconsidering their mission practices and contact strategies with indigenous people.

Within the Seventh-day Adventist Church the early proposals to reach
indigenous people were first conceived for mission to the native communities of the United States and Canada. However, the impact on Adventist missionary mentality was further strengthened by the work in South America, especially the missions conducted by Fernando and Ana Stahl in Peru, and Alfred and Bett Cotty on the borders of Brazil, Guyana, and Venezuela.

There is a strong connection between medical assistance programs and missionary activities in many denominations and that is exactly what took place in Adventist mission as well. Evangelism to indigenous people was always accompanied by nurses, doctors, or dentists who offered help in the villages where they were working. In Adventist mission there was even a stronger emphasis on medical work because of our beliefs which highlight the connection between physical and spiritual health.

This article will briefly highlight several aspects of the medical missionary activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church among Brazil’s indigenous people by taking a detailed look at the Karajá people.

**The Brazilian Indigenous Peoples**

There are many definitions for *Indian*. Usually, the best definitions are those which explain the collective identity of peoples, nations, societies, ethnic groups, or communities. Indians have maintained their traditional ways since the arrival of the first Europeans. New anthropological studies suggest that being an indigenous person is not biological or racial, but involves ethnicity and culture. This means that being indigenous does not necessarily mean you live in the forest and walk around naked, as many stereotypes suggest.

About 170 indigenous languages are still in use in Brazil. Some of them are now at risk of extinction since they are known only by a small group of people. Other languages are recovering their importance, and whereas they had been abandoned, are now once again being studied and learned. There are several large linguistic groups, such as the Gê or Tupi, and additional smaller groups and languages that do not fit in any other grouping.

Research shows that in the 15th century, there were about 8 million people living in the lands that today make up Brazil’s territory. The disastrous effects of colonization caused a large reduction in the indigenous population through genocide, transmission of diseases, and forced miscegenation. Census data from 1991 listed an indigenous population of almost 300,000. It is surprising that in 2000 the data noted an increase in the population to about 700,000 people. This significant increase proves how wrong the idea of the extinction of indigenous people was. Part of the reason for this resurgence is that peoples’ ethnic consciousness has been...
reawakened, and many groups have lost their fear and have come to accept their identity.

Since 1967 the federal government agency, the Indigenous National Foundation (Funai), has, together with the Ministry of Justice, been responsible for indigenous matters in Brazil. One of the responsibilities of Funai is to delimit the land that belongs to the indigenous people, which is no easy job, since there are many interests involved. Loggers and gold diggers still insist on going into indigenous lands and often do not recognize the local people’s rights.

The Constitution of 1988 assured the right of each indigenous group to occupy land according to their cultural traditions, thus strengthening the concept of indigenous territorial rights. There is also the recognition of the rights of indigenous populations to preserve their peculiar culture. The idea of integration has been replaced by the recognition of the right of cultural diversity. However, even with these improvements there is still a lot to be done in order to assure that constitutional guarantees are realized all over the country for there is often a gap between the law and practice.

**New Challenges for Indigenous Peoples**

Many issues need to be evaluated when dealing with indigenous societies in Brazil, a few of which will be highlighted in the following sections.

**Indigenous Health System**

Every indigenous culture has its own traditional medicines that have been in existence since before their first contact with Europeans. This system was based on the people’s knowledge about plants, roots, rites, and procedures that responded to their existing diseases.

However, the close proximity of the indigenous groups with the growing national society brought a wide range of diseases to the indigenous villages which were not known by them or their shamans. They never had a chance to build up any immunity to fight against the new diseases.

The government has tried to provide basic medical care, but there are difficulties for even basic health services to reach many of the villages. There is the problem of language and the lack of knowledge by many of the health professionals about the indigenous cultures. In some regions the federal government has contracted the services of indigenous organizations, churches, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to implement the needed health services. For example, over the last few years ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) has been asked to provide some of these basic services.
Indigenous Education System

When most of the young indigenous people attend a government school they usually come to school speaking only their indigenous language. This fact alone requires a differentiated educational system. The teachers need special training in order to learn how to show honor and respect to the indigenous culture and language. In order to meet this need the government has recently made plans to encourage the training of teachers from each indigenous people group in order to have more sensitive teachers in the system.

Indigenous Food

As the indigenous peoples have come into contact with outsiders their eating habits have also radically changed. When the indigenous lands were seized or encroached upon, the process of getting food became more difficult, especially for hunters and gatherers. Thus, if the church or ADRA is working in the communities the simple fact of being there for assistance can help solve, temporarily, the need for new food sources. But there is also the need to deal with the damaged social and environmental conditions and to introduce, when necessary, new food production techniques and new food types in a careful and well-balanced manner.

Indigenous Land

Land has always been important for indigenous people because it is from the land that they receive their food, medicines, wood for their homes, and tools. In addition, many cultural traditions, stories, and their history are connected to their traditional areas. There are several ongoing efforts by various indigenous organizations to clearly define indigenous land, but it is a difficult assignment because justice for indigenous people moves slowly to solve this kind of problem.

The Karajá Society and the Araguaia River

The Karajá have been living by the Araguaia River for at least four centuries, especially around the area of the Ilha do Bananal. Their language is part of the linguistic family that is also known as the Karajá, and includes the languages spoken by the Xambioá or Northern Karajá and by the Javaé. Despite some particularities, all these indigenous groups share many similar cultural features.

In addition to the river’s economic and mythological importance, the Araguaia is also a link that connects the Karajá with the national society. The river runs through almost all of Central Brazil, and because of this the region was in constant contact with sertanistas (adventurers from the
backwoods), merchants, missionaries, and immigrants, so it was not long before the Karajá people started to feel the effects of the encroaching colonialist.

The area was drastically changed when gold seekers flooded into the territory, but when the gold ran out cattle ranchers took their place. So once again the Karajá were forced to retreat from their lands, and that also affected their cultural way of life.

According to stories from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, the Karajá men used to walk around naked with ornamental ropes on their arms and legs. During special festivities and ceremonies they completely covered their bodies with intricate painted patterns that were symbolic expressions of their age and of different occasions in their lives (Bueno 1987:35).

The Karajá live in large communities, although sometimes they are required to split up into smaller groups due to scarcity of food. Another reason for splits in the community is conflicts between groups. Their houses are usually built in parallel rows facing the river. The traditional house is rectangular, with only one room and only one opening. During the rainy season, the waters from the river can rise forty feet above the normal flow, flooding the whole region. When this happens, the Karajá go up to the hills or to higher areas where they fish in the lake in the area and dedicate themselves to agriculture.

The Karajá, like many other indigenous groups, are extremely susceptible to diseases spread through contact with the regional population, especially infectious pulmonary diseases.

The First Adventist Mission Project among the Karajá

During the 1920s the leaders of the Adventist Church became interested in reaching out to the indigenous population in the Mid-West region of Brazil. This idea was not an exclusive idea for the church leaders and missionaries, but mirrored what politicians, adventurers, and scientists were talking about. At the end of 1926, the South Brazilian Union decided to send an American pastor, Alvin Nathan Allen, to organize a mission for the indigenous people of Goiás. He had worked before with indigenous peoples in various regions in Peru and Bolivia, and was forty-seven years old at the time.

Allen’s first trip was an exploratory trip to learn more about the place and see where the first mission could be established. He went from São Paulo to Leopoldina (current Aruanã, in Goiás), and then north on the Araguaia River. He traveled by river from Goiás to Belém, and returned to São Paulo by ship. This trip began in April 1927, and ended in October of the same year, according to his diary (Alvin Nathan Allen Diary).
In all the places Allen traveled, he made his best connections and contacts with the Karajá people, so became interested in starting his mission with this group of people. In January 1928 the administration of the South Brazilian Union decided that Allen could go back to the Araguaia and begin the so called, “Mission of the Araguaian Indians.” The project had the intended purpose (1) to instruct the Indians on how to survive and develop so as not to be dependent on the workers from the conference; and (2) to buy a piece of land in an appropriate place in order to reach the largest number of Indians, but also where the worker’s health would be protected. They looked for land that had fertile soil and that was close to a source of wood, which would be needed for construction (Pinheiro 1994:51, 52).

In May 1928 Allen left São Paulo accompanied by his wife Luella and his son Alvin, and also Antonio Pereira and another couple, Emílio and Ofélia Gutzeit. The place they chose for the headquarters of the mission was Piedade. They spent many days in the construction of the small school and housing. Some of the local Indians helped in the construction.

In 1932, after four years of work in Piedade with few results, Antonio Pereira and two others went on to Fontoura, in the Ilha do Bananal to establish a second mission among the Karajá. This village was one of the biggest on the Araguaia River, and Allen’s plan was to form many small missions along the river. Thus, the first school among the Karajá was established at Fontoura.

After six years of work in the Araguaia mission, Pastor Allen needed to be transferred to the south of the state of Goiás. He was fifty-three years old at that time and his wife was physically weak, not being able to endure the pressures of living in an area of difficult access. Up to that point, no baptisms were reported. The huge cultural differences between the missionaries and the Karajá hindered the progress in the evangelistic activities and even in the assistance programs. In 1938 the Allen family returned to the United States. These early beginnings among the Karajá begun in the 1920s were almost forgotten in the years that followed.

**Difficulties in Maintaining the Mission**

In 1934 the mission headquarters was moved from Piedade to the village of Fontoura, but means were scarce so it was difficult to continue the work. The ethnologist Herbert Baldus, an important scholar of the indigenous societies of Brazil, tells what he saw in the village of Fontoura when he passed through it in 1947:

In Piedade, where we went the next day, there are no more Karajá. In 1935, I found some of them working on the Adven-
tist mission. On July 12, I passed by the Adventist mission in Fontoura. When I visited it in 1935, it had just been established. Now it is almost abandoned. Only Mr. Antonio Gomes [one of those that helped with the development of this small missionary post] and his family are left, to take care of everything. Even in that time many Karajá of the conquered village had died of malaria, especially the kids. In April of 1935, there were 123 Indians in this village. According to Mr. Antonio Gomes, this number went down to 80 in 1939 and to about 45 in 1947. From the nine students that the missionary school had, which were between 10 and 12 years old in 1939, only one is still alive. In July 1947, the Karajás had established themselves on a sand island in front of the mission, which was at the right margin of the river. At the time of high waters, they go and live on the opposite margin. (Baldus 1948:151)

Antonio Gomes got sick and died in 1950. The mission was then basically forsaken. As we can see from Baldus’ report in 1947, the situation in Fontoura was precarious. The mission was not able to find a solution to the high mortality rate caused mainly by malaria and tuberculosis. In addition to the high death rate there was also an exodus of Indians from Fontoura to the nearby villages. Although the mission was abandoned, the Araguaia was still a region that needed to be reached by the church.

**New Incentives for the Karajá Mission**

In 1953 a mission boat was bought by a missionary nurse as a way to once more start some missionary activity among the Karajá. Three years later it was decided to send another missionary couple, Isaac and Joaquina Fonseca, to Fontoura. They were able to move to the indigenous territory because of the authorization of an indigenous leader that sympathized with the Adventists.

Another mission boat was acquired with more space and more possibilities for attending to the needs of the population. Alvino and Maria Xavier, both nurses, were called to be in charge of the activities for this boat (Pinheiro 1994:64), and it became well known among Seventh-day Adventists for its social activities. Many of the Karajá villages were visited and the doctors and dentists were especially welcomed. This work was also news worthy in the secular press and was mentioned in the *Folha de São Paulo*, one of the most important newspapers in Brazil.

Alvino and Maria worked on the boat between 1962 and 1970. Even with all this community assistance and social activity, no baptisms occurred among the Karajá during this period.
The First Baptisms among the Karajá

Calebe and Abigail Pinho arrived in Fontoura in 1970, but had to leave six of their seven children at a boarding school. Only their youngest son was able to be with them so it was not an easy decision to accept the offer to continue the work on the Araguaia. The separation from their many children made it very difficult to continue in the mission (interview with Abigail Pinho, July 2002). The family stayed in Fontoura until 1977, and during that time the Karajá often received visits from various Adventist volunteers that would do various types of service for the community.

Pastor Calebe began daily morning worship services, and after four years some of the Indians started to have an interest in the church, leading to the first baptism. Among the first converts was Paulo Kuaji who translated the sermons into the Karajá language. During his time in the mission, Pastor Calebe baptized more than seventy Indians, and among those first baptisms, the conversion of Antônio Tewahura stands out. According to Abigail Pinho, this man became a great preacher among his people. He would study a Bible lesson with the missionary couple and immediately share it with other Indians. In addition he would travel to different villages to share the Adventist faith. Sometimes he would travel by bicycle or even by foot.

From the time of those first conversions there developed a growing opposition. Indians that were baptized stopped eating turtle meat, a traditional food in the Araguaia, and they also stopped participating in some of the traditional festivities that were part of the Karajá cosmology. The converts gave up other cultural elements because they were now considered unnecessary. This situation of cultural change was studied by anthropologists that visited Fontoura, and because of it the missionaries were looked on as if they were trying to change the essential elements of the indigenous life. Among other accusations, the newspapers said that the mission “discourages the practice of the indigenous ritual Ruanã, which, according to anthropologists, is the basis of the political and social structure of those people” (Jornal do Brasil 1976). In addition the mission was accused of treating “the Karajás with racial prejudice” (1976). It was the absence of the Adventist Indians from the traditional festivities that were interpreted as racial discrimination encouraged by the missionaries.

In the following words the anthropologist Marielys Siqueira Bueno describes the Aruanã ritual which the Adventists no longer attended:

The Aruanã festivity, where they reenact the myth of the creation story of the Karajá, also considered an artistic manifestation, is the most well-known and recounted festivity by all authors and also the most significant for the Indians. It is truly
an amazing spectacle—men dressed in interesting hay costumes, beating their feet monotonously to the sound of voices and rattles. Under the masks that completely cover them, hides the Aruanã spirit, and the songs bring back the memory of the myths of the tribe and reinforce their religious experiences. (Bueno 1975:37)

Pastor Calebe, however, argued that he never prohibited the Indians from eating turtle meat. He only taught what the Bible said about the distinction between clean and unclean food. Among the unclean animals were the capybara, collard peccary, and the leathery fishes. Those who converted voluntarily avoided those kinds of meat, as well as alcoholic beverages and the Aruanã dances, which were dedicated to the Karajá gods (Pinheiro 1994:95, 06).

Although the Karajá leaders recognized and valued the Adventist assistance during the recent years and from years before, different opinions on the presence of the mission in Fontoura led some leaders and the Funai to banish the Pinho couple from the village in 1977. Until today no specific reason has been given for this action. According to Antonio Tewahura, the Fontoura village was split by the issue. Funai agents promised better assistance than what was being offered by the mission, which motivated the Karajá leadership to agree to the removal of the missionaries. In addition, Tewahura emphasized the fact that a Funai agent collected signatures of all the people of the village who were interested in having better opportunities to sell their crafts. Of course, everyone signed it. Then, according to Tewahura, those signatures were used on the petition requesting the expulsion of the mission (interview with Antonio Tewahura, July 2003). Another sad fact is that the Funai did not provide all that they had promised to the village of Fontoura.

Calebe and Abigail Pinho left Fontoura during the first semester of 1977 and moved to a district in Goiás that was still at the margins of the Araguaia River, but with no contact with the indigenous people. Newspapers claimed that the couple had saved up a lot of money during their time in the mission. However, they left Fontoura with only their personal belongings and the added responsibility to raise a Karajá child. Abigail tells how an indigenous family begged them to take and raise the child. Notwithstanding the fact that they already had many children, Calebe and Abigail adopted the girl as their daughter. Thus, besides their seven children, now they had one more daughter that lived with them. Their interest in the Karajá did not end there, for Mrs. Pinho worked on preparing the Adventist Karajá Hymnal (interview with Abigail Pinho, July 2002).
The Remnants of the Mission After 1977

Beginning in the 1960s the Adventist mission sent some Karajá young people from Fontoura to IASP (Instituto Adventista de São Paulo), an Adventist boarding school. Some of them did not adapt well and ended up going back to their families. The challenge of cultural adaptation and being away from family are common problems for many Karajá students that need to study outside their environment. Recently a boarding school that welcomes some young Karajá is IABC (Central Brazil Adventist Institute) located in Goiás.

When the mission personnel were expelled from Fontoura the church was left in the hands of a converted Karajá, Antonio Tewahura who had received training as a Bible worker and who is respected in his community and the neighboring villages as a wise counselor. Another local leader who had been born in Fontoura was João Weheriá who was baptized in 1975 and later went to study in IASP. He found living in a boarding school difficult and many times thought about going back home. One of the obstacles he faced was the food, which was very different from the Araguaia diet.

After finishing high school João went to the Instituto Adventista de Ensino (IAE) where he was the first Indian to enroll for a degree in theology. In spite of many obstacles and difficulties he graduated in 1984 at the age of 35.

It took a while before João Weheriá received a call to pastor. Meanwhile, Adventist leaders in Goiás worked to reestablish contact with the Funai and presented a plan whereby João would stay in a boat along the Araguaia River, assisting the villages. The Funai agreed with the plan and João went to work with his people three years after finishing his studies in theology.

In his first year of ministry, 25 Indians were baptized. In July 1993, João Weheriá became an ordained Adventist pastor, reinforcing his decision to be a missionary.

According to a report in 2003 from Pastor Weheriá, Antonio Tewahura, and Iwraro Karajá, the church in the Santa Isabel village had grown to about 150 members, some of them from JK and Watauí, two small neighboring villages. In Fontoura there were about twenty-six members attending even though there were 160 members on the books. According to Tewahura, this loss of members was due to the decision of some to abandon the Adventist faith. Others had died or moved away.

There was also a small Adventist group in São Domingos where Paulo Kuaji was one of the members. He, along with Leandro and Waxiaki Karajá, helped in the translation of hymns that were being prepared for the Adventist Karajá Hymnal (a project led by Abigail Pinho). From these recent
reports it seems that there is an emerging leadership among the Indians. The worship services are conducted in the Karajá language, and when an outsider attends, there are translators to help.

The work of the church among the Karajá has also increased the church’s understanding of how to work with indigenous peoples. The methods and approaches used should help the church in future work among Indian populations. Especially helpful in this regard was the work of Pastor Matson Santana who worked as a missionary on the Araguaia from November 2004 to December 2009. Since Pastor Matson was interested in missiology his work and insights from working with many Karajá villages should also prove helpful for future indigenous work.

Research has shown that the conversion process among the Karajá is long and drawn out, but when a Karajá converts it usually lasts, even if it seems unstable at times. The data from 2006 lists a Karajá population of more than 2,500 scattered in many villages. It is also interesting to note that in April 2010 the total number of Adventists among the Karajá was 513 (about 20 percent), although this number needs to be updated to check and identify those that are regularly attending church.

**ADRA’s Recent Actions**

Beginning in the early 1990s, ADRA started some social projects in the Karajá villages. The agency built four Centers for Development in the Ilha do Bananal. These centers were funded by contributions from ADRA Italy and also from the Northern Ireland government. The projects were designed to offer a basic health orientation and health care, basic sanitation, guidelines for businesses and small industry, classes on the dangers of alcohol, classes teaching sewing and agriculture, and the projects also provided dinghies for transportation purposes. ADRA also furnished equipment and seeds to encourage agriculture in all the villages. They also encouraged the breeding of bees and chicken. In partnership with Funasa, 170 bathrooms with running water were built. Some of the villages that participated in these projects included Wataú, JK, Santa Isabel, Fontoura, São Domingos, and Macaúba.

With the funds from Northern Ireland an Indigenous Cultural Center was built in São Félix that today also houses a small cooperative to promote the selling of indigenous crafts.

It’s also important to mention the work ADRA has done in the development of community leadership. A good example is the support ADRA gave to Waxiaki Karajá from Santa Isabel. She studied elementary education at UNASP (Centro Universitário Adventista de São Paulo) and was also financially assisted by the American non-profit organization International Children’s Care (ICC).
Finally, mention should be made of the Indian exchange program that was funded by ADRA in partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency and Funai. The purpose of the program was to learn more about the indigenous developmental models in Canada. Four Karajá Indians participated: Iwraro Karajá, João Weheriá, Antônio Tewahura, and Marcos Karajá, traveling to Canada in April 2003 and visiting projects in Toronto, Oshawa, Ottawa, Vancouver, Victoria, among other cities (Barbosa and Borges 2003:14).

Final Thoughts

In this brief history of the Karajá mission there are many lessons that can be learned about the missionary and the help and assistance offered by the church. One of the characteristics of the mission on the Araguaia was its inconsistency due to (1) the interference of the Funai, (2) lack of trained indigenous leadership, and (3) the lack of funds.

A second area was that within the Karajá community there was a lot of resistance to any change of their traditional worldview. The first baptism happened only after fifty years of mission work. This struggle to communicate the gospel in understandable ways for the Karajá was impacted by the lack of good information about the indigenous culture and the politics involved in working for indigenous people. Anyone who goes into an indigenous area needs to have at least some basic knowledge about the culture of the people they will be working with. In recent years many anthropological studies have been made which allow for a deeper understanding of the cosmology of the people, the way they eat, their relationships with nature, the way they process their contacts with society, etc. Even more important is the need for missionaries to be respectful of the people’s worldview during the process of evangelism. Anthropological studies can be a tremendous help in building understanding and relationships between the indigenous peoples and Seventh-day Adventist missionaries.

It is important for the missionary enterprise to know where to start when entering a community. Best practices suggest that before anything is attempted study should be given to the social and cultural characteristics of the group that the church seeks to share the gospel with. Studies by historians and social scientists cannot be ignored. In the case of the Karajá, there are many dissertations and thesis that thoroughly describe and analyze these people and their cosmology. Instead of being looked on with reproach and suspicion, these studies contain much important information that can help the missionary.

I believe that the many years of Adventist work and struggle on the Araguaia will continue to have an impact on Brazilian Adventist work
among indigenous peoples. The ups and downs of the Karajá mission will influence other projects and missionaries. The current presence of Adventist Karajá leaders will also increase the attention given to the debate over cross-cultural evangelism that involves contact between Indians and missionaries. Pastor Matson Santana’s reflection about missionary practices among Indians in Brazil was unheard of before his pioneering work, and it will continue to be important for future practices. Based on the missionaries’ past experiences his analysis sought to show what went right and what went wrong among the Karajá.

There are other considerations that will be important for work among indigenous peoples. In 1996 a group of Brazilian anthropologists had a meeting to discuss the work of religious organizations among indigenous people during which it was concluded that the actions of the federal government through the Funai had often been faulty. Therefore, they suggested that the assistance and support of religious organizations is valuable in work among indigenous groups, but the right to receive assistance should not be conditioned by whether or not the local people accept the religious beliefs of the assisting group. Missionary activity needs to respect the liberty and authority of the indigenous people so the goal of Christian social activity is not to force the gospel on the people but to present in respectful and winsome ways the salvation found in Christ.

Those missionaries who want to work in indigenous societies anywhere in the world should realize that cross-cultural contact is never a one-way street. Indigenous people will interpret the Christian message that they receive through their own cultural lenses and based on their own values and history. Sometimes the Christian message will be completely rejected while social assistance is welcomed. At other times indigenous peoples will adopt many of the practices and doctrines of the Christian faith and will look to the culture and practices of the larger society to contribute to their own social and ethnic reconstruction. Between these two extremes are many variables, so missionaries need to be aware of these possibilities. The goal is always to bring people to an understanding of the biblical message and past mission history has demonstrated that the Lord can work in miraculous ways to accomplish this. What may seem at first a simple rejection of the gospel or syncretism of the message with local beliefs or practices, can often in the future give way to rich new expressions of the biblical message in the indigenous community.

Anthropologists, including Robin Michael Wright, former professor at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Brazil) and currently a professor at the University of Florida, suggest that in most cases the way Christian mission to indigenous Indians and how the missionary message is interpreted are closely related to the religious concerns of the Indians.
Although every human being has a need of salvation in Christ, Christian witnesses should not ignore the problems that the people are facing. A deep understanding of local worries and concerns must be sought out so those points can be used to establish bridges of communication with the Christian message. This type of respectful dialogue, where the missionary is a learner of the indigenous culture, can help break down walls that can hinder the preaching of the message. When Pastor Matson spent time learning about Karajá religiosity in order to discover bridges of communication he could use to share the biblical message, he was involved in a dialogue that emphasizes the differences without giving up the universal message of the gospel.

For centuries indigenous peoples were the target of massacres, forced exile, dispersion, impositions, and prohibitions. Society asked them to adapt, negotiate, and make concessions. Much of their traditional culture was lost during the process of contact with the national society. Many characteristics of the outside society are common in some indigenous villages. This reality suggests that the idea of a cultural rescue may be necessary in the social assistance and missionary approaches used. Important cultural aspects like the appreciation of the local language, the use of medicinal plants, championing the sense of community and sharing, the production of crafts, and many others things need to be valued, even those things that are becoming rare due to outside influence.

In addition to the biblical message that is lived and preached by the missionary in a contextualized manner, there also needs to be intentional training of local leadership so they can continue the work. Thus, Adventist institutions must provide safe havens for young, promising Indians who have accepted the Adventist message. The social assistance approach which has always been important in contact with Brazil’s Indians, adds an additional point of contact with indigenous people because their own history has shown that they needed a health care system. In this way, the combination of preaching the gospel with care and orientation in the health area are important elements to the diffusion of the message.

Missionaries also have a responsibility to warn the people in the area (including people in the church) of the necessity to respect the Indians in order to contribute to a more congenial environment. More required classes in anthropology should be included in the curriculum in the Adventist universities in majors like Theology, Education, and Nursing. The benefits of the anthropological studies will help not only those who will have contact with the Indians but will help create bridges of understanding for anyone who may have contact with people from a different culture.

An analysis of the Adventist activity among indigenous people shows a history of victories and failures. Our past needs to be considered when
it comes to the present and the future for there are many implications for other parts of Brazilian territory. Many stories about missionaries still need to be studied and analyzed in the light of the current concepts of mission and cultural change. These initiatives of historic rescue can stimulate the discussion about current mission strategies used by the church. The world increasingly talks about the importance of appreciating cultural diversity and allowing each group to have autonomy when it comes to different cultural practices. Indigenous people should have that autonomy, but when they learn about the gospel they will also be able to be part of a global community that transcends cultural differences and is united by the grace of Jesus.

In order to be efficient in missionary approaches the cross-cultural worker needs to take into consideration that there is not a superior or inferior culture. To take the gospel to indigenous societies does not mean that the task is to civilize them or make them more like us and our set of values. Instead it is necessary to understand the peculiarities and positive aspects of the society we want to reach.

Finally, the missionary that comes into contact with an indigenous community needs to understand that there is no culture that is completely ideal. Only God is capable of making a culture that is perfect. Each society has elements that contradict the Creator’s original plan, and this includes the missionary’s own culture. For this reason meekness is essential, for meekness should also lead to a deep reflection of one’s own values and limitations.

Notes

This article is adapted from my 2007 Doctoral Thesis from the Universidade de São Paulo, entitled “Indigenous People and the Second Advent Message: Adventist Missionaries and Indigenous People in the First Half of the 20th Century.” The Portuguese version of the dissertation can be found at http://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/8/8138/tde-10072007-104907/

The Associação Brasileira de Antropologia (Brazilian Anthropology Association) requires that all indigenous names be written in capital letters and without inflection (example: the Timbira people—the Timbira); and that the sound of a strong /c/ be written with a /k/.

The diary has entries from April 1927 to May 1930 and formed the basis for my doctoral dissertation. The first published source that mentioned Allen’s diary was Greenleaf 1987:67-77.
Works Cited


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Once upon a time the Seventh-day Adventist Church was about mission. As the church grew and diverse entities developed, mission appeared to lose its intentionality and attention. Today mission appears to be running by default, without a strategic focus. Church leadership is aware that mission is too critical to be relegated to autopilot, and steps are being taken to remedy the situation.

The Report Card

The church has come a long way. From a tiny group of 3,500 believers in 1863 when the Seventh-day Adventist Church was formally organized, it has grown to 15.7 million baptized members in 2007 (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2007:4). We rejoice in the more than 1 million accessions every year (2007:4). In 2007 it was the sixth time in the history of the church when more than a million people joined the Adventist communion annually (2007:2). We take pride in having established work in 201 of the 230 countries and areas recognized by the United Nations (2007:77). We delight in the 64,000 organized churches, 571 local conferences and missions, and 103 unions in 13 divisions (2007:4). In terms of institutions, we thank God for the 168 hospitals and 433 clinics spanning the globe, not to mention the 62 publishing houses and 7,300 schools with 1.5 million students (2007:6).

Indeed, the church has brought the Three Angels’ Messages to the world on a scale never before imagined. Every day in 2007, 2,849 believers joined the church and almost six new churches were established (2007:2). That the church has grown exponentially is nothing short of amazing. The faithfulness of our members who had contributed $2.7 billion in tithes and offerings (2007:2, 4) is no less remarkable.

Yet beneath this seemingly rosy picture of progress lurks a troubling reality of imbalanced development in mission: rapid expansion in some
areas and lamentable non-growth or decline in others. Looming large on the horizon is the 10/40 Window, where two thirds of the world’s populations live. Yet the church has scarcely made headway in this vast region.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the phenomenon of uneven growth in the global church. First, we will examine the current situation in mission. Second, we will examine selected church-sponsored programs to ascertain how well they measure up to meeting the formidable challenges of the 10/40 Window. Third, we will analyze the data collected and conclude with some recommendations.

**Mission Assessment**

Performance assessment is done in the following five areas: accession trends, membership distribution, population per member ratio, membership per million population ratio, and the 10/40 Window.

**Accession Trends**

Accession means baptism plus profession of faith. A careful perusal of the accession figures reveals evidences of uneven growth. On one hand we have had huge accessions in Latin American and the African continents. In 2007, the accessions in South American Division (SAD) and Inter-American Division (IAD) represented 22 and 19 percent of the total world accessions, while East-Central Africa (ECD) and Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Divisions (SID) chalked up 18 and 14 percent respectively. Hence these four divisions combined were responsible for 73 percent of the total world accessions.

At the other end of the spectrum were the 9 divisions with low accessions (table 1). These divisions accounted for 27 percent of world accessions. The three European divisions combined represented 1.5 percent of accessions as a percentage of the total accessions, reflecting a difficult continent where the gospel has had limited impact.

In broad strokes, figures in 2007 accessions indicate rapid growth in Latin America and Africa, and slow growth in Europe and the South Pacific.

**Table 1. Accessions as Percentage of World Total (2007)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South American</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-American</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East-Central Africa</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa-Indian Ocean</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Membership Distribution

Another way of considering uneven growth is examining world membership distribution. Perhaps not surprisingly, the same demographics in accessions are also reflected in membership distribution. Increase in accessions moved in tandem with a rise in membership. Thus we see a heavy concentration of membership in Latin America and Africa, and a much smaller membership in Europe, the South Pacific, and some parts of Asia (table 2). Suffice it to say that large accessions engender expansion of membership, and large membership in turn spurs further increase in accessions.

Thus membership distribution in the world divisions is regrettably disproportionate, with the African divisions (except WAD) and Latin American divisions accounting for 8 million members, or 64 percent of world membership. Membership in the European continent accounts for about 2.6 percent of world membership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>MEMBERSHIP</th>
<th>% OF WORLD MEMBERSHIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter-American (IAD)</td>
<td>2,968,485</td>
<td>18.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East-Central Africa (ECD)</td>
<td>2,617,706</td>
<td>16.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa-Indian Ocean (SID)</td>
<td>2,283,279</td>
<td>14.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia (SUD)</td>
<td>2,187,125</td>
<td>13.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia-Pacific (SSD)</td>
<td>1,345,615</td>
<td>8.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American (NAD)</td>
<td>1,062,189</td>
<td>6.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia-Pacific (SSD)</td>
<td>902,394</td>
<td>5.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central-Africa (WAD)</td>
<td>798,494</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Asia-Pacific (NSD)</td>
<td>590,684</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Pacific (SPD)</td>
<td>399,979</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The third way of examining uneven growth is to look at the population per member ratio. Back in 2007, the church had a population per member ratio of one for every 423 persons on planet earth (2007:2). This figure, while heartening, masks the huge disparity between both ends of the spectrum. On one hand are countries with a low population per member ratio, and on the other hand are countries with an exceedingly high population per member ratio.

The top ten countries with the lowest population per member ratios comprise of Pitcairn (1:2), Montserrat (1:5), Grenada (1:8), Saint Vincent and Grenadines (1:8), Belize (1:10), Dominica (1:11), Antigua and Barbuda (1:11), Saint Lucia (1:12), Jamaica (1:12), and Cayman Islands (1:12) (2007:78-80).

At the other end of the scale are countries with high population per member ratio. The top 20 countries in this category include Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Syria, Somalia, Afghanistan, Morocco, Iran, Algeria, Turkey, Bhutan, Djibouti, Comoros, Mauritania, Western Sahara, Tunisia, Brunei, Maldives, Iraq, Egypt, and the Channel Islands (table 3). Seven of these countries are located in EUD and six in TED territories. Thus the two European divisions shoulder the lion’s share (65 percent) of these countries with few or no Adventist membership. These divisions not only have to contend with secular Europe, but also with the huge Muslim population in their backyards.

Table 3. Population Per Member Ratio (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>POPULATION PER MEMBER RATIO</th>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>MEMBERSHIP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>1:27,601,000</td>
<td>TED</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>1:22,389,000</td>
<td>TED</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>1:19,929,000</td>
<td>TED</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>1:9,119,000</td>
<td>ECD</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>1:6,378,000</td>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>1:6,342,20</td>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1:2,848,320</td>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>1:1,003,059</td>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1:986,227</td>
<td>EUD</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Membership Per Million Population Ratio

The fourth way of appraising mission trends is to examine the membership per million population ratio. Membership alone is not necessarily a precise gauge of the depth of mission penetration. The membership per million population ratio may be a more accurate measurement of the extent of mission challenge.

In 2007, there was only one Adventist for every 1 million Turkish population (table 4). In Iran there were none. In Egypt the ratio was 10 Adventists to 1 million Egyptians, and in Pakistan 67. All these three countries at the bottom of the scale are Islamic countries. Again, these figures are a grim and painful reminder that the church is confronted with the colossal responsibility of reaching the Muslim world for Christ.

### Table 4. Membership Per Million Population (2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>POPULATION ESTIMATE</th>
<th>CHURCH MEMBERSHIP</th>
<th>MEMBERSHIP PER MILLION POPULATION</th>
<th>DIVISION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1,317,955,000</td>
<td>360,822</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>NSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>1,131,883,000</td>
<td>1,339,606</td>
<td>1,184</td>
<td>SUD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>302,201,000</td>
<td>1,000,578</td>
<td>3,311</td>
<td>NAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>231,627,000</td>
<td>190,405</td>
<td>822</td>
<td>SSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>189,335,000</td>
<td>1,331,282</td>
<td>7,031</td>
<td>SAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>169,271,000</td>
<td>11,396</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>TED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>149,002,000</td>
<td>27,196</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>SSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>144,430,000</td>
<td>257,943</td>
<td>1,786</td>
<td>WAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>141,681,000</td>
<td>51,875</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>ESD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>127,730,000</td>
<td>15,213</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>NSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Inflation</td>
<td>Currency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>106,535,000</td>
<td>597,540</td>
<td>5,609</td>
<td>IAD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>88,706,000</td>
<td>571,653</td>
<td>6,444</td>
<td>SSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>85,134,000</td>
<td>9,077</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>SSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>82,254,000</td>
<td>35,925</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>EUD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>77,127,000</td>
<td>163,524</td>
<td>2,129</td>
<td>ECD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>77,127,000</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>EUD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>73,418,000</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>TED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>71,208,000</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>EUD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>65,706,000</td>
<td>12,083</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>SSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo, Dem. Rep.</td>
<td>62,636,000</td>
<td>507,790</td>
<td>8,107</td>
<td>ECD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the top 20 most populous countries in the world, 5 are located in the SSD, 3 in EUD, 2 in TED, 1 in NSD, and 1 in SUD. Probably the most onerous division in the world in terms of reaching large populations is NSD with China and its humongous population of 1.3 billion. SUD is not far behind with its Indian population of 1.1 billion.

In short, NSD, SUD, SSD, EUD, and TED have the unenviable task of working in large populations with small membership in their territories. Whether division human and financial resources are aligned in direct proportion to the extent of the enormous task remains to be seen.

**10/40 Window**

The fifth way of assessing the missionary enterprise of the church is to examine it from the 10/40 Window arena. The 10/40 Window is a term generally believed to have been coined and popularized in 1990 by Luis Bush, International Director of the AD 2000 & Beyond Movement. The Window is the rectangular area stretching across northern Africa and Asia, between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. The makeup of the countries within the rectangular has changed through the years. Bush’s original list encompasses 59 nations. Subsequent lists vary from 52 to 62 to 69 countries. Some argue that although geographically within the 10/40 perimeter, the Philippines, Portugal, and South Korea as Christian countries should be excluded, and nations such as Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan should be included.

The 10/40 Window, as defined in this paper, encompasses the following 65 nations: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Brunei, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chad, China, Djibouti, East Timor, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Mauri-
tania, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Western Sahara, and Yemen.

TED tops the list with 16 countries in the 10/40 Window (table 5), followed by SSD (11 countries), and EUD (8 countries). IAD, NAD, SAD, SID, and SPD do not have countries in the 10/40 Window.

Seventh-day Adventist membership in these 10/40 Window countries is small or even non-existent. Open evangelism in some of these countries is either fraught with danger or impossible because of government restrictions and persecution. Though access is restricted to foreigners, some Global Mission (GM) pioneers are working among the indigenous populace.

These sobering figures show that the Great Commission, by no stretch of the imagination, could be described as near completion in the 10/40 Window. Those divisions in the Window are confronted with huge challenges perhaps unimaginable to people elsewhere. They will certainly need more funds, trained personnel, and other provisions to work in such forbidding and at times inhospitable conditions.

| Table 5. Distribution of 10/40 Window Countries in World Divisions (2007) |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Trans-European Division (TED)     | 16                |
| Albania, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen |
| West-Central Africa Division (WAD) | 11                |
| Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal |
| Southern Asia-Pacific Division (SSD) | 11                |
| Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam |
| Euro-Africa Division (EUD)        | 8                 |
| Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara |
| Euro-Asia Division (ESD)          | 6                 |
| Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan |
| Northern Asia-Pacific Division (NSD) | 5                 |
| China, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea, Taiwan |
| East-Central Africa Division (ECD) | 4                 |
| Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia |
Adventist Response

We have taken a quick survey of the church’s state of affairs by examining five aspects of the 2007 statistical reports: accession rate, membership distribution, population per member ratio, membership per million population, and the 10/40 Window. We have become somberly aware that the growth of the church has been noticeably disproportionate: phenomenal in some areas and sluggish in others. How should the church address the considerable disparity of growth in different parts of the world? Have the current church-sponsored mission programs helped rectify the situation, or have they contributed to the growth imbalance?

To answer these questions truthfully and objectively, we draw upon the 10/40 Window as an assessment tool. Granted, the 10/40 Window is not the only benchmark to measure effectiveness. However, as far as mission is concerned, there is perhaps nothing more urgent and challenging than the 10/40 Window, which is largely untouched by the gospel.

The following programs are evaluated according to the footprints they have impacted on the 10/40 Window:

- Inter-Division Employee (IDE)
- Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS)
- Global Mission (GM) Pioneers
- General Conference (GC) Staff Evangelism
- ShareHim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Accession Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia Division (SUD)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-American Division (IAD)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North American Division (NAD)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American Division (SAD)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Pacific Division (SPD)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Inter-Division Employee (IDE)

The Inter-Division Employee (IDE) program has been the cornerstone of the international mission of the church. Typically IDE appointees go to mission service for five years. They serve on the front line of evangelism. Many work in institutions as administrators, professors, or physicians. Mission advances were due in no small measure to the pioneering spirit of the early IDEs.

During the flourishing years of the 1970s, we had more than 1,500 IDEs. The number has since steadily declined. As of 2008, 919 IDEs were sent around the globe, costing the church more than $21 million per annum, or about 16.5 percent of the GC world budget. The North American Division (NAD) was the principal contributor of IDEs. It used to supply almost half of all missionaries. The trend had since waned. In 2008 NAD sent out 33 percent of all missionaries. SSD was the largest consumer of IDEs, taking in 19 percent of all IDEs.

Table 6 shows a telling picture of the state of mission in 2008. IDEs were deployed in 63 percent of the 10/40 Window countries. Two countries (North Korea and China) were access restricted countries. Countries such as Egypt, Jordan, Israel, UAE, East Timor, and Pakistan have open access, yet church membership remains relatively small.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH IDEs</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH NO IDEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TED (16)</td>
<td>Albania, Egypt, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Pakistan, Sudan, Yemen, UAE</td>
<td>Bahrain, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD (11)</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal</td>
<td>Benin, Guinea, Mali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD (11)</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Cambodia, East Timor, Sri Lanka, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam</td>
<td>Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD (8)</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Tunisia, Turkey</td>
<td>Morocco, Libya, Western Sahara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD (6)</td>
<td>Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD (5)</td>
<td>Japan, Mongolia, Taiwan</td>
<td>North Korea, China (except Hong Kong)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD (4)</td>
<td>Djibouti, Ethiopia</td>
<td>Eritrea, Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUD (4)</td>
<td>India, Nepal</td>
<td>Bhutan, Maldives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not all IDEs work in a “mission field” in the traditional understanding of the term. Many of them work in the GC Headquarters as well as in GC
institutions. In fact, these two groups of IDEs represented 19 percent of all IDEs in 2008.9

Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS)

The AVS volunteers are short-term missionaries. Typically they serve from a month to a year. Many extend their stay in the mission field after their initial term has expired. In 2008, the church was blessed with 755 volunteers.

The United States, with its renowned culture of volunteerism, was the largest contributor of volunteers in 2008, sending a whopping 476 (63%) volunteers to virtually every continent on earth. Other contributors of volunteers included South Africa (6%), Australia (5%), Canada (3%), and Argentina (2%).

The largest consumer of volunteers was South Korea. With its vast network of English language institutes, the country understandably has an insatiable appetite for more volunteer teachers. Not surprisingly, in 2008 the country absorbed 195, or 26 percent of all volunteers. Volunteers were also very much in demand in Micronesia (6%), Taiwan (5%), Marshall Island (4%), and Guam (4%). Most schools in Guam and Micronesia have been dependent on volunteer teachers for years.

What was the distribution of volunteers in the 10/40 Window? Most volunteers served wherever they were needed. Of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window, volunteers appeared in 22 of them, or about 34 percent (table 7).

Table 7. Adventist Volunteer Service (AVS) in 10/40 Window (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH VOLUNTEERS</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH NO VOLUNTEERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TED (16)</td>
<td>Egypt, Kuwait, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>Albania, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD (11)</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Chad, Nigeria, Senegal</td>
<td>Benin, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD (11)</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand</td>
<td>Brunei, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD (8)</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD (6)</td>
<td>Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Many volunteers were institutional workers serving in the Adventist school system. Some schools offered volunteers free housing and utilities, round-trip airfare, and a generous stipend. The enormous difference between remunerations of volunteers working in institutions and non-institutions has effectively blurred the line between volunteerism and livelihood. If individuals “volunteer” to work in Korea or Taiwan where life is relatively cushy, who would volunteer in Jordan, Bhutan, or East Timor? How then would the people from the 10/40 Window countries ever hope to hear the gospel?

Global Mission Pioneers

The Global Mission (GM) pioneer program is part of the GC Office of Adventist Mission. GM pioneers are nationals working in their own contexts in unentered territories without having to adapt to a new culture or learn a new language. GM projects are jointly selected by the local mission/conference in consultation with the union and division. Funding is shared among the GC, division, union, and conference. The total cost of 2008 GM projects amounted to almost $15 million, to which the GC contributed $5.1 million.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH GM PIONEERS</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH NO GM PIONEERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TED (16)</td>
<td>Albania, Israel, Pakistan, Sudan</td>
<td>Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD (11)</td>
<td>Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD (11)</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam</td>
<td>Brunei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD (8)</td>
<td>Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Western Sahara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD (6)</td>
<td>Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan</td>
<td>Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2008, there were 1,604 GM pioneers working on 1,236 projects in 113 countries. Pioneers were found in 41 (or 63%) of 65 countries in the 10/40 Window.

General Conference Staff Evangelism

While hundreds of IDE, AVS, and GM pioneers are busy serving the world church, GC personnel are also involved in short-term missions. Special funding of $100,000 has been set aside for this purpose, and GC workers are encouraged to participate. The idea is to conduct reaping campaigns somewhere in the world field, with special funding ranging from $1,500 to $10,000 according to the size and nature of the meetings. The funds do not cover travel, per diem, and accommodation costs, which would come from travel budgets of traveling staff. The GC staff evangelism fund stipulates one third of the GC subsidy must be budgeted for adequate follow-up and funding of facilities.

### Table 9. General Conference Staff Evangelism in 10/40 Window (2005-2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH GC REAPING CAMPAIGNS</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH NO GC REAPING CAMPAIGNS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TED (16)</td>
<td>Egypt (1 time)</td>
<td>Albania, Bahrain, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD (11)</td>
<td>Nigeria (2 times)</td>
<td>Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD (11)</td>
<td>Indonesia (20 times); Malaysia (3 times)</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD (6)</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan (2 times)</td>
<td>Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD (5)</td>
<td>Mongolia (1 time)</td>
<td>China, Japan, North Korea, Taiwan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-10/40 Window countries where GC staff conducted reaping campaigns between 2005 and 2009: Philippines (17 times), USA (11 times), Ghana (5 times), Mexico (4 times), Zambia (4 times), Brazil (3 times), Mozambique (2 times), New Zealand (2 times), Tanzania (2 times), Hungary (2 times), Croatia (2 times).

Following are countries where GC staff conducted reaping campaigns since: Australia, Angola, Belgium, Burundi, Bulgaria, Egypt, Kenya, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Peru, Russia, Romania, Samoa, Singapore, Tahiti, Ukraine, UK, and Yugoslavia.

From 2005 to 2009, GC personnel conducted reaping campaigns in 36 countries. Indonesia appears to be the destination of choice with 20 visits (table 10), followed by the Philippines with 17 visits, and the USA and India with 11 visits each. The rest of the tally includes Ghana (5 times), Mexico (4x), Zambia (4x), Brazil (3x), Mozambique (2x), New Zealand (2x), Tanzania (2x), Hungary (2x), Croatia (2x), Kyrgyzstan (2x), Nigeria (2x), and Australia, Angola, Belgium, Burundi, Bulgaria, Egypt, Kenya, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Peru, Russia, Romania, Samoa, Singapore, Tahiti, Ukraine, UK, and Yugoslavia with one visit each.

What was the distribution of GC evangelists in the 10/40 Window? Out of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window, GC personnel selected only 7 countries (11%) where they conducted reaping campaigns in the past 5 years (Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Mongolia, and Nigeria). In other words, the places they went tended to cluster around countries where the work had been well established, and very few went to difficult countries. Basically GC personnel went wherever they wanted to go or requested to go. Participating in evangelism is a laudable endeavor. But going to countries where membership is small, workers are few, resources are meager, and the goings is tough is even more commendable.

**ShareHim**

Different divisions adopt diverse approaches to lay training. The 1000 Missionary Movement was born in SSD and later adopted by other divisions. Peru’s renowned small group ministry model has been much emulated beyond the boundaries of the union. NSD’s special brand of His-Hands Mission Movement has successfully inspired many young people to be home missionaries. The list goes on. Perhaps one of the largest short-term mission programs is ShareHim, a ministry of the Carolina Conference in partnership with The Quiet Hour and Amazing Facts. ShareHim
(formally Global Evangelism) has adopted “Experience God’s Power through Witnessing” as its motto. Each year it organizes and sends evangelistic teams around the world. Besides its global outreach, it also trains members and pastors to do evangelism in North America (table 10).

How conspicuous were ShareHim volunteers in the 10/40 Window? A study of their 2003 to 2008 records suggests that volunteers under their banner conducted meetings in 11 (17%) of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window (table 8). India stood head and shoulder above others with about 270 campaigns. Malaysia was a distant runner-up with 68 campaigns, followed by 41 in Benin, 33 in Mongolia, and 32 in Indonesia. Other nations included Ethiopia (31), Nigeria (18), Guinea Bissau (12), China (11), Taiwan (3), and Kazakhstan (1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIVISION</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH SHAREHIM VOLUNTEERS</th>
<th>COUNTRIES WITH NO SHAREHIM VOLUNTEERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TED (16)</td>
<td>Albania, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAD (11)</td>
<td>Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria</td>
<td>Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSD (11)</td>
<td>Indonesia, Malaysia</td>
<td>Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUD (8)</td>
<td>Afghanistan, Algeria, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Western Sahara</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD (6)</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSD (5)</td>
<td>China, Mongolia, Taiwan</td>
<td>Japan, North Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECD (4)</td>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUD (4)</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Analysis of Statistics

The church is serious about the Great Commission. Leadership has frequently and adroitly communicated to the church about mission being its sole raison d’etre. Through the media and pulpit, the message appears to be getting through to membership about the importance of “finishing the work.” Huge resources have been committed. A relentless push for evangelism is becoming a way of life. New work has started in previously unentered areas. Churches are being established in far-flung corners of the earth. Given our puny size and limited resources, we praise the Lord.
for these breathtaking achievements thus far.

The success story is somehow belied by a troubling trend of disproportionate growth. It is well documented that Latin America and the Africa continent have been engines of growth for years. The two continents represent 73 percent of world membership. On the other hand, the European continent accounts for about 2.6 percent of world membership. In terms of accessions, the three European divisions make up only 1.5 percent of world accessions.

The same trend of disproportionate growth is also noted in the population per member ratio. While Latin America and Africa generally have low ratios, elsewhere the ratios are incredibly high. For example, in Jamaica or Saint Lucia, the population per membership ratio is 1 to 12. But in Turkey it is 1 to 986,227, and in Mauritania 1 to 624,800. The colossal disparity is a cause for concern.

The phenomenon of uneven growth extends to the 10/40 Window as well. The European divisions are located in or near the Window, with 30 out of the 65 countries in their territories. Along with WAD, SSD, ESC, and ECD, all these divisions face the mammoth task of reaching the 3.2 billion people (two thirds of the world population) living in the Window. On top of that, NSD, SSD, and SUD have the additional challenge of working in some of the most populous nations on earth, many of them having humongous cities of more than 10 million people.

The trend of uneven growth can become an intra-division situation as well. In the TED, membership in the country of Sudan is growing in leaps and bounds, averaging a 6.8 percent growth rate from 2003 to 2007, and outperforming the world average of 3.97 percent in the same period. Yet, the rapid expansion emblematic of Sudan is atypical in the rest of the division. Another case in point is the SSD, where the Philippines and Indonesia have been engines of growth. The membership in these two countries amounts to about 84 percent11 of the total division membership, and the remaining 16 percent are distributed in 16 10/40 Window countries, where growth rates are almost infinitesimal.

Analysis of Adventist Response

How did the church tackle the situation of uneven growth? There have been numerous responses from official quarters, as well as supporting ministries, to fulfill the Great Commission. Formally we have the IDE program for cross-cultural ministry, the AVS program for short-term mission, and GM pioneers for unentered territories. These formal programs are augmented by many supporting ministries as well as short-term mission projects sponsored by conferences and institutions.

In terms of mission footprint on the 10/40 Window, the IDE program
probably has the best record. In 2008, they were touching lives in 63 percent of the 65 countries in the 10/40 Window. AVS missionaries covered about 34 percent, GM pioneers 63 percent, GC staff 11 percent, and Share-Him 17 percent (table 11).

What do we make of this footprint assessment? We can probably draw several conclusions. One telling revelation is that as a church we have not been doing as well as we could in the 10/40 Window. Somehow in the multiplicity of tasks and priorities, as well as financial and personnel constraints, the Window is in increasing danger of being overlooked or forgotten. This apparent neglect surfaces time and again in our study. Three significant trends are noted: a shift from frontline mission to institution, from proactive to reactive, and from pioneer mission to mission of least resistance.

A Shift from Frontline Mission to Institution

There has been a notable shift from frontline mission to institution maintenance. In 2008 we sent out 755 IDEs, of which 424 (or 56%) were institutional missionaries working in ADRA, GCAS, as well as in educational and medical institutions. Ten years ago, institutional IDEs accounted to only 45 percent of the total IDEs. A similar trend is noted in the AVS program. Volunteers in Korea, Taiwan, Micronesia, Marshall Islands, and Guam represented 45 percent of all volunteers. Almost all of them worked in educational institutions.

The shift of sending more missionaries to institutions than to frontline evangelism comes about perhaps not by design but by default. The early Adventist mission movement, beginning in the 1890s through to the 1930s, concentrated almost exclusively on foreign mission. The work rapidly expanded from its home base in North America to Europe, Asia, and Africa. Whenever missionaries were sent, they were sent to foreign lands to establish mission stations. As membership expanded, missionaries invariably established medical, educational, and publishing institutions. So the shift from frontline mission to institution is indicative of a maturing church in foreign mission and is not necessarily a negative development and should not constitute a scathing rebuke to the church’s missionary programs. Be it as it may, is it possible that the large deployment of missionaries to institutions has been done at the expense of the 10/40 Window whose critical significance has not diminished and whose massive needs are ever present? Should national workers take on greater responsibilities in institutions, thus freeing foreign missionaries to work in more critical areas?
A Shift from Proactive to Reactive

Most calls for long-term and short-term missionaries are generated from divisions, which in turn respond to requests coming from subsidiary organizations. The GC screens the calls and provides partial funding. As a rule, the GC doesn’t initiate calls, even though it finances most of the IDE budgets. Invariably these calls derive from the needs of existing ministries and institutions and are seldom related to frontline mission. Few missionaries are sent for strategic reasons. Granted, in recent years we did send missionaries to Yemen, Mauritania, and Syria. But such initiatives are few and far between compared with mission in the 1960s and 1970s.

The current situation is reminiscent of the time of Judges when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 17:6). With good intentions, every entity does what it thinks is best in the interest of mission. Redundancy of similar efforts is not uncommon. Except for GM pioneers, the current scenario of calling missionaries and fulfilling those calls appears largely reactive rather than proactive, which is a far cry from the heydays of the single-mindedness of the Foreign Mission Board. Created in 1889, the Board was tasked with a strategic function “for the management of the foreign mission work” of the church (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1889:141, 142).

As the work expanded and matured, it was easy to lose its strategic focus. To be strategic is to behave like a chess player, planning several moves in advance and anticipating possible countermoves. This is different from the myopic player, who looks ahead only one step at a time and responds to one opposing move at a time. Could it be that the lack of zeal for a renewed strategic focus on the 10/40 Window is not so much due to the absence of resolve and knowhow but rather to the absence of a structure or mechanism to bring about that focus?

A Shift from Pioneer Mission to Mission of Least Resistance

According to Ohm’s law, an electrical current takes the path of least resistance. Recent mission endeavors have tended to follow the same law. Whatever is most economical, wherever is most responsive, whenever is most convenient, that’s where we consign resources. We continue doing what we are used to doing with little or no evaluation.

This study has repeatedly shown that the church is predisposed to spending time and resources in areas where the work has already been well established. A case in point is the GC staff evangelism program where 17 evangelistic meetings were conducted in the Philippines by GC personnel from 2005 to 2009. The ShareHim program mobilized roughly 295 teams to conduct similar reaping campaigns in the same country within the same time frame. But the question is, Why the Philippines of
all countries? Why would the Christian country need foreign help when it has a membership of close to 600,000 Adventists, 6,200 churches, 10 hospitals, 6 colleges and universities, 1 publishing house, and 3,500 literature evangelists?

Besides the Philippines, other favorite destinations of these short-term missionaries include Sabah and Sarawak, Jamaica and Saint Lucia. Sabah and Sarawak already have a large Adventist membership. Jamaica and Saint Lucia have some of the lowest population per member ratios in the world.

Granted, GC personnel and ShareHim evangelists, as well as many conference-sponsored mission teams, are not necessarily tasked to reach the 10/40 Window. Some of these groups make it clear that their aim is to train and motivate Western lay people for evangelism and not to reach the unreached. Their aspiration is well taken. But could the resources spent on these “easy” places be redirected somewhere else in the world where the going is “harder” and the level of gospel penetration minimal or even non-existent? Can we live with less glamorous results or is the numbers game more important?

This research study has a sense of déjà vu about it—the same old patterns appearing with new names. Once upon a time the old name was Burma. The early leadership subscribed to the theory of least resistance by concentrating on the ethnic minorities who were more responsive to the gospel. The outcome a generation later is that we have a membership of almost 26,000 in 2007, most of whom are ethnic minorities who make up less than 10 percent of the general population. By concentrating evangelism on the minorities, we excluded ourselves from focusing on the Burmans, Burma’s main ethnic group, which constitutes 68 percent of the population. Today millions of Burmans live in huge cities along the central valley, stretching from Rangoon in the south all the way to Mandalay in the north, and we have less than 100 Burman Adventist believers.

The almost same episode was replicated in Taiwan, where missionaries found the 9 indigenous tribes to be much more responsive to the gospel than ethnic Chinese. Most tribal people lived in the mountains, and the Han Chinese preferred the plains. The perpetuation of the mission of least resistance resulted in huge indigenous membership and much smaller ethnic Chinese membership. This imbalance in membership is also reflected in ministry. Today we have a dearth of ethnic Chinese pastors and overabundant minority pastors. The conundrum deepens when ethnic Chinese churches refuse to accept indigenous pastors and indigenous pastors refuse to pastor ethnic Chinese churches.

The same can be said of following the path of least resistance by working almost exclusively in rural areas. It is no wonder that today we are a
church of villages and islands. Cities are languishing for lack of attention. Yet population growth in cities is fast outpacing that of rural areas.

Mission taking the path of least resistance is fine as long as it doesn’t exclude itself from reaching other more onerous groups. We should by all means watch for open doors and receptive groups and move ahead with them, but we cannot forget the difficult. It may have been more expensive and arduous to win the Burmans in Burma and the Han Chinese in Taiwan, but these people groups deserve the right to hear the gospel and be called children of the living God (Rom 9:25, 26).

**Summary and Conclusion**

In this paper we have outlined the admirable accomplishments of the world church. We have analyzed statistical trends from 2003 to 2007 in terms of accession, membership, population per member ratio, membership per million population ratio, and the 10/40 Window. We have enumerated the Adventist response to mission in the 10/40 Window through the IDE, AVS, GM, GC, and ShareHim venues.

The study highlights two disquieting trends in mission: disproportionate growth in the world field and near negligence of the 10/40 Window. Mission as we know it today is being defined by the reality of huge disparity in the distribution of resources. Making the situation even more untenable is the lack of coordination and leadership in mission to correct the current autopilot syndrome. Mission appears to be running by default without a coordinating body to oversee the strategic interests of mission. Which entity is responsible for mission? Some might answer “Adventist Mission.” After all, it has the right name. A closer scrutiny, however, reveals that other entities are also inextricably involved. Presidential is a stake holder in mission by way of its association with the IDE Budget Oversight Committee (IDEBOC), a committee that allocates and keeps track of IDE budgets around the world. Secretariat is in partnership with mission by virtue of its role in identifying, recruiting, training, and sending missionaries. Treasury works through the Financial Planning and Budgeting (FP&B) Committee as well as with Secretariat in the financial aspects of mission through the Interdivision Employee Remuneration and Allowances Committee. The Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, as well as Adventist Mission, oversee and promote the 13th Sabbath mission projects. World divisions identify mission projects and request funding from the GC. Media ministries such as Hope TV and Adventist World Radio contribute much through the airwaves and cables. Supporting ministries are at the forefront. Each of these entities works almost independently, with separate silos and agendas raising funds for their causes. So which agency is really responsible for mission? When
everyone is responsible, nobody really is.

To remedy the current state of affairs, it seems imperative that the church provides strategic directions. In warfare, mission command and control is critical to provide purpose and direction. The church needs a mission command and control to provide global leadership in redressing imbalance in mission, identifying human and financial resources, channeling these resources to unreached areas, starting new initiates, and realigning territories if necessary.

The church has not been known for taking challenges lying down. It always rises to the occasion, no matter how difficult the task may be. The church leadership is aware that mission is too critical to be relegated to autopilot. It is convinced of the urgent necessity to give coordination and attention to mission and to assume a global leadership role commensurate with the immensity of the task remaining. To streamline operations, steps are being taken to merge IDE functions in the GC secretariat and TRIPS. Three mission-related committees are being eliminated in favor of a more centrally coordinated committee. On top of that, a high-powered strategic planning and budgeting body is being established to give strategic direction to mission. That body is chaired by Presidential and members include leaders in Secretariat, Treasury, and Adventist Mission.

We are hopeful that as the result of these significant changes, mission under the Lord’s guidance will again find its focus and direction to move forward valiantly until “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14).

Notes

1The 2007 edition of the Annual Statistical Report has been used for this article.
2Accessions are defined as additions to the church by baptisms and profession of faith.
3Each day in 2007, members contributed $7.3 million to the mission of the church.
4There were 1,561 IDEs in 1979. The highest ever recorded figure was in 1983 with 1,584 IDEs.
5In 1999, the cost was $16.1 million per annum. The annual IDE cost excludes costs to divisions and the GC.
6NAD contributed 48% of all IDEs in 1999.
7The percentage declined a decade ago. In 1999, 22% of IDEs served in SSD.
8The figure denotes the number of 10/40 Window countries in the division.
9As of 2008, the total number of IDEs serving in GC headquarters were 119 and in GC institutions 56. They included ADRA-Africa (5), Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (27), Adventist University of Africa (6), GC Auditing Services (6), HIV/AIDS (2), and Adventist World Radio (10).
10ShareHim has as its objective “to develop in Seventh-day Adventist members and pastors in the ‘first world’ a renewed ownership of this Movement’s Message and Mission as well as confidence that God will work through each to achieve His objectives by making public evangelism a lifestyle for each congregation.”

11SSD 2007 membership was 902,394. The combined membership of the three Philippine unions was 571,653 and the combined membership of the two Indonesian unions was 190,405.

Dr. G. T. Ng currently serves as the Secretary of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Prior to his appointment he also served as Associate Secretary, Secretary of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, Dean of the Seminary at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in Silang, Philippines, and as a missionary in Cambodia.
The major non-Christian world religions have made only a faint thumb print on the mission and theological agenda of the Seventh-day Adventist Church throughout its nearly 150-year history. But in recent years, that thumb print has inevitably become more distinct as the Adventist Church has grown rapidly in regions where non-Christian religions dominate. Partly by choice, partly by force of circumstances, and partly from the desire to work together in common causes such as religious freedom, Adventists have increasingly been drawn into dialogue with non-Christian believers.

**Other Mission Priorities**

Writing in 1856, Adventist pioneer James White called for a missionary spirit among church members, “not to send the gospel to the heathen; but to extend the warning throughout the realms of corrupted Christianity.” When the church’s first official overseas missionary, J. N. Andrews, traveled to Switzerland in 1874 he echoed this priority. He saw his task as sharing distinctive Adventist beliefs with other Christians. According to Borge Schantz, Adventists “approved of and praised” mission to non-Christians but saw it as a task for other churches” (Knight 2007:122).

For the first quarter of a century after 1844, Adventists had, in Richard Schwartz’s words, “only a limited concept” of taking the Good News to all the world. Initially the church had seen its mission field as almost exclusively the United States (Schwarz 1979:141). The thought of a mission overseas was daunting for the “little flock” of Adventists, and Arthur Spaulding says this early view of the mission field was a “comforting rationalization” (Spalding 1961:193). In fact, it was not until the 1890s that the church even sent missionaries to non-Christian lands (see Knight 2007:124-128).

However, it did not take long before Seventh-day Adventist missionaries were crisscrossing the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, establishing
congregations in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Pacific. But again, as they reached the shores of foreign lands, they conducted their work with little regard for reaching out to adherents of non-Christian religions. And as Richard Schwarz suggests, “Initially Adventists had little concept of the difficulties involved in meeting sophisticated non-Christian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam” (Schwarz 1979:357).

Todd Johnson and Charles Tieszen point out that “tribal peoples were the focus of Christian mission in the twentieth century,” (Johnson and Tieszen 2007) and Adventists, too, reached out to these groups and to Christians of other denominations. Even in recent years non-Christian religions have continued as something of a missiological blind spot among Adventists (despite Global Mission and other initiatives), with the church operating in many parts of the world almost as if other religions did not exist—aiming most of its “outreach” efforts to other Christians or animists.

Throughout its history, the Adventist Church’s mission focus has been almost totally constrained within the borders of one world religion—Christianity. A brief survey of any Adventist Book Center reveals that almost all titles are written by Adventists for Adventists (or for other Christians). Almost all assume that their readers have a Christian worldview, including a belief in the Bible. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of membership growth in the Adventist Church has come from other Christians or from animists at the fringes of other major religions.

Soon after the Global Mission initiative to reach “unentered areas” began in 1990, then-director of Global Mission, Mike Ryan, visited a country to conduct a planning session. After working with church leaders on the philosophy of Global Mission, he encouraged them to work together to lay concrete project plans. When the plans came back, Ryan saw that they were aimed at reaching only the minority religious groups in the country, while totally ignoring the dominant religion that made up more than 80 percent of the population.

Jon Dybdahl recalls asking some early Adventist missionaries to India what their evangelistic approach was to Hindus. “They replied,” writes Dybdahl, “We don’t go to Hindus. We search out Christians and give them further light” (Dybdahl 2006:19). This was the attitude even while Christians made up only 4 percent of India’s population at the time.

**Early Adventist Views of Non-Christian Religions**

A survey of early literature suggests Adventists saw few, if any, redeeming features in other religions. In 1898, D. A. Robinson wrote about “the hard, cold, Christless creed of fate of the Mohammedans” and “its blighting influence upon millions” (Robinson 1898:436). In the same year, G. C. Tenney wrote of the “ponderous and soul-crushing establishments”
of “Hinduism,” “Brahmanism,” and “Mohammedanism” (1898:445). C. P. Edwards called Hindu priests “living incarnations of the character of the evil one” (1900:458) and Carrie Stringer wrote of “the blight of heathenism, Buddhism and Mohammedanism” that made people’s lives “sad and hard” (1927:3). In 1912, J. E. Bowen described Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism as “baneful and false religions” (1912:5) and the Sabbath School Quarterly in 1974 said that “Moslem influence on Christianity was as deadly as the sting of a scorpion” (1974:87).

But although evangelism and conversion remained the dominant Adventist discourse about other religions, and although there were no calls for anything like what today is called interfaith dialogue, there were occasional and growing hints of the need for understanding and bridge-building.

In 1946, the Adventist Church set up the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) to promote religious liberty and freedom of worship (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia s.v. International Religious Liberty Association). Over time this organization inevitably involved leaders from other religions in discussions and planning. World conferences of the IRLA now feature prominent leaders from non-Christian religions. Today it consistently calls for greater understanding and dialogue between world religions (Adventist News Network 2007).

As early as 1902, American Guy Dail, then recording and corresponding secretary of the German Union, had written of the need for missionaries to “[arrive] at a mutual understanding with our newly acquired neighbor” and added that one of the “first duties” was to “recognize whatever is good in them and in their institutions, and with some nationalities, as the Chinese, and the educated Arabs and Hindus, it will be to our advantage to have an appreciation of their literature and history” (Dail 1902:207, 208). He concluded that the missionary “must study the art of pleasing others, of putting himself out for the sake of being agreeable and affable to them” (1902:208).

The IRLA grew out of an earlier International Religious Liberty Association, established in 1893, which evolved from the National Religious Liberty Association, established in 1889 (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia).

**A Broadening Perspective in the 1960s**

During the 1960s mainline Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church began moving toward discussions with non-Christian religions, and during this time the term “interfaith dialogue” was coined. For the Catholic Church, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was a watershed in opening up the church to the possibilities of interfaith dialogue. Around the same period, changes in mainstream Protestant theology
downplayed exclusive truth claims among the churches, and prepared them for dialogue with non-Christian religions. As William Hutchinson writes, at this time “new initiatives in theology were gaining their clearest—and for traditionalists their most alarming—expressions in the context of overseas missions, where questions about Christianity’s relation to other religions could not be avoided or papered over with ambiguities” (Hutchinson 2004:222, 223).

Although the Seventh-day Adventist Church never moved toward formal interfaith dialogue during the 1960s, there were significant moves toward building bridges to and better understanding of non-Christian religions. The General Conference Executive Committee had voted in 1956 to start an orientation program for missionaries that would include studying “indigenous religions and educational systems” (Minutes of the General Conference Executive Committee 1956). This did not happen until ten years later when the Institute of World Mission (IWM) and the Department of World Mission were established at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Russell Staples, who joined the IWM as an instructor in 1971, recalls that “the need for a more informed interaction with non-Christian world religions was certainly a major issue” leading to these additions to the seminary. He adds, “The establishment of the Institute of World Mission opened the way for more direct and concentrated study regarding relationships with the world religions” (Staples 2009:e-mail to author).

In 1961, five conferences on how to better reach out to Muslims were held in different parts of the world, led by Ralph Watts Sr., a general vice president of the General Conference (Whitehouse 2008). As a result of these conferences, it was voted to establish an Islamic Studies Center, with Robert Darnell as the director. (For various reasons, this never came to fruition.) These conferences were prefigured by a 1935 Ministerial Convention in Jerusalem that organized a working group to “find ways for approaching Islam from a Muslim point of view” (Pfeiffer 1981:86).

Darnell, field secretary in the Middle East Union, was an Adventist pioneer in building bridges to Muslims. He called Muslims “our friends”—a theme echoed by others in the church in the Middle East at this time (see Semaan 1964:6). In 1963, Darnell wrote:

The true spirit of Christ is the spirit of love for our neighbors. We believe that among the Christians the Muslim has no more sincere friend than the Adventist. Adventist-Muslim friendship will he a demonstrated fact when we enlarge the circle of our love and take the Muslim in. Until then we will continue to be an unknown unappreciated minority. (Darnell 1963:10)
In Tehran, Iran, Darnell pioneered a new approach to public meetings. “The lives and sayings of the prophets were treated in typically Muslim style and quotations were made from the Qur’an and Muslim traditions where appropriate,” reported the Middle East Messenger. “The lecturer spoke in an atmosphere of respect for Islam, its book and its prophet” (Darnell 1967:7).

In 1967 at Adventist World Headquarters in Takoma Park, Maryland, the Home Study Institute (HSI) announced a new course in comparative religions. It involved a “careful study” of major world religions including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Animism. “A careful study of world religions can provide a sympathetic understanding of other faiths,” said HSI president D. W. Delafield (Holbrook 1967:3).

In 1966 Ernest Steed came to the General Conference to serve as World Temperance director and executive director of the International Commission for the Prevention of Alcoholism and Drug Dependency (ICPA). Through the temperance emphasis, Steed made significant contacts with Islamic leaders in the Middle East. In 1969 he returned from a 9-week overseas trip and reported to the General Conference Executive Committee that there was a revival of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. “The temperance work is the one cause that can find rapport with these people,” he said (Steed 2008).

In Afghanistan Steed met with government leaders, including the Speaker of the House of Representatives, who reportedly called him “Brother Steed,” and said, “We are brothers; you are a Seventh-day Adventist Muslim.” In Ceylon he attended a seminar run by the Adventist Temperance secretary. The chairman, who was president of the Buddhist Federation of Ceylon, said. “I have learned more in the last two days about Seventh-day Adventists than I have ever known before” (General Conference Executive Committee Minutes 1969).

Steed organized the first World Congress of the ICPA in Kabul, Afghanistan in 1972, which “signaled the beginning of a significant collaboration between Seventh-day Adventists and the Muslim community” (Steed 2008).

Steed took time to become conversant with the themes of the Qu’ran and the principles of Islam. He visited Egypt on several occasions, met with the Grand Mufti, spoke in mosques, and also was a guest speaker at an all-Islamic Conference. Earnest Steed’s son, Lincoln, recalls that “after his father spoke at one of these meetings, a religious leader in the audience was offended. He angrily rose to speak. He admitted that the material was excellent, but asked why they had to hear it from a Christian. There was an embarrassed silence, and then the organizer of the conference said, ‘I would like to invite Dr. Steed to become a Muslim.’ Pastor Steed paused,
prayed for the right words. He then turned to the organizer and said, ‘Thanks for the invitation, but I’m already a Muslim.’ The audience broke into applause” (Steed 2009).

**Philosophy of Dialogue**

Despite its roots in an inter-denominational movement, the Adventist Church has been skeptical, if not suspicious of ecumenical activities. While the church has no officially stated opinion on ecumenism, and although it supports many of its goals, it has steered clear of joining ecumenical organizations and, in the words of the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, believes that “in the total picture the banes tend to outweigh the boons.” But, also in the words of the encyclopedia, the Adventist Church believes that “the ecumenical movement has promoted kinder interchurch relations with more dialogue and less diatribe and helped remove unfounded prejudices” (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, s.v. ecumenism).

The Adventist Church has moved with even greater caution in the area of the interfaith movement with other world religions. Would an updated version of the *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* include the statement: “The Interfaith movement has promoted kinder interfaith relations with other religions, with more dialogue and less diatribe and helped remove unfounded prejudices”? Perhaps it would.

Angel Rodriguez, director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference writes that “despite the potential dangers,” dialogue with other Christians also has “potential benefits.” He adds, “Therefore we should not discourage, formally or informally, approaching other Christians and even non-Christian religions” (2003:8, 9). John Graz, director of the General Conference Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Association, says that “[interfaith dialogues] are indispensable if we are to develop understanding, good will, and peace” (2008:101).

In January of 2007, William Johnsson, retired editor of the *Adventist Review*, was appointed as a part-time special assistant to the General Conference president for Interfaith Relations. He was assigned to help arrange dialogues with “non-Christian entities,” help select topics and presenters, and serve as co-chair with a representative from another entity (Minutes of the General Conference Administrative Committee 2007).

Later that year, Johnsson wrote that Adventists should “seek to engage leaders of Islam in conversation.” He added: “The reality is that both their religion and ours occupy the same territory, since we are world religions. We should seek to know them better and help them to know what we believe and stand for” (Johnsson 2007:10).

As a sidebar to Johnsson’s article in *Adventist World*, General Conference president Jan Paulsen wrote: “What then are the values that should
mark our relationships with those who do not share our faith? Respect, sensitivity, and a desire to move beyond caricatures toward mutual understanding—let this be our goal as we continue to engage in the mission that has been entrusted to us” (2007:8).

Rodriguez adds: “Only the truth is most effective in dealing with others. False stereotypes and the lack of correct information weaken witness. It is precisely the purpose of the conversation to create an environment in which we are willing to listen to each other in a Christian spirit of love and cordiality” (2007:28).

Wesley Ariarajah, professor of Ecumenical Theology at Drew University, suggests three main approaches to interfaith dialogue, where each faith tradition:

1. Learns about each other in a respectful milieu, but also gives an “authentic witness” to its own faith.
2. “Is challenged and transformed by the encounter with others.”
3. Is in a “common pilgrimage towards the truth,” and “shares with the others the way it has come to perceive and respond to that truth” (Ariarajah 2002).

The current approach of the Seventh-day Adventist Church fits most easily the first category, although it is hard to imagine honestly engaging in this type of dialogue without being “challenged and transformed” (category 2), to some degree. The third category, where participants sit around the table as theological equals, with no witnessing agenda, comparing notes—and totally open to change—seems incompatible with the traditional Adventist mission agenda.

Of course any type of interfaith dialogue has its critics—from both the liberal and conservative perspective. Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith*, and popular apologist for atheism, calls interfaith dialogue “a strategy of politeness and denial.” He adds, “If there is common ground to be found through interfaith dialogue, it will only be found by people who are willing to keep their eyes averted from the chasm that divides their faith from all others” (Harris 2006).

Ironically some Adventists share Narris’s skepticism, for similar reasons, seeing dialogue as a compromise, a sell-out, a denial of the church’s distinctive and unique message. But dialogue need not be this. As religious studies professor Paul Mojzes writes, “The Church cannot change into a society for interreligious dialogue enterprise. If the Church holds no distinct, worthwhile message and cause, it need not bother enter into dialogue, because it will have nothing to give in the give-and-take of dialogue” (Mojes & Swidler).

Mojzes quotes the Czech Marxist philosopher, Milan Machovec, who once wrote that he was not interested in dialoguing with a Christian who
had no desire to convert him, “with one who holds that the Christian truths have only subjective and thus limited validity, a mere personal preference” (Mojes & Swidler). He wanted to dialogue with Christians who believed that their message had universal applicability.

Within the Adventist Church the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church adopted in 2007 an official Statement on Islam, designed to foster good relations between the Adventist Church and Muslims.

**Global Mission Study Centers**

The Global Mission initiative, voted by the General Conference Executive Committee in 1990, provided a mandate for engaging with people of other religious traditions. Instead of focusing just on the “to every nation” part of Rev 14:7, it also emphasized “every nation, tribe, language, and people.” The emphasis was still on evangelism, but it provided space for establishing study centers to look at ways of building more effective bridges to other religions. Centers for Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism have been established, and all except the Hindu Center have been heavily involved in interfaith dialogue.

**Buddhism**

According to William Hutchinson, formal religious discussions between Christians and Buddhists did not really start until the 1980s (2004:189). The Adventist Church was not far behind when in 1992 the Far Eastern Division, supported by Global Mission, asked Clifton Maberly to establish a Buddhist Study Center (information in this section is from e-mails sent by Clifton Maberly, February 2009).

At first Maberly was hesitant. “My first thought was that we didn’t know enough about Buddhism to begin authentically,” he says. “Yes, we had Buddhists in Thailand who had become Adventists, even Buddhist monks who were now pastors, but as far as I knew, no one had built bridges between the two disparate worlds,” he adds. “I was sure none of us knew who we were speaking to or what we had to say that was relevant.”

Maberly knew exactly where he wanted to establish the center, near the Mahachulalongkomrajavidyalaya University (MCU), the largest public Buddhist university in Thailand, with more than 10,000 monks enrolled.

Maberly made an appointment to see the head Buddhist monk for Bangkok, the highest ranking member of the Sangha (the society of Buddhist monks) for Bangkok, and also the abbot of the Mahathat Temple. He explained to the monk that he was setting up a study center to explore the similarities and differences between Adventism and Buddhism. And asked for the monk’s blessing and suggestions.
The monk supported the venture, and suggested a place near the university would best allow for getting to know each other properly and allow for good interaction. Maberly found a place at nominal rent, on temple property, 30 meters from the main entrance to one of the most important Buddhist universities in the world. He then met with the chancellor of the university, a leading Buddhist scholar. The scholar was impressed with the project and encouraged university lecturers to assign their students to visit the center and do comparative studies under Maberly’s supervision. Maberly asked the chancellor how he would react if one of the graduate monks became a Christian through the process. “He said he trusted that we would never try to stack the cards in our favour when presenting our ideas and beliefs,” says Maberly, “and that if a monk became convinced that Christianity had better answers than he already had, he would hope he would convert—it would be the only intellectually honest thing to do.”

Maberly set about establishing the center with room to study, debate, and dialogue. He began working on a library and set up a computer lab. Soon 20 to 60 monks were visiting the center—named the Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture—each day. He encouraged university groups to use the center as their place of meeting, and various associations of monks began meeting regularly there.

Maberly found that monks were happy to critique materials the center prepared and distributed to church workers to use. He and Siroj Sorajakool had re-written the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in language designed to “express the meaning of the document in appropriate Thai.” He gave it to five Buddhist scholars at the university—the teachers of the monks who came to the center. Within a few days he discovered that none of them had been able to get past the first eight or nine statements. “The statements didn’t make any sense to them at all,” says Maberly. “They had so many questions for clarification that it seemed futile to go on. By the time I had heard all their questions I also ran out of steam, and put the document aside as a flawed document for them.”

“I soon learned that we learned the most if we assumed monks were our colleagues,” says Maberly. “When we exchanged notes as fellow-shepherds—fellow pastors—we got a measure of each other. We spent hours talking through the challenge of caring for congregations. I was even asked for tips on preaching—on homiletic skills needed to keep the attention and convict the listeners. I became confident to talk to Buddhist monks anywhere about anything.”

It was important to Maberly to engage the monks in the center and implement their suggestions where possible. Soon he had a group of what he calls monk “owners” who felt this was their center.
Maberly also helped facilitate more formal dialogues between Buddhists and Christians. “We assisted people of all levels of experience wanting to be able to talk with a real Buddhist or a real Christian in a safe place,” he says. “We set them up, advised them how to go about it, and sometimes debriefed them afterwards. I was astounded that so few could carry on a meaningful dialogue. I had to do more damage control with Buddhists than Christians. The triumphalist arrogance of Christians was hard for Buddhists to bear.”

In 2002 Scott Griswold was appointed director of the center. Griswold came with experience as a church pastor and as an Adventist Frontier Missions missionary in Cambodia, working among the Buddhists in that country for six years. Although not denying the importance of dialogue, he has not continued Maberly’s more formal attempts to connect with Buddhist leaders but has instead emphasized a spiritual ministry to Buddhists. “Dialogue’s intention should be two-fold, focusing on commonality and recognizing differences,” Griswold says, and “actually sharing with them in a helpful manner so they can see what we truly teach and its great value for them” (Griswold 2009: e-mail to author).

Islam

On July 1, 1989 the General Conference established the Global Center for Islamic Studies at Newbold College in England, with Borge Schantz as director. It was the first tangible result of the Global Strategy discussions that had begun at the General Conference Annual Council in 1986, and which culminated in Global Mission being voted at the General Conference session in 1990 (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, s.v. Global Mission). Schantz promoted a strongly evangelistic approach for the center, and in 1995 reported that during his time as director, the center published “14 different models for Muslim evangelism” (Schantz 1995:28).

The same year Jerald Whitehouse was appointed director, and he renamed the center The Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR), reflecting his priority on dialogue and building bridges to Muslims within their own socio-religious culture.

Whitehouse says that he accepted the position on the assurance from General Conference leaders that the church would support experiments with new methods, and its success would be judged on numbers of ministries not baptisms. “The focus was to see ministries established whether successful or not so that we could begin to learn how to relate effectively with Muslims” (Whitehouse 2008).

In February 2003, GCAMR participated in a “Building Bridges Conference” sponsored by the Trans-European Division. Since then the center has been involved in many dialogues, including personal meetings with

In Mindanao, Whitehouse and then-Adventist Mission coordinator for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, Rick McEdward, joined fifteen Seventh-day Adventist leaders and scholars and fifteen leading Muslim scholars for a two-day conference at King Faisal Center for Islamic Studies at Mindanao State University.

An influential Adventist faculty member at the university had approached McEdward and said, “Pastor we need to do something here, they respect us but they don’t know us.” She made the initial arrangements, and then invited GCAMR to care for the dialogue.

At the conclusion of the dialogue, the Muslim scholars said that according to the Qu’ran, Christian groups are more similar to Muslims than any other group. But, they added, Adventists were the only ones they could relate to. They also said that if any tension ever arose between Muslims and Adventists over any issue, they would be happy to act as mediators to diffuse the problem (McEdward February 9, 2009: e-mail to author).

Judaism

Adventism finds Judaism perhaps the most natural candidate for interfaith dialogue. In the 1930s, the North American Division began publishing Shabbat Shalom, which aims to “promote a climate of respect, understanding and sharing between Jewish and Christian communities” and calls itself “The Journal of Jewish-Christian Reconciliation.”

The World Jewish Adventist Friendship Center aims at “fostering mutual respect, dialogue, understanding, education, and research” between Jews and Adventists, and is conscious of the “unique opportunity to generate interfaith dialogue at the highest levels.” Richard Elofer, appointed director of the center in 2000, has been an ambassador for increasing dialogue between Adventists and Jews. He organized an “Adventist Jewish Friendship Conference” in Jerusalem in February 2006. This six-day conference aimed at “building bridges” between Adventists and Jews, and featured both Adventist and Jewish presenters. Wherever he travels, Elofer tries to set up personal meetings with Jewish leaders. He has also helped foster a network of Beth B’nei Tzion congregations (Jewish-Adventist congregations), all of which rank dialogue with Jews as one of their major goals.
Other Formal and Informal Dialogue

As the church has grown in the area of the 10/40 Window, and as migration has brought adherents of non-Christian religions to America and other areas where the Adventist Church is strong, growth in interfaith interaction, whether planned or unplanned, official or unofficial, was inevitable. These can range from the Adventist-Muslim Relations Coordinator of the North American Division speaking at interfaith dialogue dinners to Adventists in suburban Australia to talking to Muslim neighbors over the back fence; from formal visits to the General Conference by non-Christian religious leaders to formal debates between Adventists and Muslims in Indonesia.

Some dialogues occur at the institutional level with cooperation between various Adventist organizations, such as the “Our Father Abraham” Conference held at Andrews University in March 2006. Sponsored by the International Religious Liberty Association, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, and Shabbat Shalom, the conference brought together Muslim, Jewish, and Adventist scholars for a better understanding of each religion.

Other meetings appear to just “fall into place,” but without consultation with other areas of the church that are also involved in interfaith dialogue. For example, in November 2008, a consultation entitled “Sabbath in Text, Tradition, and Theology” involving Adventists, and other Christian and Jewish scholars began in Boston. Co-chair Tom Shepherd, an Adventist theologian from Andrews University, says the goal of the conversation is “to foster an open and rewarding dialogue between Jews and Christians on this important religious institution” (Shepherd 2009:10). However, Richard Elofer, William Johnsson, and John Graz were unaware of the consultation until after the event.

A controversial example of unofficial Adventist interfaith dialogue is a project in Manhattan, New York, established and run by Samir Selmanovic, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor and a leading voice in the Emergent Church movement in the United States (information in this section is from e-mails sent by Samir Selmanovic to the author on February 6, 2009). Faith House Manhattan describes itself as “an inter-dependent community that honors and learns from “the teachings, practices, sufferings, and joys of people from different faiths.” “Faith House will seek to bring progressive Jews, Christians, Muslims, and sojourners of no faith to become an interfaith community for the good of the world.”

Principle number 9 of the 10 principles that guide the project states: “We do not believe in proselytizing: we believe in personal choice and transformation.” Selmanovic explains that “proselytizing is primarily an effort to change one’s loyalties to religion (and even using God to do so),”
and that this is “a sort of religious colonialism or personal manipulation.” Instead, what Faith House advocates is transformation. “Conversion and transformation are . . . natural outgrowths of people’s spiritual growth and when these include conversion that is to be celebrated.”

Selmanovic advocates a two-way street in interacting with people of other religious faiths. “If we want them to attend our events, we must attend their events,” he writes. “If we want them to be spiritually open to us, we must be spiritually open to them. If we want them to change, we must be ready to change. If we want them to read our Scriptures with trust and respect, we must read their Scriptures likewise. We are interdependent” (Selmanovic 2009).

Oscar Oscindo, who has been an Adventist pastor for fifteen years, and Ahi al Kitaab International have been conducting mujadalas (interfaith dialogues) with Muslims in East Africa. These have mostly taken the form of public debates, conducted with respect and friendship.

The Hope Channel recorded a recent event in Mombasa, Kenya for possible later satellite broadcast, and the dialogue was broadcast live for two days on the local Muslim FM Radio station that covers the Coast Province of Kenya up into Tanzania. It resulted in some misunderstandings and tensions in the local community, but Osindo says they were resolved. “Our relations with Muslims have been renewed and enhanced,” says Osindo. “I spent two days after the dialogue meeting with diverse key Muslim leaders in the region. We agreed to diversify our cooperation in other areas such as community development, youth, education, and anti-drug abuse campaign among others” (Osindo 2009: e-mail to author).

Conclusion

Twenty years ago sociologist Robert Wuthnow pointed to a “declining monopoly of specific religious traditions over the enactment of religious convictions” (1988:301). Today in the West, Christian denominationalism is becoming less important, there is a growing suspicion of specific truth claims by any organization, and accepting all religious beliefs as equally legitimate is elevated to a virtue.

The dominant discourse about religion in the democratized world is pluralistic, and it is tolerant. In such an environment the words conversion, proselytizing, and missionary become dirty words—subverting the dominant discourse—while words such as co-existing, mutual respect, and working together fit comfortably.

The historical approach of the Adventist Church to its mission does not fit comfortably with this discourse. While respecting the adherents of other religions and championing religious freedom, Adventism has historically been concerned with discovering God’s truth, and sharing that truth with others.
George Knight says the belief that it has a distinctive end-time message has “dominated Adventism for more than a century.” And its conviction that Jesus will not come until the world has heard the Three Angels’ Messages “has undergirded and pushed forward the Adventist impetus for world mission” and left it with no choice but to evangelize in every nation (Knight 2007:110, 111).

Of course within Adventism there are a growing number of other voices suspicious of this traditional view, and more in harmony with the dominant discourse. Reinder Bruinsma writes, “Clearly, for a growing number of Adventist believers in the West the metanarrative of Adventism as a worldwide, divinely ordained movement, united by one theology and one organizational model, with uniform programs and resources, has outlived its sell-by date” (2005:19).

Loma Linda University Religion professor Siroj Sorajjakool argues that God’s revelation is not limited to the Bible and “God has been revealing himself from the beginning of time in every part of this world.” He adds: “When love incarnates in our lives, we may finally realize that our categorical thinking, the division between superiority and inferiority, true and false, right and wrong, better and worse, which we so desperately seek for religious self-affirmation, no longer exists because love transcends all these categories” (Sorajjakool 2004).

The tension between the traditional, dominant discourse of taking Adventist truth to all the world and those calling for a greater acknowledgment of what God has already been doing in the world may ultimately prove a healthy one for the church and its mission. The danger on the one hand is that we are exclusively preachers of the Word, deaf to the echoes of truth in other religions, unable to contextualize our message, and unmindful of how God has put “eternity in the hearts” of people unacquainted with Jesus or the Bible. The danger on the other hand is that we lose any sense of a distinctive witness or prophetic calling, and see our role as merely helping enhance or supplement the experience of non-Christian believers.

Some within the Adventist Church are also suggesting that its role in dialogue and mission is more effectively conducted from the position of a separate religion, a remnant movement outside the boundaries of Christian denominationalism. They point to distinctive features of Adventism that distance it from Protestantism and Catholicism, and argue that unshackled from Christian denominational baggage, Adventism would be in much better shape to build bridges with other religions.

Despite the attractions in such an approach, the church should not rush too quickly to dismiss completely the soil in which it has grown. Adventist mission is built on the biblical mandate to preach Jesus Christ,
the prophetic voice of Ellen White that helped shape Adventism as a reformist Protestant movement, and a rich heritage of centuries of Christian theology and mission that has stood the test of time. Adventism should distance itself from theological aberrations and heresies in other Christian churches, it must continue to be reformist, and it should be stripped of “caste and country,” but we should step cautiously before stripping it totally of its Christian cloak.

As official interfaith dialogue grows stronger, it is ironic that Christians appear to be totally ignoring their non-Christian neighbors. Research by Todd Johnson and Charles Tieszen suggests that Christians are hopelessly and inexcusably out of touch with non-Christians in their communities (2007). They found, for example that in North America only 35.6 percent of Buddhists, 22.7 percent of Hindus, and 67.8 percent of Muslims say they know even one Christian. They conclude that around the world, 86 percent of Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslim do not personally know even one Christian. In Europe only 31.8 percent of Buddhists, 57.6 percent of Hindus, and 18.5 percent of Muslims say they know at least one Christian.

The time is more than ripe for the Adventist Church and its members to broaden their horizons to engage non-Christian believers in a serious, open, meaningful, and Christ-like way. Since the church was founded in 1863, we have done a lot of talking, preaching, writing, and broadcasting—at people from various religious traditions. But have we also listened and learned? Have we worked to understand? And have we shown genuine care like we should?

In 2003, Malcolm Bull wrote, “If growth continues at the same rate in the next century. Seventh-day Adventism will become America’s single most important contribution to world religion” (279). Now is the time to rise to that high responsibility.

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As Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the other Protestant Reformers developed their theological positions they also developed deep missiological commitments. Millions of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, animists, and others knew little or nothing about the Bible and had not accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Reformers knew the long history and ongoing work of Roman Catholic missionaries among non-Christian peoples. They quickly become convicted of their obligation to proclaim the Protestant way of being a Christian to non-Christian peoples. Therefore, they launched a systematic plan of global mission. They would not only work to reform the church from within but also to convert non-Christians to Jesus Christ.

**Historic Reality**

Sadly, the real narrative is quite different from this wishful narrative. The Reformers focused almost exclusively on *missio interna* (internal mission, to reform Christians) and ignored *missio externa* (external mission, to convert non-Christians). Luther saw mission primarily as restoring biblical principles like *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide* within the church. Christians should bear witness to non-Christians when possible but no specific missionary structure was needed. The period of Lutheran orthodoxy (c. 1580-1675) saw an even more narrow view of mission as Lutherans were locked into theological conflict among themselves and with other Protestants. The Great Commission was understood to have been fulfilled by the Apostles, leaving no universal obligation for Christians. Non-Christians living within Christendom were to be evangelized but Christians had no obligation to those beyond Christian circles.

Philip Spener (1635-1705) was the Lutheran Pietist who led a reawakening of the missionary impulse. August Francke (1663-1727), at the Univer-
Recruited Bartholomaeus Zigenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau to go to Tranquebar, in India. Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) and the Moravian Brethren began a missionary sending initiative in 1732. In 1793 William Carey (1761-1834) sailed for India. The momentum increased gradually and the modern Protestant missionary movement was dawning as the nineteenth-century began. From the time Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the cathedral door in 1517, three centuries would pass before a strong Protestant missionary movement to non-Christians would be underway.

The church of all ages has had to be converted and reconverted to God’s whole mission to humanity. Even the Apostles themselves had to be converted to God’s whole mission. Peter’s vision of the unclean animals and his subsequent baptism of Cornelius and family (Acts 10) was a pivotal point in the Holy Spirit’s work to convert the church to God’s whole mission. The Early Church took some time to widen its missional focus from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and then to all peoples everywhere as Jesus had instructed (Acts 1:8).

Protestants went through a similar process just as the Early Church had, but it took much longer. Their reformation of theology did not extend far enough into a biblical theology of mission. They spent too long debating theology between themselves. They ignored the “so what?” question. What good is excellent theology if it does not produce strong mission? Like Peter before his amazing vision, early Protestants had an incomplete conversion to God’s mission, even though they were converted to Jesus.

What About Adventist Mission?

Adventist history records a journey from the “Shut Door” theory into a steadily broadening focus on God’s mission. In 1901 the church reorganized itself because it had developed a global mission focus. The last century has seen steady expansion around the globe, but how well converted are today’s Adventists to God’s whole mission? How complete is our mission focus?

To evaluate the Adventist mission focus we should consider the three main dimensions of Adventist mission. First, Adventists seek revival, reformation, and spiritual maturity within our church—our own missio interna. We find the mandate for this dimension in the message to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22). Second, Adventists have a mission to share a reforming prophetic message with other Christians leading them to a fuller walk with Christ. This dimension might be called the Adventist missio interna externa—mission inside Christianity but outside Adventism. Third, Adventists have an external mission to non-Christians—Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others—the Adventist missio externa.
Is there an order of priority for the three dimensions of Adventist mission? Arguments can be and have been made that each of the three is most important. For the *missio interna*, some argue that unless things are right within the church the other two dimensions will fail. On the other hand, some Adventists have argued that the *missio interna* will take care of itself if the other dimensions are emphasized. “Just get members involved in evangelism and all of their problems will take care of themselves” is an argument I have heard. One prominent leader even expressed the view that “nurture” was not even a good word to use. For the *missio interna-externa* the case for completing the unfinished Reformation within Christianity is often made. For the *missio externa* the argument is that non-Christians are the ones in the most dire need of the gospel. I don’t think Adventists have thought seriously enough about this last point.

I believe that Christ’s command of Acts 1:8, the mission narrative of Pentecost (Acts 2), and the whole paradigm of mission in the Apostolic Church paints a picture in which the three dimensions of mission are overlapping, intertwined, mutually supportive, and equally important. There was nurturing instruction, member fellowship, and sustained prayer within the Apostolic church (*missio interna*); there was mission to Jews and Gentile converts to Judaism who worshipped God but were not Christians (*missio interna-externa*); and there was mission to Gentiles who worshipped pagan deities (*missio externa*). My sense is that most Adventists would support this balanced and integrated three-dimensional model of mission—at least theoretically.

Where do Adventists place their real, actual, on-the-mission-field priorities? Without a doubt Adventists place the lowest priority on *missio externa*—mission to non-Christians who, as a group, are in the most dire need of the gospel. Like other contemporary Protestants, Adventists commit just a small fraction of their human and material resources to mission among Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and the adherents of other religions. What absorbs the great bulk of Adventist time, energy, and resources for mission is the *missio interna-externa*—evangelizing and reforming those inside Christianity but outside Adventism. In doing so, Adventists are repeating the mistake made by the early Protestants who were more concerned with reforming Christians than converting non-Christians. To be fair, Adventists are more converted in theory to *missio externa* than the early Protestants, but that conversion is in our heads without being in our hands, feet, and pocket books. As for the Adventist *missio interna*, the evidence seems mixed. Adventists commit a major portion of available resources to a variety of ministries that serve church members; however, we generally tend to provide weak nurture and discipling for new members. This oversight may be a by-product of the priority we give...
to *missio interna-externa*. When most converts come from other Christian denominations they do not appear to need as much spiritual nurturing as converted Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus would need.

**Conclusion**

Today’s Adventist Church needs a fuller conversion to God’s mission to non-Christian peoples that goes beyond head commitment to impact its hands, feet, and pocket books. Three powerful realities support the assertion that a fuller Adventist conversion to God’s whole mission is needed. First, people who do not make the Bible their ultimate source of truth, who do not worship the Creator God alone, and who have not accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are in the most dire need of the gospel message. Dr. G. T. Ng, newly elected General Conference Secretary, is famous for asking rhetorically, “What good is it to proclaim the second coming to people who don’t yet know about the first coming?”

Second, non-Christian peoples comprise two-thirds of the world’s population. By working mostly to reform Christians, Adventists have made an inadvertent choice to focus on just one-third of humanity.

Third, the Adventist membership has grown nicely but not where peoples in the most dire need of the gospel are concentrated. The geographic areas where 75 percent of the least evangelized non-Christian peoples reside contain only 25 percent of the Adventist membership. Saying it another way, 75 percent of Adventists live, work, and witness in areas with just 25 percent of the world’s population. In yet another snapshot, 76 percent of Adventists reside in the Americas and in Sub-Saharan Africa, leaving only 24 percent in the entire remaining world.

These reflections about Adventist mission have many implications. First, Adventists need to reflect deeply on our motivation for mission. Mission is not primarily about the blessings we receive from being involved but about God’s desire that all will be saved. The blessings we receive should be seen as secondary derivative benefits of self-sacrificing service. Adventists need to rediscover self-sacrifice and prepare for the stern challenges of mission among non-Christian peoples.

Second, Adventists need to avoid the theological in-fighting that distracted early Protestants from mission. Chasing down every wrong trend within Christianity can distract the church from God’s whole mission. A strong focus on bringing the Adventist message to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and postmoderns will give appropriate focus and scale to issues we face with other Christians.

Third, if we are to be more effective among non-Christians we need to try new, creative methods. Our accustomed methods were developed in America for Christians and they are not necessarily the best for mission.
among Indian Hindus or Middle Eastern Muslims. The Adventist message, with its particular beliefs and practices, should not be equated with any particular method of sharing that message. Adventists who experiment with new methods often function on the periphery where personal danger is common. Ironically, these pioneers sometimes experience opposition and hostility from fellow Adventists who work in comfortable offices and ivory towers. The Adventist mission pioneers of the future who will discover more effective methods will need permission for trial and error experimentation, prayerful support and guidance, and freedom from distant critics.

Fourth, Adventist mission needs to function strategically. The left and right hands need to know what the other is doing so as to work together harmoniously. Human and material resources need to be allocated strategically.

There never has been as many people living at any one time who have not heard the gospel message as there are today. The time for revival, reformation, and full conversion to God’s whole mission is upon us.

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Contextualization is about “how the Gospel and culture relate to one another across geographic space and down through time” (Whiteman 1997:2). But as well as being about communicating the gospel in ways that make “sense to people within their local cultural context,” Darrell Whiteman argues that “good contextualization offends.” This is not due to cultural offense, but rather, when the gospel is shared and the church organized “along appropriate cultural patterns . . . people will more likely be confronted with the offense of the Gospel, exposing their own sinfulness and the tendency toward evil, oppressive structures and behavior patterns within their culture” (1997:3). Such contextualized expressions are prophetic, expanding the ways in which the gospel is understood and the kingdom of God experienced.

While forms of organization that reflect both cultural patterns and the tri-unity of God cannot be neglected if the church is to be effective in sharing the gospel in post-Christendom societies, those must be the subject of another paper. In this article I will focus upon contextualized expressions of the gospel message in post-Christendom societies, with specific reference to Australian culture. Readers from other post-Christendom societies will identify a frame and process in this study, for their own environments. It is my contention that countercultural expressions of the gospel most constructively confront post-Christendom communities.

After reviewing Stephen Bevans’ models of contextual theology I will use Paul Hiebert’s four steps of “critical contextualization” (Hiebert 1987:109-110) as my outline. Part 1 will review Bevans’ models and explore the first of Hiebert’s steps—an exegesis of Australia’s cultural trends. Part 2 will explore steps (1) reflection upon the biblical message of the gospel to be contextualized, (2) an analysis of convergence and dissonance between the gospel and Australian culture, and (3) suggestions for fresh symbols and rituals to communicate the gospel in forms indigenous to Australian culture.
Contextual Theology and the Countercultural Model

Context shapes our thinking in ways we do not realize. It is therefore imperative that attempts to understand and communicate the Christian faith take this into account. Whereas classical theology has been “a kind of objective science” based on two loci theologici (scripture and tradition for Roman Catholics; and scripture and understandings developed around scripture, for Protestants), contextual theology also recognizes the validity of “present human experience” (Bevans 2007:4). While this changes “the whole equation” (2007:5) for Scripture and associated interpretations are themselves products of cultural contexts, Bevans argues that this recognition is essential for an “authentic theology” (2007:5) and that “there is only contextual theology” (2007:3).

Each context is complex, representing a mix of several realities. This means that laying down “the absolutes of biblical faith . . . as a standard” (Wiklander 2006:122) cannot get away from the reality that Scripture, which was written within a variety of contexts, is always interpreted within another, and delivered to another, the recipient context. Bevans proposes six models of contextual theology as a way to think about “the interaction of the gospel message and culture” (Bevans 2007:ix).

Table 1. Models of Contextual Theology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Models</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>The unchanging Scripture message is adapted using context as the vehicle for a dynamic-equivalence translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropological</td>
<td>God’s revelation and grace is found as “seeds of the Word” within each context, with Scripture serving as a map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praxis</td>
<td>God’s presence and revelation is seen in activity—as a way of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthetic</td>
<td>A synthesis of all models—in dialogue with the message of Scripture and all aspects of the diverse changing human contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendental</td>
<td>God is revealed in the authentic, converted, faithful, subjective experience of personal and communal understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countercultural</td>
<td>While the context is taken very seriously, the gospel needs to challenge, encounter, engage, contrast with, and purify context</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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While these models are not exclusive of each other, some function more adequately within certain circumstances. Also, according to context, specific expressions of faith may represent different models. While within a monotheistic context, a consistent public prayer life may be seen as translation or anthropological; and while humility and deep spirituality
may be synthetic and transcendental within a Buddhist context; these expressions of faith are countercultural-praxis within a secular, postmodern and post-Christendom Australian context.

While emphasizing the validity of each model, and highlighting how the transcendental model makes it possible for the gospel to be heard in postmodernity, Bevans acknowledges the particular relevance of the praxis and countercultural models for secularized and postmodern environments. Their value for the Australian context is found in their presuppositions. The countercultural model seriously engages the context, but is also suspicious of it. It is not anticultural, nor a reflection of Niebuhr’s “Christ against Culture,” and it does not regard context as needing “to be replaced with a purer religious one” (Bevans 2007:119). However, it challenges, encounters, engages and confesses the gospel “as an alternative worldview in a hostile and indifferent culture” (2007:119). It presupposes that (1) the human context is ambiguous and insufficient; (2) the story of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is “the clue to history” and the future; (3) the alternate option of a “community of character” based on the Christian beatitudes, not the “unprovable ‘values’” of western pagan society; and (4) the gospel engages our context through church communities, transformed by this gospel, and seen in authentic Christian practice (2007:120-124).

Bevans’ conclusion that the praxis model of contextual theology is not done “simply by providing relevant expressions of Christian faith but also by commitment to Christian action” (2007:72) extends the fourth presupposition of the countercultural model. Theology is a process or activity, “a way of living” (2007:74). The countercultural model will be specifically used as a basis for reflecting upon the interaction of the gospel message with Australia’s cultural trends.

Analyzing Australian Cultural Trends

Consistent with Hiebert’s critical contextualization process, the countercultural model suggests that contextual theology is best done by first analyzing the context, for only a theology that critically engages the context can faithfully present and live out the gospel. It is therefore not my purpose here to collate statistics, but rather to identify and analyze observable trends in Australian post-Christendom culture and the forecasts of generational demographics.

Australia has been described as “a land of enigmas and contradictions” (Garvin 1987:11). With 24 percent of the population born overseas (ABS 2006), being Australian is clearly not determined by facial features, skin color, or first language, but has to do “with a state of heart and mind committed to a unique future” within which “we find our spiritual bearings” (Garvin 1987:14). Manning Clark described this as “a whisper in the mind
and a shy hope in the heart” (Clark 2006:2).

While at first it seems strange to suggest that “a shy hope” is a defining quality of Australian identity, it is consistent with the idea of the Australian dream—something that is hoped for! It is expressed in the quiet (even shy) way in which Australians have greeted each other with, “‘G’day. How ya going?” It presses the question asked by Donald Horne in 1964, “What is an Australian?” (25). Reflection upon his answer provides the basis for a comparative study, demonstrating clear cultural trends.

The Lucky Country—1964

In the mid-1960s Australia was a stable society with a high level and expectation of home ownership. Horne identified Australians at that time with the three expressions: (1) fair go, mate; (2) having a good time; and (3) give it a go. Inherent in the exclamation, “Fair go, mate!” was an “expectant distrust,” non-competitive mate-ship, as well as the pressure to conform. Horne saw Australians as tolerant and suspicious—not caring unless it involved them, but wondering “what’s he after?”

While he detected “no centre” to Australian society, having a good time was what life was about, with sport being life “and the rest a shadow.” He identified a “deeply inlaid skepticism” as perhaps “the most pervasive single influence.” He saw Australians as practical, experimental, and with little continuity with a past, ready to adapt and change—“a largely non-contemplative people,” but ready to give it a go, especially with the added encouragement, “she’ll be right.”

Horne’s 1964 snapshot provides just one point of contrast with our present situation. While he saw changes coming, he could not have foreseen the extent to which societal issues he considered major would be re-defined. However, it is those factors that were not high on his agenda, but are now central to the Australian context, that indicate the most significant societal trends. These include:

1. Indigenous culture and spirituality: The heritage of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders has gained ascendancy in Australian consciousness. While professing a fair go for all, Aborigines—along with gays, feminists, and religious minorities—have been subject to societal bullying. The Bringing Them Home Report (1997) did more than raise awareness of the suffering of the stolen generation. It drew attention to their dispossession, the genocide suffered, as well as further exposing the myth of Australian egalitarianism. The 2008 National Sorry Day was widely supported, indicating a commitment to reconciliation, and a growing appreciation of Aboriginal indigenous traditions, spirituality, and connectedness with the land. At the same time, legislated antidiscrimination and tolerance—to ensure all are treated equally regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity,
119

age, disability, or sexual preference—represents a most significant transformation in Australian culture.

2. The environment and urbanization: Aboriginal people lived in harmony with the land and bush for millennia, but migrant settlers struggled to “convert” the bush and retreated to the friendlier coastal environs. Most Australians have not been to Uluru (Ayres Rock), crossed the Nullabor Plain, fished on the banks of the Murray-Darling, or recited bush poetry. However, they have become aware of the synergy between country and city as a result of drought and depleted water resources, their economic reliance upon mining, and the impact of greenhouse gas emissions and global warming on the environment, with major social and economic implications.

3. Multiculturalism and diversity: Australia is a migrant nation. While the pre-Vietnam White Australia policy ensured an essentially European and Christian character to the culture, policy changes opened the door to economic and political refugees as well as asylum seekers—contributing to the current ethnic and religious diversity. One does not have to be born in Australia to be a true blue patriotic. A rich variety of ethnicity, languages, cuisine, sports, entertainment, dress, customs, spiritualities, religions, household, and family options are now seen as Australian. At times the harmony of such diverse elements is exposed as fragile, as experienced in racial violence at Cronulla beach on December 11, 2005; however, ethnic and religious groups have made the transition to Australian culture with little conflict.

4. Nationalism and ANZAC: Regardless of where they have come from, there is an uncanny uniformity of expectations with most thinking of themselves as mainline, decent, average Australians. Perhaps, because of their diverse backgrounds, Australians hold their national identity lightly. Many have experienced the horror and cruelty unleashed in the name of nationalism, and they are happy to simply savor being Australian rather than trying to define it. An Englishman, Douglas Adams, observes that because they have traveled or migrated to Australia, they know that the grass is not greener on the other side of the fence for “Australia is, in fact, the other side of that fence” (Adams 2008). Growing participation in ANZAC day services is a celebration of this. And although the debate over becoming a republic will return to the political agenda, this may suggest that regardless of the design of the flag or the nationality of the Head of State, freedom, peace, and democracy are those qualities cherished.

5. Terrorism and security: Terrorism came home with the Bali bombings on October 12, 2002—“sometimes called ‘Australia’s September 11’” (AFP 2002)—because of the numbers of Australians killed. These events forever changed national security procedures, while community attitudes toward
security had been changing due to reports of crime and assault. Homes have become private places of refuge and retreat.

6. Sport and the arts: The weather in Australia draws many to outdoor activities. Sport is an equalizer, turning the culture upside down, bringing teams and heroes together from diverse backgrounds. These events provide one of the few opportunities for fellow Australians to hear their national anthem, *Advance Australia Fair*. However, Horne’s 1964 assessment that “sport is life to most Australians” (37) is not true today, if it ever was! While sport has a high profile in the media, Australians also participate in a rich variety of cultural opportunities—art, film, drama, dance, ballet, music, choirs, galleries, museums, libraries, and gardens; as well as the diversity of cafés, restaurants, and wineries.

7. Church, religions, and spirituality: Although Australia was not founded by Christian reformers it is a myth to suggest Australia has a non-church heritage with no religious traditions. The church was present at Sydney Cove, and key founders of Melbourne were devout Christians. Churches were built on the hills or main streets of most towns, and in many ways church was central to life. It is also a myth to suggest that this is a godless society. It may be true to say that religion is not a subject Australians talk about much, but they do think about it—and religion and spirituality are defining elements of Australian culture today. However, there have been significant shifts. By the early 1980s some were wondering whether God would survive in Australia. Church attendees were aging and attendance was falling—dropping from 39 percent of the population attending monthly in 1966, to only 20 percent by 1998 (Mason, Singleton, & Webber 2007:51).

Migration has contributed significantly to major religious trends since the 1960s, including the growth of charismatic churches; the viability of some churches and survival of others, with the arrival of southern Christians; and the substantial presence of every world religion. There has also been an increasing fascination with New Age and indigenous spiritualities. But one of the most significant statistics is the increase of those recording “no religion” in the 2006 census. While churches, relying heavily upon volunteer labor, continue to make an important contribution to society, many have become disillusioned with local churches as places of transformation or spiritual growth, or alienated and hurt by clergy and church abuse. Some have had no experience in church, while others are disconnecting to experiment with simple and workplace forms of church.

**Trajectory of the Future—Generation Y**

In 2007 Michael Mason, Andrew Singleton, and Ruth Webber published a comprehensive Australian survey of Generation Y spirituality. In
this study *spirituality* is used to denote outlook and values, whether religious or not, thus providing the basis for suggesting the directions they will take society and indicating future patterns for Australian culture.

While most Generation Ys indicate their families are “their closest source of support” (Mason, Singleton, and Webber 2007:30), their world is vastly different from that of their parents. It is characterized by cultural pluralism, information deluge, “increased anxiety about personal and environmental risk, precarious employment, increased instability in families, rampant consumerism, greater individualization and the emergence of the ‘spiritual marketplace’” (2007:41). Four notable “social and cultural conditions” in which Generation Y are “coming of age” were identified by which their spirituality is impacted: “changing labour markets, increased instability in family arrangements; rampant consumerism; and individualization” (2007:231).

These suggest a radically changed relationship between the individual and future Australian society. Whereas sociology’s founding fathers Emile Durkheim and Max Weber “identified religion as intimately involved in the process of socialization—the process of integrating individuals into society” (Mason, Singleton, and Webber 2007:42), fewer are now connecting with religious traditions. The status of work is being elevated as “a way of finding connectedness, community and meaning” (2007:232). Also, while their families have been “the most important agent” in their socialization, increasing instability in families and their smaller size will further “disrupt or alter” the processes of socialization for Generation Y. Hyper-consumerism is redefining leisure and determining the identity of individuals, with “self-improvement or self-knowledge . . . a form of religious expression” (2007:233-234).

Individualism, perhaps the hallmark of Generation Y, has major implications for the future of Australian society. Acknowledging “only those norms of action which are formulated in specific, limited contracts between individuals” or “‘social contracts’ in a new and limited sense,” society will no longer be regulated by universal principles or shared meaning expressed in social and religious institutions, “but by individuals who insist on their own cultural and psychological uniqueness” with ethical and political considerations framed around individual rights rather than any concept of a just society (Mason, Singleton, and Webber 2007:43, 44).

Unquestionably environmental concerns, globalization, and national and personal security, will continue to define this changing society. ANZAC, along with sporting and cultural fixtures, can be expected to function as quasi-religious and national institutions. However, the heart of Australian culture and identity will be found in its multiculturalism and urbanization. The tide of multiculturalism cannot be turned back. Even if
migration policies were now changed, the future diversity of Australia is assured for many ethnic families and religions—ensuring the rapid growth of both. For this reason future research could reveal a larger representation of next generations from these world religions than those interviewed by Mason, Singleton, and Webber. The experimentation of Generation Y with New Age and indigenous spiritualities could also suggest future trends. Theirs is a “supermarket” approach to beliefs and morality, with only 13 percent accepting that any one Christian denomination has a monopoly on truth (Mason, Singleton, and Webber 2007:90, 96, 97). Current patterns of migration and demographic trends suggest a continuing decrease in those identifying themselves as Christian, with an increase in adherents to other world religions, New Age, and indigenous spiritualities.

The Gospel to be Contextualized into Australian Culture

The countercultural model seriously engages the context, but is also suspicious of context for the model is ambiguous and insufficient without the story of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. At this point it is imperative that I clarify the gospel to be contextualized in Australia’s post-Christendom culture.

The biblical concept of salvation seems foreign to the current or emerging post-Christendom culture, but while there are different ways to express it, the apostle Paul took pains to show that there is only one gospel (Gal 1:6-8 NIV, used throughout). He wrote to the Corinthians, “I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved” (1 Cor 15:1-2). He then outlined “the essential Christian message” (Keller 2008:2), “that Christ died for our sins . . . he was buried . . . he was raised on the third day . . . and that he appeared” (1 Cor 15:3-5). Paul then affirmed that the gospel preached by Peter, the Twelve, James, “all the apostles’ and himself is the same (1 Cor 15:11).

It is my intention to focus upon countercultural expressions of this gospel of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, rather than the exploration of missiological, ecclesiological, or other theological concerns more commonly treated under the gospel and culture nomenclature. It is not within the scope of this paper to debate why the “relationship between Christ’s death on the cross and human salvation” (Roennfeldt 2000:65) has been problematic for some theologians and biblical scholars, but to relate this gospel to the Australian context its essence must be determined.

While “Christ’s death has some type of salvific ‘effect’ on God, human beings, or the human situation” (Brondos 2006:7); perspectives on “the
meaning of the death of Jesus Christ,” Ray Roennfeldt observes, “arose out of differing social and cultural conditions” (2000:67). (See table 2.)

Table 2. An Overview: Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key idea</th>
<th>Culture and history</th>
<th>Reason for Jesus Christ’s death</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Atonement</td>
<td>Early church fathers suffered oppression in Roman Empire</td>
<td>To destroy ‘tyrants’ holding people in bondage &amp; suffering—to reconcile all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption</td>
<td>In the time of the church fathers, a high percentage of the population were slaves</td>
<td>To save from ‘tyrants’ within (sin &amp; death) by taking on fallen human nature in incarnation &amp; death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Under feudalism (in Anselm’s time, in the 11th century), many could not pay their debts</td>
<td>To offer up the honor &amp; obedience to satisfy the divine justice of the ‘feudal lord’, God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>By the time of John Calvin the distinction between satisfaction and punishment was lost</td>
<td>To ‘pay the penalty that we deserved’—delivering us from the consequences of our sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example</td>
<td>Modernism found satisfaction in substitution unreasonable</td>
<td>To ‘awaken within people gratitude and love for God’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Recent decades have reflected a culture of involvement &amp; subjectivity</td>
<td>To destroy the ‘old man’ of sin &amp; bring a ‘new man’ into existence by virtue of our participation in Christ’s death &amp; resurrection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Brondos 2006:1-7; Roennfeldt 2000:66-67).

New Testament writers “used a wide variety of word pictures” to explore the meaning of Christ’s sacrifice (Roennfeldt 2000:67). While it is not wise to press every detail, Leon Morris chooses covenant, sacrifice, Day of Atonement, Passover, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, and justification as key metaphors to demonstrate that “the cross is at the heart of the Christian way”—that we are saved “by Christ’s atoning death” (Morris 1983:5, 12). (See table 3.)
Table 3. The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ Is at the Heart of the Gospel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imagery</th>
<th>Each metaphor points to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Covenant</td>
<td>“Forgiveness of sin flows from his death as the sacrifice that inaugurates the new covenant” (Morris 1983:35, 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrifice</td>
<td>Christ did “away with sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Heb 9:26)—and “we have been made holy” through his sacrifice “once for all” (Heb 10:10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day of Atonement</td>
<td>Christ as high priest and judge enters the Most Holy “once for all by his own blood” (Heb 9:6-14)—access into God’s presence is open to us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passover</td>
<td>Jesus chose the time of his death—the Passover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption</td>
<td>God has redeemed us by suffering in our stead, bearing our curse, paying the price of our sin. Christ our kinsman, redeemer, avenger has set us free by paying the ransom price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciliation</td>
<td>Christ’s death and resurrection breaks down the barriers of enmity and hostility—restoring peace and fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propitiation</td>
<td>“God is angry when people sin” (Morris 1983:154). This “wrath of God” is turned away by the propitiation (“sacrifice of atonement”) of Christ (Rom 3:25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justification</td>
<td>The justice and righteousness of God are honored and “we are reckoned as right” (Ps 51:4; Morris 1983:177, 185, 196) through the redemption and propitiation of Christ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each metaphor confronts us with the holiness of God, the gravity of sin, and the awful cost of salvation. God is holy, righteous, and just. His character cannot be slighted. His “high standards” cannot be relaxed. His law cannot simply be “set aside.” Nor can sin be ignored. It destroys a relationship with God, separating us from him. It defiles, fostering hostility and enmity between God and humanity. It produces hatred towards God (Jas 4:4). It makes us God’s enemies (Rom 5:10). It enslaves us. It kills. It makes God angry. This is “not some trifle.” “Sin means death (Ezek 18:4; Rom 6:23), and nothing less suffices to take it away” (Morris 1983:67).

Each metaphor proclaims the centrality of Christ’s death and the unique reality that God chose to do this to himself. It was his choice to establish a new covenant based on forgiveness, flowing from his death as a sacrifice for his “covenant-breaking people” (Morris 1983:28, 32). His sacrifice was not just a demonstration of love. By his death he did something that love alone and Old Testament sacrifices could not. Morris argues, “Unless the
death of Christ really does something, it is not in fact a demonstration of love” (Morris 1983:8). God knows our helpless condition, and he initiated the plan. This provides a radical perspective on sacrifice, atonement, redemption, reconciliation, and propitiation. Our forgiveness, cleansing, freedom, reconciliation, justification, and access into the Most Holy presence of God are secured by his choice to be our ransom, sacrifice, or sin offering. This “was a calculated divine plan” (Reid and Mueller 2008:5, 7). Clearly hilasmos (1 John 2:2; 4:10) and hilastērion (Rom 3:25) encompass expiation—but it is propitiation that is needed and provided by God himself (Morris 1983:151-152). It is not to bribe or win the favor of God, for it is his favor for us that brought him to the cross (Reid and Mueller 2008:7).

In the death of Jesus Christ the holiness and justice of God, and his mercy and grace, are embraced, demonstrating the “full extent of his love” (John 13:1). It is there that we can see the full meaning of costliness (Morris 1983:67). In the crucifixion of God in Jesus is seen the ultimate in status reversal (Gorman 2001:4-7). This upside-down nature of God’s kingdom is the theme of Matthew’s Gospel, and when asked for a sign of his authority and “the kingdom of God” (Matt 12:28) Jesus would give no other evidence than “the sign of Jonah” (Matt 12:38-42; 16:1-4), the sign of his death, burial, and resurrection.

Paul’s “master story” (Gorman 2004:102; Phil 2:6-11) of Christ’s humiliation and crucifixion for our salvation, is the foundation of God’s kingdom. This upside-down attitude of Christ is the value by which citizens of his kingdom live, considering “others better than” themselves and “the interests of others” above their own (Phil 2:3-4). Michael Gorman speaks of this as cruciformity (2001:4-7), the defining nature of God’s kingdom. While there are both individual (inward spiritual) and corporate (social and eschatological) implications, any definition or contextualization of the gospel that disregards the whole cruciform story of God’s kingdom and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the basis of this kingdom is a “different gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6).

The Critical Task Now!

Having identified countercultural contextualization, with praxis as integral to the process, as perhaps the most effective approach to confront post-Christendom cultures with the gospel, I have sought to take both the context and the Bible seriously, while remaining duly suspicious of the culture. On the basis of this, the critical task to be undertaken in Part 2 is an analysis of areas of convergence and dissonance between the gospel and Australian culture, which will then provide a framework for suggesting fresh symbols and rituals to communicate the gospel in forms indigenous to the Australian culture.
Works Cited


Peter Roennfeldt has served for 40 years as an Adventist pastor, church planter, missionary, seminary teacher, and Ministerial Association Secretary at Conference and Division levels. He and his wife Judy have lived in four countries; planted more than 25 Adventist churches; and Peter has equipped and supported church planters and pastors in over fifty countries—cultivating church planting movements, supporting the planting of hundreds of Adventist churches, and encouraging insider faith movements within Islam and Judaism. He is also regularly invited to speak on mission for evangelistic mission agencies and evangelical Bible colleges. Peter and Judy live in Melbourne, Australia.
Problem

Many Africans and members of other traditional societies of the world who still hold to a supernaturalistic and spiritualistic worldview visit diviners, shamans, spiritualistic herbalists, and the traditional medicine men and women who use enchantments, divination, charms, invocation of the spirit world, etc. They engage in such practices for various reasons which include, to diagnose and treat various ailments, both physical and psychological which plague their clients, a quest to know the future through divination, and also for the preparation of different kinds of charms and medicines. Christians, including some Yoruba Adventists, also engage in such consultations, a practice which is categorically condemned in the Scriptures, the normative source for the Christian faith and life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was, first, to study the causes, forms, meanings, and ramifications of dual allegiance among Yoruba Seventh-day Adventists, and, second, to propose an Adventist response to dual allegiance among Yoruba Seventh-day Adventists.
Method

I used a basic or generic qualitative research approach to gather data for subsequent analysis and study. Data collection was done among Yoruba Seventh-day Adventists in Nigeria. Participants were interviewed regarding worldview, culture, causes for the calamities of life, solutions for the problem of life, their ethno-history, encounters with Christianity, and other experiences that generated a rich data supply for the study.

Results

The research showed that dual allegiance exists among the Yoruba Seventh-Adventists and it appears in different forms; it was caused by the discrepancies in the cultural and worldview specificities between the Christian missionaries and those of the Yoruba recipients; the lack of contextualization of the gospel to the Yoruba milieu; slavery in the history of the Yoruba, especially due to the participation in it by some Christian missionaries and bishops; failures in the three essential Christian encounters of allegiance, truth, and power; people movement; and the role of Ifà, the Yoruba deity of wisdom and divination in the missionary expeditions among the Egba, a sub-tribe in the nineteenth century.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Dual allegiance is a significant issue in the Seventh-day Adventist Church that needs a concerted effort to both detect and eliminate from within the believers. Critical contextualization is the process that will address the problem. A major emphasis is needed on the power of the gospel. Pastors and lay leaders of the church need to be trained in critical contextualization. The creation of a study center for African Traditional Religions and worldviews will help the denomination to better understand how to contextualize mission to Africans and other people groups with similar worldviews.
BOOK REVIEW

Richard Stearns
The Hole in Our Gospel
Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009
$22.99

From its outset, *The Hole in Our Gospel* aims at challenging readers on their understanding of the gospel, on how they cope with global misery, and their coherent lives in the midst of it all as the author seeks to answer the ultimate question posed on page 1: “What does God expect of us?”

Unlike what one might expect, Richard Stearns, president of World Vision since 1998, does not write about his charity or our important monetary contributions, but draws from his experience as a successful corporate executive to look for a meaningful Christian life as he seeks to understand what is lacking in the response by Christians to the major world challenges.

*The Hole in Our Gospel* has 303 pages of biblical explanations mixed with social insights, seasoned with real-life experiences, and sprinkled with carefully-chosen quotations. This book’s twenty-six chapters of thought-provoking and deeply-engaging reading is divided into five major parts: The Hole in My Gospel—And Maybe Yours, The Hole Gets Deeper, A Hole in the World, A Hole in the Church, and Repairing the Hole.

Stearns begins with his understanding of the gospel and states that “in our evangelistic efforts to make the good news accessible and simple to understand, we seem to have boiled it down to a kind of ‘fire insurance’ that one can buy. . . . Focusing almost exclusively on the afterlife reduces the importance of what God expects of us in this life” (17), when “the
gospel—the whole gospel—means more than the personal salvation of individuals. It means a social revolution” (20).

The practical implications of the book are described in the third section when Stearns draws the readers’ attention to the many challenges that the poor of the world face (disease, poverty, lack of water, hunger, and political turmoil) and fills in the text with details, statistics, and stories.

The hole in the church is introduced in the next section with information from a survey that asked evangelical Christians whether they would be willing to donate money to help children orphaned by AIDS, assuming they were asked by a reputable Christian organization that was doing this work. Only 3 percent answered that they definitely would help, while 52 percent said that they probably or definitely would not help (198). Many Christians believe poverty to be the result of sinfulness and therefore see evangelism as the best, and sometimes only, medicine. Poverty indeed can have profound spiritual dimensions, and reconciliation through Christ is a powerful salve in the lives of both rich and poor. But salvation of the soul, as crucial as it may be for fullness of life both in the here and now and in eternity, does not by itself put food on the table, bring water out of the ground, or save a child from malaria (128).

What makes this book even more relevant, in my opinion, is the fact that the author bravely and skillfully undertakes the difficult task of walking a fine line between being criticized for being an extremist on the position of the social gospel or having a shallow biblical understanding, and therefore, not being very balanced. Stearns explains his position saying, “I don’t want to also suggest that all true followers of Christ must forsake everything to bring comfort and justice to the poor. I only propose that a genuine concern for ‘the least of these’ that finds tangible expression must be woven into the pattern of their life and faith” (60) Even Jesus did not spend every waking hour helping the poor. He dined with the wealthy, celebrated at weddings and feasts, taught in the synagogue, and perhaps even did a bit of carpentry. Still, there is no question that his love for the poor found consistent and concrete expression in his life and ministry (60).

All the issues presented in this book are very relevant to the Adventist Church, but a specific passage may speak even more directly to us. Stearns thinks that because of a rise in premillennial eschatology, some Christian groups reasoned that since Jesus is coming back, why bother trying to fix the world now? It is easy to see how this dividing of the gospel leaves people with only half a gospel, that is, a gospel with a hole in it, as people became satisfied with their particular piece. This “holey” gospel, on the other hand, reduced the full gospel (201).

The Adventist Church, however, is directly quoted in a positive way as part of a real-life illustration when the book is telling about pastor Morgan
Chilulu’s vision for his 120 member church in Kamfinsa, Zambia in an AIDS affected community. He was excited about the other churches in his community that came together. “All churches have become one,” he said. “There is no Pentecostal; there is no Evangelical; there is no Seventh-day Adventist. Thirty churches have come together. Now thirty churches are speaking the same language. We work together without any quarrel” (236).

Although Stearns is an executive, he approaches the issues as a good missiologist, shows the empathy of a social worker, and makes appeals like a good minister. The book’s ending is certainly directed to all the above and especially to everyone who is part of the Christian family. “What will historians write about this nation of 340,000 churches? Will they look back and see a Church too comfortable, insulated from the pain of the rest of the world, empty of compassion, and devoid of deeds? God’s image and identity are still defaced. They are slandered by poverty, by injustice, by corruption, by disease, and by human exploitation and suffering” (255).

The Hole in Our Gospel received the 2010 Christian Book of the Year award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA). On the last pages, the reader will find a useful study guide while other material can be found on its website: www.theholeinourgospel.com
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